

Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs last met in Trinidad and Tobago in May 1995. As one of the three key strategic areas for action, they decided that all member countries of the association *should* formulate and implement specific national youth policies by the year 2000.

This handbook has been produced by the Commonwealth Youth Programme as a practical guide for achieving this aim. Its focus is the formulation, promotion, implementation, monitoring and fine-tuning of national youth policy. It stresses the need to consult young men and women throughout the process. It also emphasises the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of special groups – particularly of young women and girls, who are relatively deprived of education, health services, resources and access to decision-making fora.

The handbook forms part of a package of resource documents which comprises: a Commonwealth Youth Charter, outlining all the principles to be considered in ensuring the full participation of young women and men in national development; the handbook of guidelines; a series of information sheets, which illustrate practical ways to carry out certain elements of the policy establishment process; and a series of resource documents, which cover, for example, international charters of relevance to youth policy and other useful reference documents. Together these components form a Youth Policy Tool-kit.

The tool-kit will be circulated to Commonwealth member countries. On the basis of government requests, teams of consultants – trained in use of the tool-kit – will be commissioned to assist national officials and counterparts in the development of individual country policies for youth. Thus, the Commonwealth Youth Programme is providing a package of measures which includes resource documents, advocacy, technical assistance and capacity-building.

Our young men and women of today are destined to become the leaders, decision-makers, entrepreneurs and parents of tomorrow's Commonwealth. In order to ensure that sustainable growth is achieved by our membership, we must guarantee that, irrespective of gender, race, religion or caste, all Commonwealth young people have equal rights and equality and equity in opportunities to participate fully in their own self-development and that of their communities and countries. I hope that this handbook and the associated materials and assistance will provide a healthy stimulus to achieving that objective.

Sir Humphrey Maud
Deputy Secretary-General, Economic and Social Affairs
Commonwealth Secretariat
June 1996