

INTRODUCTION

This report was commissioned by the Commonwealth Secretariat for the 17th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (17CCEM) meeting in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia from 15 to 19 June 2009.

It responds to the Communiqué of Commonwealth Ministers of Education at 16CCEM, in Cape Town, South Africa (2006) that the Commonwealth Secretariat should *provide regular reports of Commonwealth progress on achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in education and Education for All goals.*

The report is also designed to assist the debate which lies at the heart of 17CCEM: *Education in the Commonwealth: towards and beyond global goals and targets.*

In 2006, the Commonwealth Secretariat issued a report for 16CCEM to provide an overview of basic education across the Commonwealth using data from 2004.¹ This report uses internationally quality assured data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS) from 2007 or for the most recent year for which data are available.

The report is in two parts. **Section A** describes briefly the composition and the diversity of the Commonwealth before providing two short overviews on a) trends and significant advances in basic education across all of the countries of the Commonwealth and b) regional trends and patterns for Commonwealth Asia, Commonwealth Sub-Saharan Africa, the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Commonwealth Pacific.

Section B presents data for each Commonwealth country in graphical and diagrammatic form, contrasting wherever possible, the state of basic education in 1999 with the latest available statistics.² Particular attention is paid to pre-primary education, Universal Primary Education (UPE), progress towards higher levels of adult literacy, gender parity and equality and some proxy indicators of better quality in basic education.

Individual Commonwealth countries will in many cases have later national data sets than those presented in this report. But in order to ensure a measure of cross country comparability and quality assurance, international data sources are used except for a few clearly identified cases. This means that there is a time lag of at least two years and in some instances longer which is something of a constraint to international education sector policy debate. On the other hand, unless there have been dramatic changes in policy and practice in support of basic education – which do of course occur – the trends that are shown for the first five to seven years of the current decade are likely to be significant in interpreting the performance of education systems in Commonwealth countries in providing good quality basic education for all.

¹ Commonwealth Secretariat, 2006. *Achieving the Goals: The Performance of Commonwealth Countries in Achieving the Millennium Development Goals in Education and the Dakar Education for All Goals.* Prepared by Steve Packer and Carlos Aggio. London. Commonwealth Secretariat.

² Data has been analysed for 52 Commonwealth countries. Fiji has not been included. Rwanda was not a member at the time the report was prepared.

