

Human development: health and education



In 2002, the Commonwealth Secretariat's Education and Health Sections merged with the Gender Affairs Division to become the Social Transformation Programmes Division. This has helped the Secretariat to refocus its human development programmes on the Millennium Development Goals, as mandated by the 2002 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting.

Retention of human resources

The international migration of health workers is having a grave impact on the ability of source countries, most often developing countries, to meet the health needs of their populations. In 2001, Commonwealth Health Ministers requested that the Secretariat develop a Commonwealth code of practice for the international recruitment of health workers. The Code and its Companion Document were accepted for implementation by Ministers of Health at their 2002 and 2003 Pre-World Health Assembly Meetings respectively.

The Commonwealth Code of Practice for the International Recruitment of Health Workers seeks to manage international recruitment in a manner that benefits all parties involved – recruiting countries, the recruits themselves and source countries. The Code presents a set of implementable guidelines and a framework which all Commonwealth countries can adapt to meet their specific needs, and the Companion Document explains and clarifies terms and concepts within the Code.

Similar issues relevant to the mobility of teachers in the Commonwealth were raised by Caribbean Ministers of Education, who met in 2002 and developed the Savannah Accord. This led to the request for a pan-Commonwealth study of the problem and the development of draft guidelines for the international recruitment and retention of teachers across the Commonwealth. This important issue is expected to be examined by Commonwealth Education Ministers at their Conference in October 2003 in Edinburgh, UK, and it is hoped that a working party representing the broad diversity of all Commonwealth countries will be formed to take this issue forward.

Impact of HIV/AIDS

Calls to action on HIV/AIDS have been issued by various Commonwealth ministerial meetings. At their meeting in 1999 Commonwealth Heads of Government declared HIV/AIDS a global emergency, and the 2001 UN General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS set out a clear agenda. Consequently, the Secretariat has been challenged to play a greater role in the fight against HIV/AIDS. It is assisting member states in their effort to achieve the goal of halting and beginning to reverse the spread of HIV/AIDS by 2015.

The Secretariat's Inter-Divisional Steering Committee on HIV/AIDS, under the chairmanship of a Deputy Secretary-General, continues to provide for the co-ordination of a Secretariat-wide agenda to address HIV/AIDS. The Secretariat's overall strategy is to consolidate efforts to reduce the impact of the pandemic on individuals, families, communities, and various sectors of national economies by:

- using the good offices of the Secretary-General for high-level advocacy at meetings and interactions with Heads of Government and international organisations;
- promoting the multi-sectoral approach to HIV/AIDS to strengthen programmes focused on the mobilisation of women, men, young people, persons living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHAs), NGOs and community-based organisations in national HIV/AIDS response programmes; and
- providing technical assistance and support to Commonwealth governments in the area of capacity-building to mitigate the impact of HIV/AIDS on their human resources.

The Secretariat's programmes further assist member states in improving the quality

Above:

HIV/AIDS robbed this child of his parents and is decimating key workers in societies that cannot afford to lose them

Opposite:

Access, inclusion and achievement are at the heart of Commonwealth efforts to improve education

of health care provided to PLWHAs, through improved preventive, curative and supportive care programmes based on the multi-sectoral approach and by providing for the specific health needs of women and young people.

Gender and HIV/AIDS

Gender inequality is a major contributing factor to the spread of HIV/AIDS. The fastest-growing group to be infected with the virus is currently young women aged 15–24; in 2001 it was estimated that 6–11 per cent of young women in this age group worldwide were infected with HIV. In recognition of this, there is an ongoing effort within the Secretariat to systematically assess Commonwealth projects and programmes to ensure that they do not perpetuate existing inequalities, and that the needs and concerns of both women and men are addressed in policies, strategies and programmes at all levels.

In order to institutionalise gender mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS in a sustainable manner, the Secretariat is collaborating with the Atlantic Centre of Excellence for Women's Health to establish an International Institute on Gender Mainstreaming in HIV/AIDS at Dalhousie University in Halifax, Canada. This Institute will provide HIV/AIDS programme managers from resource-poor Commonwealth countries with the knowledge and skills needed to integrate gender awareness into HIV/AIDS policies.

In its health programme implementation, the Secretariat works in collaboration with Para 55, a Commonwealth NGO Group which motivates governments, the private sector, NGOs and other actors in civil society to take more concerted actions across sectors to respond to the HIV/AIDS global emergency.

HIV/AIDS has also continued to impact adversely on education, especially through the death of trained teachers. The Secretariat carried out an appraisal mission to Botswana jointly with the International Labour Organisation, and later commissioned four studies on HIV/AIDS and behaviour change strategies in Malawi, Namibia, Swaziland and Zambia. A synthesis report will support a Risk Management Manual for teachers and learners in Africa.

Education: beyond Halifax

The Halifax Statement on Education issued by Commonwealth Education Ministers in 2000 continues to provide a framework for Secretariat action in collaboration with other Commonwealth bodies: the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU), the Commonwealth Foundation and many other



professional associations and NGOs.

To improve access and equity in education, effective national education strategies, policies and sustainable development efforts to strengthen linkages between formal and non-formal education were supported. To promote quality education, the Secretariat organised training programmes to enhance the capacity of member countries to produce good quality resource materials for science and maths teachers. Low-cost tertiary level textbooks in some key development areas were published and sold through campus bookshops in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean.

The Secretariat's head teacher training modules have proved useful as a set of tools for improving management skills of head teachers in all regions of the Commonwealth. In collaboration with COL and the Indira Gandhi National Open University in India, head teacher training modules are being updated and translated into distance learning modules leading to a diploma course for head teachers.

The sharing of best practices under the School Improvement Programmes of small states was promoted through professional exchange between Ministries of Education in small states. Evaluation of the impact of school improvement initiatives emphasised the value of school-based self-assessment as a

critical contribution to overall school development.

The Secretariat maintained its commitment to promoting mobility through the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan and worked with national Ministries of Education and the ACU to advance not only scholarships, but also staff exchanges and multidisciplinary fellowships.

The Secretariat, together with international partners, supported initiatives for peace, conflict and citizenship education in Sierra Leone and Sri Lanka. It also promoted Commonwealth values through citizenship education, bringing together education and civil society groups to determine strategies for curriculum development. Subsequently, the Pan-Commonwealth Virtual Network on Citizenship Education was established to monitor and report on curriculum development, methodology and teacher training. A policy seminar on 'Citizenship, Multiculturalism and Heritage' was organised for Southern Africa.

Gender considerations are built into the design of all human development programmes and activities through policy-making, developing resource materials and by continually underlining the importance of gender equity.