



**COMMONWEALTH
YOUTH FORUM**

13th Commonwealth Youth Forum: Declaration by Young People of the Commonwealth

Final - October 2024

“Navigating Our Course: Building Resilience for a Common Future” is the youth’s proactive response to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM 2024) theme, “One Resilient Common Future.” This theme underscores the vital role of young people and their tremendous potential and will in charting and propelling the course towards a resilient and prosperous future for the Commonwealth. As exemplified during the Commonwealth Year of Youth, young people are pivotal agents in forging this resilient future. We will continue to be the energetic, innovative and empathetic voices of the Commonwealth, committed to advocating for and taking action towards these policy recommendations, as we envision and navigate the way towards a prosperous and resilient future for all.

Executive Summary of the 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum Declaration

We, the young people of the Commonwealth, reaffirm our dedication to the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Constitution of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC). Our theme, "Navigating Our Course: Building Resilience for a Common Future," underscores the pivotal role of youth in steering the Commonwealth towards a resilient and sustainable future. This declaration is constructed as an 'instrument of action,' designed to provide clear, actionable advice for all who engage with it.

The year 2023-2024, celebrated as the Commonwealth Year of Youth, has highlighted the indispensable role of young people in promoting peace, democracy, and development. As we commemorate milestones such as the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the 10th anniversary of the Commonwealth Charter and the CYC, we recognise the urgent need for increased youth engagement to achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals. With young people constituting 60% of the Commonwealth’s population, their involvement is crucial for the revitalisation and growth of our global family.

Our declaration addresses key areas essential for building resilience across the Commonwealth. We emphasise the necessity of creating platforms for youth participation in governance, advocating for legal provisions that include youth representatives in national initiatives. Recognising the importance of social media, we urge governments to engage young people in ongoing political and cultural dialogues. We call for a reevaluation of voting age eligibility and the implementation of accessible voting options to ensure all youth can participate in democratic processes.

In the realm of environmental sustainability, we underscore the urgent need for youth-led climate action. We advocate for the integration of climate education into national curricula, beginning at the primary level, and call for increased investment in research, scholarships, and initiatives focused on sustainable practices. We emphasise the role of young entrepreneurs in pioneering green technologies and urge governments to support these endeavours through substantial funding and resources.

Economic resilience is another cornerstone of our declaration. We propose solutions to foster youth entrepreneurship and create decent job opportunities. Financial incentives, skills training, and access to markets are crucial for empowering young entrepreneurs. We stress the importance of inclusive economic policies that support sustainable growth and ensure the active involvement of young people in policy-making processes.

Social inclusion and human rights advocacy are integral to building resilient societies. We call for youth-led initiatives that address social inequalities, ensure access to quality education and healthcare, and promote mental health and well-being. Inclusive policies that support marginalised communities and enhance social cohesion are imperative. We advocate for community-based approaches and the

protection of the rights of all individuals, emphasising the need for comprehensive and inclusive social development initiatives.

This declaration, as an 'instrument of action,' articulates our collective vision and policy recommendations. It reflects extensive consultations and the diverse perspectives of youth across the Commonwealth. We are committed to harnessing transformative technologies and addressing global challenges with resilience and innovation. We envision a Commonwealth where every young person can thrive, contributing to a sustainable and inclusive future.

As we transition from the Commonwealth Year of Youth, we reaffirm our commitment to these ideals and pledge to collaborate with all stakeholders to turn our aspirations into reality. We call on Commonwealth leaders, organisations, and partners to join us in this endeavour, ensuring that the legacy of the Year of Youth continues to inspire and empower future generations.

Introduction

We, the young people of the Commonwealth, convened in Apia, Samoa, from 21 to 22 October 2024 for the 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF), to stand united in our commitment to the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Constitution of the Commonwealth Youth Council.

In light of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2024 theme “**One Resilient Common Future**,” we emphasise the critical role of youth in fostering resilience and sustainability for all. Our theme for the 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum, “***Navigating Our Course: Building Resilience for a Common Future***,” underscores the critical role of young people in steering the Commonwealth towards a resilient and sustainable future. This theme highlights the unique potential and importance of youth as proactive agents of change, capable of innovating and adapting to global challenges. By emphasising resilience, it affirms the necessity for youth-led initiatives and policies that fortify communities against socioeconomic and environmental adversities, ensuring a shared and prosperous future for all.

2023-2024 was declared the Commonwealth Year of Youth, dedicated to youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development. This special year provided a platform to underscore the essential role of young people in promoting peace, democracy, and development across the Commonwealth. The year 2023 marked 50 years since the establishment of the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) in 1973 and the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Commonwealth Charter. As we celebrate these milestones, we acknowledge the approaching 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), reinforcing the urgent need for increased youth engagement to achieve these global objectives.

Young people, constituting 60% of the Commonwealth’s population, are vital to its present and future. Their understanding and commitment to the Commonwealth as a family of nations with shared values are crucial for the Commonwealth’s growth and revitalisation. To remain relevant, Member Governments, Commonwealth organisations, youth networks, and partners must actively and effectively engage with young people as co-creators in development. Emphasis should be placed on involving young people from challenging circumstances, those who are socially excluded, and those at the grassroots level. The Year of Youth highlighted the strategic importance and invaluable contributions of young people, addressing their diverse priorities for sustainable and inclusive development, the challenges they face, and how their potential can be strengthened.

In this context, the 13th CYF builds upon the momentum generated by the Commonwealth Year of Youth, reinforcing the significance of youth participation in shaping a resilient and inclusive future. The advancements in transformative technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), present unprecedented opportunities and challenges. AI has the potential to revolutionise various sectors, driving innovation, enhancing productivity, and addressing critical issues such as climate change, healthcare, and education. However, it also raises concerns about ethical implications, job displacement, and data privacy, which necessitate thoughtful governance and inclusive policies.

The young people of the Commonwealth recognise the dual nature of AI and other transformative technologies as both opportunities and challenges. We are committed to leveraging these technologies to drive positive change while advocating for responsible and equitable use to ensure no one is left behind.

Building on this foundation, the 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF) Declaration articulates our collective vision and policy recommendations. We, the youth, are dedicated to harnessing the power of artificial intelligence (AI) and other transformative technologies to address pressing global challenges and foster innovation across the Commonwealth. Our commitment is to ensure these technologies are leveraged equitably and responsibly, driving sustainable development and enhancing the well-being of all.

In addressing the climate emergency, young people are at the forefront of advocating for urgent and decisive action. The Commonwealth, with its diverse member states, is uniquely positioned to lead global efforts in combating climate change. The impacts of the climate crisis are felt acutely by the youth, particularly in vulnerable regions where rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and biodiversity loss threaten livelihoods and future prospects.

As young leaders, we emphasise the importance of integrating climate resilience into all aspects of development. This includes promoting green technologies, supporting sustainable practices, and ensuring that climate policies are inclusive and youth-centric. We call upon Commonwealth leaders to prioritise climate action, uphold their commitments to international agreements, and provide the necessary resources for adaptation and mitigation efforts.

The 13th CYF Declaration serves as a testament to the unwavering resolve of young people to contribute to a resilient and sustainable Commonwealth. Our recommendations are the result of extensive consultations, reflecting the diverse perspectives and innovative ideas of youth across the member states. We advocate for policies that support economic resilience, social inclusion, environmental sustainability, and democratic governance, all underpinned by the active participation of young people.

Together, we envision a Commonwealth where every young person has the opportunity to thrive, where our collective efforts contribute to a sustainable and inclusive future, and where the voices of youth are central to shaping the policies and actions that affect our lives. As we move forward from the Commonwealth Year of Youth, we reaffirm our commitment to these ideals and pledge to work collaboratively with all stakeholders to turn our aspirations into reality.

The 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum Declaration encapsulates our determination to navigate the challenges of today and build a resilient future for tomorrow. We call on all Commonwealth leaders, organisations, and partners to join us in this endeavour, ensuring that the legacy of the Year of Youth continues to inspire and empower generations to come.

By this Youth Declaration, we:

- I. *Affirm* our endorsement of the Commonwealth Youth Development Index Update Report 2023 and note with concern the persisting inequalities in levels of youth development within and among Commonwealth countries. We call upon governments and stakeholders to prioritise and invest in comprehensive data collection and youth-focused research. Such investments are crucial to deepening the understanding of youth development challenges and opportunities, thereby providing a robust evidence base to inform and strengthen policies and initiatives aimed at fostering the holistic development of young people.
- II. *Reaffirm* our support for the 'Marlborough House Commitments' as agreed upon by Ministers responsible for Youth at the 2023 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting. This commitment serves as a minimum standard to which all member states should collectively aspire, ensuring the well-being, empowerment, and overall progress of young people across the Commonwealth.
- III. *Acknowledge* the vital role and contributions of the Commonwealth Youth Council in ensuring the inclusion of young people's voices in the Commonwealth's decision-making processes. We also recognise the important roles played by formal and informal national youth councils and bodies, national student organisations, youth organisations, youth movements, associations, networks, and other youth-led entities in building a safer, more stable, secure, and productive society for young people. Furthermore, we appreciate the ongoing support of youth workers and the entire youth sector, alongside ministries and departments of youth and other stakeholders, in advancing youth development.

We therefore call on governments, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international donor partners, and other stakeholders in member countries to collaborate with the Commonwealth Youth Council in supporting the following policy recommendations.

Pillar 1: Resilient Democracies

As young people of the Commonwealth, we recognise that one of the most important indicators of the Commonwealth's success is its steadfast commitment to democratic practices and values. We, the youth of the Commonwealth, call upon our leaders to establish, support and enhance frameworks and networks that ensure our participation in governance processes, the preservation of our human rights, and the effectiveness of our efforts to eradicate corruption.

A resilient Commonwealth must have strong democratic foundations, underpinned by inclusive policies that empower all. We acknowledge and celebrate the diversity within the Commonwealth, recognising that this diversity leads to varying approaches in governance, human rights, and anti-corruption efforts across Commonwealth Member States. However, it is our collective hope to continue the legacy of the 2023/2024 Year(s) of Youth by inspiring our leaders in government and civil society to leverage our cultural, historical, and economic differences as opportunities for increased mutual understanding.

We believe that a resilient democracy is one where every decision supports the Commonwealth Charter, which advocates for an independent, impartial, honest, and competent judiciary. Such a system is integral to upholding the rule of law, engendering public confidence, and dispensing justice. These principles align with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 16, which emphasises peace, justice, and strong institutions, and are implicitly embedded in other goals and targets.

Despite the clear connection between the rule of law, access to justice, and sustainable development, young people often lack participation in these crucial discussions. Many youth leaders do not have the opportunity to present their ideas on global issues such as climate change, human rights protection, transparency in recruitment, and workplace discrimination. Engaging youth in decision-making processes ensures that governance and the rule of law are aligned with the aspirations and needs of future generations.

Youth, as the leaders of tomorrow, play a pivotal role in sustaining the rule of law and ensuring good governance. To fulfil this role, young people must understand these concepts and be acknowledged as essential contributors to the development of legal and judicial systems. We advocate for creating more opportunities for youth to engage with decision-makers on critical governance issues and expanding youth training in this area.

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

1. Leaders of the Commonwealth to ***enhance Youth Political Participation*** by investing in mechanisms that facilitate youth political engagement, including incorporating civic education into formal and non-formal education curricula and providing opportunities for youth to pursue political internships. Empowering youth to actively participate in governance processes is essential for building a more representative and responsive democracy¹.
2. Governments to **uphold the fundamental human rights of young people**, particularly for those living in vulnerable communities and promote the rule of law and democratic principles as paramount for fostering inclusive and sustainable outcomes as supported by **Article VI** of the Commonwealth Charter which recognises the importance of maintaining and strengthening the

¹ Youth Outcome Statement Asia Regional Youth Leadership Summit, p.5

commitment to the democratic process, including the inalienable right of the individual to participate by means of free and democratic political processes in shaping the society in which they live.²

3. Leaders to **strengthen their commitments to youth mainstreaming** as a strategy for making young people's capacities and rights an integral dimension of the design, implementation, analysis and monitoring and evaluation of conventions, legislation, policies, and programmes in all political, economic and social spheres, at all levels.³
4. Governments to **foster the development of digital democracy processes** among Commonwealth countries to enhance governance effectiveness and accountability. Special attention should be given to ensuring accessibility for People with Disabilities and other marginalised communities, guaranteeing their meaningful participation in democratic processes.⁴
5. Governments of Commonwealth countries where the voting age is currently set at 21 to open or **reopen dialogue on lowering this age to at least 18**, ensuring that young people are fully included in the democratic process. This dialogue should actively involve seeking honest and meaningful feedback from youth and youth champions within their jurisdictions, ensuring that the perspectives of the younger generation are central to any decisions made, thereby fostering a more inclusive and representative democracy across the Commonwealth.
6. Governments to **implement mandatory transparency and good governance reporting processes** across member countries, formalising mechanisms to safeguard human rights defenders. Transparency and accountability are crucial for maintaining the integrity of democratic institutions and ensuring the protection of human rights.⁵
7. Governments and stakeholders to **counter growing political polarisation** by implementing mechanisms for inclusive dialogue and engagement that foster deliberative democracy processes, such as citizen assemblies and town halls, in ways that encourage reasoned debate. Ensuring high-quality public input will enhance governance effectiveness and accountability, making these processes accessible for marginalised communities and strengthening democratic resilience.⁶
8. Member states to work with Commonwealth institutions and other actors to **expedite the process of reviewing and amending gender discriminatory legislation to be inclusive**, as enshrined in their constitutions and in line with regional and international mechanisms. Additionally, member states and Commonwealth institutions should work to provide equal protection for women and girls under existing laws, and to extend protection to other areas, including protection from violence, in labour rights, education and housing.⁷
9. Stakeholders to **develop and implement new digital tools and mechanisms to prevent misinformation and hate speech**, which are essential in maintaining the integrity of democratic

² Article VI Commonwealth Charter

³ Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Outcome Statement, 2023

⁴ Youth Outcome Statement Asia Regional Youth Leadership Summit, p.5

⁵ Youth Outcome Statement Asia Regional Youth Leadership Summit, p.5

⁶ Human Development Report 2023/2024

⁷ CYGEN Submission to 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum Declaration

processes⁸. We recommend that youth be consulted in the design of these mechanisms, and be involved as directly as possible in their implementation. We recommend a particular focus on discouraging the use of dehumanising and discriminatory language on social media. This includes, but is not limited to, the use of racial slurs, intentional gender-discriminatory language, and the use of colloquialisms which are demeaning to people with disabilities.

⁸ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023, p.18

Pillar 2: A Resilient Environment

In the face of unprecedented environmental challenges, the youth of the Commonwealth stand united in our commitment to fostering a resilient environment—a foundation upon which the future of our societies and the planet depends. A resilient environment is one where ecosystems are robust and capable of withstanding the impacts of climate change, where communities thrive in harmony with nature, and where the natural world is protected, preserved, and enhanced for generations to come.

We, the young people of the Commonwealth, envision a Commonwealth where clean air and water are guaranteed for all, renewable energy powers homes and industries, and waste is minimised through circular economies. A Commonwealth where forests, oceans, and wetlands are protected and restored, providing habitats for wildlife and resources for communities. Agriculture is sustainable, feeding the population while nurturing the soil and maintaining biodiversity. Education systems equip every citizen with the knowledge and skills needed to be stewards of the environment, and green jobs are the backbone of the economy, offering sustainable livelihoods while advancing environmental goals.

In a Commonwealth united by the principles of resilience, each member country, regardless of size or economic status, contributes to and benefits from a collective commitment to sustainability. Small island states, vulnerable to the ravages of climate change, are fortified with the resources, partnerships, and innovations necessary to thrive in the face of rising seas and extreme weather. Larger nations lead by example, reducing emissions, protecting biodiversity, and sharing knowledge and technology to help all nations progress towards climate goals.

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

10. Governments to take bold steps to **transform their economies by investing in low-carbon development**. This transformation should prioritise innovation, job creation, and environmental sustainability, translating international climate commitments into actionable national strategies. This includes phasing out fossil fuel subsidies and implementing robust legislative frameworks to support renewable energy and green entrepreneurship.⁹
11. Governments and stakeholders at all levels to **broaden inclusion and strengthen partnerships to ensure that youth, especially those from vulnerable communities, are actively mainstreamed in formal decision-making processes related to climate action**. Youth perspectives should be integrated into national and international development strategies and action plans to ensure that their voices shape climate policies and actions.¹⁰
12. Governments to **strengthen their recognition and support of the critical role of young people in climate activism across the Commonwealth**. This includes the mainstreaming of youth considerations into the development work of the Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH) and prioritising investments in youth-led initiatives that contribute to renewable energy development, natural resource conservation, marine life protection, carbon-neutral projects,

⁹ 12th Commonwealth Youth Forum Declaration, Theme 5: Environment, Climate Change, and Sustainability

¹⁰ Human Development Report 2023/2024

and effective waste management. These initiatives are essential for securing a resilient, sustainable, and biodiverse planet for future generations.¹¹

13. States are urged to **prioritise and commit to universal climate change education and literacy**, ensuring that it is adequately funded and accessible to everyone, regardless of ethnicity, age, sex, or social status. Climate change education should be systematically integrated into national educational frameworks from the primary level onwards.¹² Sustainable practices should be mainstreamed in education systems, encouraging schools to support green initiatives and activities that empower students to become environmental stewards. By integrating environmental education into school curricula, we can nurture a generation committed to sustainable living and climate action.¹³
14. Governments to **promote the adoption of nature-based solutions** by fostering collaborations between research institutions and indigenous communities. These solutions should focus on sustainable practices in forestry, agriculture, oceans, and food systems, leveraging the unique knowledge of indigenous communities to develop green solutions that contribute to biodiversity conservation and the protection of natural ecosystems.¹⁴
15. Governments and stakeholders at all levels to **condemn and actively combat the impunity surrounding crimes against Indigenous peoples, human rights and environmental defenders, as well as the silencing of climate activists** through state-led and state-sanctioned actions. It is imperative that all Parties fulfill their legal obligations to respect, protect, and promote human rights for all individuals without discrimination. This includes holding perpetrators accountable and halting unilateral actions that jeopardise common environmental interests. Ensuring the safety and rights of those defending the environment is crucial to advancing global climate justice.¹⁵
16. Governments and stakeholders must **mobilise public and private finance sources to support decarbonisation across all sectors and advance climate resilience**. This includes fulfilling international commitments on climate finance, such as the operationalisation of Green Climate Funds in each country. The focus should be on creating sustainable financing pathways for youth-led climate resilience projects, reducing reliance on external grants.¹⁶ Climate financing should be devolved to the lowest level possible, ensuring that grassroots youth-led actions on climate change receive the necessary support. Special attention should be given to grassroots organisations that may lack the technical capacity to secure large grants. Establishing strong mechanisms for equitable access to climate finance is crucial to ensuring inclusivity and fairness in youth-led projects.¹⁷
17. Governments at the national and state level to **improve access to climate finance for youth-led projects** by making strategic risk and regulatory adjustments, leveraging blended finance, and attracting impact investments. A dedicated channel for direct funding to youth-led climate

¹¹ 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Outcome Statement

¹² Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change, 2023

¹³ Human Development Report 2023/2024

¹⁴ Human Development Report 2023/2024

¹⁵ COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

¹⁶ COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

¹⁷ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change, 2023

initiatives should be established, bypassing traditional government mechanisms.¹⁸ By supporting initiatives aimed at achieving a zero-emissions future, we can enhance global resilience to climate change. This includes substantial funding and resources toward fostering an enabling environment conducive to youth entrepreneurship in green businesses and technologies.

18. Stakeholders at all levels to **advance urban resilience by committing to environmentally sustainable projects** such as low-emission buildings, mass transport systems, and urban infrastructure improvements. These efforts should be designed to benefit the urban poor and reduce environmental impacts while creating income opportunities for young people in green sectors.¹⁹
19. Governments to **develop and implement comprehensive resilience and adaptation strategies that focus on the most vulnerable communities**. These strategies should address the risks posed by climate change, such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and resource scarcity, ensuring that local communities are equipped to cope with and adapt to these challenges.²⁰
20. Leaders to recognise that in the face of increasing climate-induced displacement, it is vital to **safeguard the well-being of mobile populations, particularly children, youth, and women migration** and planned relocation as viable adaptation and risk reduction strategies. This includes integrating climate mobility into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Dedicated provisions should be allocated within the Loss and Damage and Adaptation funds to address human mobility, encompassing strategies such as early warning systems, disaster risk reduction measures, the safeguarding of the right to move, and the preservation of the right to stay.²¹
21. Governments, particularly those in the Global North, must **acknowledge their disproportionate role in perpetuating the climate crisis and the unjust burdens placed on frontline communities**. Adequate compensation should be provided to those communities most affected by climate change. Moreover, Parties must ensure that the diverse voices and perspectives of affected communities are promoted and represented at all levels of climate governance, including local, national, and international bodies.²²
22. We call for the **fostering of regional cooperation and the establishment of global alliances to address critical environmental issues** such as hazardous pesticides, waste management, and air quality improvement. These partnerships should include governments, civil society organisations, private sectors, and youth-led initiatives to ensure comprehensive and sustainable climate solutions.²³
23. Governments are encouraged to **intentionally increase partnerships with small states and regions most vulnerable to climate impacts**, such as the Pacific islands. These areas can serve

¹⁸ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change, 2023

¹⁹ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change

²⁰ Human Development Report 2023/2024

²¹ COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

²² COP28 Global Youth Statement, 2023

²³ Youth Outcome Statement Asia Regional Youth Leadership Summit

as pilots for effective climate solutions, with an emphasis on regionalism and long-term vision. This approach ensures that small states are not left behind in the global climate agenda.²⁴

24. Stakeholders to **highlight successful national and regional climate actions that align with international frameworks**, such as the Paris Agreement. These examples should be used to inspire broader adoption of effective strategies across the Commonwealth, demonstrating the positive impacts of well-implemented climate policies.²⁵

Pillar 3: Resilient Economies

In the face of growing global uncertainties, the youth of the Commonwealth underscore the imperative of building resilient economies that can withstand shocks, adapt to dynamic changes, and foster sustainable and inclusive growth. A truly resilient economy is one that empowers all its citizens—particularly young people—to participate fully in economic life, drives innovation, and ensures that prosperity is equitably shared across society.

We envision a Commonwealth where economic policies are not only designed to promote growth but also to ensure that such growth is inclusive and sustainable. This vision includes economies where young people have equitable access to opportunities in entrepreneurship, innovation, and technology; where the workforce is well-prepared for the demands of the Fourth Industrial Revolution; and where economic activities are aligned with the imperatives of environmental stewardship and climate resilience. The transitions towards green and digital economies are critical pathways to achieving this vision, and young people must be at the forefront of these transformative processes.

Recognizing these challenges and opportunities, we call upon governments, international organizations, private sector stakeholders, and civil society to commit to concrete actions that build resilient, inclusive, and sustainable economies across the Commonwealth.

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

25. Governments, international financial institutions, and the private sector to **significantly increase investments in youth entrepreneurship and innovation ecosystems**. This includes establishing youth-friendly funding mechanisms, facilitating access to capital, and providing mentorship and market opportunities. Prioritize support for youth-led enterprises in sectors that drive sustainable development, such as renewable energy, agribusiness, and digital technology. Ensuring the success of youth entrepreneurs is essential for economic diversification and resilience.²⁶
26. Policymakers to **enact and enforce legislation that promotes economic diversification, reducing reliance on single industries or sectors that are vulnerable to external shocks**. Diversification should be pursued through strategic investments in green industries, circular economies, and sustainable agriculture, creating jobs while protecting the environment. This

²⁴ Human Development Report 2023/2024

²⁵ Human Development Report 2023/2024

²⁶ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023

will require the active collaboration of governments, the private sector, and international donors to integrate these strategies into national development plans.²⁷

27. Governments and development partners to **adopt inclusive economic policies that prioritize equity and social justice**. This includes implementing targeted programs to address economic disparities, ensuring fair wages, and creating employment opportunities for marginalized youth, including young women, people with disabilities, and those in rural areas. These policies should be supported by robust social protection systems that safeguard vulnerable populations from economic shocks.²⁸
28. Stakeholders across sectors to **accelerate the digital transformation of economies by investing in digital infrastructure, education, and literacy**. Ensuring that all young people, particularly those in underserved communities, have access to digital skills and tools is crucial for their participation in the global economy. Digital literacy must be integrated into both formal and non-formal education systems, with particular emphasis on coding, data science, and digital entrepreneurship.²⁹
29. Stakeholders at every level to recognise the transformative impact of digital and AI technologies on the employment prospects and innovation potential of young people across the Commonwealth. To bridge the existing digital divide and skills gaps, we urge governments to prioritize inclusive and affordable digital access for all youth, including investing in critical infrastructure and comprehensive digital skills training. Furthermore, we support the expansion of initiatives like the Commonwealth's "AI for Youth" initiative which aims to empower young people, particularly in small and vulnerable states, through research, capacity building, and ethical AI policies. These efforts should ensure that all youth, including young women and people with disabilities, are equipped to harness the power of AI and digital technologies, fostering innovation, entrepreneurship, and equitable development across the Commonwealth.³⁰
30. Governments and international organizations to **prioritize the development of green economies by establishing clear policy frameworks and providing incentives for sustainable practices**. This includes supporting the transition to renewable energy, promoting sustainable agricultural practices, and fostering green innovation. Youth must be central to these efforts, with programs that provide training, funding, and support for youth-led green initiatives.³¹
31. Civil society organizations and the private sector to **collaborate with governments in creating comprehensive strategies that address youth unemployment**. This includes developing public-private partnerships to offer apprenticeships, internships, and vocational training programs that align with the needs of the labour market. Special focus should be placed on equipping young people with skills relevant to emerging industries, such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, and renewable energy.³²
32. International development partners and philanthropic organizations to support initiatives that **promote financial inclusion for young people**. This includes expanding access to banking

²⁷ Human Development Report 2023/24; 11CSMM Final Ministerial Statement

²⁸ 12th CYF Declaration; 10CYMM Outcome Statement

²⁹ Technology in Education Report; Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index Update Report 2023

³⁰ 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting Outcome Statement, September 2023

³¹ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change; COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

³² WEF Future of Jobs Report 2023

services, financial literacy programs, and digital finance platforms that empower youth to manage their finances effectively and invest in their futures. Financial inclusion is critical for building economic resilience and reducing poverty.³³

33. Governments and stakeholders to **strengthen mechanisms that promote transparency, accountability, and good governance in economic management**. Corruption and mismanagement of resources undermine economic resilience and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable. Implementing stringent anti-corruption measures and ensuring that youth are actively engaged in governance processes are essential for building trust and sustainable economies.³⁴
34. Governments and educational institutions to **develop and expand programs that focus on upskilling and reskilling the workforce**. As technological advancements and automation continue to reshape industries, it is crucial that young people are equipped with the skills necessary to navigate these changes. This includes the integration of lifelong learning opportunities that allow individuals to continuously adapt to evolving job markets.³⁵
35. Regional and international bodies to **facilitate cross-border collaboration on economic initiatives that benefit young people**. This includes promoting regional trade agreements that prioritize youth-led businesses and creating platforms for knowledge exchange and joint ventures among young entrepreneurs across Commonwealth member states. Such collaboration can enhance economic resilience by leveraging regional strengths and fostering innovation.³⁶
36. Governments and international organizations to **establish and enforce labour standards that protect young workers, particularly in the informal sector**. Young people are often vulnerable to exploitation and poor working conditions, especially in informal or precarious employment. Strengthening labour protections, including the enforcement of minimum wage laws and occupational safety regulations, is essential to safeguarding the rights and well-being of young workers.³⁷
37. Stakeholders to **promote economic resilience through inclusive and sustainable tourism**. This includes investing in eco-friendly tourism initiatives that engage local communities, particularly young people, in preserving cultural heritage and natural environments. Tourism, when managed sustainably, can be a significant driver of economic growth, job creation, and cultural exchange, contributing to the resilience of local economies.³⁸

³³ Human Development Report 2023/24

³⁴ 12th CYF Declaration; 10CYMM Outcome Statement

³⁵ WEF Future of Jobs Report 2023; Technology in Education Report

³⁶ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023; Human Development Report 2023/24)

³⁷ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change, 2023

³⁸ Human Development Report 2023/24; Global Youth Statement 2023

Pillar 4: Resilient Societies and People

A resilient society is one where every individual, regardless of their background, is empowered to thrive, contribute, and lead. It is a society that fosters inclusivity, promotes social justice, and ensures that all citizens, particularly young people, have access to the opportunities and resources necessary for their development. In the face of global challenges such as public health crises, social inequalities, and environmental degradation, the youth of the Commonwealth recognize the urgent need to build societies that are resilient, equitable, and just.

This pillar focuses on the importance of healthcare access, social protection, community engagement, and the recognition of diversity as key components of resilient societies. The following recommendations call on governments, civil society, international organizations, and the private sector to take decisive action in creating societies that protect and empower all individuals, particularly the youth.

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

38. Governments to **ensure that healthcare is recognized as a fundamental human right and to take immediate steps to make quality healthcare accessible and affordable for all young people**. This includes expanding healthcare coverage, reducing costs, and ensuring that marginalized groups, such as women, people with disabilities, people of colour, and Indigenous peoples, are prioritized in healthcare access.³⁹
39. Governments to **increase national health budgets to strengthen healthcare systems**. This includes enhancing the capacity to detect, respond to, and recover from public health crises, with a particular focus on youth. Effective healthcare systems must be resilient and capable of providing quality care to all young people across the Commonwealth.⁴⁰
40. Governments to **develop and implement comprehensive mental health policies** that provide free, accessible, and appropriate mental health services for young people. These services should be available in safe and conducive environments, addressing the growing mental health challenges among youth, including the 20% increase in anxiety and mental health cases since 2020.⁴¹
41. Leaders to **tackle the stigma associated with mental health by integrating prevention, care, and treatment programs at both the school and community levels**. Mental health education should be mainstreamed in curricula, and community outreach programs should be established to raise awareness and provide support for young people.⁴²
42. Governments and civil society to **close the gaps in social protection systems to reduce inequalities**. Social protection programs must be designed to protect young people from abuse, violence, exploitation, and neglect, particularly in the face of unemployment and child labour. Accurate data collection is essential to ensure that these programs effectively target key areas of concern for youth.⁴³

³⁹ Human Development Report 2023/24; World Employment Social Outlook Trends 2023

⁴⁰ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023; Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations

⁴¹ Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index Update Report 2023

⁴² Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change; COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

⁴³ 10CYMM Outcome Statement

43. Governments to **develop and implement policies that ensure the social and economic inclusion of all young people**. This includes addressing barriers to education, employment, and social services that disproportionately affect marginalized communities, including those living in rural areas, young women, and minority groups. Social protection programs should be expanded to provide safety nets for those most at risk.⁴⁴
44. Civil society organizations and international partners to **support youth engagement in community development initiatives**. Young people should be seen as pioneers of change within their communities, equipped and empowered to lead social initiatives. Community engagement programs should be designed to foster leadership, civic responsibility, and social cohesion among youth.⁴⁵
45. Governments and educational institutions to **prioritize inclusive education that respects and promotes diversity**. This includes implementing curricula that reflect the cultural, linguistic, and historical diversity of the Commonwealth, as well as providing resources and support for students from marginalized communities. Education should be a tool for empowerment, fostering understanding and respect for differences.⁴⁶
46. Stakeholders to **promote and protect the rights of young people in all aspects of life, particularly in the context of digital spaces**. This includes safeguarding the privacy, security, and freedom of expression of young people online, as well as addressing issues such as cyberbullying, online harassment, and digital exclusion.⁴⁷
47. Governments to **implement robust policies that address the social determinants of health**. This includes improving access to clean water, sanitation, nutrition, and housing, which are fundamental to the well-being of young people. A holistic approach to health must consider these broader social factors that influence health outcomes.⁴⁸
48. International organizations and development partners to **support initiatives that enhance the resilience of local communities to climate change**. This includes investing in community-based adaptation strategies that engage young people in protecting their environments and building sustainable livelihoods.⁴⁹
49. Governments and stakeholders to **ensure that young people are meaningfully involved in decision-making processes at all levels of society**. Youth participation is essential for the development of policies and programs that are responsive to their needs and aspirations. This includes creating platforms for youth engagement in governance, policy-making, and community leadership.⁵⁰
50. Governments and civil society to **promote the cultural and creative industries as a means of economic empowerment and social cohesion for young people**. The arts, culture, and creative sectors provide significant opportunities for youth to express themselves, preserve cultural

⁴⁴ Human Development Report 2023/24; World Employment Social Outlook Trends 2023

⁴⁵ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023

⁴⁶ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change; COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

⁴⁷ Commonwealth Global Youth Development Index Update Report 2023

⁴⁸ World Bank Africa Group Annual Report 2023; Human Development Report 2023/24

⁴⁹ Commonwealth Youth Policy Recommendations on Climate Change

⁵⁰ 12th CYF Declaration; 10CYMM Outcome Statement

heritage, and contribute to economic development. Support for these industries should include funding, training, and market access for young creatives.⁵¹

51. Stakeholders to **develop and implement strategies that promote gender equality and empower young women and girls**. This includes ensuring access to education, healthcare, and economic opportunities, as well as protecting their rights in all areas of life. Gender equality is fundamental to building resilient and inclusive societies.⁵²
52. Governments to **prioritize the protection of human rights, particularly for vulnerable and marginalized youth**. This includes enacting and enforcing laws that protect young people from discrimination, violence, and exploitation, and ensuring that all youth have access to justice and equal opportunities.⁵³

Conclusion

Despite the multifaceted challenges facing the global community, including economic instability, climate change, and social inequalities, it is imperative that governments and stakeholders continue to invest in the youth sector. This investment must be rooted in empirical evidence and strategic in both planning and monitoring to ensure that youth-focused initiatives are effective and sustainable. To achieve meaningful and lasting impact, efforts must be intensified to amplify inclusive youth voices and ensure their representation in decision-making processes at all levels.

It is equally critical to equip young people with the tools, resources, and platforms they need to participate meaningfully in shaping their futures. Youth perspectives on governance, rule of law, democracy, human rights, climate action, economic development, and technological innovation are essential as young people remain at the forefront of global development efforts. In this context, the 13th Commonwealth Youth Forum serves as a crucial platform for youth to articulate our views, exchange ideas, and collectively envision the steps necessary to achieve the SDGs and address the pressing challenges we face.

We affirm the importance of ongoing partnerships and collaboration between the Commonwealth Youth Council, other Commonwealth youth networks, the Commonwealth Secretariat, member states, and civil society organizations. These partnerships are indispensable in delivering on our shared vision for a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous Commonwealth. It is through these collaborative efforts that the policy priorities outlined in this Declaration can be realized, safeguarding the future for young people across the Commonwealth.

The delegates of the 13th CYF extend their deepest gratitude to the Government of Samoa for hosting this pivotal forum and the 5th Commonwealth Youth Council General Assembly. We look forward to Samoa's continued support in championing youth participation and leadership within the Commonwealth, ensuring that the voices of young people remain central to the Commonwealth's agenda

⁵¹ Human Development Report 2023/24; Global Youth Statement 2023

⁵² COP28 Global Youth Statement 2023

⁵³ World Employment Social Outlook Trends 2023