

While young women and men are seen as beneficiaries of any national policies and initiatives, there is obvious merit and wisdom for any country to look at a wide range of issues and opportunities from the point of view of the particular needs, concerns and aspirations of their young people.

It is a practical response to the acknowledgment that young women and men, in the words of the Commonwealth Youth Charter:

- ★ *"form a significant proportion of most national populations (in some Commonwealth countries this exceeds 50 per cent);*
- ★ *need a supportive, participatory and informative environment to move successfully from the dependence of childhood to the autonomy and responsibility of adulthood;*
- ★ *have a unique contribution to make to national development due to their energy, enthusiasm, resilience and an ability to inject a fresh focus;*
- ★ *have had less life experience and often significantly less access to information, resources and power over their lives than older people, making them more vulnerable to neglect, abuse and exploitation; and*
- ★ *often represent the most "at risk" group in terms of the major socio-economic challenges including unemployment, low income, physical and sexual abuse, poor housing, substance abuse and a wide range of health issues including HIV/AIDS – with young women being most disadvantaged in these areas."*

It is the accepted responsibility of all Commonwealth countries and their governments to ensure young women and men are given every opportunity to reach their full potential, and to be active participants in national development.

It is easy to rhetorically state the important role of young men and women in national development. It is much more difficult, however, to design and implement the mechanisms to ensure its effective reality. Formulation and implementation of a national youth policy is seen as an essential element of this process. This is well summarised by the words of the declaration from the Commonwealth Youth Ministers meeting in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago in May 1995:

"We propose that all Commonwealth governments should make a special commitment to youth development. This should take the form of the development, refinement and implementation of National Youth Policies as instruments of change ..."

“Possibly one of the greatest challenges facing our society is how to create the kind of environment that will allow for the mass flowering of our young people. The world is changing so rapidly and in such myriad directions that one needs to take the long view of all contemplated social action, especially those having to do with the complexities of sensibly integrating your youth into society. The latter task necessitates the development of a youth policy as the basis of immediate and distant social action”.

Introduction, Government of Guyana Youth Policy

In addition, the National Youth Policy Development 2000 project will provide:

- * Training and the development of resource materials to assist in building the capacity of member countries to formulate, promote, implement, monitor and review national youth policies and programmes.
- * Technical assistance through regional facilitators to Commonwealth governments wishing to formulate, promote and implement new national youth policies or to upgrade existing policies.

The creation of a national youth policy is an acknowledgment of the specific needs of young women and men, as well as a formal recognition of their unique contribution to national development. It provides a means and a symbol for society as a whole to declare, document and intensify their commitment to their young citizens, and an opportunity to determine appropriate priorities, goals and strategies. It provides an opportunity to give expression to a nation's understanding of values, rights and responsibilities as regards their young women and men.

As a document of national and historic significance, a national youth policy, with its associated action plans and programmes, will raise the profile and understanding in the wider community about young men and women, their potential and the constraints they face in realising that potential. Above all, a national youth policy will promote a framework for action for all agencies and organisations interested in the needs and contributions of young women and men.

This Handbook has been produced as a tool for designing and developing the processes necessary for youth policy formulation and implementation. It is recognised, however, that it is important to avoid the temptation to create a "model template" which simply encourages replication. Each national youth policy must be a reflection of the unique resources, needs and aspirations of young women and men in each country, and its special cultural, political and socio-economic realities.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has developed a plan and project, namely – National Youth Policy Development 2000 – which is designed to assist Commonwealth countries with the formulation, refinement and implementation of national youth policies. The production of this Handbook and accompanying Tool Kit represents the initial element of this assistance. The Handbook and Tool Kit seek to provide a collection of guidelines, information and tools for the effective formulation, promotion, implementation, monitoring, review and updating of national youth policies.

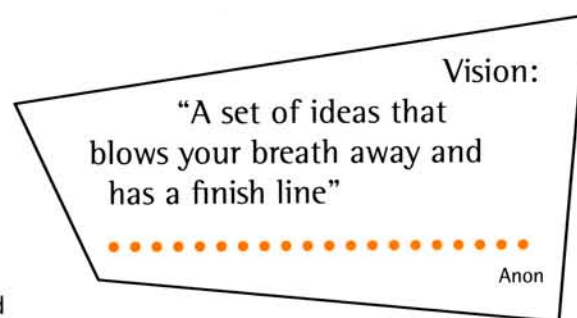
The Commonwealth Youth Charter (a copy of which is included in the Tool Kit) contains a recommended plan of action for member countries. The other forms of recommended action are inter-related with, and dependent upon, an effective national youth policy, namely:

- ① Formulation and implementation of a **national action plan** which explicitly accommodates the particular practical and strategic gender needs of young women and men.
- ② Nomination of a **lead agency** in government, holding responsibility for co-ordinating youth matters across government.
- ③ Creation of **co-ordinated government machineries**, including inter-ministerial and inter-departmental committees on youth affairs, and designated focal youth officers in each ministry.
- ④ Establishment of **consultative and participatory mechanisms** with young women and men.
- ⑤ Establishment of a **youth affairs collaborative mechanism** fulfilling the role of a National Youth Council.
- ⑥ Creation of an **annual gender-disaggregated youth budget**.
- ⑦ Development of **capacity building mechanisms** within the fields of training (including gender training) and development, professional networking and research.

Finally, as stated, a national youth policy should be a document of national and historic significance.

However, its eventual status will be judged against its ability to be:

- * a vision for youth development that gives young women and men faith in the future
- * a vehicle based on the idealism, commitment, energy and creativity of young men and women which offers them the opportunity to shape their own future, assume responsibility and play an active role in the life of their country and community
- * a statement of values and principles which is gender-sensitive and provides a holistic response to the needs and aspirations of both young women and men
- * a mechanism to address the traditional social relations between young men and women and contribute to the objective of gender equity and equality
- * an instrument to raise the profile of young women and men within the government and the wider community
- * a framework for future action and a statement of the relationship between young people and national goals
- * a catalyst for communication, cooperation and co-ordination between government and non-government agencies concerned with youth development
- * a document of relevance for all stakeholders concerned for, and involved with young women and men
- * a bench-mark to review youth policy and programme relevance and achievement



Quite a challenge! Hopefully this Handbook and Tool Kit will assist the accomplishment of a relevant, dynamic and useful national youth policy.