

**COMMONWEALTH YOUTH MINISTERS MEETING
17-19 MAY 1995, PORT OF SPAIN, TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO**

COMMUNIQUE

Investing In Tomorrow's Commonwealth: Youth Towards The Year 2000

INTRODUCTION

1. The Second Meeting of Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs was held in Port of Spain from 17-19 May 1995. Forty-one Commonwealth countries were represented. The Meeting was opened by the Prime Minister of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Hon Patrick Manning, and chaired by the Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs, Hon Mrs E Jean Pierre.

2. The special theme for the Ministers' deliberations was "Investing in Tomorrow's Commonwealth: Youth Towards the Year 2000". Ministers focused on a series of detailed and practical areas for action in youth development, endorsing a menu of options from which packages could be adopted by individual governments to address the specific needs and problems faced by young women and men in each of their countries. They emphasised the fundamental importance of establishing and reinforcing partnerships for development between governments and their young people, between the different areas of government which have an impact on youth, between governments and the Commonwealth Secretariat, between governments and the private sector, between member countries themselves and between member countries of the Commonwealth and the global community. Ministers stressed the value of Commonwealth co-operation in this process, noting the shared heritage and informal arrangements which promote frank dialogue and concerted actions to preserve the values and achieve the objectives upon which the Commonwealth is based.

3. Ministers agreed that the concepts of economic development and social progress were about each generation being sustainably better off than its predecessor. Ministers stressed the pivotal importance of youth in this process, highlighting that young people had a unique contribution to make to national development due to their energy, enthusiasm, resilience and ability to inject a fresh perspective on issues. They could also be instrumental in bringing better balanced cultural, economic, humanistic and social, moral and ethical values to families and societies of the future. Ministers considered that to achieve this potential, young men and women needed a supportive and informative environment to move successfully from the dependence of childhood to the autonomy and responsibility of adulthood. Ministers saw a need to develop policies and invest in programmes which provided young men and women with the opportunities to participate fully in the nation's economic and social development through empowering them and enhancing their human resource development. Ministers noted that whilst the necessary investment may seem high in the short term, the long-term costs of not doing so would be very much larger.

4. Ministers acknowledged the overriding and all-embracing concept of youth empowerment which included equity, access to resources and participation in decision-making. For practical purposes, Ministers recommended three interrelated strategic areas for action- Youth Empowerment, National Youth Policy Development and Human Resource Development for Young Men and Women- and endorsed them as central pillars of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's (CYP) Strategic Plan to the year 2000.

Youth Empowerment

5. Ministers stressed that investing in young people enabled them to fulfil their potential, both as individuals and as a force in national development. They saw youth empowerment as a new guiding concept in this process. Ministers emphasised that empowerment meant more than mere participation which, in the past, had often been manifest in token consultation without any effective embodiment of youth views and concerns in policies, programmes and projects. They considered that pursuing the objective of youth empowerment gave young people the maximum opportunity to contribute to the economic, social and cultural advancement of their families and countries and to gain self-fulfilment. Ministers also noted that, in claiming their rights, young people should acknowledge their responsibilities.

6. For practical purposes, Ministers suggested that at the national level, appropriate structures and process should be supported to allow government decision-makers to identify the views and concerns of young women and men and, with them, develop relevant policies, programmes and remedial action. Ministers noted with satisfaction, proposals to strengthen the Commonwealth Youth Forum and Youth Caucus. They cited this action as a good example of how to improve youth participation at the pan-Commonwealth level.

7. Deep concern was expressed by Ministers that ever increasing numbers of young men and women, including refugees, who find themselves in a vicious cycle of poverty, powerlessness and vulnerability. For these young people, and especially young women, the provision of resources and services - education, health, housing, sanitation, support services and specific youth programmes - was limited. Ministers noted that this was a major factor in the increasing trend of migration of young people from rural to urban areas, which placed added pressures on existing facilities and exacerbated the already deteriorating situation of urban youth. For this latter group, Ministers called for urgent action to resolve the problems of street children, the exploitation of young women and men by adults, drug abuse, crime and violence and declining levels of education and health which all prevented access to positive development opportunities. Ministers recognised that many of the problems faced by young people today could be traced to the breakdown of the family and stressed the need to strengthen family structures.

8. Ministers deplored the fact that young women's participation in society continued to be severely restricted in most countries of the Commonwealth. Ministers expressed concern about the increasing rate of unintended teenage pregnancies in many countries and emphasised the need for policies and programmes to resolve this problem. Ministers also noted that, in some countries, young women had lower access to education and employment and were excluded from decision-making and management. Further, they were more vulnerable to physical and sexual abuse and health hazards (such as malnutrition, maternal death, HIV/AIDS and STDs), situations exacerbated by their lack of information, status and power. Ministers pointed out that young women would only gain equitable access to resources and full, effective participation in decision-making when gender issues were made explicit in national youth policies and programmes. This applied particularly in terms of the establishment and operations of structures such as National Youth Councils. They therefore called for measures to redress these existing gender inequalities.

9. Serious concern was expressed by Ministers that young people experienced a disproportionate burden of unemployment, with young women, school leavers and drop-outs being particularly vulnerable. Across the Commonwealth youth accounted for about 25 to 30 per cent of the total labour force and faced unemployment rates, mostly in the range of 30-50 per cent. Young women often had unemployment rates twice those of their male peers.

10. Among the urgent actions required to address youth unemployment, Ministers stressed the need for a people-centred macroeconomic policy framework which focused on employment,

poverty reduction and social integration. They pointed to credit availability, skills and management training, marketing, investment, savings and technology transfer as being particularly important. They announced the launch of a new initiative by the CYP to provide a package of measures which, at least in part, addressed these needs. The Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI) would enable young people, ineligible for credit through commercial loans, to set up small-scale enterprises. The scheme, to be operated by local NGOs contracted to the CYP, would be closely monitored by the CYP Regional Centres and the pan-Commonwealth office. The CYCI would specifically target disadvantaged groups of young women and men who would be empowered through their establishing self-employment. The package of assistance offered would include credit and savings components vocational skills and enterprise management training and peer counselling services ministers expressed the view that with success of the pilot schemes, and the collaboration of other development agencies, the private sector and foundations providing resources and finances for the revolving funds, there would be good prospects for the CYCI being replicated and having a multiplier effect over time and contributing towards the reduction of youth unemployment.

Development of National Youth Policy and Structures

11. Ministers were concerned that only 17 out of the 51 Commonwealth member countries had formal and specific national youth policies. They considered such policies to be essential if governments were to be able to adequately address the present problems and concerns facing young women and men in society. Ministers urged that all member governments should establish effective National Youth Policies by the year 2000. '

12. Ministers noted that a vital component of youth policy development was the mainstreaming of youth issues into other sectoral, social and macroeconomic policies, pointing out that, often, these other policies could exert a greater impact on the opportunities, welfare and livelihoods of young men and women than youth policies themselves. In this regard, Ministers called for concerted efforts by all ministries and departments of government to promote responses to youth needs, involving the mainstreaming of youth concerns in other sectoral policies and programmes. To facilitate this, Ministers recommended that mechanisms such as policy formulation task forces be established as a means of formalising the consultative process among the relevant arms of government, NGOs and young people. Ministers recognised the desirability of legislation which would clearly state and protect the rights of youth. It was also agreed that young men and women should actively participate in the development and implementation of national youth policies.

13. In order to implement appropriate youth development policies, effective structures were required. Ministers expressed regret that, in many countries, the lack of influence, resources and status experienced by youth ministries was still the main barrier to youth policy development. They pointed out that the majority of Commonwealth government structures also associated youth affairs with a multiplicity of other, sometimes unrelated, portfolios. Ministers saw that this could result in confused priority-setting and competing demands for scarce resources, including the time which ministry staff could allocate for youth-oriented policy and programme activities.

14. In implementing these policies, Ministers emphasised that governments should ensure that mechanisms were set up for their regular review, fine-tuning and evaluation in order to assure the continued relevance of youth policies and programmes.

Human Resource Development For Young Men And Women

15. Ministers pointed out that young men and women constituted an increasing proportion of the populations of Commonwealth developing countries and were a major asset in generating the

economic and social advancement of nations. They advocated that in order to achieve sustainable gains in overall development, human resource development (HRD) strategies must be implemented which explicitly targeted young people and addressed their specific needs. Ministers stressed the importance of recognising that the youth of today were the leaders, decision-makers, businessmen and women and parents of tomorrow and their success in these capacities was entirely dependent on current investments in their human resource potential.

16. In terms of basic education, Ministers were deeply concerned that approximately 50 per cent of children who entered primary education dropped out before acquiring a permanent state of literacy and that young women and girls were especially likely to drop out of school. In addition, Ministers noted that illiteracy rates among young women were much higher in the rural areas than in the urban sectors of developing countries. They pointed out that poor levels of educational achievement were observed to result from high pupil:teacher ratios, a severe lack of educational facilities, a lack of trained teachers and limited school teaching resources, highlighting that class sizes of 40-64 pupils per teacher had been reported in parts of the Commonwealth. Further concern was expressed that levels of functional literacy were low in some parts of the Commonwealth. Ministers called for urgent and comprehensive remedial action in these areas.

17. Ministers noted that effective HRD strategies embodied both economic and social aspects. They involved elements which aimed to build up a nation's stock of human capital as well as those which improved the quality of life. In this way, HRD was vital to the empowerment of youth. Ministers pointed out that it provided a knowledge, skills and value base for participation in decision-making, establishing choice and accessing and managing resources.

18. Ministers recognised the particular emphasis placed by Commonwealth Heads of Government on HRD at their Meetings in 1991 and 1993, recalling the recommendations from the report of a Commonwealth Working Group on Human Resource Development, Foundation for the Future. They indicated that the principal objective of youth HRD was to foster the development of knowledge, skills, values and understanding which could benefit young men and women and the societies in which they lived. They agreed that HRD should involve a wide range of learning activities which were designed and co-ordinated to support the development of youth's human potential.

19. Ministers acknowledged that developing countries were undergoing radical changes, with the implementation of economic and social adjustment programmes and moves toward more open economies. They recognised that the stresses and competitive pressures placed on societies by these events were most keenly felt by vulnerable groups, such as the poor, youth and women. Whilst Ministers agreed that the ability to make rational and economic decisions was important for young women and men they recommended that this needed to be balanced by HRD strategies for youth which reinforced and preserved the humanistic and cultural values of communities.

20. In this context, Ministers noted with satisfaction that a central tenet in the vision of the CYP was to work towards developing a society where young women and men were empowered to develop their potential, creativity and skills as productive and dynamic members of society. They suggested that appropriate, broadly-based and flexible youth HRD strategies were key components in the fulfilment of that objective. They also recognised that the implementation of such strategies could only be effected through the joint and collaborative endeavours of national governments, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), development agencies and the private sector.

21. Ministers recommended that, in order to be effective, an HRD strategy for youth should be sustainable, reflect the principle of empowering young women and men and be informed by gender planning. They also noted that cost-effectiveness in the delivery of HRD programmes could be

improved by using more flexible, non-traditional learning modes, such as distance learning. They commended the work of the CYP in this regard and welcomed the proposed collaboration with the Commonwealth of Learning (COL) in this process.

22. Ministers noted the review of CYP HRD activities, considered by the CYP Committee of Management in May 1994, which indicated that the diverse and changing circumstances in the Commonwealth required a refocusing of effort to provide an inward evaluation and a more strategic, integrated and cost-effective programme. They endorsed the revised strategy, addressing the needs of specific groups of young women and men, targeted from a broader base of the youth population. Ministers agreed with the CYP focus on four important target groups which included: young women and men involved in youth development; youth taking on leadership positions in groups; front-line youth workers, including professional groups such as social workers, teachers, health workers, police officers or parents, whose activities have a significant impact on young men and women; and managers and policy-makers involved in youth development. In relation to the two latter groups, CYP's role was to facilitate their understanding of youth issues and concerns

23. Express their deep concern about the prevalence of HIV/AIDS and STDs among young people, Ministers welcomed the CYP's success with HIV/AIDS networks in Africa and called for their replication and extension to other regions of the Commonwealth. They called for immediate action in the area of health education and counselling as ways of reducing the incidence HIV/AIDS, STDs and other preventable diseases among young women and men.

24. Commonwealth Youth Ministers welcomed the participation of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) Committee on Co-operation through Sport in the 1995 Youth Ministers Meeting and expressed their strong support for the Committee's work. They found t9ft'CHOGM Committee's submission on sport and development to be particularly useful. t //

25. Sport indisputably played a fundamental role in individual, social and national development. Ministers encouraged governments to invest in sport and physical education and applauded the efforts of Commonwealth countries which have mounted assistance programmes in the areas of sport and physical education. Ministers recognised the need for additional recreational facilities and cultural activities in member countries. It was hoped that these programmes would be expanded to include other countries. Ministers urged all Commonwealth governments, both unilaterally and through the Commonwealth Secretariat, to press for the inclusion of sport and physical education programmes, particularly those involving grassroots youth development, in bilateral and multilateral Official Development Assistance programmes. Ministers commended the work which the Commonwealth Secretariat had done in the area of sport and development and called for these efforts to continue and for adequate resources to be provided. Youth Ministers also accorded full marks to the hosting of the 1994 Commonwealth Games in Victoria, Canada. They commended the Commonwealth Games Federation for its role in overseeing the Games and endorsed the recommendation of CHOGM that governments maintained and if possible increased their support to the Federation.

26. Commonwealth Youth Ministers concluded that sport was an integral part of building the future Commonwealth, promoting Commonwealth principles such as gender equality, non-discrimination and fair play, and ensuring their relevance to future generations. It was in this context and in the light of the above findings that Ministers strongly recommended that the Auckland CHOGM renewed the mandate of the CHOGM Committee on Co-operation through Sport. Youth Ministers also agreed that sport was an inexpensive, readily-accessible and largely untapped means of furthering CYMM objectives, and invited the Committee to take part in future ministerial meetings. Furthermore, in keeping with CHOGM's request that sport be integrated into other

Commonwealth programmes, Ministers agreed that a formal linkage should be established between the CHOGM Committee and CYP, and that the Committee should be given an observer status at CYP meetings.

27. Ministers agreed to accept the invitations of the Malaysian Government to meet in 1998 and of the Solomon Islands to meet in 2000.