



6th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting

Thematic Papers



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Commonwealth Secretariat



Commonwealth Secretariat
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Contents

5 HIV/AIDS

The challenges for young people

JOSEPH AMUZU

- 5 Introduction
- 5 Background
- 6 United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and HIV/AIDS
- 6 Poverty dimensions and socio-cultural vulnerabilities
- 7 Young people and sex
- 8 Young people and lack of information
- 8 Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
- 9 Intravenous drug use and alcohol abuse
- 9 Armed conflict, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS
- 9 Young people in the sex trade
- 9 Young males having sex with males
- 10 HIV/AIDS and gender
- 10 Why are young people particularly affected by HIV/AIDS?
- 11 What needs to be done?
- 13 What is the Commonwealth Youth Programme doing? Achievements and challenges
- 14 Conclusion
- 15 *References*

16 National Youth Policy (NYP)

Case studies from St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago

TENNYSON S D JOSEPH, PHD

- 16 Introduction
- 17 The socio-political architecture of globalisation
- 18 Assessing the efficacy and relevance of the CYP/global youth policy agenda
- 19 Resistance and adjustment: the youth policies of St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago contrasted
- 19 St Lucia – welfarism as historical necessity
- 20 Trinidad and Tobago – the tentative embrace of developmentalism
- 22 Conclusion: an appraisal of Caribbean youth policy, and the CYP agenda
- 24 *Bibliography*

25 National Youth Councils

ARMSTRONG ALEXIS

- 25 Introduction
- 26 Young people and the independence of national youth councils
- 28 Why a National Youth Council?
- 28 NYC structures
- 30 NGO approach that guides youth participation
- 30 The role of government
- 31 Youth mainstreaming
- 32 Conclusion
- 33 *Notes*

34 Young People and the Digital Divide**CARLOS FERNANDES, VARSHA JAGDALE, JEANETTE FERNANDES, JASON FERNANDES**

- 34 Introduction
- 35 Young people: beneficiaries of the Internet and digital technologies
- 37 The youth: helping bridge the digital divide themselves
- 38 Tackling the causes of the digital divide
- 39 Evolving and extending CYP's work in ICT
- 40 Conclusion

41 Youth Crime and Violence**KEITH BELL**

- 41 Introduction
- 42 Issues, causes and concerns
- 45 A review of crime statistics in The Bahamas
- 46 Tackling the problem of youth crime and violence
- 47 The Urban Renewal Programme (URP)
- 48 The School Policing Initiative
- 49 Church/community participation
- 51 *Notes*

APPENDIX A

- 53 Crime Statistics – The Bahamas

APPENDIX B

- 55 Caribbean Youth Explosion, Grenada, 2000

56 Young People and Legal Rights (YPLR)**JULIAN JACK**

- 56 Background
- 56 Global context
- 57 Enabling conditions
- 57 Case studies
 - 57 1 The Bahamas
 - 58 2 Canada
 - 59 3 Ghana
 - 60 4 India
 - 61 5 Malaysia
 - 62 6 New Zealand
 - 63 7 South Africa
 - 64 8 United Kingdom (England and Wales)
- 66 9 Recommendations
- 67 *Notes*
- 68 *Further reading online*

HIV/AIDS

The challenges for young people

Joseph Amuzu

Introduction

The HIV/AIDS epidemic, combined with the demographic, cultural, social and economic factors associated with those living in poverty, presents a significant challenge in establishing sustainable livelihoods. As a group, young women and men are marginalised in society, which results in limited access to resources including kinship networks, education, land, technology and little or no interaction with formal institutions. Young women in particular, are affected in a disproportionate manner.

The overall goals of this paper are to:

- ❖ articulate how the cultural and social position of young people limits their choices and makes them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS;
- ❖ demonstrate how global productivity and security will hinge on developing young people's full potential and engaging them not only as beneficiaries, but also as participants and problem-solvers.

Background

HIV/AIDS is undoubtedly a common challenge, perhaps the greatest so far faced by Commonwealth member states, with the vast majority being developing countries in Africa, Asia, Caribbean and Pacific. Commonwealth countries represent approximately 30 per cent of the world's population, but carry a disproportionate 60 per cent of the world's HIV/AIDS burden. Thirteen Commonwealth countries in sub-Saharan Africa now have HIV/AIDS adult prevalence of between 15 to 39 per cent, with women disproportionately infected.

It is estimated that 50 per cent of all new HIV infections are among young people, and that 30 per cent of the 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS are in the 15-24 year age group. The vast majority of young people who are HIV positive do not know that they are infected, and few know the HIV status of their partners. In sub-Saharan Africa, 60 per cent of all infections occur in young females.

In sub-Saharan Africa, 11 million children under the age of 15 years have experienced the death of one or both parents due to AIDS, among a total of 34 million orphans from all causes. Although prevalence is generally low among those aged 5-15 years, approximately three million children are themselves infected with HIV.

The Caribbean is the second most affected region in the world. Among adults aged 15-44, AIDS has become the leading cause of death. Several countries and territories with economies that are dependent on tourism rank among those most heavily affected by the epidemic in this region.

South and South East Asia have a higher total number of HIV infections and annual AIDS deaths than any region except sub-Saharan Africa. National HIV infection levels in Asia are low compared with other continents but the populations of many Asian nations are so large that even low national HIV prevalence means large numbers of people are living with HIV/AIDS. Latest estimates show that about 5.1 million people were living with HIV/AIDS in India in 2003.

In the Pacific region of the Commonwealth, Papua New Guinea has the highest prevalence of HIV infection. An estimated 0.6 per cent of adults—roughly 16,000 people of the adult population of about 2.6 million—was living with HIV at the end of 2003. On remote islands, seafarers and their partners appear to be most at risk. High rates of other sexually transmitted infections have also been detected on some other islands.

HIV/AIDS is also posing a problem in the developed Commonwealth countries but the magnitude is far less than in other Commonwealth regions. These countries have the means and technology to provide prevention, treatment, care and support services to those infected and affected. The main risk groups for HIV/AIDS identified in the developed Commonwealth countries are men who have sex with men, injecting drug users and people who have received treatment with blood products. However, the heterosexual mode of infection is now increasing.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic is one of the most important and urgent public health challenges facing governments and civil societies around the world. Young people (15-29 years) are at the centre of the pandemic in terms of transmission, impact, and potential for changing the attitudes and behaviours that underlie this disease.

Fortunately, most young people are not infected. In fact, for the period of early adolescence, HIV rates are the lowest of any other period during the life cycle. The challenge is to keep them this way. Focusing on young people is likely to be the most effective approach to confronting the epidemic, particularly in high prevalence countries.

United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and HIV/AIDS

At the United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS in June 2001, heads of state and government committed themselves to meeting a number of key goals to diminish HIV/AIDS prevalence among young people aged 15 to 24. These include:

- ❖ Reducing HIV/AIDS prevalence among the young by 25 per cent in the most affected countries by 2005, and by 25 per cent worldwide by 2010.
- ❖ Ensuring that young people have the information, education, services and life skills to reduce their vulnerability to HIV/AIDS, reaching 90 per cent by 2005 and 95 per cent by 2010.

The Millennium Development Goals represent an unprecedented global commitment to combating poverty, hunger, disease, and inequality. Goal 6, “to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases,” elevates the fight against HIV/AIDS to a place among the world’s highest development priorities, recognising the enormous suffering the epidemic causes, as well as the threat it poses to achievement of the other goals.

At a more fundamental level, any attempt to understand the root causes of HIV/AIDS must consider its striking association with poverty and social vulnerability, a central theme that transcends regional variations and differences in mode of transmission.

Poverty dimensions and socio-cultural vulnerabilities

The challenge of HIV/AIDS cannot be addressed outside the context of the poverty that prevails, particularly across Africa. It is impossible to overcome the HIV/AIDS pandemic without far-reaching

social and economic change across the continent. The HIV/AIDS pandemic not only causes poverty, it is also fuelled by it. Many cultural characteristics that prevail in African societies can be traced back to poverty and the need for material support, and many of them include a sexual component that allows for the transmission and spread of HIV/AIDS.

“The mesh of poverty and HIV/AIDS is the deadliest combination on the planet, and there’s not the slightest possibility of confronting poverty so long as AIDS runs its savage course.”

Bono

Worldwide, 95 per cent of the 40 million people living with HIV/AIDS live in developing countries. Those countries, already struggling with unjust trade, crippling debt, and ineffective and insufficient aid, have been shell-shocked by AIDS. As people die, the epidemic robs communities and regions of their producers, public servants and future leaders.

Today, young people constitute one of the fastest growing groups to be infected with the HIV virus. According to the UNAIDS, almost 7,000 young people are infected with the HIV/AIDS virus daily, representing more than half of all new infections. At the end of 2003, there were 11.8 million young people (aged 15-24) living with AIDS worldwide. Out of this number, 7.3 million are young women and 4.5 million are young men. More specifically, in sub-Saharan Africa, out of 28.5 million people living with the virus, 6.2 million are young people. Of this number, 76 per cent are young women. The Commonwealth is home to 60 per cent of all persons living with HIV/AIDS.

Young people are vulnerable to HIV/AIDS due to several factors. These include risky sexual behaviour, experimentation with drugs and alcohol abuse, poverty, peer pressure and lack of information. In most developing countries in Africa, Asia and the Caribbean, the breakdown in the social structure has also compounded the vulnerability of young people. This is further worsened by widespread ignorance among young people of the risks associated with unprotected sexual activity. Recent knowledge and behaviour indicators show that in countries with “generalised” HIV/AIDS epidemics, with an antenatal HIV prevalence above 10 per cent, more than 80 per cent of young women aged 15 - 24 did not have sufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS. On the contrary, in countries where knowledge and awareness of HIV/AIDS is high, this does not necessarily translate into behaviour change. This, points to the fact that young people’s vulnerability is a result of several factors interfacing at different levels.

Young people and sex

Sexual activity begins in adolescence for the majority of people. In many countries, unmarried girls and boys are sexually active before the age of 15. Recent surveys of boys aged 15 to 19 in Kenya and other countries found that more than a quarter reported having sex before they were 15. A study in Bangladesh found that 88 per cent of unmarried urban boys and 35 per cent of unmarried urban girls had engaged in sexual activity by the time they were 18. In rural Bangladesh, those figures were 38 per cent for boys and 6 per cent for girls. Early marriage occurs across the globe, but it is most common in parts of Africa and South Asia. In India, 50 per cent of girls are married by the age of 18.

Adolescents who start having sex early are more likely to have sex with high-risk partners or multiple partners, and are less likely to use condoms. Delaying the age at which young people first have sex can significantly protect them from infection. Lacking the necessary knowledge and skills, younger adolescents are less likely to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS than young people in their early twenties. In Malawi, 29 per cent of boys aged 15 to 19 used a condom, compared to 47 per cent of the men aged 20 to 24.

Adolescents who are not yet sexually active must be encouraged to delay sexual activity. When young people do have sex, they must be able to protect themselves. Good-quality condoms have to be easily available and free or affordable. In some instances, however, knowledge about where to get a condom has declined. It is vital to provide basic information continuously to adolescents. Even when young

people do have information, some engage in unprotected sex because they lack the skills to negotiate abstinence or condom use. They may be fearful or embarrassed to talk with their partner about sex. Still others may not adopt safe behaviours because they perceive their individual risk to be low. In Nigeria, 95 per cent of girls aged 15 to 19 perceived their risk of getting HIV/AIDS to be minimal.

Young people and lack of information

New studies from across the globe have established that the vast majority of young people have no idea how HIV/AIDS is transmitted or how to protect themselves from the disease. In countries with generalised HIV/AIDS epidemics, such as Cameroon, Lesotho and Sierra Leone, more than 80 per cent of young women aged 15 to 24 do not have sufficient knowledge about HIV/AIDS.

Misconceptions about HIV/AIDS are widespread among young people. They vary from one culture to another, and particular rumours gain currency in some populations both on how HIV/AIDS is spread (by mosquito bites or witchcraft, for example) and on how it can be avoided (by eating a certain fish, for example, or having sex with a virgin). Surveys from 40 countries indicate that more than 50 per cent of young people aged 15 to 24 harbour serious misconceptions about how HIV/AIDS is transmitted.

One recent study, for example, showed that being a member of a well-run community youth group reduces a young woman's risk of contracting HIV. Protective factors include, positive relationships with parents, teachers, and other adults in the community, feeling valued, positive school environments, exposure to positive values, rules and expectations, having spiritual beliefs, and a sense of hope for the future.

Those young people who are forced to live on the social and economic margins of society have even less access to information, skills, services and support than young people normally do. If they are already living with HIV/AIDS, they suffer even worse stigma and discrimination and have virtually no access to care or drugs when they fall ill.

Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)

Over 100 million new sexually transmitted infections (STIs), excluding HIV, occur each year among young people under 25 years of age. STIs greatly facilitate HIV transmission between sexual partners, so treating and preventing them is an important step in breaking the HIV/AIDS chain of infection. A study in South Africa showed that men infected with herpes simplex virus – type 2 (HSV-2) were seven times more likely to be also HIV positive than sexually active men who did not have HSV-2. Another landmark study in Mwanza, United Republic of Tanzania, showed that HIV incidence was 40 per cent lower after two years in communities where symptomatic STIs were better managed than in communities lacking good STI care.

STIs spread rapidly in great part because the majority of infections either do not produce any symptoms or signs, especially in females, or produce symptoms so mild that they are often disregarded. Some STI symptoms may even disappear over time, creating the false impression that the disease, too, has disappeared. Finally, many young people do not know the difference between normal and abnormal conditions and therefore do not know when to seek medical care.

Even when they suspect they have an infection, many young people do not seek medical care because they fear that their privacy will not be respected. They may be too embarrassed or feel too guilty to seek treatment. Services may also be inaccessible because clinics are far away or have limited hours. Health providers may be reluctant to serve adolescents. When services are located in maternal and child health centres, they are unlikely to be used by young men.

Intravenous drug use and alcohol abuse

Intravenous drug use is one of the many addictions that often begin during adolescence. Drug use among young people, especially young men, has increased dramatically in recent years. People who share needles and syringes for injecting drugs are at very high risk of contracting HIV/AIDS. Adolescence is often a time of experimentation with drugs and alcohol. In the United Republic of Tanzania, young people aged 16 to 24 who smoke and drink alcohol are four times more likely than their peers to have multiple sex partners.

Armed conflict, sexual violence and HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS spreads amid the dislocation and destruction of armed conflict, as communities scatter and health services, educational infrastructure and legal protections collapse. At the beginning of the new millennium, 35 million people were either refugees or internally displaced, about 80 per cent of them children and women. Some young people find relative safety in refugee camps, though even there, they may be victimised and abused. Many remain without any protection at all and are the targets of rape and sexual violence. They often have no access to HIV information, health care or the means to practice safer sex.

Reported rape is on the rise in many countries, but most sexual violence still goes unreported. Both boys and girls are vulnerable to sexual violence, including abuse and exploitation. In Botswana, a 1998 study found that over 40 per cent of all rape cases reaching the courts involved children under the age of 16, 58 per cent were between the ages of 11 and 20. In KwaZulu Natal, South Africa, 10 per cent of adolescent girls reported their first sexual experience as forced or rape. Surveys from nine Caribbean countries found that 48 per cent of adolescent girls who had had intercourse reported that their first sexual intercourse had been forced. The perpetrators are not always strangers. Both girls and boys are at risk of being violated by relatives, family friends, employers, teachers and other adults they may trust.

Young people in the sex trade

It is estimated that about one million children are abducted or coerced into the sex trade each year. Because the commercial sexual exploitation of children is largely hidden, accurate data is difficult to collect. The Social Welfare Board of India has reported that roughly two out of five sex workers are children under 18, some as young as 8 or 9. Adolescents who are sexually exploited also have virtually no negotiating power to ask for safe sex from their exploiters. As many as 48 per cent of adolescent sex workers are HIV positive in Pune, India. This, points to the need to strengthen efforts to prevent young people from being ensnared in commercial sexual exploitation. Since girls rapidly become infected after entering prostitution, special efforts are also needed to identify and provide preventive services to new sex workers.

Young males having sex with males

The risk of contracting HIV from unprotected anal sex is especially high. The social stigma and violence visited on those identified as homosexual can magnify the risks of contracting HIV, as these people may hide their sexuality and consequently do not have access to the information they need. Some young men who engage in sexual relations with other males may not identify themselves as homosexual or may have experimental and temporary homosexual experiences, without protecting themselves from unsafe behaviours that put them at risk for contracting HIV/AIDS.

Young people suffer the stigma and discrimination often associated with HIV/AIDS and may be denied education, work, housing and other basic needs as a result. Young girls are likely to drop out of school to care for parents infected with HIV or for younger siblings. Orphans also leave school because of discrimination, emotional distress or because they cannot afford to pay school fees.

The fear of stigma and deep-rooted discrimination makes young people less likely to adopt preventive strategies such as using condoms, seeking testing for HIV/AIDS and other STIs, adhering to treatment or disclosing their HIV status to sexual partners. National and community leadership must break the silence, challenge the stigma and eliminate the shame associated with HIV/AIDS.

HIV/AIDS and gender

HIV/AIDS has a profound effect on young women. More than half of infections occur among women worldwide. Not only are women more susceptible biologically, they are significantly more vulnerable because of gender norms imposed on women. According to a UNAIDS report on HIV/AIDS and young people, young women and girls are often sexually ignorant and know little about sex and sexuality. This lack of knowledge puts them at a heightened risk of HIV infection. Furthermore, young women and girls are often expected to be passive. This gender role may lead to sexual passivity and domination by male partners, thus eroding them of control over their sexual lives. The social factors, which heighten women's susceptibility vary from country to country and are rooted in culture, economy, etc. In addition, early and forced marriages all leave young women vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS infection. The Commonwealth Secretariat and its partners have played an important role in the recent global recognition that HIV/AIDS is an integral gender issue and that the fight against the pandemic cannot be waged without addressing the specific gender dimensions of prevention, mitigation, care, treatment and support.

The danger of infection is highest among the poorest and least powerful. Young girls living in poverty are often enticed or coerced into having sex with someone older, wealthier or in a position of authority, such as an employer, schoolteacher or older 'sugar daddy', in order to stay in school or support themselves and their families. A study in Botswana found about one in five out-of-school adolescent girls reporting that it is difficult to refuse sex when money and gifts are offered.

Marriage on its own offers no protection against HIV/AIDS for young women, especially if their husband is much older. A study in Kisumu, Kenya, reported that as many as half of the women with husbands at least a decade older were infected with HIV/AIDS; by contrast, no women were infected whose husbands were only three years older or less. Another study of nearly 400 women attending the city's STI clinic in Pune, India, found 25 per cent infected with STIs and 14 per cent positive for HIV; 93 per cent of these women were married, and 91 per cent had never had sex with anyone but their husbands. Lacking the power to negotiate safe sex practices, many young brides may be even more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and STIs than unmarried girls.

Why are young people particularly affected by HIV/AIDS?

In order for young people to take the risks that are important for their development and avoid those that will do them irreparable harm, their rights to health and development need to be fulfilled. This includes their rights to information and skills, a range of services, a safe and supportive environment, and opportunities to participate. Frequently, this is not the case. HIV/AIDS flourishes where human rights are not protected.

Young people are vulnerable because they often do not know how serious the problem of HIV/AIDS is, how it is caused or what they can do to protect themselves. Many young people do not have access to information about HIV/AIDS, or the opportunities to develop the life skills that they need to turn this information into action. Frequently, they also do not have access to services that consider their specific needs.

In addition to the individual characteristics of young people themselves, they are also influenced by other young people and made vulnerable by the attitudes and behaviours of the significant adults in their lives, such as parents, teachers and service providers. The wider context in which they live, learn and work, including social values and norms, policies and legislation, and their economic situation are also very important. In countries where the predominant mode of transmission is by heterosexual sex, girls are often more vulnerable than boys, for both biological and social reasons. Conversely, in countries where the predominant routes of spread are men having sex with men or intravenous drug use, boys are likely to be more at risk from HIV. Young people involved in sex work, migrants and refugees, and adolescents living on the street, in war situations or who are marginalised and discriminated against, are all likely to be especially vulnerable.

Of course, vulnerability is also increased by HIV/AIDS itself: for example, young people who are living with HIV/AIDS and AIDS orphans (of whom large proportions are adolescents) become even more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

What needs to be done?

A number of issues should be considered before taking any actions to address the spread and impact of HIV/AIDS among young people:

- ❖ recognising that HIV/AIDS is not the same everywhere, and because individual and contextual factors are so important it is crucial to adequately assess and analyse the situation – finding out about HIV/AIDS is an intervention;
- ❖ accepting that there is no silver bullet – many things need to be done through a range of channels and sectors, including families, peers, schools, health services, NGOs, faith-based organisations, the workplace, the media, the sports sector and the private sector – policy-makers must think comprehensively and act strategically;
- ❖ a balance must be found between interventions aimed at all young people and those directed to the most vulnerable, between short-term and long-term actions;
- ❖ young people must be involved in the development and implementation of programmes;
- ❖ HIV/AIDS can be used as an entry point for moving a broader sexual and reproductive health and development agenda – many other problems are linked to HIV/AIDS in terms of cause and effect, for example alcohol, drugs and violence, as are protective factors; and finally
- ❖ funding should not be a limiting factor.

HIV/AIDS is hitting the world's young people hardest. More than half of the 14,000 people newly infected each day are under 25 years old; most of them are girls. Despite the disproportionate burden they carry and the fact that they are more likely than adults to adopt and maintain safe behaviours, young people are routinely disregarded when strategies on HIV/AIDS are drafted, policies made and budgets allocated.

There is need to place the world's two billion young people and children at the centre of global and national HIV/AIDS policy, programme and investment strategies.

Soon after the December 2004 tsunami, adolescents and young people mobilised, helping to distribute aid, assisting with clean-up and rebuilding, and caring for those younger than themselves. Yet their enthusiasm, creativity and energy are not being fully utilised in rehabilitation and development efforts, or in the fight against HIV/AIDS.

Governments can contain the epidemic at relatively low cost by investing in prevention before HIV/AIDS becomes a significant health issue and by providing young people at especially high risk of contracting HIV with the information and support they need to prevent infection.

Prevention is the key to reducing infection rates and ultimately defeating HIV/AIDS. Interventions must be relevant to local conditions. And they must be tailored to the differences between boys and

girls, young people living in rural and urban areas, children in school and out of school, younger and older adolescents and young people married and unmarried. Policy-makers must recognise that young people, especially girls, need to have their rights protected. HIV prevention efforts must also recognise young people's immediate needs for shelter and food, as well as their need to earn an income in safe and non-exploitative ways.

Increased HIV prevention could prevent 29 million infections by 2010 and bring down HIV/AIDS infection rates among young people by a quarter.

Presidents, Prime Ministers, Ministers, youth leaders, entertainers, sports figures, religious leaders and other influential individuals must have the courage to talk openly and without judgement about sexuality, about violence against girls and women and about drug use.

Policy-makers must ensure that adolescents have the information, services and support they need. Leaders must marshal the necessary financial resources for the fight against HIV/AIDS and develop strategies based on thorough analysis of the local situation. In countries where strong political leadership has fostered openness about the issues and wide-ranging responses, the tide is turning and clear successes are being achieved.

Education is recognised as a critical factor in the social and economic development of a nation. The universally accepted role education plays is reflected in the priority given to the Millennium Development Goal of achieving universal primary education by 2015. In the era of HIV/AIDS, the role of education is paramount in protecting the 'window of hope' – the uninfected children who represent the future of young people, families, communities and nations. The educational environment offers a unique opportunity to provide children with the knowledge and skills needed to protect themselves from HIV infection, as well as the skills required to cope with HIV/AIDS as it affects young people's lives.

It is now well recognised across the Commonwealth that providing appropriate HIV/AIDS education with a focus on life skills – particularly relating to decision-making, negotiating and communication with the joint aim of delaying first sexual intercourse and encouraging protected sex needs to become a core component of education.

Access to education accelerates a range of socio-economic changes that reduce susceptibility to HIV infection. For many in the Commonwealth, HIV/AIDS has already had an enormous impact on the state's ability to provide education as many teachers are lost to HIV/AIDS and pupils are impacted by AIDS directly, or become carers or orphans. The loss of teachers to HIV/AIDS is further exacerbated by the outward migration of teachers and the difficulty of teacher retention. Educating young people about HIV/AIDS, and teaching them skills in negotiation, conflict resolution, critical thinking, decision-making and communication, improves their self-confidence and ability to make informed choices, such as postponing sex until they are mature enough to protect themselves from HIV/AIDS, other STIs and unwanted pregnancies.

Sport can play a significant role in the education of young people about HIV/AIDS. It can be used to communicate and help reach out to young people in communities that can be difficult to reach and can provide positive role models to raise awareness and deliver prevention messages on HIV/AIDS. Sport can also

promote social integration and help break down barriers and reduce the stigma surrounded by such diseases through its inclusiveness and teamwork structures.

According special priority to young people will change the future course of the epidemic. Changing behaviours and expectations early results in a lifetime of benefit – both in HIV prevention and in overcoming HIV-related stigma. The challenge is to promote effective programmes that engage young people in all aspects of the response to HIV/AIDS. . . .In every country where HIV transmission has been reduced, it has been among young people that the most spectacular reductions have occurred.

Peter Piot, Executive Director, UNAIDS

Youth-friendly services offer treatment for STIs and access to condoms and help young people become responsible for their sexual and reproductive health. Voluntary, confidential HIV counselling and testing services allow young people to determine their HIV status.

Communities and governments must understand the factors that increase young people's vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. They must support young people with public information campaigns, both in and out of schools, to raise awareness and combat stigma. They must provide legal protection for women, people living with HIV/AIDS and children orphaned by AIDS. They also must enact and enforce legislation against the sexual exploitation of children, against early and forced marriage and against sexual violence and coercion, within and outside marriage.

All this requires strong leadership. The issues surrounding HIV/AIDS are deeply embedded in cultural and social beliefs and practices, many of them sensitive, intimate, personal and private. Leadership means having the courage to meet the sexual and reproductive health needs of young people. It means working with young people to create an environment in which HIV/AIDS is not discussed in secrecy and shame, but openly and with compassion.

In too many countries, an official conspiracy of silence about AIDS has denied people information that could have saved their lives. We must empower young people to protect themselves through information and a supportive social environment that reduces their vulnerability to infection.

Kofi Annan, United Nations Secretary-General

Leadership means making sure that every young person in every community is equipped with the facts about HIV/AIDS and how to prevent it, and has access to the services, skills and support needed to develop safe behaviours from the start and to spread the message.

Finally, leadership means creating a culture of zero tolerance for sexual abuse, exploitation and any form of violence against children and adolescents.

This paper underscores the urgent need for governments and civil society everywhere to work with young people on effective prevention, treatment and care strategies for them. It calls for unparalleled political commitment to build the partnerships needed to raise critical financial and human resources. And it calls on adults everywhere to demonstrate their willingness to confront difficult issues. Young people are our greatest opportunity to defeat HIV/AIDS.

For example in Kampala, Uganda, HIV/AIDS prevalence rates among pregnant girls aged 15 to 19 fell from 22 per cent in 1990 to 7 per cent in 2000, most likely because of delayed first intercourse, fewer partners and increased condom use. The President of Uganda has spoken openly about HIV/AIDS, and the mass media as well as the government and community and religious organisations have active public education campaigns.

In Lusaka, Zambia, HIV prevalence among adolescents aged 15 to 19 declined from 28 per cent in 1993 to 15 per cent in 1998. There is also evidence of increased condom use and fewer sexual partners, attributed to a vigorous programme providing life skills education and health services for young people.

What is the Commonwealth Youth Programme doing? Achievements and challenges

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has made positive contributions towards the fight against HIV/AIDS among young people. It has provided appropriate interventions in promoting awareness on HIV/AIDS and related issues, and has established a 'human face' for these interventions. The personal experiences of living with HIV/AIDS through sharing information on HIV and AIDS prevent, mitigating impact, treatment, care and support as well as issues of human rights, and advocacy has had considerable impact in countries where HIV positive networks have been established through CYP's Youth Ambassadors for Positive Living (YAPL) project. This has had the

effect of presenting a more human dimension to the issues relating to HIV/AIDS beyond the clearly evident social, economic and/or technical generalities.

The project has provided leadership to young people, along with appropriate HIV/AIDS education with a focus on life skills particularly relating to decision-making, negotiating and communication, a forum for talking openly and without judgement about sexuality, about violence against girls and women, about drug use and information, services and about the support that young people need.

The YAPL programme area has been popularly received nationally and internationally. It is a flagship programme for the Commonwealth and provides high visibility. Youth ministers and youth leaders must marshal the necessary financial resources to support the programme.

The programme was designed as an activity to recruit young HIV positive people and to have them present their personal experiences as well as foster some momentum for the development of peer networks. Once this was done, the issue of how to provide continuity and support was left unaddressed because of the lack of a longer-term framework and resource, especially financial resources. This approach does not match up to the high visibility and impact that the programme has in member countries and internationally.

The HIV/AIDS component of CYP's strategic plan needs to be elevated to the level of a programme area with a separate strategy and clear objective. It also needs to be provided with adequate human and financial resources.

Conclusion

In conclusion, a ten point Action Plan is suggested to stimulate discussion and actions by Ministers at this meeting.

- 1 Combat fear and prejudice still common towards those with HIV/AIDS, especially among policy-makers and opinion shapers.
- 2 Provide young people with knowledge and information.
- 3 Equip young people with life skills to put knowledge into practice.
- 4 Provide youth-friendly health services.
- 5 Promote voluntary and confidential HIV counselling and testing.
- 6 Work with young people, promote their participation.
- 7 Engage young people who are living with HIV/AIDS.
- 8 Create safe and supportive environments.
- 9 Reach out to young people most at risk.
- 10 Strengthen CYP's HIV/AIDS programme, build partnerships, and monitor progress.

Global success in combating HIV/AIDS must be measured by its impact on our children and young people. Are they getting the information they need to protect themselves from HIV? Are girls being empowered to take charge of their sexuality? Are infants safe from the disease, and are children orphaned by AIDS being raised in loving, supportive environments? These are the hard questions we need to be asking. These are the yardsticks for measuring our leaders. We cannot let another generation be devastated by AIDS.

Carol Bellamy, Executive Director, UNICEF

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National Youth Policy (NYP)

Case studies from St Lucia
and Trinidad and Tobago

Tennyson S D Joseph, PhD

Introduction

This article builds on a discussion paper presented to the Regional Advisory Board of the Caribbean Regional Centre of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), in St Kitts and Nevis, on 10 October 2005 (see Joseph 2005). The main aim of that earlier discussion paper was to:

- ❖ highlight the main features of the socio-political architecture emergent in the Caribbean;
- ❖ identify its impact upon the formulation and implementation of youth policy; and
- ❖ suggest some programmatic and policy responses relevant to the challenges identified.

This paper will be more specific in focus. As the title suggests, the paper seeks to highlight the specific policy responses and approaches which have been adopted in two Commonwealth Caribbean countries, namely St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago. These were chosen precisely because they bring into sharp focus the contrasting policy responses which have been developed in these two Commonwealth Caribbean territories at varying levels of economic development after nearly two decades of exposure to a rapidly and continually changing global politico-economic environment, normally encapsulated under the rubric of globalisation.

While globalisation is a general set of economic, technological, political, cultural and ideological processes impacting on all nations and peoples, it has resulted in divergent policy and programmatic approaches to youth development across sovereign jurisdictions. Interestingly, those responses have been contextualised within a philosophical framework which has expressed a commitment to values such as youth empowerment, democratic inclusion, and social development. These values have been largely informed by the Commonwealth and other international development agencies and have been characterised as marking a departure away from a traditional approach which had previously seen youth policy as being social welfarist or remedial in orientation. For instance, the summary document of the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment expresses the view that:

.....
youth empowerment is based on the belief that young people are themselves the best resource for promoting their development, and that they must be both architects and agents in meeting the challenges and solving the problems faced in today's world in the new millennium.

.....
Commonwealth Youth Programme 1998

The aim of this paper is to test how closely these philosophical aspirations have affected youth policy formulation in the Commonwealth Caribbean. This paper sets itself four main tasks. First, it will provide an overview of the emergent global politico-economic architecture and highlight the manner in which it has resulted in a shifting ethos of the role of the post-colonial state from social protection to global adjustment, particularly as reflected in social policy formulation in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

Secondly, the paper will demonstrate how developmental agencies such as CYP have articulated philosophical responses which are both reflective of and reactive to the new environment. An attempt will also be made to provide a philosophical appraisal of the new direction.

Next, the paper will examine how these new philosophical orientations have been incorporated into two national youth policy documents (in St Lucia and in Trinidad and Tobago). The paper will conclude by highlighting the implications for future Commonwealth youth policy programming resulting from the specific cases, as well as from the wider discussion.

The socio-political architecture of globalisation

One of the major impacts of globalisation on the Commonwealth Caribbean has been that it has shaped a set of subjective interpretations and pre-determined socio-political assumptions about the transformational potential of the post-colonial state. In direct terms, globalisation and its attendant philosophy of the “retreat of the state” (see Strange 1996) has resulted in the prevailing assumption by policy-makers that the current socio-political context may have constrained the social interventionist efforts, which had defined the post-colonial developmental assumptions of the Caribbean state. Despite the variations in degree, a philosophy of state interventionism had largely defined the *raison d'état* of the Caribbean post-colonial state from the earliest days of the Caribbean independence movement. Such an interventionist ethos was a logical and historically necessary response to the colonial experience. While this interventionist thrust was never without its external and domestic challenges and critics, there was a wide degree of consensus that it was the responsibility of the post-colonial state to build social infrastructure, in a context where such objectives had never been the central feature of the colonial state.

It is no accident therefore, that the first genuine attempts at social interventionism, and the creation of an embryonic welfare state, emerged in the 1940s, following a period of mass social protest in the Caribbean and prior to the period of eventual colonial withdrawal from the region (see Lewis 1977). It is also no accident that much of the post-colonial politics of the Caribbean from the 1960s to the 1980s was defined by the creation of an interventionist state that placed meeting of the social needs of its population at its centre.

Admittedly, there were varying degrees of commitment to these approaches due to a period of ideological contestation in the 1960s and 1970s, but it can be argued that those decades represented a sort of ‘golden age’ in terms of the Caribbean’s pursuit of a humanistic social agenda. There is no clearer evidence of the successful pursuit of this agenda than in Barbados which, through its construction of a highly developed welfarist-interventionist state, has been able to maintain a relatively high human development standard; to enjoy a commitment to democratic norms and institutions; and to boast of high levels of social and political stability.

By the mid-1990s, the Caribbean had undergone a difficult process of transition to a broad acceptance of global neo-liberal norms. The main consequence of this reversal was a wholesale redefinition of the role of the Caribbean state, specifically in its impact upon the formulation of social policy and the functioning of the public sector. It is in this context that the redefinition of the philosophy of youth policy formulation in the Caribbean can be understood.

In an insightful and instructive paper on public sector reform in the Caribbean, C Y Thomas (1996) made the essential point that the entire thrust of public sector reform has, contrary to popular perception, not necessarily been “a downsizing of the state,” but has been a specific attack against the social interventionism of the Caribbean state. While downsizing has been rationalised through an emphasis on the ‘size’ of the state, what is being reversed is not the size, but the expectation of state interventionism. Ironically, these reversals have not been slowed by the proliferation of special ministries of social transformation, complete with special poverty reduction or elimination units, which in any case were merely concessions to the need to ‘adjust with a human face’. Indeed, according to Thomas, the proliferation of such agencies is hard evidence of such a reversal, since prior to the onset of globalisation, the protection of vulnerable groups was the very *raison d'être* of the Caribbean state. It is as if aware of its abrogation of its historical role since the 1980s, the Caribbean state had belatedly and apologetically recognised the need to create buffer zones and shock absorbers to human misery and neglect.

Assessing the efficacy and relevance of the CYP/global youth policy agenda

The impact of the shifting global environment on the consciousness of the international development community, including agencies like CYP, is clearly discernible, particularly in the language and intent emanating from the international dialogue. One of the main trends in youth policy discourse has been the conscious pursuit of an agenda that has moved away from the welfarist/problem-solving approach which had previously shaped youth policy.

The prescriptive and diagnostic approaches addressed by the Third Meeting of Caricom Directors of Youth Affairs in 2004 consciously sought to move beyond symptoms to embrace an approach which was developmental rather than remedial. In addition, the model for youth development adopted by that meeting was one which was “asset-based as opposed to problem-centred”. Arising out of this shift in consciousness, was a policy formula which expressed a commitment to “holistic positive development” which includes parenting and citizenship education, the exploration of issues pertaining to cultural roots and identity, and the use of sport and the performing arts as development tools” (see Caricom 2004, p 5).

This movement away from the welfarist/interventionist basis of youth policy has been given further authority by the Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (see CYP 1998). The summary document of the Commonwealth Plan of Action consciously linked the need for the asset-based approach to the specific demands of the new global environment. According to the document, “youth empowerment is based on the belief that young people are themselves the best resource for promoting their development, and that they must be both architects and agents in meeting the challenges and solving the problems faced in the new millennium” (CYP 1998). In addition, the document argues that “effective and meaningful participation in decision-making is central to the Commonwealth’s definition of youth empowerment [and] this definition goes beyond both the social welfare approach and participation, because it defines the full range of conditions young people require if they are to shape their own lives and enrich their communities” (CYP 1998).

In assessing the efficacy of the Commonwealth youth policy agenda, and the new direction to which it is committed, two rival conclusions can be drawn.

On the one hand, this commitment to an asset-based, self-driven, empowerment approach can be seen as a pernicious and worrying development when understood as part of the broad criticism of globalisation and its ideological handmaiden, neo-liberalism. As implied from the earlier examination of the new geo-political/ideological infrastructure, one of the weaknesses of this approach is the manner in which it has led to an abandonment of the weak and the vulnerable, through the abandonment of the ideals of welfarism and social protection.

It must be asked therefore, whether CYP and other international agencies, have not in themselves contributed to a process of uncritical adjustment to the new global environment by their wholesale adoption of the new approach. This issue assumes even greater significance when it is considered that the region’s dominant political culture continues to demand that the state plays a direct interventionist role to protect and cushion vulnerable groups from the external environment. From this perspective, the CYP approach can be seen as philosophically weak in that it facilitates state withdrawal in a period when significant degrees of state interventionism may still be necessary.

On the other hand, the new directions in youth policy could be seen as an appropriate philosophical adjustment to the real constraints caused by the current global environment. When viewed in this light, the CYP perspective can be understood, not as a facilitator of neo-liberalism, but as adequately capturing the development needs of the Caribbean region in a context where the old model has been rendered ineffective.

This prognosis however, ignores the unequal levels of readiness of the various states for adjustment to global neo-liberalism. Related to this is the assumption that all states are ideologically committed to making the transition to neo-liberalism and have bought into the necessity for such an adjustment.

When the varying levels of post-colonial development among the Caribbean states are considered, one might conclude that in some cases, a degree of resistance to the wholesale adoption of neo-liberalism may in fact be an appropriate policy response. This reality may account for the key differences in youth policy between the various Commonwealth Caribbean countries. An examination of the youth policies of St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago may bear this out.

Resistance and adjustment: the youth policies of St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago contrasted

St Lucia – welfarism as historical necessity

An examination of the youth policy thrust of St Lucia would suggest that welfarism rather than developmentalism has been the dominant driver. One explanation for this may be that at the time of the formulation of its youth policy, St Lucia was focused on reducing its dependence on the banana industry. A major preoccupation for policy-makers would therefore have been to cushion vulnerable groups from the fallout from the retreat from banana production. Under the sub-heading of Economic Participation, for instance, St Lucia's National Youth Policy document makes the following observation, which can be seen as shaping the ensuing policy prescriptions:

.....
The most serious problem confronting young people in St Lucia is unemployment. This has led in [sic] increasing economic deprivation and social degradation for a majority of young people. Unemployment is even now more pronounced in the rural areas because of the displacement of young farmers in the banana industry. Large-scale unemployment not only promotes the drug trade, but other social ills such as sexual promiscuity, unstable family life, crime and deviance, whereas employment brings independence, security dignity and self-worth.

Government of St Lucia, undated p 6

The introduction to the youth policy document also observed a number of “deficiencies in several critical areas that would affect national development”. These included “inadequacies of the formal education system, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, insufficient sporting and recreational facilities, substance abuse, crime and social deviance” (Government of St Lucia, undated p 1).

In relation to the new directions in youth policy as envisaged by CYP and the Caricom document, two broad observations can be made. The first is that the issues identified by the St Lucia youth policy document, suggest that St Lucia's perception of youth policy concerns are very much framed within the traditional social welfarism of the immediate post-colonial period. Thus, the emphasis on issues like “teenage pregnancy” and “drug abuse” suggest a rather narrow reading of the role and responsibility of the Ministry of Youth, and justify CYP's concern that “youth development work has been – and in many cases still is – centred on a social welfare approach”. According to CYP, this social welfare approach

.....
views young people as presenting problems which need to be solved through the intervention of older people. This approach is limited, perceiving young people as passive objects upon which interventions must act, rather than as active subjects participating in the shaping of their lives and communities. It tends to be based on a range of negative assumptions about young people – that they are, at best, unable to take care of themselves and, at worst, responsible for crime and violence. This view tends to perpetuate the very problems it seeks to solve.

.....
CYP 1998

The second observation is that while the St Lucia National Youth Policy document suggests several interventionist imperatives on the part of government, the resolution of many of these ills would require a deeper and more fundamental commitment to social protectionism than is currently envisaged within the current framework. For example, overcoming the challenge of the “inadequacies of the education system” would require a degree of investment in the education sector which would

reverse the current trends of reduced state responsibility and increased student responsibility which have accompanied the neo-liberal turn in the Anglophone Caribbean.

When viewed in this light, the CYP thrust away from welfarism appears unworkable.

This criticism however, does not intend to downplay the progressive intent of the new directions in youth policy as outlined by CYP. It can be argued that one of the positive outcomes of the ‘youth empowerment’ approach is the elevation of youth policy to a status normally reserved for economic development policy in the administrative pecking order. This is an important and necessary corrective to the dominant perception of the role and place of Ministries of Youth in the Commonwealth Caribbean.

In addition, many of the policies normally identified within Caribbean youth ministries as correctives suggest a tendency to treat symptoms as causes. As a result, these policies tend to provide palliatives rather than real solutions to the problems confronting our youth. The Government of St Lucia youth policy document, for example, in response to the problem of unemployment, supports the creation of an “employment agency that provides unemployed young people with information about job opportunities” (Government of St Lucia, undated p 6). Instead of addressing the issue of youth unemployment frontally by creating conditions which can allow for greater participation by youth in economic activity, the Ministry of Youth is taking on the role of employment agency, an activity which can best be undertaken elsewhere. In this way, the problem of youth unemployment – the absence of jobs – is therefore treated as a symptom – the absence of knowledge about available jobs. As a result of this wrong diagnosis, the wrong prescription is proposed. It is clear that the intent of the CYP approach is to move the Caribbean out of this narrow and limiting perspective of youth policy. It is equally clear that the Government of St Lucia has not yet made this transition.

Trinidad and Tobago – the tentative embrace of developmentalism

In contrast to St Lucia’s youth policy, which is preoccupied with cushioning the ‘vulnerable’ youth population from the effects of a global adjustment out of the banana economy, the youth policy of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago is philosophically rooted in developmentalism. This reality is captured in the introduction of the Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy document, which states that:

[T]he development of a national youth policy for Trinidad and Tobago is viewed as a serious challenge, not only because of the subject matter but also because of its implications for successful and sustainable development. Trinidad and Tobago has embarked on a process to reach first world status by the year 2020. This youth policy may well be seen as the first major step towards the achievement of such a status. Indeed, today’s youth would be the main architects and beneficiaries of Vision 2020.

Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p 9

This marks a significant philosophical departure from the St Lucia approach. In the first place, it links youth development to the wider policy goal of the attainment of first world status. Secondly, because the policy recognises youth as the main architects and beneficiaries of this goal, it places youth policy at the centre of the development thrust. Formulation of a youth policy therefore has “serious and far-reaching implications for Trinidad and Tobago’s development planning, policy-making, programme development, action planning and implementation” (Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p 9). As a consequence, it is far easier to facilitate a link between economic development policy and youth policy in the Trinidad and Tobago case than it is in the St Lucia case, with its preoccupation with the welfarist approach.

The Trinidad and Tobago case is far more easily reconciled with the CYP emphasis on identifying young people as a resource to be tapped. This policy orientation is deliberately set out in the document in the following way:

.....
For many experts in social policy development, as indeed the [sic] youth policy is, one can develop the policy as a programme, which will mean a set of procedures and activities. It can be a method, which means a way of working so that the overall goal is attained. It may be a movement, that is, a crusade, a cause to which people become committed or it may be a process, a continuous dynamic mechanism whereby people move from being acted upon to being actors, moving from a state where few participate to one in which many or most participate. The process approach is the approach which found favour with the National Youth Policy task force and the youth of Trinidad and Tobago. As a result, it is being argued here that successful policy development can only occur if the process places at the centre of its operation, the human factor.

.....
Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p 15

The main failing of the Trinidad and Tobago youth policy document however, is that the goals and the corresponding strategies which it outlines do not go far enough in linking youth policy to the overall goal of development. The policies continue to reflect the concern with creating special frameworks for youth development, as distinct from seeing youth activity as a major contribution to overall national development. The defensive tendencies associated with welfarism appear to have remained so deeply rooted that the Trinidad and Tobago policy seems to be at variance with the government's avowed effort at conceptualising a broader and more progressive conception of youth policy.

By way of example, the Trinidad and Tobago policy identifies a number of objectives, each with a corresponding set of policy approaches. Goal One seeks to create "an empowered young person with positive values who can use acquired knowledge and skills to make informed choices while meaningfully participating in problem-solving and decision-making at family, community and national levels" (Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p 35).

Among the policy objectives attached to Goal One are the "promotion, adoption and acceptance of positive values such as discipline, responsibility, patriotism, high self-esteem", (objective 1, p 36), and the "need to ensure that young people acquire appropriate negotiating, problem-solving and other life skills" (objective 4, p 37). Linked to these objectives are strategies which include the need to "expand and enhance existing programmes of Community-Based Organisations (CBOs), Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) and other youth-serving organisations such as uniformed groups, youth clubs, and councils in the school system and in local communities" (Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p36). Similarly, the need to develop "projects/programmes/processes to enhance existing problem-solving, negotiating, anger and conflict management skills" are also identified (Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p37).

Evident in all of these prescriptive measures is the continued presence of the adult-led, problem-solving approach, which the CYP approach seeks to overcome. Clearly missing is a policy approach that recognises the youth of Trinidad and Tobago as already possessing a tremendous wealth of talent, knowledge and ability which can be used to push the country towards its goal of first world status by 2020. Despite the fact that **Goal 2** speaks of the need to create "an enabling environment that will facilitate youth development" (p 39), and identifies the need to create "mechanisms to increase the level of youth employment and employability" (Objective 10, p 44), the policy prescriptions which follow from these objectives appear pedestrian and weak. The policy prescription which approaches the developmentalist model most closely, is the call for "the promotion of culture and sport as mechanisms for employment and income generation" (Government of Trinidad and Tobago National Youth Policy, p 45).

When viewed against the already existing reality of the tremendous revenue-earning capacity of culture and sport (incidentally, both youth-dominated sectors) in a Caribbean which is now confronting the realities of tourism, television and image rights, and intellectual property, the policy document appears to be grossly understating the real contribution which the youth of Trinidad and Tobago can make or has already made to the advancement of their economies. It is an amazing

omission in a country that has produced, Brian Lara, Dwight Yorke, George Bovell and Machel Montano.

These omissions give the Trinidad and Tobago document the quality of appearing too tentative in pursuing and advancing the developmentalist philosophy which it has articulated for itself.

Conclusion: an appraisal of Caribbean youth policy, and the CYP agenda

Having perused the policy documents of St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago, we can now turn to an assessment of CYP's "youth empowerment", "self-development" approach when measured against the existing realities in the Caribbean.

It can be safely concluded that the degree to which various countries embrace the CYP approach is dependent upon the actual developmental needs identified by the governments themselves. The youth policy of St Lucia, coming out of a post-banana economic adjustment context, is understandably preoccupied with the need for welfarist-interventionist measures to cushion vulnerable groups from upcoming economic impacts. In contrast, the Trinidad and Tobago policy is based on a remarkably different set of developmental assumptions. Rather than starting from the perspective of the country's vulnerability to globalisation, the Trinidad and Tobago policy is rooted in a philosophy of optimism toward the country's survival prospects and is inextricably linked to the goal of achieving developed country status by 2020. In aspiration, therefore, the Trinidad and Tobago policy appears compatible with the CYP approach.

However, both policy papers appear timid in that they fail to follow the CYP approach to its full extent. Neither St Lucia nor Trinidad and Tobago appears to have moved away from the 'adult-led' approach, despite the inclusion of young people in the policy formulation discussions. Similarly, St Lucia and Trinidad and Tobago have not integrated youth policy into their economic development policies. There are no measurements of the contributions of culture and sport to GDP (both youth-dominated sectors), and there are no measures to enhance the contributions of these sectors to national development.

It is clear that a central objective of the Commonwealth's youth empowerment approach is to address youth needs not as a curative measure, but as a model of advancement. It is also clear that neither Trinidad and Tobago nor St Lucia has succeeded fully in embracing such a model. A failure to pursue such a model will be to continue to treat youth work as social work, that is, a branch of social policy dealing with social problems such as unemployment, teenage pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and drug abuse, and will result in the perpetual entanglement of Caribbean youth policy in the adult-led, social welfare approach.

A failure to go beyond the narrow welfarist approach will result in the continued failure of Caribbean governments to elevate youth ministries to a footing equal to that of the Ministries of Agriculture, Tourism and Industry and Commerce. This is a quantum leap that must be made if real advances in youth policy formulation in the region are to be made. It is surprising that given the historical successes of the West Indies Cricket team, the brilliant and original creations of the Caribbean's young musical icons on the global stage, and the rich contributions of young Caribbean academics, researchers and writers, Caribbean governments have still not realised that their young people may be the real engines of Caribbean development, rather than the social problems that existing policy seems to have defined them as being.

On the other hand, the CYP approach may be too accommodating to the objectives of global neo-liberalism to sit comfortably with a group of countries whose independence movements were born out of social welfarism and social democracy. By emphasising self-empowerment and youth-centredness, the CYP approach may be guilty of ignoring the real increase in poverty and lack of economic prospects which has accompanied globalisation and trade liberalisation. Indeed, the evidence suggests that the impact of globalisation may very well have increased, rather than reduced the need for social

welfarism within the Caribbean social space. When analysed from this perspective, the social welfarism identified in the St Lucia document may well be considered the ideologically appropriate response for that country.

Finally, in relation to the advancement of a philosophy or approach to shape youth policy in the face of a changing global environment, it appears that an appropriate balance between welfarism and developmentalism must be pursued. While advocating self-empowerment, such a philosophy must be careful not to downplay the real presence of dehumanising circumstances affecting our youth and should call for a slight shift in existing policy focus. For example, while the construction of recreational and sporting facilities can continue to be a policy priority for our youth ministries, this objective should be pursued not simply an exercise to get young people off the streets, but also as an investment in training, calculated to advance regional economic development.

A similar focus can apply to the provision of duty-free concessions and special tax breaks to musical artists and groups, steel band groups, painters, artisans and other cultural workers. Such a philosophical shift is consistent with another key statement coming out of the earlier cited Third Meeting of Caricom Directors of Youth Affairs, that issues pertaining to cultural roots and identity be more fully explored.

This philosophical shift does not envisage the abandonment of welfarist approaches and policy measures; rather, it suggests a broadening of the conception of youth ministries to become central pillars in the economic development agenda. These ministries must, in the formulation of their policy agendas, build on the strengths of youth, not just focus on the social ills associated with their existential realities. They must carve out an agenda which will highlight the economic and developmental benefits which can be derived from the investment in youth infrastructure, as distinct from one which highlights the social consequences which may arise from neglecting youth. Finally, youth ministries must come out of defensive mould. They should remain aware of the overarching global politico-economic context impacting upon Caribbean societies, but they should not allow themselves to be too constrained or overwhelmed by these realities. Instead, they should seek to fashion an economic development agenda that sees youth as a resource to be tapped. It is through the pursuit of such an approach that Caribbean youth policy can validate the CYP agenda as an appropriate response to the realities of globalisation and the current challenges of development in the first decade of the twenty first century.

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National Youth Councils

Armstrong Alexis

Introduction

Throughout the Commonwealth and the rest of the world, National Youth Councils (NYCs) are considered to be at a significant crossroads. The relationship between young people and their self-governing institutions and the responsibility of governments to provide support, avenues and opportunities for effective youth development have often blurred the boundaries of responsibility and ownership of those councils.

National Youth Councils in the Commonwealth currently reflect a multiple variation of structures, operating procedures and accountability protocols. On one hand, there are NYCs that have been established by young people to address their needs and to serve as a forum for advocating their perspectives on national development issues. These youth councils, while working collaboratively with governments, are self-governing, autonomous and independent of government. On the other hand, there are NYCs that have been established by governments to implement their public intervention programmes and official mandates. The Singapore NYC, established by the government and chaired by the Minister of Community Development, Youth and Sports is an example of the latter, while the British Youth Council, a non-governmental organisation (NGO) established by young people to serve the needs and interest of young citizens, is an example of the former.

Such diverse situations have led the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) to review the structure of existing Commonwealth NYCs and to propose a blueprint for the future establishment of NYCs in Commonwealth member states.

Despite general consensus that National Youth Councils are necessary for youth advancement, there is no agreement on whether they should be established by governments or should be self-governing, autonomous bodies. This paper argues that National Youth Councils are important for the advancement of the youth sector, and should be youth-led, self-governing and autonomous. The paper further argues that if governments create an enabling environment for young people to establish, manage and determine the agenda of NYCs, a platform for true stakeholder participation will be set and young people will accept responsibility as self-determined partners.

NYCs are presented as agencies that help young people to identify, match and meet their needs with the offerings of government and other service providers. Whether economic, social, political, cultural or environmental, national development can only be achieved if there is a focus on the most dominant group of the population, which will ultimately become the major agents and benefactors of national development. Their commitment to promoting development must be nurtured and governments should encourage self-determined NYCs to create their own space for empowerment and engagement in the development process.

The paper explores the existence and functioning of NYCs in Commonwealth member countries. It is hoped that a debate will ensue that will reach consensus on the most appropriate model and framework

for National Youth Councils. Implementation and adaptation of the model will most certainly reflect the individual circumstances of each member country, but it is important to have a common platform that will help shape international and national public sector intervention on this all-important issue, which holds the key to engaging young people on matters of youth participation in decision-making. It is further hoped that National Youth Councils will receive greater focus and attention as efforts to find innovative means of engaging young people are placed at the centre of our development paradigm.

Young people and the independence of national youth councils

One of the fundamental arguments for establishing NYCs is empowerment. Young people are often seen as lacking the necessary experience, social networks, contacts and skills to play a part in their own development. As such, governments frequently deal with them as beneficiaries and think that all their needs can be met by dealing with what the state determines to be their most urgent need. This old paradigm is based on the assumption that a caring government will establish mechanisms and structures to provide and deliver services to needy groups.

The new paradigm of empowerment encourages young people to own the process of development. The Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) recognises the need for young people to become owners of the new development paradigm, stating that *“empowering young people means creating and supporting the enabling conditions under which young people can act on their own behalf, and on their own terms, rather than at the direction of others.”*¹

A National Youth Council should therefore have as its primary aim, the empowerment of young people to participate actively in shaping their societies. In order to engender strong stakeholder participation in youth development, young people must themselves show the willingness, interest, desire and ability to carve out their own roles and spaces. Governments should create the enabling environment that would allow young people to foster their own leadership capacities by ensuring that their representative structures are membership-based, that they emphasise strong and autonomous stakeholder and involvement and that these structures allow youth leaders to advocate on behalf of their peers. While government should provide the enabling environment, it should not seek to establish and control these councils.

In keeping with the views expressed by the young people in the European Youth Forum, the character of independent and effective National Youth Councils is embodied in the following rights and privileges:

- ❖ the right to choose their own representative organisational structure, and decide upon their own statutes;
- ❖ the right to elect their own leadership and representatives through democratic procedures;
- ❖ the right to determine composition of statutory bodies and working structures;
- ❖ the right to take decisions on issues of membership;
- ❖ the right to select working methods, including the right to have closed meetings for their members only, to set their own agenda;
- ❖ the privilege of accountability only to their own members; and
- ❖ the privilege of financial support from government given freely without infringing upon the rights mentioned above.²

Over the past decade and a half, young people have been calling for greater involvement in decision-making on issues of concern. Their call for a shift away from the welfare approach to youth development must be matched with a resolve to present a common approach for self-determination, and to take advantage of the opportunities that are available to them. More importantly, they must create their own opportunities, develop an understanding of the key youth development issues and maximise their advocacy and lobbying skills.

Government-established and -run NYCs have access to resources and may be delivering much-needed interventions that benefit young people, but the elements of self-determination, autonomous representation and stakeholder group advocacy are largely de-emphasised and in some cases neglected. National Youth Councils must also serve as significant youth structures for the expression of youth views and for transmitting the desires of youth directly to the decision-makers. In some Commonwealth member countries, where the NYCs are established by young people who are determined to participate as equal partners, these councils create opportunities for youth to participate and get involved in decision-making and their officers are elected by popular vote of young people. These councils are autonomous organisations serving as a communications channel between youth, the private sector and the state to design policies, programmes, and projects of interest to youth.

National Youth Councils have a relatively long history across the Commonwealth. As far back as the 1950s, the establishment of NYCs was seen as an approach that would create avenues for young people to address youth issues and issues of national development from the youth perspective. The councils were guided strictly by youth and were often in stark opposition to governments and any other agencies that wanted to maintain a paternalistic, unequal relationship with youth.

Although youth interest in establishing National Youth Councils reached its peak in the 1980s, young people's advocacy in the 1960s and 1970s had significant outcomes on the political ferment that was emerging across the Commonwealth. The achievement of political independence from Britain gave young citizens from former colonies the opportunity to rally together and to lobby governments to put youth issues on the national agenda.

Young activists were sufficiently sensitised to the political and developmental issues that guided public opinion and policy at the time. They thought it their responsibility to posit youth views on current issues and national youth leaders emerged, not because they were provided with opportunities but because they created opportunities to voice their concerns.

In the Caribbean, few of the National Youth Councils of the 1980s were affiliated to the partisan political structures of their countries. The forthrightness of their leaders often placed them in stark opposition to the political status quo. However, their vision, articulate positions and charismatic personalities made them potential targets for recruitment into political parties, which co-opted many to the detriment of the youth movement.

National Youth Councils are youth structures established by youth to serve the interest of youth. They ought not to be the youth voice of any established structure working with youth. It cannot be emphasised enough that while NYCs must develop collaborative working relationships with all parties interested in youth development, they must maintain their independence and autonomy. Through an NYC, agencies and structures working with youth should receive the perspective of youth. They should not dictate to but rather should be dictated by the NYCs. Young people must maintain that level of autonomy and independence in order to ensure that youth priorities remain at the forefront of the development agenda.

Young people must show the resolve to place on the development agenda, the concerns of their peers. The Commonwealth has several examples of National Youth Councils that are government-led and that do not enjoy the embrace of the young people themselves. It is of course possible for the agenda of government to be in harmony with the priority needs of the young people, but every effort must be made to ensure that councils, instead of representing governments' vision to the young people, should represent young people's vision to the government.

It is only through the constant articulation of youth issues that the development of Commonwealth countries can be secured and if the young people do not participate in that process, there will be no guarantee that the objective of human-centred, youth-focused development can be achieved.

Why a National Youth Council?

A study of National Youth Councils across the Commonwealth indicates that these councils have a set of common objectives. One underlying feature of all the aims and objectives outlined by the various NYCs is the need to advocate on behalf of and provide a voice for young people. The British Youth Council, for instance, has as its aims to:

- ❖ provide a voice for young people;
- ❖ promote equality for young people;
- ❖ help young people be more involved in decisions that affect their lives; and
- ❖ advance young people's participation in society and civic life.

The Council states clearly that this can only be achieved if young people are allowed to operate independently for their own welfare and benefit.

In the case of The Gambia, the NYC is founded on the following objectives:

- ❖ to facilitate youth empowerment for active participation in national development;
- ❖ to support and encourage active youth participation in the process of development of policies and programmes;
- ❖ to facilitate the socio-economic and cultural development of youths in the country; and
- ❖ to facilitate youth networking and exchanges at national and international levels.

As agencies formed by citizens based on a non-governmental approach, National Youth Councils can and should address social, political, environmental, economic and humanitarian questions and provide answers and services related to these issues in manners public agencies and government departments may not feel compelled, comfortable or even competent to use. There is a strong sense of commitment to community and sector that they represent. They are free of all pressures to conform to the dictates of big interests and government. On the other hand, if formed by the government, NYCs will be constrained in their advocacy, capable only to pronounce on issues relevant to government and in a manner acceptable to the government.

NYCs must advance the cause of youth. They must contribute to the society and have as their strength a resolute membership that is anxious to participate in the shaping of our democracy and decision-making processes and in the promotion of the values of peace, equality and civic responsibility. By ensuring that an NYC is a bottom-up organisation, opportunities are created for young people to be empowered and to understand their role in society. One fundamental lesson is the need to be proactive by first understanding the challenges that confront youth, rallying together to respond to these challenges, designing appropriate mechanisms to channel youth concerns, managing the process of advocacy effectively, and assessing the impact of youth involvement in decision-making. The skills learnt in this process are transferable and will serve any young person well in his/her future endeavours.

NYC structures

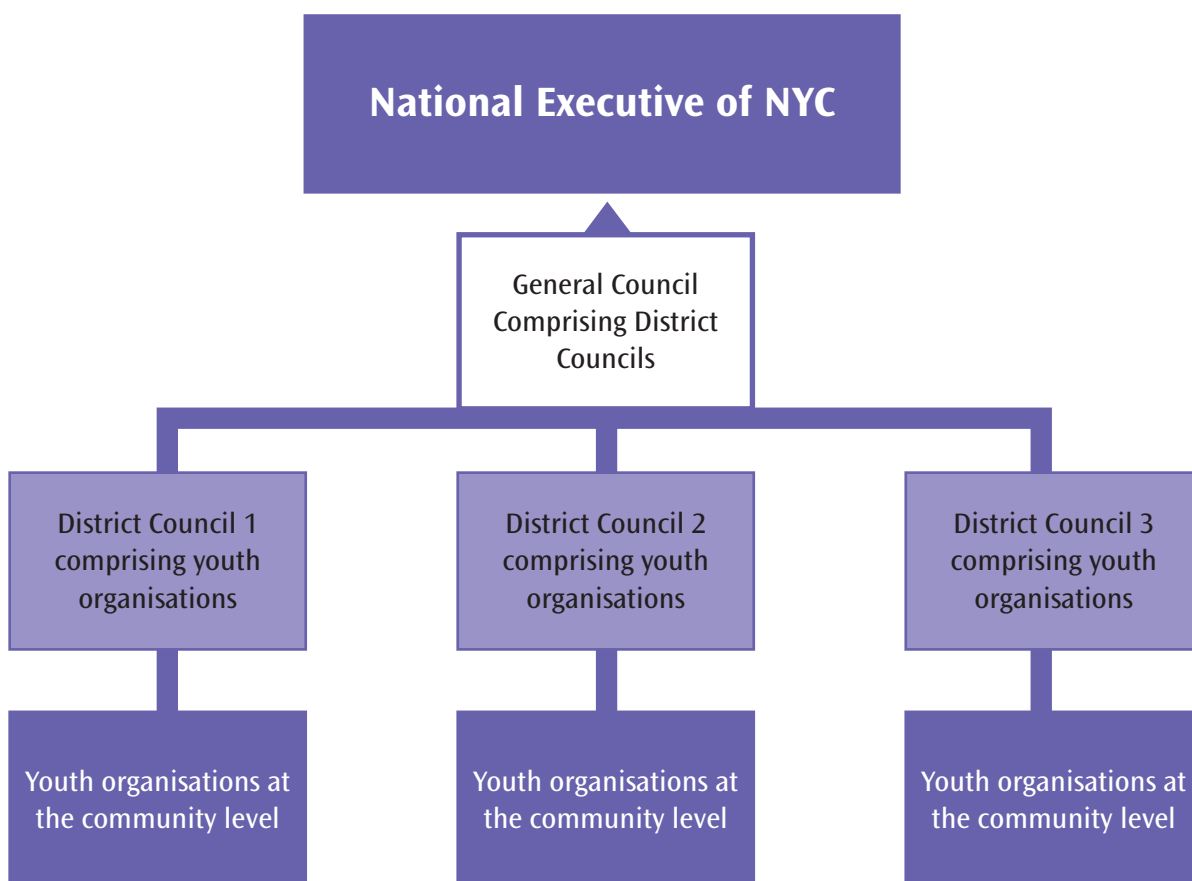
The evidence from across the Commonwealth suggests that NYCs have evolved in numerous ways. Despite the differences, there are a number of factors that must be taken into consideration when setting up a NYC. The structures must be democratic and representative of youth organisations in the respective country. In many cases across the Commonwealth, and particularly in cases where the NYCs are autonomous of governments, the structures reflect the membership configuration. It is important in designing structures that the membership, whether it is individual young people or youth organisations, must have access to all the operations of the Council. In order for the Council to be representative of its members, it must bring together local, community and regional youth organisations. In serving as an umbrella organisation, the NYC provides young people with one voice and facilitates cohesive planning and execution of streamlined programmes.

Given the realities of National Youth Councils across the Commonwealth, and the peculiarities of each Commonwealth member country and region, it is impossible to propose a single model that can be applied across the Commonwealth. Nevertheless, a framework that will democratise the NYCs and allow youth participation to remain central to the structure and operations of the Council is being proposed. This framework emphasises the establishment and strengthening of youth organisations at the community level, district groupings of community youth organisations and a national structure that comprises all the district groupings.

Figure 1 is an organogram of the proposed framework, which can be adjusted to suit local specificities. It proposes that youth organisations be established within districts and in cases where they already exist, be strengthened to facilitate youth participation at the grassroots level. These youth organisations can then form themselves into district councils that will represent the young people associated with organisations at the organisation level within communities. The district councils are brought together to form the general council of the NYC and through agreed-upon statutory meetings such as annual general meetings, biennial conferences/meetings and general assemblies, national executives are elected by the membership. Such a democratic framework and mode of operation has been endorsed by many NYCs. In 2001, the European Youth Forum adopted a policy paper which advocates for just such a democratic and representative structure of NYCs that would allow young people to play an important role in a democratic society.

The strength of the membership of NYCs is of critical importance for the effectiveness and success of the NYC. Often, emphasis is placed on the national structure (like the national executive), but little attention is given to the membership. Any attempt to make an NYC relevant to the times and perform effectively must pay attention to the base structure of youth organisations, since the national body's effectiveness is always a reflection of the strengths or weaknesses of the membership.

Figure 1: Proposed NYC framework



NGO approach that guides youth participation

Non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have a long history of co-operating with governments on various aspects of development. Thomas and Thomas (1998)³ present four stages of NGO evolution that places popular participation at the centre of development. These stages have seen young people playing a major role and have demonstrated the benefits of promoting the principles of open and democratic society. NYCs that reflect an NGO philosophy will contribute to increased levels of participation among the youth.

In the first stage when ‘relief work’ underpinned the NGO philosophy, young people were at the forefront of efforts to assist in the post-war reconstruction of nations. Leading agencies of that era were largely Christian missionaries that attracted young people, and youth wings of significant influence were created. During the second stage, the philosophy changed to sustained development work through ‘self-help groups’ that provided services at the field level. Here too, young people in developed countries engaged counterparts in developing countries to rebuild communities and to spearhead interventions such as housing, water supply and community renewal. The 1980s saw a third wave in NGO philosophy where ‘advocacy’ became the major philosophy. Existing large institutions in developing countries were influenced to develop strategies that favoured the poor. Activities of international agencies such as the WHO and UNDP implemented through the governments of the developing countries are examples of this philosophy. During this period, young people were able to form groups that influenced the work and function of these agencies.

Since the 1990s, the NGO philosophy has focused on ‘people-centred-development’. As part of this philosophy, autonomous self-help groups with well-defined goals were encouraged to take up development themselves, based on their perceived needs. NGOs acted only as external catalysts and facilitators in this process. Youth NGOs also received tremendous attention during this period, as the outcomes of the mid 1980s focus on youth by the United Nations spurred many young leaders into action. The guiding philosophy of the youth movement then was that youth comprised a marginalised group which needs to advance its own concerns in response to its increasing needs. Across the Commonwealth, National Youth Councils were being formed and support from the international community made it possible for these NYCs to design their own programmes and intervention priorities outside of what was being offered by the government. Youth NGOs that operate from the perspective of self-determination are therefore a successful model for engaging the youth population and tapping the vast potential of the most vibrant sector of the productive population.

The role of government

Governments must facilitate youth development by setting the environment in which youth participation is harnessed and encouraged. The United Nations’ Declaration of 1985 as International Youth Year gave countries a clear mandate to create programmes directed at promoting youth development. Ever since this international focus, many Commonwealth countries have established youth departments and ministries, thereby increasing public sector interventions on youth involvement. In India for instance, the creation of the Department of Youth Affairs in the Ministry of Human Resource Development was clear recognition that young people needed special attention because of their potential and actual role in the progress and development of the country.

Throughout the Commonwealth, member governments have embarked on public sector programmes for youth development. Many youth affairs ministries have developed significant interventions to facilitate the advancement of young people. Government’s role vis-a-vis that of young people should be to seek to establish sound and appropriate policies, design programmes that reflect the national agenda, establish effective delivery mechanisms for the implementation of public sector programmes and develop and encourage partnerships to monitor and assess the relevance of the programmes which it designs and implements.

Many Commonwealth countries have received support from CYP to formulate and adopt national youth policies. These policies set the stage for comprehensive youth development within the context of national development. Governments have also taken the lead in formulating education and employment policies that benefit the youth sector.

Many innovative youth programmes have been implemented across Commonwealth countries. Some of these have their roots in the post-war period. Traditional programmes such as the Cadet Corps, Scouts and Guides and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards Programme have served to engage young people across the Commonwealth in positive behaviour and in many countries, variations of the national youth service concept also exist. Commonwealth Youth Ministers have endorsed the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative as a programmatic intervention to provide young people with access to income-generating opportunities. All these are useful government interventions, to which governments allocate significant financial, technical and human resources that serve young people well.

Governments also have the responsibility to establish public sector-led agencies and institutions to formulate and implement its policies and programmes. In Jamaica for instance, the government has established the National Centre for Youth Development. This agency serves essentially as a policy unit that conducts assessments of the status of youth development in the country. The agency in no way conflicts with the roles and responsibilities of a National Youth Council, which can make use of the assessments of the status of youth prepared by that technical wing of the government.

In India, the government has been running a very successful programme under the auspices of the Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan (NYKS). The NYKS is an autonomous body of the Department of Youth Affairs and Sports and is one of the largest grassroots level organisations in the world, working with almost eight million out-of-school youth affiliated to youth clubs across the country. Its mission, programmatic interventions and purpose is determined by the government and it reports to the government. As successful as that intervention is, it cannot perform the same kind of role as an NYC.

There must be a distinction between public sector responses to youth development and the role of young people as partners in advancing the cause of youth. Governments must continue to seek relevant programmatic interventions, but these must be counterbalanced by other activities determined by young people to be of value and relevance.

Youth mainstreaming

Youth mainstreaming is an approach for advancing national development by focusing primarily on youth development. The concept goes beyond the general philosophy of caring for the young; it presents national development as an objective, which, if it is to be achieved, must address the needs, aspirations, concerns and desires of the most dominant sector of the population. Social policy and development should be targeted at specific population groups that have been traditionally neglected and/or discriminated against, but that are significant sectors of the population. It therefore argues that by addressing the employment, economic, health, housing and life needs of youth, the foundation will be laid for addressing the development needs of the society as a whole. Within this scheme, young people should organise themselves in a manner that allows them to define a stakeholder responsibility, advocate on behalf of their peers, hone their leadership skills and represent their members in various arenas.

The flip side of mainstreaming is marginalisation. In many countries, young people are kept on the periphery of the major economic, social, political and other decision-making structures of society. Although there is growing recognition that by integrating them, the society is able to generate a broad range of social and economic benefits which otherwise would have been unattainable, there is still very little opportunity for meaningful involvement of young people in development. The International Labour Organisation asserts that “whereas the full participation of youth in the life of

the nation is important for the achievement of social justice and the attainment of objectives of national development, it has become increasingly evident that far too many young people have been left at the margin of society.”⁴

Commonwealth countries must therefore adopt policies and programmes that help guarantee young people’s successful transition into adulthood and integration into national development processes, since no significant national development can take place without them.

Through self-determined and autonomous NYCs, young people can advocate for meaningful mainstreaming efforts. They can provide governments with the reality check necessary to ensure that government programmes and interventions are relevant and in tune with youth needs.

Conclusion

National Youth Councils should be youth-led, autonomous and self-governing. Care must be taken, however, not to underestimate the role that governments can play in supporting the efforts of young people in establishing NYCs. The need for sound leadership qualities to be harnessed within youth bodies like NYCs is essential for the sustained growth and development of young Commonwealth citizens. Given the critical role that young people are being called upon to play in national development, it can only be to everyone’s advantage to allow them create their own institutions and run them without undue influence from government.

Governments, on the other hand, must recognise that given the current scenario of limited resources, high youth mobility and increasing distractions, young people more than ever require both policy and programmatic interventions that will build their capacities to identify and address their own needs. Commonwealth governments must urgently prioritise public-private partnerships as a means of reaching consensus on – and bolstering resources for – the priority issues for development. Such partnerships can serve as an apprenticeship period for youth leaders who may in the future be called upon to take leadership roles within government and in the private sector.

The structure to be adopted for an effective and functional National Youth Council must reflect the current status of the youth movement in the specific Commonwealth member country. It must as well, reflect the future intentions of young people as they seek to advance their own cause. That notwithstanding, the framework proposed in this paper can serve to guide young people and youth activists who wish to establish councils in their respective countries. One main criterion for the establishment of an NYC is that it should give voice to the average young person in a community through a local level youth organisation. A functioning NYC will ensure that its ties with its member organisations at the community level allow every young person equal opportunity to influence decision-making and to access the services of the organisation.

Finally, as we reflect on the role that governments should play in supporting young people to contribute to national development, we must recognise that the roles of government and of the young people are different even if they share common goals. Government will not always be in harmony with the youth movement and vice versa. With young people receiving the support of government to find and occupy their own space in the development arena and with strong independent youth leadership, the Commonwealth stands to deepen democracy even further across its member states.

All our countries will benefit from involving young people and young people themselves will feel a greater sense of inclusion if they have equal rights and responsibilities. Youth ministries seeking to engage young people in ways that allow them to fully embrace and assess government interventions must recognise that the young people require structures that are void of governmental influence to shape proper responses to these interventions. Autonomous, self-governing National Youth Councils afford young people and governments the opportunity to collaborate as equal partners; it is important for governments to facilitate that collaboration, leaving young people free to shape these NYCs in the way that best suits their needs.

Armstrong Alexis



Armstrong Alexis is St Lucian. He studied at the University of the West Indies, where he gained a Bachelor's degree in social work before reading for a Master of Science degree in sociology. As a graduate student, Armstrong showed academic and leadership abilities and was appointed to various positions on the staff of the Sociology and Social Work Department.

A teacher by profession, Armstrong taught for seven years in his community Gros Islet. He developed a passion for youth development work and was one of the founders of the St Lucia National Youth Council (NYC) in 1985. He was also actively involved in the Caribbean Federation of Youth, an organisation he led as President from 1995 to 1997.

He was appointed as St Lucia's first Director of Youth and Sports, a position he held for two years before becoming the Regional Director of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's Caribbean Centre.

Armstrong is currently back in St Lucia and is the chief executive of a consultancy firm, Alexis Consultancy Services (ACS).

Notes

- 1 PAYE page 1.
- 2 Taken from the European Youth Forum Policy Paper on the Independence of National Youth Councils. Greece 2001.
- 3 Stages in the Evolution of Post-War NGO Ideology.
- 4 International Labour Conference, 72nd Session 1986 – Report V – YOUTH p 6.

Young People and the Digital Divide

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Introduction

The world today is a product of the revolutions it has undergone – whether social, industrial or developmental. The eighteenth century’s agricultural revolution was followed by the nineteenth century industrial revolution, which was in turn followed by the twentieth century’s digital revolution that continues into the new millennium. The digital revolution promises to be even more dramatic than anything we have seen before.

The terms ‘information age’ and ‘knowledge economy’ have frequently been used to describe the world we live in today – this is primarily driven by easy access to information through the Internet and instant communication through the mobile phone and related technologies. It has changed the way millions of people communicate, live and do business. However, this progress has been concentrated in the developed world – primarily among the rich and urban – and there continue to be millions of people more that have not been able to reap the benefits of the digital age in which we live.

The biggest challenge of the twenty-first century is to ensure that digital technology can reach every human being on the planet – the child in Africa, the young fisherman in the Caribbean or the Pacific and the 15-year old farmer’s daughter in Asia, who wants to make something of her future. Unless proper and timely action is taken, the ‘digital divide’ might well end up becoming a ‘knowledge divide’, resulting in a permanently divided world where the young people on the ‘wrong’ side of the divide will never have access to the means to improve their lives.

The Internet has been hailed as a “great equaliser” (Brynjolfsson and Smith 2000), a revolutionary technological tool that is capable of transferring large volumes of information across borders in an instant. This global information could be used for commerce, digital libraries, e-learning, telemedicine, e-government and many other applications that could help solve vital problems in the developing world, such as disease, poverty, malnutrition, etc. These problems also frequently become catalysts for instability in society, which often result in violent conflicts and wide scale acts of destruction.

Developed nations have in abundance many of the resources that the developing ones could use to resolve these and other problems, but geographical, economic, political and cultural barriers exist that prevent these resources from being transferred effectively. Another two billion citizens, if brought into the digital fold, would increase productivity, efficiency and markets. It would also help create a stable and sustainable global economy.

This digital revolution has already begun. Cell phone usage and ownership is doubling every year in some developing countries and Internet penetration in India, for example, is expected to have a compounded annual growth rate of over 50 per cent for the next few years. We have seen the immediate benefits of companies delivering digital technologies like cell phones to poorer and poorer

people – in the last decade, 300 million Asians have emerged from extreme poverty. Despite progress so far, speeding the pace of the digital revolution, so that the young people who will shape our future world have the abilities and the tools to make better lives for themselves, is a responsibility that we cannot shirk.

Young people: beneficiaries of the Internet and digital technologies

Today, young people can access virtually unlimited information available on the Internet for their education and research, to earn money, to make choices about their careers, jobs or travel options, and to form partnerships and organisations to effect social change and generate income from business and employment.

Schools are enriching the educational experiences of their students by using digital media and teaching them to use the Internet as a research tool to find information. Computer education has been included as a vital subject for study and young people are exposed to both computer software and hardware to make them better equipped as adults in the fast developing digital world. Assignments are submitted online and global education is easily accessible and made available by the power of the Internet. Children are getting exposure to the world around them in ways that was never possible barely 10 years ago.

Barely 10-15 years ago, an encyclopaedia was seen as the best way to “gift knowledge” to one’s children and was frequently one of the most prized possessions of a family. Encyclopaedias were unaffordable for most; the original, printed edition of the Encyclopaedia Britannica costs over US\$1,500, which is prohibitively expensive for anyone in the developing world (and for many in the developed world as well). Today, people can turn to Wikipedia, a free encyclopaedia hosted online and continuously updated by various contributors. In a comparison between Encyclopaedia Britannica and Wikipedia, both were similar in terms of accuracy, with four errors in Wikipedia, for every three in Britannica. What is interesting is that Wikipedia is not only a free encyclopaedia, but a movement that leverages the Internet not just to disseminate knowledge, but to aggregate it as well – information on Wikipedia is added by volunteer contributors and reviewed regularly by specialists and experts. With Wikipedia, everyone has the ability to aggregate knowledge efficiently, validate it, update it and perhaps most importantly, have it freely available to anyone on the Internet.

The arrival of the digital age is not lost on today’s youth, who are using new technology in a number of critical and creative ways. For instance, young people and children that are suffering from illnesses and diseases have turned to the Internet for information, solace and companionship. Such youth are often socially isolated, but on the Internet, they are able to interact directly with other young people suffering from similar afflictions. They are able to share their fears with someone who understands and learn how others their age are coping. *Common Thread* (<http://www.commonthread.org>) is a web site that provides such a virtual hangout for children who are disabled or sick.

The Internet can also offer support to children with learning disabilities through a simple online exchange with their parents, teachers and with specialists. Since 2000, children with learning disabilities have been helped by a 15-year-old learning-disabled school student in India via the website he created. He sought to use the free and free flowing resource of the Internet to bring about awareness about this condition in a country that failed to recognise that such a condition exists and where little help or information was available. Soon, his website was visited by other children, who used the message-board to express their needs, share their thoughts and coping strategies, helping each other in ways that few adults could.

These are only two examples of how young people are using the Internet to connect with other people, to solve their problems and to learn about the world. It is obvious that bridging the digital divide is a task that youth have taken on voluntarily and wholeheartedly. It is only a matter of time before youth all over the world find ways to be better connected in positive and far-reaching ways.

Today, more young people are increasingly choosing to educate themselves in the field of computer science, information technology, management information systems and electronics. Because of the growing demand for these skills, many young people are finding employment at attractive pay scales. This has served to open the doors for students from developing countries who are now in high demand worldwide for their essential skills in today's information society.

As a result of the new technologies, people in existing jobs are able to function more effectively and produce dramatic and profitable results. It is now no longer necessary for people to get together physically in order to achieve their collective goals. The Internet now makes it possible for individuals to interact and meet online using video conferencing and to discuss their business strategies in the same way as if they were face to face.

In addition, new job opportunities have sprung up everywhere, since technology services can be provided and developed anywhere in the world. Software development for example, is being outsourced to countries like India, which can offer the same services at competitive rates.

Remote call centres have been set up, offering global help and support for business products. National economies are developing rapidly and profits are surging. Thousands of university graduates, who would otherwise be unemployed, are now gainfully employed in call centres and other remote service centres. Their incomes are rising, and so is their quality of life.

Doctors are exchanging information and research over the Internet, sharing their experiences and knowledge. Scientific and medical advancements are given exposure and researchers work together online and contribute to further advancements in medicine and medical research. Medical records are easily and quickly exchanged and patients receive timely and expert medical care a lot faster than ever before.

In rural areas in developing countries, very few people have access to the Internet, but increasingly have access to cell phones. To reach these people, mobile phone-based solutions need to be developed to provide services through this delivery system. One such initiative in India is the development of telephone-based interactive voice response systems that offer the latest commodities prices to farmers, via telephone in the local language. Young farmers have been the first to adopt services such as these. Through access to current market prices, they are able to find buyers for their produce directly without being exploited by middlemen. Access to information has helped farmers learn how and when to plant their crops for the best possible harvest; it also gives them the ability to better match the supply of their produce with demand, thereby creating more efficient markets.

The digital revolution has also served to expose social injustices and bring other pressing social problems to light. Issues like dowry abuse, corrupt politicians, and unethical business practices have been exposed by consumers and victims who have found a voice through the Internet. A good example is the story of 30-year-old Pakistani woman, Mukhtar Mai, who was gang-raped by four volunteers under orders of a village court simply because her younger 12-year-old brother was seen walking with a girl from a more influential tribe. Mukhtar Mai's story spread on the Internet and drew worldwide attention and condemnation of the justice system when the perpetrators were acquitted. Eventually, the Pakistani Supreme court rejected the acquittals of the suspects. Mukhtar Mai's story has brought to attention hundreds of other gang rapes and has made the world more aware of this atrocity. Furthermore, it has stimulated quicker and more effective reactions by the Pakistani Government.

Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are tools that can be used to encourage active citizenship and invite youth civic participation in forming and implementing policies for the economic and social advancement of the country. In Singapore, a feedback website (www.feedback.gov.sg) was set up to collect feedback from citizens regarding government policies. Feedback from citizens resulted in significant cost savings for the Government and also resulted in the removal or revision of rules and regulations that constrained the efficient functioning of business.

The youth: helping bridge the digital divide themselves

Youth are, however, not just beneficiaries of the new digital society. They are helping to develop its potential, expand its scope and, most importantly, bridge the digital divide which exists in all countries. One of the immediate benefits has been the increase of gainful employment, especially self-employment. Take for example the story of nineteen-year-old Sukanya Sakkarai from a remote village in Ulagupitancanpatti, India. She shares an eight-room tile-roofed house with her parents, older brother and 16 other relatives. She left school at the top of her class, her parents and the people in the village knew she was very bright and deserved a chance at higher education. Nevertheless, she had resigned herself to being married off to a stranger by her parents and settling down to a quiet hard working colourless life of a village wife. Her father Aryanand had decided to arrange her marriage quickly since if she went for further studies, it would be a greater challenge to find an appropriate groom.

She was working at her once-a-month job as an accountant in a co-operative when she was approached by scouts from a communication company who were looking for somebody to take on the challenge of managing a computer-equipped Internet kiosk – something she had never heard of before. After initial apprehension, Sakkarai borrowed US\$65 toward the kiosk and took up the challenge. Information technology had arrived at her doorstep to change both her life and the lives of all in her village.

In order to prepare for the challenging but exciting task ahead, she enthusiastically underwent a week of training in a nearby town, learning her way around the Internet as well as becoming proficient in the Tamil language version of Microsoft Word. Today, she runs a small yet thriving business offering Internet browsing, email, video conferencing, computer classes and weekend screening of Tamil-language films using her CD-Rom drive, all for a small fee. She now also acts as conduit between semi-literate villagers and government bureaucrats, through email and the Internet.

While the story of Sakkarai is inspirational, what is more important was how exactly the lives of her fellow villagers changed because of her kiosk. It is easy for people living in urban areas to be sceptical about this. In fact, the people in Sakkarai's village were sceptical themselves – they had no idea how they could use the kiosk to enrich or better their lives. Consequently, Sakkarai's business was initially slow. But things changed quite suddenly.

One day, a neighbour Arumugam Gurusami, a farmer, came to her with a unique problem. Distressed because his okra crop seemed to be infested with something that turned the crop a sickly yellow, he approached her for help. Sakkarai took a picture of his diseased plant and emailed it to a scientist at a regional agricultural college. The scientist got back to her the same day, confirming that the crop was infected with the acaulpha yellow mosaic virus, which could be treated easily with a solution of boron and nitrogen. An excited Sakkarai printed out the email, rushed to Gurusami with the information. She charged him 10 rupees – about 22 cents – for the email. Gurusami, a man of 50 who had earlier never even heard of a computer, had finally been touched and served by information technology.

As soon as the village heard about this, business began to pick up, and Sakkarai began to bring in regular revenue. Sakkarai is truly an ambassador for information technology and is playing a pivotal role in bridging the digital divide, not only in her village but also in other rural parts of India, where other entrepreneurs have invested in kiosks after having been encouraged by the success of Sakkarai's successful venture.

The digital divide, however, is not just about infrastructure and connectivity. It is also about learning and training so that individuals can use, leverage and benefit from infrastructure managed by individuals such as Sakkarai. Sakkarai has recognised this as well. A large part of Sakkarai's income comes from conducting computer classes for the village children, their teachers and parents. Villagers visit her kiosk to talk to Sakkarai, learn from her, browse the Internet and chat online with relatives far away. Sakkarai also helps villagers get birth certificates by email, saving the villagers the cost and inconvenience of the long bus ride and the long queues in the government offices. Sakkarai has even used video conferencing – in so doing, she helped a group of women get the district collectors' approval to start a dairy co-operative.

Governments have already recognised that it is not just about infrastructure – empowering the rural masses to leverage such technologies is crucial and this is done through education. A good example is the rural e-Seva (“seva” means service in Hindi) project in Andhra Pradesh in India. E-Seva has made great strides in terms of citizen service delivery. The rural e-Seva project includes computer education for children. Another good example is Singapore. While Singapore has cutting-edge infrastructure with 99.1 per cent mobile phone penetration and 52.7 per cent broadband penetration as of January 2006, it is continuing to improve infrastructure, such as the recent initiative to enable wireless Internet anywhere in the city-state, and to promote use of its E-Government services. A noteworthy programme is the E-filing volunteer programme that relies on individuals skilled in IT and Internet technologies to help less-savvy segments of society file their tax returns electronically. IRAS, the income tax authority for Singapore, has saved millions of citizen-tax dollars with this move to electronic tax filing.

Tackling the causes of the digital divide

Businesses have profited tremendously from these new digital technologies. Email and other instant communication such as video conferencing allow executives from different parts of the world to meet virtually online and make important decisions as if they were sitting at a table across from each other. Every day, more and more software is developed mostly by energetic and highly motivated youth all over the world to support developments in the business world.

These technologies could do much more for the world as a whole; access to the Internet, e-learning technologies and access to health and economic information can help make the world a better place for the poor, underprivileged and disenfranchised. Unfortunately, these very people are most likely to be disadvantaged by location, income, language, inclination or education.

Those who are disadvantaged by virtue of location are generally those living in poor developing countries, especially in rural areas where there is little or no infrastructure to support the use of information technology. While there is no shortcut to economic growth, the exploitation of the latest technologies could give industries in developing countries a competitive advantage.

There are over 720 million young people living on less than US\$2 per day. More often than not, they are un-educated, undernourished, homeless and frequently sick. Because of these limitations, they remain trapped by their poverty and often cannot afford to get an education. While their very deprivation robs them of tools to lift themselves out of poverty, governments, NGOs and socially conscious individuals can use the Internet to highlight their condition, spearhead efforts to serve their needs and give them a voice so that they may be heard by decision-makers. Governments can make education and technology cheaply available to them by co-operating with NGOs for donations of used computers, educational software and teaching tools to make up for the lack of qualified teachers available to them. Opening Internet kiosks, free and easily accessible online libraries, offering online education and e-government facilities could greatly change the lives of poor young people, encourage social inclusion, and help level the playing field.

To help these individuals get out of the vicious cycle of poverty, various initiatives have been undertaken. For instance, in the United States, 20 million personal computers (PCs) become obsolete every year, despite them being still serviceable. Furthermore, it is expensive to dispose of these PCs because of environmental reasons, incurring further costs. Volunteers from Computers for Africa, work to maximise the life of these computers. They help bring technology to some of the world’s most disadvantaged people, technology that gives hope for a better future. This becomes a win-win for all players in the value chain – the businesses get credit for such donations, the environment is not adversely affected, volunteers develop skills in refurbishing such PCs and people in Africa get computers to improve the quality of their lives and develop their nations.

Another driver of the digital divide is that the medium of the Internet is largely in English. Language therefore can be a very significant barrier to increased Internet use for people who are not proficient

in English, which forms a significant portion of the population. For instance in India, which constitutes 1/6th of the world's population, over 1,600 languages, are spoken, and 80 per cent of all literate people cannot read or write English. Efforts to make the Internet available in as many languages as possible would help close the digital divide for these people. Governments must strive to ensure that they stimulate the creation of content in local languages.

Evolving and extending CYP's work in ICT

The Commonwealth Youth Programme's Technology Empowerment Centre (CYP TEC) is a major component of its work to develop information and communications technology skills and access for young people. CYP TEC works to bring young people in developing Commonwealth member countries on par with their counterparts in developed countries and reduce the digital divide. CYP TEC has made great strides in its mission to bridge the digital divide and CYP TEC on Wheels is one such model. These Internet vans bring the Internet to the masses, in places where the masses cannot go to the Internet. This model is being extended to other Commonwealth developing nations where infrastructure is poor.

The private sector has also helped bridge the digital divide, and there are great opportunities in the area of public-private partnerships to help achieve this. Drishtee, for example, a private for-profit kiosk company, has already started setting up and franchising rural PC kiosks. Villages are benefited because the kiosk serves their communication and information needs. Kiosk agents collaborate with companies to provide insurance policies, health queries, agri-data, matrimonial and astrology related queries.

An independent company in India, n-Logue Communications, identifies promising kiosk owners, trains them and provides equipment – computer, printer, battery backup and wireless Internet antenna – for about US\$1,000; n-Logue helps the owners arrange financing, which is then paid off with revenue from the kiosks. The company makes its money from hourly connection fees. So far, n-Logue has set up more than 500 kiosks in Tamil Nadu and other states, with plans for 10,000 by next June.

To bridge the digital divide in rural and remote areas of India, TeNeT has worked for over a decade towards cheaper alternatives for connecting phone exchanges and homes. Low-cost wireless local loop technology which provides cheap, relatively fast Internet connections to fibre-optic cables as far as 18 miles away, eliminate the need for telephone lines. With this type of innovative technology, India could nevertheless provide wireless coverage for up to 85 per cent of the country.

An amazing new computer was developed in late 2005 by a non-profit spin-off from the MIT Media lab called One Laptop Per Child, for use by children in primary and secondary education around the world, particularly in developing countries. It will initially be launched in countries like Brazil, China, Egypt, South Africa and Thailand. The 500 MHz laptop will work as a computer, an electronic book, a television, and a writing or drawing tablet, can be powered either with an AC adapter or via a wind-up crank. The purpose of the wind-up crank is to ensure computer access in areas where electricity and power are not dependable. It features a low-power display that can be switched from colour to black and white to allow viewing in bright sunlight because many children in developing countries have school outdoors. It will run on an open source operating system like Linux to keep costs down and the computers will be free to schoolchildren. This will greatly improve the level of education helping children to learn both in and out of the classroom. This technology will eventually make it possible for all children in the world to have their own notebook computers.

The eGranary Digital Library Appliance is a collective contribution of hundreds of authors and publishers to afford learning opportunities to scholars in Africa – many schools, clinics and hospitals have no Internet connection. Bandwidth in Africa costs 100 times the cost in the USA. This makes connection to the Internet prohibitively costly. A solution to this problem is the "Internet in a Box"TM, a plug-and-play server which fits effortlessly into any local area network and provides instant

access to millions of digital documents – including video and multimedia – at educational institutions in underdeveloped countries or in rural areas with little or no Internet connectivity. Large assortments of educational documents are moved onto the subscriber's local area network (LAN) so that the documents can be made available to everyone within the institution freely and instantly. The E-Granary works by securing authors or website publishers permission to copy material with rich educational content from the Internet and copy these to a hard drive at the University of Iowa's WilderNet Project. Copies are then made on hard disk and distributed to subscriber universities. When Internet content is placed on a server within individual campuses, students have access to the hundreds of thousands of documents with no bandwidth cost. This is a low cost, innovative way to deliver media-rich digital teaching tools to students and researchers in developing countries.

CYP TEC and CYP's other work to promote and enhance ICT should be extended through various private partnerships. By leveraging programmes like eGranary, One Laptop Per Child and E-Seva, governments can put information, technology and education in the hands of young people.

Conclusion

It is of paramount importance to bridge the digital divide, but unfortunately, there are no easy answers. By leveraging lessons learnt from other parts of the globe, we can make the world more productive, more efficient and more stable.

Carlos Fernandes



Carlos Fernandes is the founder of Perceptivel – pronounced 'Perceptive Eye' – a company with interests in the broad technology space (including enterprise software, media, the Internet, etc), which he founded based on patent pending technology he invented. This invention won him the prestigious Tan Kah Kee Young Inventors' Award and other international awards.

With a strong belief in affecting positive social change, Carlos co-founded LDKids, an initiative to help learning disabled children cope with their academic environment. Carlos is also a visiting Professor at the National University of Singapore, where he teaches a courses designed to help organisations manage innovation.

Carlos is a member of MENSA and holds a Bachelors Degree in Electronic Engineering (First Class with Honors) from the University of Bombay, a Masters in Information Technology and an MBA (High Honors) from the University of Chicago GSB. He has also been inducted into the Beta Gamma Sigma Honour Society.

Youth Crime and Violence

Keith Bell

Introduction

.....
We must bring our attention to bear on two of the most urgent issues that are wreaking havoc on our populations: the HIV/AIDS pandemic and the intolerable increase in the incidence of crime that has made personal security the overriding concern of all our peoples.

.....
Focus on Drugs 2002:1

These powerful words from Prime Minister the Hon Said Musa of Belize, summarises the concerns expressed by CARICOM Heads of State at the 22nd CARICOM Meeting held in The Bahamas in 2001. Although five years have elapsed, these words act as a reminder to Caribbean countries of the sobering and serious challenges facing this region.

A popular African proverb states that it takes a village to raise a child. If Caribbean countries subscribe to this belief, and if children in this region develop into young people who exhibit anti-social and criminal behaviour, then we would have failed in our duty and will ultimately suffer the consequences for such failure.

The increased use of technology and global access to information combined with the changing nature of the traditional family structure have resulted in a large number of young people who, while technically smarter and more astute, lack the fundamental discipline and support most commonly seen in two-parent traditional families. Coupled with the new, materialistic images portrayed by the surrogate parents and role models from film, television and music to which the youth (many of whom are 'latchkey' children) are exposed during their formative years, this climate has caused increased delinquency and criminal behaviour among the young people of The Bahamas, the Caribbean and the wider world.

This paper seeks to address:

- ❖ the multiple causes which result in the high incidence of youth violence, and increasing youth criminal trends;
- ❖ the dual role played by many young people as victims often forced to become perpetrators; and
- ❖ how the socio-economic effects of governmental decisions/non-decisions affect the future of young people, and the choices they make.

In identifying the problems and the causes, the goal of the paper further seeks to:

- ❖ offer positive suggestions for youth empowerment through urban renewal programmes, using strategic partnerships between government, private and church committees and councils to provide programmes and activities which provide productive options for young people and give them a voice in our communities;
- ❖ create, reinforce or reinstate youth programmes that will give Caribbean youth a sense of inclusion in the decision-making process relating to youth policy; and

- ❖ provide proactive solutions to reducing criminal and anti-social behaviour among the young people of this region, focusing on rehabilitation and other solutions to change young people's behaviour, rather than incarceration.

The input of various government departments which focus on youth (sports, culture, and youth) is addressed and the necessity for a policy of inclusion when dealing with matters concerning the youth is highlighted.

This paper will also examine the School Policing Initiative, a strategy that was recently instituted by the Government of The Bahamas that seeks to address the growing problem of violence within the school system. By extension, the initiative also serves as a catalyst to direct young people in the areas where they show special interests. In this way, it is anticipated that their paths can be redirected for them to become productive citizens of society.

This paper is geared towards finding solutions to problems that have been left unresolved for too long. It will concentrate on very practical and feasible solutions which can, with minor adjustments, be adapted to suit country, especially those in the Caribbean region since they share many aspects of culture and a common history. In the end, this paper hopes to recreate the template for the 'village' which will raise the children.

Issues, causes and concerns

Many Caribbean nations face alarming rates of criminal activities. In some countries, violent crimes are steadily on the rise, while others are subject to 'spikes'. These spikes are usually associated with drug trafficking and related activities. No matter the varying rates and types of crimes in the Caribbean, there is one consistent factor in these island nations: **the face of crime is getting younger.**

How did this come about? What are the contributing factors to this trend?

A variety of experts in the field of child psychology, criminal psychology and criminal justice suggest a variety of causes for anti-social and criminal behaviour in young people, ranging from social exposure to genetic predisposition. With these factors in mind, one must focus on a number of factors which are generally held to be predictors for violent, anti-social or criminal behaviour in young people today.

The first is the community context. Poor, high-crime neighbourhoods add an extra element of stress to the day-to-day lives of families trying to raise young children, and detract from parents' ability to give time to their children. Further, they set standards for behaviour that encourage violent solutions to disagreements or interpersonal tension and they promote an attitude of suspicion about the motives and intentions of other people. As a result, young people learn to use violence pre-emptively.

The second factor is the family unit itself. Families influence violence in many ways, in some of the same ways as neighbourhoods do. Many parents unintentionally 'train' their children to be confrontational and aggressive by only paying attention to them when they behave in these ways and by failing to respond positively when their children are socially appropriate and use non-confrontational behaviour to get what they want. In more extreme cases, serious abuse can leave some children so emotionally unstable that they react unpredictably to stress, particularly to events that make them fearful or angry.

There are important individual differences in young children, some of them genetically linked and some due to early traumas, especially birth traumas. Impulsive and inattentive children are difficult to rear in the best of conditions. When family and neighbourhood circumstances add to the problem, these children are often unprepared emotionally, cognitively and socially for the development challenges ahead of them. This can place them on a pathway where their problems escalate and they become successively alienated from teachers, peers and even family so that their only support is from other delinquency prone youths. This happens especially when they attend schools with a high density of children who are equally unprepared for school¹.

Law and policy-makers in a number of countries are also beginning to note a correlation between the breakdown of families and various social problems. While not always the case, a recent study by the US-based Heritage Foundation entitled *The Real Root Cause of Violent Crime* indicates the following:

- ❖ over the past 30 years, the rise in violent crime parallels the rise in families abandoned by fathers;
- ❖ high-crime neighbourhoods are characterised by high concentrations of families abandoned by fathers;
- ❖ state-by-state analysis by Heritage Foundation scholars indicates that a 10 per cent increase in the percentage of children living in single-parent homes leads typically to a 17 per cent increase in juvenile crime;
- ❖ the rate of violent teenage crime corresponds with the number of families abandoned by fathers;
- ❖ the type of aggression and hostility demonstrated by a future criminal is often foreshadowed in unusual aggressiveness as early as age five or six years;
- ❖ the future criminal tends to be an individual rejected by other children as early as the first grade, who goes on to form his own group of friends, often the future delinquent gang.

On the other hand, the study also noted that:

- ❖ neighbourhoods with a high degree of religious practice are not high-crime neighbourhoods;
- ❖ even in high-crime inner-city neighbourhoods, well over 90 per cent of children from safe, stable homes do not become delinquents. By contrast, only 10 per cent of children from unsafe, unstable homes in these neighbourhoods avoid crime;
- ❖ criminals capable of sustaining marriage gradually move away from a life of crime after they get married;
- ❖ the mother's strong affectionate attachment to her child is the child's best buffer against a life of crime;
- ❖ The father's authority and involvement in raising his child is also a great buffer against a life of crime².

Research conducted on crime trends and strategies indicate that the most significant changes over the next few decades will not be in the scope of crime, but rather in the nature of crime. Today's increased use in technology and e-commerce will create more technologically savvy criminals who will be more organised, creative and international in their approach to crime and criminal activities. The one variable that research indicates will have the most significant influence on the nature of crime is technology.

The computer, digital and cellular age will bring about changes in the face of crime and usher in a new generation of technologically-astute young offenders. The assumption is that the largest offending demographic group will continue to be young males between 15 and 25 years of age. This at-risk group continues to grow as a strong, constant male presence is notably absent from the home and the only role models available to these disenfranchised youths are movie heroes and the stars of rap, reggae and rock.

A 'catch-22' situation is also prevalent in many countries which make perpetrators out of victims. Due to the increased criminal activity and gang violence in school systems today, young people feel a need to seek the protection of others to keep them safe from the criminal element in their schools and neighbourhoods. As a result, the victims or potential victims become part of gangs (whether formal or informal) for protection purposes. In many instances, they end up perpetrating crimes in order to fit in or participating in other anti-social behaviour, thus becoming a part of the very problem they sought to avoid.

The increased instance of single-parent families, inadequate school staff, inappropriately trained school staff and an irresponsible media were identified as contributing factors to an increase in school violence in the United Nations Secretary-General's study on violence against children³. Caribbean participants felt that the breakdown within the family structure is responsible for the anti-social,

violent behaviours evident at schools. Further, many schools are understaffed, as there is a lack of trained school counsellors or social workers assigned to the school. Also, teacher training is deemed inadequate and it is felt that teachers are generally poorly equipped to deal with or reduce school violence. Finally, the promotion of violence and the valorisation of violent young actors or characters in the media are regarded as the media's input in increased school violence⁴.

Domestic violence also contributes to the state of affairs in many schools. Domestic violence adds to the plight of young people as it exposes them to threats of violence and actual violence, often leaving them feeling unsafe and vulnerable, even at home. In addition, due to the breakdown of the traditional family structure throughout the Caribbean, the extended family no longer exists. Young persons no longer have the benefit of being reared and exposed in a secure environment, and are often neglected and left to be raised by the television and the streets. This strains the social fabric to the breaking point and fosters an environment that allows violence to grow and flourish. The unfortunate result is that this violence spills over into neighbourhoods, schools and the wider community.

Also contributing to the problem of youth and crime are social and economic factors. The information superhighway and advances in digital communication has removed the traditional country borders and everyone with cable television or access to the Internet is exposed to the lifestyles of the rich and famous. The over-the-top lifestyles lived by famous movie stars, millionaires and music moguls provide young people with unrealistic views of how to dress and act to be somebody. Their need to be part of the 'real crew', dress in the right 'rags' and own the right 'bling' and 'toys', places a strain on young people who may already be economically disadvantaged. It has been determined that their desire to present the right image is also a driving factor in a number of criminal activities (shoplifting, petty theft, burglary and even armed robbery).

For many at-risk youth, the escape from this seemingly inevitable route into anti-social and criminal behaviour may be something as basic as being able to attend a private, church or government school out of the area in which they live. However, many countries possess educational zones (for convenience), which ensure that young people have access to learning by placing them in schools located in their district/community. This zoning, however, can be a double-edged sword, as it can trap young people in a certain 'area' mentality, which makes it more difficult for them to resist peer pressure and often results in their falling prey to gang activity.

All of the above, coupled with the high cost of living in today's society, which obliges a majority of mothers to work to support the family and not be at home when children return from school, means that young people are left unattended (without a nurturing or preventative adult influence) for a number of hours on a daily basis. The 'village' which is charged with raising these children (many of the 'villagers' being barely older than the children they are to raise) is for the most part, struggling to raise themselves and are not accessible when young people need answers to questions. Hurts, concerns and even the excitement of something new learned during the day, often has to wait until later as jobs/careers and just plain work, interfere with family time. This results in numerous young people being raised by MTV, *Jerry Springer*, *Will & Grace*, *South Park* and other television programmes which may highlight or sensationalise dysfunctional behaviour and present anti-social behaviour as acceptable.

The incidence of rage among young people is extremely high. Forty per cent of school-going CARICOM students reported feelings of rage. High rates of sexual abuse and physical abuse among children likely play out in rage among young people, which can affect their school performance and lead to violence.

Youth unemployment is especially elevated in some Caribbean countries. According to World Development Indicators from 1996 to 1998, St Lucia had the highest youth unemployment rate in the Americas followed by Jamaica. In the Caribbean, St Lucia, followed by Dominica, St Vincent and the Grenadines and Jamaica have the highest youth unemployment rates. In contrast to the United States, which has high levels of youth violence, the proportion of Caribbean adolescent males who

carry firearms is extremely high. Fully one-fifth of students had carried a weapon to school in the 30 days previous to the survey, and nearly as many had been in a fight using weapons.

Gang violence is also high in the Caribbean, with 20 per cent of male students and 12 per cent of female students at one point having belonged to a gang.

Although data on drug use is scanty, anecdotal evidence suggests a widespread social acceptance of alcohol and marijuana in some Caribbean countries, among both in-school and out-of-school youth. Out-of-school youth aged 13 to 19 years are most at risk of substance abuse as well as drug dealing. Further complicating the situation, the Caribbean is a major trans-shipment point for drugs entering the United States and Europe.

The pressures brought to bear on young people by all of the above factors, along with the challenges of preparing to lead in an uncertain future where they become more technologically astute at an earlier age, but less skilled at many of the social graces which allow for non-violent and diplomatic solutions to problem, places today's youths in a very precarious position.

A recent World Bank study conducted on Youth in the Caribbean for the United Nations expressed:

.....
Young people are the custodians of our society and the trustees of prosperity for future generations. Nowhere is this more apparent than the Caribbean region, where two-thirds of the population is under the age of 30. This youthful profile of the Caribbean nations presents both opportunities and challenges in the years ahead, as the important role that young people play in national and regional development becomes increasingly apparent⁵.
.....

Yet, many young people who are the leaders of the future are consumed with anger and uncertainty about their role in society. They are easily influenced and led by prevailing negative environmental and social conditions. This important role, as noted by the World Bank Study, is jeopardised by the high incidence of crime and criminal activities among today's young people.

A review of crime statistics in The Bahamas

A review of criminal activities in The Bahamas reveals the following as the current face of crime that is predominantly:

- ❖ Bahamian males
- ❖ between the ages of 16 and 35 years old;
- ❖ middle to lower class individuals;
- ❖ of a low educational attainment;
- ❖ marginalised members of society;
- ❖ repeat offenders;
- ❖ likely to reside or offend in a low class, densely-populated area;
- ❖ likely to possess a weapon (knife or firearm).

In matters before the courts in The Bahamas, the average age of young men appearing before the courts on serious criminal offences ranged from 18 to 30 years in cases ranging from possession of drugs and weapons to murder (see Appendix A for overall crime statistics and breakdown of matters committed before the Supreme Court).

Statistical overview of persons charged: juveniles and young offenders

For 2005, a total of 8,181 incidents were recorded in The Bahamas. During the first quarter of 2005, a total of 178 juveniles and young adults were charged with various offences versus 124 for the same period in 2006, representing a 30 per cent decrease in the number of persons charged. The offences of note are murder, armed robbery; robbery, stealing, stealing from vehicles, stolen vehicles and housebreaking (see chart below and Appendix A for additional charts by category).

<i>Offence</i>	Recorded Crimes		Detected Crimes		Juveniles or young men (percentage of total)	
	<i>2006 Jan – March</i>	<i>2005 Jan – March</i>	<i>2006 Jan – March</i>	<i>2005 Jan – March</i>	<i>2006 Jan – March</i>	<i>2005 Jan – March</i>
Murder	16	12	16	10	100	83
Armed Robbery	162	170	35	24	22	14
Robbery	48	58	8	5	17	9
Stolen Vehicle	245	224	10	37	4	17
Stealing	302	349	14	26	5	7
Stealing from Vehicle	257	289	5	17	2	6
Housebreaking	791	485	36	59	5	12
Total	1821	1587	124	178	7	11

As criminal activities continue to grow, the criminals continue to get younger and younger. If this current trend continues unabated, there will be serious economic and social consequences in the future.

Tackling the problem of youth crime and violence

An essential component of any partnership affecting the youth must be the youth themselves. Many programmes have met with limited success precisely because they failed to recognise that the individuals to whom the initiative is directed must become key stakeholders; there must be direct dialogue/involvement/consultation with such persons, or there is no buy-in.

Alternatives to the problems outlined above must lie in a strategic partnership between government, church, social and private organisations as well as the wider community to target the root causes of crime and dysfunction in young people through joint initiatives and programmes.

Research concludes that there is a correlation between current crime trends among youths and the following:

- ❖ poverty;
- ❖ truancy;
- ❖ lack of positive activities;
- ❖ unemployment;
- ❖ social marginalisation and inequality;

- ❖ the illegal drug trade;
- ❖ corruption;
- ❖ the trafficking of firearms; and
- ❖ the ineffectiveness of existing criminal justice systems in providing rehabilitative options for young people.

A number of partnerships, youth enrichment programmes and urban renewal programmes have been undertaken in different countries. They seek to achieve a more concentrated approach directed towards reducing criminal and gang activities and anti-social behaviour in schools, while creating a safer home and community environment to nurture the youth in order that they may become productive citizens.

Two such initiatives undertaken in The Bahamas work at creating safe environments for young people to flourish both at home and away from home. The first of these initiatives is the Urban Renewal Programme, which seeks to root out criminal activity and anti-social behaviour at the source (the community) and provide a safe, crime-free environment for young people where they can relax and allow their creative nature to be expressed. The second is the School Policing Initiative, which addresses the growing problem of violence within the school system.

The Urban Renewal Programme (URP)

In May 2002, the Progressive Liberal Party became the Government of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas. An immediate concern was to address social ills affecting the wider society, particularly in the ‘black belt’, over-the-hill areas. Accordingly, Prime Minister the Honourable Perry Gladstone Christie, initiated an urban renewal scheme in the Farm Road Constituency. Given the overwhelming success of the scheme, the Government is now duplicating it in other over-the-hill areas.

To date, there is a renewed sense of loyalty and community spirit as social standards have improved. The communities have experienced reductions in crime, increased employment opportunities, improved housing and an environment that is becoming “clean, green and pristine”.

The Urban Renewal Project (URP) has captured international attention and won top awards including:

- 1 the Motorola Community Policing Award of the Association of Caribbean Commissioners of Police (ACCP); and
- 2 the Community Policing Award of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP).

The purpose of the URP is to:

- 1 reduce the levels of crime and the fear of crime;
- 2 improve the physical environment of communities;
- 3 enhance housing provisions for residents;
- 4 foster relations between government and non-government agencies and the community; and
- 5 encourage residents to create, participate in and maintain activities that seek to shape and develop their communities, especially those relating to the young and the old in the community.

The overall objective is the development of improved systems of governance by delivering social services closer to the community. Two of the most powerful and successful undertakings in URP related to youth engagement are the Citizens on Patrol project and the revitalisation of youth marching bands.

Citizens on Patrol commenced in the Englerston Constituency in New Providence in 2004. This area was plagued with criminal activity and disturbances by delinquent youths and repeat offenders. The

Royal Bahamas Police Force faced a significant challenge in seeking to provide regular patrols in this area. The idea of enabling the residents to become key stakeholders in protecting their own neighbourhood was conceptualised to address this challenge.

In a pilot study, young men, many of whom were considered marginalised members in society, were given the opportunity to serve their community as ‘district constables’. They received basic training in law enforcement and were placed on supervised patrols by urban renewal teams. This programme has met with resounding success.

The Citizens on Patrol has received widespread support. Due to the unyielding determination of these district constables, The Bahamas have seen a decline in the frequency of disturbances in the areas in which they patrol. This has enabled full-fledged mobile officers to deal with matters in other areas, leading to significant seizures in firearms, dangerous drugs and stolen property.

The Citizens on Patrol constables have uncovered matters and addressed concerns in such a professional manner that the initiative has been copied in other areas; they have become the ‘eyes and ears’ of the community and nothing occurs within their borders without their knowledge. This initiative provides an excellent example of empowering youths and enabling them to take responsibility for the communities in which they live.

URP also takes great pride in pioneering community marching bands. Many doubted whether it would be possible to take young persons who were challenged in their lives or who had never played a musical instrument and form successful bands. URP has been able to take all the energies and talents of young persons and produce successful musical showcases. Today, all the bands are in demand to play at various events.

The Farm Road Marching Band is an excellent example of this success. For the first time in Bahamian history, a marching band has gone on an international tour. It was indeed an achievement; many of the underprivileged youths had never travelled outside the boundaries of their constituency. Equally importantly, the Parents Association, which was formed to act as trustee of the band and their very own children, travelled with the Band and saw to their needs. Through this association, parents have raised funds, provided instruments and other essentials and once again have become actively and meaningfully involved in the lives of their children.

These are only two of many successful undertakings by young people through URP who, once given the opportunity, direction and support can become productive and active citizens.

The School Policing Initiative

A special School Based Policing (SBP) unit was established in 2005 “to foster a partnership between all of the legal, social and educational entities involved in fostering a safe and crime free environment in the school system⁶.”

The underlying premise of SBP is that making schools safer requires a comprehensive strategy that includes the following elements:

- ❖ opportunities to acquire the knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to maintain a school environment in which conflict and differences can be addressed in a manner characterised by respect and civility;
- ❖ intervention and supports for those who are at risk of, or already engaged in, violent or antisocial behaviour contrary to Ministry of Education standards and in violation of the laws of the Commonwealth of The Bahamas;
- ❖ a proactive approach in identifying and preventing where possible random or planned acts of violence in our schools; and
- ❖ an effective response to incidents when they occur – one that respects the rights of victims and witnesses, as well as those of the alleged perpetrators in accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth.

Schools are supposed to be a safe place to grow and learn, so the effective partnership between education, government, private and law enforcement authorities in the form of a school-based policing initiative ensures that all areas of development necessary for young people to function, learn and grow, work together with one common goal: ensuring that schools are safe and focused on education. In addition to focusing on reducing criminal behaviour in youth, SBP is focused on identifying at-risk youths who may themselves be the victims of violence, abuse (physical and mental) and criminal/anti-social behaviour, then providing the necessary counselling to help them rise above the status of victim in their own homes and/or communities.

Church/community participation

A number of organisations (education and church-based) have focused on educating the youth to be able to resolve conflict in non-violent manners. They provide lectures, retreats and reference materials for school guidance counsellors and for individuals who may wish to learn to take the high road in matters of conflict. Several highly successful community outreach programmes are noted below.

Youth Alive Ministries, in association with Youth Against Violence

These are two working church ministries which are comprised of former troubled teens and gang members who now work with troubled and at-risk youths to empower and provide them with other options to criminal and anti-social activities. They provide:

- ❖ youth campaigns such as *Peace on the Streets* and *Extreme Leadership*, and workshops using drama, music and a variety of artistic avenues as a means of providing alternatives for today's youth;
- ❖ professional youth workshops and seminars on topics such as extreme leadership, sex and dating, conflict resolution, parents and teens, and strategies for saving the next generation, which are geared towards teens, parents, youth workers, pastors and young adults. These events involve drama, music and multimedia presentations;
- ❖ two television programmes, *talk 2 me* and *Effective Youth* hosted by young people and directed at young people;
- ❖ outreach programmes at schools, parks, streets, malls and in other countries;
- ❖ A call-in radio show called *The Ruffneck Myxx*, which offers positive advice and a listening ear to young persons.

Youth Empowerment and Skills Training (YEAST) Programme

Another model of rehabilitative empowerment that can be easily modelled from country to country is the Youth Empowerment And Skills Training (YEAST) Programme, which has been introduced into the Commonwealth of The Bahamas by the Roman Catholic Archdiocese.

YEAST focuses on young men between the ages of 17 and 25 years, providing them with skills and training to either advance in the job market or to become entrepreneurs. The precept of the programme is that if young men are given tangible skills (masonry, carpentry, plumbing, etc) to earn a living, along with discipline, encouragement and basic educational skills, they will be empowered to reach their potential and contribute to their communities.

In the past, youth partnerships within a number of organisations have proven successful in engaging young people in activities which keep them focused on helping themselves while helping others. Organisation such as Kiwanis, Lion's Club, Rotary, Toastmasters and the JayCees have provided young people with social and practical skills, leadership and parliamentary training, empowering them to speak and act knowledgeably on matters concerning their country, world affairs and the needs and concerns of youth.

In some countries however, many of these organisations have been challenged due to lack of support (financial and public) and the many lessons they provided for young people have been curbed. By

developing strategic partnerships with private and governmental agencies, such organisations will be able to make a difference in the lives of young people.

There are also many initiatives that concentrate on young people with specific skills or who excel in some way, whether in the arts, sports or in school. While this must be encouraged, this group represents a small percentage of young persons and the average achiever is left by the wayside. There are no Hollywood movies, television shows or news articles written about the average girl who helps her mother prepare her siblings for school, maintains a 'C' average, stays out of trouble and goes on to become a clerk. Likewise, there is no special media attention given to the young man who keeps the house and family together while his mother struggles in the absence of a father to provide for her family. These young people go about their everyday lives unnoticed, and in many cases underappreciated. The attention they crave is often given by gang members who satisfy their need to belong. In order to stem the rising tide of criminal activities among young people, many countries may need to take a two-pronged approach by establishing urban renewal programmes and national youth programmes.

Urban renewal programmes

Young people do not operate in a vacuum, but are nurtured by three separate, yet equally important environments daily (home, the community and school) so it would be useful to develop projects that help families and communities to supplement school-based programmes.

Urban renewal programmes provide a multi-pronged approach towards changing the environment in the school and at home while focusing on young people, not only as individuals, but as part of the wider community. Urban renewal can revolutionise the face of policing in a country. It makes “the members of the community ‘partners’ with the law enforcement agencies, and allows them to ‘police’ the community by consent. This type of partnership increases the ability of government agencies to take services into the heart of desolate, crime-infested areas and transform them into communities⁷”.

Urban renewal takes a simplistic approach; it fosters a relationship between the community and the police and creates a bond of trust between officers assigned to areas targeted for urban renewal and the residents of these areas. This bond removes some of the suspicion which can exist when strangers enter a community and also allows young people to develop a relationship of respect and trust with the officers. This relationship can be the difference which makes a young person reject anti-social behaviour or become involved in criminal activities.

Further, “in poor communities, the more successful persons may migrate to higher status neighbourhoods, thereby depriving the young people in these neighbourhoods of conventional models of success and of authority figures⁸.” One of the goals of any successful urban renewal programme should be to provide mentoring or partnering with individuals who have been a part of the community and may have moved away as a result of their success. These individuals can serve as tangible role models for young people in these communities through this type of partnership.

Partnerships between various government agencies and social partners can reduce or eliminate the bureaucracy and red tape which may ordinarily exist between various agencies and can bring immediate relief in the areas of:

- ❖ poor and inadequate housing;
- ❖ no bathroom facilities;
- ❖ unsanitary conditions;
- ❖ overcrowding;
- ❖ unemployment;
- ❖ lack of positive activities for the young and old;
- ❖ truancy;
- ❖ environmental and social decay; and
- ❖ crime.

In addition to the cosmetic or physical changes in the community, there must be changes made in the activities and opportunities offered to youths in these areas. Educational and cultural programmes which focus on learning who we are as a people, and teaching young people the traditions and culture of our respective nations will go a long way to keeping young people involved in positive activities and away from destructive behaviours.

A tradition which has all but died out in many Caribbean nations is that of storytelling. It is through this community activity that many legends and tales were handed down from generation to generation. It is this self-same tradition which made communities the 'village' to raise the child. The involvement of elders from the community is of vital importance in the role of urban renewal, as they carry the foundation and memory of the community within them.

National youth programmes

Secondly, a structured and well-defined national youth programme will provide positive activities, education and training for young people, those at risk and those who may not be so considered. It can be used as a catalyst to involve young people in their own affairs, and give them a voice in deciding which direction their future will take. The programme should train young adults for positions of authority and directorship within the NYP itself, and let it be a model of youth moulding youth for leadership roles in the organisation and in society.

A Caribbean Youth Explosion was held in Grenada in 2000 and aimed to help young people explore issues pertaining to the implementation of regional and international agreements and integrating them into the youth empowerment agenda. The Youth Explosion incorporated a Youth Assembly of Caribbean Community Parliamentarians, and was a joint initiative of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Secretariat, the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF).

The resolution related to empowerment that was passed during the conference can be found in Appendix B and provides a framework for co-operation and enhanced regional integration. This is an essential tool if Commonwealth countries are to have the kind of continuous long-lasting impact to stem the incidence of crime among the youths. It is certainly a giant step in the right direction in the best interest of all nations.

Keith Bell

Keith Bell is a Superintendent within the Royal Bahamas Police Force Research Unit.

Notes

- 1 *Little Criminals*, research conducted by John Coie, Professor of psychology at Duke University
- 2 *The Real Root Causes of Violent Crime: The Breakdown of Marriage, Family and Community*, Patrick Fagin, Fitzgerald Fellow, Heritage Foundation
- 3 The United Nations Secretary General's *Study on Violence Against Children*, available online at: www.violencestudy.org
- 4 *Report on the Youth Forum and on the Caribbean Regional Consultation on the UN Secretary General's Study on Violence Against Children*, Trinidad and Tobago, 9-11 March 2005.
- 5 *Caribbean Youth Development – A World Bank Country Study*, 2003, Washington DC
- 6 *Force Standing Orders – School-Based Policing*, Royal Bahamas Police Force Nassau, Bahamas
- 7 *Prime Minister's Briefing: Urban Renewal/Community Policing*, Royal Bahamas Police Force, 27 March 2006
- 8 *Crime Trends in the Caribbean and Responses*

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- Report on the Youth Forum and on the Caribbean Regional Consultation on the UN Secretary General Study on Violence against Children*, UNICEF, Trinidad and Tobago, March 2005. Available online at: www.unicef.org/barbados/UNICEF_report_Caribbean_youth_perspectives_on_violence.doc

Appendix A

Crime Statistics – The Bahamas

Persons Charged – All Bahamas

Category	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	Total
Murder	44	33	68	56	53	254
Armed Robbery	136	102	189	116	132	675
Rape	58	77	157	51	92	435
Unlawful Sex	116	66	86	47	141	456
Burglary	18	20	28	27	32	125
House/Shop breaking	245	224	378	299	426	1572
Malicious Damage	257	288	387	280	225	1437
Possession of Unlicensed Firearm	88	122	238	134	195	777
Drug Offences	1118	725	1431	1193	N/A	4467

Matters Committed to Supreme Court – 2005

Murder

Age	Offence
18 years	Murder
21 years	Murder
21 years	22 years
33 years	Murder
Murder	Murder
21 years	30 years
Murder	Murder
28 years	Murder
28 years	Murder
28 years	Murder, Armed Robbery
20 years	Manslaughter
30 years	Manslaughter
31 years	Murder
35 years	Murder

Armed Robbery

Age	Offence
16 years	Burglary
20 years	Armed Robbery (6 counts)
22 years	Possession Of Firearm
23 years	Receiving
26 years	
18 years	Armed Robbery (7 counts)
20 years	Receiving
29 years	
18 years	Armed Robbery (2 counts)
	Rape (2 counts) Forcible Detention
20 years	Conspiracy to commit Armed Robbery, Armed Robbery, Kidnapping, Possession of Firearm, Making a false Report
26 years	
26 years	
32 years	
45 years	

Continues

Sexual Offences

<i>Age</i>	<i>Offence</i>
18 years	Unlawful Sex
18 years	Unlawful Sex
18 years	Unlawful Sex
19 years 23 years	Rape
21 years	Unlawful Sex
22 years	Unlawful Sex
23 years	Unlawful Sex
24 years	Unlawful Sex
25 years	Incest
27 years	Rape, Detention
29 years	Unlawful Sex
31 years	Rape, Forcible Detention
34 years	Burglary, Indecent Assault
37 years	Incest
43 years	Unlawful Sex
44 years	Unlawful Sex
47 years	Unlawful Sex

Caribbean Youth Explosion, Grenada, 2000

Resolution 1: Empowerment

WHEREAS young people in Caribbean countries are not receiving information on policies and decisions agreed to at international fora in a timely manner;

AND WHEREAS governments are not accelerating and disseminating information and training to empower young people on structures and systems present nationally and regionally;

AND WHEREAS young people are not involved in the implementation of decision-making processes of policies, structures and systems;

AND WHEREAS existing structures need to be enhanced and strengthened so as to provide true and proper representation for youth throughout the region ensuring a united voice and equal opportunity for all.

BE IT RESOLVED that we the youth of the Caribbean Youth Explosion 2000 urge regional governments to proceed without delay in promoting and establishing simplified and transparent structures and implementing the dissemination of information for the achievement of youth empowerment.

The resolution above highlights the concern of youth in the Caribbean, and indeed in the world, of not receiving information (particularly information relating to them and their future) in a timely and systematic manner. The success or failure of any initiative aimed at helping young people will be dependent on its presentation to the young people. The matter of information sharing, and inclusion is of vital importance to young people today, and as they become more and more exposed to communication and world politics, the need for them to be 'in the know' increases.

Any programme, be it governmental, church or private, conducted by youth for youth, or designed for youth as a learning and growing experience, must focus on the entire being of the person. It must be geared towards their (the youth) way of thinking, and their desire to have a sense of inclusion in all things concerning them. The input of young people must be a part of the formation of any programme for young people, and their participation must be visible and valuable.

If we are to "train up" our children in the way they must go, then there is a need to let them have a feel for authority, yielding it and not just receiving it, a taste of leadership power, in times of crises and success, and the knowledge that there is a support base available to them at all times.

The support of family, community, church and government, and the empowerment of young people to take the reins and be a part of pro-active thinking and solutions for the future will reduce the rate of crime and criminal activities among the youth, and thereby in the communities now and in the future. The village stands ready to raise our children, it is our duty to let them know we are there.

Young People and Legal Rights (YPLR)

Julian Jack

Background

This paper summarises the Commonwealth Youth Programme's (CYP) research findings on existing legal frameworks and instruments in selected member countries. The research was prompted by mandates from Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs (as well as other international efforts concerned with youth empowerment and rights protection¹), and focuses on eight countries: Canada, the Bahamas, Ghana, India, Malaysia, New Zealand, South Africa, and the United Kingdom. These countries were chosen to reflect socio-economic diversity in the Commonwealth; it is hoped that an analysis of their experiences will be of value to governments and other relevant stakeholders in all Commonwealth countries.

CYP continues to be at the forefront of the international campaign to promote youth empowerment and young people and youth rights as direct corollaries. The most recent of CYP's initiatives in regard to youth matters, an Inter-Agency Consultation for developing the Youth Development Index², adopted a number of indicators which include education, employment, participation and youth justice³.

Considering the guiding principles set out by Commonwealth Heads of Government in Edinburgh in 1997, it seems a reasonable submission that the protection and promotion of basic human rights, especially of the young person, forms the foundation upon which the democratic architecture within Commonwealth member states should rest. The Commonwealth Plan of Action on Youth Empowerment, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, referred to here as "the Convention", and the Beijing Rules are perhaps the best reference points from which to begin this research, if only for the reason that they encapsulate all the ideas which Commonwealth governments have set out as their ambitions for protecting the rights of young people and to empower these citizens in their respective countries.

The Convention has been ratified by all Commonwealth member states and is the most widely and rapidly ratified human rights treaty in history. The general practice in Commonwealth jurisdictions regarding international treaties such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child is that they do not have direct application in domestic law unless they have been enabled by statute. A case in point is the United Kingdom, where the Convention on the Rights of the Child has not been incorporated directly into UK law. Thus, the rules contained in the Convention are examples of "rules of imperfect obligation": that is, rules that are obligatory (in international law) but the breach of which does not attract the imposition of a formal sanction by a judicial body. They are nevertheless matters which the courts should take into consideration when interpreting legislation or developing the common law.

Global context

Approximately 1.3 billion people currently live in extreme poverty. Within and across all countries there are growing disparities and inequalities which threaten social cohesion, and which are strongly

related to youth mortality, violence and psycho-social stress. The overwhelming majority of the Commonwealth youth population still has to struggle on a daily basis with severe economic limitations, and views wealthy society as an unattainable example or a promise. The inequities that exist between the affluent, middle-income and poor of this family group of nations present member governments with an array of problems and challenges, including the protection of youth rights and meaningful youth empowerment.

The challenges vary not merely with the level of political will, but also with scarcities of resources which affect the enabling conditions for legal reform. However, in all cases the needs of young people can be considered in the context of the following:

- ❖ finding a secure starting point for themselves based on values, self-awareness and self-confidence;
- ❖ coping with change, which requires flexibility, adaptability and mobility;
- ❖ gaining constructive control of technological progress through access to knowledge and skills; and
- ❖ Combating isolation by developing a sense of belonging and identity, gaining acceptance and being recognised.

Enabling conditions

If the ambitious goals of the Plan of Action and other instruments are to be achieved in a reasonable period of time, there is need for governments in the member states to make a significant commitment of resources at the national level to those causes, coupled with an integrated approach involving relevant cross-sectoral agents and stakeholders. The major multilateral lending agencies should be urged to consider assisting those countries that undertake such measures; and also those set in the outcomes to the World Summit for Social Development, the International Conference on Financing for Development, the World Summit for Sustainable Development, and the Millennium Development Goals. More importantly, debt forgiveness and debt relief should provide an impetus for governments in the Commonwealth to undertake the requisite measures for bringing about youth empowerment and the promotion and protection of young people's rights. Further, youth empowerment and the protection of youth rights should be regarded by the multilateral finance and lending agencies as composite elements of good governance when assessing the developmental need of developing Commonwealth member states.

Case studies

1 The Bahamas

1.1

The Bahamas can be regarded as a young and youthful nation; 35 per cent of its population is under the age of 18. It is an archipelagic state comprised of over 700 islands, which faces peculiar difficulties in the delivery of services to its 22 inhabited islands. In many respects this necessitates a duplication of infrastructure in each of the islands. The government has committed itself to safeguarding the well-being of the nation's young people, and to meeting its obligations in the areas of promoting healthy lives, providing quality education, protecting young persons against abuse, exploitation and violence, and combating HIV/AIDS⁴.

1.2

The legal rights of young persons are provided for under the Bahamian Constitution of 1973 and other key legislation, including *inter alia* the Education Act 1962, the Minors Act 1976, and the Sexual

Offences and Domestic Violence Act 1991. The Constitution provides that every person in the Bahamas is entitled to fundamental rights and freedoms. The Children and Young Persons (Administration of Justice) Act defines youths as those people being between the ages of 14 and 18. Protection from any form of cruelty is guaranteed under section 17 (1) of the Act. The Act also prohibits the detention of any person below the age of 10 years, and provides that the death sentence cannot be applied where the crimes concerned were committed by someone under the age of eighteen.

1.3

The Bahamian government's position toward empowering its young persons is to develop within them a keen appreciation for good governance, the rule of law and respect and tolerance for others. This will ensure young people's full involvement and integration in the process of economic and social development⁵. There are 15 institutions in the Bahamas which house young persons in need of substitute family care, and the abuse and neglect of young persons remain serious problems⁶.

1.4

Although the Bahamian Government regards the welfare and education of young persons as priorities, its efforts in many respects are adversely impacted by lack of sufficient funding to maintain and improve standards. The public schools, in particular, lack basic educational materials, and facilities are at times overcrowded and substandard in some respects. Unemployment continues to frustrate efforts at empowering Bahamian youth, with over half of those between the ages of 15-24 out of work. This is due largely to the structural adjustment challenges that the Bahamas, like many other Commonwealth Caribbean countries, continue to experience.

2 Canada

2.1

There are approximately 4 million Canadians between the ages of 15-24, comprising 14 per cent of the country's population. The Canadian government has developed comprehensive programmes geared at protecting the rights of these young people and establishing an environment which enables them to realise their true potential through the constitution and many other forms of federal legislation.

2.2

The Canadian legislature has identified its youth justice system as being one of the most crucial areas for ensuring that the interests and rights of its youth population are securely protected. On 1 April 2003, the Youth Criminal Justice Act (YCJA) came into force, replacing the Young Offenders Act (YOA). The YCJA provides the legislative framework for a fairer and more effective youth justice system. One of its aims is to prevent the permanent isolation of those young people who have fallen on the wrong side of the law. The government continues to reiterate that a more holistic approach towards the protection of young people's rights must be taken, and therefore holds in equally high regard, other legislative instruments such as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the Canadian Bill of Rights.

2.3

While not legally enforceable, the preamble to the Youth Criminal Justice Act contains significant statements by parliament about the values on which the legislation is based. Part 1 of the YCJA clearly sets out various procedures or approaches that the law is to adopt when dealing with young offenders extra-judicially, such as warnings, cautions and referrals given by police officers and prosecutors. The Act has also made provision for committees of citizens, to be known as youth justice committees, to assist in any aspect of the administration of the Act or in any programmes or services for young persons⁷. These committees offer timely support to the juvenile justice system so that cases can be dealt with swiftly and more effectively.

2.4

A specific set of criteria must be met before the committal to custody of a young person. Before imposing a custodial sentence, the court must also have considered all reasonable alternatives to custody and must have determined that there is no reasonable alternative that would be capable of holding the young person accountable in accordance with the purpose and principles of sentencing. These are set out in section 38 of the YCJA:

- ❖ the sentence must not result in a punishment that is greater than the punishment that would be appropriate for an adult who has been convicted of the same offence committed in similar circumstances;
- ❖ the sentence must be similar to the sentences imposed on similar young persons found guilty of the same offence committed in similar circumstances;
- ❖ the sentence must be proportionate to the seriousness of the offence and the degree of responsibility of the young person for that offence; all available sanctions other than custody that are reasonable in the circumstances should be considered for the young persons, with particular attention to the circumstances of aboriginal young persons;
- ❖ the sentence must be the least restrictive sentence, in that, it should be the most likely to rehabilitate and reintegrate the young offender into society, promote a sense of the responsibility in him/her, and allow for an acknowledgment of the harm done to victims and the community.

2.5

As regards the empowerment of its young people, the Canadian government has provided for the compulsory education of young persons between the ages of 4 and 16. Particular regard is made to recognising the special cultural needs of Canada's indigenous population. Although primary responsibility for education rests with the provinces and territories, the Government of Canada plays an important support role in education. The mandates of several federal government departments intersect with education in areas such as official languages, post-secondary education funding, and human resource development.

2.6

The country boasts an enviable record for the provision of education. Under the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act 1994, the government provides financial support to those who seek further education and there are no shortages of grants and support from the private sector. Despite such achievements, the Canadian government remains aware that there are difficulties experienced by some segments of the society, in particular those of the Aboriginal communities. There are more than 400,000 Aboriginal young people under the age of 20 in Canada and they are greatly at risk. The rate of suicide among Aboriginal youth is five times higher than the Canadian average. Further, almost a third of Aboriginal children live in single-parent families, twice the rate of the general population. And while Aboriginal youth are more likely to complete high school now than they were 15 years ago ((78 per cent as compared with 37 per cent), their unemployment rate is 32 per cent, almost double the rate for non-Aboriginal youth.

3 Ghana

3.1

It is estimated that young people aged between 5 and 35 years constitute approximately 62 per cent of Ghana's national population. This segment of the population constitutes the bulk of the country's human resource potential, which demands effective harnessing and mobilisation to accelerate and further the development of the country. Youth development and empowerment is piloted through the National Youth Policy, which establishes various guiding principles aimed at enhancing the participation of young people in the development of the country.

3.2

Co-ordination among the various governmental bodies and mechanisms involved with youth rights could be strengthened, at both the national and local levels, with a view to developing a comprehensive policy on young people. These measures should also aim to strengthen and deepen co-operation with non-governmental organisations (NGOs). In addition to problems such as youth unemployment, teenage pregnancy and an increasing incidence of HIV/AIDS and other STIs, young people face increasing rates of homelessness. Approximately 100,000 young persons between the ages of seven and eighteen live and work on the streets of Ghana's larger urban centres. Lacking other means to obtain food and shelter, many resort to commercial sex work.

3.3

Under section 28(1) of the Ghanaian Constitution, a young person under the age of eighteen years is referred to as a child or as a juvenile when in conflict with the law. In regard to the protection of young persons' rights, section 28(1) of the Constitution obliges parliament to enact legislation so that:

- ❖ every young person has the right to the same measure of special care, assistance and maintenance as is necessary for his/her development from their natural parents, except where those parents have effectively surrendered their rights and responsibilities in respect of that young person in accordance with law;
- ❖ every young person, whether or not born in wedlock, shall be entitled to reasonable provision out of the estate of his/her parents;
- ❖ parents undertake their natural right and obligation of care, maintenance and upbringing of their young in co-operation with such institutions as Parliament may, by law, prescribe in such manner that in all cases the interest of young persons are paramount;
- ❖ young persons receive special protection against exposure to physical and moral hazards; and
- ❖ the protection and advancement of the family as the unit of society are safeguarded in promotion of the interest of the young person.

3.4

The girl-child and young adolescent females remain at greater risk than young males. Statistics show that girls drop out of primary school at a higher rate than boys, often due to societal or economic pressures. In 1999, it was estimated that 69 per cent of girls were enrolled in primary school, compared to 81 per cent of boys, and that 44 per cent of boys reach the secondary school level of education compared with only 28 per cent of girls, and that at tertiary level education, girls constitute only 23 per cent of university students. Evidence further suggest that 97 per cent of teenage girls who get pregnant drop out of school, and among those aged 20-24 who gave birth by the age of 20, 60 per cent received less than seven years of schooling.

3.5

Young and adolescent females' rights are also breached by certain traditional practices such as *Trokosi* (also known as *Fiashidi*), where a virgin girl is given up to a religious shrine for as much as three years, as an act of atonement, and female circumcision. Despite the fact that the revised Criminal Code subjects offenders to a minimum sentence of three years' imprisonment, circumcision or genital mutilation of young females continues to be practiced, with prevalence estimated at 30 per cent. Another vulnerable group is young people in custody. The minimum age of criminal responsibility is a weak area, as are the quality and adequacy of alternative measures to imprisonment, and training programmes on relevant international standards.

4 India

4.1

India has a record 375 million young persons, more than any other country in the world. Their condition has improved in the last five decades, with mortality rates up, school dropout rates down,

and several policy commitments made by the government at the national and international levels. It is noted that significant commitments towards ensuring the basic rights of young persons have been made by way of the inclusion of the right to primary education in the Constitution as a fundamental right (under Article 21(a)) for children aged 6-14 years. To this can be added the various constitutional and legal provisions providing for policies beneficial to the rights of young people, including the following:

- ❖ Article 15 of the Constitution, which gives power to the State to make special provision for the betterment of young persons;
- ❖ Article 24 which prohibits employment of persons below the age of fourteen in any hazardous activity;
- ❖ Article 39(e) which provides for the State to ensure against the abuse of the persons of tender age for any kind of economic benefits;
- ❖ Article 39(f) which requires young persons to be given opportunities and facilities to develop in a healthy manner and in conditions of freedom and dignity.
- ❖ In 2000, India also passed the Juvenile Justice (Care and Prevention of Children) Act..
- ❖ The Child Labour (Prohibition and Regulation) Act 1986 prohibits the employment of young persons in a series of occupations and processes.

4.2

Despite these numerous legislative interventions, there is still need to improve the survival and healthcare needs of the young persons, as well as their education, development, protection and empowerment. Data suggests that existing levels of unemployment are extremely high among the youth population. A number of employment schemes are in operation (like TRYSEM – Training of Rural Youth for Self-Employment and SEEUY – Self-Employment Scheme for Educated Unemployed Youth). As can be expected, the numbers of persons registered with these exchanges often tend to exceed the number of placements available. Ultimately, such schemes are not on a scale able to meet the overwhelming demand for jobs among India's many poor and unemployed youths.

5 Malaysia

5.1

The total youth population (based on Malaysia's definition of 15-40 age group) is now estimated at 10.81 million (41.5 per cent of total population). Relevant legislation in Malaysia for empowering young people and protecting their rights include several acts concerning the juvenile courts (in 1947, 1981, and 1982), adoption legislation enacted in 1952 and revised in 1981, a child labour act passed in 1966, a women and girls' protection act passed in 1973 and revised in 1987, and child protection and child care acts passed in 1981 and the 1990s. Under Malaysian law, a juvenile is defined under the Child Act 2001 as someone under the age of 18 and in relation to criminal proceedings someone who has attained the age of criminal responsibility as stipulated by s.82 of the penal code [Act 574]. There is evidence suggesting that between 2002 and 2004 14,691 juveniles were arrested for committing offences, giving an average of 420 cases per month.

5.2

The cultural dynamics of Malaysia demand that different laws apply to Muslim youths in that country. Islamic law is applied by the Shariah courts of Malaysia. The Shariah Criminal Procedure (federal territories) Act 1997 (Act 560) interprets "youthful offender" to mean an offender above the age of ten and below the age of 16 years. There is need for an appropriate youth age limit to be established statutorily, which can be universally applied throughout Malaysia's justice system, so as to avoid inconsistencies in the delivery of justice where young persons have broken the law.

5.3

Many reforms have been introduced in order to achieve a highly skilled and highly motivated work force. The government has attempted to make education very market-centred through the promulgation of several bills. These legislative interventions have led in part to the privatisation of education

especially tertiary education. The Education Act 1996 forms the basis for the government's provision of basic educational instruction to the country's youth and young citizens.

5.4

As regards the empowerment of Malaysian young persons through employment, the government enacted several pieces of legislation with the aim of ensuring that workers enjoy good working conditions, a decent standard of living and secure employment and livelihood. The rights of young persons are therefore protected by the Children and Young Persons (Employment) Act, 1966, but Malaysia's young persons still experience high unemployment.

6 New Zealand

6.1

The development of restorative justice in New Zealand has been influenced to a large extent by the need for corrective approaches to counter institutional discrimination and racism, and allegations of ill-treatment of Maori children and people in the 1970s. Those concerns gave rise to a series of investigations which yielded a number of reports. The Puaotekāwhiri Report is perhaps the most significant, in that it set out thirteen recommendations, most of which were adopted when developing the Children Young Persons and Their Families Act 1989. Importantly, the Report recommended a greater degree of family/*whānau* involvement in decision-making; supervision as a replacement for custody and care options; and the development of a separate youth court.

6.2

Restorative justice processes in respect of criminal cases in New Zealand are based on voluntariness, but are underpinned by a set of guiding principles: that victim and offender are placed at the centre of the process, and that restorative justice processes should only be undertaken in appropriate cases, taking into account the type of offence, the willingness of the victim and offender to participate, and the participants' suitability.

6.3

The New Zealand Children, Young Persons and Their Families Act was passed in 1989. The new law provides for jurisdictional separation between children and young persons in need of care and protection, and those who offend against the law. Measures for dealing with young offenders were designed to eliminate the blurring of principles and processes between care and protection and youth justice which characterised the previous approach. Moreover, the Act introduced a group approach to decision-making – the Family Group Conference, which allows all the participants in a particular forum to contribute to the process and to work towards the determination of an outcome. The aim is to move away from the adversarial and confrontational procedures apparent in courtrooms, and towards outcomes shaped by the families themselves and agreed to by all the participants, including the victims.

6.4

The Act engenders the idea of a partnership between the State and families in resolving issues that affect their young ones. Thus, in contrast with most systems of juvenile justice, it is intended in the New Zealand system that responsibility be given to families, *whānau*, *hapū*, *iwi*ⁱⁱⁱ and family groups to respond to offending by young persons. The underlying intention is to empower families to deal with youth offenders themselves and to restrict the power of professionals, in particular the power of social service professionals. Thus, except for minor to moderate offending, which is usually dealt with by the police by means of an immediate warning or similar procedures, families are given the opportunity to be involved in decisions about how to deal with their young offenders.

6.5

The 1989 Act specifically provides that:

- ❖ where public interest allows, criminal proceedings should not be used if there is an alternative means of dealing with the matter;

- ❖ criminal proceedings must not be used for welfare purposes;
- ❖ measures to deal with offending should strengthen the family, *whanau*, *hapu*, *iwi*⁸ and family group and foster their ability to deal with offending by their young offenders;
- ❖ young people should be kept in the community;
- ❖ age should be a mitigating factor;
- ❖ sanctions should be the least restrictive possible and should promote the development of the young person in the family;
- ❖ due regard should be given to the interests of the victim;
- ❖ the young person should be entitled to special protection during any investigations or proceedings;
- ❖ the young offender should be confronted, held accountable for his/her offending behaviour and given opportunities to take responsibility for their actions by making amends to the victim(s) of their offence(s); and
- ❖ the youth/young person be involved in a face-to-face meeting with the offence victim, so that he/she can see the effects of their conduct in human terms.

6.6

The current youth justice system in New Zealand is an example of Maori justice in practice. The age of criminal responsibility in New Zealand is 10, and ‘children’ or rather, persons under the age of 14 cannot be prosecuted except for the offences of murder and manslaughter. A young person beyond the age of 16 who commits an offence is dealt with in the same manner as an adult: in the District Court or, if the offence is serious, in the High Court. Under the 2002 Act, New Zealand’s Courts are now obliged to take account of the outcomes of any restorative justice processes that have occurred when sentencing any offender.

7 South Africa

7.1

It is estimated that around 45 per cent of the South African populace is less than 20 years of age. This youthful population is afflicted by many problems and challenges, chief amongst which is the HIV/AIDS pandemic. 60 per cent of new HIV infections are believed to occur in young persons between the ages of 15 and 25. This problem is further exacerbated by the fact that six out of every ten young persons live in poverty; and 5 per cent of young persons between the ages of 10 and 16 are going without schooling. The idea of integrating young people into the South African mainstream is based on the belief that “young people should become an active part of nation-building, reconciliation, reconstruction and development⁸.”

7.2

Young persons’ legal rights in South Africa derive from the South African Constitution, South African laws which include the Child Justice Bill and the Child Care Act 1983 and international conventions such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Under the Bill of Rights, promotion and protection of the rights of young persons in South Africa is paramount throughout government strategies (this is referred to as the ‘first call for children’). This means that matters concerning young persons must receive priority in the allocation of national budgets in all areas. In addition to the right of the young person “to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services,” as stipulated under section 28 of the Constitution, every young person enjoys the right to housing, food, water and social security, enshrined elsewhere in the Bill of Rights. In regard to education, the Constitution grants every person the right to a basic education and the South African Schools Act (1996) provides for compulsory education between the ages of 7 and 15.

7.3

The passing into legislation of the Child Justice Bill in 2002 has led to the recognition by the South African government that young persons are a vulnerable group in need of special attention. As early

as 2002 it was estimated that over 2000 young persons were awaiting trial in South African prisons and about 1800 were serving sentences. The Bill, for the first time in South Africa, referred to, and entrenched, diversion and aspects of restorative justice. Drawing to some extent on the New Zealand model of conferencing, and Australian research on restorative Justice processes, and building on indigenous processes of dispute resolution, it attempts to provide the widest possible framework for the development of these alternatives to formal court procedures, without going as far as to introduce them as a compulsory step. A number of projects have been established or are planned to improve court operations through the provision of pre-trial services (aimed particularly at assisting women and young persons), to introduce a witness protection programme, and to introduce children's (juvenile) representatives in courts. A volunteer programme to create a court-approved youth advocate is also under consideration and family courts are being established to deal with family-related matters, which would include counselling and support services for young victims of abuse.

7.4

In addition to the socio-economic rights provided to everyone in sections 26 and 27 of the Constitution, s28(1)(c) is specifically targeted at young people's socio-economic rights and accords every young person a right to basic nutrition, shelter, basic health care services and social services. This section of the Constitution is informed by a recognition of the particular vulnerability of young persons. And despite the government's support for the 'children first' strategy, the majority of young persons in South Africa are not being provided with their basic needs: food, water, social security, shelter, health care services and social services.

8 United Kingdom (England and Wales)

8.1

UK legislation aimed at protecting young persons' rights can be traced as far back with the 1833 Factories Act which placed restrictions on the age at which young people could work in factories and mills. Today, youth/young persons in England and Wales have the right to apply for court orders, to give or withhold consent for medical treatment (for those capable of making an informed decision), to make complaints to the relevant local authority, to have their ethnic, linguistic, and religious background considered in decisions affecting them, to have reasonable contact with their families (usually applied in a circumstance where there was abuse), and in general to be consulted regarding their wishes. At the same time, the case of the UK suggests that youth and juvenile offenders are often considered as problems to be regulated rather than a vulnerable cross-section within their communities and societies. It has been largely from the point of view of reducing the levels of youth crime that governments have sought in recent times to promote the protection of young people's rights through legislative processes.

8.2

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act abolished the common law presumption in England and Wales (*doli incapax*) that a child under 14 does not know the difference between right and wrong (previously clear and positive evidence of a young person's understanding wrongness of actions was required). Further, the 1998 Act requires young offenders to make reparation either to the victim or the community, commensurate with the seriousness of the offence (Reparation Orders) and gives courts powers to order parents to attend training and guidance sessions to control the behaviour of young persons who have committed a criminal offence or persistently truanted through a new Parenting Order. Another important feature of the Act is that it introduced Anti-social Behaviour Orders (ASBOs) – civil preventative orders by which a court order can be issued to a person aged 16 or over who is pursuing a course of conduct that has caused, or is likely to cause, alarm and distress in the community. The aim of such orders is to tackle serious, persistent but low-level disorder. They are civil, not criminal sanctions.

8.3

The 1982 Criminal Justice Act limited the use of custody for young offenders and abolished imprisonment for the under-21s. “Borstals” (corrective institutions for youth) were replaced by Youth Custody Centres, allowing for short, sharp sentences lasting 4-6 months. By 1991, the Criminal Justice Act was passed, setting up youth courts with an emphasis on youth welfare. The 1991 Act also inserts a new section in order to protect young witnesses, which provides that a child’s evidence in criminal proceedings is to be given unsworn. Further, it includes a new sentence of detention in a Young Offender Institution for young people aged 15 to 20. The 1991 Act, in tandem with the Children Act 1989, continued a twin-track approach of punishment and welfare. The Criminal Justice Act changed the name of the Juvenile Court to the Youth Court and extended its jurisdiction to include 17 year-olds. Section 68 and schedule 8 amend the relevant definitions of ‘young person’ to ensure that for most purposes, those aged 17 will be treated as young persons rather than adults (as is already the case with 16 year-olds); this is not yet in force.

8.4

These interventions were followed by the passing of the Criminal Justice and Public Order Act 1994, which provide for a new secure training order in response to the problem of persistent offending by juveniles (12-15 year-olds, later amended to cover 12-14 year-olds). The process of reforming the youth justice system continued with the enactment of the 1999 Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act. This led to changes in court procedures regarding young people and established Youth Offender Panels for first time offenders aged 10-17 who plead guilty. And in order to reduce the intimidation that young suspects may feel when tried in an adult court there is a ban on robes and wigs and uniformed security officers in any courtroom where defendants under age 18 are tried on serious criminal charges.

8.5

Youth crime, particularly common in socially deprived areas, has been identified as an issue in 34 of the 39 regeneration schemes established under the New Deal for Communities (NDC) programme. Offences committed by young people in the NDCs are most frequently perceived to be theft and handling (particularly vehicle theft), and violent crime (mainly fighting). The most common motives generally given by young people for their offending are material gain and boredom. Evidence also suggests that social exclusion is a major contributing factor to youth crime and anti-social behaviour, especially in areas with high concentrations of ethnic minority communities.

8.6

Shortly after coming into office in 1997, the current government embarked on the most radical reform of the youth justice system for 50 years. Reforms to the system are focused on preventing offending through:

- ❖ a clear strategy to prevent offending and re-offending by young persons;
- ❖ helping offenders, and their parents, to face up to their offending behaviour and take responsibility for it;
- ❖ earlier, more effective intervention when young people first offend;
- ❖ faster, more efficient procedures from arrest to sentence; and
- ❖ partnership between all youth justice agencies to deliver a better, faster system.

The Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999 introduced some new elements to the youth justice reform process. First-time offenders who plead guilty and do not require a custodial sentence are referred through a referral order to a panel drawn from the community and facilitated by the youth offending team. The panel will look at the causes of offending and draw up a contract with the young offender and their parents to tackle these. Although the operation of this mechanism is not identical to the restorative approach used by New Zealand (described above), it nevertheless shares common features.

8.7

The position of the government regarding youth empowerment is guided by the principle that all young people should volunteer and contribute to their communities, the idea being to develop and inculcate among them a stronger sense of rights and responsibilities and to improve mutual understanding between young people and the wider community. Evidence suggests that the reduction of poverty among young people constitute an integral component of the government's empowerment strategy. The target is to halve poverty among young persons by 2010 and end it by 2020.

8.8

There is also the issue of assisting young people who do not have access to good services, perhaps because they live in a run-down area. Sure Start, a cross-departmental strategy, brings together early education, childcare, health and family support to give a good start in life to young persons living in disadvantaged areas. It is based on the government's belief that investment in early childhood can help later performance at school, prevent truancy and reduce the risk of unemployment, drug abuse and crime. Its goal is to ensure that all young persons are ready to learn when they arrive at school. Sure Start is targeted at young persons and their families in areas of need and considered key to the government's drive to prevent social exclusion, raise educational standards, reduce health inequalities and promote opportunity. Government departments, national agencies and local partners work together to achieve this objective. Sure Start programmes are also intended to assist teenage parents return to education or employment. The government's strategy in this respect aims to halve the rate of conceptions among under-18s in England by 2010; drive down the trend in conception rates for under-16s and to help more teenage parents to return to education and employment.

9 Recommendations

9.1

The foundation for developing model legislation and other interventions for promoting and protecting the rights of youths and young persons in Commonwealth jurisdictions are based on Commonwealth values and principles:

- ❖ the promotion of sustainable development through cooperation and partnership;
- ❖ targeted investment in youth during early childhood years;
- ❖ full and inclusive participation of youth and women in civic affairs;
- ❖ good governance;
- ❖ coordinated and cross-sectoral youth policy;
- ❖ support for families and other social groups, as well as for individuals;
- ❖ inclusive education and training opportunities as the cornerstone of social policy (including free, compulsory education for children, in a language appropriate to them);
- ❖ economic enfranchisement of young people; and
- ❖ human rights as the guiding framework whether or not the state and civil society are in a position to implement all best practices.

9.2

In the context of criminal justice systems, member states should place particular emphasis on securing:

- ❖ crime prevention;
- ❖ restorative justice;
- ❖ alternatives to custody;
- ❖ reconciliation of legal structures with traditional practices;
- ❖ an appropriate age limit for criminal responsibility;

- ❖ sensitisation of professionals and other influential persons on youth rights and social inclusion issues;
- ❖ systemic integration of professional youth work and development into the penal system through special programmes for police and prison officers;
- ❖ establishment of specialised youth procedures and youth courts; and
- ❖ access to free legal representation for young offenders.

The imprisonment of youth or young persons should be an absolute last resort, as expressly stated in UK and South African legislation. Further, no young person or juvenile should at any time be imprisoned or held in detention in police cells, or with any adult offender.

Abolition of corporal punishment will serve to implement member states' obligations under various international instruments such as the Beijing Rules on Juvenile Justice; Article 7 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights; the Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

9.3

Rehabilitation of offenders ought ideally to begin with the family (although a traditional family structure may be absent, or stand in need of support). In this regard, provision should be made through legislative means for the offending juvenile/ young person to have contact with his/her family, so as to ensure that the family take on a greater degree of responsibility for providing emotional and other support during and after the period of rehabilitation. The management of cases involving young persons and juveniles should be treated with the utmost urgency as an overriding principle of the juvenile justice systems of member states. It is noted that the Canadian justice system has made this a priority. It has made a concerted effort to reduce the number of cases actually going to the courts by diverting misdemeanours to community boards, and hiring youth workers to make best practice recommendations to assist the courts. An interesting feature of the Indian justice system has been to legislate for the discretionary removal of previous convictions from a juvenile offender's record.

9.4

Finally, as well as being an end in itself, young people's well-being is the key to sustainable crime prevention. Member states are urged to adopt national policies and strategies in which create conducive conditions for investment in young people.

Julian Jack



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Notes

- 1 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, 1992; World Conference on Human Rights, June 1993; Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, April-May 1994; International Conference on Population and Development, September 1994; World Summit for Social Development, March 1995; Fourth World Conference on Women, September 1995; World Conference Against the Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children, August 1996; Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting, Port-

- of-Spain, 1995; Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, Edinburgh 1997; Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 1998.
- 2 Commonwealth Youth Programme Inter-Agency Consultation for Developing a Youth Development Index, Marlborough House, Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 11-12 July, 2005, p 20.
 - 3 Ibid.
 - 4 HE Paulette Bethel, Permanent Representative of The Commonwealth of the Bahamas to the United Nations, 58th Session of the United Nations General Assembly, 21 October, 2003.
 - 5 21st Century Citizens: Young people in a Changing Commonwealth, Commonwealth Youth Programme,
 - 6 US State Department Report 2003.
 - 7 Section 18, YCJA.
 - 8 Equivalent to extended family, sub-tribe and tribe groupings.
 - 9 Speech by President Nelson Mandela on South African Youth Day, Pietersburg, 16 June 1996.

Further reading online

The Bahamas

[www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/\(Symbol\)/CRC.C.SR.1014.En?OpenDocument](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/(Symbol)/CRC.C.SR.1014.En?OpenDocument)

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[www.canadiancrc.com/Youth_Justice_webpage/Youth_Criminal_Justice_Act.htm#UN %20Convention](http://www.canadiancrc.com/Youth_Justice_webpage/Youth_Criminal_Justice_Act.htm#UN%20Convention)

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unicef.org/voy/explore/rights/explore_225.html

www.socdev.gov.za/Media/2005/April/budgetvote/child.htm

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www.bichardinquiry.org.uk

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www.youth-justice-board.gov.uk/PractitionersPortal/Assessment/

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www.jrf.org.uk/bookshop/details.asp?pubID=262

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www.connexions.gov.uk/

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