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“Young People at the Centre of Sustainable Development”

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Marlborough House
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Produced by Mr Jean-Paul Brice Affana

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Introduction

The 54 Commonwealth member states are facing social, economic and environmental global challenges. Heads of Government who met in Trinidad and Tobago in 2009 underlined the critical importance of integrated and sustainable approaches to development. They recognised that the challenges of the twenty-first century are deeply interconnected and that sustainable development requires institutions whose mandates and operations are responsive to this fact and to the needs of small, poor and highly vulnerable developing countries. They emphasised the importance of promoting sustainable development with regard to human resource development (CHOGM, 2009). Two years later, Heads of Government met in Australia where they agreed that a series of actions was needed to ensure effectiveness in responding to contemporary global challenges and to build resilient societies and economies across the Commonwealth. They highlighted that the significant challenges facing the global economy require that the international community works cooperatively to secure a sustainable global recovery. They also recognised the importance of a strong response to these challenges (CHOGM, 2011). An effective response to these challenges requires a collective mobilisation and full participation of all relevant stakeholders who have to be fully engaged here, and among all need to have a voice.

Young people are one of the social groups most affected by global challenges. They represent a majority proportion of the world's total population, with 44% under 25 years (UNFPA, 2012). At least 60% of the Commonwealth's population, out of over 2 billion in total, is under 30 years (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011). The enormous number of young people in the Commonwealth, and the harsh conditions in which so many of them are struggling to survive, pose a frightening challenge and an amazing opportunity. Why and how can young people play a key role in responding to this challenge? Kamallesh Sharma, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, reiterated the organisation's priority commitment to placing young people at the centre of sustainable development during the 7th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (7CYMM, 2008). This shows that youth's role in achieving sustainable development is recognised and they have to be empowered throughout the whole process. Hence, elaborating an all-inclusive approach which integrates an understanding of how planning for development with, by and for young people as relevant stakeholders could lead to successful youth empowerment, and a lasting impact on global development.

This paper aims to inspire a vision of a development that integrates young people and youth empowerment principles at the heart of development goals and priorities for the future. We want decision makers and other relevant stakeholders to be guided by the contents of this paper in order to engage constructively with young people as beneficiaries and as partners in development, and to support them to initiate and lead development strategies. We advocate here for a paradigm shift that recognises young people not as a “problem category” or as a target market, but as full-fledged partners in development and as progressive, determined stakeholders in the fight to overcome global challenges. The paper ends by presenting the long-term benefits of placing young people at the centre of sustainable development, and shares recommendations on how development through a youth lens at all levels of society can deliver positive global development outcomes.

I. Sustainable Development is Needed in Today's World

The United Nations Conference on the Human Environment in 1972 brought together the industrialised and developing nations to define the “rights” of the human beings to a healthy and productive environment. The World Commission on Environment and Development addressed in 1987 the conflicts between environment and development goals by formulating a definition of sustainable development as: *“a development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”* (WCED, 1987). The recognition to revitalise humanity’s connection with nature led to the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992 in Rio de Janeiro. There “Agenda 21”, a Programme of Action for Sustainable Development, and the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development that recognizes each nation’s right to pursue social and economic progress, and assigned to States the responsibility of adopting a model of sustainable development, were adopted. The spirit of the conference was captured by the expression “Harmony with Nature”, brought to the fore with the first principle of the Rio Declaration: *“Human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature”* (UNCED, 1992). The World Summit on Sustainable Development held in 2002 in Johannesburg, South Africa, another important step, served as a follow-up conference to renew the global commitment to sustainable development made at the 1992 Earth Summit.

In June 2012, following the UN General Assembly’s resolution *A/RES/64/236*, world leaders met in Rio de Janeiro for the UN Conference on Sustainable Development – also referred to as “Rio+20”. The conference had three main objectives: securing renewed political commitment to sustainable development, assessing the progress and implementation gaps in meeting already agreed commitments, and addressing new and emerging challenges. “The Future We Want”, the outcome document of the conference, shows that Rio+20 was an opportunity to move away from business-as-usual and to act to end poverty, address environmental destruction and build a bridge to the future. UN member states adopted clear and focused practical measures for implementing sustainable development, based on the many examples of success we have seen over the last 20 years, and their focus was made on seven priority areas: decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans, and disaster readiness (UNCSD, 2012).

Sustainable development is an important topic of discussion and a priority for today’s world, as it is a development approach that ensures the well-being of the people by integrating the social, economic and environmental pillars. The growing focus on the environmental pillar demonstrates that the environmental protection is a very high priority. However, it is important to mention that sustainable development is not only about environmental sustainability. Social equity which can fulfil the basic needs of human beings and enable participatory democracy is also a crucial element of sustainable development. Intergenerational equity could be considered as the central ethical principle behind sustainable development as it is about fairness and derives from a concept of social justice (Falk, *et al*, 1993). The concept of sustainable development is therefore needed and integral to the construction of a new paradigm of global development.

II. Why Should Young People be at the Centre of Sustainable Development?

All global citizens have to be seen as relevant stakeholders to achieve a development that is sustainable. In fact, we must consider the significant role that these stakeholders – including young people – can play in order to avoid our world collapsing from exploitative use of resources and development of economies. Mmasekgoa Masire-Mwamba, Deputy Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, reminds us that *“young people are our partners and, as such, they have to be*

strategically engaged as architects of change and development agents” (CYP, 2008). In line with her statement, we see many strong reasons why we should give a priority role to young people in the process of enabling sustainable development. Those reasons comprise:

II.1. Young People Constitute a Majority Proportion of the World’s Total Population

It is not only a well known assertion that young people constitute a majority proportion of the world population. It is a reality! In developed countries, the youth population currently comprises 28% – or 362 million people – of the total population. In least developed countries, 60% of the total population – or 503 million people – are under the age of 25 (Lin, 2012). By 2015 we will have 3 billion young people in the world, with 2.5 billion living in developing countries. All these indicators point inexorably to the fact that young people will be exposed to greater challenges and inequalities than any other social group (CYP, 2008).

Commonly referred to as the ‘youth bulge’, this demographic imperative will result in the largest ever cohort of young people transitioning into adulthood. The youth bulge represents both a challenge and an opportunity for sustainable development (CYP, 2008). Whether a country has a predominantly old or youthful population has important implications for all the pillars of sustainable development – for example, for labour markets, natural resource use, and social security programmes. Societies with aging populations may make effective use of a growing number of old but active and productive persons (Lin, 2012). Youthful societies have tremendous opportunities for harnessing the potential of their large young populations as they enter the labour market. Capturing their potential for innovation, including the ability to adopt new technologies, can accelerate economic progress and speed up the transition to sustainable development pathways (Muehldorfe, *et al*, 2012). The rate of this progress, however, will depend on the provision of essential supports, including education, health services and technologies. The demographic category of youth remains excessively prone to poverty and unemployment. This state of poverty, along with the world population growth and the youth bulge, has placed young people at the centre of many complex issues. The United Nations Secretary-General’s High Level Panel on Global Sustainability states in its 2012 report that many developing countries, with their large youthful populations, are prepared for major increases in prosperity (UN HLPGS, 2012). However, young people still constitute one of world’s greatest unrealised resources. There is no good reason why such a huge and significant demographic social group should be left out of the debate on global development.

II.2. Youth Population Dynamic and Sustainable Development Have Strong Linkages

There are strong linkages between the youth population dynamic and sustainable development, already recognised in several global agreements. The definition of sustainable development from the World Commission on Environment and Development addresses these linkages by referring to “*the ability of future generations to meet their own needs*”. Young people, who already share our planet with the elders of today, will inherit it and pass it on to the generations of tomorrow. ‘Agenda 21’ also highlights this link when advocating for the advancement of the role of youth to be actively involved in the protection of the environment and the promotion of economic and social development. Children and youth have been officially recognised as one of the nine civil society Major Groups which can participate in all processes related to sustainable development at the United Nations level – other Major Groups include Women, Farmers, Indigenous Peoples, Non-governmental Organisations, Trade Unions, Local Authorities, Science and Technology, Business and Industry – (UNCED, Agenda 21, Chapters 23 and 25, 1992).

The recent report by the UN Secretary-General's High Level Panel on Global Sustainability emphasizes the need to understand demographic change, particularly in developing countries where there are large youth populations, and makes clear the importance of integrating population dynamics into effective government policies (UN HLPGS, 2012). The Rio Declaration also emphasizes the principles that human population dynamic plays at the centre of development, and the need both to increase knowledge regarding the links between demographic trends and sustainable development, and to integrate this knowledge into national and local policies and programmes (UNCED, 1992).

Young people are a heterogeneous group, and their life experiences, cultural background, education, gender, social group and economic status can be very different, depending on where they live. Each generation of young people faces different challenges, and so when working with, and planning for youth it is important to know that in his/her life, a young person goes through multiple transitions, including physical, emotional, cognitive and social (DFID, 2010). As these young people mature into adulthood, their political, economic, and socio-cultural realities will shape the opportunities and risks they face in planning their development and the development of their communities. The consideration of the dynamic of the youth population in every local and global development framework is essential in order to respond to their interests, concerns and fully meet their needs. It also enables provision of an appropriate space for their contribution.

II.3. Young People Have Access to Global Development Decision-Making Processes

At the Earth Summit in 1992, governments realised that sustainable development could not be achieved by them alone and required the active participation of all sectors of society and all relevant stakeholders. Heads of State and Government representatives who attended the Rio+20 Conference highlighted “*the importance of the active participation of young people in decision-making processes, as the issues [...] have a deep impact on present and future generations and as the contribution of children and youth is vital to the achievement of sustainable development*” (UNCSD, 2012). There are many examples among others showing how intergovernmental processes – including the Commonwealth level (**Box 1**) – are including the voice of young generations, thus enabling them to bring into the discussions their concerns, ideas and creativity.

Box 1 - The Commonwealth Youth Forum: a practical way of engaging with young people

The Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) takes place as the first official event before the opening of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) every year. More than 100 youth leaders are attending the forum during a week-long. They represent youth organisations, National Youth Councils or Commissions and youth-led development agencies. The event is serving as a stronger structure that ensures greater participation of young people in policy-making at a high-level of the Commonwealth. The last CYF was held in the city of Fremantle, Australia, from 24-27 October 2011, prior to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting. The forum has enabled young people in the Commonwealth to participate in high level decision-making processes, and also provided Heads of Government with the opportunities to meaningful engage with youth representatives of the Commonwealth. At the end of the CYF, youth participants are able to attend the CHOGM and to fully exchange with Heads of Government (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011).

Many countries across the globe, including Commonwealth nations, have developed appropriate responses to their local problems by also linking them with intergovernmental processes when appropriate. They realised that responding to human needs without compromising the needs of the next generations requires a strong consideration of the interests, needs and aspirations of young people. Aware that our planet relies on a delicate balance between human needs and the capacity of the earth to provide the needed resources, they are also conscious that youth development is not an isolated matter, and must be fully integrated with policy and programming in all fields of global development. Some governments have been reinforcing attitudes and practices that enable young people to access education, services and resources that empower them with opportunities and information to decide which role they want to play in achieving development. Youth Commissions or Youth Councils at the national level engage young people in the solutions to address their concerns and enable their effective participation in the national political life, and have been a priority focus of the Commonwealth Youth Programme. As well, several governments have encouraged and supported the participation of “Official Youth Delegates” in their official delegations to high-level decision-making meetings at the intergovernmental processes (**Box 2**) – also called official youth representatives, they are young men and women selected by their organisations, governments or National Youth Councils to represent the views, aspirations, needs and expectations of their peers at important policy meetings and conferences where they also mostly collaborate with other global young people attending. The added value of involving Youth Delegates – officially part of their national delegations or just attending as civil society representatives – has shown that they have strong possibilities to influence and change the course of the outcomes of the meetings, bringing a needed youth perspective on board. Their involvement also enables them to engage their peers worldwide through online consultation and participation, using the useful support of technology.

Box 2 - Official Youth Delegates’ participation to the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

The Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM) is a unique established mechanism at the level of the Commonwealth that focuses on young people’s representation at all levels of decision-making. Since the first meeting (1CYMM) held in 1992 in Maldives, the CYMM is including a seat and voice for young people as participants comprise ministers, senior government officials and youth representatives from the Commonwealth. The inclusion of Official Youth Delegates in national delegations to the meeting enables the participation of youth representatives to the Ministerial table when Ministers for Youth Affairs meet and debate on emerging issues related to youth development. At the 5th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (5CYMM) held in Botswana in May 2003, many countries have included youth representatives in their delegations, such as the United Kingdom which has Ms Abigail Page attending as a youth representative from the British Youth Council. The youth representative from the Bahamas, Mr Mortimer Sandena, was also at the same meeting. Mauritius also has a youth representative, Ms Rzwana Hatteea (CYP, 2008).

In the examples, young people’s concerns, needs and interests are considered as a priority by our decision makers and been underlined throughout the process of achieving a global development agenda. Policy makers are being required to examine current development strategies and offer policy solutions that address the real and alleged development gaps, with young people involved as key players. This because their voice also counts!

II.4. Young People are Relevant Stakeholders to Contribute to Sustainable Development

Despite battles with unemployment, social repression, conflict situations and other challenges in their daily life, young people are emphatically on the global agenda (CYP, 2008). They can become largely influential and contribute greatly in promulgating sustainable development if they are provided with the necessary tools, opportunities and empowering environments. The youth demographic constitutes a significant pool of talents, solutions, and is indispensable in any successful development strategy. Demographic shifts such as the increasing scope of education as well as globalisation have allowed young people to emerge as a powerful force for sustainable development. They are no longer the unheard “problem” category which must be resolved by decision makers. On the contrary, they are moving towards greater understanding of their own power and responsibility in the decision-making processes, and their role as part of the solution.

Young people have the unique ability to see linkages, and to look beyond procedural protections which may hold back cooperation among institutions and organisations. Young people are vocal in their need for tangible outcomes and thus can fully contribute to simplifying bureaucratic procedures in order to make sustainable development more time-efficient, resource-efficient and targeted to the right people and sectors. They have shown through their creativity, grassroots engagement, online campaigns and actions that they can tackle problems in an efficient way. What also makes young people relevant stakeholders is that they can contribute to build a politically stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment. They can bring a true understanding of the systemic repercussions of poverty and environmental damages. Being sensitive to narratives of poverty and vulnerability, young people can understand the importance of sustainable development in securing decent living conditions for all and in promoting responsible use of resources. This sensitivity also needs to be encouraged among young people who can be one of the best proponents for good life choices. Allowing them to work in close collaboration with government, local authorities, intergovernmental organisations, and other relevant groups, as equal and active stakeholders, adds a strong dimension to the debate.

II.5. Young People Are Realising their Important Role in Sustainable Development

The attitudes of young people vis-à-vis sustainable development increasingly show that they care about how social and economic developments impact on our living environment and already affect the future and the next generations. Social media is playing a significant role in informing and connecting young people, and building their power and awareness. Young people are more and more realising their important role in this process and are now actively participating in finding solutions. A breakdown of participants at the Rio+20 Conference shows that over 1,000 young people representing six continents participated in the conference discussions and actively engaged themselves. The youth delegates of the Commonwealth Youth Climate Change Network organised at the conference a side event on the importance of achieving a “Blue Economy” in order to build a sustainable future, mainly in Small Islands Developing (MGCY, 2012). The involvement of today's youth in decision-making processes and programmes on sustainable development along with their implementation is critical because it affects their lives today and has implications for their future. Young people see the world as a system where everything is connected; where the economic policies endorsed today will have an impact on urban poverty later; where our lifestyles today can affect the ability of our children to afford theirs tomorrow. Young people are able to understand that the problems we face are complex and serious for our world. In this respect, they develop innovative solutions and use their potentials to bring in new solutions.

Young people are realising their responsibilities and ability to facilitate and help in leading development mechanisms, while also working in partnership with elders. This is called “*co-management*” by Peace Child International (**Box 5**). Young people believe in themselves and look for ways to bring their voice into decision-making processes. They are conscious that they can support their governments in managing political affairs, and finding lasting solutions which respond not only to their own needs, but also to the world’s aspirations. This motivates them to play an active participatory role. Increasingly youth actions truly support development efforts and have to be encouraged.

III. Benefits of Placing Young People at the Centre of Sustainable Development

We see the participation of young people in sustainable development as an asset for the Commonwealth countries and other nations. If positioned at the centre of its planning and implementation, they can contribute to adequate solutions to global challenges. Young people can accelerate the achievement of sustainable development if their role is considered by policy and decision makers. Thus, we have identified the following benefits to be considered when planning for sustainable development with young people:

III.1. Political benefits

Looking at the recent actions undertaken by Arab youth, we completely understand that young men and women can be very powerful when they decide to engage in national political life. While our nations are concerned about how to ensure a politically stable governance system for their citizens, young people from their side are requesting to be provided with the right and facilities to participate in all decisions that affect their life. The benefits of their participation comprise their support to their governments to stabilise the political life of their country in order to avoid creating social violence or civil war. Advancing the role of young people in implementing, on behalf of their governments and other stakeholders, Conventions or Protocols ratified at a country, regional or global level – United Nations or Commonwealth for instance – is another important benefit. Youth-led organisations for example play an important part in implementing agreements signed by their States. This also connects them with other global youth sharing the same interests and aiming at the same goals.

The role and active contribution of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy, and protection alongside with promotion of other Commonwealth values such as tolerance, understanding, freedom of religions, and respect for other cultures, have been already recognised by Heads of Government in 2009. They acknowledged that the future successes of the Commonwealth have a strong link with the continued commitments and contributions of the new generation. The final communiqué of the Youth Forum held some days early emphasized the goodwill of young people to “*participate in decision making roles at all levels of governance via a transparent, accountable and accessible process, and support to develop structures where they do not exist*” (CHOGM, 2009). This shows that engaging young people in high decision-making processes and political life contribute to activate them to act towards important decisions for their future and the future of the world. They are willing to fully meet this goal. Youth participation in political affairs of their countries is important to ensure a politically stable environment that enables social and economic development as well. They have showed us that they have a role to play in democratic governance, and want to see greater political and economic opportunities. Putting young people’s interests into national and global political affairs transform them as strong advocates for shaping new ideas and positive values (**Box 3**). Their support to political affairs and democratic governance is highly needed.

Box 3 - The Missing Millennium Development Goal, a powerful project led by a young person

The Missing Millennium Development Goal is a petition by Ms. Ajarat Bada a young leader from Nigeria to the UN member states and religious leaders to recognise that the 8 MDGs can only be fully realised with Interfaith Collaboration. Worldwide conflicts based on religious differences contribute to violence in the name of religion. They are stalling progress towards achieving the MDGs. Therefore, adopting the Missing Millennium Development Goal may serve as a prerequisite for ending poverty and achieving peace. Every religion condemns violence and promotes peace. It is therefore the role of religious leaders to oppose political agendas and expose dishonesty which is often veiled by religious fanaticism. At the same time, it is the role of governments to ensure adherence to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Ajarat has contributed through her work to raise awareness about the social impact of religious-based conflicts in the life of people. She didn't wait for her government to do something. She started doing something on her own and succeeded to call on the attention of the world leaders on an important political issue. Later, in 2010, Ajarat presented her project at the UN Alliance of Civilisations' forum (OYW, 2012).

III.2. Environmental benefits

The benefits of engaging youth in achieving the environmental pillar of sustainable development could ensure a lasting environment and safe climate to all, but also the world's continuing access to natural resources. There are numerous young people who face the impacts of environmental degradation in their daily life and see environmental protection as a crucial responsibility and high priority (MGCY, 2012). They are mindful of the long-term effects of environment degradation thus support sustainable management of the world's natural resources by adopting "green" lifestyles towards a "Green Economy". The young generation feels responsible for the survival of the futures generations, as they are aware that the survival of our planet earth is not negotiable! If young people have awareness about natural systems and the interface of environmental education, they will be able to understand the priority regarding environmental protection which is also linked to the economic and social-cultural components.

The role of young people towards sustainable development is relevant to prevent our world for collapsing from climate change. They can also support valuable environmental education and education for sustainable development as they are already raising awareness and educating others through their community engagement or youth-led organisations. That is why more support is needed so that they can increase their impacts in addressing global environmental challenges.

III.3. Social benefits

It gives strong benefits to communities when children and youth are educated, healthy, engaged in social affairs, and aware of their social responsibility as citizens. Consequently they will be more capable to use their knowledge, skills, energy and creativity for finding solutions to development, not for creating or participating in problems. An educated youth cohort is aware of their place at the centre of social development strategies, thus can encourage the education of others (**Box 4**), reduce the spread of youthful crime or devastating diseases such as HIV/AIDS.

Giving young people access to social development encourages them to support their governments in their efforts to become more accountable, and more easily adaptable to new challenges and the

speed of change. Young people who understand that they are at the centre of the attention of their governments – local or national – could easily realise the high expectations placed on their shoulders by the whole community. Also given that youth are good in using creative arts and social media, these tools help them to educate massive population in addressing social problems in a useful informal way.

Box 4 - Malala Yousafzai: the courage of a Pakistani heroine to achieve young girls' education

Malala Yousafzai was a school pupil when she became an activist for the education of young girls in the Swat Valley in Pakistan, where the Taliban had banned girls from attending school. In 2009, Malala wrote a blog under a pseudonym for the BBC detailing her life under Taliban rule, their attempts to take control of the valley, and her views on promoting education for girls. She was 11 years. A New York Times' documentary was filmed the following summer about her life, and she began to rise in prominence, giving interviews in print media and on television, and taking a position as Chairperson of the District Child Assembly Swat. On October 2012, she was shot in an assassination attempt by Taliban gunmen while returning home on a school bus. She was critically injured, but later her condition improved enough for her to be sent to a hospital in the UK. Malala's courage inspires the world and her activism for full access of girls to education and women's rights recently elevated her as the youngest nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize in history – at 15 years! The UN Special Envoy for Global Education, Gordon Brown, launched a UN petition in Malala's name, using the slogan 'I am Malala' demanding that all children worldwide be in school by the end of 2015 in recognition to efforts of the heroine. 10th November was declared as Malala's Day by the UN Secretary-General, Ban Ki-moon (World Time, 2012).

III.4. Economic benefits

There is a need for sustainable economic growth that ensures fair distribution and efficient allocation of resources. The economic pillar of sustainable development can be fully reinforced by giving a role to youth to ensure that our economic growth fits with our ecosystem protection and social needs. Investing in young people's role could help to advance sustainable economic changes and place them in a position to participate in the creation of wealth and incomes.

Young people are able to foster the world economy through the creation of youth-led enterprises and job opportunities for others. With jobs creation being a key part of sustainable economic growth, stimulating youth employment through youth entrepreneurship and development of young people's entrepreneurial skills will enable young people to access financial inclusion and better link their enterprises with development aspirations.

We strongly believe that young people can be drivers of economic development as entrepreneurs and can increasingly engage in creative economies which explore new financial models and integrate technology and social responsibility. With access to partnerships with the private sector and development organisations, young people can advocate for youth unemployment to be seen as a priority issue in Commonwealth countries. We value them as an important workforce who can help countries to overcome financial crises, and prevent the world from unsustainable economic development. We consider as an essential focus to provide young people with skills, access to credit and mentoring schemes that enable them to create decent jobs and opportunities, so that they can explore their full potential and use their skills and experiences. They could then become innovative job creators, not only job seekers.

IV. Our Suggestions to Placing Young People at the Centre of Sustainable Development

Achieving “The Future We Want” (UNCSD, 2012) with the support of young people as a critical component is feasible. Investing in youth empowerment means investing in sustainable development. Hence, the following action areas are crucial to place young people at the centre of sustainable development framework at the Commonwealth level and beyond. We underline that the active participation of young people in this process is needed.

IV.1. Enabling Development through a Youth Lens

Referring to the growing boundaries of the Commonwealth Youth Programme’s work over the last 40 years, Kamallesh Sharma, the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, highlighted that a narrow youth lens has widened in the belief that all aspects of national life have a youth dimension, and that the Commonwealth’s focus on youth development must reflect that. Member states have started to do likewise and the challenge is to make youth mainstreaming a second nature to them (CYP, 2008). We strongly agree with this declaration, as we perceive the purpose of development through a youth lens to ensure that youth perspectives, needs and aspirations are considered and included across all policy areas and decision making processes. A youth mainstreaming approach to development planning and strategies will make them more powerful and lead to greater development with their empowerment.

We advocate, as Heads of Government did at CHOGM 2009, that all governments can design and implement local and national development strategies which include a specific focus on young people so that development creates a larger, healthier, better educated and empowered youth cohort. This process must be done in full collaboration with young people as they are best placed to articulate their needs and aspirations. This must also enable processes which take into account the realities of youth. Decision makers should continue engaging with young people as beneficiaries, and as partners in development, and support them to initiate and lead development interventions. We would like to see all young people to be considered and empowered as development partners, with unique needs across all aspects of development. They should be seen as assets to their societies in the formulation of development goals. It is also essential when planning for development through a youth lens to integrate the immense potential that co-management has as a relevant approach (**Box 5**).

Box 5 - The importance of co-management when planning for development through a youth lens

Co-management is an important step to consider when planning for development through a youth lens. It happens when youth work with elders, cooperate together to address development issues and become development professionals or leading political actors themselves. This is a key aspect of the empowerment process at the core of youth-led development, which always acknowledges the importance of local contexts and cultural values and practices. At the heart of co-management is a relationship – or series of relationships – between young people and elders as well as the issues that arise on each side of this relationship. Co-management is a specific form of youth participation that sets young people on an equal level with their older partners to work towards a common goal. This concept opens the door to amazing new opportunities, ideas and challenges for young people and elders to stretch their creativity and commitment. It reduces prejudice, enhances clarity and simplicity of communication which makes it valid and useful in any sector of daily life. It gives young people the opportunity to become equal partners of elders (Peace Child International, 2011).

IV.2. Empowering Young People with Values-Based Leadership

The 2009 CHOGM final communiqué reflected on the commitment of Commonwealth member states to the organisation's values and principles (CHOGM 2009). The recently adopted Commonwealth Charter also reaffirms the core values and principles of the organisation and recognises that its special strength also lies in them (Commonwealth Charter, 2012). Young people will learn, promote, commit to, and achieve our shared values and principles, and accordingly become their promoters and protectors across the Commonwealth.

Youth participation in democratic processes, through free and fair elections for example, and their commitment to human rights will enable them to respect the protection of cultural, civil, social, political, and economic rights as the foundations of peaceful and stable societies. Young people have to understand why the rule of law, peace security, and sustainable economic growth are essential to the progress and prosperity of nations' development. They have to be trained on how to collaborate with their governments to make them accountable and recognise the importance of the protection of fundamental human rights, devotion to good governance, and the rule of law as an essential protection for the people of the Commonwealth.

Young people have the power to strengthen democratic processes, adhere to values, and fight systemic corruption. As a significant social component, they are dramatically affected by the impact of corruption practices and lack of integrity by some leaders they strongly believe in and trust. As they are future leaders and decision makers, it is absolutely necessary to empower them with anti-corruption values which can help mitigate the effects of corruption, and to provide them with plausible skills to strengthen core integrity values. That is how they will gain new insights on what integrity is and how to practice it as individual, in the society, and everywhere they find themselves. Young people are able to take personal and collective action. They formed in 2010 the Global Youth Anti-Corruption Network, a global movement of young leaders, journalists, artists and ICT experts who work to improve transparency and social accountability for better governance. Young people are aware that *“with corruption, there can be no sustainable development, nor political stability [and] corruption literally is the antithesis of development and progress”* as acknowledged by Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria (ICPC, 2010).

IV.3. Enhancing Youth Voice and Youth-led Activity

We recognise that youth voice and participation in national and global decision making processes and development planning have never before been so positively highlighted and supported across the globe. We consider this a key opportunity to realise the Commonwealth Charter's vision to consider the *“positive and active role and contributions [of young people] in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values”* (Commonwealth Charter, 2012). A close collaboration between the UN Envoy on Youth and the Commonwealth Youth Programme should be established so that both work together in addressing needs, concerns and aspirations of young people from the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth Youth Council (**Box 6**) and all National Youth Councils across the Commonwealth should cooperate with international programmes focused on youth development, such as the United Nations Programme on Youth, the African Union Youth Programme, the Council of Europe, the European Youth Forum, and others.

Box 6 - The Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC)

Under the slogan ‘My Voice, Our Council, One Commonwealth’, the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) was recommended by the Eminent Persons Group of the Commonwealth at the CHOGM in 2011 as an independent youth-led council that would strengthen and widen the current Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus in order to represent a wide cross section of youth in the Commonwealth. The CYC is an exciting inclusive initiative that seeks to communicate, engage and advocate for youth-led participation. Commonwealth regions have adopted the CYC during regional consultation meetings and their recommendations are to be discussed at the 8CYMM (CYP, 2013).

Participation is one of the key components of sustainable development, and an important factor to achieve its goals. As a result, we advise that an effective engagement of young people in sustainable development planning and implementation takes into consideration a three-lens approach to youth participation (**Box 7**). This approach can enhance the process through which young stakeholders participate, influence and share responsibilities on development initiatives and on decisions which affect their lives. We want young people to have a position of participatory beneficiaries as well as collaborative partners. This should also imply mutual cooperation and shared responsibility to provide young people with the experience they need when progressing to becoming legitimate development leaders.

Box 7 - The three-lens approach to youth participation in development strategies

The three-lens approach to youth participation is described in the UK Department for International Development (DFID)’s Guide on Youth Participation. In 2007, DFID’s Youth Working Group commissioned a youth mapping study that assessed current approaches to youth within DFID’s policy and programming, and found that both DFID staff at headquarters and at a country level were increasingly aware of the need to address youth issues. The study advocated that development assistance should work for the benefit of youth, with youth as partners, and be shaped by youth. This approach to youth participation uses three lenses: working for youth as beneficiaries; engaging with youth as partners, and supporting youth as leaders. The approach is an asset for policy makers and development agencies working on effective participation of young people (DFID, 2000).

IV.4. Strengthening Youth Mainstreaming and Youth Empowerment

Youth Ministers endorsed at the 7CYMM the importance of mainstreaming and recognising the need for appropriate resource allocations to be made for youth development programmes across all sectors. They underlined priorities for countries to train, empower and develop young people’s ability to respond to the world’s challenges and aspirations, to act as responsible citizens, and become future policy makers. We agree with them that moving towards a systematic integration of youth development into the work of all relevant stakeholders is crucial to successfully strengthen youth empowerment in sustainable development planning.

It is essential for Commonwealth countries to develop national programmes that build lasting youth empowerment across all relevant aspects of government and development. Empowered, young people gain the ability to make decisions and implement change in their own lives and the lives of others. We are aware that the capacity and ability of youth to support sustainable development in the Commonwealth also depends on the successful implementation of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2007-2015 (**Box 8**). Therefore,

the Commonwealth Youth Programme along with the Commonwealth Youth Council and all National Youth Councils can play a key leadership role in training decision makers and young people from our member states on the PAYE's contents, strategies and methodology. Our young people need to have full access to this key resource.

Box 8 - The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 (PAYE)

The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment 2007-2015 (PAYE) was developed by the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) and other key stakeholders to respond to the Commonwealth mission to empower, engage and create value so that young women and men can contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and countries and to their own fulfilment. The PAYE highlights the priority of achieving an effective youth empowerment in its 13 strategic objectives designed to engage governments, strategic partners and young people themselves on the transformational agenda of youth empowerment. The PAYE also identifies a peaceful environment of equality, democracy and peace as an enabling condition of youth empowerment. The CYP is using the Plan of Action to guide its actions on youth development and empowerment, as well as foster the role of young people in development agenda. The PAYE has enabled the CYP to provide young people across the Commonwealth with appropriate responses to their needs and aspirations. It also advocates making policies and services appropriate for youth participation and to contribute to building young people's commitment to solutions (CYP, 2007).

The African Union has developed a key resource with important similarities to the PAYE. This has identified "Accelerating Youth Empowerment for Sustainable Development" as the theme for the African Youth Decade 2009-2018. and a Plan of Action has been developed as well (AU, 2011).

IV.5. Reinvigorating Youth Employment and Youth Enterprise

The Commonwealth Charter commits to "investing in and promoting [youth] development, particularly through the creation of opportunities for youth employment and entrepreneurship" (Commonwealth Charter, 2012). The 2013 Commonwealth theme, "Opportunity through Enterprise" also encourages young people to achieve their full potential and take courageous steps to launch ambitious enterprises and open up new avenues of opportunity. That is what lies at the heart of the Commonwealth approach of enabling individuals and communities to find ways to strive together to create a better future that is beneficial for all (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2012). At the 7CYMM, Youth Ministers highlighted the necessity to accelerate work to develop and implement measures to promote the economic enfranchisement of young people. They agreed that attention should be given to making available opportunities for business generation and self employment in the tourism, agriculture and environment sectors; as well as expanding entrepreneurship training to include global trading and market opportunities for youth.

We want to build lasting solutions in already existing useful responses that have been developed by the Commonwealth Youth Programme to improve economic and employment opportunities for young people, and foster youth enterprise. The implementation of the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI) – developed with learning from Grameen Bank, UNDP and other microfinance approaches – and the parallel Micro Credit Management System (MCMS) in all regions of the Commonwealth can make us successful in providing young people with an enabling environment, skills development, credit delivery and programme support services for

the creation and success of their enterprises (**Box 9**). We agree with the experts and practitioners in the field of youth enterprise who met at the Pan-Commonwealth Conference on Investing in Youth Employment held in 2011, that the CYCI is one model that merits being taken to scale, based on the guiding framework for the Commonwealth Action Plan for Youth Enterprise (CAPYE). Other successful initiatives such as the Commonwealth Asia Alliance of Young Entrepreneurs (CAAYE) have to be encouraged and replicated across the Commonwealth, as they fully contribute to the Promotion of Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL).

Box 9 - Providing young entrepreneurs with start-up funds for their small-scale enterprises

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has developed different initiatives that provide young entrepreneurs with start-up funds for their small-scale enterprises as they face barriers to access funding. A major part of this work in the Promotion of Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL) is the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI). It is an integrated package of micro-credit, enterprise training and business support targeted at young women and men with the potential for self-employment. The Commonwealth Secretariat has advanced the CYCI in the African region by placing technical experts in countries – Cameroon, Namibia, Nigeria, Swaziland and Zambia – who worked in collaboration with the CYP Africa Centre to enhance the capacities of young entrepreneurs and small-scale enterprises in creation of sustainable livelihoods. In India, the launch of the Youth Enterprise Financing Programme in 2010, a joint programme of the Central Bank of India and the Commonwealth Secretariat, has served as an example of such collaboration which is needed across the Commonwealth through the sharing of experience and good practice. The CYCI has a lot of potential (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011).

The capacity and creativity of young people to overcome unemployment already has the attention of governments and other stakeholders who also support ideas which work well and can be replicated. Social and green entrepreneurship, for example, are a growing trend among young people which combines economic growth while tackling a social or environmental issue. There is also a need for funding for start-ups to be made easier for young people to access, as they currently face huge barriers to fund their own small-scale enterprises – Swaziland for example established in 2010 a total of 499 youth business enterprises through the Youth Enterprise Fund which contributes to the reduction of youth unemployment through the provision of business capital for young people to start their own businesses. We need more actions like this to be done.

IV.6. Including Youth Development as an Important Focus in the Post-2015 Agenda

The outcomes of the Rio+20 Conference agreed that United Nations member states should develop a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as a follow-up to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which expire in 2015. We don't only want the SDGs to seek to balance the social, environmental and economic dimensions of sustainable development, and to be coherent with and integrated into the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015 (UN SDKP, 2012). Drawing on lessons learned from the MDGs, we fully recognise and accept that one of the principles of the Post-2015 Development Agenda should be inclusiveness. That is why we strongly want the SDGs to fill a crucial gap in the MDGs which had no specific focus on youth, despite contributing to create a larger and better educated youth cohort than ever before. Within this context, we see the ongoing design of the Post-2015 Development Agenda as a precious window of opportunities to place young people at the centre of development policy and planning. Not only will this ensure that youth development challenges and youth participation are more adequately represented in the global development framework, but it will also support the

efforts of the Commonwealth and the United Nations to integrate young people's concerns and aspirations at the centre of the Post-2015 Development Agenda.

Engaging the voice on young people from the Commonwealth in the Post-2015 Development Agenda is an important step for us. However, we don't only want young people to be included in the on-going discussions and consultations to design the SDGs – both physical and online consultations are being organised by the United Nations and at a national or regional level to collect youth views, perspectives and aspirations. The key point that we want to make about this process is that there should also be a goal focussing on youth development and youth empowerment. This is crucial as the Post-2015 Development Agenda offers high potential to young people to play a relevant role in achieving global development. We acknowledge the efforts made by all young people who are already involved in social, economic and environmental projects and initiatives which accelerate the success of the MDGs and aim to ensure a successful Post-2015 Development Agenda at grassroots, national and global levels. They inspired us all to move towards great achievements, and we would like to see these efforts being recognised and promoted across the Commonwealth in order to amplify their impact.

IV.7. Working Together Towards a Collective Impact

The global challenges that the world faces today require highly coordinated action; as sustainable development and youth development cannot be achieved by any one sector working alone, and all stakeholders have a key role to play. Working together and with global partners to engage young people as key players in recovering the global economy or in ensuring a more sustainable and balanced society that will benefit all Commonwealth countries requires appropriate mechanisms, policies and services which will also contribute to building youth's commitment to the solutions. We look for more collaborative opportunities and commitments, and the development of frameworks for cooperation as pre-conditions for successful collective impact. Young people are skilled enough to contribute to collective impact.

We recognise that National Youth Councils across the Commonwealth and the Commonwealth Youth Council could serve as appropriate platforms to engage young people in work aiming to achieve an effective collective impact. Through these councils, young people are connected with other relevant stakeholders willing to support their role in development related issues. We also find it important that cooperating and collaborating on an intergenerational basis happens as an inclusive approach. This is also how ownership and co-management could be enabled for young people.

Collective impact holds great promise for our communities to create sustainable solutions. Young people as future leaders will need to be more collaborative, inclusive, asset-based, committed to learn, and accountable to implement this approach effectively. Successful collaboration is the result of specific factors that can be recognized and duplicated. Because no single group can do it alone or has the magic key; we need to do it together (Walker, 2012).

IV.8. Enabling Effective Monitoring and Evaluation of Youth Development

We realise that enabling proficient monitoring and evaluation of youth development; mainstreaming; and engaging young people as relevant stakeholders in sustainable development requires that Commonwealth member states develop and use appropriate mechanisms or tools. As agreed by Youth Ministers at the 7CYMM, such tools and mechanisms should not only enable decision makers to monitor and evaluate youth contributions to development initiatives,

but also enable them to monitor and evaluate their own strategies and actions towards youth development and mainstreaming. This will enable young people and decision makers to notice where gaps and needs for improvement might be while collaborating together. It is also important to always consider that youth development is an ongoing process and that it is fundamental to build on already existing tools and mechanisms.

We envision that Youth Ministers will actively and effectively use at the national level the Youth Development Index (YDI) that the Commonwealth Secretariat has recently developed (**Box 10**) as national youth policies also have to be monitored, evaluated, and regularly reviewed for a better collective impact.

Box 10 - The Youth Development Index developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat

At the 7CYMM, Youth Ministers discussed the creation of a Youth Development Index (YDI) by the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP). The CYP has now developed the YDI to serve as the primary evaluation tool of its work and the implementation of the PAYE 2007-2015. The YDI measures the status of young people of the Commonwealth, aged 15-2, in five key domains: education, health, employment, and civic and political participation. It also aims to assist Youth Ministers and other policy makers in identifying areas for investment to ensure youth fulfil their potential (CYP, 2013).

Conclusion

The Commonwealth Eminent Persons Group's report to Heads of Government in 2011 outlines 106 recommendations for reform so that the intergovernmental organisation better addresses growing concerns for the future and its role in the international community. The report recognises that young people play an active role in society in many ways as they often have more energy, creativity, idealism and motivation towards shaping a positive future. It also highlights that there is still a lack of sufficient avenues for the productive channelling of these attributes within the Commonwealth. Therefore, involving young people now will help creating a better future across the Commonwealth tomorrow (Commonwealth Secretariat, 2011).

Commonwealth member states can accelerate development by empowering and mainstreaming the role of young people in delivering positive development outcomes, while also enabling their full participation in this process. Young people have unique concerns, needs and aspirations regarding aspects of development. They can bring fresh perspectives, innovative ideas and creative solutions to support, initiate and lead development strategies. This, they should be seen as assets for their societies. They can also be strong advocates for change – leading and influencing their peers, and shaping new ideas and deepening positive values. Young people have often been catalysts for positive change, calling for democracy, good governance, social and environmental sustainability. They are well placed to provide realistic and lasting solutions based on innovative approaches and interconnectivity among themselves.

We realise that there are still significant and growing needs to advance the development and empowerment of young people across the Commonwealth. This can be fully achieved if our governments give a priority focus to the needs, interests and concerns of young people in their strategies to overcome the challenges related to sustainable development's achievement. The full and effective participation of young people in decision making processes to design and

implement national – and global – development strategies will then serve as a relevant input. This will also contribute to creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act as responsible leaders accountable for decisions that will impact future generations. Engaging and partnering with young people brings new energy, enthusiasm and creativity to decision making processes, and creates an intergenerational bond that inspires values-based leadership and co-management. Based on the investment that the Commonwealth has made in young people's aspirations during the last 40 years, it is clear that it is important to allow young people to create solutions and build support. Youth people are needed and valuable at the centre of sustainable development!

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