

Empowering Young People

By the year 2005, more than half of the world's population will be below 30 – perhaps as much as 70 per cent in the world's least developed countries. Young people are the most important resource for the future development of Commonwealth nations – as well as being a key sector of society today.

Empowering young people (those aged 15-29) to take charge of their lives and transform their

societies in a positive way is therefore of vital importance. The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) works to achieve this through programmes in three strategic areas: youth empowerment, the development of national youth policies and human resource development. The Secretariat carries out these activities at the pan-Commonwealth level and through the CYP's Regional Centres in Lusaka, Zambia (for

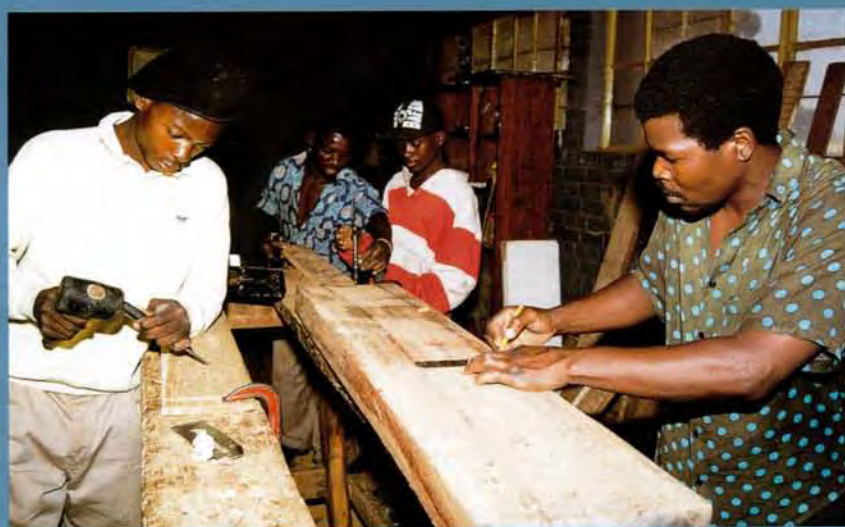
Africa), Chandigarh, India (Asia), Georgetown, Guyana (Caribbean), and Honiara, Solomon Islands (South Pacific).

Youth Empowerment

Through the CYP, the Secretariat has worked with governments and young people to develop a Commonwealth Plan of Action on Youth Empowerment (PAYE). Endorsed by the 1998 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Malaysia, the PAYE presents a guiding framework for addressing the needs and concerns of young people in the Commonwealth, and assisting governments in establishing and maintaining the enabling conditions for youth empowerment in the new millennium.

The economic empowerment of young people is the goal of the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI), which presents a methodology for micro-credit and enterprise development for young people. Pilot projects are running in India, Guyana, Solomon Islands and Zambia in partnership with local NGOs experienced in credit management. More than 1,000 young people have benefited from these projects, mainly in India where the pilot has been particularly successful.

The CYP is working with the Secretariat's Poverty Alleviation Task Force to promote and develop the CYCI as an approach to poverty alleviation. The response has been positive: several governments have



Empowering youth by assisting in business in Zambia (*above*) and in a literacy programme in Bangladesh (*right*)





Furniture-making enterprise by young people in Zambia with assistance from the CYCI

expressed interest in applying the CYCI methodology to their credit schemes, and working partnerships are being forged with international agencies. The CYP has developed a toolkit with practical, hands-on mechanisms for implementing the CYCI model at the national level.

The CYP also empowers young people by facilitating their participation in decision-making. Members of the Commonwealth Youth Caucus participate in CYP consultations and planning meetings, ensuring that young people's perspectives are taken into account. The CYP's Regional Youth Forums participate in regional youth networks and international meetings, and work with governments and other stakeholders in all regions on youth policy formulation and implementation, and human resource development. The CYP has also developed partnerships with youth NGOs to promote youth participation in civil society organisations.

National Youth Policy Development

In order to maximise the potential of young people, it is essential to have a coherent and comprehensive national youth policy. The National Youth Policy (NYP) 2000 project set the target of a national youth policy in place in every Commonwealth country by the year 2000. In 1995, when NYP 2000 was set up, only 17 Commonwealth countries had such policies. By mid-1999, more than 40 member governments had requested technical assistance to formulate national youth policies, and policy formulation was in progress in some 35 countries. The NYP 2000 Toolkit has been extensively used as core material by member governments, and non-Commonwealth countries in Africa and Latin America and regional organisations have requested permission to adapt and use it for their own programmes.

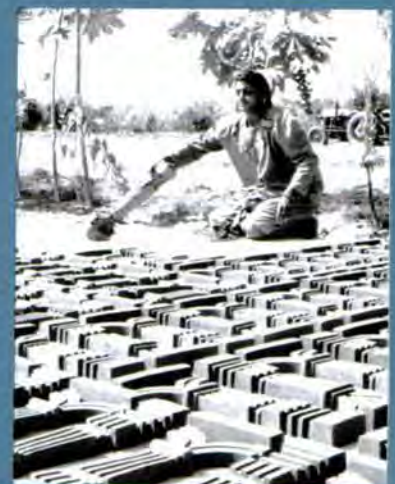
A Credit to Her Community

Varsha was living in a single room built especially for her on top of her father's two-room apartment in Guptanagar, India. Although educated to grade 10, she had no marketable skills, and with no earnings of her own, she struggled to support her three children on her labourer husband's wages.

In 1997, she attended a workshop presented by the International Centre for Entrepreneurship and Career Development (ICECD), the CYP's partner agency for the CYCI pilot project in India. After an initial assessment, the ICECD selected her as a project beneficiary and recommended that she consider opening a school for children aged three to six.

She conducted a survey of the neighbourhood and found that there was demand for such a school. She prepared a room in her father's apartment and, with the help of a CYCI loan, purchased a rug, a ceiling fan, chalks, slates and educational toys. The initial enrolment of 15 children soon grew to 35; the children learn the alphabet, numbers, songs and nursery rhymes.

Varsha now earns more than 700 rupees per month. The experience of setting up the school has brought her not only a much-needed income, but also the satisfaction of contributing something valuable to her community.



Making cement pilasters in India for the building industry

A New Approach to Human Resource Development

The CYP has, since its inception, been a leader in the provision of training for youth development workers. Now, the accessibility and scope of the Diploma in Youth in Development programme has been greatly

expanded through its remodeling in modular form and the building of national capacities to deliver the programme by supported distance education.

The new programme has been launched in all four regions of the Commonwealth, through the establishment of partnerships

with 15 tertiary educational institutions and the collaboration of the Commonwealth of Learning. Thirteen core training modules have been developed for programme delivery and for stand-alone use in other contexts such as capacity-building workshops at the CYP Regional Centres. By providing linkages to other degree programmes, the Diploma has helped to establish a professional career path in youth affairs.

Priorities for the New Millennium

In 1999/2000 work will begin on the Youth Development Index, one of a series of tools being developed to provide governments with a framework to analyse their current status in relation to youth empowerment, strategies for developing national action plans and targets, and indicators to ensure that progress is measurable.



Professor Abdul Khan, Vice-Chancellor of the Indira Gandhi National Open University, signs a Memorandum of Understanding with the Commonwealth Youth Programme on delivery by distance learning of the Youth in Development Diploma

The Commonwealth Youth Service Awards

A group of teenagers hanging around a local cafe in Summerside, Prince Edward Island, Canada, were asked by a police officer to move on. One girl answered with the question: "Where to?"

This was the beginning of Generation XX, a youth centre which became one of the 1998 winners of the Commonwealth Youth Service Awards.

After several meetings between the young people and the police officer, a committee was formed, and a deal was made with the owner of an abandoned building whereby the young people would lease it for a nominal fee and be responsible for upkeep. After major refurbishment, the centre was ready to open.

The Generation XX 20th Century Youth Centre consists of a skateboard and

roller blade park, a concert area, a lounge area, a canteen area, and a pool table and arcade game area. Upstairs are rooms where music bands can rehearse. The centre is staffed by one full-time employee and two volunteers. Club members who work for the centre receive a discount on membership fees, and funding is also provided by the national, provincial and municipal governments.

Youth matters dealt with by the police have decreased by an estimated 30 per cent because of the centre, which received a crime prevention award from the Premier of Prince Edward Island.

Generation XX is one of many projects highlighted by the Commonwealth Youth Service Awards, which have been awarded annually since 1985 to initiatives by young people that contribute to their societies. Up to five regional awards worth £1,000 each

are granted, as well as three pan-Commonwealth awards worth £3,000 each.

In previous years, the awards have focused on such themes as environment and enterprise development. In the period 1998-2000, the theme of the CYP awards will be young people's outstanding contribution to promoting the Commonwealth values of peace, democracy, human rights and equality.

Lessons learned from the CYCI pilots will be incorporated into the Micro-credit Management System (McMS), an innovative set of structures and mechanisms to co-ordinate the efforts of governments, NGOs, the private sector and international agencies in micro-credit programme implementation. The Secretariat will develop and promote the McMS and CYCI as an integrated national poverty alleviation strategy.

Major new sections on implementation strategies and developing national action plans will be added to the NYP 2000 Toolkit. In collaboration with the CHOGM Committee on Co-operation Through Sport, the CYP will adapt the methodology of NYP 2000 for use in national sports policy formulation.

Following proposals tabled at Commonwealth forums in 1998, the CYP will research the feasibility of a Commonwealth Youth Volunteer Scheme and a Commonwealth Youth Visa Scheme.

The pilot cycle of the remodelled diploma programme will be fully operational by June 2000, with 2,000 participants – more than the total number (some 1,700) participating in residential CYP diploma programmes in the previous 24 years. Enrolments are expected to rise still further after the pilot cycle, and several partner institutions are developing degree programmes based on the diploma. The certificate programme will be revised to provide entry-level training to prepare grassroots youth workers for the diploma programme.



A beneficiary of the CYCI in India repays part of his loan which helped him in his business dealing with household linen