

# Citizenship Education in the Work of the Commonwealth Secretariat

Today, I add my small voice to what I hope will become a groundswell of protest from a mature citizenry against a destructive, ethnically polarized political culture which has been entrenched for too long and which threatens to plunge us into civil disorder. Stop fanning the flames of ethnic antipathy in exchange for votes... For the sake of beauty, fragility, the astonishing creative potential of our New World Civilization, let us be mature enough to... recognise and respect differences, to seek healing, to build bridges, to honour and appreciate diversity.

(University of the West Indies lecturer quoted in Ellis et al. 2002: 2)

## Overview

A variety of organisations exist in support of the Commonwealth's mandate and priorities, all of which are tasked in their various capacities with carrying forward the Commonwealth's core values of 'democracy, freedom, peace, the rule of law and opportunity for all' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011). Some of these organisations support an agenda for respect and understanding with explicit programming, working from policy level to support governments in the development of national curriculum frameworks for citizenship education, to grassroots level initiatives training communities in good governance. Other Commonwealth agencies and initiatives promote intercultural understanding implicitly by bringing people across cultures and nations together through the universal languages of film and literature or through sports. These agencies cover citizenship initiatives not only through a variety of sectors including education, governance and culture, but also work from global levels with activities such as international youth forums, to national and sub-national levels. With this broad range of activities related to the promotion of respect and understanding across organisations, sectors and levels, citizenship education in the Commonwealth is an active area and serves as a major cross-cutting theme for programming. Commonwealth agencies also have an abundance of youth related programming, demonstrating a commitment to civic engagement of young people across the world. Given that half of the 2 billion people in the Commonwealth are under 25 years old, citizenship education, whether implicit or explicit, represents a window of opportunity to influence a world of active citizenship and peace for the next generation. This chapter provides an overview of some of the initiatives, research and other forms of engagement with citizenship education of the Commonwealth Secretariat and its sister agencies.

## **Policy and planning for citizenship education through formal education**

Mainstreaming the relevant knowledge, skills and values through the formal education system is one critical and sustainable avenue to educating the next generation in both local and global citizenship. The Commonwealth Secretariat implements technical support and policy development programmes prioritised by Commonwealth Heads of Government. Their mission as a 'force for peace, democracy, equality and good governance; a catalyst for global consensus-building; and a source of assistance for sustainable development and poverty eradication', implies that they are key advocates and actors for citizenship education. The Commonwealth Secretariat also works in support of global initiatives for education and peace building including the Millennium Development Goals, Education for All, and United Nations Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security.

Over the last decade the Commonwealth Secretariat through its Social Transformation Programmes Division has supported initiatives to strengthen national education systems' effective delivery of citizenship knowledge and skills through policy, curriculum, pedagogy and school management. In 2000, the 14th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers identified citizenship education as a key priority, noting that 'The use of education to promote values of democracy, human rights, citizenship, good governance, tolerance, etc., as espoused by the Commonwealth in its key declarations of principles should be strengthened' (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2000). Following this direction from its constituents, the Commonwealth Secretariat launched an initiative to 'assist member countries develop a framework through which they could prepare and share relevant resources for an innovative approach to citizenship education' (Osman and Leibowitz, 2003: 3). Central to this initiative was the reconceptualisation of citizenship education, moving from standard civics education to a broader notion of citizenship as a dynamic, constantly negotiated process based around the three pillars of heritage, multiculturalism and citizenship education. As the then Secretary-General put it:

I would argue that we have a two-dimensional matrix for good citizenship in the modern Commonwealth. Along one axis we have the dynamic forces of heritage, multiculturalism and citizenship... Along the second axis of my two-dimensional matrix we have the paths or channels of tolerance, liberation and celebration.

(McKinnon, 2001)

The initiative also promoted the development of citizenship education policies and planning frameworks that unified national priorities and strategies. In the following years the Commonwealth Secretariat supported a number of Commonwealth governments to develop policy frameworks for citizenship education through a consultative process.

To this end, the Secretariat initiated 'an exploratory study in Small States of the Caribbean to examine the extent to which Government-led and non-government education programmes and activities support, enhance and implement Citizenship Education' (Ellis et al., 2002: 2). In March 2002, two search conferences were organised in Guyana and in Trinidad and Tobago. These Caribbean states share a similar challenge of a diverse population in which ethnic divisions have historically been exploited for political gain. Differing levels of access to education between the ethnic groups are also a source of social exclusion that undermines a sense of equal citizenship and exacerbates tensions. Within schools, obstacles to citizenship education include a traditional emphasis on academic subjects and a low priority given to the affective domain.

The two publications emerging from this initiative (Paul, 2002; Ellis, 2002), unlike the later publication on Sierra Leone, are not blueprints for future citizenship education provision, but overviews of current activities. The studies assess the diverse providers of citizenship education, their conceptualisations and curriculum approaches, and put forward recommendations for action. Common issues and concerns emerging were as follows (Ellis et al., 2002):

- Programme delivery: the need for collaboration between government and NGOs, given scarcity of resources
- The 'hidden' curriculum: the need to move towards more open methods
- The teacher's role: centrality of the teacher as role model
- The political culture: the need for the broader society to support unity and celebration of diversity

Following the Caribbean conferences, a seminar was held in Johannesburg, South Africa, in April 2002 in order to discuss a framework for 'heritage, multiculturalism and citizenship education'. The seminar brought together educators from a number of southern African countries as well as Canada and the UK, involving discussion of the principles of the framework as well as its application to the specific contexts of each of the countries (Osman and Leibowitz, 2003). The seminar put forward a series of recommendations, principal of which was the development of a common framework for citizenship education for Commonwealth countries. A particular conception of citizenship was not however, endorsed, the position being that 'Citizenship education can be defined as everything for any country; it is not committed to any political system'. However, requirements for critical thinking and human rights education were included. In relation to the curriculum, a whole-school approach was adopted, with infusion across the range of subjects, although history and religion were seen to have a key role. The recommended learning outcomes were as follows:

- Political literacy
- Co-operative learning
- Conflict resolution
- Recognition of cultural diversity
- Critical awareness of one's history
- Solidarity
- Religious tolerance and respect

As can be seen, these learning outcomes correspond closely to the orientations of the later Civil Paths to Peace report.

The Social Transformation Programmes Division also engaged in intensive work in Sierra Leone. Visits were undertaken in 2001 and 2002 leading to the development of a curriculum framework for the country (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2004). The backdrop against which this initiative was developed is an extreme one of a decade of violent conflict, the destruction of the education system and the traumatising of large proportions of children and youth through direct involvement in violence and sexual abuse. The broader challenge facing the country is highlighted in this passage:

A number of African countries, including Sierra Leone, have given themselves very

progressive constitutions, and yet they are continuously caught in endless and costly internal conflicts. One of the lessons of this is that it is not easy to internalise values enshrined in constitutions policy documents. (p.22)

The task of the framework, therefore, is to promote these values effectively in young people. The approach involves both the elements of 'a multi-disciplinary standalone programme' and infusion throughout the curriculum (p.12). The curriculum proposals involve the following elements:

- Peace education
- Human rights
- The constitution
- History
- Arts, culture and sport
- Religion education

Teaching strategies involve dialogue and debate, promotion of role models, experiential learning and the use of role play and projects. Elements of peace and reconciliation are also strong in the framework, in light of the recent conflict. There is a strong emphasis on patriotism and national sentiment, again explained by the need to heal the wounds of the civil war. Attention is also paid to equity, with enforcement of non-discrimination policies in schools, particularly in relation to gender, with the promotion of positive role models for girls. The framework proposes a delivery mode that is 'differentiated and yet centrally co-ordinated' (p.63). It therefore involves collaboration with a number of different agencies such as the Anti-Corruption Commission, and its syllabus on 'ethics and corrupt practices'.

A further conference was held in London in July 2002, the Pan-Commonwealth Roundtable on Citizenship Education in Small States. Delegates were invited from a number of countries – including Botswana, Cayman Islands, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Jamaica, Mauritius, Namibia and Northern Ireland – 'many of which have been experiencing a resurgence of social tension, conflict and violence based on ethnic, religious, cultural and partisan political differences' (pp.4–5). Emphasis here was placed on small states of the Indian and Pacific oceans, given the previous attention provided to Africa and the Caribbean. The roundtable made the following recommendations for curriculum content:

- Mother tongue instruction and multilingualism
- Values relating to HIV and AIDS
- Gender
- Environment
- Special needs and disability
- Religion
- Social justice and human rights

Recommendations were made for a 'holistic approach', one 'which would foster links and interactions between schools and the wider community and civil society' (p.14). Citizenship education could be treated as a separate subject or infused, but the 'infusion' model was preferred to 'integration', since in the former the subject teaching is enhanced through the citizenship content. While Ellis et al. (2002) recommend 'the monitoring and evaluation of programmes to ensure the sustainability of initiatives' (p.13), the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat in this case

did not include follow-up research. The initiatives relating to national citizenship education frameworks ended in 2003, following a programme rationalisation conducted as an outcome of the Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting.

There are, however, more recent initiatives in similar areas. Amongst current programming towards citizenship skills through formal education is the Secretariat's 'Model Human Rights Curriculum for Commonwealth Law Schools'. In addition the Secretariat has signed a Collaboration Agreement (2009–2012) with the Commonwealth of Learning to work together in a number of programme areas. Following the recommendations of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding the two organisations will be involved in:

- Facilitating the development and offering of innovative materials on the themes of Civil Paths to Peace by seven Commonwealth Higher Education Institutions;
- Encouraging young people from across the Commonwealth to link community-based activities (e.g. short video or audio clips) about respect and understanding to a common website (Commonwealth of Learning, 2011).

### **Addressing marginalisation through access to both formal and non-formal education**

As important as curricula for respect and understanding in schools is addressing equitable access to schooling for all children and building an inclusive learning environment. Inclusion of marginalised groups in schools can serve to promote values around diversity and can also help to break cycles of exclusion that fuel long term conflict. Where access to schooling has not been possible, non-formal education opportunities can help bridge the gap to improve the livelihoods and life skills of disenfranchised groups. Currently the Secretariat supports a variety of programmes towards inclusive education opportunities. Based on the findings of a multi-country study on 'Gender Analysis of Classroom and Schooling Processes in Secondary Schooling', pilot action projects were run in India, Malaysia, Seychelles, and Trinidad and Tobago to address boys' under-achievement and girls' under-attainment in schools. Findings from these pilot projects were published as an Action Guide on making schools more gender responsive (Atthill et al., 2007).

The Secretariat has also supported skills-based education in communities affected by conflict. In Northern Uganda, former child soldiers and youth affected by the 23 year civil war received rehabilitation and training in a range of practical life skills. The Northern Uganda Youth Development Centre was established to by the Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with the Government of Uganda to reinforce reconstruction and reconciliation efforts in the region. The Secretariat also supports access to education through all phases of emergency, and has amongst its publications a handbook on *Achieving Education for All: Good Practice in Crisis and Post-Conflict Reconstruction* (Williams, 2006).

The Youth Ambassadors for Positive Living programme engages youth from all over the world in educating one another and their communities about HIV and its prevention. The programme also provides HIV positive youth with a supportive environment to exchange experiences. Youth Ambassadors are trained to participate in a variety of public forums to 'assist young people in overcoming fear, ignorance, prejudice and discrimination related to HIV/AIDS. They also help in demystification and reverse stigmatisation process'.

## **Further study: citizenship education at the tertiary level**

There are a few Commonwealth agencies devoted to tertiary education, all of which support an agenda towards respect and understanding. The Institute of Commonwealth Studies is a post-graduate institution in the UK devoted to the study of the Commonwealth, housing an interdisciplinary and practice-oriented human rights MA programme. The Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit (CPSU), a think tank based at the Institute of Commonwealth Studies, specialises in issues of Commonwealth policy including globalisation, democracy, civil society and human rights. The Commonwealth Scholarships programme has supported over 26,000 individuals from across the Commonwealth to continue their higher education overseas, promoting intellectual cross fertilisation. Commonwealth awards are disproportionately supported by the UK, Canada and New Zealand, but in recent years India and Malaysia as well as a handful of African and Asian countries have begun hosting Commonwealth scholars (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2009).

## **Promoting citizenship education through civil society**

Besides the variety of ways in which citizenship education can be promoted through formal and non-formal education from primary through tertiary levels, the role of civil society in fostering mutual understanding and civic participation is critical. The mandate of the Commonwealth Foundation is to 'strengthen civil society, thereby advancing Commonwealth values and programme priorities related to democracy and good governance, respect for human rights and gender equality, poverty reduction, and sustainable, people-centred development'. One key area of their work is on citizenship and participation. The Foundation supports training for civil society organisations on governance and related issues and has produced a variety of handbooks for use by facilitators, civil society organisations or government offices to guide good governance. The publications include *Citizens' education action learning guide*, *Citizens and governance toolkit*, and *Civil Society Accountability Toolkits* for Belize, India, the Pacific and Uganda. The People's Forum, also supported by the Foundation, is a platform for civil society organisations to raise issues and set agendas for change. Notably, the 2009 Commonwealth People's Forum Civil Society Statement calls upon member states 'to recognise that education offers a key means of strengthening social capital and can serve peace building by encouraging tolerance of difference'.

## **Promoting respect and understanding through arts and sports**

Besides civics and education on global issues, cultural activities can play a powerful role in bringing people from disparate backgrounds together and encourage cultural exchange. The Commonwealth Foundation promotes intercultural understanding through its Culture and Creativity Programming, supporting international arts and literature. For example, the Foundation works to support and promote film within and across Commonwealth countries. Amongst its initiatives is support to 'burgeoning festivals in member countries where films from elsewhere in the Commonwealth are showcased'. The Foundation's work is in keeping with the 2005 UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion of the Diversity of Cultural Expressions, which forms the basis of its work in promoting inclusive policies on culture. The Royal Commonwealth Society also sponsors programming in the arts with its annual Youth Commonwealth Competition in photography, writing and film. The Commonwealth Games Federation holds the Commonwealth

Games every four years bringing athletes together from across the Commonwealth. Reflecting an increasing interest in the potential for sports to promote international understanding, the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting 2008 Communiqué:

Noted with interest the launch of the final report of the UN Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group entitled *Harnessing the Power of Sport for Development and Peace: Recommendations for Governments* and agreed to consider the report recommendations and the development of action plans.

The Communiqué also notes that ‘Youth policies should draw together key departments at national and local level – education, health, sport, gender, culture, law and order, social inclusion – to ensure an integrated youth sport strategy’.

## **Youth Participation in building a better world locally and globally**

A recognition of the importance of youth participation and education cuts across all Commonwealth agencies, many of which support programmes specifically designed to engage young people in both global and local issues. In particular a variety of youth conferences, forums and summits bring youth from across the globe together to give them a taste of how high level debate and decision-making amongst world leaders happens. These formats give young people a chance to learn about global issues and in some cases give them a voice in the political process.

Two platforms for the voices and perspectives of young people are sponsored by the Commonwealth Secretariat. The Youth Caucus is a network covering 54 countries, with representatives from each region of the world forming a caucus with full participatory rights at the Commonwealth Youth Ministers’ meetings. The Commonwealth Youth Forum is a meeting of young people from across the Commonwealth who meet prior to the annual Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs) to discuss critical issues. Their views are presented to the Heads of Government through an official communiqué.

The Royal Commonwealth Society holds annual Commonwealth Youth Summits across the regions of the UK, as well as a national summit in London, designed to bring young people together to work on global issues. The Youth Summits also include a simulation of the CHOGMs, with young people playing the roles of heads of state or foreign ministers to debate key issues. The themes for 2010 included the Millennium Development Goals, Health and Education for All. Likewise CPSU supports an annual Summer Youth Conference which aims to ‘engage young people on contemporary Commonwealth themes such as good governance, sustainability and development’. In 2010 its theme was ‘Global Diversity and Equality’. CPSU has also run a ‘Commonwealth Clubs’ project for secondary schools, developing links and fostering understanding between teenagers in different countries.

The Commonwealth Secretariat Youth Programme supports a variety of initiatives related to youth development, including training in vocational skills and in youth development work and small grants with training in entrepreneurship. The Commonwealth Games Federation also caters to youth involvement through the Youth Games which bring together youth from across the Commonwealth to compete in sports and athletics.

There are, therefore, a range of relevant activities relating to citizenship being promoted by the Commonwealth Secretariat and its sister organisations. However, more concerted efforts at promoting citizenship within basic education are needed, renewing the positive initiatives established from 2001–2003. The most effective forms of involvement that can be engaged in by the Secretariat will be explored in the sections that follow.