

Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials Meeting (Asia Region)
Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam, 27-29 August 2019
Summary Conclusions and Recommendations

The Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials Meeting (Asia Region) was held in Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam from 27th – 29th August 2019, under the theme *Resourcing and Financing Youth Development: Empowering Young People*. The opening ceremony was attended by The Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth and The Honourable Major General (R) Dato Paduka Seri Haji Aminuddin Ihsan bin POKSM DSP Haji Abidin, Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei Darussalam. The meeting was chaired by the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport of Brunei Darussalam, Pengiran Mohammad Amirrizal bin Pengiran Haji Mahmud and attended by senior government officials, national youth leaders, representatives of higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as other relevant stakeholders from the seven¹ (7) Commonwealth member states in the Asia region. Representatives from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Asian Development Bank (ADB) as well as representatives from 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.

This was the first Senior Officials meeting held in the region since the 9th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting held in Kampala, Uganda in 2017.

1. In her welcoming remarks, The Rt. Hon Patricia Scotland QC, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth recalled the mandates given by Youth Ministers and Heads to mainstream youth development into development planning, prioritising youth participation in decision making as well as investing more human and financial resources in youth development to achieve inclusive, equitable and sustainable development for present and future generations.
2. The Secretary-General emphasized that despite the global economic downturn and uncertainty, it was important for governments and stakeholders to support the youth sector and youth-specific programmes through funding and human resource development strategies relying on empirical evidence to demonstrate positive results for the young people and society both in the short and long terms.
3. The Secretary-General launched the Commonwealth Youth Awards for Excellence 2020 and called for increased regional applications for the Awards.
4. Commonwealth Youth Work Week 2019 was also launched during the opening ceremony. Commonwealth Youth Work Week will run from the 4th-10th November 2019 under the theme: Youth Work in Action. The Secretary-General called on all member states to celebrate the role and contribution of youth workers, practitioners and stakeholders. A dedicated webpage with youth work week resources and publications is available for member states and stakeholders.

¹ People's Republic of Bangladesh, Brunei Darussalam, Republic of India, Malaysia, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, Republic of Singapore and Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

5. 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 meetings to deepen cooperation and knowledge sharing on Commonwealth youth policy actions.
6. The participants of the meeting also took note of the various country-specific challenges and opportunities in implementing youth policies in the region. In particular, participants raised the challenge of coordinating national youth development initiatives in some member states and identified the need to implement programmes at scale to meet the needs of large youth populations in the region. Against these challenges, the meeting acknowledged that the role and function of the Ministry or Department of Youth could be better supported or strengthened where appropriate, to coordinate national youth policy implementation, reducing duplication and enhancing policy coherence across various government ministries and sectors.
7. Senior officials also emphasized the importance of designing and implementing evidence-based strategies and programmes, which can be achieved through a more effective use of data and deeper collaboration with research centres and universities.
8. The meeting took note of the Commonwealth Secretariat progress report against 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 Youth Development Index and the Baseline Study on Youth Work in the Commonwealth.
9. The Meeting acknowledged the need for greater regional presence from the Commonwealth, in light of the closure of the CYP Regional Centre in 2013. Some member states identified the gaps in alignment to Commonwealth youth policy priorities as a consequence of the centres closure.
10. Senior officials took note of the High Level Policy Paper on the Commonwealth Heads of Government 2020 proposed sub-themes and possible outcomes on youth. Senior Officials were encouraged to present policy recommendations during the consultation process with their Ministries of Foreign Affairs.
11. The Meeting welcomed reports and updates from UNDP, SAARC and ADB on their regional youth development strategies and programmes.
12. All stakeholders and development partners welcomed strategies to enhance regional cooperation and collaboration on youth development priorities in support of national youth policy implementation especially common priorities such as youth employment or nurturing future-ready Asia youth.
13. The Meeting recognized the value and contribution from the Commonwealth Youth Organizations including the CYC, the CSA, CAYWA, and Commonwealth Higher Education Consortium for Youth Work members and identified the opportunity to better harmonize efforts at a national level in addressing youth development issues and priorities.

14. The meeting received a technical presentation 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 academic institutions of the Commonwealth Higher Education Institutions (CHEC4YW).
15. Participants of the meeting took note of the developments to support and strengthen the knowledge, skills and capacity of youth workers within the region.
16. Senior officials reviewed the concept and principles of Youth Mainstreaming and considered strategies and approaches in promoting youth mainstreaming across governments. Senior officials examined the practical steps towards youth mainstreaming in keeping with the mandate given by Heads in 2018.
17. Senior officials received presentations on youth participation and identified the challenges in engaging young people from marginalised communities. They took note of the youth participation structures supported in the Commonwealth and agreed to continue working with youth leaders to ensure meaningful engagement in decision making processes in keeping with the Heads mandate.
18. The meeting underscored the challenge of youth unemployment and took note of the Heads' recommendation for a systems approach to tackling the issue. Senior officials reviewed the policy options and strategies to promote youth entrepreneurship using the Commonwealth guide documents. Senior officials agreed to review current actions to align with the policy guide.
19. 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 Ministerial Taskforce guidance. The Governments of India and Bangladesh will present the regional progress report and action plans at the next Commonwealth Ministerial Taskforce Meeting on behalf of the member states.
20. In the Senior Officials Caucus Meeting, the participants identified the changing political, economic, social and technology (PEST) dynamics in the region and shared context specific initiatives to address the regional youth challenges and leverage on the regional opportunities going forward.
21. The Senior Officials suggested several key policy recommendations to confront the challenges such as strengthening participation of young people in policy making; skilling and upskilling young people to prepare them for future challenges; providing young people more opportunities to contribute to society; and enhancing the use of technology in policy making.
22. The caucus of National Youth Delegates proposed the development of a regional youth mechanism to better represent and coordinate youth issues and priorities in the region, such as peace, climate change, education, capacity building and entrepreneurship.

23. The youth leaders agreed to strengthen existing national youth bodies and to work with governments and partners to deepen youth participation at all levels of decision making, especially for marginalised youth groups. To overcome challenges of youth employment, National Youth Delegates recommended the use of program and initiative-based approaches to enhance employability, instil entrepreneurial characteristics, and to allow different models of job creation including social entrepreneurship and innovation practices.
24. Participants in the Stakeholders Meeting recommended changing the discourse towards positive youth development and a shift of focus from unemployment to provision of decent work, including on employability and entrepreneurship implementation. They called for greater regional cooperation among development agencies, the stakeholders and the Commonwealth Secretariat including through a peer review mechanism of programming, policy, and exchange of good practices.
25. At the same time, the participants also called for greater regional cooperation among development agencies, the stakeholders and the Commonwealth Secretariat including through a peer review mechanism of programming, policy, and exchange of good practices. This includes the issue of professionalising youth work which the meeting called for recognition of non-formal education and prior learning.
26. In her closing remarks the Secretary-General challenged meeting participants to be transformational in their approaches, treating not just the symptoms of the youth development issues but the social, political, and economic root causes youth development challenges. She reiterated the magnitude of the responsibility entrusted onto all stakeholders to achieve the common goal of empowering young people through resourcing and financing youth development.
27. The delegations thanked the Government and people of Brunei Darussalam for hosting the meeting.