
2. An Overview of Education in Small States

As in the general literature, in the present study population size has been taken as the primary indicator for defining which countries and territories to analyse. In its work on the economies of small states, the World Bank uses the threshold of 1.5 million people, but notes that in practice there is a continuum and that some states with populations that are larger than the chosen threshold share some or all of the characteristics of smaller countries.⁵

This view is reflected in the work of the Commonwealth Secretariat, which also uses the 1.5 million population benchmark. However, its annual publication, *Small States: Economic Review and Basic Statistics*, provides data on states with populations up to five million, since many of these share characteristics with the smaller countries. In facilitating dialogue with its members on small state issues, the Commonwealth includes Botswana, The Gambia, Jamaica, Lesotho, Namibia and Papua New Guinea (with a population of over six million people) – but not New Zealand or Singapore – on the grounds that issues of remoteness and insularity, susceptibility to natural disasters, limited institutional capacity and economic diversification, vulnerability arising from economic openness, poor access to external capital, and a relatively high incidence of poverty are present in full or in part in all of these larger small states.

A different classification starting point is ‘islandness’. The UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs recognises 51 small island developing states (SIDS) which share similar physical and structural challenges to their development. Most of these states suffer from degrees of remoteness, are small in land area and population (less than 1.5 million) and have narrow resource bases that are highly vulnerable to natural disasters. Their economies are open and heavily dependent on trade for national income.⁶ Most of these countries belong to the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS).⁷ As one might expect, a list of small

island states and states classified by smallness of population shows a high degree of coincidence (Appendix 1).

Table 1 lists the world's small states by size of population and geographical region. It separates 87 states with populations below 1.5 million from the 34 states that have between 1.5 and five million people. Of the total of 120 states with fewer than five million people, 80 are sovereign states and 40 are territories in forms of association and dependency with larger countries.⁸ Regionally, the greatest concentrations of small states are in the Caribbean and the south Pacific.

Small states in the Commonwealth

Of the 80 sovereign countries with populations below five million, 32 (40%) are full members of the Commonwealth (Table 1). Twenty-three are island states, 15 of which are multi-island countries. When 1.5 million people are used as the benchmark, 25 fully independent Commonwealth countries comprise 53 per cent of the total of 47 small states globally.

Although these Commonwealth member countries have much in common, there is considerable diversity. Table 2 shows levels of income per capita and rankings on the Human Development Index (HDI) of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). Thirteen of the fully independent Commonwealth small states for which data are available (excluding New Zealand and Singapore) have high or upper-middle income levels (World Bank data) and very high or high HDI ratings (UNDP data). At the other end of the scale, only The Gambia scores low on both indices, but all the Pacific states are lower-middle income countries, with the exception of low income Vanuatu.

The scale and scope of education systems

The systemic challenge for all small states – rich and poor – is to deliver education services for a small number of students from a restricted institutional base. Enabling all children and adults to benefit from a full range of educational opportunities from early childhood to tertiary education is almost inevitably constrained by size, a limited range of expertise and high unit costs of specialisation which countries with fewer than 1.5 million people find hard to bear.

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 per cent of GNP, but in Commonwealth small states the average is 7.1 per cent and in only two of the 19 states for which data are shown in Appendix 2 (The Gambia and Mauritius) is the proportion below the global average.

Table 1. Small states and territories by size of population

Region	Population <1.5 million	Population, 1.5–5 million
Africa	Cape Verde; Equatorial Guinea; Gabon; São Tomé & Príncipe; <i>Swaziland</i>	<i>Botswana</i> ; Central African Republic; Congo (Republic of); Eritrea; <i>The Gambia</i> ; Guinea Bissau; <i>Lesotho</i> ; Liberia; <i>Namibia</i>
Americas	French Guiana (FRORD); Suriname	Costa Rica ; Panama; Uruguay
Arab States	Bahrain; Djibouti; Qatar	Lebanon; Mauritania; Oman; United Arab Emirates; West Bank & Gaza
Atlantic	Bermuda (BROT); Falkland Islands (BROT); Faroe Islands (DENSG); Greenland (DENSG); Iceland ; St Helena (BROT); St Pierre & Miquelon (FRTC)	
Asia	Bhutan ; <i>Brunei Darussalam</i> ; Macao-China (SAR); Timor Leste	Georgia; Mongolia; <i>Singapore</i>
Caribbean	Anguilla (BROT); <i>Antigua & Barbuda</i> ; Aruba (NETHFA); <i>The Bahamas</i> ; <i>Barbados</i> ; <i>Belize</i> ; British Virgin Islands (BROT); Cayman Islands (BROT); <i>Dominica</i> ; <i>Grenada</i> ; Guadeloupe (FRORD); <i>Guyana</i> ; Martinique (FRORD); Montserrat (BROT); Netherlands Antilles (NETHFA); St Barthelemy (FROC); <i>St Kitts & Nevis</i> ; <i>St Lucia</i> ; St Martin (FROC); <i>St Vincent & the Grenadines</i> ; <i>Trinidad & Tobago</i> ; Turks & Caicos (BROT); US Virgin Islands (UST)	<i>Jamaica</i> ; Puerto Rico (SGUT)
Europe	<i>Andorra</i> ; Cyprus ; Estonia; Gibraltar (BROT); Guernsey (UKCD); Isle of Man (UKCD); Jersey (UKCD); Liechtenstein ; Luxembourg ; <i>Malta</i> ; Monaco ; Montenegro ; San Marino; The Vatican	Albania; Armenia; Bosnia & Herzegovina; Croatia; Ireland; Latvia; Lithuania; Macedonia FYR; Moldova; Norway; Slovenia
Indian Ocean	Christmas Island (AUST); Cocos Islands (AUST); Comoros; Mayotte (FROC); <i>Maldives</i> ; <i>Mauritius</i> ; Réunion (FRORD); <i>Seychelles</i>	
Pacific	American Samoa (UST); Cook Islands (SGNZ); Federated States of Micronesia ; Fiji Islands; French Polynesia; Guam (SGUT); <i>Kiribati</i> ; Marshall Islands ; <i>Nauru</i> ; New Caledonia (FRORD); Niue (SGNZ); Norfolk Island (AUST); Northern Marianas (SGCUS); Palau ; <i>Samoa</i> ; <i>Solomon Islands</i> ; Tokelau (NZSAT); <i>Tonga</i> ; <i>Tuvalu</i> ; <i>Vanuatu</i> ; Wallis & Futuna (FROC)	<i>New Zealand</i>

Notes: Countries in bold are UN members; countries in italic are Commonwealth members. 2008 data. 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; SAR: Special Administrative Region of the People's Republic of China; SGCUS: Commonwealth in Political Union with USA; SGNZ: Self Governing in Association with New Zealand; SGUT: Self-Governing Unincorporated Territory of the USA; UKCD: United Kingdom Crown Dependency; UST: Unincorporated territory administered by USA Office of Insular Affairs.

Table 2. Commonwealth small states: income and human development

	Very high HDI 0.900 and above	High HDI 0.800–0.899	Medium HDI 0.500–0.799	Low HDI below 0.500
High income >US\$11,906 GNI per capita	Barbados Brunei Darussalam Cyprus Malta	Antigua & Barbuda Bahamas, The Trinidad & Tobago		
Upper-middle income US\$3,856–11,905 GNI per capita		Dominica Grenada Mauritius St Kitts & Nevis St Lucia Seychelles	Belize Botswana Dominica Grenada Jamaica Namibia St Vincent & the Grenadines	
Lower-middle income US\$976–3855 GNI per capita			Guyana Lesotho Maldives Papua New Guinea Samoa Solomon Islands Swaziland Tonga Lesotho Vanuatu	
Low income <US\$975 GNI per capita				Gambia, The

Notes: This table includes all independent Commonwealth small states with a population up to five million, excluding New Zealand and Singapore but with the addition of Papua New Guinea. 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. GNI: Gross National Income; HDI: Human Development Index.

Source: UNDP (2009), Table H; World Bank (2009b), p. 377.

In most small states an important part of this expenditure is devoted to extending the scale and scope of education systems through external partnerships. These include regional universities, notably the University of the West Indies 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). Other opportunities are secured through collaboration with larger states outside the immediate geographic region, including partnerships with universities offering distance education programmes.

From these observations a number of complex issues arise, including the extent to which policymakers and planners in small states must necessarily envisage higher unit costs than their counterparts in larger states. In addition, the advantages and disadvantages of bilateral, regional and international collaboration in the delivery and support of education services must be weighed carefully in terms of value added.

Beyond global goals and targets

Some small states, while they support international commitments to achieve EFA and the MDGs, have found the global focus on universal primary education and gender parity insufficiently attentive to their own achievements and needs. Many small states identify and prioritise more pressing national 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, 11 of the 24 Commonwealth states with populations below 1.5 million for which data are available have primary net enrolment rates of 90 per cent or over, and seven have rates of 95 per cent or over (Appendix 2). Certainly, further effort is needed to reach and sustain figures close to 100 per cent, but the picture compares positively with many other parts of the world (Packer and Aggio, 2010). On the other hand, nine countries have primary net enrolment rates below 85 per cent. Solomon Islands, a country that has experienced recent debilitating conflict, has the lowest net enrolment rate (62%) among Commonwealth small states (see Appendix 2). As the *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2011* makes clear, it is largely impossible to project enrolment rates forward to 2015. Aside from the weakness of data there are many education policy and global variables that make projections based on current trends extremely problematic.

Enabling the last 5–10 per cent of the most disadvantaged children to participate in a complete cycle of basic schooling is a challenge which confronts

most states, including higher-income countries. While it may be possible to identify some barriers to schooling that confront the most needy children which are directly related to the smallness of the state (e.g. isolation in countries which are made up of a widely scattered archipelago; problems associated with specialist provision for children with special needs when the numbers in any one community or location are very small and specialist expertise and training is limited; and the limitations of budgets to meet very small scale and localised requirements), it is primarily issues of poverty, conflict, inadequate financing and the poor quality of schooling which afflict small and large countries alike. There are, however, some differences in levels of enrolment over time within the countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Commonwealth Pacific that may be worthy of scrutiny in relation to the policies and strategies that have been pursued in different small states.

On the MDG gender parity indicators, most small states have either achieved parity in formal schooling (primary and secondary) or the disparity is in favour of girls. The latter is particularly evident in the Caribbean, where enhancement of boys' achievements has long been identified as a priority (Miller, 1991; Kutnick, 2000). Thus, 19 countries have a Gender Parity Index (GPI – females/males) for secondary education above 1.0, and in eight instances the figure exceeds 1.1 (Appendix 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 on some of the other EFA goals, notably the extension of access to pre-primary education, where the pattern of public provision is 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 in many instances a paucity of 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 extends well beyond it. This is leading policymakers and planners to ask how they can best develop a balanced approach to education across the whole sector in ways that go beyond the international priorities of the first decade of the new millennium.

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 its volume. Nevertheless, some statistics are available. In total, for the 25 independent Commonwealth small states for which data are available (Appendix 2) approximately US\$223 million was provided for aid specifically for the education sector in 2007. This compared to just over US\$12 billion in aid for education globally.

Appendix 2 shows that very little direct aid funding goes to education in the Caribbean (although St Vincent and the Grenadines is shown in the database of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as receiving US\$17 million in 2007). Assistance in the south Pacific is much greater, though it varies from year to year. For example, Papua New Guinea received well over US\$100 million per annum at the beginning of the decade, but only US\$40 million in 2007. Samoa received US\$4 million in 2007 compared with US\$24 million in 2006. Aid to Vanuatu fell from US\$14 million in 2000 to US\$9 million in 2007.

Some 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.

Much work remains to be done to unravel the data on aid to education in small states – its volume, predictability, forms, culture, reporting requirements, benefits and the extent to which it heightens levels of dependency and obligation (Collier and Dollar, 2001; Coxon and Munce, 2008). These questions will gain in importance if negative economic forces and climate change have a serious impact on public service budgets in small states.