

19<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers, Nassau, The Bahamas

STATEMENT FROM THE CIVIL SOCIETY FORUM ON EDUCATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT IN SMALL STATES: THE QUALITY AND EQUITY IMPERATIVES

Sunday 21 June 2015

Preamble

*Recognising the distinctive experience and priorities of Commonwealth Small States and the importance of maintaining dedicated support for education where the Commonwealth has a unique mandate and comparative advantage*

*Highlighting the need for a transformative shift from the historical approach to education, to ensure meaningful reforms for successful and sustainable development*

*Acknowledging that much can be gained from building upon the successful experience of Small States for the wider Commonwealth, we call on Governments to support increased flexibility in the framing and implementation of emergent global goals and agendas, maximising relevance in meeting Small State needs and the engagement of diverse Commonwealth communities.*

The Civil Society Forum on Education in Small States and Sustainable Development therefore prioritises the following policy considerations and actions for Small State Governments in two broad areas:

**Consolidating Basic and Secondary Education: Quality and Equity**

1. Recognising that many Commonwealth Small States have made significant progress in basic and secondary education but are still challenged with reaching children and youth with disabilities, **we call on Ministers to ensure that the Education Acts/Laws of their countries are aligned with the current requirements of inclusive learners, and that funding commitments are made to the implementation of inclusive education.**
2. In maintaining quality education post-achievement of universal basic education and providing a pathway for strengthening learning outcomes, **we encourage Ministers to standardise the allocation of funding for the Ministries of Education (MoEs), (following through on the recommendations of the Incheon Declaration), to prioritise funding to Early Childhood Care and Education, and to redistribute MoE budget allocations to strategically advance the quality agenda, including a standardised allocation for continuous training of teachers and school leaders.**
3. Understanding therefore the pivotal role played by teachers in consolidating quality and equitable basic and secondary education, **we ask Ministers to strategically invest in the delivery of teacher training, continuing professional development, and wider professional learning, and the development of integrated communities of practice that will ensure long-term teacher support.**
4. Acknowledging the gender inequality challenges Small States are facing education, **we encourage Ministers to integrate into the training of education staff and students an understanding of how gender in society and schooling impacts on learning for boys and girls, and to broaden criteria by which successful schools outcomes are measured to fully recognize multiple intelligences.**
5. Recognising that MoEs need to work in partnership with a wide variety of stakeholders to effective and efficient finance equitable, quality basic and secondary education, **we call on Ministers to develop and implement an integrated approach between Ministries relevant to sustainable development aims such as the blue economy, and with civil society, young people, the private sector, and to devolve decisions down to the local level for greater accountability and transparency (e.g. through the devolved public distribution of actual detailed expenditure).**

## Further and Higher Education (FHE) for Sustainable Development

6. Understanding the important role of Open Distance Learning (ODL) programmes in the Small State context, **we ask Ministers to recognise that ODL programmes are fully equivalent to conventional delivery, to do more to adopt ICT technologies and ODL as platforms** - including the mobilising of local and external resources - to drive education for sustainable development (ESD).
7. Emphasising the need for training for employability and sustainable livelihoods, **we call on Ministers to continuously increase investment and widen access to quality further and higher education (FHE) and to strengthen the role, status and accreditation of national and regional TVET systems.** In doing so, priority should be given to the employability of graduates, and the provision of dedicated support to young people including counselling, career advice, and job-seeking assistance.
8. Recognising that deep inequalities exist in access to FHE, **we call on Ministers make robust provisions for removing barriers to all**, including identifying under-represented groups, setting rates for meaningful participation in FHE, and instituting a broad variety of relevant FHE programmes.
9. Building on the existing work in the area of resilience in Small Island Developing States (SIDS), **we ask Ministers to strengthen research capacity of FHE institutions and other communities of knowledge.** This includes enabling a more transformative framework for ESD, including: further work on a Small States definition of “resilience”, community linkages to capture and share knowledge (including traditional knowledge), and empowering communities to enact solutions.
10. Highlighting the importance of a clear strategy for sustainably financing FHE, **we call on Ministers to develop, maintain and strengthen their financing policies for comprehensive and inclusive FHE systems.** The financing should be aligned with national development plans and develop a clear policy for innovative partnerships, including partnering with civil society and the private sector, such as establishing an FHE fund/levy (or similar, depending on context).

### Cross Cutting Areas

11. Acknowledging the strategic importance of strong data, **we call on Ministers to strengthen collection and analyses of robust, disaggregated and appropriate data in order to track, monitor and evaluate issues**, such as gender inequality. This will inform policy and practice and enable strategic directions, and make data and evidence easily accessible to stakeholders, including civil society.
12. Recognising that society requires citizens with skills for civic engagement, and to ensure that everyone exercises their citizenship fully, **we encourage Ministers to plan for and finance non-formal and community education programmes and initiatives.**

**As part of the offer to engage and develop meaningful partnerships, civil society reaffirms its commitment to:**

1. Offer support to government by participating in policy formulation around education, and play an active role in partnering, monitoring and evaluating implementation of education policy and practice.
2. Mobilise local groups to undergo training and to participate in the collection of data for the monitoring of education and sustainable development goals, and develop an integrated approach to education and sustainable development in small states within civil society and across sectors.
3. Advocate for a transformative ESD framework through consultation, research and development, programme partnerships and targeted implementation within communities.
4. Participate actively within the commonwealth CSO network in order to be knowledgeable of our peers, creating awareness of practices, implementation success and lessons learned.
5. Solicit home country government funding for CSO capacity building in collaboration with peers across the Commonwealth for stronger civil society - civil society partnerships, alignment, and strategic synergies.
6. Develop capacity for parents, teachers, and communities to engage in policy dialogues, ascertaining ways for children to develop values, ethics and soft skills essential to responsible citizenship.
7. Promote the value of FHE, non-formal and community education and follow-through on the call for greater public-private partnerships in FHE by advocating for legislation to incentivise private giving towards funding to FHE, including TVET.