



UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC
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Address by

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to the Research Colloquium

Education and Development in the Commonwealth: Comparative Perspective
Education and Development in the Commonwealth: The view from UNESCO

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The National College for School Leadership,
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Dear Colleagues and Friends,
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,

I should like to thank the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission and the Centre for Comparative Education Research, for having invited me to attend this Research Colloquium. I have the pleasure of joining my greetings to you with those of the Director-General of UNESCO, Mr. Koïchiro Matsuura, the Chairman of the Executive Board, Mr Hans-Heinrich Wrede, as well as all those from the entire Organization.

It is an honour and a pleasure for me to have been called upon by the University of Nottingham to deliberate on one of the priority matters of our era "Education". As a scholar of the Commonwealth of Learning, as a citizen of Nigeria, Nigeria a member of the Commonwealth family of nations, as a participating member of the UNESCO Commonwealth group, I know that I am at home here amongst friends and colleagues. For my part, I am fully aware of the tremendous efforts made to encourage the development and sharing of education knowledge, resources and technologies especially in helping newer and developing commonwealth nations join the wagon on attaining the Education for All target by 2015.

The strength of the Commonwealth wide network lies on the input of all its bodies. This voluntary association of more than 54 independent sovereign states invested in its capacity in providing support to each other and working together towards international goals. The Commonwealth is described as a "family" of nations, originally linked together by the British Empire, and now they are building on their common heritage in language, culture and education. This has enabled them to work together in an atmosphere of greater trust and understanding than generally prevails among nations. The Commonwealth has used this link to strengthen each others development, and to work in partnership to advance global agreement over crucial issues. It brings together some 1.7 billion people of many faiths, races, languages, traditions and levels of economic development, it represents almost one-third of the world's population.

As we all know and agree the right to education is a fundamental human right. It occupies a central place in Human Rights discourse and is essential and indispensable for the exercise of all other human rights and for development. *"As an empowerment right, education*

is the primary vehicle by which economically and socially marginalized adults and children can lift themselves out of poverty and obtain the means to participate fully in their communities". Individuals can exercise none of the civil, political, economic and social rights unless they have received a certain minimum of education. Enforceability of the right to education is indeed a challenging task. Of highest importance is the consensus that education is vital to the international fight against poverty and exclusion.

Education is, without a doubt, the root to cultivating sound and sustainable development. The Commonwealth network has always given high priority to the field of Education. This commitment, sustained after Jomtien, has continued to work actively in both higher and basic education, including recent work on the contribution which higher education can make in the support of basic education. It is a fact that the Commonwealth has always worked in response to the need of its member governments which are expressed in the recent mandates given by the triennial Ministers of Education meetings. It is also true that the Commonwealth has also contributed to the standard setting and upgrading of education and development world-wide.

UNESCO for its part, constituted a declaration of faith in education for the building of a better future. It declared that "Since wars begin in the minds of men it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed". The States party to its constitution, believing in full and equal opportunities for education for all, UNESCO embarked on giving a fresh impulse to education and the spread of culture by collaborating with its Member States, among and between nations, in the promotion of the development of educational activities, in advancing the ideal of equality of educational opportunity without regard to race, sex or any distinctions, economic or social. And so did the Heads of Government of the countries of the Commonwealth, in its 1991 Harare Declaration, they affirmed the principles to which the Commonwealth is committed, it stated "We believe in the liberty of the individual under the law, in equal rights for all citizen regardless of gender, race, colour, creed or political belief", they the Heads of Government of the countries of the Commonwealth emphasized the importance and urgency of economic and social development to satisfy the basic needs and aspirations of the vast majority of the peoples of the world, and to seek the progressive removal of the wide disparities in living standards amongst its members.

Several Commonwealth countries have made significant progress in education, economic and social development while others are poor and face severe problems, these include excessive population growth, crushing poverty, debt burdens and environmental degradation. The Commonwealth network has worked and is still working with renewed vigour in areas such as providing fundamental human rights, gender disparity, provision of universal access to education, the promotion of sustainable development, the alleviation of poverty in the countries of the Commonwealth, in the development of human resources, particularly through education, training, health, culture, sport and programmes. They have also consistently encouraged an adequate flow of resources from the developed to developing countries effective and in the increasing programmes of bilateral and multilateral co-operation aimed at raising living standards and respect for the principles of sustainable development. They decided at Millbrook to fulfil more effectively the commitments contained in the Harare Declaration by laying emphasis on the promotion of sustainable development and in facilitating consensus building.

Both the old and new Commonwealth countries perform well on education indicators from recent reports, however it should be noted that most of the low achieving Commonwealth countries are in Sub-Saharan Africa and they risk not attaining the Education for All (EFA) goals. However, recent studies show that most Commonwealth developing countries are in a better situation as regards achieving the Education for All (EFA) than their non-Commonwealth counter parts. Indicators also show that enrolment rates are higher, there are lower levels of repetition and lower level of dropouts than in the rest of Sub-Saharan Africa, meaning that they have a higher internal efficiency in education. Distance and Open education is one of the that the Commonwealth network has employed in an attempt to ensure as many people as possible have access to the types of education they will need to fulfil their true potential

The core purpose of UNESCO's education programme is to achieve EFA in its broadest sense – education for all, at all levels and throughout life. Education is the foundation of personal fulfilment, of economic growth and of social cohesion. It is a critical factor in overcoming poverty and ensuring sustainable development. The World Education Forum in Dakar set an agenda for progress towards this aim expressed as six goals. Two of these goals, include attaining universal primary education (UPE) by 2015 and gender parity in schooling by 2005, these are also part of the Millennium Development Goals of the United

Nations. These goals also happen to be the same objectives in the renewed agreement made by representatives at the 2003 Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting. They decided that in order to attain the MDGs in respect to education, their programme will focus on two fundamental aspect of education for development, which is achieving good quality universal primary education and reducing gender disparity in access to primary and secondary education particularly in LDCs and small states. To achieve this, the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) support will be directed towards promoting education as a key priority in all Commonwealth agenda, facilitating matching of educational need with the broader range of Commonwealth resources available as well as demonstrating and sharing best practices for wider replication.

UNESCO has the responsibility for coordinating the global movement to achieve EFA, this responsibility is also towards its Commonwealth members in attaining the EFA goals. Since the year 2000, it has developed close and productive links with four key stakeholders groups, namely governments of developing countries, multinational agencies, civil society and bilateral developing agencies. This has enabled UNESCO and other agencies to develop its work in a complementary fashion so that each plays to its area of strength and comparative advantage for effective implementation and results.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

UNESCO would keep encouraging collaborative partnership in the development and implementation of policies. I personally attended and participated in the United Nations Literacy Decade Regional Launch in Africa on the occasion of the ADEA Biennale meeting. Partnership should and must be formed at the widest level, between and among governments, civil society, private sector, the international community, national and regional level as well as at grass root level. UNESCO has been tasked to lead and coordinate the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012), as it is also one of the three quantitative Dakar goals, is also in halving the rate of adult illiteracy by 2015, on current trends, this may be the hardest to achieve. But encouraging inter-cultural dialogue as directed by its Resolution 47 of the 32nd session of the UNESCO General Conference in 2003 on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations and creating a shared and expanded vision of quality education for Sustainable Development will be a key vehicle for pursuing this agenda.

In order to help its members achieve sustainable development, UNESCO assist its Member States in making progress towards attaining each of the six goals, which focus respectively on primary education, gender parity, early childhood care and education, life skills, adult literacy and quality. It will continue to promote EFA programmes in the E-9 and Sub-Saharan Africa in particular, in close collaboration with other international agencies, notably the World Bank, to ensure that the Fast Track Initiative provides effective and sustainable assistance to countries that need it.

UNESCO welcomes with enthusiasm the Commonwealth Education Section work plan which focuses on the new role of advocacy. Advocacy plays an important role in maintaining commitment across the local and international community. This aim to ensure the coordination of funding mechanisms and other EFA activities, UNESCO's international advocacy for an integrated vision of EFA relates EFA to the Millennium Development Goals. Advocacy is the key function of the High-Level Group on EFA that the Director-General of UNESCO convenes annually. The independent *EFA Global Monitoring Report*, produced each year, provides the Group with a springboard for its advocacy role, to which the Department for International Development (DFID) made tremendous contribution in the last two reports. The report is to provide a thorough analysis of the development of education globally, an assessment of the progress towards achieving the six EFA goals and a commentary on the extent to which the international commitments announced in Dakar are met. Each report has a special theme.

Unfortunately there is no comprehensive global overview of progress towards the goals as only countries with a complete set of indicators can accurately calculate their Education for All Development Index (EDI). Among the ninety-four countries having the data, very few have either achieved the four most quantifiable EFA goals or are close to doing so, even though they exclude most of the Western European and North American countries, where EFA goal achievement is higher. It is also notable that no country from Sub-Saharan African, the Arab States, or from South and West Asia with the exception of Maldives is presently close to achieving the goals. The EFA global monitoring report, reports that countries close to achieving the goals include a number of countries from Latin America- Argentina, Chile Cuba Guyana, and the Panama while as countries very far from achieving the EFA goals are from Sub-Saharan African and also include India, Pakistan and Bangladesh. Primary-school enrolments are low, gender ratios are highly unequal, illiteracy is

widespread sometimes a majority never reach the fifth grade of primary school. Thus countries in this group are faced with multiple challenges that will have to be tackled simultaneously if EFA is to be secured and attained by 2015. The task of achieving gender equality in education at all levels by 2015 is more profoundly challenging.

During the 15th Conference of the Commonwealth Education Ministers (15CCEM) in Edinburgh, Scotland, progress in education was reviewed across the Commonwealth in the context of the main theme of the Conference which was “Closing the Gap: Inclusion and Achievement”. They identified key issues, challenges and opportunities that needed to be addressed and stressed the need to work with vigour if they were to meet the targets of the EFA and the MDGs. They identified six Action Areas in which they need to enforce efforts, namely Achieving Universal Primary Education; Eliminating Gender Disparities in Education; Improving Quality in Education; Using Distance Learning to overcome Barriers; Supporting Education in Difficult Circumstances; Mitigating the Impact of HIV/AIDS in Education. UNESCO in assisting its Member States towards attaining the six EFA goals will continue to pay particular attention to the role of education in halting the HIV/AIDS pandemic and coping with its consequences. EFA will not be achieved unless the spread of the disease is arrested. In many countries, it has already destroyed educational gains won through determined efforts over many years.

Please allow me to compliment our host, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan whose tremendous effort and extraordinary progress were clearly pointed out during this conference, mainly for encouraging student flows in all directions particularly at the postgraduate level and in a south-south direction. It was also indicated that smaller states need more scholarships and fellowships. The Commonwealth have continually demonstrated its concern relative to small states confronted with a host of extremely complex problems in providing cost-effective education and training to their citizens. A large proportion of the members of the Commonwealth are classified as “small states”. Thirty-two out of the 54 members of the Commonwealth are small states.

The socio-economic, environmental and cultural vulnerabilities of small states are, however also well recognised and generate distinctive educational dilemmas and problems for attention. These problems are shaped and modulated by the three now well-known variable – scale, isolation and dependence – they were examined so fruitfully nearly two decades ago in

an experts meeting on educational development in small states, organized in Mauritius by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Important questions are also raised by the application of western, large-country models of educational planning to the development paradigms of small states. UNESCO's International Institute for Education Planning (IIEP) and the University of the West Indies carry out joint projects on distance learning materials for educational planners and policy-makers in the Caribbean.

Today, six Institutes and two centres specialized in education work as part of UNESCO's Education Sector to assist countries in tackling education problems of particular concern for Sustainable Development

Let us take the case of UNITWIN as example. UNITWIN is the abbreviation for the **UNI**versity **TW**ining and **N**etworking scheme, the Programme was established in 1992 following a decision of the General Conference of UNESCO taken at its 26th session. It was launched with the aim of developing inter-university co-operation, while emphasising the transfer of knowledge between universities and the promotion of academic solidarity across the world.

The **UNITWIN/UNESCO Chairs Programme** serves as a prime means of capacity-building through the transfer of knowledge and sharing in a spirit of solidarity with and between developing countries. Since the programme was launched in 1992, some 500 UNESCO Chairs and inter-university networks have been established in over 110 countries. These chairs and networks address all major fields of knowledge within UNESCO's competence, as reflected in a sampling of the titles of existing 13 chairs established so far in seven individual SIDS: environment and sustainable development in Bahrain, educational technologies in Barbados, biomaterials in Cuba, peace, teacher education and culture in Fiji, higher education in Mauritius, freedom of expression in Papua New Guinea and human rights and democracy in Dominican Republic and I wish to pay my condolence at the same time to the families and victims of the terrible disaster they are going through now.

One of UNESCO's family of educational institutes, the **International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)** has as mission to strengthen the capacity of countries and to plan and manage their education systems. This includes assisting them in activities related to small island developing states on educational strategies and an ongoing discussion and study of the

role of e-learning in higher education. In the Caribbean, regional training workshops have been held on such topics as reforming school supervision for quality improvement, developing indicators for planning basic education and education costs financing and budgeting. In co-operation with the Grenada Ministry of Education, recent activities have included an institutional audit of the ministry and the preparation of an education sector diagnosis and a long-term education plan. The framework for a strategy on education and AIDS in the Caribbean has been developed in association with the University of the West Indies. In terms of poverty reduction, among the projects of the Social Sciences Sector of UNESCO is that on “Breaking the Cycle of Poverty Among Marginalized Youth in the Eastern Caribbean States”. A joint initiative with the Inter-American Institute for Co-operation on Agriculture (IICA), component activities include a sub-project for enhancing the participation of marginalized youth in the development process, in four countries: Dominica, Grenada, St Kitts and Nevis and St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Finally, UNESCO and the Commonwealth have actively been collaborating and will continue to collaborate and co-operate on issues of mutual interest and commitment to both parties and to its respective Members State. It is through international co-operation that the greatest hopes for the future sustainability of education and development lie. International efforts should and must continue for better partnership and co-operation, all modes of international and regional co-operation and development should and must be explored and expanded.

It is also the responsibility of decision makers, opinion leaders and NGO’s to take concrete action to ensure a healthy, sound and sustainable use of resources for the benefit of present and future generations, particularly in parts of the world where poverty and chaotic urban growth, environmental degradation and lack of basic services and education hither development advancement.

Thank you.