

## Chapter 7

# The Role of Youth in Accelerating Caribbean Development

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### 7.1 Introduction

As the world embarks on a new set of Sustainable Development Goals endorsed by the international community in September 2015, it is important to recognise the role of young people as key stakeholders in achieving any development goals. As they will inherit the societies and world in which they live, young people have a vested interest in creating a future that is prosperous and peaceful. Development that does not fulfil the needs of young people and equip them with the capacity to effectively transition to the next phase of life is unlikely to be sustainable. Consequently, to be truly effective in achieving the Caribbean we want, we must consider the current and future challenges of the region's youth. In the Caribbean, 60 per cent of the population are under 30 (Forbes 2015). This significant segment of the population is a critical force for change and development, yet young people still face major challenges. They are often burdened by unemployment and underemployment. The Caribbean Development Bank (2015) reports that the youth unemployment rate for countries in the region with available data is on average 25 per cent, while the adult rate ranges between 6 per cent and 15 per cent. Moreover, a regional youth unemployment rate of 25 per cent is nearly double the global average for youth unemployment, which is 14 per cent (World Development Indicators 2015).

The issues of high unemployment and lack of opportunities for young people have wider economic and social consequences. Studies link these factors to migration and 'brain drain', and problems of crime and violence that hinder the further development of these small countries.

This chapter aims to review the challenges youth in the Caribbean face, with a particular focus on youth unemployment. It also explores some options for addressing these challenges, and for more broadly encouraging youth development. The chapter continues with an assessment of youth development in the region (section 7.2), and then explores the issues and the challenges that young people in the Caribbean face (section 7.3). Section 7.4 examines youth unemployment more closely, while section 7.5 looks at strategies for tackling youth unemployment, particularly how governments can help facilitate youth entrepreneurship. Section 7.6 offers recommendations for mainstreaming youth development, while section 7.7 concludes the chapter.

## 7.2 Measuring youth development in the Caribbean

A review of youth development in the Caribbean is a good first step to understanding young people and their challenges. The Commonwealth defines youth development as ‘enhancing the status of young people, empowering them to build on their competencies and capabilities for life. It will enable them to contribute and benefit from a politically stable, economically viable and legally supportive environment, ensuring their full participation as active citizens in their countries’ (Commonwealth Secretariat 2013a). The Commonwealth’s Youth Development Index (YDI) seeks to capture a quantitative measure of youth development on a scale of 0 to 1, with 1 being the highest. The index is a composite of 15 key indicators (see appendix 1), which collectively measure youth development in 170 countries and 51 of the 53 Commonwealth countries. The YDI has five domains, which measure levels of (1) education, (2) health and well-being, (3) employment, (4) political participation and (5) civic participation for young people.

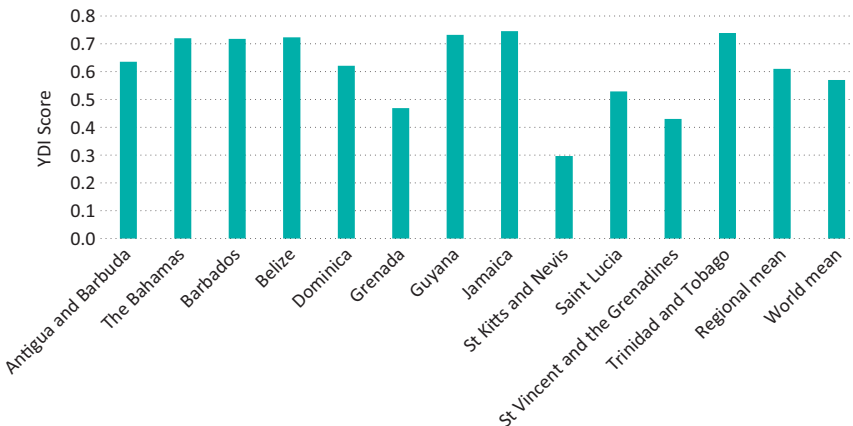
Figure 7.1 shows that, as a region, the Caribbean fares relatively well for youth development, with a mean score of 0.61 compared with a world mean of 0.57. Most of the countries fall into the medium classification of youth development.

However, the graph also highlights the fact that Caribbean young people are not a homogeneous group. The YDI score varies greatly across the region, with a high of 0.75 for Jamaica and a low of 0.30 for St Kitts and Nevis. These differences showcase the importance of country-specific youth development policies and programmes to meet differing needs.

## 7.3 Youth issues and challenges in the Caribbean

Youth issues in the Caribbean cannot be fully understood in isolation from the overarching socio-economic, political, cultural and ecological circumstances of the

**Figure 7.1 Youth Development Index scores for the Commonwealth Caribbean**



**Table 7.1 Youth Development Index scores by domain for Commonwealth Caribbean**

Country	YDI score	Education (28%)	Health and well-being (28%)	Employment (28%)	Political participation (8%)	Civic participation (8%)
Antigua and Barbuda	0.63	0.78	0.59	0.73	0.29	0.33
The Bahamas	0.72	0.76	0.83	0.74	0.54	0.33
Barbados	0.72	0.85	0.86	0.68	0.29	0.33
Belize	0.72	0.78	0.70	0.81	0.63	0.44
Dominica	0.62	0.74	0.56	0.65	0.62	0.33
Grenada	0.47	0.79	0.75	0.01	0.12	0.33
Guyana	0.73	0.77	0.85	0.72	0.42	0.57
Jamaica	0.75	0.84	0.83	0.70	0.58	0.46
St Kitts and Nevis	0.30	0.41	0.52	No data	0.12	0.33
Saint Lucia	0.53	0.41	0.72	0.57	0.37	0.33
St Vincent and the Grenadines	0.43	0.43	0.74	0.14	0.45	0.33
Trinidad and Tobago	0.74	0.84	0.72	0.80	0.58	0.44
<b>Regional mean</b>	<b>0.61</b>	<b>0.70</b>	<b>0.72</b>	<b>0.60</b>	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.38</b>

Source: Commonwealth Secretariat 2013a

countries within which they live. The Caribbean has unique cultural and historical experiences that, coupled with the current political and economic conditions, define youth experience in these countries. Young people face an increasing array of challenges, exacerbated by socio-economic and political shifts that are happening today at an extraordinary rate. These changes place greater demands on young people to adapt, devise solutions and become more resilient in order to enhance their life chances. The challenges often vary at the individual country level because of historical, cultural, economic and environmental factors.

The YDI is a useful starting point for understanding the impact of the social, economic, political and cultural factors on youth development in the Caribbean. As seen in Table 7.1, the region scores rather well in the areas of education (0.70) and health and well-being (0.72). However, the political and civic participation domains have significantly lower scores, with regional means of 0.42 and 0.38 respectively. These categories may nonetheless suffer from data gaps, which might contribute to the low scores.

These scores support findings in the Commonwealth's report *Challenges and Opportunities for Youths in Small Island Developing States of the Commonwealth Caribbean* (2013b), which lists the challenges of Caribbean young people as:

- lack of opportunities to participate and have their voice heard;
- divisive politics which lead to division among young people;

- a pervasive culture which teaches that young people should be seen and not heard;
- single-industry economy (leading to a lack of employment opportunities);
- lack of financial resources;
- mass migration of trained youth – ‘brain drain’; and
- lack of vision on the part of leaders.

These challenges have little to do with education or health and well-being. Rather, they centre on matters of employment opportunities, political issues and civic engagement. Given the importance of employment to overall youth development, this chapter will explore youth unemployment in more detail.

## 7.4 Youth unemployment

In the employment domain of the Commonwealth’s YDI, the Caribbean as a region averaged 0.60 (see Table 7.1). The employment domain accounts for 28 per cent of the index and is made up of two indicators: youth unemployment, and the youth-to-total-unemployment ratio. The 0.6 score is lower than that of the other two equally weighted domains (education, and health and well-being) and as such is a key factor in driving down the overall YDI score.

Youth unemployment is a global challenge facing young people across both developing and developed countries. The impacts of tendencies towards jobless growth, flexible employment and temporary engagement – even for long-term jobs – evidenced since 2007, have continued and have affected young people disproportionately. Indeed the International Labour Organization (ILO) notes that, for every one older person unemployed, there are approximately three young persons unemployed (ILO 2012a). There is also the issue of the mismatch of skills, where ‘over-education and over-skilling coexist with under-education and under-skilling’ (ILO 2013).

With specific reference to developing countries, the ILO notes that the problems of over qualification and under qualification also exist. Moreover, two thirds of the youth population are under engaged, in that they are unemployed, are under employed, have left the labour force or are not in educational institutions/programmes.

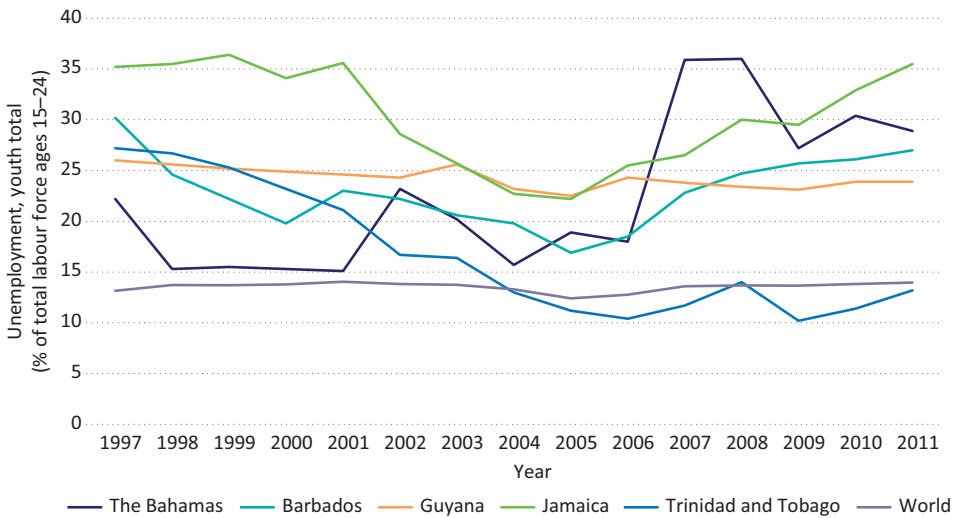
Youth unemployment is an issue the Caribbean has been struggling with for decades (see Figure 7.2). Nearly 20 years ago the ILO reported that:

*The youth cohort looms larger in terms of unemployment. An estimated 404,000 persons or 15% of the region’s labour force are unemployed. Of this 51% or 203,000 are between the ages of 15-25. As a result, youth unemployment rates are substantially above the national averages across the region and average around 40% in the 15-19 age group and 30% in the 20-24 age group.*

ILO 1997

Unfortunately, there are no signs of an easing of this problem. Between 2007 and 2013, youth unemployment rose by 4 million, with the biggest increases occurring in the

**Figure 7.2 Youth unemployment rates in selected Caribbean countries, 1997–2011**



**Source:** World Development Indicators 2015

Caribbean and Latin America: from 13.7 per cent in 2008 to 14.3 per cent in 2011 (ILO 2012a). Caribbean-wide data indicates that Saint Lucia, Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and Jamaica have the highest youth unemployment rates (CARICOM 2012).

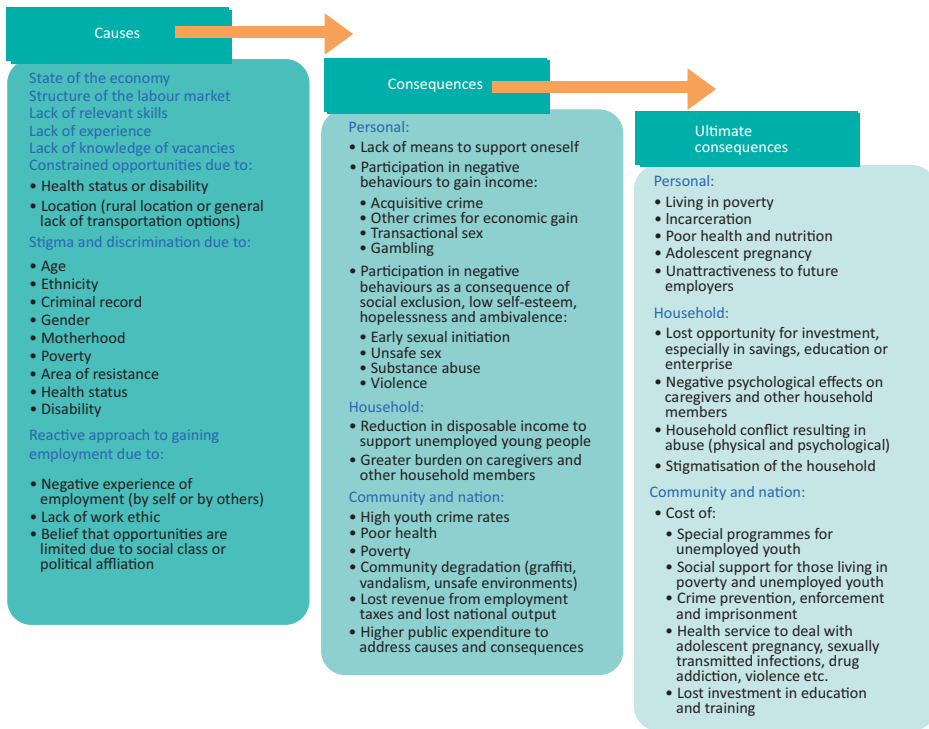
The UN Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) attributes these high rates of youth unemployment to the reduction of economic expansion and reduction in foreign direct investment. Additional challenges include loss of preferential treatment in agriculture products, a depressed market for minerals, losses due to lack of market diversification, stagnation of the manufacturing sector in the face of increased competition, and the increasing vulnerability of the tourism sector. As a consequence, the labour market is contracting. There has also been a spike in the rate of growth of informal or part-time jobs as a source of income generation. To effectively combat poverty, therefore, governments must first resolve and win the battle against youth unemployment (UN ECLAC 2004).

The persistence of youth unemployment has both economic and social consequences. The non-involvement of youth not only keeps the Caribbean from benefiting from a significant component of its productive capacity, but also – alarmingly – has the potential for exacerbating social tensions and nurturing a climate of anti-social behaviour, criminality, virulence and violence.

The Caribbean Development Bank’s 2015 report, *Youth Are the Future: The Imperative of Youth Employment for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean*, lays out both the causes and the possible consequences of youth unemployment for the region (see Figure 7.3).

This sort of analysis not only drives home the impact of inaction regarding youth unemployment, but also highlights trigger points for effecting change.

**Figure 7.3 Youth unemployment: summary of causes and potential consequences**



Source: Caribbean Development Bank 2015

## 7.5 Strategies for tackling youth unemployment

Given the severity of youth unemployment in the Caribbean, and the fact that it has been an enduring challenge for several years, devising a strategy for addressing the problem has become a priority. There should be a multipronged approach to tackling youth unemployment. The final report from the ILO's regional seminar, *Addressing the Employment Challenges of Caribbean Youth in Times of Crisis* (ILO 2012b), offers several recommendations for future action on youth employment in the region. Among them are changes which seek to (1) create greater economic opportunities and (2) enhance education and skills. The region can also benefit from policies that (3) facilitate youth entrepreneurship.

### 7.5.1 Create greater economic opportunities

Caribbean stakeholders at a 2012 regional meeting highlighted the need for the development and implementation of macro-economic policies and strategies to promote economic and employment growth (ILO 2012b). Countries should consider the development of youth employment policies that are integrated with macro-economic policies and that stimulate better co-ordination and collaboration among agencies involved in youth employment and development. This solution has

been alluded to in chapter 2, where it was noted that policies that deal with the issue of youth unemployment will also have the added benefit of decreasing the crime rate, in addition to allowing young people to pursue new opportunities.

### 7.5.2 Enhance education and skills

It is important to improve the links between traditional education and technical and vocational education and training programmes, and the demands of the labour market by the strengthening of partnerships with the public and private sectors, to support curriculum development and the expansion of work-based learning such as apprenticeships and internship programmes. Chapter 1 highlighted that, for the Caribbean to capitalise on opportunities in 2050, the region must focus on key skills and competencies, such as critical thinking and problem solving, if it is to fully participate in the knowledge economy. Furthermore, chapter 4 suggested that the region should assess the formal education system and, if necessary, curricula and programme content should be re-engineered to incorporate orientation in the competencies of creativity, entrepreneurship, team building and leadership skills. These changes will assist in the reduction of youth unemployment, by ensuring that both the technical and critical-thinking skills young people acquire through the education system make them more employment-ready.

### 7.5.3 Facilitate youth entrepreneurship

The slow recovery from the last economic recession has meant a period of jobless growth for many countries in the Caribbean. The ability of the market to provide jobs has weakened. In the midst of this economic environment, it is important to consider options that enable young people to create jobs for themselves through entrepreneurship.

Entrepreneurship can help to foster economic empowerment and address youth challenges. Entrepreneurial behaviour can also help small states generate innovative solutions to some of the challenges they face such as logistical issues, climate change and limited institutional capacity. Chigunta (2002) outlines a number of reasons for promoting youth entrepreneurship, including its ability to:

- create employment for the entrepreneurs themselves and for those they employ;
- integrate marginalised young people into the economy;
- reduce social and psychological problems linked with unemployment;
- help develop and promote skills and innovation in young people;
- stimulate the local community through the provision of goods and services; and
- spread the benefits of new technologies and economic trends, because young entrepreneurs are often most responsive to them.

The UN Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) has collaborated with the Youth Affairs Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop the forthcoming *Policy Guide on Youth Entrepreneurship*. The framework uses the

**Figure 7.4 Key components of the entrepreneurship policy framework**

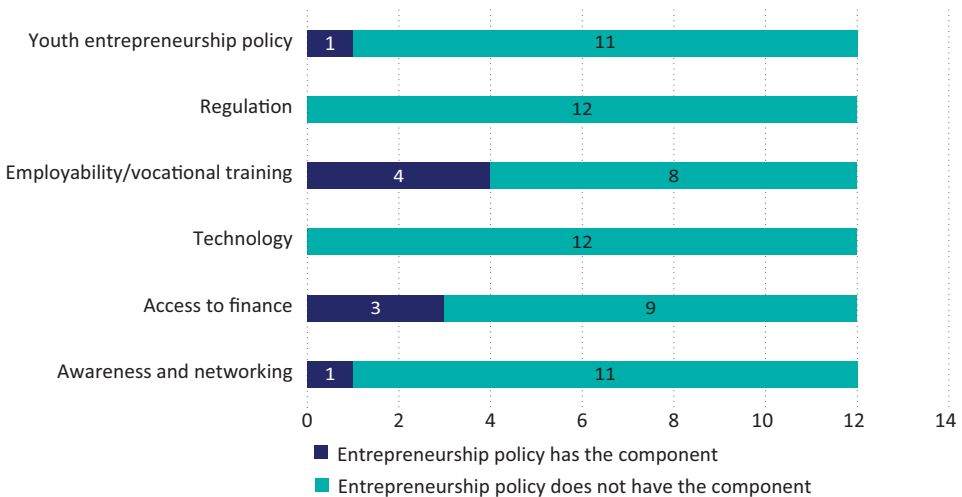


Source: UNCTAD 2012

same six priority areas as UNCTAD’s 2012 publication, the *Entrepreneurship Policy Framework* (see Figure 7.4), but provides measures that have a direct impact on youth. Taking into account the ongoing challenges facing young people, including unemployment, poverty and access to finance, the *Policy Guide* offers youth-specific recommendations that policy-makers will need to consider when developing a youth entrepreneurship strategy.

Research by the Commonwealth Secretariat (2015) shows that very few Caribbean countries have a youth entrepreneurship policy that encompasses all six youth-specific components suggested by the *Policy Guide* (see Figure 7.5). Most notably, their entrepreneurship policies do not address issues of optimising the regulatory

**Figure 7.5 Implementation of elements of the *Policy Guide* among Commonwealth Caribbean states**



Source: Authors’ calculations

environment or facilitating technology exchange and innovation. While education and vocational training is the most widely represented element, it is still not consistently included in entrepreneurial policies.

There are several challenges that prevent small Caribbean countries from fully implementing the aspects of the *Policy Guide*. Among these are:

- **Limited data available to create an effective youth entrepreneurship policy:** Effective policy should be grounded in research to truly reflect the country's needs. Data is required to achieve the policy objectives suggested by the *Policy Guide*, particularly to identify country-specific challenges and to set goals and priorities. Small states such as those in the Caribbean are often hindered by a lack of data, which may result in policies that do not achieve the desired results effectively.
- **Lack of youth-specific regulations and incentives:** The *Policy Guide* suggests minimising regulatory hurdles where appropriate. Young entrepreneurs may need tailored regulations to ensure that they are given the support they need to enter the market. Making it easier for young people to navigate through the start-up requirements will stimulate business formalisation and uptake. In addition, the introduction of youth-friendly and youth-oriented business services will reduce traditional biases and negative perspectives, and ultimately increase participation.
- **Small state educational challenges:** Among other things, small states' education systems struggle with resource dispersal and scatter (Steward and Thomas 1996), absence of local research, evaluation and consultancy capacity (Lloyd and Packer 1994; Crossley and Holmes 2001) and tension between local educational content and that of international qualifications (Bray and Steward 1998). More specifically with regard to entrepreneurial education, there are likely to be few qualified teachers. Furthermore, the education system in many small states focuses on rote learning to pass exams, rather than more flexible creative learning styles (Bacchus 2008). While this approach prepares people to become skilled employees, it does not encourage them to become employers or to initiate a start-up business.
- **Small private sectors to facilitate technology exchange:** While the *Policy Guide* suggests promoting inter firm networks that help spread technology and innovation, the private sector in some small states is small and not well developed. There are limited opportunities to network in some fields, particularly for technology-based ventures, as there might not be any local private companies with which to connect.
- **Structure of the financial systems does not encourage lending to youth entrepreneurs:** Some small states have financial systems that are designed to attract overseas funds and serve the needs of international clients, as opposed to those of local populations. Therefore, small states face a challenge in developing a system that is responsive to the needs of their young population, while still attracting the overseas funds that some rely on.
- **Lack of economic diversification limits networking opportunities:** Many small states have limited natural resources and are challenged by limited diversification

possibilities (International Monetary Fund 2014). As a result, for young entrepreneurs looking to enter the market in an underrepresented industry, there may be few local businesses with which to network.

The Commonwealth Secretariat (2015) put forward five areas of action to further facilitate youth entrepreneurship. These are:

1. **Develop entrepreneurship policies:** As entrepreneurship is a vital part of economic growth and development, it is recommended that governments develop policies aimed at promoting the emergence of new entrepreneurs and facilitating new business start-ups. The *Entrepreneurship Policy Framework and Implementation Guidance* and the *Policy Guide on Youth Entrepreneurship* are great tools that can be used to develop effective policies.
2. **Design an entrepreneur-friendly regulatory environment:** The presence of a strong regulatory environment, which is easy to understand and does not deter budding entrepreneurs, will serve to stimulate economic opportunities for young people, ensure governments are able to generate tax revenues from businesses and ultimately alter the stereotypes that regulators have of young people. Malta's Business First programme is a great example of a user-friendly regulatory project that can be easily replicated in other small states.
3. **Use education as an agent of cultural change:** To truly encourage young people to start businesses, the perception that both young people and entrepreneurs are risky investments needs to be combated. Providing an environment that embraces risk taking and rewards creativity and innovation will help to create a positive attitude towards young entrepreneurs. Introducing entrepreneurial education early on in the national curriculum can help foster a culture that embraces more risk taking, a characteristic needed by entrepreneurs. An education system that encourages creativity and problem solving helps to generate an innovative and dynamic society and economy.
4. **Encourage active engagement and networking:** Small states can capitalise on the very characteristic that makes them a unique grouping: their size. Their relatively high internet penetration, coupled with their close-knit communities, allows for effective and meaningful networks to be developed. Young entrepreneurs can be linked more easily with successful business people, either locally in person or regionally and internationally via the internet.
5. **Develop specific youth entrepreneurship policies:** While it is possible for the young people to benefit from wider entrepreneurship policies, specific and targeted youth entrepreneurship policies will be more effective and productive in reaching out to the young people and gaining their support and interest. To encourage more successful young people entrepreneurs, governments of small states should deepen their commitment to targeted youth development.

Undertaking these recommendations can help the Caribbean to create a policy environment which supports young people to start their own businesses and which facilitates the growth and success of those businesses.

## 7.6 Mainstreaming youth development

However, it is important to note that any policy aimed at tackling youth unemployment will be more effective in an environment of broad-based youth support. Given this, governments of the Caribbean region should deepen their commitment to youth development and empowerment.

More practically, they should seek to include and mainstream youth development through three main avenues:

1. building the evidence base for youth policies;
2. strengthening youth leadership and governance;
3. promoting youth economic and social citizenship.

### 7.6.1 Building the evidence base for youth policies

Currently, 16 of 17 Commonwealth Caribbean countries have dedicated national youth policies, which vary greatly in their level of currency. The Caribbean has also taken steps to address some of the critical issues surrounding the relevance, responsiveness and sustainability of regional youth policy frameworks. In this regard, CARICOM has also adopted a Youth Development Action Plan which, based on the landmark situation analysis of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development (CCYD), seeks to help member states meet six regional CARICOM Youth Development Goals.<sup>2</sup> While the formulation of policies is widespread and has usually been led by a government ministry or department of youth affairs, two main issues have hampered policy effectiveness. First, a lack of mainstreamed approaches to multisectoral implementation partnerships, within and outside governments, has often limited interventions to seemingly identifiable ‘youth issues’ such as education, sport and culture. There is a need, however, to ensure that all national development policies take into account the needs of young people; respond in an integrated way, allowing one sector to reinforce efforts in another; and consider the effects of actions on youth well-being.

Second, all stages of the policy cycle, from formulation through implementation to monitoring, have been affected by a lack of systematic data collection and analysis. Certainly, the region has benefited from some good research on the situation of youth, but these studies have been infrequent and have only recently increased in frequency since the new millennium, as attention is paid to ensuring that youth development responses are evidence-based.<sup>3</sup> Among the most seminal regional research reports have been the 2003 report of the World Bank on *Caribbean Youth Development: Issues and Policy Directions*; the 2010 CCYD report *Eye on the Future: Investing in Youth Now for Tomorrow’s Community*; a chapter of the 2012 *Caribbean Human Development Report (CHDR)* entitled ‘Reducing Youth Violence and Enhancing Youth Resilience’; and now, most recently, the 2015 Caribbean Development Bank’s report on youth employment, entitled *Youth Are the Future: The Imperative of Youth Employment for Sustainable Development in the Caribbean*. These have all raised the profile of young people as partners in development; yet,

through their own shortcomings, they have also highlighted the need for more and, up-to-date qualitative and quantitative data on youth.

### 7.6.2 Strengthening youth leadership and governance

In the Commonwealth Caribbean, there are some, albeit imperfect, examples of regional institutional frameworks for youth participation in development dialogue and initiatives. There is the Caribbean Regional Youth Council (CRYC), which is an independent, democratic federation of national youth councils and other relevant national youth platforms.<sup>4</sup> The CRYC is an affiliate of the Commonwealth Youth Council. However, it remains challenged by the relative weakness of some national councils and availability of resources to carry out its mandate. In addition, there is the CARICOM Youth Ambassadors Programme, which is a youth network closely affiliated to the CARICOM Secretariat. The programme has contributed to shaping the regional human and social development agenda through participation in governance and policy meetings of the Secretariat. However, the mainstreaming of youth participation into all areas of the CARICOM agenda (beyond social development) remains inappropriately elusive (Gilbert-Roberts 2014).

### 7.6.3 Promoting youth economic and social citizenship

To date, economic interventions that address young people's needs and concerns are more often treated as social protection measures than as socio-economic development strategies. Global trends in addressing the economic needs of children and young people have now adopted a model of youth economic citizenship that integrates financial education, social education and financial inclusion as key elements of youth economic empowerment and financial capability (CYFI 2013).

Such a framework will be important for the Caribbean to influence the preparedness of young people for economic life more effectively and address one of the more intractable economic issues confronting young people, which has received significant attention: unemployment/underemployment.

A notable omission in the Caribbean youth development landscape is the absence of integrated youth employment policies, as mandated by the ILO, and policies that address financial inclusion and financial education.

The link between full economic participation and social well-being cannot be overstated. Reducing incidences of ill-health among young people is a priority area of action. Communicable (including HIV and sexually transmitted infections) and non-communicable diseases (including diabetes and obesity), mental health, substance abuse, violence-related injuries, and vehicular-related injuries and mortality are all areas of concern (see, for example, UNDP 2012; CCYD 2010; Bailey and Coore-Desai 2009; St Bernard and Matthews 2003). The ability of young people to access social security benefits, housing and healthcare must also be addressed. Improvements in these areas are likely to coincide with reductions in the level of child and youth poverty. Young people have consistently indicated their willingness and ability to

actively participate in the conceptualisation and execution of strategies, programmes and initiatives to address these development challenges.

## 7.7 Conclusion

This chapter's exploration of the current issues that young people face in the Caribbean is an important element in securing the sustainability of the region's development vision for 2050. Supporting young people in tackling the challenges that they face is a critical part of both achieving and sustaining the region's development goals.

While the YDI score of 0.6 for the region suggests that young people in the Caribbean are doing relatively well, the number masks the fact that there are persistent challenges that continue to plague the region. Chief among these is youth unemployment. Tackling this issue requires a multipronged approach that covers creating economic opportunities, enhancing education and skills, and facilitating youth entrepreneurship.

## Notes

- 1 Inputs to this chapter were provided by Ayesha Constable, Henry Wallace Charles and Terri-Ann Gilbert Roberts.
- 2 These goals reflect and endorse the objectives of global frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals, the World Programme of Action on Youth and the Convention on the Rights of the Child as well as the Commonwealth Plan for Action for Youth Empowerment.
- 3 The 2014 Baku Commitment to Youth Policies adopted at the Global Forum on Youth Policies – in which Commonwealth Caribbean young people, policy-makers and youth development experts participated – calls for knowledge-based and evidence-based youth policies to secure more effective youth development action.
- 4 There are currently 11 national youth councils or national youth organisations that are members of the CRYC.

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