Making connections and building partnerships
Many governments are exploring options and mechanisms to involve the private sector in providing education. This involvement comes in many forms. From the supply side, the public sector may fund private school operations with vouchers, subsidies, capitation grants, stipends, and contracts for education systems. From the demand side, there are mechanisms that can promote parental choice, school competition, and accountability. The idea is that parents choose the best schooling alternative for their children following quality criteria, generating demand pressure on schools to increase enrolment and attain higher productivity (better academic results at a lower cost).

Indeed, the role of public-private partnerships (PPPs) is increasingly recognised by governments that are developing institutions, funding mechanisms and regulatory frameworks to leverage private capabilities and expertise to enhance public education.

PPPs are common in several OECD countries where more than 20 per cent of public expenditure is transferred to private organisations, either directly or through households, to pay for education services and enable school choice. But now, increasingly in developing countries, there is a recognition of the role of private schools and the development of mechanisms that use private schools’ capacity to expand access. Several countries subsidise private schools, mostly faith-based non-profit organisations, either with school inputs (such as teacher salaries and textbooks) or through per pupil grants. The Gambia, Mauritius, Tanzania and Uganda collaborate with non-public schools to deliver education. More recently, excess demand from attempting to universalise primary education coupled with limited public funding has increased the number of private low-cost schools that cater to low-income students, mostly at the secondary level.

There is a growing trend now for governments to:

- Strengthen the capacities of their public agencies to regulate, monitor and contract private schools
- Develop private operators’ capacity to deliver quality education by facilitating access to capital and technical assistance to improve educational and management practices
- Create institutions that assist in the implementation of PPPs and guarantee the necessary flows of information.

But what do we know about these public-private partnerships in education?

The strengths of the four main types of PPP contracts – vouchers, subsidies, private management, and private finance initiatives – need to be assessed by how they assist in the attainment of three key objectives. These objectives are: (i) increased enrolment; (ii) improved educational outcomes; and (iii) enhanced equality in access to a quality basic education. Proponents of PPPs provide the following six reasons to support their case that there might be a positive relationship between PPPs and education outcomes.

1. PPPs can induce competition in the market for education. The private sector can compete for students with the public sector. In turn, the public sector can react to the competition by improving the quality of public education.

2. PPP contracts allow more flexibility than most arrangements in the public sector do. Generally, the public sector has high inflexibility in hiring teachers and organising schools, while PPPs do not. A flexible contract can create a better fit between the supply and demand of education.

3. Private providers in PPP contracts are usually chosen through an open bid process based on quality criteria. Contracts usually stipulate a certain quality of education, and the best proposals are chosen. By itself, this characteristic of the contract can increase the quality of education.

4. PPP contracts can achieve an optimal level of risk-sharing between the government and the private sector. The change to an optimal level of risk-sharing may increase efficiency in the delivery of services and, consequently, may induce more resources and higher provision in the education sector.

5. The private sector can have higher standards in delivery of education services. PPP contracts can reflect specific standards and quality targets. Therefore performance during the life of the contract, with adequate supervision, can lead to education improvements.

6. A model of PPPs that combines the strengths of government, the private sector, and civil society stakeholders to advance education can create new, sustainable education reform initiatives.

Yet what is the empirical evidence to support the case of such benefits through the PPP approach?

Unfortunately the evidence base required to make this assessment is still lacking. While the literature on vouchers is large and the strength of the empirical evidence is strong, the evidence on the other three types of contracts – subsidies, private management, and private finance initiatives – is far less abundant or robust.
Future experimentation with PPP models needs to be accompanied upfront by a rigorous impact evaluation design. However, although drawing on a small set of empirical studies, a number of lessons have been learnt.

**What lessons have been learnt?**

**Improve the perception of the role that the private school sector plays for the public benefit**

In many countries the initial culture is hostile to private providers of education, particularly those that are for-profit. One option would be to introduce a policy that clearly defines the place of private providers in the national long-term education strategy.

**Allow not-for-profit and for-profit schools to operate**

Private for-profit schools play a significant – and indeed growing – role in many countries. While private schools are often seen as catering solely to the wealthy, the reality is that for-profit schools are important in providing education to the poor. Private for-profit schools come in a variety of forms, including single owner-operated schools, chains that operate a large number of schools, and education management organisations.

**Promote and facilitate foreign direct investment in education**

Foreign direct investment in education is small but growing – in developed countries, developing economies, and transition economies. In 2005, foreign direct investment in education was nearly US$3.5 billion, up from just US$86 million in 1990 and US$401 million in 2002, and most of it is in developed countries. Although foreign direct investment in education still remains considerably smaller than in other sectors of the economy. In 2007, it accounted for less than 0.1 per cent of foreign direct investment in the service sector.

**Set up clear and objective establishment criteria and streamline processes for registering private schools**

Many countries limit the scope for new providers to enter the education marketplace. The consumer protection objective of many of these regulations is laudable. Minimum standards can help ensure the quality and safety of private sector provision and protect consumers from unscrupulous operators. But these benefits must be balanced against the negative impact of overly restrictive entry regulation. Poorly designed registration criteria for private schools often have the opposite impact of what is intended.

Rather than promoting increased access, higher quality and safer schools, overly restrictive registration criteria can, as well as producing long, convoluted school registration processes and onerous regulatory mandates, reduce access by detering potential providers or by increasing their costs so much that the schools become unaffordable. Alternatively, such regulation may push schools to operate outside the law as unregistered or clandestine providers, meaning the government will have fewer levers to protect consumers. This can impose costs on consumers, and invariably these costs will fall disproportionately on the poor, who have fewer education options. Governments should ensure that school registration criteria include the following five key components, that is, that they are: (i) realistic and achievable, while meeting policy goals efficiently and effectively; (ii) objective and measurable, to minimise discretion and limit scope for corruption; (iii) openly available to prospective private school entrants; (iv) output-focused to allow for flexible and diverse delivery approaches; and (v) applied consistently across various levels of government.

**Provide subsidies to the private school sector**

In addition to providing general investment incentives, governments can encourage private investment in education by offering monetary or in-kind subsidies to private schools. These subsidies can be upfront – for example, free or discounted land, establishment grants and education infrastructure. Land can be especially important in urban areas where land is expensive. Governments can also encourage private investment by facilitating work visas for foreign teachers, management and technical staff.

**Summary**

In summary, PPPs may offer more scope for rapidly increasing access to quality education than do alternative funding and delivery models – even fully public and fully private models – but there can be some challenges and risks involved in PPPs. There is still a lack of robust empirical evidence to guide the innovator’s path, evidence that could both illustrate the diverse channels of relationship between the private provision of public services and educational outcomes and shed light on concerns associated with PPPs. Inputs to education, processes and outputs are very different and require several different forms of contracts (including management, support, professional, operational, educational services and infrastructure). All of these variations need to be assessed separately as they are likely to have different requirements for being effective. Going forward though in these turbulent financial times, it is likely that many more countries, both developed and developing, will be looking for ways to leverage the capacity and expertise of the private sector to provide education.

One certainty, though, is that contracting out of educational services, wherever it is done, will remain controversial. Critics will continue to make some of the following arguments: that PPPs merely lead to the privatisation of education and thus a reduction in the government’s control over a public service. That increasing educational choices available to students and their families may increase socio-economic segregation if better-prepared students end up self-selecting into high-quality schools further improving their outcomes. Or the concern that poorer students that are left behind in the deteriorating public schools lose the support and pressure from more educated parents to improve quality.

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MICHAEL LATHAM has worked with the CBT Education Trust since 1982. Over the past two decades he has worked in Asia, Africa and the USA/Caribbean in an operational and business development capacity.

One of his key areas of work is in the area of public-private partnerships in education. He is currently engaged by the WB/IFC as the Project Director for Private Education Support Projects in Ghana and Kenya and as Director for the DFID Self-Help Group Partnership in Education Project in southern India.
ActionAid’s education evolution

David Archer

ActionAid is one of the leading international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) working on poverty and development, with its headquarters in South Africa and an annual budget of over US$100 million. It works in 35 countries, the vast majority of them being low income Commonwealth countries. Ramesh Singh, the present Chief Executive of ActionAid, observes: “Education has always been part of the DNA of ActionAid.” This is an appropriate image not only because education has been a central part of ActionAid’s work through the years but also because that work has evolved dramatically. From its early work responding to the immediate needs of sponsored children it has evolved into a rights-based organisation that links grass-roots programmes to national and international campaigning and advocacy work. The evolution typifies the journey of many international NGOs – but the driving force in the specific evolution of ActionAid’s education work has been its continuing commitment to evaluation and critical analysis of its practical experience – as can be seen from the following short, slightly simplified, historical review.

1970s

Throughout this decade, ActionAid’s education work was defined by its approach to fundraising. Wealthy individuals in the UK would sponsor individual children and of course, one of the first expectations of the sponsors was that the sponsored children would be able to go to school. So the money would be spent on paying school fees, purchasing school uniforms and providing school equipment for the sponsored children. However, within a very short time, ActionAid’s field workers expressed concerns that this approach was ineffective and unjust. They were helping one child but not their brother or sister or neighbour. It seemed like a lottery that the children lucky enough to be sponsored were helped and yet other children, who had equal needs, were ignored. It was random and inequitable – but most importantly it was ineffective. ActionAid was helping lots of individual children to access schools but doing nothing to help the schools themselves. Even though the sponsors felt happy at giving such direct help, if the school was poor, the children received little education.

1980s

In the 1980s, ActionAid moved to helping rural schools directly, particularly with a focus on infrastructure. Most schools in the areas ActionAid worked had classes under trees or were ramshackle buildings made of mud-brick, letting in little light or air.

The most common response was thus to build modern classrooms that would provide a conducive learning environment. The sponsors were delighted to receive photos of the new school buildings; these buildings were the most tangible, concrete evidence that their money was directly benefiting the children they sponsored. ActionAid developed a reputation for building good quality schools at low cost, using local materials and encouraging active community participation (and challenging the use of contractors from capital cities using imported materials). ActionAid models even influenced the policies of the European Community and World Bank at the time.

However, a self-critical internal evaluation of 16 years of building schools in Kenya found that ActionAid had no notable impact on school enrolment and no impact on achievement. Indeed, there was even evidence that poor children were more systematically excluded. The key reason for this was the wider policy context. The government was under pressure from the World Bank to limit public spending on education. Effectively, the government was told that it could not afford to run a national education system unless it directly charged all children to go to school. Costs would have to be shared with parents. In this climate, school management committees were encouraged to charge ‘user fees’. Those schools that had an impressive building felt more confident to raise more fees. Of course, the school management committees were invariably dominated by relatively better off parents and community leaders – those who had the time to dedicate to the school and who welcomed the status that this role conferred – and who could comfortably afford the fees. Most of them had little idea that even a modest fee would have a devastating impact on the poorest children who came from families with little or no cash income. Moreover, the evaluation found that, in the absence of any other inputs, better infrastructure did not improve learning achievements.

1990s

ActionAid shifted focus again in the 1990s towards the running of schools in poor and remote communities. Evidence collected from many of these areas showed that often over 50 per cent of local children had either never stepped inside a classroom or had dropped out within the first couple of years. It thus became clear that the cost of schooling was a major obstacle but there were many other factors, such as the distant location of some schools, which also influenced this low enrolment rate. In one way or another government schools seemed increasingly inaccessible to the poorest families and they seemed reluctant to change.
As a result, ActionAid began to set up ‘non-formal education’ (NFE) centres, or ‘community schools’. These NFE centres would be located in the more remote and poorest communities, using low cost improvised buildings put up by parents themselves. Local parents were actively involved in managing the centres. They could determine the annual calendar and daily timetable to fit around the times when children needed to work. The centres could focus attention on a reduced or core curriculum that provided children with essential skills, often working in their mother tongue (rather than the official language) with learning materials that were relevant in the local environment. Local people would be recruited as teachers, given accelerated training and encouraged to use participatory methods. Evaluating this work ActionAid was convinced it was making a difference. The centres were reaching the poorest children and often enrolled more girls than boys. In many cases children learned rapidly, often reaching the equivalent of fifth grade primary school within just three years. The centres were often inspiring to those who visited them, with creative teaching and joyful learning environments.

However, in the late 1990s, ActionAid brought together its education staff from around the world to review the experience of running NFE centres and it became clear that there were some fundamental contradictions. Most fundamentally there was a problem with sustainability. ActionAid was running NFE centres but could not continue to do so forever (as it only stayed in any area for ten years). At some point they needed to hand over the NFE centres to the Ministry of Education. But government education budgets were tight and when they saw an affluent international NGO like ActionAid providing education in one area, the local government or district education office would, quite sensibly, decide to invest their own resources in other areas. Over a period of years this often meant that government investment in education declined in the areas where ActionAid ran NFE centres. At the very point that ActionAid wanted to hand over the responsibility for the centres, the government would be less able than ever before to assume that responsibility. There were many other problems that emerged when ActionAid reviewed the NFE work closely. Children who completed an NFE course were often unable to access government schools, either because their learning was not recognised or they were not competent in the official language, and this meant children had to start all over again in the same government systems! Besides, there was no quality control in these NFE centres: some were good but some were bad. In some areas ActionAid and other NGOs had lots of centres while in other areas there were none… There was just no coherent planning. Moreover, ActionAid realised that however many centres it ran, these would only ever be a drop in the ocean. Even the huge national NGO, BRAC, in Bangladesh, which runs 35,000 centres, is still covering less than 8 per cent of children in the country. The vast majority of poor children are still in government schools – and yet these receive much less attention. It also became clear that, unintentionally, ActionAid was absolving governments of their responsibility and was becoming an agent in the privatisation of education for poor children, undermining the capacity of local people to secure their right to education.
Since a little before 2000, ActionAid has committed itself to taking a rights-based approach to development, working with ‘rights holders’ (especially the poorest and most excluded) and holding ‘duty bearers’ (governments) to account. It uses participatory approaches to adult learning (like the Reflect approach) to help communities demand quality education. It then works with governments to ensure they are able to deliver quality schools. The challenge is to make government schools work effectively and to ensure government education systems facilitate this.

ActionAid recognises it cannot do this alone and that it must come together with others who have experience of education work. So ActionAid has played an active role in bringing together local and national NGOs, teacher unions, parents’ groups, faith-based organisations, social movements and even the private sector, to form broad based coalitions on education in each country. The following points summarise the key aspects of their role.

- The central concern of the coalitions is to place education reform higher up the domestic political agenda. As a result, they engage constructively with Ministries of Education, reviewing practice and contributing to developing new policies and plans; they monitor performance and compile learning, especially about what works, to get the poorest and most excluded children into school.
- They demystify and independently track government spending on education and see whether money flows through the system effectively to the school level.
- They support district-level capacity building and the development of strong school governance and accountability systems.
- They stimulate public debate at local and national levels, working with the media and with parliamentarians to increase democratic accountability and oversight.
- They raise awareness of education rights at all levels.
- They engage with bilateral and multilateral donors – also holding them to account – and challenge any abuse of power by the World Bank or the IMF.

In practice, of course, these national education coalitions are very diverse, and few actually do all the above. In most Commonwealth countries, they are young coalitions, under ten years old, but they represent the most significant development in the education landscape in recent years. In Africa, 32 national coalitions are linked together in the Africa Network Campaign on Education For All (ANCEFA). Similar regional coalitions are emerging in Asia and Latin America – and globally there are at least 65 national coalitions linked together in the Global Campaign for Education (which mobilises over 10 million people each year during its Global Action Week).

The Commonwealth has been in the forefront of this education revolution through the work of the Commonwealth Education Fund, which was set up by Gordon Brown in 2002. This £14 million fund was jointly managed by ActionAid, Oxfam and Save the Children Fund and supported precisely this sort of work through to 2008. ActionAid co-ordinated this work in most countries, and the achievements have been significant. In many areas there have been successful campaigns to remove user fees, leading to massive surges in enrolments. By exposing corruption and taking officials to court in countries like Uganda, the education budget is now flowing more efficiently. By working with Ministries of Finance in countries like Malawi, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, progress is being made in resisting the macro-economic conditions imposed by the IMF, thus enabling countries to hire more teachers.

Much remains to be done but the foundations are being laid now across low-income Commonwealth countries to make education a top priority. This is more important now than ever. In the context of the global economic crisis, increasing investment in education makes both short-term and long-term economic sense (see ‘Education on the Brink’, Global Campaign for Education, April 2009) and this means working together to change the policies and perceptions of many in the IMF and in Finance Ministries. In this critical work civil society actors can be useful allies for Ministries of Education across Commonwealth countries. Together, we can place education at the top of the political agenda and make government schools work effectively!

Endnotes

1 see www.actionaid.org.
3 see www.right-to-education.org.
4 see www.campaignforeducation.org.
5 see www.commonwealtheducationfund.org.

DAVID ARCHER is the head of ActionAid’s education team, and an expert on international education. He is a prolific writer and activist with more than 20 years’ experience working in international aid. david.archer@actionaid.org.
Making education work

The gender dimensions of the school-to-work transition

East Asia and Pacific Regional United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI)

The United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI) is the Education For All flagship for girls’ education and the principal movement to narrow the gender gap in primary and secondary education, and to ensure that by 2015, all children everywhere will be able to complete primary schooling, and that by then, girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education. UNGEI works through partnerships with organisations committed to these goals at global, regional and country levels.

Introduction

The intrinsic worth of education has been duly recognised in the international arena through several instruments. In addition to the rights-based argument, education is often considered a critical factor in facilitating a smooth transition from school to work and creating better opportunities in the labour market afterwards. Nonetheless, in many developing countries, there continues to be a lack of education available to large numbers of children and youth, and when education is available, sometimes it does not translate into higher employment due to mismatches between skills and labour market demand or further political, social and economic constraints. There still exist disparities between females and males in the opportunities for quality education at the basic level and beyond, as well as in subsequent opportunities for employment.

Economic, political and social barriers have historically marred the participation of women in education and in the labour market. While such barriers are manifold, there are equally as many, and more, reasons for investing in girls’ education, including better maternal and child health, income growth and higher productivity, to name just a few. A World Bank study of 100 countries found that a 1 per cent increase in the share of women with secondary education boosts annual per capita income growth by 0.3 percentage points. These facts make a strong case for investing in girls’ education, and indeed, the recognition of these benefits has fuelled the international push to achieve parity in education. With certain benefits, however, such as income growth and productivity, increases can only happen if education is accompanied by more and better opportunities for women in the labour market. In an effort to investigate the link between education and labour market outcomes of women, this paper provides a brief overview of the regional and national progress towards achieving parity in education. It then examines how men and women fare in the labour market and finally concludes by highlighting the relationships, or lack thereof, between girls’ education and the ensuing employment opportunities.

Achieving the MDGs and EFA

The last decade brought significant growth for the East Asia and Pacific region, driven by China to a large extent and accompanied by a significant decline in the shares of the working poor (those who earn US$1 per day or less). Concomitantly, the region’s expenditure on public education as a percentage of GDP rose from 2 per cent in 2000 to 3 per cent in 2002. In compliance with the MDGs and the Dakar Framework for Action EFA initiative, the East Asia and Pacific region is on track towards achieving universal primary education by 2015 (Figure 1), although high regional averages conceal the fact that some countries are lagging behind.

Of the 689 million children enrolled in primary school and the 512 million enrolled in secondary education worldwide, 27 per cent and 29 per cent respectively are in East Asia and the Pacific. While the total gross enrolment rates in tertiary education are low in all regions of the world, East Asia and the Pacific saw an increase between 1996 and 2005 from 8 per cent to 20 per cent. In 2005, at the regional level, the gross enrolment rate of females was on a par with males for secondary levels of education but was slightly lower at the primary and tertiary levels.

The regional numbers nonetheless obscure the lack of gender parity in education at the national and sub-national levels. Girls have traditionally faced a number of barriers to their education, such as physical or social distance, relevant curricula sensitive to

Figure 1

Universal Primary Education by 2015

Source: UN, World Bank staff estimates
their needs, the availability of separate school facilities for girls or female teachers, and child labour. While a disaggregated analysis of gender disparities at the sub-national level is beyond the scope of this paper, note must be taken that such disparities do exist and should be accounted for in policy prescriptions.

The Gender Parity Index (GPI), based on gross enrolment in primary/secondary/tertiary education, is the ratio of the female-to-male values of the gross enrolment ratio in primary/secondary/tertiary education. A GPI between the range of 0.97 and 1.03 indicates parity between the sexes. A GPI below 0.97 indicates a lack of parity to the disadvantage of females, and a value above 1.03 indicates a lack of parity to the disadvantage of males.

With regard to primary education, recent international data reports that several countries in the region have not achieved gender parity. Only Mongolia, Myanmar, Kiribati and Malaysia have an index of 1 or higher, indicating gender parity or a higher propensity for females to be enrolled in primary education than males.

Females often fare better when looking at the GPI based on the gross enrolment ratio in secondary education. In 13 out of the 20 countries for which there is data, females have a higher propensity than males to be enrolled in secondary education. Indonesia, Myanmar and Vietnam, however, are very close to achieving parity.

Data also indicate that females have a higher propensity to be enrolled in tertiary education than males in 10 out of the 17 countries in the region for which such data are available. Countries where women have yet to achieve parity in terms of the gross enrolment ratio in tertiary education are Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Samoa, Vanuatu and Vietnam. Data on the female share of graduates in a particular field for any year between 2000 and 2005 is only available for a small group of countries in the region. Based on this limited data, it appears that females tend to favour the areas of health and education – areas commonly perceived as ‘nurturing’. The share of female graduates in engineering, manufacturing and construction, however, is low in all countries for which there is data, strengthening the notion that these areas are conventionally male.

The latter data confirm that significant progress is being made with regards to girls’ education in the East Asia and Pacific region. Additionally, however, based on the limited evidence available, it appears that females and males tend to opt for different occupations, which is perhaps due to socio-cultural expectations and influences. The different tracks that females and males pursue can be investigated further by looking at their respective participation in public technical and vocational education and training.

Gender representation in the labour market

With a growth rate over twice the global average, Asia today is touted as the most economically dynamic region in the world. Growth in East Asia and Southeast Asia has been accompanied by...
large relative shifts in production away from agriculture towards industry. Flows of foreign direct investment (FDI), competitive integration into global markets and the exceptional export performance for a wide range of labour and capital intensive goods have fuelled this growth and dynamism. East Asia, in particular, is characterised by a growing middle class and rapid urbanisation. The question emerging from this discussion is how females and males have fared in the labour market in the face of all these changes.

The 2006 estimates illustrate that significant differences in the rate at which males and females participate in the labour force remain in both sub-regions. Males in both sub-regions are disadvantaged, but the difference is more pronounced in Southeast Asia and the Pacific (24 percentage points) than East Asia (15 percentage points). The decline in the labour force participation rates between 1996 and 2006 may partly be attributed to the fact that youth are remaining in school longer.

In several countries in the region, male and female youth are more or less represented equally in employment. In Cambodia and China (including Hong Kong, Macau and Taiwan), young women have a higher propensity to be employed than males. Incidentally, in these two countries, females also have a lower gross enrolment ratio than males in tertiary education. This implies that a higher proportion of young females may be leaving education to start full-time work.

In Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Philippines and Thailand, females have a lower propensity to be employed than males do, while in Malaysia, Mongolia, the Philippines and Thailand, they have exceeded males in terms of the gross enrolment ratios in secondary and tertiary education. This implies that young females tend to remain in the education system longer rather than becoming employed. These data, nevertheless, do not say much about whether an education ultimately helps females secure employment. Furthermore, it is not only a question of more employment but also of whether education facilitates better employment. Based on employment data alone, these questions remain unanswered.

**Linking education and labour market outcomes**

Perhaps this report's most significant contribution is to highlight the fact that, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of (i) gender parity in education and in the labour market, and (ii) making the link between the education of girls and the subsequent employment outcomes, it is still difficult to make these assessments adequately on the basis of existing data.

As such, only partial aspects of the initial question raised in this report have been addressed: how does parity in education, or lack thereof, translate into labour market outcomes for women? Women in the region seem to be making headway in achieving parity in education, but beyond parity, are women making progress, and are higher proportions of girls in secondary and tertiary education translating into better employment outcomes for them?

On the one hand, evidence seems to suggest that when young women stay in education longer, they tend to postpone employment; on the other, females’ unemployment rates tend to be higher than males’. In some countries, more women are unemployed at higher levels of education. This could suggest one of two possibilities: first, there are fewer professional/technical jobs available for women; or second, women with higher levels of education tend to be more selective in their job search. Which of these two possibilities reflects reality needs to be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

With regard to education and employment/unemployment, there are times when there is parity between men and women, and there are times when one or the other fares better. This perhaps leads to the question of whether a disadvantage for males necessarily implies an advantage for females. This seemingly simple question does not have a simple answer. One argument suggests that educational systems and the labour market have a certain capacity to set males and females in competition for the same seat in school or the same job in the labour market. Nonetheless, when it comes to developing countries, this argument is tenuous at best. The observed disparity between females and males in most developing countries is often more a result of engendered bias and stereotyping than the simple notion that a disadvantage for males implies an advantage for females. Indeed, based on the limited information available, men and women tend to opt for different subjects in higher education and in technical and vocational education and training programmes. Additionally, females and males tend to be employed in different professions. It is therefore imperative to note that a lack of parity, even when it points to an advantage for females, is undesirable. In fact, the lower gross enrolment rates of boys for some countries in the region are a matter of concern. It is important to capitalise on the dynamism of the East Asia and Pacific region in order to create more and better jobs for females and males. Emphasis should not only be placed on achieving parity in education but also on overcoming any economic, social and political barriers that may prevent females from finding work that allows them to make use of their education and skills – implying both supply and demand side measures. On the supply side, females should not be limited to certain subject areas in their training and education by any constraint other than their own choice; while on the demand side, more emphasis should be placed on creating jobs, particularly those of the calibre that allow women to make the most of their education and skills.

**Recommendations for future action**

Strides towards parity must be accompanied by specific steps to institute equality between women and men in all aspects of political, economic and social life.

- Implement measures to change social perceptions through advocacy; eliminating the perpetuation of gender bias in education via textbooks, for example; and legislating and enforcing anti-discrimination laws in the labour market, for instance with regards to wage differentials.

- Ensure that continued progress towards gender parity at different levels of education is paired with efforts to create more and better paid employment opportunities for women and to enhance their access to productive resources.
• Provide educational and career counselling for girls to better match education and skills with labour market demand. Linking education to labour market outcomes is a critical step in the economic empowerment of women.

• Empower females through positive role models in addition to education. Employment opportunities should not be restricted to fields deemed to be appropriate for females by society at large – the only restrictive factor should be individual choice.

• Design and implement specific policies that target the most vulnerable and disadvantaged and address persistent gender inequalities among the poor, minority groups and those residing in rural areas. As child labour is a major cause of school dropout for girls across Asia and the Pacific, policies and programmes should be implemented to prevent and combat this problem. While girls are vulnerable to child labour, which is largely hidden and unmeasured, it is important to recognise that boys are more exposed to work of a hazardous nature than girls and the differences become more pronounced as they get older.

• Provide incentives to encourage the participation and hiring of females in high-level positions, including political positions, and encourage their involvement in decision-making processes.

• Ensure that gender mainstreaming in curriculum and teacher training include the promotion of norms that support gender equality.

There is also a need for qualitative and quantitative studies to address deficiencies in the available data and literature. This includes household-level poverty data disaggregated by sex, in order to identify intra-household resource allocation and poverty by household member, data about the occupations that men and women pursue, strengthened understanding and data on technical and vocational education, and better understanding of the self-employed and the differences between young women and men in access to productive resources, credit and business or livelihoods.

End notes

1 This report, in its original form, was prepared for the East Asia and Pacific Regional UNGEI and presented at the UNGEI Global Advisory Committee in June 2008. The report was subsequently published and is available in hard copy and via the web at: http://www.unicef.org/eapro/UNC_UNGEI3_130109_Final_Web.pdf.
2 To learn more about UNGEI, visit www.ungei.org.
5 Ibid., Herz and Sperling (2004).
6 Ibid., Dollar and Gatti (1999).
9 http://www.worldbank.org/education/edstats. Based on data from the UNESCO Institute of Statistics. The gross enrolment rate for primary education is the number of pupils (total, male, female) enrolled in primary, regardless of age, expressed as a percentage of the population (total, male, female) in the theoretical age group for primary education. The same definition applies to the gross enrolment rates for secondary and tertiary education.
Working in partnership

How Link Community Development works alongside district local government: The case of Masindi

Link Community Development

I am particularly pleased with the way LCD tackles local education challenges in partnership with stakeholders. The result is a better quality of education for children, now and long into the future.

Derek Nkata (former District Education Officer, Masindi, Uganda)

Introduction

Link Community Development’s (LCD) mission is ‘to work in partnership to improve the lives of children and young people in rural communities in sub-Saharan Africa’. In recent years the programme has grown to service over 800 rural schools in five African countries. This article draws on LCD’s experience of its work in Masindi, Uganda since 2000, and explores the special importance of the partnership that LCD has as a service provider with district local government.

The challenge of Universal Primary Education in Uganda

Uganda is striving to realise the goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE). It has made considerable headway and the number of primary school pupils has tripled from 2.6 million to 7.4 million since the policy was initiated in 1997. However, this expansion has put the education system under severe strain and serious concerns have emerged about the quality of education offered by most government primary schools. Recent national competence tests revealed that, after six years of primary education, only 33.5 per cent of pupils passed competency tests in literacy and only 30.5 per cent passed numeracy (as reported in New Vision, January 2008). While enrolment rates are quite high, at 84 per cent, the national average completion rate for both boys and girls is only 43 per cent (EMIS, 2007). If demand for education is to be sustained then quality must be improved.

In Uganda and several other countries, the drive towards UPE has coincided with a policy of decentralisation, enacted through the Local Government Act of 1997. This places responsibility for education squarely in the hands of District Education Offices. The aim is to give communities greater access to the decision-making that determines policy and the allocation of resources. Several studies have identified a lack of professional capacity at district level as a key limiting factor of decentralisation. It is for this reason that LCD has identified local government as the key partner for its rural school improvement programmes.

The case of Masindi

Masindi is an ordinary rural district in Uganda that has made extraordinary improvements in the performance of its primary schools. The district is situated about 200km to the north-west of Kampala. There are currently 180 government primary schools with a total enrolment of over 100,000 pupils (53 per cent of whom are boys and 47 per cent girls). All of these schools are supervised by just six district inspectors who are poorly funded and poorly mobilised.

In Uganda, enrolment has tripled since 1997

The district education office, Masindi
LCD began work in Masindi in 2000, after an invitation from the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOES) to share the experience it gained from working in South Africa and Ghana. The district education officer and his staff had direct input into the original funding proposal which was agreed by Big Lottery Fund (UK). Since 2001, LCD’s work in Masindi has depended upon the long-term placement of experienced educators in the district office. These ‘change agents’ have largely worked within the district’s own resource constraints and have focused on capacity building, improved delivery and accountability.

There is a clear memorandum of understanding between LCD and the Masindi District, which lays out the roles of each partner in the project. There are termly project steering committee meetings at which progress is reviewed and plans and reports jointly approved. LCD and district staff have worked together to deliver a programme that includes:

- School performance reviews (described below)
- Training and mentoring for inspectors and district officials
- Training and mentoring for headteachers in management skills
- Governance training for school management committees
- Training of teachers in literacy teaching methodologies
- Placing 100 British ‘global teachers’ on five-week placements during their summer vacation in schools, over a five-year period (2001–06)
- Linking 80 Masindi schools with partner schools in the UK to exchange correspondence and undertake shared curriculum projects.

**School performance reviews**

It is impossible to tease apart the impact of each of these interventions, but the cornerstone of LCD’s partnerships with Masindi District has been an innovative approach to school monitoring and support called the School Performance Review (SPR). The SPR has helped the district to realise its mandate to assure the quality of service delivery in schools. It consists of an annual cycle of activities that includes the following steps.

1. The gathering of accurate information by a team of district data collectors, about the performance of each school in the district, and preparation of a report.
2. Dissemination and discussion of the report by stakeholders at school and district level through school performance appraisal meetings and a district education conference.
3. Preparation and implementation of school improvement plans at school, coordinating-centre and district levels, which address the specific needs and weaknesses identified at school level.
4. Development and delivery of targeted training and support in response to documented needs.

Since 2002, LCD has implemented the SPR successfully in all schools in Masindi. The benefits of SPR include the following.
• It provides schools with clear feedback on performance against nationally approved standards.
• It provides information by which LCD and district-led training interventions can be closely tailored to actual need.
• The meetings mobilise community and district support for education, imbue a sense of urgency and allow stakeholders to apply accountability pressure upon schools for improvement.
• The School Development Plans that result from SPR provide a common agenda for school improvement activities.

The SPR model has now been replicated in a total of 400 schools in four other Ugandan Districts. Contextualised versions have also been successfully implemented by LCD in Ethiopia, Ghana, Malawi and South Africa. SPR has already proved to be a cost-effective method of providing support to schools.

In 2005, LCD’s partnership with local government on school improvement work was recognised by the Ugandan Ministry of Education and Sports by an invitation to take up office space within their Directorate of Education Standards. This move has ensured that the lessons gained from implementing SPR in Masindi can be integrated into national school inspection policy.

Evidence of impact

The impact of the partnership between LCD and Masindi District is now widely recognised. In 2008, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs conducted a national impact assessment of UPE in Uganda. Their report stated that:

In Masindi, the District Office, the Education Standards Agency and the NGO LCD have worked since 2000 to improve district and school management. Examination results in these schools are approximately 50 per cent higher than the results of comparable schools.


If UPE is to be achieved and sustained then the issue of how to assure quality must be addressed. SPR offers a model for how this might be achieved within realistic resource constraints.

This work would not have been possible without the close relationship that LCD has developed with Masindi and at least twelve districts like it in Uganda, Ghana, Ethiopia, Malawi and South Africa. This partnership has developed over a long period. It is based on the trust that develops when two organisations share the same challenges and constraints while striving for a common objective.
Educational media initiatives

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) reports on its work

Sreedher Ramamurthy

Commonwealth Educational Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA) is the only office of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) outside Vancouver, Canada. CEMCA functions through networking and information transfer. The CEMCA Advisory Council comprises representatives from major open learning institutions in the region. The advisory council serves as the guiding light for broad policy formulation, monitoring and evaluation. CEMCA’s services are available to all developmental and educational institutions and agencies in Commonwealth Asia.

COL established and funded CEMCA as a regional centre to build capacity in educational media in the Commonwealth Asia region. CEMCA began with a media focus but has since expanded to embrace all technology-based learning while also serving to link open and distance learning (ODL) needs in any area with ODL competencies. It is intended as a resource for the region that can organise capacity-building workshops, and provide expertise and resources in the area of ODL using its own staff and local experts. CEMCA is an autonomous body accorded international status by India.

In consonance with the mission of COL, CEMCA promotes the meaningful, relevant and appropriate use of information and communication technology to serve the educational and capacity-building needs of the Commonwealth member states in Asia. CEMCA has two main sectors of operation:

- Education
- Livelihood and healthy communities.

In the education sector, CEMCA works in the areas of:

1. Open schooling
2. Higher education
3. e-Learning
4. Digitally integrated content for ODL
5. ODL.

In the livelihood and healthy communities sector, CEMCA works in the areas of:

1. Healthy communities, Foundation for Research in Community Health (FRCH)
2. Skills development
3. Low-cost technology
4. Internet radio/community radio.

Apart from this, CEMCA has been conducting two major projects: for the Department of Science and Technology (DST), Government of India, on science for women’s health and nutrition; and Planet Earth.

CEMCA has also been:

- Conducting regional consultations on community radio awareness – to orient and guide functioning community radio stations (CRS) – CEMCA also facilitated a face-to-face meeting with managers of functioning CRS with officials of the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) of India in February this year (2009).
- Holding a workshop for letter of intent (LOI) holders – to guide them through the next stages of the procedure, so giving LOI holders an opportunity to interact with officials from MIB and the Department of Telecommunications. CEMCA has also been helping LOI holders to apply for their SACFA (Standing Advisory Committee on Frequency Allocation), and so on, which many applicants find difficult to negotiate on their own.
- Setting up a permanent help desk – to help applicants through all stages from filling the basic application to applying for SACFA and other licenses. To date, CEMCA has facilitated over 100 CRS through various stages of their applications.
- Holding capacity-building groups – for NGOs and CBOs (community-based organisations) in content generation for audio and video (like IT for Change/ITFC – Mahila Samakhya in Karnataka, FRCH in Pune/Parinchey – Maharashtra, etc.). The long-term vision is for these groups to have CRS of their own.

CEMCA helps the Asian Commonwealth member countries to increase their access to education of quality at all levels by focusing on quality assurance, teacher development, alternative forms of schooling, new approaches to higher education, and the creation of expertise in e-Learning.

Teacher development

CEMCA has been working on:

- Expanding teacher education through combinations of ODL and classroom-focused training
- Increasing opportunities and capacity for developing and delivering quality professional development to teachers and other education sector personnel
• Applying ODL and flexible learning to increase access to basic and secondary schooling, particularly for the marginalised and those whose access to education is restricted.

Higher education
CEMCA has been working on:
• Developing and strengthening systems, models and materials for higher education through open universities and dual-mode operation universities
• e-Learning for education sector development
• Increasing awareness, building capacity and developing content for e-Learning in the education sector
• Facilitating the use of open educational resources.

Quality assessment, particularly in multimedia learning materials, is another of our major thrust areas.

EasyNow
EasyNow is an educational initiative that provides the arena for academic institutions to develop multimedia material at affordable cost with the active participation of the internal staff – academics and technical personnel – so that they enhance the quality of ODL programmes in respective institutions. It also provides the multimodal platform for the benefit of all categories of students so that no one is in a disadvantageous position. It uses advanced techniques for optimising the size of the various files so that audio and video streaming is achieved over the NET and students have access to the material instantaneously. As EasyNow has successfully addressed some of the major problems plaguing online ODL programmes using cost-effective techniques, it is becoming popular with academic institutions desirous of running their virtual campus.

CEMCA has been training institutions and universities to use EasyNow with the active support of V. Krishnamoorthy, who had initially conceived and developed the modules. CEMCA has so far trained staff members of four institutions in India, namely Yashwantrao Chauhan Open University, Nashik; Tamil Nadu Open University, Chennai; Central Institute of Education Technology (CIET), New Delhi; and National Institute of Open Schooling, NOIDA. It has provided training to the University of Maldives, Male; and the Sri Lanka Open University in Nugegoda, Sri Lanka. CEMCA has also organised workshops in authorware for three institutions including the Bangladesh Open University (BOU), Dhaka. The training of the staff of the Malaysia Open University, Kuala Lumpur is yet another milestone in the activities of CEMCA, which may be followed by a few more institutions this year. Over the four days of training, the participants are introduced to the following major activities through hands-on practice:

• Creating text using HTML and PDF formats
• Making and editing movies using Movie Maker (an open source software)
• Making slide shows
• Capturing and editing audio using Audacity (an open source software)
• Using optimisation of text, audio and video files for streaming effects
• Using the text-to-speech techniques of open source or proprietary software like Text Aloud
• Uploading lessons on the NET.

The participants are also informed of the possibility of using techniques for the visually handicapped, including magnification, audio conversion and Braille printing. Participants are introduced to other available open source software that they can download and use in the production of enriched media lessons. The groups prepare the lessons, based on the softcopy of the lessons available, in multiple modes and in nine different formats during the four days of the workshop. The nine possible modes are:

1. Internet browsing
2. Open and Distance Learning (ODL) format
3. Format for persons with special needs

Audio-based
4. Streaming audio
5. Text to speech

Video-based
6. Slide show
7. Streaming video – traditional classroom
8. Streaming video – enriched classroom
9. VCD or DVD for standalone systems.

One of the major capacity-building initiatives in community radio that CEMCA has undertaken has been through the community radio project of RVPSP, Department of Science and Technology, known as the Science for Women’s Health and Nutrition. The project is aimed at raising awareness about health and nutrition-related issues among women. Thirteen community radio stations were prepared to take up the project, and eventually ten community radio stations ran the programme as a daily broadcast.

CEMCA came up with the idea of demonstrating the use of an internet-based teleconferencing system that was cost-effective for Wawasan Open University, Penang, Malaysia. The model it devised would work on the basis of a call-in facility with audio and video input and a live streaming/webcasting service in place. CEMCA decided to work with Skype for the call-in audio-video facility. CEMCA also thought of live streaming using a static IP address and with an MMS/HTTP port opened for facilitating easy access to students and others.

DR SREEDHER RAMAMURTHY is Director of Commonwealth Education Media Centre for Asia (CEMCA), New Delhi.
The theme for the fiftieth anniversary of the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Ministers (17CCEM) is ‘Education in the Commonwealth: Towards and beyond global goals and targets’. The 17CCEM will bring together a diverse range of educational stakeholders, including education ministers, senior officials, representatives from national and international agencies, academics, teachers, non-governmental organisations, youth and the private sector.

An opportunity to influence ministerial decisions

The Commonwealth Foundation and the Government of Malaysia’s Institut Aminuddin Baki are jointly hosting the Stakeholders’ Forum in the run-up to the 17CCEM. The Stakeholders’ Forum is an integral part of the CCEM alongside the Teachers’, Vice-chancellors’ and Youth Forums and will focus on the theme of ‘Making connections and building partnerships: Towards and beyond global education goals and targets’.

The Stakeholders’ Forum brings together civil society, the private sector, academia, and other non-state actors, providing them with a platform to discuss and debate priorities and challenges in education. It is also a chance to build partnerships and to give new direction to discourse and action in education. In addition, it will give delegates the opportunity to meet ministers and officials, as well as delegates of the other 17CCEM forums.

Past forums have successfully influenced the outcomes of the ministerial meeting. Typically, statements are considered by ministers and senior officials and integrated into the final ministerial communiqué, which forms the basis of policy on Commonwealth education. The Forum’s overriding goal is to formulate recommendations to influence the outcome of the ministerial meeting.

Bringing about greater change

Four sub-themes will be explored in a series of workshops and panels held over three days at the Stakeholders’ Forum. The theme and sub-themes of the Forum reflect issues central to Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It was civil society’s view that to sustain progress and bring about more far-reaching change, the agenda needs to be broadened beyond these global goals and targets both in developing and developed countries.

Delegates will look at examples of good practice as well as areas for concern and discuss ways in which problems can be tackled.

The effects of the global financial crisis on the developing world

The 17CCEM takes place against the backdrop of a global financial crisis posing even greater challenges for development. The developing world did nothing to cause this crisis, yet progress in meeting development objectives may be dramatically halted by it. In Africa alone, an estimated US$50 billion in income could be lost over the next two years. Achievement of the education MDGs could be severely affected by the crisis, and already an estimated 30 million children remain out of primary education in Commonwealth countries despite education being one of the most important ways of achieving personal growth and community development.

Through the workshops and panels taking place under the four sub-themes, delegates will look at the priority issues. They will review initiatives to determine their effectiveness. Achievements will be highlighted and participants will share experiences, and suggest actions and recommendations to bring about further change.

The sub-themes in detail

Making inclusive access and learning a reality

Exclusion from education can be the result of many factors. In some countries, gender bias is a cause, although other developing countries are making headway in enrolling and retaining girls in education.

Overall progress is still erratic. Of the 30 million children not receiving primary education in Commonwealth countries, 57 per cent of these are girls. A workshop led by the United Nations Girls Education Initiative (UNGEI) and the Commonwealth Secretariat will address the problem of gender exclusion.

Gender is not the only factor threatening access to education. During other sessions, panellists will discuss how chronic poverty and environmental disasters affect education in marginalised and vulnerable communities. They will look at strategies and initiatives for those living in refugee camps and post-disaster areas. Then they will highlight priorities that need urgent attention and make recommendations for action.
More than 25 million people in Commonwealth countries live with HIV and AIDS. This is over half the world total. Forum participants will have the chance to look at the successes and challenges of HIV and AIDS prevention education; particularly successful initiatives by governments and civil society; and the lessons that have been learned. They will discuss whether the successful initiatives can be established within education policies.

Disability, too, is a factor in exclusion. A workshop run by Leonard Cheshire International aims to promote understanding of the fact that inclusive education and provision for disabled students are interlinked. Delegates will explore ways to improve the training of teachers and adapt the school environment to students with special needs and those with disabilities.

Achieving a continuum in education

This sub-theme will examine education provision from pre-primary and primary, through to secondary and higher education.

The UNESCO-led global movement, Education for All, aims to meet the learning needs of all children, youth and adults by 2015. The numbers of entrants to secondary education have increased as a result of the movement, and delegates will review how this has affected government responsibility, financing and quality.

Panellists will review and compare strategies for early childhood care and education (ECCE) provision as well. They will share their experiences and highlight the benefits of ECCE programmes. As well as furthering initiatives and improvements, the goal is to strengthen the case for investment in ECCE programmes.

Education is about much more than classroom learning: it is the pathway to dialogue, mutual respect and understanding. This is why the theme of continuous, lifelong learning is an important aspect of the Forum.

Panellists will also explore innovations in education systems and curricula that promote good citizenship and ethics. They will look at how policy- and decision-makers can be helped to promote education as a valuable tool for dialogue and citizenship.

The value of informal and real-world learning methods will also be examined and participants will discuss ways to promote them. For example, non-governmental organisations could make a real contribution to non-formal education initiatives. Discussions will focus on what governments can do to provide regulatory and supporting frameworks that encourage them to take part.

Lifelong Learning for Farmers is a good example of real-world education. The programme helps rural communities find appropriate technology-based open and distance education methods to improve their livelihoods. Other strategies will be discussed that encourage a self-sustaining process of lifelong learning.

Technical and vocational education and training (TVET) is an important area for the continuous education theme and participants will hear about current trends and issues. In addition, panellists will discuss the new skills needed for a globalised world and how they are being integrated into vocational and technical education curricula.
Redefining quality in education

There have been many positive steps to increase levels of education provision, but there is concern about the quality of teaching in many Commonwealth countries.

Poor teaching quality, combined with the pressures of poverty, can affect continuing education. For example in Bangladesh, where considerable progress has been made in achieving gender equality in education and free primary education, the dropout rate is 47 per cent.5

This sub-theme aims to demonstrate that, while primary education targets such as the education MDGs and EFA are important, quality needs to be maintained. Panels will look at whether quality is being achieved in relation to the MDGs and EFA.

However, quality can have different meanings depending on context, perspectives and different cultural environments. Redefining quality is critical if education is to play a more relevant and instrumental role in the social and economic development of a country. Defining quality and discussing how it can be assessed and monitored will be central to this sub-theme. The role of leadership and management in achieving quality education will be examined. Participants will share developing and developed country experiences, as well as highlighting examples of good practice. They will also discuss the importance of literacy and education as a way of empowering marginalised and vulnerable communities, and removing gender disparity.

A discussion on contemporary challenges for public education in the Commonwealth will focus on maths, science and technology, and environmental education.

There are many excellent ICT initiatives around the Commonwealth that address quality and access in education. The ‘best practice’ methods they use to bridge the digital gap will be explored and shared. A project is underway in Africa to determine whether open source or proprietary software is more cost-effective for public access centres such as schools and libraries. The open source versus proprietary debate will be on the agenda for discussion under the sub-theme ‘Redefining quality’.

Realising the potential of non-state actors

The public and private sectors both have an important role to play in education provision. Equally important is how well and how much they collaborate. Collaboration, together with partnerships and knowledge sharing, will be emphasised across all the workshops and panels running under this sub-theme.

The relationship between the two sectors and how the private sector can become more involved, particularly within higher education, will be examined. For example, the economic crisis is likely to have an impact on financing for education.

Participants will look at the current worldwide financial system and explore gaps that need to be filled by international non-governmental organisations and the private sector. They will discuss how civil society can support education as public funding declines. Successful private–public ventures that could be adapted for other countries will also be highlighted.

Rapid changes are taking place in technology, creating both opportunities and threats for the Commonwealth’s many small states. For example, digital publishing could have an adverse effect on traditional publishers while at the same time it could open up new, cheaper possibilities for education such as technology-based distance learning, open learning, and the development of virtual knowledge repositories.

The impact and opportunities created by these new trends, and how they can best be harnessed to advance education in the Commonwealth, will be debated.

The sub-theme will also question whether or not multicultural education can be used as a positive force in building nations and encouraging social cohesion. Successes will be highlighted alongside the challenges that need to be overcome by governments and school authorities. The role that civil society can play will be discussed across all the sessions.

Stimulating debate and action towards education and beyond MDGs

We are now more than midway to the target date of 2015 for achievement of the MDGs. With some exceptions, the picture is not encouraging, reinforcing the conclusions of the UN Report published in September 2008.6

Recurring problems include the failure of conventional economic growth to relieve poverty, extreme regional disparities, inadequate spending on health and education, and insufficient aid.

Through the series of focused workshops under each of its sub-themes, the Stakeholders’ Forum aims to stimulate debate, and highlight successes as well as areas of concern. It will enable participants and policy-makers to take stock of success but, more importantly, to define ways of meeting education challenges.

The ultimate goal is to achieve recommendations that will influence and help ministers to formulate effective policies that will take the Commonwealth closer to achieving the education MDGs.

The Forum will create a positive environment for delegates to share a wealth of experiences, ideas and successes that will provide valuable learning for all.

Endnotes

4 Commonwealth Secretariat, http://www.thecommonwealth.org/Internal/34040/34041/14251/0aids_in_the_commonwealth/
6 http://uk.oneworld.net/guides/bangladesh/development
Fifty years of achievement for the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

John Kirkland

50 not out, and approaching a second half-century with confidence. That’s the message that the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan (CSFP) will deliver to Commonwealth education ministers in Kuala Lumpur this June.

The CSFP is one of the largest and most successful forms of Commonwealth collaboration – but also one of the least well understood. Set up by ministers at the first Commonwealth education conference in 1959, it provides a mechanism through which any Commonwealth country can offer scholarships or fellowships to citizens of any other member state. The awards are financed by host countries themselves, not the Commonwealth centrally.

A Commonwealth-wide initiative

A staggering 26,000 individuals have benefited from the Plan and, although the United Kingdom has maintained its promise at the first conference to be the largest single contributor, it is far from the only one. Commonwealth Scholarships have been offered throughout the 50-year period by Canada, India and New Zealand, and in recent years by the likes of Brunei Darussalam, Ghana, Jamaica, Malta, and Trinidad and Tobago. Malaysia and South Africa are among the countries that have started to offer awards recently, whilst some 24 countries in total have hosted Commonwealth Scholarships at some point during the Plan’s history. Award holders have travelled from Barbados to Sri Lanka, the UK to Sierra Leone, and Tanzania to Mauritius – all in the name of the Commonwealth.

Both the number and the nature of awards have changed over time, in ways that reflect the history of higher education and the Commonwealth itself. A history of the CSFP, to be published later this year, suggests that, while the scheme was initially seen as a means of enhancing Commonwealth cohesion, host governments have increasingly seen benefits for their international development programmes, international diplomacy activity and the competitiveness of their higher education systems.

At their 2000 conference, education ministers called for more diversity in the range of opportunities offered. This has been embraced, for example by the introduction of distance learning scholarships, particularly in the UK, which allow high-level study to be undertaken without physically leaving home or job; through the introduction of short-term professional fellowships for those in mid-career; and, in recent years, by Canada’s emphasis on postdoctoral work and undergraduate exchanges. Overall, however, postgraduate study, at both Master’s and doctoral level, remains the most prevalent route for Commonwealth Scholarships, and the emphasis of the scheme on academic merit, although influenced by development objectives, remains intact.

A record of achievement

The impact of the Plan has extended far beyond individual recipients. Studies conducted over the past few years show that alumni have an outstanding record of reaching the highest level in their chosen professions. The second Directory of Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows, supported by the UK and Canada and launched in April 2009, contains some 4,000 career profiles of past award holders, and the names of over 25,000.

Ruth Lugwisha (left), Commonwealth Professional Fellow, Environment Agency, UK, 2007, examining landfill liner used in modern landfills in the UK
Perhaps surprisingly, the alumni studies suggest that Commonwealth Scholarships have not provided the route to ‘brain drain’ often associated with other programmes. Studies of those who have held awards in the UK found that 85–90 per cent have returned to, and are still working in, their home countries. Of the minority that do not, many work in relevant occupations, for example positions with international development agencies or research that impacts directly on their home country. Several possible reasons can be advanced for this – the role of home governments in nominating candidates, the commitment made by award holders at the time of their awards to return home on completion, and the inclusion of both short and long awards in the mix of opportunities offered.

Commonwealth Scholars and Fellows also show a propensity to build careers in the public sector. A recent evaluation exercise of alumni who studied in the UK showed that education was the most popular sector of employment – higher education, in particular. This is not surprising given that, for many years, a proportion of awards have been reserved for young and mid-career staff in developing country universities. The figures show that these scholars have done exactly what the Plan expected of them. Alumni have gone on to make an impact in all walks of life, however – with hundreds of examples of leaders from occupations ranging from politics and government to the private sector, NGOs to journalism, science to law.
Alumni and their professions

Alumni have an outstanding record of reaching the highest level in their chosen professions...

Dr Kenny Anthony (Commonwealth Scholar from St Lucia, PhD Law, University of Birmingham, UK, 1985–88) is Leader of the Labour Party and formerly Prime Minister, St Lucia.
Professor Saleem Badat (Commonwealth Scholar from South Africa, DPhil Southern African Studies, University of York, UK, 1995–97) is Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, South Africa.
Professor Lino Briguglio (Commonwealth Scholar from Malta, PhD Economics, University of Exeter, UK, 1979–82) is one of the lead authors of the Fourth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2007.
Professor Ijaz Hossain (Commonwealth Scholar from Bangladesh, PhD Chemical Engineering, University College London, UK, 1983–86) has also been recognised by the IPCC for his contribution to the report.
Sir Ross Cranston (Commonwealth Scholar from Australia, DPhil Law, University of Oxford, UK, 1973–75) is a High Court judge in the UK.
Professor Gajaraj Dhanarajan (Commonwealth Scholar from Malaysia, PhD Entomology, Aston University, UK, 1971–74) is formerly CEO of the Commonwealth of Learning, Canada.

Edward Greenspon (Commonwealth Scholar from Canada, MSc Politics, London School of Economics and Political Science, UK, 1984–86) is Editor-in-Chief of The Globe and Mail, Canada.
Professor Germaine Greer (Commonwealth Scholar from Australia, PhD English, University of Cambridge, UK, 1964–67) is a writer and broadcaster.
Dr George Kanyeihamba (Commonwealth Scholar from Uganda, PhD Law, University of Warwick, UK, 1971–73) is Justice of the Supreme Court of Uganda.
Dr Kevin Lynch (Commonwealth Scholar from Canada, MA Economics, University of Manchester, UK, 1972–73) is Clerk of the Privy Council and Secretary to the Cabinet, Canada – the country’s most senior civil servant.
Dame Bridget Ogilvie (Commonwealth Scholar from Australia, PhD Immunology of Parasites, University of Cambridge, UK, 1960–63) is a Fellow of the Royal Society and formerly Director of the Wellcome Trust, UK.
Dr Lockwood Smith (Commonwealth Scholar from New Zealand, PhD Intestinal Protein Turnover, University of Adelaide, Australia, 1973–77) is Speaker of the House of Representatives, New Zealand.
Professor Walter Woon (Commonwealth Scholar from Singapore, LLM Law, University of Cambridge, UK, 1982–83) is Attorney-General of Singapore.

Looking to the future

Back in 1959, the founders of the CSFP recognised that the means of delivery would need to adapt over time, in order to reflect changing needs. In Kuala Lumpur in June 2009, their successors will be asked to recognise that, despite the huge success of the past, the Plan cannot rest upon its laurels. New mechanisms will be proposed to ensure even greater impact and relevance in the next half-century.

Foremost will be the establishment of the CSFP Anniversary Endowment Fund, the foundations of which were laid at the 2006 CCEM in Cape Town. The fund will not replace the contributions made by existing host governments, but will provide an additional resource to support awards hosted by low- and middle-income countries. The impact of this will be huge, and will establish the Commonwealth-wide credentials of the Plan more fully than ever. The fund will also provide a forum for universities in these countries to showcase the educational experiences that they offer to an international audience, opportunities for ‘northern’ students to study in destinations not previously considered, and a new route for south-south collaboration. With £1.3 million already committed even before the formal launch of the fund at the 2009 CCEM, and the news that HRH The Prince of Wales has agreed to be Patron of the fund, the prospects for the new initiative already look bright.

Another topic of discussion for ministers will be the relationship between home and host countries. Partnership has always been a key principle of the CSFP, with both parties contributing to the nomination and selection of candidates. Perhaps new communication technologies could now be used to strengthen the relationship still further, with more regular two-way discussion throughout the selection process. The introduction of an electronic application system in the UK later this year also provides a step in this direction. Alumni, who increasingly maintain electronic contact with the CSFP and each other through subject-specific professional networks, also have an increased role to play.

A historic opportunity

At their meeting in Oxford 50 years ago, ministers could not have anticipated the size and impact that their creation of the CSFP would have. Now 50 years later, ministers have an opportunity both to consolidate and to expand the scheme, and make it even more relevant to future generations. It is vital for the future of the Commonwealth that the opportunity is grasped.
Community learning
Perspectives on the role of media in non-formal education

Ian Pringle, Mikey Rosato and Charles Simbi

Lack of learning opportunities as a barrier to development

There is a profound lack of appropriate and effective learning opportunities in remote, rural and resource-poor parts of the world. Schools, by and large, do not cater to non-formal or lifelong learning needs of adults or youth. Universities and colleges have at best a limited footprint in most rural and remote areas and courses are rarely framed to meet the livelihood, health or development needs of communities or their members.

Just as it is hard to imagine universities offering non-formal educational services in developing areas, it’s unlikely that community groups can fill the gap on their own. Local media, community development programmes, information and communication technology (ICT) centres, development and other localised services, even when information-based, are seldom effectively structured for engaged learning. There is however untapped potential in collaboration among these groups: educational institutions, local development agents, media/ICT groups and communities.

Open and distance learning

Open and distance learning (ODL) is best known in the context of formal education – correspondence and distance education through universities leading to qualifications. But there is also a hugely important role for ODL practice in non-formal learning; learning about health, parenting and resolving conflict; and about entrepreneurship, livelihoods and life skills.

The core principles of ODL – its openness, scaleability, geographic reach, flexibility for learners, and cost-effectiveness – make it especially relevant in rural, remote and resource-poor areas. Formal or non-formal, in areas of greatest need, ODL is likely to be the only way mass learning necessary to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) can take place.

The widening gap between the range and volume of communities’ education needs and the capacity of conventional face-to-face, bricks-and-mortar institutions and approaches to meet those demands points to innovative learning programmes delivered through local media and other technologies as a solution. The key elements of ODL – media-based learning materials, structured learning curricula and objectives, and learner support – are all appropriate and feasible in these areas where non-formal learning is most needed. It is now a question of applying the right models of ODL, be they new or old, and to build the capacities of groups to carry them out.

Community-based technology and media facilities

One requirement for ODL is media that can carry the learning content. In the past decade or so there has been a dramatic expansion in ICT- and media-enabled community facilities around the globe. These include telecentres, community radio, village
knowledge centres, wall newspapers, community access points, information kiosks, community TV, and community learning and education centres.

India, for example, has set ambitious targets in this field, initially suggesting the country would set up a knowledge centre for every village – as many as 600,000; a goal that has subsequently been scaled down to ‘only’ 100,000. Additionally, when the government allowed the establishment of community radios a few years ago, it envisioned an equally large scale – some 4,000 in five years.

There are certainly success stories in the global movement of community-based technology centres, even if many have an element of exaggeration. Ambitious words like ‘information’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ are often part of the names of the centres.

The expansion of local community-based centres with development-related mandates bodes well for ODL, because access to technology is a prerequisite for the type of mass learning distance education makes possible. Local communication and information facilities, like the ones we see expanding so rapidly in many parts of the developing world, are potentially vital parts of new community-based learning models; however the presence of technology is a necessary but, on its own, insufficient condition for good things to happen.

The majority of ‘ICT for development’ and ‘ICT for education’ initiatives have been technology-driven rather than people-oriented in their approach and thinking. They are well intentioned but too often miss the real ingredients: people, their needs and rights, and the content that links them together.

Community radio

Community radio has a long history in the Americas but is a more recent phenomenon in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia-Pacific where it has, to a large extent, been linked to if not driven by development agendas. Although it is hard to put media like community radio in the same category as telecentres and other types of IT centres, their development in some areas shares common characteristics of a technology-focused, top-down approach.

Community radio as a tool for participatory development is based on a logical premise, one that also supports its role in ODL, namely that in remote, rural and resource-poor areas community radio is a critical, if not the only mass information and communication service.

Community radios excel at actualising people’s right to speak and be heard, and at realising the principle of freedom of expression – what we often refer to as ‘voice’ – enabling people to participate at many levels in society and development. In developing areas, they are as unique in enabling ‘voice’ as they are in providing for local news and culture.

Where community radio faces greater challenges, and too often falls short in Africa, Asia-Pacific and Caribbean regions, is in addressing the information and content needs and rights of their communities. In addition to a ‘right to expression’, communities also have a ‘right to information’ and a ‘right to learn’.

Community radio – or any other community media or technology facility for that matter – is a vital tool for education; however, educational broadcasting and learning programmes are not easy to create, manage or sustain. New models are needed.

Community learning programmes: non-formal ODL

Following the idea of the ODL course team – in which lecturers work together with instructional designers – one of the main aims (and challenges) in developing non-formal ODL is to harness the collaborative power of education, development and media/ICT groups in creating educational content and learning programmes at the community level.

Community radios not only broadcast in local languages but are firmly rooted in local contexts and are trusted by their listeners. They also work in culturally appropriate ways. They draw on local community membership as ‘owners’, managers and staff. They also have limited capacity, particularly in content areas that require specialised knowledge, such as health or agriculture.

Alongside extension services and other public agencies, community development organisations often have the expertise required to meet health and livelihood needs. They share an increasing

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**Box 1** Community learning

**Principles for developing community learning programmes**

1. Start with local needs.
2. Know your audience; identify your learners; talk and listen to them.
3. Act now; think long term.
4. Bring together media/ICT, knowledge-based and education groups into win-win collaborative partnerships.
5. Plan for sustainability and scaleability from the start.
6. Prioritise local resources, including financial.
7. Establish clear learning objectives and curricula.
8. Be interactive in planning and programming.
9. Include face-to-face learning support.
10. Monitor and evaluate on an ongoing basis.

**Box 2** Phukusi la Moyo – Bag of Life

The name Phukusi la Moyo comes from a local traditional Chewa proverb: Phukusi la moyo umasungu wekha (‘Everyone should jealously protect their own bag of life’). This proverb teaches that everyone is responsible for their own lives and health and should have a full bag of skills, knowledge and experiences, which they can use when needed. The hope is that the radio programmes will be a source from which people living in Mchinji can draw to fill their ‘bags of life’ and safeguard mother and child health.
realisation that development is primarily a question of information and learning; however, their coverage and reach is generally limited by face-to-face and print-based methodologies and materials.

Seldom does either of these groups make the most of what we know about how people learn and all that adult and non-formal education experts have to offer.

The Phukusi la Moyo programme

An example of a promising community learning process is a programme called Phukusi la Moyo (literally, ‘Bag of Life’), developed in response to a need for education about maternal and child health in Mchinji District, Malawi.

Phukusi la Moyo has been developed through collaboration between communities in Mchinji, MaiMwana Project (a community-based maternal and child health NGO), the Mchinji District Health Office (Malawi Ministry of Health), Mudzi Wathu Community Radio Station, Story Workshop (a Blantyre-based educational media production group) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL).

Background to the programme

Malawi’s maternal and child mortality rates are among the highest in the world. In the past, a great deal of work to address high mortality rates was carried out at health facilities through training of staff, improving quality of services and provision of more resources. However, in Malawi, only about half (57 per cent) of women deliver in a health facility; only 57 per cent of women attend the recommended four antenatal care sessions; and only one-third (31 per cent) of women and children receive postnatal care. As a result, organisations are increasingly working at the local level to develop the capacities of communities to take control of their own health. It is only through a combination of facility and community-based approaches that countries will be able to achieve their MDG targets for maternal and child mortality respectively.

Box 3 Workshop report

Workshop report, Charles Simbi (Story Workshop)

‘By the fourth day [of the workshop], the Phukusi la Moyo programme was now taking shape. The format was known, the name created and the programme matrix ready. It was now time for the producers to gather the materials for the first programme. They went out to interview different stakeholders. The whole morning was reserved for content collection. The producers visited a nearby village which is host to one of the MaiMwana women groups to record songs and interviews for the first four programmes. The signature tune of the programme was created by the village women and was also recorded. The producers also interviewed some MaiMwana and district health officials as well as women’s groups’ representatives. The producers were on their way to producing their first Phukusi la Moyo programme.’

MaiMwana Project has been implementing this combination of approaches in collaboration with the Mchinji District Health Office since 2003. Learning from these activities and, more importantly, the explicitly expressed needs of communities in Mchinji, has revealed the need for a more specific behaviour change communication strategy to supplement existing activities in the district. ODL through radio has the potential to reach communities with messages that can increase the awareness and change the attitudes of community members in relation to mother and child health. These changes, supported by existing community mobilisation and facility-based interventions, have a great potential to improve mother and child health and reduce mortality.

Using radio

The focus of the learning programme is a weekly 30-minute mother and child health radio show, Phukusi la Moyo, broadcast by Mudzi Wathu Community Radio, which reaches the whole of Mchinji District. Data suggest that as many as 80 per cent of households have radio sets, making potential access to the learning content high. The total population of the district is approximately 380,000 people. This means that within this total population, over one year, the programme has the potential to reach 15,000 women who will become pregnant in the district and the parents of 125,000 children aged 5 and under.

Programme development

In March 2009, the partners collaborated in a five-day design and content creation workshop, facilitated by three representatives from Story Workshop. Two representatives from Mudzi Wathu Community Radio Station, two from the District Hospital, two from MaiMwana Project and three representatives from communities in Mchinji participated in the workshop, which was supported financially by COL with major in-kind contributions from all parties.

The workshop stimulated the development of the following:

- A list of maternal and child health issues on which to focus the programme’s core messages.
- A message matrix listing, in relation to: 1) negative behaviours/practices; 2) possible consequences of the negative behaviours; 3) positive/expected behaviours; and 4) the benefits of practising the positive/expected behaviours.
- A programme matrix listing each programme in the series, including the theme or the issues under discussion; the communication objectives (expected outcomes); the target audience; and likely interviewees.
- A format for the programme, in this case, a magazine featuring interviews, debates, vox pop, drama, listeners’ letters, quizzes, poetry and human interest stories.
- A set of programme success factors, including the roles and responsibilities of each partner.
- A strategy for the role of listening groups in the programme.

Materials for the first four programmes were also recorded from nearby communities during the workshop and the pilot programme was fully developed and edited – ready for broadcast. A further 13 programmes were mapped out in detail. The programme team also decided on the name and the time of broadcast.
Face-to-face learner support

One of the partners’ objectives is to move beyond ‘messaging’ and a one-way ‘pushing content’ approach towards more interactive and engaged models for local educational programming.

The Phukusi la Moyo programme is also training 200 existing women’s groups in the skills necessary to become effective listening and learning clubs. The training draws on the experience of both Mudzi Wathu and MaiMwana Project. Three representatives from each of the 200 groups are being trained in the skills necessary to facilitate discussions about the programmes; facilitate the application of what women are learning to their own situations; and to facilitate group-based learning activities and skills development.

This network of groups covers approximately 350 villages and a total population of 80,000 people across the whole district. The groups were established by MaiMwana in 2005 and have been engaging in a community mobilisation action cycle in relation to mother and child health. This has involved meeting on a regular basis to:

- identify mother and child health problems;
- explore the causes of these problems and the ways to prevent and manage them;
- develop locally feasible strategies to address these problems;
- implement these strategies;
- evaluate the results of these strategies on mother and child health.

The activities are facilitated by trained local women who use visual aids such as picture cards and Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) methods to stimulate discussions. The groups are now starting a second phase of this cycle where they will identify and try to solve new health problems. The radio programmes provide information to these discussions and are further supported by the visual tools that the groups are using.

Success factors

Phukusi la Moyo is in its infancy, but there are a number of reasons its potential is already evident. It draws on and integrates demonstrated models and successful practices, in this case from the experiences of COL, MaiMwana Project and Mudzi Wathu Story Workshop.

The programme responds directly to a real, evident need. Malawi’s maternal and child mortality rates are high. The decision to use the community radio came out of the lessons learned from MaiMwana Project’s first five years working in Mchinji District and the explicitly expressed needs of women in Mchinji for more information and education about mother and child health issues.

Learners participate in all aspects of the programme. They are clearly identified and are part of the planning and development process. The programmes also have a strong element of field recording and live interaction. Building on MaiMwana Project’s community-based approach, there is already a sense of ownership for the programme among the communities, which arises from their engagement in the process – a critical factor for overall sustainability.
While the programme is reliant to some degree on external funding support, the prospects for financial sustainability are good. The Mchinji District Health Office has committed to budgeting for the basic costs of running the programme as part of its District Implementation Plan in coming years. This funding will come from the Malawi Ministry of Health through the Sector-Wide Approach.

The programme takes a long-term approach; for example, the development workshop focused on the design of a long-term programme, not on an individual show or piece of content. It is envisioned that the programme will run for at least three years.

The listening clubs will also be sustained in a number of ways:

- MaiMwana has received a further five years of funding, which will allow it to support the groups until at least December 2013, by which time their operations should be self-sustaining.
- The district women’s committee has established an independent organisational structure to help them collaborate and lobby for their own resources and funding.
- The groups have established their own bank account to help fund group activities and have succeeded in raising money for this account.

Data suggest that there is potential for 80 per cent of households in Mchinji District to listen to _Phukusi la Moyo_. In parallel to this coverage of individual households, MaiMwana Project aims to scale up the number of groups/listening clubs in Mchinji gradually over the next few years with approximately 500 groups running by early 2010 (covering half the district) and approximately 1,000 groups by early 2011 (covering the entire district).

The ‘win-win’ collaboration between local subject experts (in this case, the Mchinji District Health Office and MaiMwana Project), media groups (Mudzi Wathu Community Radio and Story Workshop) and education specialists (from MaiMwana Project and Story Workshop) is a critical element of the approach and a proven model of community-media-institutional partnership.

A key challenge faced by the programme is the financial and technical sustainability of the radio station. Maintenance requires technical expertise and funds. Mudzi Wathu Community Radio Station has signed a memorandum of understanding with a national broadcaster to provide this assistance, but the relationship will have to be carefully negotiated to ensure the radio is able to broadcast effectively for and beyond the duration of the programme.

**Conclusion**

_Phukusi la Moyo_ is a promising example of what can be achieved by bringing together communities, knowledge intermediaries, media and public institutions into a community-based learning process. The programme is rooted and focused clearly in community needs and the rights of women and children. It uses media technology to deliver learning content to a geographically dispersed audience in a manner that is cost-effective and pedagogically sound. The programme is participatory in design and draws on local voices together with local and national knowledge organisations for the formulation and contextualisation of learning objects. It incorporates off-air elements and complementary media for learner support and moves beyond messaging and pushing information towards engaged learning about health and building healthy communities.

**Endnote**

Whether education is seen to be part of the solution to the current financial crisis remains to be seen. When the G20 met in London in March 2009 they emphasised the importance of education and training as a catalyst to stimulating their national economies and softening the blow of the global recession. 

But what about the low-income countries (LICs) where the majority of the world’s 75 million out-of-school children reside? Will the rich countries keep their promises to increase aid for education? Will the recipient governments match this funding and wisely apply the resources to improve the quality of education? Will civil society be able to influence their governments to invest in teachers and improve their training so children learn the right skills to access good and steady employment, thereby contributing to strengthening the economy (and averting future crises)?

These questions are not new, but they do take on a new dimension in a time of recession. The International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates that the LICs will be hit hard – 30-50 million more workers are expected to be unemployed, pushing over 200 million people to the brink of starvation and poverty (ILO 2009). For women, who tend to have lower educational attainment levels, the impact is expected to be worse as they tend to be the first to lose their employment (ILO, 2009a).

If we want people, especially the poor, marginalised and women, to not only survive but thrive through the crisis we must bolster investment in areas that will support them, such as education and healthcare. But perhaps we must also seek a paradigm shift in the way these ‘essential services’ or rights are fulfilled. If schools offered better quality learning, would people be better equipped to deal with periods of uncertainty?

The crisis not only challenges donors and governments to uphold their commitments to education but also offers an opportunity to build an even stronger, more egalitarian system that is accessible to all children. If we want children to learn more and have ‘real competencies and holistic capacities’, then we must:

(a) invest in teachers;
(b) support greater involvement of parents and communities in ensuring schools provide good quality education;
(c) widen policy and decision-making platforms so open debates on the key elements required to make schools more effective can take place.

Investing in teachers

The situation of teachers is a crucial indicator for achieving the gender parity and universal primary education (UPE) goals by 2015. Addressing the 18 million shortage in teachers worldwide is imperative. Sub-Saharan Africa alone requires 3.8 million more teachers – a 68 per cent increase between 2004 and 2015 – if countries are to reach the goal of UPE with a pupil–teacher ratio (PTR) that offers reasonable opportunity to learn of 40:1 (Global Monitoring Report 2009). However, the PTRs continue to rise, often reaching over 100:1 in rural areas, and trained pupil–teacher ratios (TPTR) continue to dwindle. Recent research shows that 12 per cent of teachers in Uganda and Malawi are untrained or under-qualified (ActionAid Malawi, 2009; ActionAid Uganda, 2009).

However, simply increasing the number of teachers in a classroom will not automatically lead to better learning. Improving children’s learning outcomes depends in large part on the quality of teaching that takes place in the classroom. Research shows that improving learning largely depends on teacher development and meaningful, context-specific teacher-centred approaches (Chapman, 2000; Kent, 2005). The trend in teacher training however is to truncate the years of training. In Senegal, teacher training programmes were reduced from 4 years to 6 months (this policy is now being reviewed) and varies from 2 years in Uganda and Malawi to 1-4 years in Burundi (ActionAid Burundi, 2008; ActionAid Senegal, 2009).

Hiring more trained teachers and ensuring those in service benefit from continued professional development requires resources. However, in times of financial crisis, governments are likely to clamp down on spending. The likely target for cuts tends to be teachers, who occupy the largest budget line for education, often

Renewing interest in the quality of education

Have we lost sight of what education is all about?

Akanksha A. Marphatia
amounting to 90 per cent of available resources. Faced with limited resources, governments have turned to hiring untrained and under-qualified teachers to fill the gap. This compromises the quality of teaching and can impact children’s learning outcomes.

Another reason for limiting the number of teachers that can be hired comes from an unlikely, but important source: the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Recent reports by civil society organisations (CSOs) working on health and education show that the widely imposed ‘wage bill ceiling’ in IMF macro-economic conditionalities have negatively impacted the ability of countries to hire teachers and health workers. Though the IMF has recently ceased imposing these ceilings in its loan agreements with LICs, the overly restrictive monetary (low, single-digit inflation rates) and fiscal (low to zero deficits) policies continue to appear as strict conditionalities and continue to limit spending (Global Campaign for Education, 2009).

Placing limits on wage spending is smart budgeting but the question is who sets these ceilings and based on what considerations? Research shows that the ceilings have mostly been based on the need to contain spending in order to meet the macro-economic targets of the IMF rather than on national education goals. Unless these policies are challenged and changed to support economic stability and increased investment in social sectors, the likelihood of increasing investment in teachers remains slim. And all this at a time when investment in key sectors of health and education is precisely what countries require to shield themselves from recession. The G20 countries are practising this policy with the UK and USA running historical fiscal deficits and increasing spending on education and health. President Obama has said that ‘[the] last thing a government should do in the middle of a recession is to cut back on spending’ (Financial Times, 2009).

Promoting parental involvement in learning

Investing in teachers is one part of the equation for improving learning. Parental involvement in education is equally important. However the participation of parents must move beyond functional uses (e.g., school construction, fees, books, etc.) to involvement in governance, supporting teachers and taking part in their children’s learning. This can happen if parents believe education is a worthwhile investment and if they have a good understanding of what constitutes ‘good quality’ learning. This requires a better understanding of the role of parents and teachers in improving children’s learning outcomes.

Exactly how this information is derived has been shown to be as important as the results. When a wide range of actors – parents, pupils, teachers, adult learning groups, education coalitions, teachers’ unions, national research institutions and Ministries of Education – are directly involved in diagnosing the current state of education, learning achievements and the quality of teaching, then the solutions are likely to be more realistic (ActionAid, 2009).

These broad partnerships have the potential of widening the space for debate and discussion around expectations of schooling, responsibilities of different stakeholders and greater accountability vis-à-vis policy-makers for delivering a high quality of education. Involving stakeholders in bottom-up processes that are participatory and inclusive in nature pave the way to successful reforms (Dembélé and Schwillé, 2003; Heneveld, 2007). Challenging the notion of whose voice and experience counts by involving parents – especially those that are illiterate – and pupils can be empowering. It results in greater awareness of what effective schools and quality learning should be like, offering opportunities for advocating specific changes to fulfil this ‘vision’. By partnering those who have first-hand experience of learning (communities and teachers) with groups who already have an advocacy platform (education coalitions and teacher unions), and by involving research institutes who have the evidence to make a stronger case, you may well have the ingredients for change.

Renewing commitment to learning

Renewing commitment to learning therefore requires not only widening current platforms but creating new spaces for engagement with decision-makers. If education is to become a national prerogative (in other words, concern to all citizens) and an essential tool that people can use to better shoulder the financial crisis, then decisions about funding and policies must be made in consultation with civil society. These discussions are already starting to take place in many countries through the efforts of the Global Campaign for Education and regional and national education coalitions. The ‘paradigm shift’ involves widening this circle to include pupils and parents, teachers, unions, researchers and economists. It also requires moving beyond the education sector to include the externally imposed macro-economic policies by the IMF that continue to set the parameters around national spending. Macro-economic policies must be set through a process of debate and discussion with wider civil society. The discussion around ‘trade-offs’ between restrictive policies and increasing investment in education and health must be exhausted. The solution – which balances investment in education and health, protects and promotes women’s access and fulfilment of these rights and promotes economic stability – must be derived by national policy-makers and civil society and not external actors, be they donor agencies or international financial institutions. Only then can the ‘quality of education equation’ – investing in teachers, promoting parental involvement in learning and civil society engagement in policy discussions – be fulfilled.

What can the Commonwealth Ministers of Education do?

The Commonwealth Ministers of Education must first ask where and how they can continue to add value. Is it through a broader education/development agenda or on particular issues? Below are some of the future issues Commonwealth Ministers of Education need to consider.

- Revisiting the role of the IMF.
- Building the capacity of Ministries of Education and Finance staff to work out alternative macro-economic scenarios that enable a balance between macro policies and social spending.
- Ensuring civil society, including teachers’ unions and parents, are at the table when discussions take place so that the power circles shift.
- Broadening partnerships between education coalitions, teachers’ unions, economists and research institutes.
Renewing interest in the quality of education

As Senior Education Research and Policy Co-ordinator at ActionAid, AKANKSHA A. MARPHATIA has led multi-country comparative research on quality education and the impact of the IMF on education finance. She previously worked on gender and education issues in Sub-Saharan Africa with a range of NGOs, UN agencies, government ministries and the International Centre for Research on Women.
Young people make up half of the 2 billion population of the Commonwealth.

Young citizens of the Commonwealth can make positive contributions to society by being agents of social change.

Young people will lead the Commonwealth into the future in their roles as leaders and responsible citizens.
It’s time for the paradigm to shift – youthwise

Dr Fatiha Serour

The future of the Commonwealth lies in its young people with all their creativity, potential and energy. They are our students, our young entrepreneurs, our workers and eventually our carers. They are also the very people who society is leaving behind, marginalised by their age, yet caught up in a rapidly developing world, which is losing the traditional boundaries that helped shape the generations that went before them.

They will inherit our world but have little say on what kind of world that will be, as decisions that affect the world’s future are not left to them. Climate change, massive global economic shifts, depletion of resources and a potential energy crisis – these are all going to require bold new thinking and brave new action. To this end, we are responsible for equipping young people with the skills and tools they need to act positively and constructively. Education is central to this.

Today, young men and women are disproportionately affected by the current economic, social and political turmoil. The under-30 population currently represents over 60 per cent of the Commonwealth’s citizens. They are the largest group ever to enter the transition into adulthood. By 2015, there will be three billion Commonwealth’s citizens. They are the largest group ever to enter population currently represents over 60 per cent of the

They are the very people who society is leaving behind, marginalised by their age, yet caught up in a rapidly developing world, which is losing the traditional boundaries that helped shape the generations that went before them.

But for this to happen, it goes on, young people need to be seen and treated as potential assets and engaged in processes of dialogue and decision-making.

The Commonwealth is well positioned to facilitate this – a point reiterated by Lord Alderdice, the UK Liberal Democrat peer and member of the Commission. At an education meeting earlier this year, he told delegates:

*As an association, the Commonwealth is uniquely placed – both in terms of its diversity and history – to make an important contribution both within its member countries and globally. The Commonwealth operates through the relationship of shared culture and diversity. Our differences do not need to lead to division, but to enrichment and diversity. The Commonwealth is not based on a model of dominance, but one of engagement, understanding and sharing.*

Diversity, co-operation and a shared vision – this is how the Commonwealth has been working for the past 60 years. And it is fitting that the theme for this year’s anniversary looks back on the association’s achievements and forward to its future: The Commonwealth@60: Serving a New Generation.

The theme recognises that young people need to be equipped to deal with the world they will inherit and it calls upon the leaders and policy-makers of today to help make this happen. To this end, the Commonwealth has invested in youth development to empower young people to become active participants in the decision-making that will affect their lives. They need our support.

For over 30 years, the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has worked to champion the rights of young people, ensuring their engagement in the development process so that they can play an active part in reversing marginalisation, poverty, illiteracy, unemployment and disease. We push for young people to be represented at all levels of decision-making, including a seat and voice at the table when Commonwealth Ministers meet on youth issues.

CYP is a single-focus youth development agency and our work is conducted through four regional centres – in Zambia, Guyana, India and Solomon Islands. During the past three decades, we have forged cultural, geographical and historical ties with young people, governments, National Youth Councils, Youth Commissions and civil society organisations across the Commonwealth.

The participation of young people in decision-making is integral to our work at CYP. Our work affects those in youth development and we primarily work with Youth Ministries, Youth Development Professionals and Youth leaders in Commonwealth countries.
Below are some examples of where we have made a meaningful difference.

Rehabilitating former child soldiers

The Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre, a Government of Uganda project located in Gulu District and currently supported with funding from the Commonwealth Youth Programme, targets young people aged 15–25 in Gulu District and will subsequently expand to cover the Acholi sub-region. The project aims to help young people gain decent employment through learning vocational and other skills and also create a healthy young labour force to ensure a constructive contribution to the development and peace-building process. It will also facilitate youth involvement in social and cultural reconstruction as a way of helping them reclaim their identity. Dialogue and the promotion of reconciliation and peaceful co-existence are encouraged at the Centre. This effort is directly aimed at the families and communities who have been torn apart by the conflict.

Peer counsellors increase understanding of HIV/AIDS

The Commonwealth Youth Programme helps young people in Commonwealth countries to target issues like HIV/AIDS. Young Ambassadors for Positive Living (many of whom are HIV positive themselves) are taught accurate information and trained to communicate with young people about the virus. To date, over 200 young people across Africa, Asia, the Pacific and the Caribbean have received training.

These ambassadors organise ‘street plays’, which are performed in villages or open fields and which contain information on HIV/AIDS. Doctors provide advice regarding the content in the scripts and often attend the plays, so they can answer questions raised after the production. Music concerts take place with ambassadors performing in areas such as shopping malls. The music, which tempts a young crowd, contains messages that address important points about HIV/AIDS.

Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI)

The CYCI was set up to offer loans, training, education and business support for young men and women across the Commonwealth. It was piloted in Zambia, India, Guyana and Solomon Islands, and has since been replicated in a further 12 countries. In India alone, nearly 1,000 people gained functional literacy through the project, and 9,000 have been exposed to health-awareness camps and exhibitions.

The loan from the CYCI has helped me to be independent and not to be a sex worker... I can buy my own soap, food, clothes. (CYCI participant, Florida Harrison, from Malawi).

Commonwealth Youth Development Awards

The Commonwealth Youth Development Awards were established to recognise significant contributions to the development of young people in communities. Every year, approximately £35,000 is made available to outstanding youth-led initiatives. Recent winners of the Gold Award include a soil regeneration project in India and an initiative in Fiji to provide alternative livelihoods to the drug trade, including fishing, farming and a canteen business. Through these awards, CYP recognises the efforts of young people to develop their communities by creating innovative and sustainable development projects. The projects are evaluated on the participation of young people in identifying, planning, implementing and monitoring the project.

Youth Development Diploma

The Diploma in Youth Development Work, currently offered by 29 partner institutions in 45 countries, is designed to provide youth workers with an underpinning knowledge on which to base their work with young people; an understanding of the values and ethics of the profession, grounded in the values and principles of the Commonwealth; and the practical skills to undertake the work. The Diploma is made up of 13 ‘core’ modules, in addition to region-specific modules. The modules cover topics such as enterprise and economic development, youth policy, gender, health, project management, the environment and sustainable development. Each module takes approximately 4–6 weeks of full-time study but students are free to arrange a different schedule in their individual ‘earning agreement’ with the university they are registered with.

Education has a central role to play in our vision for young people. It’s about their own learning, both formal and informal. It’s also about educating today’s leaders and policy-makers on the importance of engaging youth in a meaningful way.

In Malaysia at this year’s Education Ministers’ Meeting, the Youth Forum will focus on core concerns and questions of young people in education. It will discuss the relevance, quality, accessibility, and accountability of education and how it can prepare them for life and for employment. Further, it will raise the issue of how the school environment can become a democratic space for students’ participation. There will also be a joint session with universities, students and employers about defining and meeting the needs of all stakeholders.

As primary recipients of education, we believe it is essential that young people have a say in the processes that determine their learning. You cannot have an education system without consulting the very people who will benefit from it. It’s time for a paradigm shift – youthwise.

DR FATIHA SEROUR joined the Commonwealth Secretariat as Director and Head of Youth Affairs in September 2006. She is a socio-economist with over 20 years experience in senior positions within the UN Family organisations; non-governmental sector; and academia as a lecturer, and researcher, on rural development in Africa, at the universities of Aberdeen, Oxford and Oran. Dr Serour holds a BA in Sociology and Modern Languages, an MA in International Relations and a PhD in Political Economy: Comparative Development Strategies in Africa.