Commonwealth Education Policy Framework

First Draft

January 2017

The Commonwealth

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Summary of the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework

Cornerstones	
Equity	Education is a human right: as such all individuals should have access to educational opportunities. Access must be irrespective of any form of disadvantage or discrimination due to age, gender, socio-economic status, geographic location, disability, ethnicity as well as minority and marginalised groups.
Quality	Access and retention without quality are of little value. Six attributes of quality – equitable; effective; empowering; sustainable; appropriate; and wellbeing and safety.
Relevance	Learning experiences should be directly connected to the personal aspirations of students and the real-life issues they are likely to face. Education should meet societal needs, including but not limited to employment and productivity. Education should support the delivery of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
Sustainability	The advent of the SDGs means that sustainability is at the core of the global education agenda. This vision of sustainability is broad, encompassing the social, economic and environmental areas. The sustainability of education is dependent on finding ways to resource activities adequately in the future but also requires careful attention to be given to building and maintaining the support of other stakeholders.

Enablers	
Governance	Political will; legislation; policy & regulation; strategic planning; financing; organisation; quality assurance; accountability.
Knowledge	Research & development; innovation; monitoring & evaluation; dissemination and uptake; Information and Communications Technology (ICT) & online learning.
Advocacy	Leadership & ethics; social mobilisation & community engagement; multistakeholder participation; communication.
Capacity	Educational professional development; curriculum & pedagogy; infrastructure & technology; standards & accreditation; wider workforce management.
Elements	
Pre-school	Early socialisation of children; readiness of learners; staff development; effective coalition for delivery.
Primary school	Reaching hardest to reach; building, literacy, numeracy and socialisation; providing foundations for secondary schooling; early assessment of learning & development; gender role models; language policy.
Secondary school	Differentiated policies for lower & upper secondary education; balance of subject knowledge; safety & accessibility; tackling specific threats; addressing specific gender-based factors of child non-attendance.
Technical and Vocational Education and Training	Overcoming negative image; skills for work & life; stronger links to industry; better transitions; wider skills sets; life-course approach; professional development; vocational schooling.
Tertiary education	Qualification comparability; meeting national needs; addressing international higher education; strengthening industry links & improving employability; strengthening research capacity; expanding scholarships; innovative funding.
Adult education and learning	Delivering flexible programmes that meet adults' needs; educator development; reintegration programmes; learning cultures.

Contents

Purpose and Application of the Framework

In light of the vision for education articulated by Sustainable Development Goal 4, the global challenges for education and the commitment made by Ministers of Education at the 19th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (19CCEM), and drawing both on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations 2015) and the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action (UNESCO 2015), the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework (CEPF) aims to provide member countries with a comprehensive approach to:

i.   identify key policy gaps and challenges;

ii.   assist renewal and development of national education policies and legislation that enables the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in line with Commonwealth needs, priorities and values;

iii.   ensure delivery on the critical aspects of Goal 4 of the SDGs;

iv.   enable policy development that addresses simultaneously the challenges of equity and quality in a sustainable way and enhances the relevance of education across all SDGs;

v.   provide a mechanism for member countries to compare, review and formulate their respective national education policies; and

vi.   support the benchmarking of policy implementation with similar member countries and the monitoring of national progress on implementation.

The CEPF is explicitly a framework. It offers a series of thinking tools for considering what makes sense in specific national contexts. Additionally, the document is supported by a series of further documents, on curriculum, partnerships and financing, that can assist in the education policymaking process. It presents a view of how a Commonwealth perspective, embedded in Commonwealth values and supported by Commonwealth collaboration, can enrich other international and national policy processes. The CEPF does not seek to substitute for such processes. It can be adapted into a tool by member countries to assist them to scale up investment in education; to ensure that education delivery focuses on, among other things, equity, lifelong learning, workforce planning and relevancy to twenty-first century skills and jobs. However, it is for member countries to decide how useful the framework is for their particular circumstances.

The CEPF will complement existing international frameworks and address some of the gaps inherent in the existing national policies of member countries in relation to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Commonwealth's values as outlined in the Commonwealth Charter.

The CEPF, which will encompass a life-course perspective, takes a systems strengthening approach that will build capacity for education policy and frameworks across the Commonwealth in an effort to improve educational outcomes reflective of the SDGs. The framework can also be used to assist member countries in finding and subsequently addressing gaps in their respective policies.

Background

'*Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights*' (UNESCO 2016). Its nature as a fundamental right means that it requires no other justification. Yet, as the above quotation notes, it is also the basis for the achievement of other rights. In pursuit of their obligations under various international human rights conventions, Commonwealth member countries have already committed to ensuring that quality education must be available and appropriate to the needs of all.

There is also robust evidence about the economic benefits that flow from education, (Thomas with Burnett 2015) as well as a range of other benefits, including gender equality, democracy, peace and personal development (World Bank 2016). Recognition of this multifaceted case for education's developmental importance has been given in the new SDGs.

The global community's new vision for education is expressed via Goal 4, that is, to '*ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*' (United Nations 2015). SDG4 effectively replaces the education-related Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) goals. SDG4 is more encompassing and ambitious than its predecessor goals and covers the full spectrum of education: early childhood care and education, primary, secondary, technical and vocational education and training, tertiary, and adult education and learning. The SDGs are also far more explicit in their applicability to all nations and not just to the South.
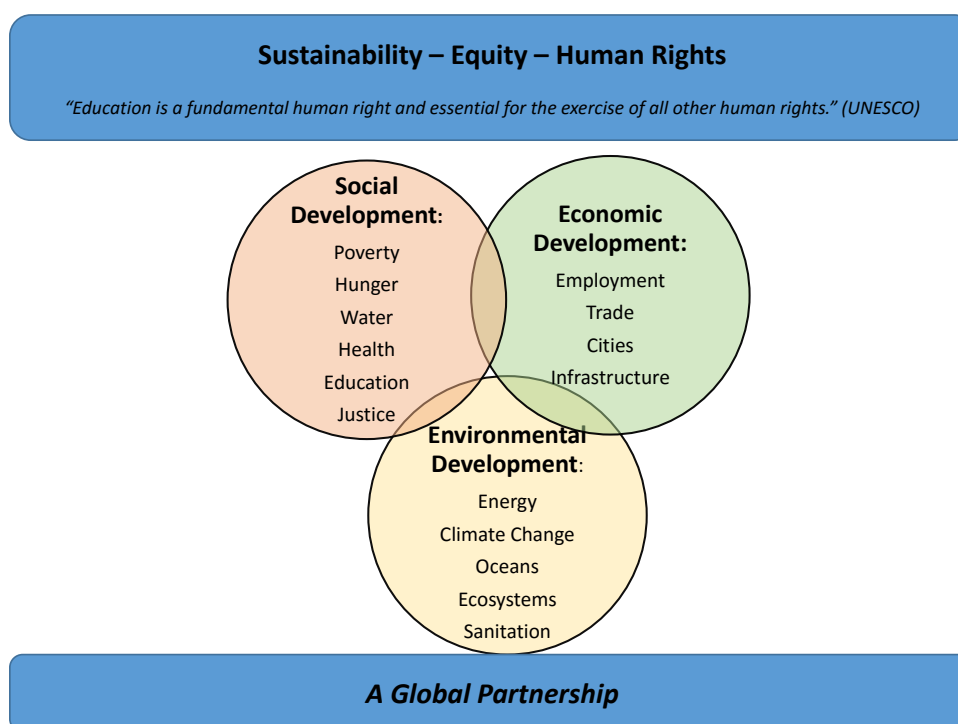
Education is one of the strongest instruments for reducing poverty and achieving other development goals. In this regard, SDG4 has significant implications for the other 16 SDGs, whether that be, for instance, as the producer of necessary human resources for health and other sectors (*The Lancet* 2016) or in its work of educating citizens to adopt more sustainable practices.

At 19CCEM, Commonwealth ministers of education reaffirmed the Commonwealth's values of equity, access and development, stressing the key role of Education for Sustainable Development (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015).

Whilst advances have been made by Commonwealth countries in education over the past 15 years, in line with the MDGs and EFA initiatives, there are still challenges that must be addressed urgently. These challenges include the following:

- At the end of the MDGs phase, more resourced countries were close to Universal Primary Education (UPE), but only one-third of the children reached UPE in the developing countries. There are approximately 17 million primary-aged children out of school.

- There is a similar pattern for lower secondary enrolment where there are 16 million youth out of school.

- There are over 400 million illiterate adults.

- Whilst gender discrimination towards girls has improved, there are still approximately 3 per cent more boys than girls enrolled in primary schools across Commonwealth countries. Notwithstanding this, in some countries, boys are underrepresented and underperforming especially at the secondary level. (Bray and Menefee 2015)

Figure 1: Overarching elements of the Sustainable Development Goals (2015–30)

Sustainability – Equity – Human Rights

"Education is a fundamental human right and essential for the exercise of all other human rights." (UNESCO)

Social Development:
Poverty
Hunger
Water
Health
Education
Justice

Economic Development:
Employment
Trade
Cities
Infrastructure

Environmental Development:
Energy
Climate Change
Oceans
Ecosystems
Sanitation

A Global Partnership

The expansion of the global education vision from the MDGs to SDGs means that education in the Commonwealth faces the dual challenge of continuing to work on the above issues whilst extending its attention to the wider set of priorities contained in the SDGs.

The stronger focus on these goals as global rather than development-oriented is of particular significance to the Commonwealth, given its core identity as a community of states from across all levels of economic and human development representing varied geographic locations.

At the same time, education policy in the Commonwealth needs to be aligned to espouse Commonwealth values, as contained in the Commonwealth Charter (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013). Whilst there is much resonance between the Charter and the SDGs, a CEPF should give particular emphasis to considering how education contributes to freedom of expression; tolerance, respect and understanding; the rule of law; peace and justice; improved gender relations, including less gender-based violence; and managing climate change. It needs also to embrace the notion of the 'young Commonwealth', a demographic reality that is both challenge and opportunity. The Nassau Declaration is particularly strong in its emphasis on the 'potential of learners and youth to act as agents of social change and peacebuilding' (Commonwealth Secretariat 2015: para 14). It is stronger on the issue of research partnerships than the SDGs and the Commonwealth is taking a lead on the issue of scholarships in particular. The Commonwealth also has a tradition of emphasising the role of education in producing skilled workers and professionals for other sectors such as health, governance and trade. This is an area in which the Commonwealth might take a leading role in the SDG delivery process.

The CEPF does not seek to repeat existing frameworks from other multilateral organisations, such as those of UNESCO and the World Bank.

As well as the Incheon Declaration, UNESCO's work is shaped by its *UNESCO Education Strategy 2014 - 21* (UNESCO 2014). This has three prongs:

1. developing education systems to foster quality and lifelong learning for all;

2. empowering learners to be creative and responsible global citizens; and

3. shaping the future education agenda.

The World Bank's *Education Strategy 2020* (World Bank 2011) stresses the overall priority of 'learning for all, beyond schooling', representing the clearest commitment yet of the Bank to lifelong learning. At the heart of the goal is also a recognition that getting children into school and keeping them there is only part of the challenge: above these comes ensuring that meaningful learning takes place. This is supported by two strands of activity: work to strengthen the capacity of education systems to achieve learning goals, and making a contribution to building a high-quality global knowledge base on education systems.

Education needs to be more relevant to the current needs of the society to enable Commonwealth member countries to address the challenges of sustainable development covering economic, social and environmental aspects (see Figure 1). In doing so, it will be necessary to deal with a world that is far more complex, in which education systems are much more open to international movements of people and ideas, and in which new technologies bring opportunities as well as challenges. Whilst ministries of education must continue to play a leading role in the delivery of education, it is clear that this must be done in partnership with other ministries and state agencies and local education authorities, with international partners, with the private sector, civil society and non-governmental organisations and with parents, learners and educators. Governance of education is undergoing a profound democratisation across the Commonwealth and policy processes must respect and reinforce this, eliminating corruption and promoting accountability.

Another major challenge is the different level of commitment and national priority given to education, which is evident from the range of education spending in the Commonwealth member countries which varied from 0.6 per cent to 26 per cent of total public expenditure (Bray and Menefee 2015). As well as mobilising national budgets for education, other domestic sources will be vital. Moreover, the SDG's achievement requires the mobilisation of large-scale international financial support, whether this be through traditional (though declining: UNESCO-GMR 2015a) official development assistance routes; new initiatives such as Education Cannot Wait; or the rapidly growing philanthropic and equity fund interest in supporting educational development. Alongside necessary funding increases, education institutions and systems must strive for greater efficiency.

Although the majority of Commonwealth member countries have current national education policies (see Figure 2), several of these policies will expire over the period 2016–18. Many of these policies were developed in the MDGs era and may need to be harmonised or aligned to the SDGs.

Figure 2: Existing national education policies, end dates by year, as at November 2015

**Existing National Policies,
end dates by year, as of November 2015**
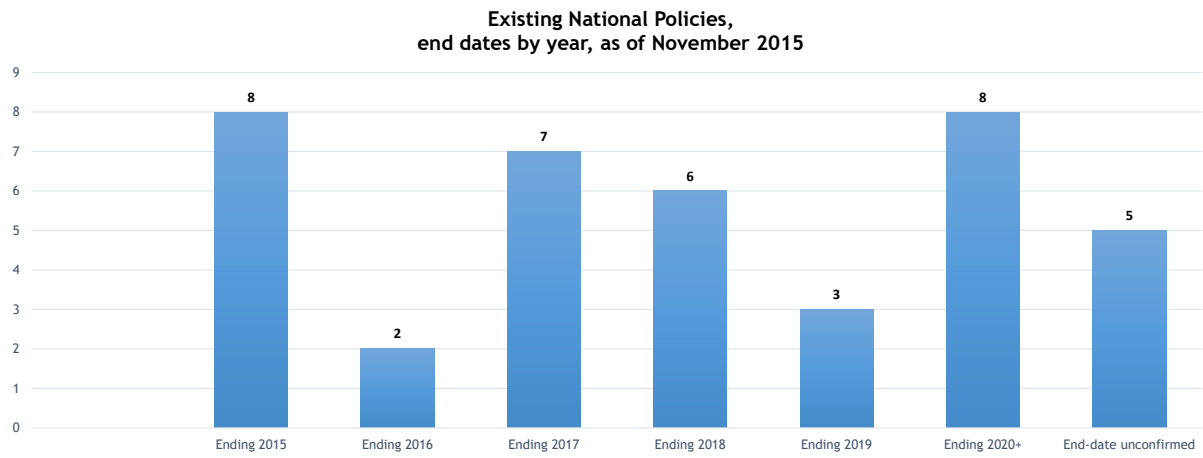
The Commonwealth Education Policy Framework

The CEPF will incorporate the following:

- **four cornerstones**: these are the guiding principles that drive a Commonwealth view of what constitutes a good education system: quality, equitable access, relevance and sustainability;

- **four enablers**: these are aspects of processes and systems that are crucial to effective policies: governance, knowledge, advocacy and capacity; and

- **six elements**: these are educational subsystems: early childhood care and education, primary schooling, secondary schooling, technical and vocational education and training, tertiary education and adult education and learning.

Figure 3 highlights the key tenets that comprise each overarching theme, that is, cornerstones, enablers and elements. The respective components under each theme are intended to provide a high-level comprehensive overview of the main policy prescriptions required for supporting the SDGs and improving educational outcomes. The figure shows the interplay between the cornerstones, enablers and elements. This diagrammatic representation provides an example of how the CEPF will be depicted.

Figure 3: Graphical depiction of the Commonwealth Education Policy Framework: Cornerstones, Enablers and Elements
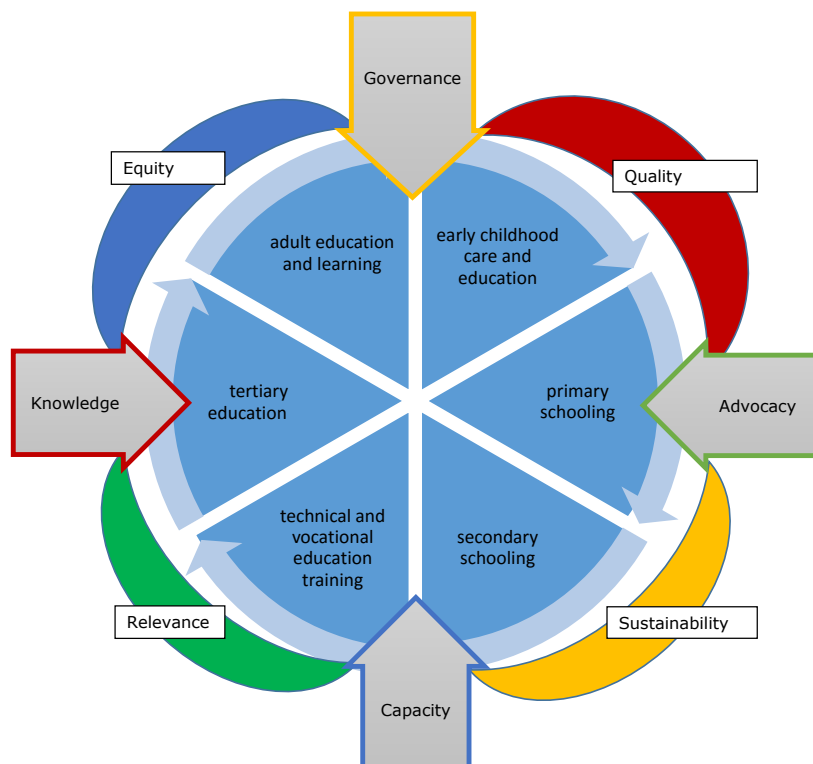
Cornerstones

In continuation from the MDGs and EFA, there is a commitment in Goal 4 to address access to education of all learners, and to extend the period of participation. Increased emphasis is being placed on the development of a quality education system that is equitable and inclusive, and is relevant to the needs of all learners so that they are able to improve their livelihoods and human flourishing and contribute to sustainable development. It is in this regard that access and equity, quality, relevance and sustainability form the basic foundation of the CEPF. Each of the four cornerstones reinforces the others and must be understood collectively rather than in isolation. A framework that is built upon these four fundamental cornerstones will ensure that education policies of member countries give due diligence to these important anchors as a means to improving education outcomes.

Equity

As education is a human right, it is non-negotiable that all individuals should have access to educational opportunities. This access must be irrespective of any form of disadvantage or discrimination. The extent of these opportunities must extend beyond basic education to give equal access to the full range of lifelong learning elements. Access should be understood in terms of the '4As' if it is to conform to rights obligations (Tomasevski 2001):

* availability – that education is free and government-funded and that there is adequate infrastructure and trained teachers able to support education delivery;

* accessibility – that the system is non-discriminatory and accessible to all, and that positive steps are taken to include the most marginalised;

* acceptability – that the content of education is relevant, non-discriminatory and culturally appropriate, and of quality; that the school itself is safe and teachers are professional; and

* adaptability – that education can evolve with the changing needs of society and contribute to challenging inequalities, such as gender discrimination, and that it can be adapted locally to suit specific contexts.

There is now a stronger understanding that access must be complemented by retention and achievement. In all these dimensions, there is considerable evidence across the Commonwealth, as elsewhere, of inadequate progress towards equity. Variations on the slogan 'no child left behind' point to a policy-level acceptance that equity must mean a focus on the individual needs and aspirations of all, but operationalisation and achievement of this commitment are far weaker.

The achievement of access, equity and inclusion requires the identification and addressing of obstacles to these goals at the individual, institutional and system levels. Where necessary, this should include differentiated funding to ensure equitable access. At all levels, targets for improved equity and commitments to expand policy and legislative commitments to promote equity should be set, monitored and reviewed. Addressing cultural and societal norms and attitudes that constrain equity in education must also be a priority, albeit one that requires great sensitivity.

Quality

Access and retention without quality are of little value. Hence, SDG4 speaks of 'inclusive and equitable quality education'. Understandings of educational quality will require readjustment in the light of the broader SDG vision. Notions of quality schooling must encompass a stronger equity dimension and must also take account of the clear SDG emphasis on 'the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (SDG4.7). Notions of quality will also need to take consideration of how learners are prepared for decent work and life and for lifelong learning. At the same time, quality should be thought of in terms of how empowering education is. This would require consideration of the extent to which education enables all learners to imagine and achieve their human flourishing.

Remembering that SDG4 is not just about schooling: quality education must have different meanings in different settings. All learning spaces must be safe and inclusive if quality learning is to take place. Multiple understandings of what constitutes successful education need to be drawn upon, including how it promotes individual, community and national resilience.
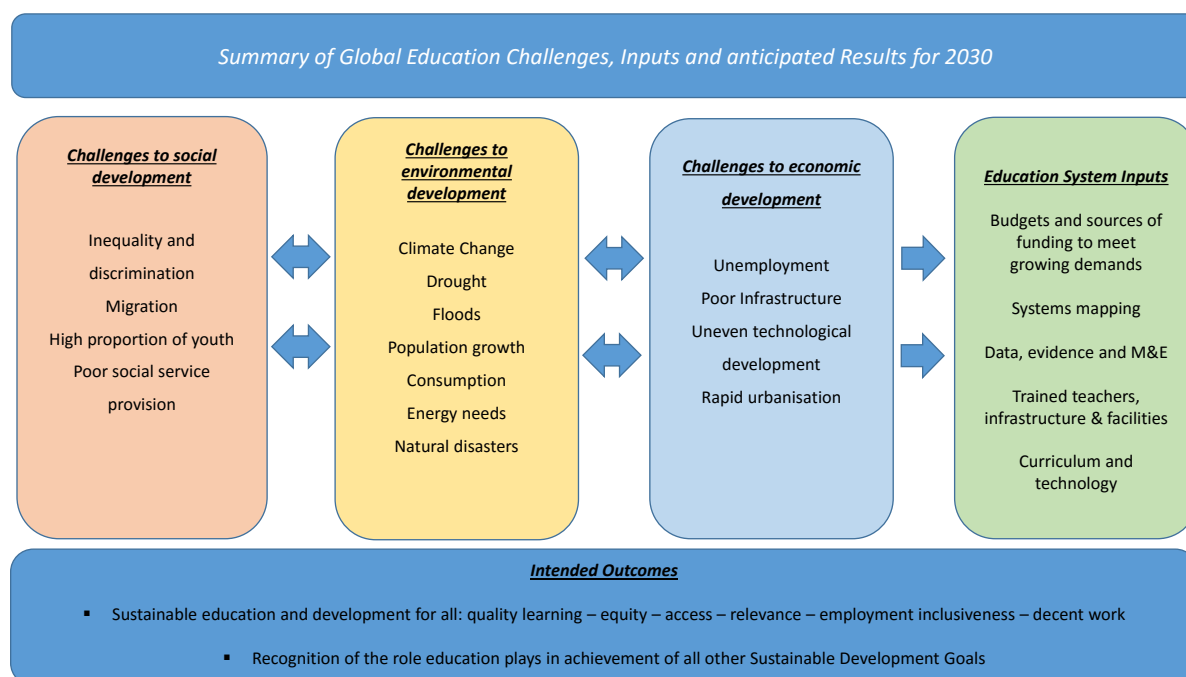
Existing notions of quality should be further developed to include the importance of well-trained educators, support staff and managers, as well as appropriate resources, equipment, learning spaces and learning materials. The possibilities of improving learning through the use of information and communications technologies will be an important aspect of all of these. Existing processes of quality assessment and improvement will need to be further developed and implemented more widely. These will include processes of external inspection and reporting systems as well as internal processes of provider improvement and educators' own commitment to professional development. Given that quality is related to resourcing in important ways, it is vital that cost effectiveness be considered as one aspect of quality. Moreover, one aspect of educational sustainability is that investments in education can be sustained financially and politically, including through the contributions of communities and individuals.

Relevance

Quality has little meaning without relevance. It is essential that education contributes to individuals', communities' and nations' ability to respond to the complex challenges of life today and in the future. Learning experiences should be directly connected to the personal aspirations of students and the real-life issues they are likely to face. It should support them to become global citizens. Education must support the value base of communities and society. It must support the ability of firms and countries to pursue economic activities in ways that build prosperity and ensure sustainable development.

This requires curricula that meet the needs of the present and can be quickly adapted to changing needs. It highlights the importance of flexible learning pathways and delivery mechanisms that support lifelong learning, and equip learners with skills, knowledge, values and attitudes that can be applied in various contexts throughout their life. This may include a strong focus on generic and transferable competencies; a better means of certificating learning, including the recognition of prior learning; and funding approaches that help learners to access formal, non-formal and informal

Figure 4: Summary of global education challenges and intended outcomes for 2030

Summary of Global Education Challenges, Inputs and anticipated Results for 2030

Challenges to social development	Challenges to environmental development	Challenges to economic development	Education System Inputs
Inequality and discrimination	Climate Change	Unemployment	Budgets and sources of funding to meet growing demands
Migration	Drought	Poor Infrastructure	Systems mapping
High proportion of youth	Floods	Uneven technological development	Data, evidence and M&E
Poor social service provision	Population growth	Rapid urbanisation	Trained teachers, infrastructure & facilities
	Consumption		Curriculum and technology
	Energy needs		
	Natural disasters		

Intended Outcomes

- Sustainable education and development for all: quality learning – equity – access – relevance – employment inclusiveness – decent work

- Recognition of the role education plays in achievement of all other Sustainable Development Goals

learning when needed across their life course. New technologies offer possibilities for novel approaches to learning that are more relevant to the lived experience of many learners but also challenge education to become more relevant to the technological worlds into which learners will graduate. In constructing new curricula and pedagogies, and identifying revised learning outcomes, it is also important to address relevance through genuine engagement with other stakeholders throughout planning and delivery. The voices of employers (large and small, public and private) must be strong, but so must those representing cultural and religious traditions, as well as those of learners, parents and educators.

As with quality, relevance must encompass equity. As the right-to-education movement has stressed, educational provision must be relevant both to the individual circumstances of all learners and to their aspirations.

Apart from the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the global community's focus on education has been transformed by emerging new challenges such as climate change, migration and radicalisation, whilst existing challenges such as gender-based violence, crime and poor governance have not receded. In this light, education for citizenship as well as transitioning young people into decent work have become more critical than ever before. Figure 4 summarises the main education challenges for 2030, the inputs that are required to modernise the education system and the intended outcomes.

Sustainability

The advent of the SDGs means that sustainability is at the core of the global education agenda. It is also a cornerstone of the Commonwealth's approach. In this view, education's relevance must be judged largely in terms of its contribution to sustainability. This moves educational thinking beyond earlier notions of education for sustainable development, which tended to be relegated to the margins and seen as little more than environmental education, important though that is. Rather, sustainability is to be understood as a broader issue cutting across the environmental, economic and social domains. Throughout the 2030 Agenda for

Sustainable Development, and particularly in SDG 4.7, education is understood as a crucial means to address global challenges and create more sustainable and resilient individuals and societies constructively and creatively (UNESCO-GMR 2014).

At the same time, education itself needs to be sustainable at the institutional and system levels. The challenge of SDG4.7 will require new curricula, pedagogies and materials, as will other aspects of an educational contribution to sustainable development. The sustainability of education is dependent on finding ways to adequately resource activities into the future but also needs careful attention to building and maintaining the support of other stakeholders. Without the support of learners and their families in particular, educational initiatives will not be sustained. Innovation in delivery, management, stakeholder engagement and funding needs to be nurtured as a means of promoting sustainability.

Enablers

The post-2015 educational agenda is marked by an increased focus on educational outcomes. Indeed, SDG4 outlines a number of ambitious targets to be met by 2030. The achievement of these targets requires that national education policies are not only aligned to the SDGs but also that key pillars are in place to support the development and subsequent implementation of policy prescriptions designed to meet these targets. In this regard, the CEPF highlights four (4) critical enablers that must be in place. These are:

1.   governance;

2.   knowledge;

3.   capacity; and

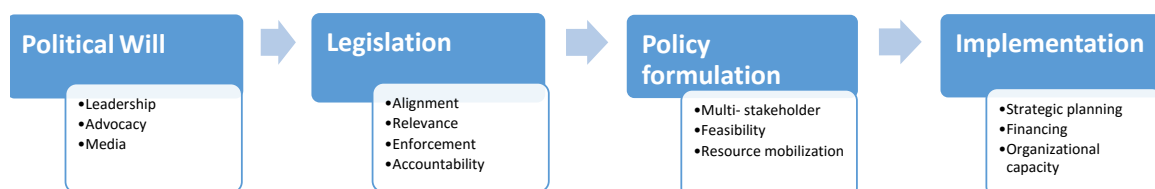4.   advocacy.

1.   Governance

Having the right knowledge and capacity in place can still be ineffective if there is an inadequate system of educational governance. The complex challenges of the current era and the greater diversity of educational providers and stakeholders implied by SDG4 bring new dimensions to the area of educational governance. Aspects of educational governance include political will; legislation; policy and regulation; strategic planning; financing; and organisation (see Figure 5).

1.1 Political will

Educational reform processes cannot simply be evidence-based. Rather, they require active support from important actors. Thus, there is a need for:

- active championing of SDG-enabling educational reforms by important leaders, particularly ministers and heads of state;

- consistent support of government to the achievement of SDG4 regardless of which political party is in power; and

- generating and maintaining widespread popular support for reforms through advocacy and sensitisation activities.

Figure 5: Education governance for SDG alignment

Political Will	Legislation	Policy formulation	Implementation
•Leadership •Advocacy •Media	•Alignment •Relevance •Enforcement •Accountability	•Multi- stakeholder •Feasibility •Resource mobilization	•Strategic planning •Financing •Organizational capacity

1.2 Legislation

Legislation is a key element of sustainable policy reform. It provides clarity about mandates, promotes enforceability, facilitates democratic scrutiny and may be necessary to mobilise resources and establish new structures and entities necessary for policy delivery. It is important to:

*   map the fit of current legislation against relevant international agreements and norms such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (Article 26: Right to education); UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989); UNESCO Recommendations; etc. and to take steps to fill gaps and to localise the provisions of such agreements;

*   review education acts, and other relevant legislation, to ensure their relevance to Commonwealth values and educational delivery against the SDGs;

*   enact new legislation, where necessary, in a timely fashion to respond to identified gaps in the current educational response to the SDGs and their obligations in education under international human rights law;

*   audit the status of enforcement of educational legislation and take action where necessary; and

*   build a robust approach to public accountability and the enforcement of legislation with appropriate and functional reporting systems.

1.3 Policy and regulation

Legislation is often only the starting point. It is necessary also to ensure the appropriate policies and regulations are in place to build a practice of education for sustainable development. This requires:

*   review of existing national education policies and regulations and the development of new policies and regulations where necessary;

*   consultations on new policy formulation and implementation that include all relevant stakeholders;

*   campaigns to ensure that stakeholders have the necessary information on which to engage with policy consultations;

*   interministerial and inter-sectoral committees/working groups to embed education across wider policies;

*   careful attention to the feasibility of policy implementation in the process of policy development;

*   articulation of theories of change that anticipate the likely obstacles to policy implementation and the necessary sequencing of implementation; and

*   education diplomacy and foreign policy that encompass the importance of education to fostering respect, intercultural understanding and economic development.

1.4 Strategic planning

Planning is an integral part of the process of turning educational visions into realities. It is widely accepted that planning must be strategic and must reflect the complex nature of education systems. It implies:

- transforming wider education policies into actionable strategies targets and outputs;

- generating relevant data and establishing appropriate monitoring and evaluation processes in order to judge the success of implementation;

- committing to reviewing and revising policies and programmes based on emerging evidence; and

- establishing an effective programme of stakeholder engagement and management.

1.5 Financing

Educational reform is not costless and often hard choices need to be made about priorities and their sequencing. Robust educational financing, therefore, will be essential if SDG4 is to be achieved. This includes:

- mobilising adequate and sustained resourcing from budgetary, other domestic and international sources;

- identifying and establishing sustainable financing systems;

- establishing and maintaining transparency and accountability in the financial management of education;

- building systems and cultures that base funding on performance against SDG4 and other national education objectives; and

- maximising the efficiency of education systems in terms of value for money and ensuring the minimisation of transaction costs in administering education.

1.6 Organisation

Successful educational delivery also requires that the right people, institutions and processes are in place to allow goals to be met. This necessitates:

- clarifying the roles, responsibilities, outcomes and accountability of organisations, stakeholders and individuals;

- planning processes of educational decentralisation so that the appropriate structures and procedures are in place to deliver education functions appropriately at all levels; and

- ensuring there is sufficient capacity to deliver infrastructure, services, functions and operations.

1.7 Quality

A well-functioning and efficient quality assurance mechanism will be a fundamental component for effective governance of education systems that possess a capacity to continuously improve quality across the system. Six attributes of quality are:
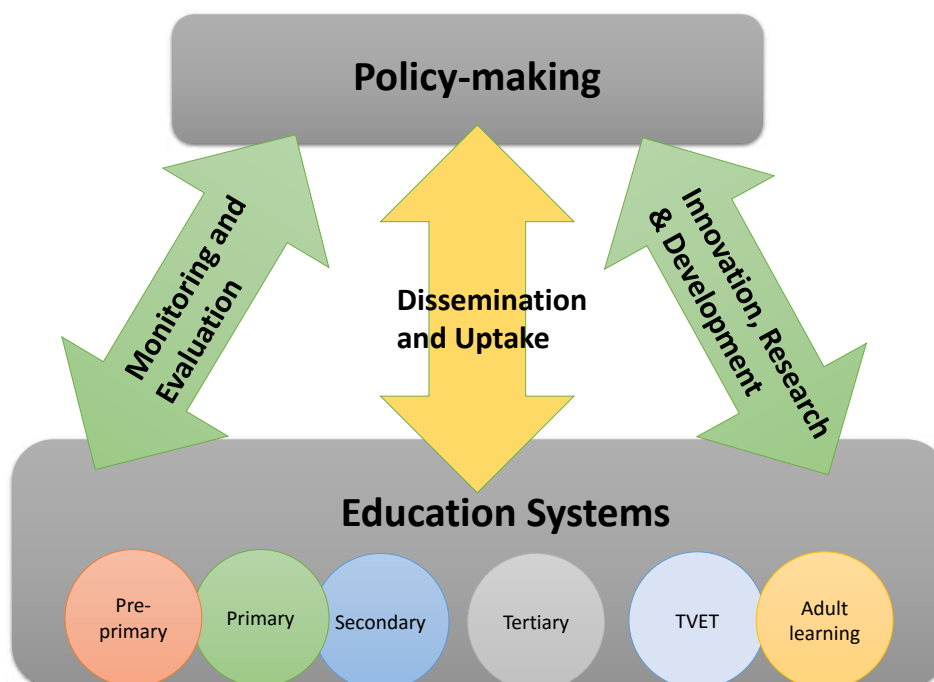
- equitable – that education is fair and accessible for all;

- effective – that educational decisions at all levels are grounded in the best available evidence and that programmes and interventions deliver their intended outcomes in a cost-effective manner;

- empowering – that education enables all participants to imagine and achieve their human flourishing;

- sustainable – that educational provision can be maintained at an acceptable level over time and that education contributes at individual and societal levels to the achievement of development that is socially, economically and environmentally sustainable;

- appropriate – education that is relevant to the needs of the society and economy as well as meeting rights-based concerns regarding the appropriateness of learning provision in terms of physical accessibility and acceptability of message and medium; and

- wellbeing and safety – education that is safe and nurturing and which contributes to individual, community and societal wellbeing and resilience.

1.8 Accountability

SDG4 is appropriately ambitious in terms of increasing quality, breadth and participation in education. However, countries will have to achieve this in the face of serious budgetary constraints. Thus, they are under pressure to provide education more effectively and efficiently, at the same time as doing so more equitably. The current toolkit being used to try to manage the tensions inherent in this places much emphasis on accountability as a key mechanism for improving the performance of education systems and, hence, for delivering on the SDG4 commitments. Key priorities for the promotion of educational accountability include:

- greater attention to ways in which learners and parents can be empowered to have choice about learning options and voice regarding their quality and appropriateness;

- the eradication of corruption at all levels of educational expenditure;

- clear and agreed professional standards for educators, and adequate support to these professionals to meet such standards;

- further professional development for senior officers of education providers and of district officials in order to support decentralisation efforts;

- strengthening systems of financial accountability to ensure efficient, effective and equitable resource allocation to education and that providers deliver on the same criteria;

- improving regulatory accountability (including effective inspection regimes) to build compliance with rules and regulations;

Figure 6: Flows of knowledge production and transmission in education

Policy-making

Monitoring and Evaluation

Dissemination and Uptake

Innovation, Research & Development

Education Systems

Pre-primary

Primary

Secondary

Tertiary

TVET

Adult learning

- improved approaches to using learning assessments to influences practices at all levels, incorporating the lessons from community-based, national, regional and global initiatives; and

- strengthened global accountability mechanisms so that countries are held accountable for their performance in delivering on SDG4 but are also active participants in establishing appropriate performance measures.

2. Knowledge

Education is about the development of individual, community and societal funds of knowledge. Much of the transmission of knowledge takes place in education systems, whilst the production of new knowledge is a core function of tertiary education. Moreover, education policy also requires a strong knowledge base in order to be effective. This requires attention to research and development; innovation; monitoring and evaluation; and dissemination and uptake (see Figure 6).

2.1 Research and development

In order to enable education, there is need to:

- identify, fund and make use of quantitative and qualitative research that can inform policy;

- address particular research gaps regarding elements of education that were not MDG priorities;

- fund new Commonwealth research collaborations on emerging education policy challenges and innovative practices;

- ensure that all officially funded research is compliant with open-access provisions for data and outputs;

- build capacity within education systems to access and use economic and labour market research;

- improve coordination of research, policy and planning/development across all relevant authorities;

- strengthen the collection, use and dissemination of available information;

- improve access to and use of data to support more evidenced-based decision making – including data warehouses;

- share evidence for education practice and policy internationally through mechanisms such as the Commonwealth Education Hub;

- benchmark against regional and national standards; and

- revise learning assessments and curricula to make them more reflective of the changing needs of learning systems including delivery on SDG4.7.

2.2 Innovation

Innovation is complex and contextualised, social as well as technological. Educational innovation requires:

- understanding that much innovation builds on what is already there and is a matter of incremental improvement;

- identification of key educational risks and opportunities, and the carrying out of feasibility studies for new innovations;

- inculcation of national and institutional cultures of innovation that encourage organisations and their staff to experiment, and facilitate the sharing and peer review of promising practices;

- facilitation of innovative approaches to teaching, learning and assessment, including the use of ICTs and online and blended modes;

- improved understandings of how education can support innovations.

2.3 Monitoring and evaluation

Monitoring and evaluation needs to be seen as valuable to all organisations and their staff. This requires:

- making monitoring and evaluation integral to activities of all education organisations;

- building a culture where evaluators are seen as having a level of autonomy that allows them to be critical of performance where necessary;

- encouraging the capture of baseline data prior to the commencement of new interventions;

- developing evaluation approaches that focus on uncovering what aspects of an intervention have worked, for whom and in which contexts;

- ensuring that monitoring and evaluation result in the adjustment of activities where necessary;

- establishing cultures of self-evaluation by staff and institutions so as to make educational improvement a bottom-up process;

- tracking the progress of learning outcomes at individual, institution and system levels; and

- collecting and using key data on institutional and system performance against the four cornerstones and agreed system outcome targets.

2.4 Dissemination and uptake

There is no point in producing education data, information and knowledge that will not be used. Therefore, there is a need to:

- build in plans of how research, data collection and monitoring and evaluation are intended to be used from the beginning, including how access to them can be maximised;

- give careful attention to how any outputs are communicated in a timely and accessible manner to other stakeholders; and

- extend the capacity of education officials and providers to understand how to access and use relevant knowledge resources.

3. Advocacy

Education is a complex human system that is based on a negotiated set of values. Successful delivery on SDG4 will require multidirectional processes of communication between the state and other stakeholders where all actors will be engaged in advocacy for particular interpretations and prioritisations of what approaches to education should be followed. Important aspects of this process include leadership and ethics; social mobilisation and community engagement; and communication (See Figure 7).

3.1 Leadership and ethics

We have moved away from the days in which educational policymaking was seen as a top-down process in which ministers decided what needed doing; officials determined how this should be done; and other actors were merely supposed to implement. Now, the place of other stakeholders is accepted as crucial, whilst many systems have undergone decentralisation, with education often a concurrent function of different levels of government. In this environment, it is important that:

- ministries adopt an approach that sees them share leadership and responsibility with other actors, whilst communicating their own vision for educational change;

- steps be taken, where necessary, to empower other stakeholders to become active in educational policy and implementation processes;

- where appropriate, high-level multistakeholder consultative fora be established; and

- respectful dialogue be nurtured between all educational stakeholders.

Figure 7: Communication flows in education advocacy
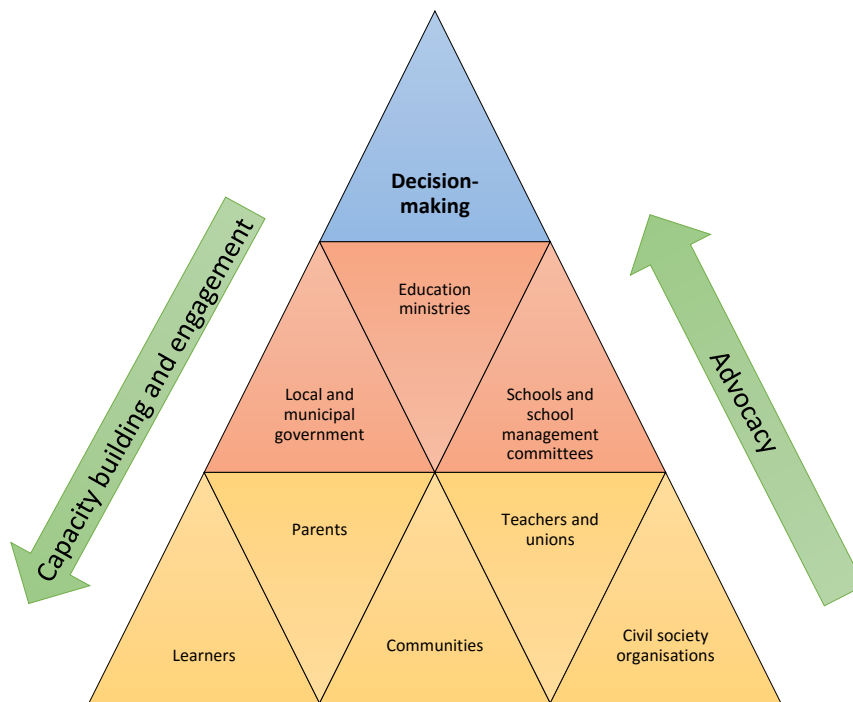
3.2 Social mobilisation and community engagement

The vision contained in SDG4 will not be achieved unless students, parents and communities are its active supporters. Equally, other national actors such as the private sector, trade unions and civil society organisations are also crucial to education change. Their active engagement cannot simply be assumed but steps may have to be taken to facilitate it, including:

- the strengthening and expansion of educational partnerships, including improved interactions between school, home and community;

- the construction of stronger partnerships with other key stakeholders;

- particular attention to engagement with minority and marginalised groups;

- an awareness that these actors should not be seen simply as supporters of the government's vision to be mobilised for implementation but as legitimate initiators of policy debates themselves; and

- building the capacity of partners to initiate policy dialogue.

3.3 Communication

Communication is clearly central to effective, democratic education policymaking. This increased democratic impulse and the rapidly changing environment of communication technologies bring new challenges to ministries and other official education organisations. An effective response may require:

- a realisation that communication must be multidirectional;

- emerging government protocols and structures for explaining how to communicate more effectively through new technologies, including social media;

- an approach to communication that stresses hearing and informing more than defending and selling;

- new staff development programmes to make officials more comfortable with using social media; and

- the revision or development of internal and external communication strategies, including environmental scanning.

4. Capacity

Education seeks to build individual and societal capacities. Education policies and programmes depend on adequate capacity and often necessitate a focus on capacity development. Elements of this include the professional development of educators, of institutional leaders and of the officials of ministries and other agencies; the construction of relevant curricula; the development of infrastructure and technologies of delivery; and the creation, review and renewal of appropriate standards and accreditation mechanisms (see Figure 8).

4.1 Workforce planning for delivering the SDGs

Education has a key role to play in the delivery of all 17 SDGs. Nowhere is this more true than in the domain of workforce development: education is central to developing nurses, agronomists, environmental scientists and all the other professional and skilled workers who will be key actors in SDG delivery. More generally, education must play a key role in developing the skills needed across the workforce to build blue and green economies, grounded in decent work. These mandates for education require that it is:

- informed by multisectoral analyses of labour force needs;

- supported by forecasting and planning exercises that can identify the particular opportunities and challenges of generating decent and sustainable work;

- built on multistakeholder and multisectoral partnerships;

- driven by a vision that seeks to limit the negative impacts of greening economies on the lowest skilled and most vulnerable; and

- underpinned by adequate resources devoted to building SDG-related skills.

Figure 8: Capacity building in the education workforce
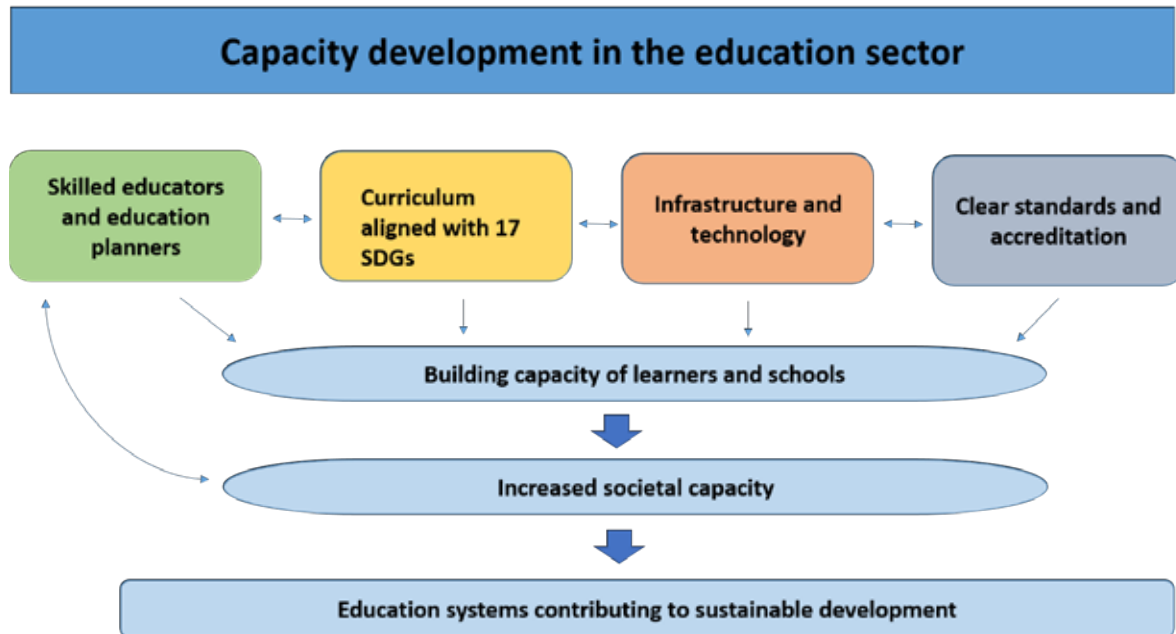
4.2 Educational professional development

Those that deliver, manage and direct education are central to the generation of high-quality learning outcomes. This requires:

- an approach to workforce management and development that is aligned to the SDGs;

- the development of appropriate professional standards for the wider educational workforce involved in delivery on SDG4;

- the creation of new programmes and providers of initial education for those parts of the education workforce not currently served by such delivery;

- the extension of access to high-quality continuous professional development;

- new approaches to certification and licensing of educators appropriate to new needs and to the diverse education workforce;

- the expansion of educational leadership programmes, particularly to elements of education where they are less well-developed;

- the growth of specialised programmes tailored to the needs of ministry officials, of staff of national education agencies and for those responsible for educational administration in devolved systems; and

- appropriate funding regimes that allow educators to implement their professional learning in settings that are well-resourced and where staff:student ratios are conducive to high-quality teaching and learning.

4.3 Curriculum and pedagogy

Quality curricula and pedagogies are at the heart of effective education, addressing the essential outcomes of any learning programme. To promote curricula and pedagogical quality, it is necessary to:

- ensure that all curricula and pedagogical approaches reflect Commonwealth values and contribute to the achievement of the SDGs;

- cater for the needs of diverse individuals and groups in the curricula designed and pedagogies utilised;

- create flexible curricula and pedagogies that are suitable to different modes and patterns of learning;

- develop innovative approaches that incorporate the benefits of new learning technologies into curricula and pedagogy;

- place particular attention on curriculum and pedagogical development activities for elements of the education system where least attention has historically been given;

- focus on appropriate pacing and sequencing of learning within and across levels of study;

- produce and disseminate learning materials and educator guides that support the achievement of curricular goals, including the development of locally produced educational software; and

- deliver appropriate training to educators on how to use new curricula and materials; and

- build strong cadres of curriculum and pedagogy leaders in education institutions in order to make improvement effective and sustainable.

4.4 Infrastructure and technology

The capacity of education to contribute to meeting the SDGs will be shaped by access to good quality infrastructure. Technology will be increasingly important here. At the same time, the spreading use of new information and communication technologies in society means that education has a vital role to play in equipping and empowering learners to use such technologies to support their human flourishing. In order for infrastructure and technology to support quality and inclusive education, it is important that there is:

- improvement in educational facilities and infrastructure, including provision of a safe and enabling environment that respects diversity and the individual needs of learners;

- specific attention paid to the challenges of developing infrastructure that is economically, environmentally and socially sustainable, and resilient in the face of environmental shocks;

- strong focus on the infrastructural challenges of providing universal access to ICT within learning institutions, including access to sustainable energy and network connectivity;

- greater integration of ICTs into education curriculum and pedagogies across all levels;

- localisation of educational software and the promotion of open educational resources;

- access to digital learning platforms to support better teaching and learning, and improved certification and portability for learning through such platforms;

- better utilisation of digital systems for monitoring attendance, learning and institutional performance; and

- development of the capacities of teacher educators and teachers' colleges to train new teachers in the latest approaches to technology-enhanced learning.

4.5 Standards and accreditation

It is impossible to have quality education without attention to what standards should be met in individual learning, in institutions and at the national level. Similarly, often individuals or institutions struggle to signal the quality of their learning or teaching. This may require further attention to processes of accreditation. In this area, it is important to:

- develop clear standards regarding what are appropriate learning outcomes for both learners and providers;

- ensure that such standards are consistent with Commonwealth values and the priorities of SDG4;

- establish robust and affordable systems for checking performance against standards;

- create systems of accreditation and certification that are widely accepted within and beyond the education sector, thus enhancing portability and employability, and which deliver value for money; and

- build platforms for delivering information about educational quality that are accessible to relevant stakeholders.

Elements

The six (6) learning stages identified below form an essential part of a country's education policy and, by extension, the education system. As highlighted earlier, unlike the MDGs, the SDGs articulates full commitment to the entire education cycle and the role of education in supporting the achievement of the other SDGs. In doing so, member countries much ensure that there is a seamless transition through each cycle, ensuring that no learner is left behind. To this end, the cornerstones and enablers play a critical role in facilitating this smooth transition and ensuring that students are flexible and equipped with the necessary skills for their future lives.

1. Early childhood care and education

Target 4.2 – By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care and pre-primary education so that they are ready for primary education

Within the Commonwealth, with the exception of the Pacific, pre-primary enrolment expanded across every region during the EFA period. The largest growth was seen in Sub-Saharan Africa, whilst smaller growth was witnessed within the Caribbean and advanced economies (Bray and Menefee 2015). Investing in young children through early childhood development programmes, thus ensuring they have the right stimulation, nurturing and nutrition, is a vital first step in realising the right to education and promoting equitable educational outcomes. Research also suggests that it is one of the smartest investments a country can make in promoting development (World Bank 2015). However, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) is a particularly challenging element of the education system, characterised by large numbers of poorly trained educators and managers in small-scale providers, weak regulation and multiple ministry mandates.

Priorities for ECCE include:

- **Maintaining a strong focus on the goal of building effective early socialisation of children**

    One crucial contribution that ECCE can make lies in ensuring that the development of Commonwealth values begins from the earliest educational engagements. Above all else, ECCE is about human development, which is located within a wider notion of the individual as part of society.

- **Ensuring the readiness of learners for primary schooling**

    One aspect of reducing the current crisis in learning outcomes is to ensure that children reach day one of primary education with the best possible preparation to start their formal learning journey. ECCE is a necessary foundation for learning in schools and attention must be given to identifying what learning is needed prior to entry into grade 1 and how this can be guaranteed for all learners.

- **Developing appropriate interministerial strategies for meeting the particular challenges of the distinctive early years (0–3), pre-school and reception phases**

  ECCE can best be seen as a set of interventions across a life stage rather than being simply about formal education provision. Whilst there is a need to focus strongly on the educational phase of transition to primary schooling, which may take place within the primary school, it is important to see this as having different functions and outcomes from the pre-school phase. Whilst learning will be mainly within the home and community in the first three years of life, there is still an important place for thinking about how to support that learning in order to maximise the benefits of later, more formal learning. The three phases have different sets of key governmental actors and their effective coordination is vital.

- **Building effective coalitions of actors to bring about improvements in the quality and quantity of provision, mindful of the particular challenges in the ECCE phase of matters of educator development, curriculum, pedagogy and quality assurance**

  Most ECCE provision, even when limited to the educational component, takes place outside the public education system. Moreover, much of it is delivered by microenterprises, often owned and managed by people from the communities they serve. There is a particular need, therefore, to develop approaches to system regulation, accountability and improvement that are sensitive to the needs and the backgrounds of the key actors but are resolute in demanding higher standards.

- **Improving approaches to measuring ECCE learning that take account of its particular objectives**

  Once the distinct objectives of ECCE and its sub-phases are identified, it will be important to turn attention to measuring the learning that takes place. This can pass valuable information to the school system so as to increase the efficiency of the primary learning phase. Diagnostic information is particularly important to facilitate targeted learning interventions but also to highlight equity concerns.

2. Primary school

Target 4.1 – By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Too many primary-aged children (approximately 17 million) within the Commonwealth are out of school (Bray and Menefee 2015). Many of those who do enter schooling do not complete primary schooling. Recent years have seen growing concerns about quality issues, with evidence suggesting that many learners are not meeting minimum learning outcomes (UNESCO-GMR 2015b). Evidence continues to show that primary education has a range of important developmental impacts (UNESCO-GMR 2011), as well as being the necessary foundation for subsequent education. Although primary education was the main focus of policy, programmes and research in the EFA era, significant challenges remain.

Priorities include:

- **Renewing commitment to reaching the hardest to reach and building strategies for getting them into school and helping them to complete and achieve**

  As has already been noted, there are too many children still out of school and there is a rights imperative that this be addressed. Due to the successes of the EFA-MDG era, many of these children are out of school for complex reasons, which require multidimensional responses. The experience of EFA has taught us that enrolment alone is not enough, for too many children are not staying in school and/or are not learning enough. Addressing these issues is the unfinished business of EFA and must be a major priority for the SDG era.

- **Ensuring a strong focus on building literacy, numeracy and socialisation in the first phase of primary education to serve as a foundation for later learning**

  There is value in making a distinction between lower and upper primary schooling. The first two to three grades are about inducting children into schooling and ensuring that they acquire the two most essential cognitive foundations for future learning: literacy and numeracy. Otherwise, their future learning careers, and lives, will be negatively affected.

- **Building upon this with a broader curriculum in the upper primary phase aimed at providing the foundations for secondary schooling**

  In the upper primary phase it is more appropriate to expand the curriculum. With the strong policy commitment to ensuring that primary education is not terminal for the majority, the focus can usefully turn from what any school leaver needs to know what the necessary knowledge and skills foundations are for lower secondary education.

- **Introducing early assessment of learning, and health and development checks in order to identify any issues quickly and to develop intervention strategies**

  The importance of introducing more rigorous measurement into ECCE is identified above. However, particularly because ECCE coverage still is far from universal, this does not mean that there should not be a very clear commitment to early assessment of learning in the lower primary phase. It is essential that primary schools and class teachers have a diagnostic sense of what their students can and cannot do as early as possible. By combining such assessments with health and development checks early in grade 1 it should be possible to identify those with special educational needs and to ensure early and appropriate interventions. Thus, such testing has an important equity dimension.

- **Implementing strategies to ensure that all primary learners have access to appropriate gender role models among staff**

  In some parts of the Commonwealth, it is rare to find a male teacher in a primary school. In other parts, nearly all primary teachers are male. The primary years are important ones for socialisation and having appropriate gender role models is of great importance. National ministries and local hiring authorities are encouraged to address this issue.

- Addressing the complex issue of language policy so as to balance a respect for parental preferences with an awareness of how language of instruction choices impact upon learning outcomes

  The primary years are often where school systems make a transition from an initial use of the home language as the language of instruction to a national language or English. However, there are sensitivities here, both regarding the status of minority languages and as a result of increasing parental demand for schooling to begin in English in a number of member countries where this does not happen as a matter of course. In some cases, this is resulting in large-scale flight to private schooling. Yet matters of the language of instruction are not just about identity and aspiration. There are concerns that an early shift to English may be a factor in poor learning outcomes in some settings. Careful attention to language policies, therefore, are necessary, so as to respect parent and community views whilst maximising learning efficiency.

3. Secondary school

Target 4.1 – By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes

Access to lower secondary education has increased significantly since 2000 and many countries have introduced free lower secondary education. However, this is highly unequal. Whether a child is male or female, urban or rural dwelling, poor or middle class, or living with a disability or not all make a difference to their participation. One in three children still do not complete lower secondary. Access and equity are worse in upper secondary, and there are quality concerns at both levels (UNESCO-GMR 2015b). As with primary education, secondary education provides important benefits and, moreover, is a necessary foundation for the vocational and higher education and training that are essential to social and economic progress (UNESCO-GMR 2012). The SDGs imply an expanded commitment to supporting secondary education.

Priorities include:

- Differentiated policies for lower and upper secondary education that make clear the distinctive purposes of each

  As with the earlier levels of education, it is important to note the differences in focus of lower and upper secondary. For a number of member countries, lower secondary will be the end of formal schooling for a large proportion of the age cohort and it is vital that learning outcomes reflect what young people need to know and be able to do for their lives as adults, citizens and workers. Upper secondary education is primarily a preparation for advanced studies and a major focus here must be on building the necessary foundations for future study.

- Strategies for building the subject knowledge of secondary teachers and resolving the unequal distribution of teachers in key subject specialisms

  Subject knowledge is a more important matter in secondary than in primary schooling. Broader issues of teacher shortages in rural and disadvantaged urban areas are likely to be even more serious in subject areas where there are national shortages. Thus, strategies for effective and equitable teacher workforce deployment are crucial to ensuring quality education for all.

- **Ensuring that all secondary schools are safe and accessible and tackling specific threats to this such as cultures of violence**

  The right to education lacks meaning if young people lack practical access to safe and conducive learning environments. One important issue here is making schools disability-friendly. Unfortunately, schools are too often sites of violence, related sometimes to drugs, gangs and weapons. Gender-based violence in schools is a scourge of a number of national systems. These threats to the right to education and wider human rights need tackling in order for schools to serve their core functions.

- **Addressing the specific gender-based factors that lead to non-attendance of many boys and girls**

  Millions of learner days are lost every year because girls lack the right personal sanitary equipment and schools lack adequate facilities. This reinforces other forms of disadvantage and depresses learning outcomes. Gender-based violence also reduces girls' attendance and learning. Early pregnancy means that many girls drop out of school and not all systems yet offer practical programmes for the return to study of young mothers. At the same time, cultural norms and economic realities mean that boys are more likely to drop out of school in a number of Commonwealth countries. Policies must be gender-aware and related carefully to the specific gender-based issues faced in national contexts.

4. Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)/skills

Target 4.3 – By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Target 4.4 – By 2030, substantially increase the number of youth and adults who have relevant skills, including technical and vocational skills, for employment, decent jobs and entrepreneurship

Target 4.5 – By 2030, eliminate gender disparities in education and ensure equal access to all levels of education and vocational training for the vulnerable, including persons with disabilities, indigenous peoples and children in vulnerable situations

Target 4.b – By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small-island developing states and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

Statistical data for TVET enrolment is not yet fit for purpose, due to the complexities of TVET, which is found as an element of comprehensive schooling and as distinct streams of schooling; located in formal post-school institutions under the jurisdiction of many ministries and offered by a mixture of public and private providers, both for-profit and not-for-profit; delivered in enterprises, both formal and informal; and often falling under non-formal provision. What is known is that TVET often has a poor reputation, yet there is also much evidence about high-quality provision and strong rates of return to investments. TVET provides essential skills for work and life (Marope, Chakroun and Holmes 2015).

Priorities include:

- **Addressing the widespread negative image of TVET**

  Although vocational learning is a universal experience, the image of public vocational learning for young people is largely negative, reflecting a history in which the learners' class and race strongly affected whether they were directed to vocational routes. Yet TVET is seen by employers as vital to economic performance and many TVET graduates are earning better incomes than would have been possible otherwise. Redressing TVET's negative image begins with policymakers taking the sector seriously. Information campaigns highlighting the successes of TVET graduates have proved popular in some settings and are worth considering more widely.

- **Clarifying the multiple purposes of TVET in national contexts**

  TVET is highly complex. It is partly aimed at making up for disadvantage in the school system by providing a second chance for the acquisition of essential skills, knowledge and attitudes. It is also concerned with helping youth with low educational attainment into the world of work. At the same time, it is a vital tool in providing the skilled workers for industry and, increasingly, this requires higher level cognitive skills to enter advanced technical and technological work. The starting point in developing an effective TVET system is a clear articulation of what the principal goals of TVET are in a particular setting.

- **Building stronger links between public provision and industry**

  A core function of TVET is to prepare young people for the world of work. For public providers, it is essential that they understand the needs of industry. Greater levels of industry involvement in curriculum development, work experience, etc. are associated with better quality vocational learning and improved labour market outcomes. New approaches are required to build stronger links between public providers and industry.

- **Strengthening mechanisms for successful and timely transition to decent work**

  Effective teaching and learning has to be the bedrock of getting young people into decent work. However, links with industry that make employers aware of what young people can do are crucial. Equally, government has a responsibility to work with other actors to promote the growth of decent work and the eradication of the most indecent forms of labour. It needs to get TVET providers involved in this process to ensure that they support the transition to decent work by developing the necessary skills.

- **Ensuring that vocational learners receive a wider set of skills, including literacy, numeracy, business and entrepreneurial skills, that can equip them for sustainable livelihoods**

  Too often, vocational learning systems have grown in the absence of economic and employment growth. As a result, young people have found themselves in great difficulty accessing the jobs for which their programmes are supposed to equip them. This points to the need for greater focus on entrepreneurial and business skills in initial TVET. However, these skills should not be seen as being simply about a safety net for those that cannot expect to get 'real' jobs. Rather, the building of business and entrepreneurial skills also makes young people more employable and productive wherever they work.

- **Recognising that TVET is accessed over the life course and facilitating access to it when required and smooth transitioning between academic and vocational pathways, and between TVET and work**

  TVET is not simply a phase of post-secondary education, but plays a vital role in upgrading skills and retraining across adulthood. Developments in the cognitive content of work mean that workers increasingly need new combinations of advanced academic and vocational learning. TVET must be seen as a lifelong learning system and not just a set of youth programmes.

- **Acknowledging and addressing the particular challenges of educator/trainer professional development and the need to combine the pedagogic and occupational domains**

  TVET providers and learners are diverse and so are TVET educators. They range from teachers of foundational skills such as mathematics, who closely resemble their school counterparts, to production workers with a secondary focus on in-house training. Many vocational educators require both workplace experience and skills, as well as pedagogic and subject knowledge. They may have very different levels of prior attainment across the range of knowledge and skills in which they are expected to show mastery. This makes the development of vocational educator programmes particularly challenging. Many national systems lack appropriate qualifications. Even where these exist, they may be poorly reflected in career pathways in both public and private TVET sectors, and this needs addressing.

- **Understanding the particular complexities of certification in the TVET sector and developing appropriate and cost-effective approaches to the recognition of prior learning and transparency and portability of qualifications**

  TVET systems are characterised by large numbers of national, sectoral and international qualifications, and the rise of national qualifications frameworks has done little to address this complexity. There are difficult policy challenges in trying to balance a desire to promote national qualifications with the attractiveness of international qualifications in a number of sectors. Migration adds to the complexity of this issue, increasing the importance of qualification portability. Millions of adults have significant amounts of knowledge and skills that are uncertified and this lack of recognition of what they already know holds them back from better wages, more decent work and further formal learning opportunities. Developing better systems to signal what people know and encouraging both workers and employers to invest in learning have strong equity and competitiveness rationales.

- **Developing national approaches to the place of vocational education in the school system**

  An important part of an overall vocational education system is learning that takes place within schooling. National approaches to vocational learning in schools vary hugely, from separate institutions, to separate tracks, to vocational content within a comprehensive curriculum. As secondary enrolments grow, it is inevitable that the vocational aspect of secondary schooling requires renewed attention.

5. Tertiary education

Target 4.3 – By 2030, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and high-quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university

Target 4.b – By 2020, substantially expand globally the number of scholarships available to developing countries, in particular least developed countries, small-island developing States and African countries, for enrolment in higher education, including vocational training and information and communications technology, technical, engineering and scientific programmes, in developed countries and other developing countries

Since 2000, an increased supply of secondary graduates has led to rapid growth in enrolments in tertiary education and an explosion of both local private providers and transnational tertiary education in many Commonwealth member countries. Quality has struggled to keep pace with these changes, as have systems of funding, staff development and regulation. There are growing concerns about the comparability of degrees and the employability of graduates (British Council 2014). Higher education is very important to a country's economic, social and environmental development, and is crucial to innovation and foreign direct investment. Tertiary education plays an essential role in supporting teacher training and curriculum development, and in providing professionals for other sectors that will be major contributors to SDG achievement, such as health (Oketch, McCowan and Schendel 2014).

Priorities include:

• **Addressing concerns about the non-comparability of qualifications**

 The expansion and growing complexity of tertiary provision in many countries has led to widespread public and employer concerns about the comparability of qualifications across providers. Given the close relationship between socio-economic status and type of institution attended, there are also strong equity reasons for being concerned with ensuring that newer providers deliver comparable quality to existing providers and are seen so to do.

• **Limiting overspecialisation and rationalising the supply of graduates across disciplines in line with broad high-level workforce needs**

 A major purpose of higher education is to increase the quantity of high skills available to the economy. However, in their expansion of programmes, providers are often driven by what programmes they can find students for and what they can deliver at the lowest cost. This can lead them to deliver overly specialised courses for which there is no labour market demand, or to over-produce graduates in certain disciplines, especially in the arts and humanities. There is a need for stronger national planning processes around higher education programming and new mechanisms for incentivising offers that are better related to economic needs.

- **Building national strategies for meeting the challenges of offshore provision and graduate mobility**

  A significant part of the growth in tertiary education in many countries has come from the rise of offshore providers, whether through distance, blended or face-to-face modes. This brings particular challenges for planning and regulation. In some member countries, the majority of graduates are outside the country and others face particular issues in retaining graduates in certain professions. Strategies for managing brain circulation thus require attention.

- **Creating stronger university-industry partnerships**

  In order to pursue both employability and innovation mandates, higher education providers need to build stronger relationships with industry. National policies can play an important role in facilitating this.

- **Supporting student learning and building employability and entrepreneurship skills**

  As tertiary education systems expand so the learning needs of these students increases regarding areas such as study skills, mathematics and communication skills. As with vocational learners, tertiary graduates are more likely than ever to need to set up their own enterprises and require the necessary skills.

- **Strengthening research capacity, particularly for applied research that can support SDG achievement**

  Large parts of the Commonwealth higher education system produce little research that is of academic or practical value. There is a need to grow research capacity but to pay particular attention to developing the capacity to do research that is developmentally useful.

- **Increasing the numbers of scholarships and exchange programmes**

  Capacity in Commonwealth tertiary institutions cannot be fully developed unless continued attention is given to creating scholarship programmes for staff and students. This may require far more attention to shorter and more flexible programmes. Scholarship and exchange programmes are also important as a means of building a shared Commonwealth higher education space.

- **Finding innovative new ways to fund tertiary education to improve institutional financial sustainability and reduce learner poverty and drop-out**

  Higher education expansion has not been matched by commensurate growth in public funding. Therefore, providers are under great pressure to diversify funding and attention is required to make such funding sustainable and equitable. Families and learners are under increasing pressure to part-fund studies and it is important that bursary programmes and other forms of financial assistance are designed so as to reach those who would otherwise be forced to devote too much attention to income generation or are likely to drop out.

6. Adult education and learning

Target 4.6 – By 2030, ensure that all youth and a substantial proportion of adults, both men and women, achieve literacy and numeracy

There are approximately 400 million illiterate adults in the Commonwealth. Adults with poor literacy and numeracy skills face multiple sources of disadvantage. They find it more difficult to make use of opportunities in society and to exercise their rights. They are also more likely to be in poor health (UNESCO 2015). Adult learning is an important element of lifelong learning. Whilst the target focuses on improvements in literacy and numeracy, there are benefits to be gained for individuals and society from broader adult learning as part of a quality and inclusive lifelong learning system.

Priorities include:

- **Findings ways to tackle reasons for poor take-up of adult education programmes, particularly among men**

  Adults engage with learning programmes for a variety of reasons and it is important to understand motivations for enrolment and drop-out better.

- **Building into programme design an understanding of the multiple motivations individuals have for adult learning**

  An improved understanding of motivations for learning can also assist in the designing of programmes that better meet the needs and capture the interest of actual and potential learners.

- **Designing flexible programmes that minimise barriers to access**

  Adults generally need to balance their learning with other commitments. Programmes that fit around existing commitments are far more likely to succeed. Adult learning is also likely to be episodic, and mechanisms are required that respect this and do not require a fixed timescale for programme completion.

- **Constructing new basic adult education programmes that address the set of skills, knowledges and attitudes adults need to live enriched lives**

  Adult basic education needs to address the broad human needs of learners and not be focused simply on employment and/or income generation.

- **Addressing the particular challenges of educator development and certification that are found in the adult learning sector**

  As with ECCE, much of adult learning takes place outside formal institutions. Most adult education programmes do not require staff to hold particular certification as adult educators, and career progression routes for adult educators are often weak. Without attention to these matters, improvements in adult education quality are likely to be constrained.

- **Increasing the availability of programmes that reintegrate adults into work and society, and meet the particular circumstances of migrants and refugees**

  Many adults come back to learning programmes at moments of crisis and major life change. For some, this is when in prison, but it may be in rehabilitation after a major injury, on demobilisation, on divorcee, or on arrival in a new country as a refugee. Adult learning at such points in life thus has a powerful role to play in helping successful integration into new communities and jobs. This deserves greater policy attention.

Meeting SDG4: Overarching issues

Across all elements, SDG4.7 highlights the need to ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development. Curriculum reform in the Commonwealth must thus focus much of its attention on addressing SDG4.7 across all education subsystems.

This focus on values resonates with the Commonwealth Charter as does SDG4.a: Building and upgrading education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, nonviolent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all. Again, this imperative must be addressed across the six elements.

SDG4.c calls on all states to substantially increase the supply of qualified teachers, including through international cooperation for teacher training in developing countries, especially least developed countries and small-island developing states. The language of the subgoal implies a focus on the two elements of primary and secondary schooling. However, the above analysis demonstrates that issues of educator development are relevant to all six elements and may indeed be more pressing elsewhere in the system due to a comparative lack of attention historically.

However, educator issues are not reducible to issues of 'the supply of qualified teachers'. Rather, across all elements there are broader educator workforce challenges. These include the matters of making the profession attractive to potential entrants, especially those with stronger qualifications; addressing absenteeism; retention; reward; and career progression. Many of these issues have a spatial dimension. Remote rural settings typically face particularly serious challenges across these dimensions, although the challenging circumstances of poorer urban settings should not be forgotten. Also, the emphasis on initial teacher education in SDG4.c should not be pursued to the detriment of attention to continuing professional development. This is linked further to questions of registration and licensing. All of these matters require attention within national policy frameworks.

As the worlds of both learning and work become increasingly complex and fluid so learners need, from early in childhood till well into adulthood, access to impartial and high-quality information, advice and guidance that can help them in identifying which educational paths and which work opportunities to pursue. A lifelong perspective on education also necessitates a new approach to funding that looks to supporting learners when they need it rather than being tied to a particular age bracket.

Implementation

Many developing countries find it easier to make policy than to implement it (SADC and UNESCO 2013). Yet policy does not have full meaning until it is enacted. Therefore, there is a pressing need to ensure that the CEPF contains a clear focus on and mechanisms to support policy implementation practices. Whilst implementation is greatly assisted by good formulation, there is also a need to think about what capacity and resources are required for effective implementation, and the role that Commonwealth collaborations can play in assisting this. Potential priorities include programmes of professional development on implementation, including both planning and monitoring; the availability of technical assistance partners with extensive experience of implementation; a strong focus on the financing of implementation; and a commitment to ongoing mechanisms for stakeholder dialogue.

The next phase of work related to the policy framework will be piloting in selected countries. This process requires the development of a common toolkit for implementation. Such a toolkit should include a user guide for this policy framework; a planning tool for determining priority outcomes and indicators; and a monitoring and evaluation framework. Indicators must relate to the wider Agenda 2030 indicator process but should focus also on specific national priorities. It will be important to break these down into medium-term targets for achievement by 2020, 2025 and 2030. Indicators should be plotted against the cornerstones, enablers and elements in order to reflect the wider Commonwealth philosophy.

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