

Caribbean Youth to benefit from Commonwealth Empowerment

GEORGETOWN, Guyana: Young people in the Caribbean and their peers throughout the Commonwealth now have an enhanced opportunity of being fully empowered politically, socially and economically as governments and youth development stakeholders seek to embrace a new road map for youth development published by the Youth Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat entitled the, 'Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2007-2015'



The Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment has been developed following close consultation with Ministers of Youth and young people themselves. It is a framework document for governmental, inter-governmental and civil society action for, and with young people in the Commonwealth.

Rohan Kemai John of Dominica benefited by CYPCC-supported Youth Business Trust

The intention is that the PAYE should take its place alongside human rights instruments, poverty reduction strategy papers, national budgets and other policy frameworks relevant to young people aged 15-29 years. Since it was first launched in the year 2000, its specific contribution has been to stimulate an assets-based approach to youth development

The publication of the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment at this time is even more significant as the Commonwealth Heads of Government prepare for their meeting in Uganda in November 2007 to formulate strategies on a range of development issues many of which, impact on young people profoundly and disproportionately.

Commonwealth Secretary General, Don McKinnon, has reported that Commonwealth estimates that between the years 2000 and 2015, over one billion young women and men would have entered the labour force, and currently there are not one billion new jobs waiting for them.

McKinnon feels that this raises formidable policy questions such as

whether there is a clear relationship between development planning and demography in policy and practice. Questions also arise as to whether there exists positive interventions to reflect these demographic trends, in training, employment and education activities and what should be the positive measurable outcomes of successfully engaging even a fraction of these young people in economic activity.

The Secretary recalled that at their 1997 meeting in Edinburgh, Commonwealth Heads of Government endorsed efforts to tackle this policy agenda and consequently endorsed the empowerment approach.

According to him, it was recognised that "empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others." (Commonwealth Plan of action

for Youth Empowerment to the year 2005) The Commonwealth Plan of Action was born, and subsequently approved by Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Kuala Lumpur.



Members of the Caribbean Regional Youth Caucus

The Commonwealth Youth Programme is seeking creative ways to make the PAYE the main reference tool for Heads of Youth Departments; to make it a bigger part of the work of the Regional Youth Caucuses in terms of awareness raising and measuring progress; more accessible to everyone engaged in youth development; and to be able to document and disseminate good practices in its implementation. There are enormous resource implications in trying to meet these aims. We are challenged to seek out firm alliances with existing and new development partners because our financial allocations have not increased over the last thirty years.

The Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment puts forward 13 Action Points for Governments, youth development stake holders and the young people themselves. These Action Points are:

Develop and implement measures to promote the economic enfranchisement of young people

Review and assess macroeconomic planning and trade regimes, and address their impact on young people while seeking to mainstream youth development across all sectors of the national economy; Engage with the education sector and with the private sector to increase access to education, vocational training; Integrate entrepreneurship, savings and investment culture and education into the education system at appropriate levels; Promote and support an integrated approach to self-employment, micro-enterprise and credit schemes;

Strengthen social support systems and collaboration between key stakeholders in youth empowerment

Establish or strengthen national support for young women and men in the areas of: youth health issues and reproductive health; emotional health and well-being; the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases; Establish or strengthen national programmes for HIV/AIDS peer education and networking for healthy lifestyles, such as the Commonwealth Young Ambassadors for Positive Living (YAPL) programme; Consider the allocation of social sector investment in each of the areas of health, education and social welfare, to meet the needs of young people.

Strengthen Ministries, Departments and legal frameworks for Youth Affairs

Formulate and implement national policies and action plans on youth empowerment; Review and update existing youth policies and their corresponding strategic action; plans based on the assessment of their impact on youth empowerment; Create or strengthen ministries/departments of youth affairs, which should include arrangements for consulting young people; Build national capacity to collect and compile socio-economic data on the youth cohort in a timely and accurate fashion as a function of effective planning, target-setting, monitoring and evaluation; Integrate planning, implementation and coordination of youth development with national development planning;

Promote the participation of young people in decision-making

Establish achievable targets for young men and women to participate in

political leadership at various levels of government, from community level through to national parliaments. This will be supported by citizenship education and consultation programmes; Establish, strengthen and support national and regional youth councils; Strengthen youth networks at the national and regional level and integrate them with global youth networks; Build young people's decision-making capacities through volunteering programmes; Encourage young people to register to vote

Promote positive role models and foster young people's self-esteem

Encourage the promotion of indigenous images and role models in the media, and the cross-cultural exchange and sharing of such; Take action to curb negative stereotypes of young people in the media, and provide young people with opportunities to propagate alternative images; Develop sporting and cultural models that appeal to young people and that encourage cultural identification and indigenous self-expression; Develop award schemes for excellence in achievement; Promote inter-generational exchange of knowledge through mentoring programmes;

Take action for equality between young women and men, and for youth in special circumstances

Ensure that data on which public policy is developed are disaggregated according to gender, age, ability/disability, socioeconomic status and ethnicity; Adopt an equal employment opportunities policy and encourage the private sector to do the same; Conduct impact assessments assessing the effects of policies, legislation, administrative procedures and regulations on specific social sectors; Provide training for young people in gender sensitization and awareness raising; Mainstream education and employment opportunities for disabled people.

Promote peaceful and democratic environments in which human rights flourish

Provide training for young people in good governance, human rights and democratic practice; Provide training in peace building, negotiation, mediation and conflict resolution; include such training in school curricula and promote its implementation by youth groups in civil society; Ensure that young people are fully informed of their human rights and are able to

exercise their rights freely; Involve young people in the monitoring and implementation of human rights instruments, and free and fair elections;

Provide quality education for all

Prioritise basic education and literacy programmes, ensuring the participation of rural youth and those in special circumstances; Review educational curricula to include components of enterprise, life skills, conflict resolution, culture, human rights and the environment, as appropriate; Broaden access to secondary and higher education, making use of cost-effective means such as distance learning; Promote knowledge transfer through volunteering and mentoring opportunities, including promotion of indigenous knowledge.

Improve access to information and communication technology (ICT)

Promote the inclusion of ICT in school curricula; Incentivise private sector development of ICT infrastructure; Train young people in the use of ICTs; Establish public tele-centres and other community programmes that provide access to ICTs; Encourage girls and women to make use of ICT through targeted programmes.

Promote health, development and values through sports and culture

Promote sport and culture as an investment in national development, using sport and culture at local and regional levels to engage young people in team-building, leadership and healthy living; Integrate drama and sports education with other programmes for basic and/or informal education on environmental awareness; health and well-being (including diet and nutrition, sexual and reproductive health, substance abuse); and human rights; Promote sporting and cultural contacts and exchanges at the national, regional and pan-Commonwealth level (including the Commonwealth Youth Games) to foster tolerance, understanding and cooperation

Engage Young People to Protect the Environment

Engage young people in awareness raising on climate change and other

pressing environmental issues; Tap the knowledge base of young people and their grassroots organisations as part of environmental monitoring and scientific data gathering; Engage young people in technology transfer and uptake issues, including for example youth participation in 'citizens juries'; Train young people in natural disaster preparedness and relief; Stimulate ethical consumerism among young people as an entry point to environmental awareness; Mainstream environmental education and debate as part of school curricula.

Professionalise the youth work sector

Invest in youth work education and training by subsidising the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth development Work and similar programmes; Facilitate the recognition of youth work training by Public Service Commissions; Partner with associations of youth workers to draft codes of professional ethics with express linkage to human rights; Partner with associations of youth workers to establish formal registration and deregistration regimes; Consult associations of youth workers as partners in the policy-making process.

Monitor and evaluate progress in Youth Development

Collect quantitative and qualitative data on youth development, including on PAYE Indicators; Engage young people in participatory monitoring and evaluation of youth programmes; Synthesise findings into periodic reports; Consider building upon PAYE indicators to develop a national Youth Development Index (YDI) as a measuring tool; Partner with Commonwealth and UN agencies to share best practices and develop a YDI which is common to participating countries.

Director of Youth Affairs in the Commonwealth Secretariat, Dr Fatiha Serour, feels that making the PAYE work for young women and men in the Commonwealth will take tremendous support and commitment from all actors involved in youth development.

"If we fail to engage our young people constructively, we are failing our own development as members of our local and global community. I am heartened that young people also recognise their responsibility in this process, and that our young Commonwealth citizens acknowledge that the youth population has to be the driving force behind these

programmes to ensure their sustainability and effectiveness”, Dr Fatiha remarked.

Meanwhile Henry Charles, Regional Director of CYP Caribbean centre has described PAYE as a critical development tool. According to Charles “PAYE is not only an excellent youth empowerment tool; it is also a critical tool for sustainable development and advancement of the Commonwealth’s democratic values.”

The PAYE 2007-2015 has been approved as the Commonwealth’s strategic framework to guide youth empowerment and participation in the coming years, and is a critical success factor in the Commonwealth’s commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).