

United Nations Transforming Education Summit (TES)
National Statement of Commitment
Commonwealth of Dominica

The Commonwealth of Dominica has a full appreciation for the disastrous effects of exogenous shocks, be they of a climatic nature (such as hurricane Maria in 2017) or the more recent COVID-19 health pandemic. The cumulative effects of these events, have compelled us to embrace a holistic perspective of *resilience*. In that respect, we have amplified our efforts to shield our country, and within this context, the education sector, from the potentially disruptive effects of future cataclysmic events.

Dominica has already demonstrated its commitment to providing our children with the best learning experience in a healthy and safe environment. While Dominica was well on its way to infusing technology in education, the COVID-19 pandemic created the opportunity to accelerate existing efforts in that regard. We are very clear, therefore, that the use of learning technologies should not be seen as an emergency response, but should be sustained and scaled up, to maximize its benefits. The ongoing training of educators to enhance their digital competency, the distribution of devices and the continuing installation of more robust telecommunications infrastructure, therefore, remain a very high priority.

We continue valiant efforts to ensure inclusiveness and equity in our educational offering. Therefore, the promotion and expansion of technical educational and vocational training (TVET) is very much in alignment with our thrust to expand the menu of choice, to reflect the multiple and diverse interests/aptitudes of our citizens, and to equip them with the relevant qualifications to enhance their employability. Therefore, Dominica has placed TVET as a high priority, with the existing and additional benefits of: 1. Embracing CVQs; 2. Curing youth employment; 3. Promoting mobility within the education sector and across various occupational fields/professions and 4. Fostering a spirit of entrepreneurship. But we must, with urgency cure the stigma and false dichotomy between academic and non-academic pursuits, with TVET being viewed as falling within the latter. Initial efforts to have specializations in certain schools in Dominica, had some early successes. The challenges encountered underscore the need for sustainable financing in education (beyond the one off project-type financing with finite life spans) to facilitate an expansion of the curriculum and sustained subject offerings, especially in the technical fields.

Indeed, “no child will be left behind”, hence, it is critical that we cater to all demographic groups in our society: The Kalinago people, girls, males and learners with physical and learning difficulties, in particular. That commitment is reflected in the physical design of our new schools (including the integration of renewable energy), remedial interventions in the classroom, strengthening of our special education program and greater diversity in the national curricula, with a renewed focus on the teaching of Civics. Additionally, we acknowledge the importance of the holistic well-being of teachers and students and endeavor to provide more sustained psycho-social support.

Recent global events have inspired Dominica to revisit subject areas such as agriculture, which afford young people the opportunity to embrace innovative technologies and practices, including, aquaponics. Moreover, in our efforts to expand nutritional support to the most vulnerable students (the school feeding program), the resurgence of school gardens and a strengthening of forward and backward linkages in the sector, can augur very well for all stakeholders. Initiatives such as this also allow for deepening collaborative efforts with sister ministries such as Health, Agriculture and Equity/Transformation, and international agencies such as the UNESCO, UNICEF, FAO and IICA.

The young people's clarion call to make learning "fun" and interesting means that in a reimagined education system, we may see greater integration of digital learning and gaming especially in areas such as Science and Mathematics. The insistence by our young people that "chalk and talk" ought to be a thing of the past, is very much in keeping with our own ambitions for the sector, given the skill demands of a global digital economy.

We recognize though, that for any such endeavor to make sense, the educational offering during the foundational years of our children must meet their needs. Our ambition to offer universal, high quality early childhood education ensures that there is equity at every level of the sector, beginning at the most critical stage in the cognitive and emotional development of our children. Hence, we are continuing to integrate that sub-sector into our main stream infant/primary schools.

At the root of any perceived change in the sector is a concerted effort and commensurate injection of resources for the continuing professional development of teachers, to ensure that they are in-step with emerging pedagogic developments and are comfortable with and competent in the use of digital educational tools.

These explicit ambitions, however, can only be realized if we are able to secure and benefit from sustainable partnerships with stakeholders who appreciate and share our vision, for a reimagined education sector in Dominica, as we build back stronger, better and smarter.