

YOUR

COMMONWEALTH

the youth perspective



# YOUNG VOICES IN AFRICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

Stories told by local journalists

12-page supplement

# Commonwealth Year of Youth in sharp focus

By **Christabel Derby**,  
Co-Chair of the  
Commonwealth  
Year of Youth  
Advisory Committee



**A**S WE approach major events such as the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting and the Youth Awards, the critical importance of the Commonwealth Year of Youth comes into sharp focus.

At its core is the staunch belief that young people are our power source.

Across our 56 countries is the recognition that we need youthful perspectives and innovations to achieve our Sustainable Development Goals, which include saving our planet, tackling poverty, and empowering marginalised groups.

It's a big task and a big ask for governments that have had pandemics, floods, storms, and conflicts thrown in their path. But when they met at their COVID-delayed summit in Rwanda last year, they all agreed that these goals could only be made possible by investing in young people, addressing their concerns, supporting their empowerment, and including them

in decision-making. And the Commonwealth Year of Youth was launched.

To manage its design and implementation, the Commonwealth assembled a strong intergenerational Advisory Committee, which I co-chair.

Since officially launching the Year in January, the Committee has been working with the Commonwealth Secretariat and a network of government departments and international partners to gear up young leaders and accelerate youth development and empowerment.

This includes capacity-building and strategy-planning sessions and scholarships such as the Commonwealth/Simplilearn partnership, which offered 10,000 course places worth \$5 million. We have also been ramping up our advocacy efforts and ensuring more young people participate in decision-making.

But our advocacy is not only to mobilise decision-makers. It is also about lighting a fire in



## COLLECTIVE VOICE:

Youth-led change is vital if our world is to survive its current challenges

our 1.2 billion young people and encouraging them to be part of a revolution and a loud collective voice that echoes across the globe demanding action and change.

As a young lawyer and youth activist from Ghana, I am intimately familiar with the barriers and the negative messages that try to convince us that we are too young and inexperienced to make a change.

Fortunately, I have proven

to myself the power of perseverance and resilience. I know firsthand that youth-led change is not only possible but is also necessary if our world is to survive its current challenges.

I also recognise the importance of intergenerational collaboration, and I am inspired by those who came before me, such as renowned International Youth Development Specialist and Strategy Advisor Dr Henry Charles, who up until last

month was my co-chair on the Year of Youth advisory committee.

Sadly, Dr Charles passed away while travelling to one of our events. But I will always be inspired by his legacy as the "Godfather of Youth Work and Youth Development Studies." He dedicated his life to youth empowerment and played a critical role in the development of the world-renowned Commonwealth Youth Programme,

which this year celebrates its 50th birthday. He has left a lasting impression on me, and one of my aims for the Year of Youth is to make him proud.

*Christabel Derby is a lawyer and the CEO of the Derby's Foundation Ghana – focusing on development, education, health, and infrastructure. She is currently the Vice Chairperson of Inclusion and Engagement for the Commonwealth Youth Council*

## Harnessing the power of youth action to shape lives

IT'S HARD to imagine that it has been a year since we met in Rwanda for the Commonwealth Youth Forum, and I took the helm of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) as Chair. It seems like just yesterday when I sat with youth leaders from the Caribbean, the Americas, Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Pacific.

It's difficult to adequately describe, with mere words, the importance of this Forum to young people sufficiently. We were emerging from the dark shadow of the pandemic and facing some of the most severe challenges in history: a



By **Kim Allen**, Chair of  
the **Commonwealth  
Youth Council**

COVID-exacerbated youth unemployment crisis, education and health systems that were in shambles, and the impending doom of climate change. These harsh realities force young people

to express their frustrations through violence, petty crimes, and protests and lead to increased suicides, teenage pregnancies, sexual harassment, and substance abuse.

But we also had a group of young people who are blessed with talent and resilience and driven by their commitment to take charge of their future.

Among the many youth-focused outcomes of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting in Rwanda was their declaration that 2023 would be dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable devel-

opment. This was the birth of our Commonwealth Year of Youth.

Fortuitously, this year coincides with the celebration of the CYC's 10th birthday and the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), which, throughout the decades, has gained a reputation among governments as a strong pillar of support for their youth development endeavours.

The CYP has been a close ally to Commonwealth countries, from drafting youth policies to training youth workers to recognising and funding

youth-led sustainable development initiatives through youth awards.

But, for me, the most invaluable gift to young people is a voice — the opportunity to have a say, at the highest levels, in the policy decisions that shape and affect their lives.

This is the power of the Commonwealth Youth Council and the growing number of youth networks that advocate for change and progress in areas such as health, education and the environment.

As members of these networks, we aim to connect with the 1.2 billion young

people across the Commonwealth to understand their concerns, hear and communicate their ideas, and spotlight their solutions and innovations in high-level international arenas.

This Voice supplement is another opportunity to be heard and highlight the real stories behind cold statistics, especially as youth ministers prepare for their summit in September.

It is also an opportunity for those responsible for government youth portfolios to listen and to work with us to turn our challenges into opportunities for prosperity and growth.

# Baliceaux: A graveyard that must be protected

Thousands died when the British stranded Garinagu people on this island. Now it is being sold off to become a billionaire's playground. By **Jada Chambers**



ONCE SAW a graveyard come alive. It's also the biggest graveyard I've ever seen. This place is called Baliceaux, a 142.1 square kilometre island in the Caribbean that is part of the nation of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Baliceaux has a haunting history surrounding the Garifuna people, as beneath the feet of those who trod the land are the bones of 2,026 Garinagu men, women and children who fell victim to what some consider to be one of the greatest acts of genocide committed by the British.

The Garifuna, formerly known as the Black Caribs, are the descendants of an Afro-indigenous population from St Vincent and the Grenadines.

Paramount Chief of the Garifuna, and Leader of the European Resistance Joseph Chatoyer was killed on March 14, 1795 at Dorsetshire Hill, St Vincent.

## EXILED

The following year, the British exiled 5,008 Garifuna people to Baliceaux, an island just off the coast of St Vincent, where there was no fresh water or food.

Vincentian historian Dr Garrey Dennie has described this act as an inexcusable criminal offence that was not manslaughter; it was done with the pure and unadulterated intention to eradicate the Garifuna people and their heritage.

Less than a year later, when

the British returned to Baliceaux, more than half of the people they had left there were dead.

The survivors were put on boats and exiled to Roatan, off the coast of Honduras.

There, the community began to increase in numbers, and they later spread to Belize and other areas across Central America. Eventually, the culture began to resuscitate, then thrive.

Centuries later in 2001, UNESCO dubbed the Garifuna culture, "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity," and since then, numerous initiatives have been put in place across the Garifuna diaspora to propel enculturation of the language and culture.

Ironically, the attempt of the British to strangle the Garifuna heritage has led to a revival.

Today, scores of Garifuna descendents from Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Belize, the US, St Vincent and the Grenadines, and the Caribbean conduct pilgrimages to Baliceaux to commemorate the pain that their people endured on that sacred island.

On March 12 2023, I made the journey myself, and that was when I saw a graveyard come to life.

The island was beautiful indeed. Its mountainous terrain is blanketed with hundreds of trees and shrubs, while the fringes of the land are encrusted with sea shells. Inland, there are giant holes that were dug into the ground. In spite of how peaceful



**EMOTIONAL JOURNEY:** Baliceaux island, just off the coast of St Vincent, has a haunting history surrounding the Garifuna people; left, Jada Chambers, forefront left, during her pilgrimage to Baliceaux back in March; inset, a pilgrim sings at Baliceaux to honour her ancestors

and serene it all was, the journey was tremendously upsetting, as some of the pilgrims grew emotional as they sailed the waters their people were forced to traverse, just to die.

There were 60 of us. There were dancers and drummers, and everyone was dressed in

white. Emotions of sadness, anger, peace and joy exploded together across the island, and it came to life.

However, it seems as if one can put a price tag on even the most irreplaceable things.

Despite all the trauma, history and the triumph of our an-

cestors, their graveyard called Baliceaux has been placed on the market by its private owners for US\$30 million to become some billionaire's playground.

Baliceaux reminds me of the Island of Goree, a pilgrimage destination that lies off the coast of Senegal, West Africa.

This island had the largest slave-trading centre on the African coast, but is now a protected destination for reconciliation and forgiveness.

Baliceaux and the island of Goree are two of the same, so why should one be safeguarded and the other put up for sale?

# Lessons to be learned from a fantastic Games

Pursue your dreams and don't focus on your mistakes.

By **Jada Chambers**



**H**AVE YOU ever met someone who was hell-bent on convincing you about something? I did. This man was like a broken record.

He said the same thing, over and over again, every day, for weeks, that I should pursue a more “lucrative” career path and give up on my dream of becoming a writer.

One week after another conversation during which he explained the importance of doing what makes money and not what you love, he passed away.

And though his death was unfortunate and untimely, it made me think of how those who try to dictate others' lives may not even live to see it happen.

The thing is, journalism is my stepping stone to becoming a writer, so had I listened to him, I would have treated writing as just a hobby and would not have been given the invaluable opportunity to report on the Commonwealth Youth Games Trintago 2023.

I began my journalism career nine months ago at *Searchlight* Newspaper, a media company

located in St Vincent and the Grenadines.

After being introduced to YourCommonwealth blog and writing my first article for the site, I was given the opportunity to travel to Tobago as a youth journalist at the CYG Trintago 2023.

The fact that I was even considered for this opportunity was a surreal moment in itself! The furthest I've travelled from St Vincent is a 30km flight to the Grenadine Island of Mustique, so to fly to a whole other country was just incredible.

Much like St Vincent, Tobago is beautiful; but the Games were even more enthralling. I worked alongside journalists from UNICEF, taking photos and interviewing athletes who participated in rugby, beach volleyball, triathlon and the newly added Fast5 netball.

I questioned them on topics such as 'Safe Sport', their experience while competing in the Games, what it took for them to play at such a professional level, and their plans for the future.

Most of them who stood on



**DRIVEN:** Athletes at the closing ceremony of the Commonwealth Youth Games (photo: Getty Images)

the podium to receive their medals told me that they didn't expect to do that well.

Others said that they made grave mistakes during their races but were still able to pull themselves together to make it to the finish line; and most of those who lost their games were in no way discouraged, but ready for the next challenge.

Their mentality was inspiring and of high quality. As I inter-

viewed these 14–18-year-olds, I learnt that because success isn't guaranteed, it does not mean I shouldn't make a very good attempt to achieve it.

They taught me to focus on my goals and not on my mistakes, and finally, not to be easily discouraged when I didn't do as well as I wanted to.

The conversations I had with the athletes reflected the importance of platforms like the Commonwealth Youth

Games. I believe that prestigious events like these, dedicated to young people, present us with the opportunity to develop strong mindsets, and teach us how to become the best versions of ourselves by working hard towards our goals.

I hope events like these will not be limited to those who participate in sports but will be extended to youths who excel in other fields such as art, theatre, writing, culinary arts,

information technology and more.

In this way, more youths will engage in positive activities rather than squander their time in fruitless endeavours.

*Jada Chambers is a 19-year-old multimedia journalist from St Vincent and the Grenadines. Jada has a passion for writing poetry and stories and dreams of becoming a novelist*

## Power of youth activism can rise above challenges

By **Khaleem Ali**

OUR GENERATION isn't content with mere dreams and aspirations; we're builders of a brighter future, confronting challenges head-on.

As the world faces unprecedented crises, we refuse to be passive bystanders. Instead, we rise against norms, demanding justice, equity, and progress.

Our passion emanates from the belief in our collective voice and the power of unity. Each word, step, and idea we share ignites change. Youth activism goes beyond empty words and unfulfilled promises; it's about mobilising for

accountability. From classrooms to global platforms, young activists are demanding real change in the halls of power and decision-making. This does not come without challenges; token gestures overshadow meaningful engagement, political party ideology acts as a barrier to engagement, and independent thinking is seen as a threat to the age-old status quo.

Young people continue to be seen as too “inexperienced” and “too ambitious” and often get reduced to being pawns on the chessboard of geopolitics.

Simply put, “youth engagement” remains a buzzword, and young people are not seen as

partners but rather as problems to be “fixed.” NGOisation has also become a significant limiting factor in youth engagement and advocacy, coupled with the new need for ‘experience’ without meaningful opportunities for experience to be earned.

We must realise that ageing should never be a prerequisite for leadership.

Young people are often told to be the authors of their destiny; however, many older people continue to gatekeep the pen and paper needed to author that destiny. How do we work around these and the many other issues that limit youth engagement?

Intergenerational collaboration is crucial for inclusive societies.

By embracing diverse perspectives, we enhance development strategies and create representative communities.

Giving young people meaningful opportunities to lead is also critical; young people should be more than just voters, engaging in leadership roles to challenge norms. The fight against climate change showcases the potency of youth activists, demanding resources and space to drive climate solutions.

The recently concluded Commonwealth Youth Games epitomise collaboration and shared

objectives, resonating with youth activism's essence.

To fellow activists, I urge unyielding determination. Our journey may be challenging, but we must stand up and voice our concerns.

We are partners in sustainable development, not mere beneficiaries. The urgency for change is real; every second counts in shaping our future, and as is said, the future is NOW.

*Khaleem Ali is a youth activist with a passion for Legal Research, Policy Development and Partnership Development and Engagement*



**SISTER ACT:** Anjia and Brianna Delapenha in action for the Cayman Islands at the Commonwealth Youth Games

## Sisters praise ‘royal’ experience

By **Jada Chambers**

CAYMAN ISLAND sisters and Beach Volleyball partners Anjia and Brianna Delapenha have praised Commonwealth Youth Games (CYG) Trinbago 2023 for giving athletes a “royal” experience.

The Delapenha sisters, who are also Youth Ambassadors of the Cayman Islands Volleyball Federation, are no strangers to the world of volleyball as they have travelled near and far to compete in numerous tournaments.

However, despite having played in different places worldwide, Anjia said that at CYG Trinbago 2023, it was the first time she felt like royalty. The 18-year-old was speaking after losing a tough match against English athletes Daisy Boardman and Alice Jagielska at the Black Rock Beach Facility.

Despite her “disappointing” loss, Anjia was positive about her experience at the games. “We are police escorted everywhere. For the first time, I feel like royalty... I think the procedures and protocols in place are very

efficient and very good, and I know who to go to in terms of an injury or anything else.” she said, adding there is not much more that the organisers could have done to make the event better.

Anjia stressed it is crucial for athletes, especially youths, to have a safe environment and not to have to worry about their teammates or details off the court – considerations which she said were taken seriously at the Games.

Sixteen-year-old Brianna agreed with her sister. She spoke about her plans to persevere, even after Anjia leaves to study in the UK.

“My sister is going to go off to college, so that leaves me on the island alone, so I’d probably have to look for a new partner and hopefully develop from there.”

Anjia plans to represent her country at college level and continue bringing wealth, shine and positivity to the sport.

Trinidad and Tobago raised the bar every single day at the CYG, and the twin island has earned a reputation for giving athletes a “royal” experience.

# Why the Games matter

**T**HIS YEAR Trinidad and Tobago hosted the Commonwealth Youth Games, bringing together young athletes from around the globe. They participated in aquatics, athletics, cycling, triathlon, rugby sevens, beach volleyball and netball. There was also a fully integrated para-Athletics programme.

The breathtaking diversity and the fantastic display of talent made the Games a historic event. But the Commonwealth also saw it as an opportunity to advance its work in supporting countries’ youth development and empowerment goals, especially during 2023, designated by its leaders as the Year of Youth.

For example, they collaborated with UNICEF to deliver Athlete Impact Labs, focused on informing athletes about their rights and offering them the opportunity to recommend and shape policy in the industry.

## **Jada Chambers** speaks with young leader Dr James Frater about the importance of the Commonwealth Youth Games

I spoke with one of the Lab’s facilitators, Dr James Frater, about his experience at the Games. Frater is a medical doctor, a Commonwealth Youth Sport for Development & Peace representative and the former UK G20 Youth Delegate for Health, Wellbeing & Sport.

### What stood out for you at the Games?

JF: I grew up in Jamaica and have visited many times since, but this was my first time visiting another Caribbean Island. To say that Tobago is incredible would be an understatement. The island is beautiful; the people are warm and wel-

coming, and the Games have been a well-run and well-competed programme of events. I was particularly impressed by the level these young people have been competing at and the camaraderie between teams (when they are not competing).

### How could the Games serve the Commonwealth?

JF: Platforms like Commonwealth Youth Games are important, particularly for smaller states. Developing their capacity and infrastructure to accommodate the programme of events leaves a sporting legacy that benefits young people –



**SPORTING LEGACY:** The Games are an excellent way for Commonwealth nations to come together and unite through sport in a socially beneficial way (photo: Getty Images)

and the nation more broadly – even after the games are finished. Additionally, the Games are an excellent opportunity for Commonwealth nations to come together and unite through sport in a sustainable, innovative, and socially beneficial way.

### What is your vision for the future of young people?

JF: My vision for the future of young people ties in with the Commonwealth’s Year of Youth. I want sustainable solutions and initiatives that tackle the most urgent global problems. This means organisations must invest

in meaningful positions that put young people at the centre of decision-making at every possible level. Historically, too many decisions were made about the future without the input of the younger generations that will have to bear the consequences of those decisions.

# What inspired us to change the world...

Winners of the Commonwealth Youth Awards.

By **Charity Mwathi**



**T**URNING PLASTIC and organic waste into timber, roofing tiles, and even clean energy. Pioneering green agricultural techniques. Revolutionising access to emergency healthcare with affordable three-wheeled ambulances.

These are just some of the amazing innovations that the Commonwealth Youth Awards have spotlighted for more than a decade.

Many started out as passion projects and were implemented by the sheer determination of talented young people, some from remote and marginalised communities.

The one thing these young people all have in common is an intense desire to transform our world by providing practical solutions to complex problems,

“ Many started out as passion projects ”

and the awards have propelled many of them into international arenas.

The youngest-ever Award winner Brianna Fruean went on to address heads of state and governments at The UN Climate Change Conference in Glasgow (COP26) in 2021.

Organised and delivered by the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the Commonwealth Youth Awards provides this platform annually to tell the world about these remarkable individuals selected from five regional categories (Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe & Canada, and the Pacific) following a rigorous judging process.

The Awards have become such a permanent and invaluable fixture of the Commonwealth Youth Programme that, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, it persevered, with virtual ceremonies that were nominated

for a British broadcasting award and that broke Commonwealth audience engagement records.

This year's Awards are especially important as we return to in-person events for the first time since 2020. It also lands in the Year of Youth – a special designation by Commonwealth leaders who dedicated 2023 to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development.

In honour of the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Programme, the awards have, for the first time, recognised 50 candidates.

This year the ceremony will be hosted by the Duke of Edinburgh HRH Prince Edward, at St James' Palace on September 14. It will be part of a week-long summit for ministers of youth from the 56 Commonwealth countries.

Each of the 20 regional finalists will receive a trophy, certificate, and £1,000 to expand the impact of their work. The five regional winners will also receive £3,000, and one of them will become the Commonwealth Young Person of the Year 2023 and be awarded £5,000.

On top of the cash prize, the winners also enjoy international acclaim and invaluable networking opportunities to help boost their projects and spotlight their nations.

This year we have another cohort of exceptional talent from all around the Commonwealth, and we are checking in with the Caribbean and African finalists to find out what inspired them to change the world.

*Charity Mwathi is a Communications & Marketing Specialist from Kenya with a background in International Relations. She is currently part of the Commonwealth Young Professionals Programme and is the Assistant Programme Officer, responsible for Stakeholder Engagement in the Secretariat's Social Policy Development division*

**Ché Greenidge**  
Barbados

“ AFTER A traumatic accident left me temporarily disabled, I realised, for the first time, my inability to communicate with deaf people. This inspired me to focus on change, and my Deaf Heart initiative was born.

Deaf heart is a term affectionately used to refer to non-deaf people who care about the well-being of deaf people and who consider and acknowledge their perspective.

Since the creation of my project, I have been working with the community to empower deaf individuals in Barbados and the Caribbean through my Deaf Heart Project, bringing employment opportunities to the more than 93 per cent of deaf unemployed persons in Barbados and championing transformative change by reaching more than 100,000 people through education and awareness-raising campaigns.



**Mawuse Christina Gyisun**  
Ghana

“ WEST AFRICAN countries are responsible for 90 per cent of the global supply of Shea commodities, and more than 16 million women smallholder farmers in the region are engaged in the production of raw shea commodities for these businesses.

Sadly, many of them are from some of the poorest districts in Ghana and their households live on less than \$2 daily.

My vision is to eradicate poverty among rural women in West Africa by creating access to digitisation and related services in very remote farming communities in Northern Ghana.

My organisation, Sommalife, has impacted the lives of 20,000 rural women through skill development and increased income. More than 7,000 women out of the 20,000 have seen a 22.75 per cent increase in their income. We don't plan on stopping here.

**Maya Kirti Nanan**  
Trinidad and Tobago

“ I GREW up seeing my brother being discriminated against because he was autistic. He was not accepted into schools, and my family could not afford therapy. This inspired me to take action. In 2015, at 12 years old, I established the Autism Siblings and Friends Network (ASFN) to create opportunities for him and others with disabilities and to advocate for their inclusion at all levels.

Since then, my non-profit organisation has created opportunities for my brother and many others with special educational needs and advocated for equal access to opportunities.

ASFN operates Rahul's Clubhouse, an autism centre where autistic individuals have equal access to developmental and social programmes, entirely run by youths. It actively develops educational, social and skills programmes for autistic persons nationwide.



**Shergaun Roserie**  
Saint Lucia

“ In 2017, when a group of us from the Caribbean participated in the first Global Robotics Competition, we realised how great a chasm there was between richer countries in the global west and lesser developed countries regarding Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) education. We were inspired to do something

about this inequality, and our social enterprise, Orbtronic Ltd, was born. We aim to give young people in the Caribbean the skills to drive innovation and technology in their countries, compete at regional and international levels, and become part of the next global cohort of renowned engineers.”



**Emmanuel Tlemu**  
Republic of Tanzania

“ AFTER several community visits to highly populated areas such as marketplaces, bus stations, public toilets, and schools in Dar es Salaam, I was concerned about poor sanitation practices, lack of health knowledge, and the significant risk of sanitation-related diseases such as diarrhoea and urinary tract infections. Using my skill as an engineer,

I founded the SWASH Competition APP, a social educative platform designed to challenge people to change undesired behaviour in water, sanitation and hygiene practices through strategies such as online sanitation competitions in streets/wards and schools. My platform has engaged and inspired 30,045 students and attracted 19,954 community members in 2022.”

**Deliwe Makata**  
Malawi

“ I AM a passionate published writer, a change enthusiast and an award-winning development specialist, inspired by my vision to accelerate human social development and create spaces where individuals and communities have a voice. That is why I founded Women Inspire and Swift Capital. In the past six years, we have reached

more than 10,000 direct beneficiaries in areas of education, economic empowerment and health improvement. We work to achieve three major objectives: education as an empowerment and poverty alleviation tool, financial literacy as a poverty alleviation tool, and health education as an active contributor to economic development.”



**Ghislain Irakoze**  
Rwanda

“ WHEN MY best friend survived a garbage landslide accident, I embarked on a journey to create a waste-free and climate-resilient world. Of 50 million tons of hazardous electronic waste generated globally annually, only less than 15 per cent are adequately repurposed and recycled. Our social enterprise, Wastezon, is applying machine

learning and materials science to solve e-waste management while creating digitalisation opportunities for low-income communities in Rwanda. So far, Wastezon has impacted 5,500 Rwandan households. As an activist and researcher, I also sit on Global Greengrants Fund's Next Gen Climate Board and EU Commission's Youth Sounding Board.”

**Akola Thompson**  
Guyana

“ I HAVE always been passionate about advocacy and promoting human rights. But being part of several human rights groups, I recognised there was no collaborative approach among them. No one looked at shared challenges and how they can work together to raise awareness and encourage action and change. I saw that gap and decided to fill it. My organisation Tamùkke Feminists uses education

to support human rights causes. In 2021, we co-created with UNFPA Guyana the iMatter app, which provides information on relevant resources for survivors of violence to access services in their region. Through the organisations' Mind Fund and WorkReady programmes, LGBT+ women in Guyana have increased access to mental health services and work readiness programming.”



**CHALLENGES:** Jeremiah Thoronka grew up in a slum

**Discovering our rising stars**

DEMONSTRATING the power and importance of the Commonwealth Youth Awards, the 2021 African regional winner Jeremiah Thoronka, who set up a company that harnesses solar energy to create clean and affordable energy for thousands in his country, was prominently featured in a BBC article. Jeremiah had a challenging childhood growing up during the civil war in Sierra Leone. He lived with his single mother in a slum on the outskirts of Freetown, the country's capital, relying on dirty charcoal and firewood to generate heat and light. During the Commonwealth

Youth Awards ceremony, he dedicated his award to single mothers and people living in energy poverty. Jeremiah said: "They have no option but to use wood for energy. I stand with them, and I look forward to how we can collectively address this issue." Later that year, Jeremiah won the inaugural Global Student Prize for his work combating energy poverty. He received a one-off prize of \$100,000 (£74,741) and was congratulated by actor Hugh Jackman during the the virtual awards ceremony, which was broadcast from UNESCO's headquarters in Paris.

**Queen's Platinum Jubilee Prize**

In 2022, to mark the Queen's Platinum Jubilee, the Commonwealth Secretariat partnered with the Queen's Commonwealth Trust (QCT) to offer, for the first time, an additional prize of £20,000 to fund one of the Commonwealth Youth Awards projects. Singaporean Edward Yee, right, the co-founder of 'GivFunds Social Ventures', a non-profit organisation which provides sustainable and low-cost capital to small social en-

terprises that lie outside the reach of funders, won the prize. He was enrolled onto QCT's Youth Ventures Programme and in addition to the prize, he has been getting practical tools and support, and access to a vibrant network of young change-makers to help his project flourish. Accepting the QCT prize last year, Yee described it as a game-changer that will supercharge the growth of his initiative. This year another finalist will be awarded the QCT prize.



# How do we regulate AI?

Safeguards are needed to keep technology safe.  
By **Shannay Williams**



**W**HETHER WE recognise it or not, most of us have interacted with artificial intelligence (AI). We're all familiar with Google, Siri, Alexa, and the like and we've been using them for years. So what's changed?

Well, two weeks after the public release of ChatGPT, an open letter signed by 27,000+ people so far, including tech titans and entrepreneurs, requested a six-month halt in the development of AI.

According to the letter, "powerful AI systems should be developed only when we are confident that their effects will be positive and their risks will be manageable."

AI can be split into two broad categories: weak AI and strong AI. Weak AI is trained to perform specific tasks – like asking Siri a question.

Strong AI is, (theoretically) trained to have intelligence equal to humans or that exceeds the capabilities of the human mind. The idea of Strong AI feeds into our fears because we often ask questions like will AI replace your job completely? Can AI outsmart us? How will we know what's real?

You may have seen the viral "picture of the Pope" which focused a lot of concern on gen-

erative AI. Generative AI creates new content from the material it has already been exposed to or has access to. So theoretically, the internet could be generative AI's data playground, which can be scary; we know that social media and the internet are filled with trolls, angry content, and disinformation.

If we ask AI to generate a story or art, would it create mostly violent material? Will it create misleading content? We have reason to be concerned about AI's potential negative consequences. We also have reason to look forward to its progress.

AI could aid in the prediction of consumer behaviour, enabling more targeted digital marketing strategies and better customer service.

It may also reduce the amount of time physicians spend studying patient data; in fact, it may assist in reducing medical errors. With autonomous delivery vehicles, self-organising fleets, and self-driving cars, AI could transform the way we travel. AI has the potential to improve our quality of life.

These possibilities are thought-provoking, but I am concerned about regulations. How will we regulate AI?

Some have suggested disclaimers/watermarks on AI-generated content and even



**SCARY PROPOSITION:** The internet could be generative AI's data playground; inset, we still have more questions than answers regarding AI and regulation (main photo: Anomaly on Unsplash)

limitations on parameters users can set when using AI systems.

While there is a lot of popular debate on how much we should train AI to do and how far it will go, we still have more questions than answers.

What will be our safeguards? Are we confident that the effects would be mostly positive and the negative risks will be manageable? The questions are

endless and depending on your industry may be even more concerning. But as the debate rages on, expect AI systems like Midjourney and ChatGPT to continue to evolve.

*Shannay Williams is from St. Thomas, Jamaica. She is a holder of a Bachelor of Laws degree from the University of the West Indies*



## Ethical concerns mount over the use of AI technology

SEVERAL years ago, AI would have been thought to be little more than robots grabbing you a glass of wine, thus saving you the agony of missing portions of your favourite TV show.

However, AI is far more than that. Every time you make use of the predictive typing feature on your smartphone, or use auto-correct, you've just enjoyed the benefits of AI.

You also enjoy the benefits of AI every time you tell Siri on your iPhone to play you your favourite song.

The use of AI has multiplied rapidly in recent



By **Adedoyin Ajayi**

years. It is applied in everyday life and across virtually every sphere of human endeavour.

Global spending on AI is projected to reach US\$110 billion annually by next year. Undeniably, as humanity makes deeper inroads into the digital age, more

advanced forms of AI would be developed with bigger capabilities to execute more complicated tasks.

A noteworthy example is the development of a tool such as ChatGPT, which can be used to write a thesis. Understandably, the heavy influence of AI in everyday life has raised questions regarding its use.

Technology and knowledge however is a double-edged sword. The same knowledge that has saved lives through groundbreaking advances in medicine has also contributed to ending lives through crea-

tion of weapons. It begs the question, will the beneficial and helpful nature of AI continue into the future?

AI is not without its problems. AI can be used to achieve twisted goals. AI is made from algorithms, data from real-life occurrences.

People with stereotypes, social biases, and political preferences can use AI to replicate their preferences.

AI is not to blame for this, but this serves to highlight the importance of ethics in the creation and use of AI. Ethics is that fine line that differentiates benevolence from malevolence. Another

problem that can emanate from AI is misinformation. AI combs through millions of databases in the search for information.

This ease and speed of information delivery can easily be mistaken for accuracy. But the databases and sites might not be all accurate. Reliance on AI can gradually replace not just professional advice, but also human contact.

Sci-fi movies like *I, Robot*, *The Terminator* and *The Matrix* all depicted dystopian worlds with AI gone rogue and humans in a state of fear. Critics however have

scoffed at the notion of such occurring in reality, believing a super-intelligent AI to be more fiction than fact. While I believe that the appearance of super-intelligent AI is still far ahead into the future, there are other dangerous ways in which AI usage can harm us.

This can occur not in obvious means like violently taking over the world, but in more subtle ways such as gradually detaching us from the bonds we share with others, reducing our need for human contact, and relying more on AI rather than human judgement.

# Brain drain is turning Nigeria into sinking ship

Almost two million Nigerians are leaving each year. No wonder the country and its crumbling economy are suffering. By **Adedoyin Ajayi**



ON TWITTER/X, when Destiny Ogedegbe announced his acceptance into both Oxford University and Harvard University, arguably the two most prestigious universities in the world, the spate of congratulatory messages was enough to make one swoon with envy.

Nevertheless, subtly running beneath the congratulatory tweets were a common theme – “japa,” the joy at yet another Nigerian youth escaping the clutches of the country for greener pastures. The word “japa” loosely translates to “flee”, which when spoken with regard to the happenings in the country connotes bolting from the country in a bid to build a better life for oneself.

Nigeria is a country besieged with several issues such as insecurity, a crumbling economy with high inflation, weak human capital development, and dreadful governance.

Kidnappings make daily news; bandit attacks on villages are commonplace; and highways have become breed-



**LEAVING:** Destiny Ogedegbe

ing grounds for bloodshed. According to SBM Intelligence, a socioeconomic research firm, in 2021, more than 10,000 lives were lost in Nigeria due to actions of herdsmen, bandits, Boko Haram, and gang clashes.

The inflation rate in July stood at 22.79 per cent. The weak state of Nigeria’s naira, high costs of energy and transportation and insecurity in the country are some other factors that have contrived to create a heavily unfavourable business environment. Furthermore, an eight-month-long strike was called off in federal universities last October. The incessant

strikes in academic institutions, due to standoffs with the federal government are symbolic of a fragile desire to invest in, and subsequently develop human capital in the country.

Students have grown frustrated with these constant interruptions that have prolonged academic calendars, consequently putting their lives and dreams on hold. Besides, with about 40 percent of youths unemployed, it is little wonder social vices are rampant in the country in the form of internet fraud, prostitution, and cultism.

From the foregoing, it is unsurprising that the most populous Black nation is experiencing mass exodus of able-bodied men and women, some of whom are professionals across sectors, which constitutes labour loss and brain drain to the country.

Emigration of Nigerians to preferred destinations like the UK and the US is not a new trend. However, these numbers have spiraled, rising through the roof.

According to the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, international migrants



**RISING NUMBERS:** Nigeria is experiencing a mass exodus of men and women

from Nigeria in 2020 totaled 1.7 million, a substantial rise from 990,000 in 2010.

In 2016, Canada granted about 4,400 Nigerians permanent residence. This figure soared to over 15,000 in 2021.

A couple of months ago, I had a conversation with a close friend who left for the UK to further her education. The situation in Nigeria is akin to a

sinking ship, with sailors yelling “abandon ship” before desertion and fleeing for safety before its imminent plummet. The lack of belief that the country offers a chance to achieve one’s goals and live a good life is at the centre of the mass emigration. One notes with mixed feelings; joy – at those who have left in the hopes of creating better lives for themselves,

and sadness – that the country is worse off for their absence.

No country has a hope for development when it experiences a high level of human capital flight.

*Adedoyin Ajayi studied Economics at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria and graduated with first class honours*

## Poverty: we must tackle the root cause of child labour

ACROSS NIGERIA, it is a heartbreaking, yet a common phenomenon to see children tug at the hands and clothes of travellers in motor parks in a bid to get some Naira notes, writes **Adedoyin Ajayi**.

Constant rejection from travellers fails to dampen the resilience of these children, as they scamper about, trying to scrounge enough money for their next meal. For some of these children, this is their daily “work” to help themselves and their families.

Across the country, children can be found working

in places like construction sites, markets, motor parks, as assistants in mechanic workshops, hawking on the streets, farming, mining, and working as helpers in homes and shops.

The International Labour Organization estimates that about 15 million Nigerian children are involved in child labour. There are a number of factors responsible for the prevalence of child labour in Nigeria — parental neglect, abandonment, and displacement due to factors like flood and insecurity. Nonetheless, a chief reason is widespread



poverty in the country. The World Bank predicted that the poverty extent in Nigeria would total 95.1 million poor Nigerians in 2022.

Additionally, the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics created the Multidimensional Pov-

erty Index (MPI) as a tool to measure the poverty gap in the country.

Drawing on indices such as health, education, employment, security, and standard of living, results surpassed the World Bank

projection, and showed that a massive 133 million Nigerians live below the poverty line of US\$1.90.

For a child in a family trapped in the brutal clutches of poverty, schooling and education become secondary considerations.

Poverty leads to children dropping out of schools and subsequently into the labour market, where they often partake in backbreaking jobs, where they could potentially be exploited.

It is depressing that their childhood vigour is not spent learning and imbibing knowledge that sets

them on the path to being nation-builders and positive change-makers in future.

Fighting child labour requires a resolute effort across deck. Over the years, the Nigerian government has enacted laws to prohibit child labour.

With the dire economic conditions of the country, families would rather risk running afoul of the law in a bid to keep body and soul together. Improving the economic fortunes of the country would go a long way to ensuring child labour reduces and is subsequently eradicated.

# Getting the health kick

Youth discuss ways to avoid health problems in later life. By **Taiwo Olawehinmi, Fahmida Ankhi** and **Ellen Peprah** from the **Commonwealth Youth Health Network**

IMAGINE BEING told you have diabetes, a condition which could lead to blindness and life-threatening kidney disease. This is the plight of far too many people in the Commonwealth.

Its countries have some of the highest rates of Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) globally, and young people are among the most vulnerable.

That is why the Commonwealth Youth Health Network, in partnership with the Health, Sports for Development and Peace and Youth Divisions at the Commonwealth Secretariat, formed a new task force that engaged and consulted over 450 young people through an online survey to gather insights on the barriers to countering NCDs.

The results showed that 22 per cent of young people live with at least one NCD, and 91 per cent know at least one person with an NCD.

The task force then joined forces with partners such as the World Health Organisation and Resolve to Save Lives, to work with young people on strategies to arrest the rising rates of NCDs. This engagement confirmed what previous research had found, that while social and environmental factors continue to shape risks of NCDs like diabetes and hypertension,

simple lifestyle changes such as increasing physical activity, consuming a healthier diet and addressing mental health concerns are key to reducing the risk of developing NCDs later in life.

Young people identified factors such as targeted sales and marketing of junk and processed foods, rising food prices and food security issues, inaccurate associations of healthy food consumption with weight loss, and low health literacy as the main drivers for unhealthy diets among youth populations.

They proposed using social media to promote healthy eating and integrating health messages into school curricula. There was also a call for information on healthy dietary options to be regularly checked, revised and localised to be more relevant and adaptable by local communities.

In relation to physical activity, there was a shared concern about the need for safer spaces and better design of communities and the built environment to increase the use of public structures such as pedestrian walks, sheltered areas and green urban spaces to promote physical activity. Young people also wanted to see physical activity become an integral part of the school system.



**EDUCATION MATTERS:** Low health literacy is one of the main drivers for unhealthy diets among youth populations

Finally, there was consensus on the importance of mental health advocacy and training as well as access to quality and affordable mental health services.

Young people were concerned that many Commonwealth countries “still have outdated legislation on mental

health that reinforces discrimination, doesn’t support access to care, and doesn’t make specific provisions for the needs of children and young people”.

What we have learnt is that actions to tackle NCDs must be multi-faceted, collaborative and localised, with young peo-

ple at the very heart of their design and implementation.

We look forward to these challenges and priorities shared by young people being integrated into the Commonwealth’s new Guiding Framework, to be launched later this year.

Through this, we can create

a coordinated Commonwealth approach to tackling the root causes of NCDs and stimulate action to address poor diet and physical inactivity.

To learn more about the network and how to join, go to <https://>

## Educating a COVID generation

AS THE world begins to come to terms with the prolonged impact of interrupted learning during the pandemic, young leaders from our Commonwealth Students’ Association Africa Regional Committee share their concerns and solutions for educating a COVID-19 generation.

**Chidubem Nwaibe**  
*Nigeria representative*

“The COVID-19 pandemic has posed significant educational challenges but has also shed light on African youth’s resilience, creativity, and determination. We can ensure that no student is left behind by addressing the digital divide, enhancing distance learning strategies, prioritising mental health support, and embracing youth-led innovation.

**Julia Muhumuza**  
*Uganda representative*

“The pandemic brought unprecedented challenges, such as increased mental health issues and a surge in teenage pregnancies. But it also created opportunities, such as flexible schedules, improvements in curriculum and a greater focus on mental health support. To ensure a brighter and more equitable future for all, we need to build a more inclusive, accessible and resilient education system that empowers all students.”

**Alex Adams**  
*Botswana representative*

“The disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has widened the already large inequality of

opportunity, with the most marginalised and vulnerable children being the most affected. The consequences of this lost learning could be dire, with a generation of under-educated individuals facing lower lifetime earnings and limited opportunities. We must invest in schools, ensure equity in education, and support parents.”

**Neekhil Bhowoniah**  
*Mauritius representative*

“Undeniably, university education has undergone a seismic shift over the last academic year – in terms of teaching and learning outcomes, which will likely have a lasting impact on students. We must explore strategies such as chunking content into digestible bites to suit the new cohort of Generation Z students who have



**LOST GENERATION:** Children have been hit hard by the pandemic

grown up learning small amounts of information in short bursts.”

**Karabo Lerotholi**  
*Lesotho representative*

“When education is in danger, so is our future. The consequences for the next generation’s education are now clearly visible: a decline in learning performance, problems in psycho-social development and a deterioration

in physical condition. We should integrate the appropriate use of technology in efforts to strengthen education systems. We also need to redefine the role of an educator, with students being able to access knowledge and even learn technological skills through a few clicks on their devices while at the same time addressing the human need for face-to-face social interaction.”

# Teetering on the verge of regional disaster in Africa

As Sudan slides ever closer to a full-blown civil war, **Chimaobi Omeje** considers the implications for the Sudanese and the world



**A**FRICA'S THIRD-LARGEST country by land mass is very close to a deadly civil war after weeks of unrest and killings.

On either side of the unrest are the official Sudanese Armed Forces under the leadership of Abdel Fattah al-Burhan who currently serves as the de facto leader of the country, and the Rapid Support Force (RSF) led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

The former close friends are now the greatest enemies trying to steal power and override each other at the expense of the peaceful people of Sudan.

Since the downfall of Omar al-Bashir, the longest leader of the country, Sudan has yet to experience a sense of lasting peace. The Armed Forces under al-Burhan have been promising a peaceful transition of power to the civilian political parties, but they seem to want a share of power no matter what.

Both al-Burhan and Dagalo were fully involved in ousting al-Bashir even though Dagalo and his Rapid Support Forces were created and fully built by Omar al-Bashir.

It has been reported that the crisis came about because al-Burhan felt sooner or later, he would suffer the same fate as al-Bashir and be ousted by Dagalo.

General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan therefore planned to dissolve the RSF and weaken his second-in-command Dagalo.

It has been alleged that the crisis is being fuelled by foreign powers, following reports that there are plans by the Russian Federation to build a naval base in the Sudan area of the Red Sea. The media has also reported that there is evi-

dence that the Russian Wagner Group has been supplying the RSF with missiles, while some powerful Western countries, not comfortable with this plan, have also been providing arms and financial support.

Sudanese people must decide the fate of their fatherland and external or internal rankles should be resolved through diplomacy only.

Sudan is fast becoming a failed nation even with her rich solid minerals and human talent. A failed Sudan will result in a disturbed Africa considering its strategic position.

A failed Sudan will bring about numerous crises which should be avoided by all means.

Failure to do so will lead to a rapid rise in terrorism; within and outside Sudan if this crisis is not managed well immediately.

There are reports of an uprising within the already devastated Darfur region where General Dagalo hails from. Africanews reported that fighters are already operating within the region causing mayhem and this is as a result of the struggle for control of the area which is vital after Khartoum. There will



**GLOOMY OUTLOOK:** Smoke plumes billow from a fire at a lumber warehouse in southern Khartoum amid ongoing fighting between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (photo: Getty Images)

be a proliferation of arms especially at the hands of non-state actors.

I also believe terrorist groups such as Boko Haram, the Islamic State of West African Province (ISWAP), and al-Qaeda with its powerful affiliate al-Shabab that have ravaged the horn of Africa will be boosted with a war-torn Sudan.

Somalia is a typical example of how a country can go ahead and become very unstable after

civil wars and its effect within nearby countries as can be seen in the activities of al-Shabab in Kenya, Ethiopia, and Sudan.

In West Africa, Africa's biggest economy Nigeria might be hit with more terror from Boko Haram and ISWAP if care is not taken especially from the Chadian axis. The only gleam of hope lies in the Chadian military effort to protect their borders, but this requires joint efforts from all countries involved. There is also

the spectre of a refugee crisis. Sudanese people and foreigners are already evacuating the almost war-torn country, and this will be followed by huge pressure on poor countries within.

Egypt, Chad, Djibouti, Eritrea and South Sudan will most likely experience most of the incoming refugees from Sudan but no nearby country is free.

Europe should also expect a crisis as can be seen with the Libyan experience as stable countries within the Mediterranean have served as police guards to the borders with Europe. But how long will these borders stand if tested?

Then there is the crises of poverty, food shortages and inflation. Economies will be overstretched resulting in poverty, lack of food and clean water, inflation, and eventually deaths. A worse situation bigger than that of Ukraine could be seen. Africa as a continent is not ready for this crisis and all its problems. We have seen an unstable Nigeria with its questioned elections and bat-

tle with insecurity; an unstable Congo, Somalia, Mozambique, etc which shows the continent is already over-stretched.

Russia, America, the Chinese, and other interests should be secondary as the lives and safety of the people of Sudan must be primary and paramount.

As usual, African Union (AU) has failed again in managing this long-expected crisis which even brings to question its usefulness to the continent.

Diplomacy must be the key as the two Generals have to understand that a peaceful Sudan is nothing but a win-win for all. You must first have a people before leadership.

Ceasefires should be respected by both groups and AU, the UN should continue their diplomatic discussions, and peace restored in Khartoum and other parts of Sudan.

A standing, stronger and bigger Sudan is absolutely what the Sudanese people and the African continent need now, and all efforts must be made to save the republic

## Youth

# Youth peacebuilding is crucial for the Sahel

The region is the most impacted by terrorism in the world — but young people hold the key for a better tomorrow.

By **Victor Okechukwu Chimezie**



**T**HE SAHEL is a region in Africa made up of about 13 countries. It is located between the Sahara to the north and the Sudanian savanna to the south.

It is recognised by the United Nations as a region of huge opportunity with about 64 per cent of the population being below 25 years.

But it is seriously bedeviled by climate problems, insecurity and overpopulation, which are the three major problems facing the region.

The problem of insecurity has further worsened in recent times. The Global Terrorism Index 2023 report of the Institute for Economics and Peace has shown the region to be the epicentre of terrorism and also the region most impacted by terrorism across the world.

This is a serious challenge that needs to be tackled immediately by concerted efforts from everyone.

Terrorism can be defined as the intimidation or coercion of populations or governments through the threat or perpetration of violence, causing death, serious injury or the taking of hostages.

This affects the lives and properties of people of any nation negatively and also inhibits sustainable development of any society, which makes it a terrible menace.

The insecurity challenge has significantly deteriorated across the Sahel with over 4.1 million persons displaced in year 2022 alone.

The region also accounts for more deaths due to terrorism than the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region and South Asia combined, as stated

in the Global Terrorism Index 2023 report, with a 2,000 per cent increase in deaths in 15 years.

Burkina Faso, Mali and Nigeria have been the most hit among countries in the region with attacks from terror groups due to current political instability and from successive weak governments characterised by corruption, impunity, and disorganisation.

Their elites have failed to provide security for vast sections of the population. Corruption has also led to unpaid troops deserting as seen in Nigeria.

The Sahel is also one of the world's poorest regions, a situation brought about by climate problems alongside a huge unemployment rate, which makes life difficult and recruitment easy for terrorist groups.

With about 65 per cent of the population of the Sahel region being youths, it's an amazing opportunity to utilise its youthful energy to start working more intentionally towards peacebuilding.

This can be done by engaging grassroots youths and those in remote areas on basic peacebuilding and conflict prevention and resolution skills.

This can be done by international funders in direct partnership with civil society organisations whose members are the youths of the region.

The governments across the region have also fallen short with their weak structures and institutions that have left gaps open for Islamists and terrorist groups like Al Shabaab, Boko Haram and others to find a good foothold in the region.

Therefore, the governments must begin to strengthen insti-



## SERIOUS CHALLENGE:

A recent report has shown the Sahel to be the epicentre of terrorism, but the region offers an opportunity to utilise its youthful energy with about 64 per cent of the population being below 25 years old

tutions and provide good dividends of democracy and governance down to the grassroots and in every nook and cranny if we are to take back the region from the claws of terrorism.

Religious and ethnic group leaders must continuously preach, live and breathe tolerance to their members so that there's no room for intolerance and extremism, which do lead to terrorism when they become violent and deadly. It must be nipped in the bud at its earliest stage of detection.

Lastly, achieving peace must be everyone's responsibility.

If we are to achieve sustainable peace and development in the Sahel region, all hands must be on deck in every way possible.

## Where is the Sahel?



THE SAHEL part of Africa includes – from west to east – parts of northern Senegal, southern Mauritania, central Mali, northern Burkina Faso, the extreme south of Algeria, southern Niger, the extreme north of Nigeria, Cameroon and Central African Republic, central Chad, central and southern Sudan, the

extreme north of South Sudan, Eritrea, and the extreme north of Ethiopia. Traditionally, most of the people in the Sahel have been semi-nomads, farming and raising livestock in a system of transhumance, which is probably the most sustainable way of utilising the Sahel. The difference between the dry North with

higher levels of soil nutrients and the wetter South with more vegetation, is utilised by having the herds graze on high-quality feed in the North during the wet season, and trek several hundred kilometres to the South to graze on more abundant, but less nutritious feed during the dry period.