

**Chair's Summary Conclusions and Recommendations**  
Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials Meeting (Africa Region)  
Accra, Ghana  
28 -31 October 2019

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The Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials meeting, Africa Region, was held in Accra, Ghana from the 28-31 October 2019 under the theme: *Resourcing and Financing Youth Development: Empowering Our Youth*.

The meeting was attended by The Rt. Hon. Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and Hon. Minister Florence N Kiyingi, Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs, Uganda, Chair of the Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Taskforce. The meeting was chaired by Ghana's Deputy Minister for Youth and Sports, Hon. Perry Curtis Okudzeto.

The meeting brought together senior officials responsible for youth, national youth leaders, youth workers, academics, key regional stakeholders from across the region. Seventeen (17) Commonwealth member countries were represented at the meeting.<sup>1</sup> Representatives from the African Union (AU), the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Worker Associations (CAYWA), the Commonwealth Students' Association (CSA) and Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work (CHEC4YW) were also in attendance.

The meeting provided an opportunity to track the progress made since the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting, focus on emerging national and regional youth development issues and identify priorities for implementation by 2021.

This was the first Senior Officials meeting held in the region since the 9<sup>th</sup> Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM) held in Kampala, Uganda in 2017.

1. In her welcoming remarks, Pamella McLaren the Acting Senior Director of Economic, Youth, and Sustainable Development, commented on the socio-economic and demographic realities of young people in the region and recalled the key ministerial and CHOGM mandates on youth employment, youth mainstreaming and youth inclusion in decision making. Africa being a continent with a growing youth population, she advised senior officials and stakeholders to focus on developing evidence based youth policies leveraging the support of the National Statistical Offices in the process. She celebrated the ongoing

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<sup>1</sup> Botswana, Cameroon, The Gambia, Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Seychelles, Sierra Leone, South Africa, United Republic of Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia.

partnership between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the African Union on youth development, and identified the recent project on the Status of African Youth Report (SoAYR) and the production of the **Policy Brief: Africa's Future Youth and the Data Defining Their Lives** as tangible products from the partnership.

2. The meeting received presentations and an update on the Commonwealth's governance arrangements since 2017 including the Secretariat's efforts to mainstream youth issues and integrate youth development as part of a new Social Policy Development section.
3. The participants discussed strategies to enhance communication and cooperation between the Secretariat, member governments and stakeholders on CYP related work priorities. Delegations were encouraged to designate national Commonwealth youth focal points to enhance the cooperation and coordination.
4. The meeting identified the need for greater regional presence from the Commonwealth Secretariat, in light of the closure of the CYP Regional Centres in 2013. Some member states identified the recent gaps in alignment to Commonwealth youth policy priorities as a consequence of the centres' closure.
5. The meeting took note of the four Commonwealth youth policy priorities as outlined in the Commonwealth Secretariat's Strategic Plan and Delivery Plan: support for evidence based and mainstreamed youth policy formulation, youth participation, youth work professionalization and youth entrepreneurship and employment.
6. Participants recommended greater focus within the existing programme for interventions on the future of work including the growing digital economy and the introduction of new technology including Artificial Intelligence.
7. Participants encouraged greater cooperation between the African Union and the Commonwealth Secretariat on youth entrepreneurship and the active engagement of youth entrepreneurs through initiatives such as the Commonwealth Alliance for Young Entrepreneurs (CAYE).
8. The meeting took note of the Commonwealth Secretariat's progress report against Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) and CYMM mandates and welcomed the new toolkits and resource publications developed, in keeping with the priorities identified. In particular, the meeting received the Policy Guide on Youth Entrepreneurship, the Youth Mainstreaming Policy Guide, the Global Youth Development Index and the Baseline Study on Youth Work in the Commonwealth.

9. Participants were encouraged to take note of the upcoming youth or related policy meetings including the Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) in Rwanda in June 2020, the Commonwealth Sports Ministers Meeting in July 2020, the Commonwealth Education Ministers Meeting in Kenya 2021 and the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Jamaica in 2021.
10. The meeting received a report from the AU on the youth development landscape in Africa and on the youth policy framework for AU member states. Referencing the African Union Demographic Dividend (AUDD) Roadmap the youth policy priorities discussed under the four pillars of: Employment and Entrepreneurship, Education and Skills Development, Health and Wellbeing and Rights, Governance and Empowerment.
11. The meeting saw the launch of the **Policy Brief: Africa's Future - Youth and the Data Defining Their Lives**; a product of the collaboration between the Commonwealth Secretariat and the African Union in enhancing the evidence base for youth policy making and programming.
12. The meeting supported the recommendations including: the development of an African Youth Development Index drawing on the experience of the Global Youth Development Index; the expansion of dissemination of existing data disaggregated at country levels; prioritization of data collection on youth development indicators and greater coordination between National Statistical Offices and the youth departments.
13. The meeting welcomed the Africa Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) agreement and encouraged accelerated action on regional cooperation including urgent action on free movement of people and intra-African trade. The meeting acknowledged the opportunities AfCFTA holds for boosting youth employment, and entrepreneurship. Participants identified the need to mainstream youth into key areas such as trade and industry. Participants also took note of the Commonwealth's trade connectivity agenda and requested clear strategies to ensure young people were benefiting from the intra-Commonwealth trade opportunities identified.
14. Participants commended the AU and the Commonwealth Secretariat for partnering on common priorities and encouraged other development institutions to work together leveraging their knowledge and resources to enhance youth development and participation at national levels.

15. The Meeting took note of the progress made against agreed mandates and commitments in relation to each country's specific needs and conditions. The participants welcomed the sharing of country specific reports, strategies and initiatives and called for more frequent regional opportunities to deepen cooperation and knowledge sharing on Commonwealth youth policy actions.
16. The Meeting recognised the work, value and contribution from the Commonwealth organisations including the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC), the Commonwealth Students Association (CSA), Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Work Associations (CAYWA). Participants welcomed the progress made since 2017 but recommended greater support for these institutions at a national level. The meeting took note of the significant challenges faced by the Commonwealth youth bodies, particularly a lack of funding and political support at the national level.
17. The meeting acknowledged the current challenges of the Pan African Youth Union, including funding constraints for National Youth Councils, ineffective delivery of youth led advocacy, issues related to the legal and political status of youth councils, as well as the need for effective youth leadership. The meeting took note of the steps to rebuild the PYU and requested continued support from institutions such as, the Commonwealth Secretariat in the process.
18. The meeting received technical presentations from the Commonwealth Secretariat on youth work professionalization and took note of the policy options and strategies available to member states to promote and support youth work as a profession at the national level working in partnership with CAYWA and the Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work.
19. The meeting welcomed presentations from the Government of Ghana's Youth Employment Agency (YEA) and the National Entrepreneurship and Innovation Plan (NEIP). Senior officials commended the Government on the progress made in tackling youth unemployment issues and encouraged further opportunities to exchange ideas on these types of programmes and initiatives.
20. Participants took note of the presentation made on youth mainstreaming and youth participation. Delegates made several observations on the importance of
21. youth representation and participation in governance through youth mainstreaming and other strategies. Senior officials welcomed the development of the various toolkits, manuals and guides to support member states in their youth development programmes and policy.

22. Three parallel caucus meetings were held to discuss the current regional youth development issues, challenges and opportunities. Senior officials, youth leaders and stakeholders produced action plans with recommended policy options to be delivered by 2021 in keeping with the Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Taskforce guidance. The Governments of Uganda and Ghana will present the regional progress report and action plans at the next Commonwealth Youth Ministerial Taskforce Meeting on behalf of the member states.
23. In the senior official's caucus meeting, the participants identified the changing political, economic, social and technology dynamics in the region and shared context specific initiatives to address the regional youth challenges and leverage the regional opportunities by 2021, in keeping with the CYMM mandates.
24. The senior officials suggested policy recommendations to respond to their common challenges including: ensuring a robust legal and regulatory enabling environment for youth development and institutional strengthening to effectively implement youth policy. The senior officials identified the politicization of the youth work as one of the threats to the sector and committed to advocating for meaningful change from Commonwealth leaders on this issue.
25. The senior officials also identified the need for greater coordination at the ministerial level to reduce duplication and enhance the better use of human and financial resources targeting young people. They agreed to work to achieve greater policy coherence at the local or provincial levels to enhance service delivery and support to young people.
26. The senior officials agreed to advocate for greater government investments in Sexual Reproductive Health Rights and Gender Based Violence, centres of excellence in innovation, incubation and start up hubs, where young people can access services to enhance employability and other life skills. They also agreed to share good practices of where governments were investing in innovative government led employment initiatives such as the provision of 30% of all Government procurements reserved for young people and persons with disabilities in Kenya.
27. The improvements in technology and the use of creative industries on the continent was identified as areas for greater investment and support by governments by 2021. Senior officials agreed to support good practices such as Rwanda's Youth Connekt Africa programme and work to scale these up by 2021.

28. The youth leaders recommended governments to set aside 40% of all available leadership positions across all governance structures for young leaders and called for member states to be deliberate in establishing funds for national youth councils and national youth parliaments for effective youth participation and advocacy in keeping with the 2018 Commonwealth Heads of Government recommendation.
29. The youth leaders appealed to government representatives to enhance advocacy campaign against drug and substance abuse as well as child marriage and recommended governments to accelerate efforts to make internet affordable and accessible to minimise the digital divide. They requested that the relevant government departments accelerate the review of educational curricula, to include industry relevant knowledge and skills that will address the youth employability challenges in member states.
30. Participants in the stakeholders' caucus recommended the establishment of national youth workers' associations at country level to support the professional recognition of youth development practitioners by 2020. They also recommended the development of flexible entry requirements for youth work qualifications to encourage more youth workers to undertake educational or capacity building programmes by 2021.
31. Youth development practitioners recommended that youth work guidelines should be shared with regional inter-governmental bodies such as the African Union and Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to support the professionalization of youth work.
32. The stakeholders' caucus called for the formalisation of a policy on mobility and migration of youth workers for free flow of youth work professionals, to optimize utilisation of knowledge and skills transfer in the youth development sector by 2021.
33. In her closing remarks the Secretary-General of the Commonwealth challenged meeting participants to return to their various countries with a renewed commitment to tackling youth development issues and challenges in order to fulfil the mandates given by Ministers and Heads by 2021.
34. She reiterated the Commonwealth's commitment for the next ten years of working to achieve an accelerated implementation of social, environmental and economic progress.
35. The delegations thanked the Government and people of The Republic of Ghana for hosting the meeting.