

**Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting**  
**Republic of Maldives**  
**10-12 May 1992**  
**Concluding Statement**

1. Delegates from 39 countries, including young representatives constituting the Youth Caucus and covering all regions of the Commonwealth, met in the Republic of Maldives, for the first Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting. Twenty-nine delegations were led by ministers. The Hon Abdulla Jameel, Minister in charge of Youth Affairs, Republic of Maldives, was in the chair. The discussions explored ways in which Ministries of Youth could be strengthened and the effectiveness of youth literacy and community service schemes improved.

### **Strengthening Ministries of Youth**

2. Ministers first considered ways to strengthen the work of the unit within government - most commonly a Ministry of Youth - that is responsible for youth affairs. They expressed concern that, though young people make a major input into the development of their nations and contribute a significant proportion of the total population, Ministries of Youth commonly have very junior roles in government. They sought ways to remedy that anomaly.

3. Ministers were aware that a number of development failures could be attributed to the inability of governments to take sufficient account of the views of young people. They sought to develop a policy perspective and organisational arrangements which could avoid this situation occurring in the future.

### **The Appropriate Policy Advice and Programme Mix**

4. The meeting considered whether a Ministry of Youth's resources should be concentrated only on policy formulation and advice, or whether they should also be devoted to the delivery of services and programmes. While recognising that in some instances a Ministry might focus solely on a policy development and advice role, most countries felt that the best policies were developed when there was a dear connection to some form of programme experience and a capacity for strategic intervention.

5. The policy advice component of the Ministry of Youth's work should focus on the development of coherent youth policies based on wide ranging consultation with young people and active research on youth issues. Ministries of Youth must be equipped to play a leadership role in advocating the youth perspective on important development issues to the central planning and financial management mechanisms of government and the major spending departments. Cabinet status, high political commitment and appropriate professional capability were necessary if this leadership role was to be discharged effectively.

6. The programme work should be demand, not supply, driven, responsive to priority youth needs in areas such as unemployment, drug and substance abuse, literacy, young women and development and others in accordance with countries' individual circumstances. The primary task would be to work with young people who have not found their place within mainstream services and are vulnerable and at risk of social rejection. The Ministry of Youth should develop and implement innovative programmes in such cases.

### **Locating the Ministry of Youth within Government**

7. Recognising the varied circumstances of countries, Ministers defined a set of key influences which would help each country to determine the most appropriate location for Ministries of Youth.

(a) Policy Orientation

The primary concerns of the Ministry/Department of Youth would indicate its most appropriate place within government. For example, if the major youth concern for government action is employment then its combination with employment as the Ministry of Youth and Employment would be appropriate. However, since there are broader concerns, independent status might be more appropriate.

(b) Resources

It is important that the youth function should be given sufficient resources to meet its needs.

(c) Link to Youth

It is vital that the location of the Ministry or Department allows it to be able to establish youth needs, communicate openly and effectively with young people, and facilitate the participation of young people in its policy formulation and service delivery roles.

(d) Links to other Services

The site of the Ministry within government should also give access to planning and service delivery undertaken by other Ministries or Departments which work with young people on their sectoral remits.

(e) Access to Central Planning and Financial Management Decisions

As so many national planning and macro-economic management decisions made by governments have an effect on young people, and can, in one go, detrimentally affect the work of youth Ministries, it is vital that the youth perspective is introduced into these decision-making fora.

**Involving Young People In Central Decision-making Roles**

8. Ministries of Youth often face a central contradiction. Whilst arguing for the greater involvement of young people in community life, they are themselves managed by people outside the youth age range. Ministers agreed that insufficient attention had been given to creative ways of increasing the access of young people to planning fora within Ministries of Youth. There is need for a standing committee with young people represented on it to advise Ministries of Youth on a regular basis.

9. There are two aspects to this problem. Attention needs to be given to both the involvement of young people in paid positions within the ministry and to finding mechanisms for genuine consultation between the ministry and young people in such a way that the views of the latter substantially influence the former.

**A Strong, Independent, National Youth Voice**

10. Ministers considered it vital to the development of both young people and their countries that a strong independent, national youth organisation or platform be established in each country. Such an organisation should respect two, sometimes contradictory, principles. First, the need to respect the traditional cultural ways of the country concerned. Second, the need to be relevant to the desires, needs, and situation of young people within that country. It should reflect the views of the range of young people in any national setting, with particular attention paid to unorganised youth.

11. This organisation should focus on two roles - advocacy of the perspective of young people on development and representation of their interest to governments.

12. The young people in the organisation need to be both accountable to and representative of their peers.

## **Youth and Community Service**

13. Ministers gave special attention to discussing schemes which enable young people to work together to tackle problems of community concern. They agreed that young people have a unique contribution to make to national and community development by virtue of their enthusiasm, goodwill and youthful energy.

14. In their discussions on the relative merits of different approaches and styles of initiating and running such schemes, ministers agreed that no blueprint for success existed, but that all youth community service programmes must be rooted in, and sensitive to, local cultural traditions.

15. They further agreed that, whilst programmes should always seek to bring benefits - in terms of increased self-confidence, skills acquisition, awareness of society and its problems- to participants, it was a prerequisite that any programme

of community service must, in order to maintain its credibility, bring real benefit and enrichment to the people it purports to help.

16. In discussing the relative merits of voluntary and compulsory schemes, Ministers agreed that wherever possible such schemes should concentrate on engaging willing young participants whose contribution would therefore be given enthusiastically. There were, however, certain situations in which a form of compulsory service might be considered, including the use of community service as a component of a justice system involving treatment within the community or where young offenders were encouraged to make recompense for their crimes through service in the community. Militaristic programmes of community service were not favoured.

17. The important part played in national and community development by NGOs was recognised and ministers acknowledged the crucial role which such organisations could play in ensuring that youth community service initiatives tackled local problems competently and sensitively.

18. In considering the role which CYP should play in promoting youth community service, it was agreed that CYP should continue to develop and share its expertise in this field, in particular, through facilitating exchanges of young people between member countries through carefully planned programmes. Such programmes should draw on the experience of other agencies and should be organised so as to enable young people to tackle needs within CYP's own priority areas, as enunciated by the Review of CYP's activities, as well as to broaden the perspectives of the young participants.

19. The attention of ministers was drawn to the decisions made by the countries of the Asia region to make available seed funding on a regional basis, supplemented by in-country hospitality and support, to enable young people to work together on special regional projects. CYP was asked to consider replicating this initiative in other regions across the Commonwealth.

## **Youth and Literacy**

20. Ministers discussed the urgent and complex problem of illiteracy, its impact on national development and the manner in which different countries were seeking to tackle it through a variety of special programmes. They paid particular attention to the double role of young people - as illiterates/learners and as teachers/ contributors- and made a series of operational recommendations addressed to Youth Ministries/Departments and the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

### **Youth as Illiterates/Learners**

21. Ministers considered that the goal "Literacy for all by the Year 2000" could be approached by youth organisations by a wide-spread mounting of non-formal programmes. Their success would depend however on linking the efforts of such organisations with government measures.

### **Youth as Teachers/Contributors**

22. Young people, including those in their early teens have demonstrated their ability to be a dynamic, massive and insightful force for literacy in both instructional and back-stopping roles. For their participation to be as sustained and productive as possible requires adult organizers to provide pre-service training and in-service support (pedagogical, material and psychological), and to be sensitive to the insights and criticism of youth literacy workers.

23. Comparative assessments of degrees of cost-effectiveness of different patterns of youth mobilisation for literacy work would be of great use to decision makers in governmental and non-governmental frameworks.

### **Governments, CYP and Literacy**

24. The meeting felt that governmental structures with central responsibility for youth should maintain or increase - as appropriate - their action to involve young people in literacy work both as learners and as teachers/ contributors.

25. This should be done in close alliance both with other relevant ministries / departments (particularly the Ministry of Education) and with non-governmental bodies of and for youth of various kinds and at different levels, involving young people as far as possible in the planning as well as implementation stages.

26. Youth involvement in literacy, as defined above, should continue to be a main priority area under CYP's 1992-95 Work Programme and Plan of Expenditure, with activities at both the Pan-Commonwealth and the region-specific levels.

27. Support should in particular be provided for initiatives which, in addition to providing literacy skills as such, focus on such youth concerns as the environment, self-employment, drugs, AIDS, women 's rights and cultural identity.

28. Forms of intervention should include support for programme design training, production of promotional and pedagogical materials, development and application of evaluation materials, and broadly international exchange of realistic information about youth's involvement .

29. Systematic, durable and innovative cooperation should be established to this end with the other relevant international agencies, such as UNESCO.

## **CYP 1990- 1992**

30. Ministers commended the work done by CYP since the Review in 1990. The Programme had grown in effectiveness as a result of its more focused approach on specific pan-Commonwealth and regional priorities. The generous support from external donors which had enabled CYP to enlarge its work programme was acknowledged.

31. Appreciation was recorded of the methods which had been established to enhance national youth development, including the recently introduced internship scheme and the creation of networks of young people now operating in several priority areas.

32. Five Commonwealth Youth Service Awards for 1992 were made to youth projects from Guyana, Hong Kong, Kenya, New Zealand and Singapore. It was noted that the Award Scheme had taken its place as a major mechanism for the recognition of young people's endeavours.

## **CYP's Future Work**

33. The meeting approved a programme of work for CYP which would further enhance its activities within the six pan-Commonwealth priority areas and agreed to the establishment of new regional priorities.

34. In order to enable the programme to carry out its programme of work for 1992- 1995 the meeting approved the budgets increasing from £1.7 million to £1.9 million during the three years 1992-95. Support from governments was expressed by way of appropriate pledges. The meeting noted that the budgets would be further supported by sources of external funding.

35. Ministers expressed their continued confidence in CYP, believing that the Programme would be strengthened in the coming triennium as a result of the decisions taken by the Meeting.

36. Ministers expressed their gratitude and appreciation to the Government and people of Maldives for the excellent arrangements made for the meeting and the warm hospitality extended to them. They agreed to meet again in three years' time in the Caribbean region, at a venue to be announced later.

*Male'*  
*Republic of Maldives*  
*12th May 1992*