

SECTION A

A PERFORMANCE OVERVIEW

RECOGNISING DIVERSITY

Member countries of the Commonwealth are diverse across many dimensions of national life. **Table 1** captures three aspects of this diversity: size as measured by total population; wealth as measured by levels of income (GNI per capita); and one proxy measure of development, the Human Development Index (HDI). The table shows a broad spectrum of national situations. Twenty-six countries have a population of less than one million people. There is a spread across main income groups. And 17 Commonwealth countries have a high HDI, 24 are classified as falling into the medium HDI category, and eight countries have a low HDI (all in Sub-Saharan Africa).

Combining different indicators shows that 24 Commonwealth countries have a higher or upper middle income status and high or medium level HDI figures while 25 fall into the lower middle or low income categories with a medium or low HDI. Only six of the countries with a population of under one million people fall into the group of 25 and only four Sub-Saharan African countries lie within the group of 24.

Using these three criteria alone there is clearly a diversity of situations in which national governments are working to enable all of their citizens to benefit from good quality basic education. Providing education for 33,000 primary school aged children across the 84 islands of Vanuatu is a different challenge from serving the needs of an estimated 22 million school age children in Nigeria's 36 states. Serving a population where close to 75% of the population lives on less than US\$2 a day in Sierra Leone is dramatically different from Canada where GNI per capita is over US\$32,500. And countries with long established high rates of literacy across their populations (Cyprus over 96%; Singapore 92.5%; Trinidad 98%) should be better placed to address issues of coverage and quality at all levels of education than states where literacy (Mozambique 44%, Malawi 72%) and other indicators of human development remain low.

This diversity of circumstance means that different Commonwealth countries have different educational priorities. For example, in some countries the MDG education goals are no longer a primary objective. While all countries will continue to debate how to improve the quality of primary and lower secondary education, many Commonwealth states – as the main body of this report demonstrates – have achieved the quantitative aspects of the UPE and gender parity goals. Indeed nearly 20 years ago in 1990 25% of Commonwealth countries had net enrolment rates at the primary level of 95% or higher and 15 countries had a gender parity below 1.0. And, of course, some Commonwealth countries achieved UPE a good many years before 1990.

On the other hand, the EFA goals which take a broader view of basic education, beyond primary education alone, remain of direct relevance to all Commonwealth countries with their emphasis on the learning needs of all ages with special reference to those who are most disadvantaged. Caring for the educational needs of young children is a major policy issue in the United Kingdom just as it is the island states of the Pacific. Enabling young people and out of work adults to learn new skills has taken on even greater urgency in times of recession and growing unemployment. Recognising the enormous economic and social deficits that result from the lack of basic literacy is a common Commonwealth challenge even if the scale of the problem varies hugely.

It follows that interpreting the track record of Commonwealth countries in achieving their national educational objectives and meeting their international commitments should take close account of this diversity of circumstance and need.

TABLE 1 **Countries of the Commonwealth: Total Population and Levels of Income per capita and Human Development.**

Levels of Income GNI per capita	HDI	High HDI 0.800 and above	Medium HDI 0.500-0.799	Low HDI Below 0.500	Total
High Income >US\$11.456	Population <1m	The Bahamas, Barbados, Brunei Darussalam, Cyprus, Malta			5
	1m – 4.99m	Singapore, New Zealand, Trinidad and Tobago			3
	5m – 29.99m	Australia			1
	30m – 99.99m	Canada, United Kingdom			2
	100m+				
		11			
Middle Income (Upper) \$3.706-\$11.455	Population <1m	Antigua and Barbuda, St Kitts and Nevis, St Lucia, Seychelles	Belize, Dominica, Grenada, St Vincent and the Grenadines		8
	1m – 4.99m	Mauritius	Botswana, Jamaica		3
	5m – 29.99m	Malaysia			1
	30m – 99.99m		South Africa		1
	100m+				
		6	7		
Middle Income (Lower) US\$936-\$3.705	Population <1m		Guyana, Maldives, Samoa, Tonga, Vanuatu		5
	1m – 4.99m		Namibia, Swaziland	Lesotho	3
	5m – 29.99m		Cameroon, Sri Lanka	Mozambique	3
	30m – 99.99m				
	100m+		India		1
			10	2	
Low Income <US\$935	Population <1m		Solomon Islands		1
	1m – 4.99m			The Gambia	1
	5m – 29.99m		Ghana, Papua New Guinea	Malawi, Sierra Leone, Uganda, Zambia	6
	30m – 99.99m		Kenya, Tanzania		2
	100m+		Bangladesh, Pakistan	Nigeria	3
			7	6	
Total		17	24	8	49

NOTES: Kiribati has no HDI ranking. It is a lower middle income country with a population of <1m.

Nauru and Tuvalu have no HDI or income ranking. Each has a population of <1m.

SOURCES: Population: UN Population Division (2006 data). HDI : UNDP 2008 HDI Update. Income Rankings: World Bank 2007.