



Ninth Commonwealth Youth Forum

Hambantota, Sri Lanka 10 - 14 November 2013

Declaration by the young people of the Commonwealth

Young people constitute a majority proportion of the population in many Commonwealth countries. Commonly referred to as the 'youth bulge', this demographic imperative will result in the largest ever cohort of young people transitioning into adulthood. By 2015 there will be three billion young people in the world, with 2.5 billion living in developing countries. All the indicators point inexorably to the fact that young people will be exposed to greater challenges and inequalities than any other social group. It is essential that Governments across the Commonwealth consider young people as one of their most treasured assets to ensure future prosperity and growth of Commonwealth countries.

The Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) provides a vital platform that enables Commonwealth youth leaders to discuss youth issues, agree on a common policy and share this with key decision makers and stakeholders. The theme for the 2013 CYF was 'Inclusive Development-Stronger Together', and in working towards this agenda the Commonwealth attempted to 'leave no-one behind' by inviting all relevant stakeholders to the forum to discuss issues important to young people.

Young people in the Commonwealth are excited about a new representative youth body and are looking forward to participating in the work of the Commonwealth Youth Council. We stress the importance of youth voice and youth-led development to young people's key role at the centre of sustainable and inclusive development. We emphasise the importance of the CYC's autonomous, youth-led status, and the value of its role as a recognised representative body in and beyond the Commonwealth

Post-2015 Development Agenda

The increasingly large youth demographic in the world makes it impossible to discuss a future development framework without taking into account young people's needs, aspirations and challenges. Special efforts should be made to ensure that the voices of marginalized young people - those with disabilities, girls and young women, key affected populations, migrant youth and indigenous youth - should be heard to ensure that they are not left behind.

The youth of the Commonwealth note that:

- Young people were not adequately recognised in the goals and targets of the Millennium Development Goals.
- Placing young people at the centre of development is essential to national development and is a highly cost effective development strategy.
- The Commonwealth Youth Development Index is a strong tool to inform policy and track progress in youth development.
- The UN MyWorld survey has been extensively taken up by young people and is useful for understanding development priorities.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- It is vital to recognize youth as partners in development and mainstream their concerns in all aspects of planning, implementation and evaluation of the Post 2015 Development agenda.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to put young people at the centre of development by advocating for a specific goal on youth development and integrated youth targets for all goals in the post 2015 framework. We recommend that the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Youth Council partner to set up a working committee to propose suggested targets to the relevant decision makers for inclusion in the framework.
- The United Nations to ensure effective and inclusive youth participation in the formulation process of the Post 2015 agenda, using existing mechanisms like the World Conference on Youth 2014. We also call on Commonwealth member states to facilitate youth participation in such platforms and processes.
- All member states to be accountable for implementation of policies and programmes to achieve the post 2015 development goals. We stress the importance of making information accessible to everyone using multiple languages (ethnically, inter-generationally and non-academically), and highlight the potential of the Commonwealth Youth Development Index and other youth-related indices for tracking progress, and the potential of engaging young people in collection of better and more data.
- The Commonwealth Secretariat to establish a youth-specific Commonwealth Post 2015 Goals Monitoring and Evaluation Group, comprising of Commonwealth Youth, Ministers from member states, the Commonwealth Secretariat, Civil Society Organisations working with Youth, and independent experts, that ensures member states maintain and provide support to facilitate youth participation in planning, implementation and evaluation of the post 2015 development agenda.
- All member states to commit to strengthening national youth development and empowerment as per the post 2015 development goals, and to provide mutual support on sharing knowledge and practices to leverage the diversity of the Commonwealth to deliver on the goals.

Professionalisation of Youth Work

The Commonwealth Youth Forum recognises the important contribution of youth workers and volunteers in youth development, and endorses the Commonwealth Youth Programme's essential work to establish a Professional Code of Ethical Practice and further develop Youth Work Education and Training.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- The Commonwealth's on-going commitment to youth work education and professionalization.
- The importance and vital work of youth work practitioners to ensuring safer and healthier lives of young people.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to recognize and support Youth Work as a profession.
- The Commonwealth Youth Programme to facilitate the establishment of National Youth Workers' Associations.
- The Commonwealth Youth Programme to establish a pan-Commonwealth Youth Workers' Association as an umbrella structure.

Well-being and Economic Growth

Youth are becoming increasingly concerned about the social and environmental consequences of economic growth and the potential damage this can have on the well-being of a nation and its citizens.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- Member states often make decisions that grow their country's economy but lack consideration for sustainability and inclusivity.
- Collaboration between the private and public sectors is lacking in the Commonwealth.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- Equity, fairness and good governance are vital to any decision making at any level
- Partnerships between sectors are essential to enhancing the well-being of a community.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to recognise the importance that youth place on economic sustainability, inclusivity and human well being. Member states should ensure that economic and growth policies reflect these priorities.
- All member states, in consultation with the Commonwealth Business Council and Commonwealth Youth Council, to develop clear policies on public-private partnership that address economic sustainability, inclusivity and well-being based on existing policies and recommendations of previous forums and Councils.
- The Commonwealth Youth Council calls on the Commonwealth Business Council to work with youth to formulate youth friendly Corporate Social Responsibility policy and guidelines. We call on member states to encourage and support this initiative through promoting the importance of Corporate Social Responsibility.

Education - Fit for Purpose?

Youth of the Commonwealth recognise that educational outcomes for young people are directly related to the amount member states invest in quality education, skills based training and ICT.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- There is a disparity between member states of the Commonwealth in regards to access to education by all groups of young people.
- That education curricula of member states of the Commonwealth vary largely in regards to the inclusion and use of Technical, Vocational Educational Training (TVET).

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- Quality education based on values is important.
- Education that considers practical skills for all groups of young people is valuable and will benefit the economic needs of a country.
- Entrepreneurship is an excellent sustainable alternative for young people.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All Member states to commit to developing/reforming and implementing education policies within Member States to:
 - Improve the access of all categories of youth to quality and Values-Based Education, and ensure marketable and practical skills-building opportunities through accredited Technical, Vocational Educational Training (TVET) which builds on youth skills, especially to cater to the economic needs of the country.
 - Increase entrepreneurship education programmes to support both urban and especially rural communities.
- The Commonwealth Youth Council should commit to partnering with member states through inter-regional sub-committees and National Youth Councils, in order to:
 - Ensure inclusive and relevant educational and entrepreneurship provision to all young people of the Commonwealth, specifically focusing on girls, the differently abled, and persons with learning disabilities.
 - Develop practical systems to ensure quality and relevant curriculum development and delivery to include life skills, technical and vocational skills, leadership and social values.
 - Implement structures for monitoring the development, reformation and implementation of all Government educational programmes and policies (particularly scholarships, fellowships, internships, youth exchange programmes, academic research), with systems to also inform youth of these opportunities.
 - Provide Commonwealth youth oversight on quality standards for academic and technical education curriculum allowing for consistent accountability measures to ensure that all nations of the Commonwealth comply.

Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights

Sexuality and reproductive health rights are fundamental to the human experience; all women and men should be able to exercise these rights free from coercion and violence.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- Many young people in the Commonwealth do not have adequate access to information and services related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.
- There is a lack of involvement of marginalized young people in rural and isolated areas and LGBTIQ communities of young people in Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights programme planning and implementation.
- There is a lack of youth representation in the policy formulation process related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights of young people.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- Information and services related to sexual and reproductive health and rights is vitally important.
- Investment on young people's access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights information will enhance the well-being of the community.
- The inclusion of the LGBTIQ community and marginalised young people will ensure a culture of inclusivity and sustainability.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to increase investment in the creation and sharing of information and make available a database of resources on sexual and reproductive health and rights and concentrate the dissemination of these resources to youth.
- All member states to enforce laws that prohibit Gender Based Violence (GBV) and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM).
- The Commonwealth Youth Council to advocate for youth friendly health services in all member states.
- The Commonwealth Youth Council to identify and act upon opportunities for young people to be engaged and mobilised on sexual and reproductive health and rights through all possible mediums, especially social media

Gender Equality

Women and girls make up 70% of the world's poor, and are often the pillars of stability in communities, families and other social settings.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- Equality between genders should be evident in member government policies, the work of civil society organisations, and private sector approaches to eradicating gender discrimination.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to adopt quotas across all tiers of legislation with the aim to increase women's representation to between 30% to 50% in political and other decision-making institutions.
- All member states implement education programmes for young men and women that emphasize gender equality and the vital role of young women as key agents of national development.
- The Commonwealth Youth Council to advocate for comprehensive gender sensitization programmes which particularly address the harmful consequences of violence against women, men and children.

Generating Quality Youth Employment

Young people across the world face growing rates of unemployment, typically at higher rates than any other cohort in the world. Under-employment, un-fair working conditions and involuntary work can be attributed to a feeling of a lack of worth, social exclusion and vulnerability. The young people of the Commonwealth recognise the importance of skills

development, including vocational and technical skills training, and its potential to enhance their access to quality employment.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- More action needs to be taken by member states of the Commonwealth to seek options to create enabling environments for social entrepreneurship, focus attention on transitions from education into decent work and consider how policies need to reflect and address the vulnerable work situations young people find themselves in.
- Promotion of entrepreneurship as a sustainable solution for the increasing demand for employment is vital.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- An education system that is relevant will ensure the discharge of employable youth to the society.

The youth of the Commonwealth call upon:

- Member states to provide adequate fund matching for investment into start-ups.
- Member states to make bank loans more accessible for start-ups in order to grow and stimulate the economy.
- Member states to ensure education and learning curriculums that empower entrepreneurship and facilitate entrepreneurial thinking.
- Member states to promote tertiary education to include practical skills development, work placements and capacity building.
- Member states to enable students to receive academic recognition for internships, volunteering and relevant extra-curricular activities in order to increase their employability.

Reconciliation and Social Cohesion

Young people around the globe continue to seek and take opportunities to build a peaceful world. Moving towards global citizenship, having shared values and regenerating community efforts in ensuring mutual understanding and respect for each other are key priorities. Reconciliation is part of the pathway to social cohesion.

The youth of the Commonwealth note:

- That not all members of the Commonwealth have National Youth Councils.
- Reconciliation and social cohesion includes respecting the past and moving forward.

The youth of the Commonwealth believe:

- National Youth Councils are key to promoting reconciliation and social cohesion in member countries.
- Mutual understanding and respect are key values in the process of reconciliation and social cohesion.

The youth of the Commonwealth call on:

- All member states to continue to seek ways to increase capacity to deal with conflict through dialogue and collaborative action through the concepts of reconciliation and social cohesion.
- All member states to review their school curriculum and include topics of history, culture, citizenship, diversity, language and religion that promote reconciliation and social cohesion.
- All member states to partner with young people for development and implementation of reconciliation policies and programs.
- The Commonwealth Youth Council to advocate with each Commonwealth member state to establish a democratically elected National Youth Council that abides by Commonwealth values.
- All member states to support the CYC to build a youth-led working group to promote reconciliation & social cohesion, and to advocate for peace and unity in the Commonwealth, based on the Commonwealth values of democracy, development and diversity
- The Commonwealth Youth Council to establish an accessible database of best practice and policies on Reconciliation and Social Cohesion.
- All member states to place the existing Commonwealth report 'Civil Paths to Peace' at the forefront of all reconciliation & social cohesion endeavors through the meaningful pursuit and implementation of the report's recommendations, in order to reinforce the other recommendations of the CYC.

Conclusion

The delegates of the 9th Commonwealth Youth Forum welcome and encourage partnership between the Commonwealth Youth Council, Commonwealth Youth Programme, member states and Commonwealth civil society in moving forward towards an inclusive and sustainable future for young people.

Delegates elected the first Commonwealth Youth Council Executive Committee during this Forum and look forward to supporting and working with this committee in ensuring the recommendations from this Forum are taken forward with the full endorsement of the young people of the Commonwealth.