

# EDUCATION IN THE SMALL STATES OF THE COMMONWEALTH

## TOWARDS AND BEYOND GLOBAL GOALS AND TARGETS

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## Executive Summary

Among the 52 current member states of the Commonwealth, 28 have populations below 2 million. Small states thus comprise over half of the total. Within the group, most are at the lower end of the population scale: 22 have populations below one million, and 13 have populations below 250,000. The Commonwealth thus has a strong mandate to give special attention to small states, and a considerable history of having done so.

The fact that the 17<sup>th</sup> Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (CCEM) in Kuala Lumpur is being held 50 years after the first conference in Oxford (1959) provides a good reason to look back before for looking forward. The Commonwealth Secretariat has taken a leadership role in identifying distinctive features of education in small states. This work contains much of value that can usefully be revisited.

At the same time, contexts and modalities have changed significantly over the decades. Most obvious have been the opportunities and challenges of globalisation. The internet has significantly reduced the isolation of small states, and has given opportunities to access expertise that could not previously be imagined. Technological advances have also facilitated forms of collaboration, among which the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC) is especially exciting. Yet, the cross-national interconnectedness in this era of globalisation brings challenges as evidenced by the financial crisis which commenced in 2008.

This paper outlines key themes and lessons from experience. It notes that many small states are well advanced on the Education for All (EFA) objectives and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), but that others have some distance to go. The paper highlights the value of collaboration within the Commonwealth, both among small states as a group and between small states and larger entities. It also identifies ways in which the Commonwealth experience can inspire learning among small and larger states which are not members of the Commonwealth. It highlights issues of climate change, migration, planning for higher education, and issues of coordination, integration and regulation.

The themes in this paper will be developed further following inputs from the CCEM and other sources. At appropriate stages in the paper, key questions are raised for debate and discussion.

## **Introduction**

This paper is a contribution to discussion on education in the small states of the Commonwealth during the 17CCEM in Kuala Lumpur. Given that 28 Commonwealth countries have populations below two million (and 22 below one million),<sup>1</sup> the debate will engage a majority of Commonwealth members.

The paper is designed as a stimulus for Ministers and senior officials from small states to consider their educational priorities and strategies during a period of economic turmoil, environmental threat and social pressure on young people. At the same time it recognises encouraging developments, for example in the domain of technology. The paper has five sections, each setting some questions for debate:

- 1. New Challenges and Opportunities**
- 2. An Overview of Education in Small States**
- 3. Major Priorities for Policy and Planning**
- 4. Strengthened Research and Evaluation Capacity**
- 5. Conclusions and Possibilities**

This material recognises and builds on the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in this domain.<sup>2</sup> In some respects it is an update of the review of this work prepared by Crossley and Holmes in 1999.<sup>3</sup> The paper draws on international databases, consultation with policy makers, planners and practitioners in small states, and a critical review of the international literature.

In line with the spirit of the 17CCEM, the paper highlights the value of cooperation among and between small states under the aegis of the Commonwealth and through the other international and regional forums to which most Commonwealth small states belong. This experience can inspire learning among small and larger states which are not members of the Commonwealth. UNESCO, which has 193 member states including all the Commonwealth states, provides one forum for such wider consideration of lessons and strategies.

After the 17CCEM, a more detailed report be prepared on major planning and research priorities for education in the small states of the Commonwealth. This will be developed by the Education in Small States Research Group at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom together with UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) in France. The 17CCEM meeting provides an opportunity for Ministers to identify key issues for further exploration and inclusion in the follow-up publication.

### **1. New Challenges and Opportunities**

A decade into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, partnerships are as important as they were during previous eras. In some respects, however, contexts and modalities have changed. The increased intensity of globalisation is especially evident, and brings both challenges and opportunities. As noted by Bacchus (2008: 141), getting the best from these developments is something that small states cannot do by themselves "because they are usually 'takers' rather than 'makers' of the world economic policies". The global economic crisis which commenced at the

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<sup>1</sup> This number (and the total number of Commonwealth countries indicated in the Executive Summary) excludes Fiji Islands, which was suspended from the Commonwealth in December 2006. Fiji Islands has a population of 837,000.

<sup>2</sup> The Commonwealth Secretariat organised a seminal conference on education in small states in Mauritius in 1985 (Commonwealth Secretariat 1986), and during the subsequent decades undertook work on the organisation and management of ministries of education; post-secondary education; consultancies for education systems; examinations and assessment; telecommunications; and planning and management (see e.g. Bacchus & Brock 1987; Bray et al. 1991; Bray & Packer 1993; Lloyd & Packer 1994; Commonwealth Secretariat 1997; Bray & Steward 1998; Baldacchino & Farrugia 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Crossley, M. & Holmes, K. (1999): *Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth: Retrospect and Prospect*. London: The Commonwealth Secretariat.

end of 2008 has hit at least some small states disproportionately hard, especially the states which rely heavily on banking and tourism. Trade liberalisation has been a mixed blessing for many small states, and in some locations the issues of migration and brain drain have become even more prominent than they were before. Climate change also brings major challenges, especially for island states vulnerable to sea-level rise and intensified hurricanes.

More positively, small states have greatly benefited from the technological advances associated with globalisation. Previous generations felt that small states were disadvantaged for example by lack of ability to establish specialist libraries and to gain specialist professional advice. The internet has meant that households and institutions in small states can have the same access through this medium as households and institutions in large states. Moreover, small states are using technology to make links over vast areas. Especially exciting is the Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth (VUSSC), of which the seeds were sown in 2000 during the Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers in Halifax, Canada (Daniel & West 2008). Other changes have included expanded demand for education. A few small states are still some distance from the goal of universal primary education, but most are well advanced and indeed many are close to universal secondary education. With progress at primary and secondary levels, demand has expanded for tertiary education. Further, expansion of tertiary education is now increasingly prioritised in the global knowledge economy of which small states, like their larger counterparts, wish to be part.

Such considerations highlight the demands on policy makers and planners in small states, who may need additional or to some extent different skills from their counterparts in larger states (Bray 1992; Atchoaréna 1993; Baldacchino & Farrugia 2002; Puamau & Teasdale 2005). Policy makers and planners need strategies to benefit from the fact that small states are sovereign entities, while handling the demands that this might bring for participation in international meetings and other events. Professionals in small states may also need to be more multifunctional than their counterparts in larger states who are more easily able to specialise, e.g. in aspects of curriculum, financing and aid negotiation. Small states may be more responsive to reform since a single actor can have a greater proportionate influence than would be the case in a larger state; but this may bring challenges of volatility (Box 1). Planners in small states may also face stronger issues of dependency than their counterparts in larger states. These and other issues need further investigation in a range of contexts to identify commonalities across small states while also recognising the diversity arising from specific economic, cultural and socio-political contexts.

In tune with the Commonwealth's respect for and understanding of difference, it is important to note the diversity of contexts. Any search for common 'best practice' can underplay the place and significance of differing contextual factors across small states in shaping educational policy and practice. This highlights the dangers that can result from uncritical international transfer of models, and the benefits that can be gained from more subtle, mediated and contextualised ways of sharing experience and learning from elsewhere (Crossley & Watson 2003). At the same time, small states do have much in common, and this generates distinctive perspectives and planning priorities that often differ from those in global frameworks. Thus, one may ask:

- *How well do current global educational agendas and discourses deal with the real needs of small states?*
- *To what extent are small states looking towards or beyond global goals and targets?*
- *In what ways can cooperation between Commonwealth small states be a distinctive and strategic asset, generating insights from which other Commonwealth states may also have much to learn?*

Differences can also be seen in the factors shaping global agendas and in those driving small-state priorities. Commonwealth Secretariat work during the 1980s and 1990s on the distinctive features of education in small states focused largely on the internal workings of education systems. Today, priorities are more concerned with how small states can respond meaningfully to major external shocks and challenges – economic, environmental, cultural, and political. *How can small states secure the human and financial resources to enable their citizens to meet these challenges in their own societies and in the wider world? And, to what extent are cooperation and education important means of addressing such challenges?*

### **Box 1: Small states and sensitivity to reform**

In small states, the role and impact of individuals may be greater than in larger states. The remarks by Schweisfurth (2008: 69-70) with reference to The Gambia illustrate this point. "Even a single teacher," observes Schweisfurth, "can gain the attention of a wide audience more easily than in a more populated system with more bureaucratic layers". Impact can be extended by the polyvalent roles demanded in small states. "For example, head teachers often function additionally as inspectors and advisors. This means that one person attending a workshop could potentially have a dual impact, both within their own schools and more widely". Single institutions, especially at the level of higher education, can also have a much greater impact in small systems than would be the case in large systems.

These features of course have other sides. Sensitivity to the impact of individuals can increase volatility, and small systems may lack the checks and balances that are more evident in larger systems. Also, the fact that individuals must play polyvalent roles may limit the extent to which those individuals can secure depth in specific functions. These are among the challenges with which policy makers and planners in small states must grapple.

## **2. An Overview of Education in Small States**

In this study, as in the general literature, size of population has been taken as the benchmark for defining which countries and territories to include in the focus. If two million people are set as the upper threshold for this purpose,<sup>4</sup> 91 states and territories qualify for inclusion (Table 1).<sup>5</sup> Fifty two of the 91 states are full members of the United Nations, while the remaining territories are in various forms of association with larger independent countries.

Of the 52 sovereign countries, 28 are members of the Commonwealth. Among the 39 non-sovereign territories, 18 have formal association with a Commonwealth member (Australia, New Zealand or the United Kingdom). In total, 51% of states with populations below two million have direct or indirect association with the Commonwealth.

Like the Commonwealth as a whole, the small states are a diverse group. Table 2 demonstrates this fact in relation to levels of income per capita and to ranking on the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Sixteen of the Commonwealth small states are classified by the World Bank as having high or upper-middle incomes, and 11 have high HDI rankings.

### *Education Systems in Small States: Scale and Scope*

Unsurprisingly, education systems in small states have small numbers of students. For example, Tonga has approximately 33,000 students from pre-primary to tertiary level, excluding students studying overseas. This represents about one third of its total population of 100,000. The Gambia, with 1.66 million people, has just over 300,000 students in its schools and colleges.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> There is no official population benchmark for categorising small states. The World Bank's work on small economies uses 1.5 million. The Commonwealth Secretariat's (2009) publication *Small States: Economic Review and Basic Statistics* uses a threshold of five million. For this paper, 2 million has been set as the benchmark because it embraces the large majority of Commonwealth small states. Even if the cut-off was set at 3 million, only Namibia (population 2,050,000) and Jamaica (population 2,720,000) would be added.

<sup>5</sup> Some territories are not included in Table 1. These are places which are not populated permanently or have populations with few if any students.

<sup>6</sup> These figures are calculated from UNESCO (2008).

Table 1: The world's small states and territories

Africa	Arab States	Atlantic	Caribbean
<b><u>Botswana</u></b> <b>Equatorial Guinea</b> <b>Gabon</b> <b><u>The Gambia</u></b> <b>Guinea Bissau</b> <b><u>Lesotho</u></b> <b><u>Swaziland</u></b>	<b>Bahrain</b> <b>Djibouti</b> <b>Qatar</b>	Bermuda (BROT) <b>Cape Verde</b> Falkland Islands (BROT) Faroe Islands (DENSG) Greenland (DENSG) <b>Iceland</b> St Helena (BROT) St Pierre and Miquelon (FRTC) <b>Sao Tome and Principe</b>	Anguilla (BROT) <b><u>Antigua and Barbuda</u></b> Aruba (NETHFA) <b><u>The Bahamas</u></b> <b><u>Barbados</u></b> <b><u>Belize</u></b> British Virgin Islands (BROT) Cayman Islands (BROT) <b><u>Dominica</u></b> French Guiana (FRORD) <b><u>Grenada</u></b> Guadeloupe (FRORD) <b><u>Guyana</u></b> Martinique (FRORD) Montserrat (BROT) Netherlands Antilles (NETHFA) St Barthelemy (FROC) <b><u>St Kitts and Nevis</u></b> <b><u>St Lucia</u></b> St Martin (FROC) <b><u>St Vincent and the Grenadines</u></b> Suriname <b><u>Trinidad and Tobago</u></b> Turks and Caicos (BROT) US Virgin Islands (UST)
Europe	Indian Ocean	South Pacific	Asia
<b>Andorra</b> <b><u>Cyprus</u></b> <b>Estonia</b> Gibraltar (BROT) Guernsey (UKCD) Isle of Man (UKCD) Jersey (UKCD) <b>Liechtenstein</b> <b>Luxembourg</b> <b><u>Malta</u></b> <b>Monaco</b> <b>Montenegro</b> San Marino <b>Slovenia</b> The Vatican	Christmas Island (AUST) Cocos Islands (AUST) <b>Comoros</b> Mayotte (FROC) <b><u>Maldives</u></b> <b><u>Mauritius</u></b> Réunion (FRORD) <b><u>Sevchelles</u></b>	American Samoa (UST) Cook Islands (SGNZ) <b>Federated States of Micronesia</b> <b>Fiji Islands</b> French Polynesia (FROC) Guam <b><u>Kiribati</u></b> <b>Marshall Islands</b> <b><u>Nauru</u></b> New Caledonia (FRORD) Niue (SGNZ) Norfolk Island (AUST) Northern Marianas (SGCUS) <b>Palau</b> <b><u>Samoa</u></b> <b><u>Solomon Islands</u></b> Tokelau (NZSAT) <b><u>Tonga</u></b> <b><u>Tuvalu</u></b> <b><u>Vanuatu</u></b> Wallis and Futuna (FROC)	<b>Bhutan</b> <b><u>Brunei Darussalam</u></b> <b>Timor Leste</b>

Notes: Countries in bold are members of the United Nations. Countries underlined are members of the Commonwealth.

Abbreviations: AUST – Australian Territory Administered from Canberra; BROT – British Overseas Territory; DENSG – Self-governing Overseas Administrative Division of Denmark; FROC – French Overseas Collectivity; FRORD – French Overseas Regions and Departments; NETHFA – Part of the Kingdom of The Netherlands with Full Autonomy in Internal Affairs; NZSAT – New Zealand Administering Territory; SGCUS – Commonwealth in Political Union with USA; SGNZ – Self Governing in Association with New Zealand; UKCD – United Kingdom Crown Dependency; UST – Unincorporated territory administered by USA Office of Insular Affairs.

Table 2: Commonwealth countries with populations below two million – income and human development

	<b>High HDI 0.800 and above</b>	<b>Medium HDI 0.500-0.799</b>	<b>Low HDI Below 0.500</b>
High Income >US\$11,456 per capita	The Bahamas Barbados Brunei Darussalam Cyprus Malta Trinidad and Tobago		
Upper Middle Income US\$3,706 - 11,455 per capita	Antigua and Barbuda Mauritius St Kitts and Nevis St Lucia Seychelles	Belize Botswana Dominica Grenada St Vincent and the Grenadines	
Lower Middle Income US\$936 - 3,705 per capita		Guyana Maldives Samoa Swaziland Tonga Vanuatu	
			Lesotho
Low Income <US\$935 per capita		Solomon Islands	
			The Gambia

Notes: Data apply to 2006.

HDI = Human Development Index

Kiribati has no HDI ranking. It is a lower-middle-income country with a population below 100,000.

Nauru and Tuvalu have no HDI or income rankings. Each has a population below 100,000.

Although the total numbers in education systems may be small, all governments endeavour to provide a full range of learning opportunities. For many small states, this challenge is exacerbated by geographic considerations. Among the 28 small Commonwealth countries, 20 are island countries (Annex 1); and 14 of these are multi-island countries where schools operate in relative isolation, confronting as best they can the logistical, professional support and management issues associated with serving scattered populations. Kiribati is an extreme case, with 32 atolls spread over 3,500,000 square kilometres of the Pacific Ocean.

Efforts to give learners access a full range of learning opportunities also encounter challenges in unit costs, especially for states at the lower end of the income scale; and even states with high incomes find that they cannot secure the necessary professional expertise to support a wide range of specialisations. Factors of unit costs appear to be reflected in the high proportions of total public expenditure devoted to education in small states. The global average is 4.9% of Gross National Product (GNP), but in small states the average is 7.2% and in only two of the 18 states for which data are shown in Annex 2 is the proportion below the global average.

An important part of these expenditures for most small states is devoted to extending the scale and the scope of education systems through external partnerships. These include regional universities, notably the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the University of the South Pacific (USP). They also include regional examination bodies such as the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), and regional planning projects and programmes such as the Pacific Regional Initiatives for the Delivery of Basic Education (PRIDE) (Puamau & Teasdale 2005). Other opportunities are secured through collaboration with larger states outside the immediate geographic region.

From these observations arise a number of questions, including: *To what extent must policy makers and planners in small states envisage higher unit costs than their counterparts in larger states? And what are the pros and cons of collaboration in delivery and support mechanisms?*

### *Beyond Global Goals and Targets*

Despite the challenges of smallness, some states – while supporting international commitments to achieve Education for All (EFA) and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) – have found the global focus on universal primary education and gender parity insufficiently attentive to their own achievements. Many also identify and prioritise more pressing local needs and educational objectives. This is not to suggest that the EFA and MDG agendas have been fully achieved by all small states, especially since the agendas stress quality as well as quantity. Nevertheless, 12 of the 23 Commonwealth small states for which data are available have primary net enrolment rates of 90% or over, and seven have 95% or over (Annex 2). Certainly further effort is needed to reach 100%; but the picture compares positively with many other parts of the world. On the other hand, nine countries have primary net enrolment rates below 85%. Solomon Islands, a country that has experienced recent debilitating conflict, has the lowest net enrolment rate among Commonwealth small states at 62%.

On the MDG gender parity indicators, small states have either achieved gender parity in formal schooling (primary and secondary) or the disparity lies in the favour of girls. This is particularly evident in the Caribbean, where enhancement of boys' achievements has long been identified as a distinctive priority (Miller 1991). Thus, 19 countries have a Gender Parity Index (GPI – F/M) for secondary education of above 1.0, and in seven instances the figure exceeds 1.1 (Annex 2). Only in four countries are the figures well below 1.0, most notably in The Gambia and Vanuatu.

For basic education more generally, the attention of many small states is focused more on other EFA goals, notably to extend access to pre-primary education, where the pattern of public provision is very uneven, to improve the quality of formal schooling (primary and secondary), and – especially but not exclusively in the South Pacific – to extend the range of skills development and adult learning opportunities in communities that are heavily dependent on their own resources and local economies.

At the same time, the challenges of addressing economic vulnerability, environmental degradation, climate change, and scarce natural resources, highlight the importance of imaginative and financially realistic ways to develop skills, knowledge and experience that can sustain small economies. Developing this competency base requires the EFA/MDG agenda, but lies beyond it. This may lead policy makers and planners to ask: ***How can the EFA and MDG agenda be kept to the fore and achieved by the target date of 2015? And what supplementary goals should small states set for themselves, individually and in groups?***

### *The Place of External Assistance*

Data on aid to education in Commonwealth small states are scarce, especially when questions address the use of aid rather than simply the volume of aid. Nevertheless, some statistics are available. Annex 2 shows that very little direct aid funding goes to education in the Caribbean (although Trinidad and Tobago is shown in the OECD-DAC database as receiving US\$35 million in 2006). Assistance in the South Pacific is much greater, though variable. For example, Samoa (US\$21 million), Tonga (US\$15 million) and Vanuatu (US\$11 million) received quite significant sums in 2006, with the equivalent of US\$192, \$692 and \$144 per child of primary school age from the aid that was allocated to basic education. In total, for the 25 countries for which data are available, approximately US\$146 million was provided for aid specifically for the education sector. This compared to just over US\$11.2 billion in aid for education globally (US\$5 billion for basic education).

Other forms of assistance are focused specifically on small states. For example, scholarship programmes in Australia and New Zealand are targeted in large part on the Pacific islands. In parallel, Canada has specific scholarship schemes for the Caribbean.

However, such programmes commonly encounter problems of power relationships which are not always adequately respectful of the cultures of recipient countries (see e.g. Coxon & Munce 2008). Bearing such factors in mind, policy makers and planners might ask: ***Through what mechanisms can small states retain special priority in external assistance programmes? And in what ways should these programmes be tailored***



*to meet the needs of small states, e.g. with respect for cultural diversity, and with different design and reporting requirements compared with similar programmes for larger states?*

### **3. Major Priorities for Policy and Planning**

This section of the paper identifies a number of priorities that are attracting attention within Commonwealth small states. It cannot list all priorities, and therefore highlights the strategic importance of selected themes. A more comprehensive overview of contemporary educational priorities in small states will be developed when this text is expanded following CCEM input and feedback. Here, looking towards and beyond the EFA and MDG agendas, particular attention is given to climate change, migration, higher education, information technology, and coordination, integration and regulation.

#### *Climate change: from vulnerability to viability*

The vulnerability to climate change, particularly for small island developing states, is widely recognised as a major concern. Changing agricultural conditions threaten food security for both rural and urban populations, and are especially likely to hit the poorest countries and population groups. Even more serious may be land loss due to rising sea levels. The case of Tuvalu provides a dramatic example. In the worst scenario, the entire nation would need to be resettled on a new homeland, and islanders would become climatic refugees.<sup>7</sup>

Most small island developing states are also exposed to cyclones, droughts and floods, which are expected to be amplified by climate change in intensity and frequency. Rapid urbanisation, destructive production systems, and pollution are further threatening livelihoods and social structures. The Millennium Ecosystem Assessment stressed that “any progress achieved in addressing the MDGs of poverty and hunger eradication, improved health, and environmental sustainability is unlikely to be sustained if most of the ecosystem services on which humanity relies continue to be degraded.”<sup>8</sup>

The question then is how vulnerability can be reduced through education. Environmental considerations need to be integrated into school curricula and education sector policies. Small island states should incorporate disaster preparedness, response and recovery into educational planning, and should examine the implications of climate change on training needs in areas such as agriculture, fisheries, tourism, and environmental management.

In some states, rural development approaches have made a fundamental shift to build on the priorities and capabilities of the poor and engage more stakeholders in breaking the cycle of poverty and environmental degradation. This perspective empowers the poor by giving them greater control over the management of land, water and biodiversity. The approach develops their capacities to increase productivity in a sustainable manner and to diversify livelihoods through non-agricultural activities. Increasing attention has been paid to sustainable development strategies based on bottom-up approaches that integrate natural resources management in socioeconomic development processes. Local development planning can play a key role in strengthening livelihoods. Among the questions for policy makers and planners is: *How can the MDGs be ‘localised’ as a prerequisite for sustainable development in small island developing states? And how can small states gain stronger leverage on larger states whose environmental actions seriously affect the small states?*

#### *The Challenge of Migration*

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<sup>7</sup> <http://www.alofatuvalu.tv/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.millenniumassessment.org/documents/document.356.aspx.pdf>

Globalisation has deepened interrelationships between countries and peoples, and has particular significance in small states. In 2000 the emigration rate of skilled persons was 43.2% in states with populations below 1.5 million, compared with 7.4% for developing countries as a group (Docquier & Marfouk 2006; Docquier & Shiff 2009). Among the small states of the Caribbean, the skilled emigration rate reached 74.9%. The brain drain for university graduates was 31.9% for small states, meaning that 32 among every 100 university graduates lived outside their home countries.

The depressive effect of emigration on the stock of human capital is widely recognised as a major development challenge and as a factor of vulnerability. More positively, remittances from migrants are in some small states the most important source of foreign exchange. Moreover, migration can increase rates of return from investment in tertiary education due to the probability of earning higher salaries abroad. Nevertheless, on balance most developing countries, and in particular small developing countries, suffer more than they benefit from migration (Beine et al. 2008). Small states lose productivity in part because of limitations in the extent to which they have people remaining at home to make use of new technologies. According to Schiff and Wang (2009), the loss of productivity growth is three times higher in small states than in the other countries.

Another dimension of this challenge relates to the structure of domestic labour markets. In the Eastern Caribbean for instance, employers struggle to find qualified candidates in emerging skill areas, yet at the same time large cohorts of low-skilled young people suffer from underemployment and unemployment. In Saint Kitts and Nevis, finding a first job takes on average 14 months for a Common Entrance Examination graduate (World Bank, 2007). In other words the education system does not adequately prepare young people for the world of work. This situation requires attention to the type of technical and vocational education provided. In the Eastern Caribbean most secondary schools do offer some kind of vocational subjects, but the relevance and quality of the skills acquired are questionable. The arithmetic of labour market balances has much less margin for error in small states than in larger states. In highly specialised areas, needs can be met by one or two individuals. Anything less than this small number is a severe deficit, and anything more is a problematic surplus.

Beyond the economic perspective, youth exclusion from the labour market is a major social problem in some states. This is obvious in the Caribbean where concern for violence and social disruption are often at the core of the public debate. The youth issue is also very significant in the South Pacific and has been highlighted in Samoa, for instance, where according to the 2001 census 37% of the 15-19 age group were not at school (Afamagasa et al. 2005).

Such considerations require policy makers and planners to ask: ***How can the forces for international migration be managed in optimal ways? And what is the impact on domestic labour markets of expansion of education systems in an increasingly integrated world?***

### *Planning for Higher Education*

Higher education is increasingly seen to be important for small states as they diversify their economies to cope with the rise of the knowledge economy and service-based markets (Bourne & Dass 2003; Sweeney 2003; Atchoaréna et al. 2008; Bacchus 2008; World Bank 2009). Knowledge economies rely on highly educated citizens to innovate, collaborate, research and adapt within an increasingly complex world. In consequence, concepts such as lifelong learning, partnership, and science and technology appear alongside investing in higher education and research capacity in almost all the educational strategy documents of Commonwealth small states produced during the last decade (see e.g. Malta Policy Unit 2005; Botswana Tertiary Education Council 2007; Mauritius Ministry of Education and Human Resources 2008; Nolan 2008 [Seychelles]).

Leadership in higher education is also needed for the agenda of *quality* EFA, since excellence at the lower levels of education systems requires a strong systemic standard of teaching, leadership and research competence that comes through advanced studies available only in higher education. To this end, a number of

Commonwealth small states have begun prioritising degree-level teacher certification (see e.g. Bennell & Molwane 2008).

The Caribbean has achieved much in this regard, with the ironic result that their teachers are actively recruited to work in the USA, UK and Canada. This has led to a debilitating effect in some Caribbean countries, so many of whose well-trained teachers have emigrated that it has left large gaps in capacity to provide quality schooling (Fulford 2008). The Protocol for the Recruitment of Commonwealth Teachers adopted by Commonwealth Ministers of Education in 2004 has become a regional planning priority because to date it has had only a limited impact on the haemorrhaging of Caribbean teachers (Jules 2009).

Expansion of tertiary education is accompanied and facilitated by diversification. Initially, secondary or post-secondary colleges were upgraded and integrated into new tertiary institutions such as multi-purpose community colleges (Grant-Woodham & Morris 2009; Wolff 2009). This is noticeable in many Caribbean states such as Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Grenada, Saint Kitts and Nevis, and Dominica. Some other small states have created or are planning to create national universities, commonly based on the amalgamation of existing tertiary education institutions. This is the case for example in Samoa, Seychelles, Saint Lucia, Cape Verde, and Antigua and Barbuda. These institutions are a clear expression of national sovereignty and pride, and frequently develop a concept of the university that is tightly linked to national development concerns and local labour market opportunities.

In many small states, tertiary provision includes a large number of cross-border providers (Hosein et al. 2004; Martin 2007). In the Caribbean, foreign-owned medical schools are a well-established phenomenon. In recent years, offshore campuses and franchised programmes in a range of disciplines have proliferated in various parts of the world, being offered either as stand-alone enterprises or as partnerships with local institutions. These can be beneficial to both parties, but require careful management. Planning concerns include not only the ways in which external providers serve small states, but also the ways in which small states are used as a base to serve larger states. Concerning the latter, the number of 'degree mills' offering sub-standard and fake credentials has greatly expanded. Because, such enterprises can damage the reputations of all involved, they are now emerging as a key focus for planners (Hallak & Poisson 2008).

### *Harnessing the power of technology*

Information and communications technology (ICT) have revolutionised the processes of teaching and learning throughout the world (Pelgrum & Law 2003; McIntosh & Varoglu 2005). Small states are benefitting at least as much as large states, in part through reduction of isolation. In addition to its direct benefits, this movement is a response to the need for a technologically adept population that can teach themselves to learn and cope in the global marketplace. Evidence for this trend can be found in the massive enrolments of online students at the Botswana College of Distance and Open Learning (BOCODOL 2007), the University of the South Pacific (Whelan 2008), and University of the West Indies which has recently established an Open Campus (Marshall et al. 2008; Thomas & Soares 2009). The VUSSC is also using technology to accomplish goals that would previously have been very difficult if not impossible (Box 2).

Other developments in the Caribbean and South Pacific provide further examples on the ways in which small island states have been able to grasp the opportunities offered by ICT. In 1999, the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) launched a project to support ICT policies in its region. The strategic framework covered many dimensions including access, learner-centred pedagogies, teacher professional development, lifelong learning and information management (OECS Reform Unit, 2001). The recommended model was adopted in Anguilla, British Virgin Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines. Gaible's (2009) evaluation showed significant progress in learning. Parallel initiatives in the South Pacific were launched in 2008 but remain to be evaluated. It is made possible through a satellite-based Pacific Rural Internet Connectivity System (Pacific RICS) consisting of low-cost satellite broadband internet.

Nevertheless, policy makers and planners need to exercise caution with such schemes. Major investments are involved not only in hardware but also in training and socialisation of teachers, learners and families. Abrupt

changes in technology can bring social disruptions that have not been anticipated; and in some respects small states become more rather than less dependent on large states because the innovations demand machines, technical support and foreign exchange. Thus, policy makers and planners should ask: **What balances need to be achieved in the introduction of ICTs? And where can small states find independent professional advice on the advantages and potential pitfalls?**

**Box 2: The Virtual University for the Small States of the Commonwealth**

The establishment and growth of the VUSSC as a global network for higher education is based on principles of working together for the common good, with very little money and no donor support. This atypical structure complements the regional education networks (such as the Caribbean Knowledge and Learning Network) through which countries cooperate to develop their human resources within a traditional political framework with support from international donor/lending agencies.

Facilitated by the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the VUSSC rests on the work of individuals in small universities and colleges around the world who share their knowledge and learning materials about common issues such as teacher professional development, fisheries, construction, and disaster recovery. The internet is an essential tool (West & Daniel 2009).

*Strengthened Coordination, Integration and Regulation*

The movement to expand and diversify tertiary education systems to embrace private providers and opportunities for e-learning brings to the fore issues of cost-effectiveness, quality and student mobility. It also raises delicate issues of coordination and control. Small states are responding to these challenges by strengthening national capacity to plan, by creating national coordinating bodies, and by encouraging mechanisms for quality assurance.

In most states, the inclusion of sections for tertiary education in overall education plans has long been a standard practice. In addition several small states, such as Mauritius, Botswana and Malta, now have stand-alone plans for tertiary education. The preparation of both integrated and stand-alone documents provides an opportunity for analysis of the status and role of the tertiary education sector, in particular in relation to the labour market.

The increased concern for tertiary education is also reflected in the development of administrative structures. Countries such as Brunei Darussalam and The Gambia have created higher education divisions in their Ministries of Education. Some states, such as Fiji, Mauritius and Malta, have also created national buffer organisations to take charge of policy development, strategic planning and monitoring of the tertiary education sector. These buffer organisations are commonly headed by renowned academics and supported by technical secretariats.

Qualifications frameworks and quality assurance schemes are additional instruments for integration and regulation of tertiary education sectors. Qualifications frameworks allow for better readability of diversified tertiary education, both through the provision of level-specific and subject-matter descriptors and also through reference statements for quality assurance initiatives. Quality assurance schemes respond to the challenges posed by the private sector and the need to protect the consumers of tertiary education services from low quality and fraudulent providers. Public tertiary education may also be exposed to external assessment.

To some extent, the choices to be made for development of quality assurance mechanisms are determined by the size of the tertiary education sector. While the basic principles of 'good practice' in quality assurance are the same whatever the size of the sector, creation of a quality assurance system in a small state faces particular challenges arising from cost-effectiveness ratios and the need for specialised personnel. Small states also need to be more sensitive to cross-border providers and foreign qualifications when defining the scope for quality assurance. Ways through which small states can address these issues include design of multifunctional and

multilevel quality assurance agencies, adoption of regional solutions, building of quality assurance capacities in universities, and drawing on the expertise of larger countries (Stella 2008).

Both qualifications frameworks and quality assurance schemes are connected to the mobility agendas of students and professionals. There are thus numerous regional and multi-state solutions in this area, such as the Pacific Qualifications Framework, an initiative launched in 2009 as an umbrella structure for the national qualifications frameworks in the South Pacific. In the Caribbean, a regional network of quality assurance agencies, CANQATE, was created in 2002 to facilitate the sharing of information about quality assurance systems in the Caribbean and to disseminate good practices. The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has also become active in the coordination of quality assurance at the regional level, as the organisation in charge of implementing the Caribbean single market and economy.

Small states nevertheless face ever more prominent tensions in developing policy solutions that fit their particular needs and contexts, while regional or multi-state initiatives, which comply with broader policy agendas of economic development, are increasingly affecting their choices. This naturally limits their room to manoeuvre, but provides increased opportunities for bringing national tertiary systems in line with policy development in tertiary education at the regional and international level. Thus, policy makers and planners may ask: *What sorts of partnerships are desirable and can be tailored for what sorts of circumstances for quality assurance in the context of broader goals?* One model which might deserve wider attention is highlighted in Box 3.

### **Box 3: Regional Quality Assurance Under CARICOM**

The Caribbean Accreditation Authority for Education in Medicine and other Health Professions (CAAM) was launched under the aegis of CARICOM in 2004. CAAM was created as a regional accreditation body after the General Medical Council (GMC) of England advised it that it would no longer be responsible for accreditation of medical schools outside the European Union.

CAAM is the legally constituted body established to accredit medical, dental, veterinary and other health programmes leading to professional degrees required for practice in CARICOM member states. By judging the compliance of programmes with nationally and internationally accepted standards of educational quality, CAAM serves the interests of both the students and the general public.

CARICOM also has plans to create a broader accreditation agency in order to:

- \* establish an internationally-recognised system of post-secondary education for the Caribbean,
- \* promote the mobility of highly-skilled individuals,
- \* contribute to economic and social development, and
- \* ensure international recognition and agreements with state entities for reciprocal recognition.

*Source:* CARICOM Secretariat website; CAAM website; Parkins (2008)

## **4. Strengthened Research and Evaluation Capacity**

Throughout much of the above analysis the importance of locally-grounded research in shaping policy development and implementation is clearly evident. The 1985 workshop in Mauritius which launched the Commonwealth Secretariat's work on education small states stressed that small states should not be seen simply as scaled-down versions of larger states: they have an ecology of their own, which requires local research to supplement and perhaps modify the insights that can be obtained from larger countries (Commonwealth Secretariat 1986: 5-6). In all domains, globally informed but locally relevant innovation is required of future generations of leaders.

Strengthened local research capacity is also vital if small states are to develop more genuine partnerships and engage more effectively and critically in mediating, adapting or, where appropriate, challenging global

agendas (Holmes & Crossley 2004; Crossley 2008). As Louisy (2001: 435-436), Head of State for the Caribbean island of Saint Lucia, pointed out:

It is not easy to avoid the dangers of ‘uncritical international transfer’ if one lacks the national or institutional capacity to undertake the type of research or investigative enquiry necessary to ‘customise’ the experiences of others ... The region’s continued dependence on external financing for its development projects further strengthens the control of the development agencies (many of whom find it easier to adopt a ‘one size fits all’ policy), making it extremely difficult to bring its own perspective to policy decisions taken on its behalf.

Small states may always be constrained in this domain, but one avenue to resolve such problems lies in greater collaboration between small states (rich and poor), across the Commonwealth, and with counterparts in larger states. In the Caribbean, for example, efforts are currently being made to establish a Regional Strategy for the Caribbean Research and Education Network (C@ribNET). Even in times of economic stringency, such collaborative strategies can do much to focus more effective and relevant research upon the distinctive environmental, financial and educational concerns and priorities of small states. Thus, policy makers and planners may ask themselves: *What sorts of research and evaluation partnerships can be developed to gain expertise from larger systems while addressing issues from small-states perspectives?*

## 5. Conclusions and Possibilities

The Commonwealth has a special interest in small states because over half of its members are in this category. Accordingly, the Commonwealth Secretariat has an established tradition of paying special attention to the distinctive features of small states. Some of this work has been in partnership with UNESCO, including its International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP). The Commonwealth work has naturally focused on Commonwealth countries, but has also contributed to wider agendas which include those of UNESCO as a universal organisation with 193 member states. The 52 Ministers of Education who participate or are represented in the CCEM also participate or are represented in wider UNESCO forums. In addition, many small states, particularly in the Caribbean and the South Pacific, operate effectively together in regional forums.

These forums also put Ministers from small states into contact with counterparts in medium-sized and large states. The opportunities for collaboration and learning from each other should not of course be confined to small states – depending on the focus, they can involve states of all sizes. Thus, small states can find ways to learn from and contribute to common agendas with larger states while also focusing on their own needs. Moreover, insofar as small states are at the forefront of issues such as migratory patterns and internationalisation, policy makers and planners in larger states may benefit from examining patterns in small states which may in time increasingly characterise their own societies.

Nevertheless, it remains the case that small states do on the one hand face distinctive challenges arising from their size, and on the other hand have some distinctive benefits arising from the fact that they *are* states and therefore have a voice in international arenas which would not be available to comparable population groups within larger states. Much of the conceptual work sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat during the 1980s and 1990s is still useful. This work could usefully be revisited and called to the attention of policy makers and planners who may be unfamiliar with it because they did not occupy the same roles in the 1980s and 1990s.

As a group, the Commonwealth small states are relatively advanced in progress towards the EFA targets and MDGs. However, some still have a significant distance to travel even to the quantitative target of universal primary education, and most still have considerable work to do in the qualitative domain and at other levels of education. Thus, the global goals and targets are relevant to the small states as well as to other members of the Commonwealth. At the same time, many of the pressing priorities for small states lie beyond the EFA targets and MDGs. This paper has highlighted the need to respond meaningfully to major external shocks and challenges, especially in the economic, environmental, cultural and political domains.

Further analysis will bring additional benefits by generating ideas and providing support in areas which have emerged as priorities and which present new opportunities. A strong case can be made for continued special focus on the needs and opportunities of small states. On some occasions they may be treated as a whole group, while on other occasions it will be more appropriate to consider sub-groups, e.g.

- on a regional basis,
- distinguishing the smallest of the small from their counterparts that are a little larger, and/or
- distinguishing the less-developed small states from their more-developed counterparts.

In all cases, the small states may be considered both in relation to each other and in relation to medium-sized and large states.

Thus, a closing set of questions should include: *Where from here do Commonwealth Ministers of Education wish to take discussion and identification of avenues for action?* The team in the Commonwealth Secretariat, the University of Bristol and UNESCO's International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP) will be addressing these matters, and will value guidance and inputs.

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*Annex 1: Commonwealth Member States with Populations below Two Million – Population, International Indices, “Islandness”, and Aid*

	Total Population (2006)	% Population aged 0-14 (2005)	HDI Ranking (2008)	EDI Ranking (2006)	National Income Level H/UM/LM/L	Geography L/ Landlocked I/Island MI/Multi-Island	Aid Per Capita US\$ (2006)
<b>Below 100,000</b>							
Nauru	10,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	I	1,902
Tuvalu	10,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	MI	545
St Kitts and Nevis	50,000	29.4	60	n.a.	UM	MI	74
Dominica	68,000	24.7	77	n.a.	UM	I	99
Antigua and Barbuda	84,520	26.9	59	n.a.	UM	MI	3
Seychelles	86,000	40.2	54	34	UM	MI	160
Kiribati	94,000	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	MI	166
<b>100,000-250,000</b>							
Tonga	100,000	37.5	85	44	LM	MI	270
Grenada	106,000	32.4	86	n.a.	UM	I	100
St Vincent & Grenadines	120,000	29.2	92	91	UM	MI	95
St Lucia	163,000	28.8	66	63	UM	I	68
Samoa	185,000	40.8	96	n.a.	LM	MI	230
Vanuatu	221,000	39.8	123	n.a.	LM	MI	509
<b>250,000 -1million</b>							
Belize	282,000	38.4	88	76	UM		59
Barbados	293,000	19.3	37	61	H	I	22
Maldives	300,000	31.4	99	49	LM	MI	188
The Bahamas	327,000	35.2	49	73	H	MI	n.a.
Brunei Darussalam	382,000	29.6	27	36	H		n.a.
Malta	405,000	17.6	36	54	H	MI	n.a.
Solomon Islands	484,000		134	n.a.	L	MI	415
Guyana	739,000	25.9	110	n.a.	LM		85
Cyprus	846,000	20.9	30	16	H		
<b>1 – 2 million</b>							
Swaziland	1,130,000	40.9	141	96	LM	L	37
Mauritius	1,250,000	24.6	74	60	UM	I	63
Trinidad and Tobago	1,330,000	21.5	57	64	H	MI	29
The Gambia	1,660,000	40.1	160	n.a.	L		43
Botswana	1,860,000	37.6	126	92	UM	L	42
Lesotho	1,990,000	38.6	155	103	LM	L	60

HDI = Human Development Index

EDI = Educational Development Index

National income level: H = High; UM = Upper Middle; LM = Lower Middle; L = Low

Geography: L = Landlocked; I – Island; MI = Multi-Island

Sources: UNDP (2007); UNESCO (2008); World Bank (2008).

*Annex 2: Selected Education Indicators for Commonwealth Countries with Populations below two million*

	GER in pre-primary education % (2006 or latest year)	NER in primary education % (2006 or latest year)	Gender parity in secondary education GPI (F/M) (2006)	Adult literacy % 15+ Latest year (2000-2006)	Total public expenditure on education % GNP (2006)	Total aid to education constant US\$m (2006)
<b>Below 100,000</b>						
Nauru	89	72	1.19	n.a.	n.a.	2
Tuvalu	107	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0
St Kitts and Nevis	99	90	0.91	n.a.	10.8	0
Dominica	77	82	0.98	n.a.	n.a.	0
Antigua and Barbuda	n.a.	74	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	0
Seychelles	109	n.a.	1.13	n.a.	6.8	0
Kiribati	75	n.a.	1.14	n.a.	n.a.	2
<b>100,000-250,000</b>						
Tonga	23	99	1.04	99.2	4.9	15
Grenada	81	79	1.03	n.a.	6.0	0
St Vincent and the Grenadines	88	94	1.24	n.a.	8.8	0
St Lucia	69	99	1.19	n.a.	7.1	1
Samoa	48	n.a.	1.13	98.7	n.a.	21
Vanuatu	29	87	0.86	78.1	10.0	11
<b>250,000-1million</b>						
Belize	27	99	1.06	n.a.	5.8	1
Barbados	94	94	1.04	n.a.	7.2	0
Maldives	82	97	1.07	91.9	8.3	5
The Bahamas	n.a.	91	1.01	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Brunei Darussalam	51	97	1.06	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
Malta	97	91	1.00	92.4	5.2	0
Solomon Islands	n.a.	62	0.84	n.a.	n.a.	4
Guyana	99	n.a.	0.98	n.a.	8.6	6
Cyprus	79	100	1.02	97.7	6.5	n.a.
<b>1-2 million</b>						
Swaziland	17	79	1.00	n.a.	6.9	0
Mauritius	101	95	0.99	87.4	3.9	19
Trinidad and Tobago	85	89	1.05	98.7	n.a.	35
The Gambia	17	76	0.90	n.a.	2.1	13
Botswana	15	84	1.05	82.8	9.3	2
Lesotho	18	73	1.27	n.a.	10.8	9

GER = Gross Enrolment Rate

NER = Net Enrolment Rate

GPI = Gender Parity Index

GNP = Gross National Product

Sources: UNESCO (2008); UNESCO Institute for Statistics (December release, 2008).

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