Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Youth and Students Summit Africa
2023

Introduction

We, the Commonwealth Youth and Students representing 21 African countries, acknowledge the importance of addressing the critical challenges facing our Continent. We believe that young people, in collaboration with our intergenerational counterparts, have a significant role to play in shaping and co-creating the future of Africa. Therefore, we have identified five thematic key issues that require urgent attention from policymakers, civil society organizations, and governments across the Continent.

At the 2022 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in Kigali, Rwanda, Commonwealth Heads of Government declared 2023 a year dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development.

The year provides an opportunity to reinforce the fact that young people are at the heart of the Commonwealth's work to promote peace, democracy and development; and to mark the 50 years since the establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) in 1973. 2023 also marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Commonwealth Charter which sets out the values and aspirations that unite the Commonwealth and the commitments made by member states to its peoples. The year is also the mid-point to 2030 for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the achievement of which requires increased engagement of young people. For these reasons, 2023 provides a timely moment for Commonwealth collective celebration of the contribution of young people and renewed action for their empowerment.

Young people comprise 60% of the population of the Commonwealth and are vital to its present and future. As citizens of the 56 member countries, their understanding of and commitment to the Commonwealth as a family of nations with shared values is crucial to the growth and revitalisation of the association. To remain relevant, Member Governments, Commonwealth organisations, youth networks and partners must engage actively, effectively and intergenerationally with more young people, as co-creators in development. Particular attention should be given to young people living with disabilities, those experiencing challenging circumstances and those who are socially excluded and marginalised.

The 2023 Commonwealth Youth and Students summit hosted by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development serves as a platform for catapulting Africa's young population to the forefront of leadership discussions on the African continent. This summit has enabled crucial conversations aimed at strengthening and promoting the leadership capacity of Youth and Student Leaders within the Commonwealth. The outcomes of this summit are designed to be actionable and aimed at initiating and advancing youth development.

During the summit, Youth and Student Leaders engaged in debates on emerging youth development issues, fostering a space for the sharing of best practices and identification of collaborative opportunities. Participants also took stock of existing

policies and programming, allowing for an assessment of current approaches to youth development. Through these discussions, pragmatic actions were identified and agreed upon to enhance youth development efforts.

Theme 1: The Digital Divide

Access to digital technology is increasingly becoming a fundamental requirement for participation in the global knowledge economy. The digital divide, the gap between those who have access to digital technologies and those who do not, remains a significant challenge in Africa. This divide has particularly adverse effects on students and youth on the Continent who require technology to learn, communicate, and access information and economic opportunities.

The rapid advancement of digital technologies continues to exacerbate the challenges faced by youth and students who find themselves unable to participate in the digital revolution and participate in emerging economic opportunities due to African countries' slower rate of adoption. A narrowing of the digital divide remains essential if young people are to benefit from the emerging avenues of employment, access to services and innovation.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Governments have an important role to play in the creation of policies that prioritise digital inclusion, including the allocation of resources to improve digital infrastructure and access to technology. A conducive regulatory environment will attract investment, stimulate innovation, and foster digital inclusion.
2. Increase investment in digital skills training programs and vocational training for young people by prioritising the provision of internet connectivity and digital resources in schools, colleges, and universities. This enables students to access online educational materials, participate in e-learning platforms, and acquire digital skills necessary for future employment.

3. Promote the creation and availability of locally relevant digital content in multiple languages. This ensures that the internet is more inclusive and caters to diverse communities, enabling users to access information, educational resources, and services that are culturally relevant and address local needs.

4. Foster collaboration between governments, private sector entities, and civil society organizations to leverage their respective expertise and resources. This

can include joint initiatives to deploy technology infrastructure, regulate data tariffs, provide training programs, promote digital transparency and accountability and develop innovative solutions to bridge the digital divide by increasing access to technology and internet services in rural and low-income areas.

5. Engage local communities in the digital transformation process by involving them in decision-making and implementation. This can be achieved through participatory approaches, community-led initiatives, and partnerships with local organizations to ensure that interventions address the specific needs and challenges of each community.

Theme 2: The Economy and Creative Industries

The creative industries play a crucial role in the economic development of many African countries, providing opportunities for employment and entrepreneurship for students and youth. However, the creative industries, along with the broader economy, face significant challenges that hinder their growth and development. The economic challenges faced by youth in this sector continue to be overlooked as funding and resources are often channelled to other sectors.

As an important but undervalued contributor to the economies and social landscape of many African countries, support of young people within this sector must be promoted so as to ensure the realisation of the industry and its peoples' full potential.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement policies that support the growth of creative industries and encourage innovation and entrepreneurship among young people. Governments can create a conducive environment for economic growth within the creative industry by providing access to finance, tax incentives and policy frameworks that encourage entrepreneurship.

2. Invest in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) programs and educational initiatives that focus on building relevant skills for the creative industries. Foster partnerships between educational institutions, industry experts, and creative organisations to provide practical training, mentorship, and entrepreneurship development programs.

3. Increase investment in infrastructure, such as transportation, electricity and access to technologies. By providing access to high-speed internet, technology

hubs and incubators, governments can facilitate the growth of businesses in the creative industries.

4. Promote gender equality and diversity within the creative industries by implementing affirmative action policies, providing targeted support for women entrepreneurs, and addressing barriers to entry and advancement. This can include mentorship programs, leadership training, and access to finance initiatives specifically tailored for women.

5. Foster international partnerships and collaborations to enhance knowledge exchange, access to markets, and technology transfer. Engaging with global creative networks and participating in international events can provide exposure, opportunities for export, and learning from best practices.

Theme 3: Gender-Based Violence

Gender-based violence remains a significant challenge in Africa, with young women and girls being the most affected. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an estimated 1 in 3 women worldwide experience physical and/or sexual violence by an intimate partner or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lives.

Gender-based violence is a pervasive and persistent problem in many African countries, with profound effects on the education, mental health, and opportunities of students and youth. This violence, which includes sexual assault, domestic violence, and harmful cultural practices, often limits the potential of survivors by hindering their ability to achieve their goals. As a complex issue, the eradication of gender-based violence requires a multi-faceted approach involving not only government action but also education awareness campaigns, and partnerships with civil society organizations and the private sector.

By working together to combat gender-based violence, we can create a safe and inclusive environment for students and youth to thrive, paving the way for a brighter future for all Africans.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement comprehensive legal frameworks that address gender-based violence and provide support, safe reporting mechanisms and protection for survivors and whistleblowers. Governments must work to reduce the bureaucracy associated with reporting gender-based violence incidents which often retraumatise survivors.

2. Increase investment in continuous, age appropriate, sexual and rights education and awareness programs which conscientise citizens about their rights and bodily autonomy. Programmes should also focus on breaking stigmas associated with reporting and conscientising citizens to the resources available to them.

3. Increase access to economic and further education opportunities for young women and girls and support their participation in decision-making processes.

4. Investment in the publication, maintenance and accessibility of a national register of sexual offenders list so as to curb the abilities of perpetrators to commit further offenses.

5. Address underlying structural and economic issues that lead to GBV which are often rooted in social norms, attitudes, and beliefs that perpetuate gender inequality, stigma, patriarchy and discrimination. Governments can address these underlying causes by promoting gender equality and empowering women and girls through education, economic opportunities, and political participation.

Theme 4: The Decolonisation of Education

The legacy of colonialism in Africa has had a significant impact on education systems on the Continent, with a continued focus on Eurocentric curricula and limited investment in African knowledge systems. This has led to a limited understanding of African history, culture, and perspectives among young people, thus leading to the perpetuation of colonial mindsets and privileging of eurocentric norms and knowledge systems.
As an important tool for the development and empowerment of individuals, communities and countries, the education system must be decolonised so as to address structural inequalities and offer youth and students alternative knowledge frameworks.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Develop and implement policies that prioritise the inclusion of African knowledge systems in education curriculums. Curriculum transformation and inclusion of African knowledge systems, language and perspectives remain key to including decolonial perspectives.

2. Promote and encourage the use of local indigenous language in academic and educational settings. Governments should invest in social education which trains educators not to penalise students and learners who speak to one another in their mother tongue as such behaviours serve to reinforce and perpetuate the use of colonial languages as being the hegemon while simultaneously designating indigenous languages as being inferior. Further training should be provided to educators to equip them with the knowledge and fluency to educate in and grade submissions in indigenous languages.

3. Increase the participation of youth and students in the development and implementation of education policies to ensure they reflect their needs and aspirations. By collaborating with youth and students, governments ensure ownership and buy-in thus leading to greater engagement, commitment and investment by youth and students, in the education system.

4. Regularly evaluate the effectiveness of educational policies and interventions to ensure they align with decolonizing objectives. Adapt and refine strategies based on feedback from students, teachers, and the broader community.

5. Promote international exchange programmes that allow African students and educators to engage with counterparts from other countries. This facilitates cross-cultural learning, promotes diversity and challenges euro-centric perspectives.

Theme 5: Child Labour

Child labour remains a critical issue affecting many African countries, with millions of children engaged in hazardous and exploitative work. This practice not only violates the fundamental rights of children but also has severe consequences for their education, health, and future prospects. Children who are forced to work at a young age are more likely to drop out of school, suffer from physical and mental health problems, and remain trapped in poverty.

The eradication of child labour remains central not just to the protection and promotion of the fundamental rights of youth and students, but to the development and and progress of the African continent.

Policy Recommendations:

1. Prioritisation of the issue of child labour and the development and implemention of policies and programs to address the root causes of child labour remain critical to the eradication of this practice. This includes access

to education, providing social protection for vulnerable families, and enforcing laws and regulations that protect children and families in socio-economic distress from exploitation.

2. Catalyse increased investment in educating the public regarding the issue of child labour in Africa and conscientising the public to take action to support efforts to end child labour. This includes supporting ethical and sustainable businesses, knowing where your products and produce come from, advocating for policy change, and supporting to organizations working to combat child labour.

3. Encourage companies to adopt and implement responsible business practices, including supply chain transparency, to ensure that child labor is not involved in any stage of production. Support initiatives that certify and label products as child labor-free, and provide incentives for companies to comply with ethical standards.

4. Invest in research and data collection on child labour to better understand the scope, causes, extent and trends of child labour in different sector and regions. This information will support evidence-based policies and interventions.

5. Collaborate with international organizations, such as the International Labor Organization and UNICEF, to access technical assistance, funding, and expertise in combating child labor. Engage in regional and global initiatives to share experiences and learn from successful strategies implemented in other countries.

Conclusion:

The Commonwealth Youth and Students representing 21 African countries reaffirm our commitment to addressing the critical challenges facing our Continent. In this Commonwealth Year of Youth, we continue to urge our institutional partners to recognize the importance of co-creating with them for the progress and development of the African continent.

The 2023 Commonwealth Youth and Students summit hosted by the Nigerian Federal Ministry of Youth and Sports Development serves as a significant step in progressing the CHOGM 2022 mandate on propelling increased meaningful representation of youth in decision-making processes. By providing young people a platform for young people to engage with leaders and policymakers on issues of relevance to youth and students, the Summit has ensured that youth and student issues have been placed at the top of the agenda.

We call on member-states across the four other regions of the Commonwealth to answer the call made at CHOGM2022 and work with young people in collaborative and inclusive ways to secure our common future.

Young people and their governments must work together to address the challenges that affect us, including the digital divide, child labor, gender-based violence, and the decolonisation of education. These challenges hinder our growth and potential, and we need to collectively act to eradicate them.

The digital divide must be addressed to ensure equal access to education and opportunities. We must eradicate child labor to protect our future and promote education. Gender-based violence must be addressed to ensure a safe learning and working environment for all. The decolonization of education must be accelerated to promote inclusive and diverse learning environments, which enable us to learn about our cultures and identities. Finally, the economy and the creative industry must be promoted to create job opportunities for African youth and to promote economic growth and development.

As youth and students, we believe that by working collaboratively with our institutional partners, we can overcome these challenges and create a brighter future for ourselves and our Continent. Our voices must be heard, and our ideas must be incorporated into policies that shape our future.

Together, we can create a continent that is inclusive, prosperous, and a shining example of what can be achieved when we work together towards a common goal.