Chapter 1
What Is Youth Mainstreaming?

This section looks at:

- a definition of youth mainstreaming
- concepts and approaches in youth empowerment and youth development, including in development planning
- key considerations.

1.1 Youth mainstreaming

Ensuring equity and justice for young people in global and national planning (as for any other group side lined in policy-making) is critical, and realises a fundamental human right. This is an important ethical and moral imperative, but it is also a political priority considering the explicit articulation of national and global equality for all, including for all ages, in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Youth mainstreaming is a transformative process that is inclusive and consciously proactive, placing the capabilities and rights of young men and women alongside those of other marginalised community members in development planning. It is transformative because it radically improves young people's wellbeing and rights by translating co-created visions into youth-centric policies and programmes.

Mainstreaming is based on a guiding vision of all social groups benefiting equally from the fruits of development, and participating in that development in accordance with their full human potential.

Youth mainstreaming can be defined as:

> *Strategies for intergenerational equity and justice that enable young people's capabilities, participation and human rights to be an integral dimension of the analysis, design, implementation and monitoring & evaluation of policies and programmes in inter-sectoral planning across all social, political and economic spheres. It enables young people and adults to benefit equally from, and contribute equally to, development outcomes.*[1]

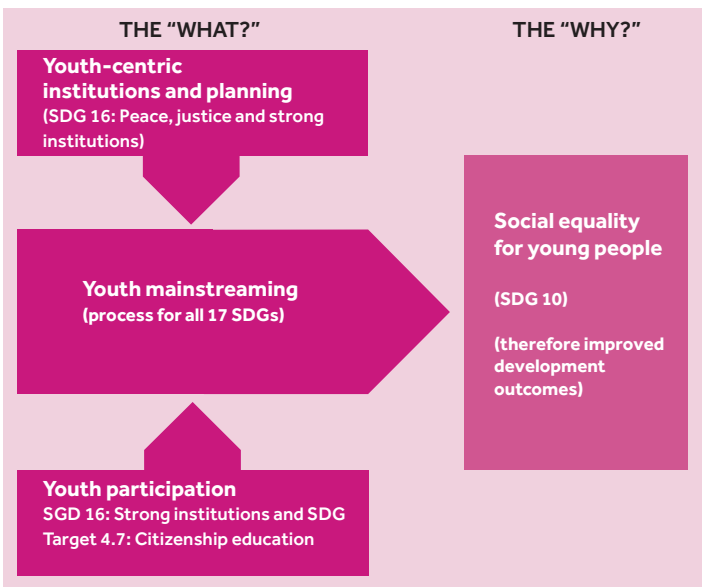
Youth mainstreaming, then, is a *strategy* to achieve the *goal* of equality. Therefore, mainstreaming is not an end in itself; social equality is. It links democracy initiatives to achieving equitable development for youth.

We can illustrate youth mainstreaming in the following manner. Figure 1.1 is aligned to critical goals in the SDGs that help us articulate youth mainstreaming – to be discussed further in Chapter 3.

It is important to keep in mind the end-goal of social equality for youth (the 'why?') as we review and reform our institutions for youth mainstreaming (the 'what?'). If we lose sight of this end-goal, our work will not be in the best interests of youth, and will not create equal opportunity and equal status for them.

Creating equal opportunities for young people means not that they need the 'same' inputs as adults or other generational groups, but that they need *specific* inputs (for equity and justice) relevant to their unique and evolving stage in life (see Annex 1), that enable them, including marginalised youth subgroups/ age groups, to achieve equal social, political and economic status with adults. Measures for equity result in social equality for all, including youth. (How we can concretely express diverse dimensions of creating equal opportunity for youth is further discussed in Table 3.1, the Equality Matrix for Youth.) Inequality and inequity are explained in Box 1.1.

Figure 1.1 The youth mainstreaming arrow



Box 1.1 Inequality and inequity

Inequality refers to the condition of being unequal, and can usually be expressed in numbers and percentages such as access to education, employment or freedom from poverty. Inequity, on the other hand, is related to injustice and unfairness. It is also often expressed in numbers, but is more often expressed in qualitative ways.

If youth unemployment is thrice that of adult unemployment, this is a clear manifestation of inequality for youth. This inequality has been shown to be a result of inequities in the employment sector pertaining to attitudes towards young people, the lack of consideration of young people's specific situation in life as those transiting from education to employment, and the lack of comprehensive youth employment strategies.

Equity and justice measures, in this sense, may be seen as mechanisms and processes which attempt to address this inequality. To take our example, this could mean comprehensive youth employment strategies that address youth-specific challenges in gaining employment. Equality is relative, never absolute, and much work needs to be done to maintain the gains that are achieved.

Indeed, the youth mainstreaming endeavour of equality is a key way in which young people express their vision for a better world; the DFiD–CSO document *Youth Voices on a Post-2015 World,* which informed SDG processes, expressed the views of young people from 12 countries across the globe. It articulated equality and freedom as the first principle ranked in order of importance. According to the report, 'The focus on equality and freedom highlights the current issue of widening inequality, which young people see as having a significantly negative impact on development'.[2] Equality for youth, and age-based discrimination, are particularly noted in the document.

1.2 Why 'youth' as a category?

From a historical perspective, 'youth' began obtaining prominence as a specific social category more than 400 years ago in the West (more recently in the global South), with the emergence of the printing press, the proliferation of ideas and the need for literacy. The education of certain age groups, particularly children and young people, therefore became a priority.[3] The increasingly fast-paced urbanisation and industrialisation of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and the widening gap between adults and children/youth, brought the notion of 'youth' even more to the fore.[4]

In political terms, on the one hand, young people became active as agents of social change as seen through civil rights and peace

movements, student unions, environmental activism and so on. On the other, they were controlled as a group, as seen through policies to limit and circumscribe youth agency in the context of young people's social and political resistance.

We often look at young people through three different lenses:[5] (see Annex 1).

1. An age category: This is a common, yet inadequate, definition of youth. The complexity of defining youth through age is seen in the way age limits are set in different contexts. In the UN, the youth age range is 15 to 24; in the Commonwealth, it is 15 to 29. Youth age ranges across countries vary from a minimum of 14 to a maximum of 35, or above. Some countries also recognise that social and economic factors that determine qualities of a 'youth phase' may mean some flexibility in extending age limits at the lower or higher end in addressing youth needs and interests.[6] An exclusive focus on age categories has also been problematised for its tendency to ignore inequalities youth face because of class, gender and other forms of marginality.[7]
2. A transitional stage: The specific transitional aspects of the journey from childhood to youth in terms of developmental stages, first impressions, sexual maturation, entry into secondary/higher education and employment, and other specific generational experiences. Young people, *as youth*, have different development priorities from children, adults or older citizens, and these priorities need to be addressed.
3. A social construct: Young people are seen as 'a critical indicator of the state of a nation, of its politics, economy, and social and cultural life'.[8] Young people, particularly since the 1960s, have become symbols of hope, but also symbols of resistance around the world. Social constructs also ascribe subjective qualities to 'youth': negatively, as rebellious, disobedient etc. (even though young people may not see themselves that way), or more positively, as idealistic and courageous by virtue of their relative independence from established and formal institutional interests. The more negative constructs also contribute to intergenerational inequity, which we will discuss further in Chapter 2.

Young people's specific generational location is qualified throughout the publication as follows:

1. Younger youth groups, for example adolescents, as opposed to older youth groups, are, *in general,* more vulnerable in all contexts.[9]
2. Young people face greater combined forms of inequality when their age-specific experiences, which can in themselves be a source of marginality, are multiplied by their experiences based on their sex, race, class, economic, social, gender, caste, ability/disability, social stability/instability etc. (intersectionality).
3. Young people's marginality must be considered in relation to the marginality of other groups such as women, children, older persons, racial and religious minorities, sexual minorities, those living with disabilities, and so on. Youth mainstreaming is therefore part of broader strategies for non-discrimination and equality for all.

In terms of policy and planning, the most marginalised youth, particularly younger youth groups, i.e. those facing the greatest social, political, economic or geographical marginalisation,[10] are the least buffered by the impacts of social inequities, and non-responsive economic, political and social policies. It is their collective voices and concerns that are the most relevant in defining policy priorities for all, as well as in youth mainstreaming.[11] Equally, positive policy outcomes for marginalised groups in general also have positive outcomes for youth, and vice versa, which implies solidarity among such groups.

1.3 Foundations for youth mainstreaming: The Commonwealth Charter and UN human rights conventions

The discussions in this publication is underpinned by rights-based principles. The Commonwealth Charter, which defines the work of the Commonwealth, reinforces the core Commonwealth values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It has an explicit asset-based view of young people and recognises 'the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures'.[12]

Commonwealth values reflect the values of international human rights conventions such as the United Nations Declaration on Human Rights (UDHR) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which explicitly articulates *children* as a cohort that is marginalised by virtue of being children, capturing the interests and rights of young people under 18.

A rights-based approach perceives young people as rights holders and the state and all institutions as duty-bearers. This sees citizens, including children and young people, as agents of change and partners in the development process – as articulated in articles defining their right to participation (Articles 18–21 of the UDHR, and Articles 12–16 and Article 17 of the UNCRC), which include articles on the right to information and self-determination.

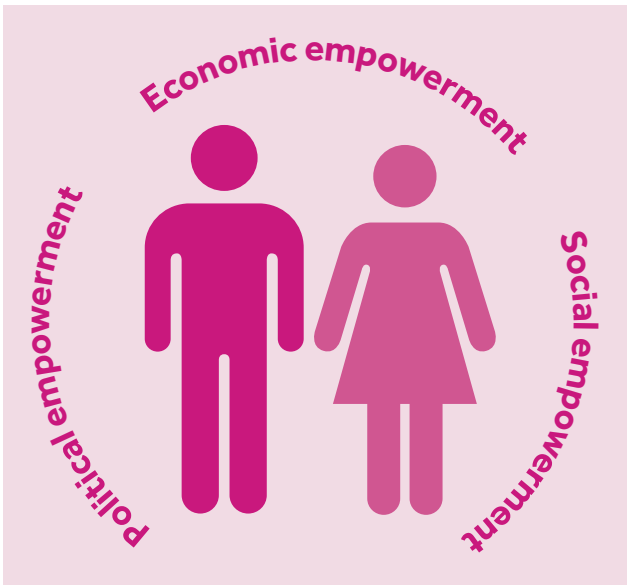
These aspirations will help us develop detailed principles for youth mainstreaming, as outlined later in Chapter 14.

1.4 The paradigm of youth empowerment

Youth empowerment has three key dimensions, as visualised in Figure 1.2:

- Social empowerment – where young people have a sense of autonomy and self-confidence

Figure 1.2 Dimensions of youth empowerment



- Economic empowerment – where young people have control over owning and managing economic and other related resources, including being employed
- Political empowerment – where young people can formally voice opinions and influence social, economic and political processes.

Fulfilling aspects of all three dimensions are important in achieving holistic empowerment for young people. See Annex 2 for an elaboration.

Youth empowerment is defined in the Commonwealth as:

> *Enhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It will enable them to contribute to, and benefit from, a politically stable, economically viable, and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries.*[13]

This definition highlights the importance of youth empowerment strategies in enhancing young people's capabilities, but also highlights the need for economic, social, legal and political enablers that contribute to this empowerment, including, importantly, through duty-bearers working with young people (with diverse capabilities and emerging power) in shaping these enablers and outcomes for equality and justice.

Box 1.2 highlights further the multidimensional nature of enhancing youth capabilities.

Box 1.2 The capabilities approach and youth empowerment[14]

The capabilities approach, developed by the economist and scholar Amartya Sen, is commonly used as a framework for understanding youth empowerment, including in the Youth Development Index (YDI). This approach focuses on 'a person's capability [opportunity] he or she has reason to value'.[15] The focus here is in the creation of opportunity, rather than how the person makes use of that opportunity. Youth empowerment strategies in this sense can be seen as strategies that enhance the capabilities of youth. This also refers importantly to the person's 'freedom to determine what they want and what they value'.[16]

The capabilities approach is an important complement to understanding youth empowerment, because it goes beyond instrumentalist measures of income or access to commodities, which are the focus of economic analysis. It also shifts the focus away from the means of living, to the actual opportunities of living.

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Box 1.2 The capabilities approach and youth empowerment (*cont.*)

A privileged young woman from a high-income family, for example, who clearly has economic opportunities, may have fewer opportunities in other terms – such as freedom of expression in the household or in the university she attends. So she has more of one means of living well, but not others. The question here is the extent to which her opportunities can be enhanced in order that she, if so willing, can indeed have freedom of expression in other spheres. Youth empowerment can be seen as strategies and processes *that enhance these opportunities* for young people, irrespective of whether they make use of them or not.

1.5 Policy/attitudinal approaches

There are diverse policy/attitudinal approaches to youth empowerment and development. The challenge, while acknowledging this diversity, is to establish a common rights-based vision for youth mainstreaming, and to uphold commitments to youth-centric planning throughout policy and programme processes. Table 1.1 shows some predominant policy approaches. Some of these support achieving empowerment and equality for youth, while others work against this.

Table 1.1 Four policy/attitudinal approaches to youth

Approach	Description
Deficit approach	A deficit lens posits youth as a 'problem' and focuses on the 'correction' of these problems, such as drug abuse, crime, illiteracy and so on. This is still a predominant approach in planning for youth. It neglects examining the failure of structures that serve young people and focuses on young people's 'failures'. It also does not acknowledge young people's own agency as problem-solvers and creators of positive social change.
Youth for development approach (Instrumentalist)	This approach is often seen as 'instrumentalist'. It sees young people as 'instruments' for broader national development and often fails to perceive the centrality of a young person's own need for self-empowerment and building connectedness. When it does look at a young people's needs, it often prioritises issues of economic empowerment and employment at the expense of their broader social and political empowerment.
Equity and welfare approach	An equity and welfare approach focuses on basic human needs and the social and economic welfare of young people. It may look at aspects of equity and inequity for young people, such as youth poverty, the need for social safety nets etc. Where young people are proactive partners in shaping basic needs, it will also be asset based.

(*continued*)

Table 1.1 Four policy/attitudinal approaches to youth (*continued*)

Approach	Description
Asset-based / empowerment approach (rights based)	This approach focuses on young people as assets in transforming their own circumstances and, through this, working for a larger good. It is rights based in prioritising young people's agency in defining and shaping social, political and economic agendas, including ensuring equality for youth. While the equity and welfare of young people are central to an asset-based approach, young people are active agents in shaping this. This is the approach that informs this publication.

Everyone has a bias towards an approach; it is important to understand why you have that bias. What evidence exists to support your choice? Are some biases informed by fear? Or hope? Which brings better outcomes for young people?

Box 1.3 looks at a concrete example of the implications of different approaches in programmes for and with young people.

Box 1.3 Asset based or deficit focused? Programmes that address violent extremism

Some conventional programmes designed for young people which attempt to combat violent extremism are based on a deficit model that sees certain young people as a potential 'threat' to society. These programmes are often, though not always, based on the interests of national security, rather than youth empowerment and contribution.

Researchers have found that assumptions behind some such initiatives, i.e. that lack of education and jobs can result in youth and others turning to violence and extremism, is not backed by evidence, and often contradicts it.[17] In turn initiatives based on these assumptions aimed at counteracting violent extremism that may have implications for less than 1 per cent of the population, have not been shown to achieve the ultimate result of reducing violent extremism.

From a youth perspective, the way 'at risk' young people are identified, or the way they are engaged with, can create further stigma and alienation in societies in which certain groups of young people already feel insecure and alienated. Some programmes, for example, request staff in public schools to identify 'potentially at risk youth' based on behaviour within and outside the classroom.[18] This is despite the fact that there is little credible evidence of typical trajectories that a person follows to violent extremism,[19] and indeed of extremist thought leading to violent extremism.[20]

Proactive, asset-based programmes that address issues of extremism and violence, however, operate based on different assumptions. The United Nations Security Council Resolution on Youth, Peace and Security, 2015,

(*Continued*)

Box 1.3 Asset based or deficit focused? Programmes that address violent extremism (*cont.*)

focuses entirely on the critical role of young men and women in peacebuilding and countering violent extremism.[21] It has a strong asset-based perception of young people. At the Commonwealth too, peace-building paradigms are based on principles of dialogue and understanding[22] articulated in *Civil Paths to Peace: Report of the Commonwealth Commission on Respect and Understanding* led by Amartya Sen. This holistic approach acknowledges the complexities of violent conflict and looks at attitudes as well as broader structural factors that influence the creation of peaceful societies. The report of the Commission:

- acknowledges the positive roles that young people play in peace-building, and rejects the notion of young people as 'mere recipients of plans'[23] or young people as 'problems';
- promotes mutual understanding and respect among all faiths and communities in the Commonwealth in achieving peace;
- is based on 'the Commonwealth's agreed fundamental emphasis on human rights, liberties, democratic societies, gender equality, the rule of law and a political culture that promotes transparency, accountability and economic development',[24] which goes beyond seeing conflict as a result purely of economic grievances;
- addresses additional structural factors such as non-sectarian and non-parochial education (quality of education as much as access to education) for young people; and
- observes that promoting civil (non-violent) paths to peace is the responsibility of all parties,[25] including governments putting in place policies for equality, justice and participation.[26]

As much as youth are proactive, positive creators, they also observe and internalise confrontational, militarised cultures. If the world sends a message that violence can be addressed by further violence, then some young people may also adopt this thinking.

Where there is dialogic engagement with young people, within cultures demonstrating respect and understanding for all, and formal structures and policies that promote peace, there will be reduced risk of negative responses to violent conflict by young people. These will instead enhance the possibilities of including and valuing the voices of young people working for peace, and influencing conflict resolution. So, moving away from deficit approaches to asset-based ones is integral to a peaceful, equal world for all, including for young people.

1.6 Young people's developmental and safeguarding rights

Young people's rights mostly overlap with the rights of all, as will be the focus throughout this publication. However,

their developmental rights and rights to protection and care (safeguarding), different in degree from younger children's developmental and safeguarding rights, are still pertinent for young people, particularly younger youth. This is because of their evolving and growing capabilities, both physically and mentally, and evolving independence and autonomy.

The UNCRC, the human rights framework that best refers to developmental rights of an evolving age group (children) with some overlap with the category of youth, refers specifically to the following:

1. Right to survival and development (Article 6) and right to a standard of living adequate for the child's (read 'young person's') physical, mental, moral and social development (Article 27 UNCRC). The UNCRC generally articulates child (in our case 'youth') development as a human right and highlights the child's right to development in the context of a positive family environment, reinforcing traditional and cultural values in fulfilling the right to child development, and linking the developmental rights of children to their best interest. Developmental rights of children with special needs (children living with disability) are also specifically addressed. It is the responsibility of the state, parents/legal guardians and other duty-bearers to ensure this. Elements of this can be inferred as critical for youth development, considering that youth are a cohort whose capacities are evolving.
2. Right to protection and care (UNCRC Article 3), applying both to parents and legal guardians, and to institutions serving children/youth. In our case, this applies not only to private domains such as the family, but also to public domains where interactions of young people, particularly of younger youth, can expose them to risks of safety and security, including in contexts of participation in expressing opinions of dissent within institutions.

Table 1.2 shows some examples of the incorporation of young people's developmental and safeguarding rights for three sectors.

Table 1.2 Young people's safeguarding and developmental rights in YM

Sector	Examples: Young person's right to physical, mental, moral and social development	Examples: Young person's right to protection and care
Poverty alleviation	Poverty and resultant trends of malnutrition and lack of housing and education can affect the physical and mental development of young people. **Implication: Integration of psychosocial and developmental (physical) specialism in poverty alleviation programmes.**	Poverty can leave youth, particularly girls, vulnerable to safety and security issues due to lack of protected living environments, and lack of access to secure sanitation. **Implication: Integration of youth safeguarding and confidentiality measures in poor communities, and poverty alleviation programmes.**
Justice	Incarceration of young people can have negative effects on their mental, moral and social development if not adequately addressed. **Implication: Integration of psychosocial and youth developmental specialism in youth justice programmes.**	Young people are excessively vulnerable to bullying and harassment in justice sector institutions, due to their age and evolving independence and autonomy. **Implication: Integration of youth safeguarding and confidentiality measures in justice programmes.**
Health	The active withholding of reproductive and other services from youth can have specific harmful effects on young people's physical and emotional development. **Implication: Integration of psychosocial and youth developmental specialism in all health programmes.**	For young people, issues of privacy and confidentiality in accessing healthcare are critical due to various levels of adult–youth dynamics and power relations, including with parents and healthcare staff. **Implication: Integration of youth safeguarding and confidentiality measures in health programmes.**

In not losing sight of the objective which youth mainstreaming attempts to reach, some considerations need to be kept in mind:

1. **Top-down, bottom-up:** Maintaining civil society's role

   Youth mainstreaming must be both top-down and bottom-up. On the 'supply' side, entire institutional frameworks including our economic policies, defence policies, social, healthcare and education policies are all accountable to young people, with youth ministries playing only one part in the whole picture. On the 'demand' side, young people's organisations and civil society have the responsibility of constantly engaging

with institutions and providing the checks and balances necessary to ensure the continuing relevance of the youth mainstreaming process to changes in young people's lives.

Without robust engagement between society and institutions, no real change is possible. It is the demand from constituencies that energises responsive planning, as proved again and again in development practice. This relationship between government and civil society, particularly organised youth groups, will be further discussed in Chapters 7 and 8.

2. **Youth mainstreaming should not co-opt youth agendas:**

   There have been, and always will be, concerns, especially among independent youth groups,[27] that 'mainstreaming' youth issues into centres of power and decision-making might result in institutions co-opting the youth agenda and taking away its 'radical edge'.[28] This then has implications for protecting fundamental freedoms, as well as incorporation of diverse voices in to the policy-making process as youth mainstreaming is implemented.

   Youth mainstreaming requires a transformation of institutions and professional capacities to open up institutional scrutiny by and for youth (and other marginalised groups), but, before this, a transformation of mindsets and social norms that affords power and voice to young people in development planning across sectors.

3. **Maintaining the youth sector's relevance:** A call for youth mainstreaming does not, however, devalue the important work of youth-specific programmes and projects run by youth ministries, departments and youth development organisations, which in fact have a wealth of knowledge for other sectors to incorporate.

Moreover, the specific discipline of youth empowerment and development and the related profession of youth work (the profession referring to skilled youth engagement) need more investment than ever, while the technical contributions of the youth development sector to youth mainstreaming are clear. This will be further discussed in Chapter 6.

1.7 Conclusions and reflections

This chapter took us through a specific definition of youth mainstreaming that focused on setting in place processes of equity and justice to achieve equality for youth. It then examined various ways of thinking about youth and their issues, which can have an impact on the way we plan for them. It also reminded us of critical considerations in terms of acknowledging the role of multiple stakeholders, of working with youth sector stakeholders and ensuring that youth mainstreaming does not co-opt youth agendas.

Box 1.4 Reflections on Chapter 1: What is Youth Mainstreaming?

- How does this definition of youth mainstreaming fit with your context? Are there any other aspects to consider?
- How did 'youth' emerge as a social category in your context? Why did this come about?
- Do policy processes you are familiar with adopt asset-based or deficit approaches to youth development, and acknowledge what everyone brings into the policy process?
- Is there a sufficient focus on young people's developmental and safeguarding rights in planning with, and for, them?
- How do we mainstream youth in all sectors while conserving the unique value of youth-specific interventions and institutions?

Notes

1 The foundation of this definition is the UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) definition for gender mainstreaming, as it appears in ECOSOC 1997. It has been revised to highlight key factors the youth sector perceives as important in youth mainstreaming.
2 DFiD-CSO Youth Working Group 2015, 8.
3 'The social category was first formulated with the idea of nation-states, science, and religious freedom' (Patel et al. 2013, 3).
4 See, for example, Tebbutt 2016 for a historical study of youth in the British context.
5 Commonwealth Youth Programme 2007, 44–54.
6 Module 2 of the Commonwealth Diploma (Commonwealth Youth Programme 2007, 44) mentions an example from the Malawian Youth Policy of the time.
7 Ibid.
8 De Boek and Honwana 2005.
9 Particularly in contexts where the higher age limit for youth is often 30 and above.
10 See Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, which provides tools for marginality mapping for young people around these five domains.

11 This is explicitly recognised in UN 2015, 3 – 'reaching the furthest behind first'.
12 Commonwealth Secretariat 2013a, 7.
13 Commonwealth Youth Programme and Institute for Economics and Peace 2013. 18.
14 This section is written with the support of material in Sen 2009, 231–8.
15 Ibid., 231.
16 Ibid., 232.
17 'A study of terrorist attacks from 1986 to 2002 found no correlation between low GDP [gross domestic product] and incidence of terrorism, a finding that has been replicated again and again across different measures and time frames. A 2016 study found that countries with higher economic prosperity and lower inequality were more likely to see residents travel to Syria as foreign fighters, rather than less, and that unemployment was "not highly correlated" to overall foreign fighter activity' (Berger 2016 quoting Benmelech and Klor 2016).
18 Brennan Centre for Justice N.D.
19 See, for example, Brennan Centre for Justice N.D.
20 Berger 2016, 3. Also see Anyadike 2016.
21 United Nations 2015.
22 Sen 2008.
23 Ibid., 12.
24 Ibid., 9
25 Ibid. See, for example, page 22 on the 'War on Terror'.
26 Ibid. See pages 25–26 on government roles in promoting peace: 'It might involve articulating clearly that government itself stands for the principles of respect for individuals as human beings, and that all people have the right to be treated fairly and with dignity. Governments can also a) adopt policies that tackle gross unfairness and injustice, b) create systems which give citizens and their preferences a strong voice, and c) acknowledge the role of the international community in shaping universal values and promoting positive change'.
27 Commonwealth Youth Programme 2008, 11.
28 This term is used in relation to gender mainstreaming in Rai 2003, 19.

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