

Young people: partners in progress



More than half of the Commonwealth's citizens are under 30 years old. Investing in these young people will be decisive in achieving the Millennium Development Goals. In their 2002 Coolom Declaration, Commonwealth Heads of Government made clear their determination to "address poverty reduction by tapping the skills, knowledge and energy of a highly motivated younger generation." The Commonwealth Secretariat is seeking to implement this mandate.

In many member countries, over 60 per cent of the population is under 30; in some, that figure rises above 70 per cent. Through the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), the Secretariat works to empower young people aged 15–29 to participate in the development and governance of their communities and societies. Its mandates stem from Heads of Government, Ministers of Youth, and Commonwealth youth representatives who participate in CYP governance meetings.

CYP works closely with other Secretariat Divisions in London. It also delivers technical assistance through four Regional Centres in Lusaka, Zambia; Chandigarh, India; Georgetown, Guyana; and Brisbane, Australia, where the South Pacific Centre is temporarily based.

At their May 2003 meeting in Gaborone, Botswana, Commonwealth Youth Ministers adopted the CYP Strategic and Operational Plan for 2003–2006, which sets the CYP's priorities under four broad strategic areas: youth enterprise development, youth networks and governance, youth participation, and youth work education and training. In focusing on these areas, the CYP will highlight relevant youth priorities, particularly the importance of efforts to combat HIV/AIDS.

Youth enterprise development

Young people, especially young women, face difficulties in accessing credit for their businesses. Youth micro-credit with enterprise training is one of the answers. The Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI) continues to demonstrate that young people are 'bankable'. CYP is spreading the CYCI model by brokering funds and offering

training to governments and credit agencies. Replication of the CYCI is under way in nine member countries, and a self-sustaining pilot project in India has benefited more than 500 young people in the past two years, of whom three-quarters are women.

CYP has also expanded its intensive courses in enterprise and retail skills. More than 200 young businesspeople and government and NGO personnel have received assistance, to expand businesses and enhance vocational training schemes. Work in this area has benefited from partnerships with the United Nations Development Programme and The Body Shop (Australia) among others. There is also an enterprise skills component in CYP's training programmes for youth work professionals.

Youth enterprise development is a key part of 'Youth for the Future', the initiative launched at the 2002 CHOGM. Youth for the Future is designed to boost public and private sector support for youth programmes, especially in the areas of technology and skills transfer. The 2003 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting increased CYP's Youth Enterprise Development budget, and it is now CYP's largest area of work.

In Asia, CYP has continued training young people in information and communications technology (ICT), both at its Asia Centre and through partnership with the Indira Gandhi National Open University. An internet-enabled mobile training centre has also begun touring rural areas.

In June 2003, the Africa Centre opened a Technology Empowerment Centre (TEC) consisting of a cyber-café and an ICT training centre. Already offering internet and word processing facilities to young people in the

Above:

Young Commonwealth citizens are pressing for political inclusion to match the responsibilities they carry

Opposite (top):

An African youth representative addresses the opening of the 2003 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting in Botswana

Opposite (bottom):

The CYP's mobile training centre brings the Internet to young people in rural India

Lusaka area, the TEC is developing ICT training programmes for young people across Zambia and the Africa region.

Human resource development

The CYP's tertiary level course, the Diploma in Youth in Development Work, is offered to students in 47 member countries. The Diploma is part of building the profession of youth work and imbuing it with fundamental Commonwealth values. In 13 countries CYP also offers a Certificate in Youth Work. The Diploma and Certificate programmes are offered via distance learning, in partnership with 25 tertiary education institutions around the Commonwealth.

"This Diploma is a dream come true for youth workers here in South Africa. The qualification is important to give weight to the profession," says Kgomo Mabusela, a Diploma graduate.

National youth policy development

CYP's ongoing technical support to Ministries of Youth has greatly strengthened the youth policy agenda in the Commonwealth and beyond. National Youth Policy development strengthens management of the youth sector, and is an opportunity for social dialogue. In Fiji Islands in 2002, the drafting of a policy and National Plan of Action concluded a process which had involved over 5,000 young people in local and national consultations. In the Caribbean, CYP is piloting a database initiative to assist with monitoring the impact of youth policy.

Youth participation

Youth participation is at the heart of all CYP's work. In 2002 Commonwealth youth representatives were instrumental in organising 'CitizenYou', a major conference on citizenship which involved young women and men from 50 member countries. CitizenYou, held in Sunderland, UK, was spearheaded by the Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council. Delegates remain in touch via an e-group, and some are undertaking follow-up activities with government, media and non-governmental organisations.

Heads of National Youth Councils now participate in Commonwealth election observation missions.

Young people and HIV/AIDS

The Ambassadors for Positive Living Programme, which began in Zambia in 1993, enables young women and men who are HIV-positive to engage in peer education and debate on health policy. It is now expanding in India, and the Caribbean pilot project



began in 2003. Chama Musoke, a Young Ambassador from Zambia, addressed CitizenYou. Participants were moved to conclude, "HIV/AIDS is the greatest threat we face".

Youth service awards

The Commonwealth Youth Service Awards recognise excellence in youth-led

development projects. In 2002, 15 regional awards were made. The pan-Commonwealth winners included two projects aimed at youth employment: Kavango Cleaning Service and Pest Control (Namibia) and Mandal Pisciculture (Bangladesh). A third winner, the Sapodilla Multi-Purpose Sports Centre (Guyana), uses cricket, athletics and other sports as tools for community development.

