

In their message to Commonwealth Heads of Government, Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs stated in May 1995 the importance of, and the necessary players required for, effective national youth policies:

"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. Representative young women and men should be actively involved in the process of policy formulation and implementation. We also recommend that youth NGOs as well as relevant arms of government be closely involved. We believe that this strategy must promote the necessary mainstreaming of youth concerns across ministries such as education, employment, health and social services ..."

"The day will come when the progress of nations will be judged not by their military or economic strength, nor by the splendour of their capital cities and public buildings, but by the well being of their peoples; by their levels of health, nutrition and education; by their opportunities to earn a fair reward for their labours; by their ability to participate in the decisions that affect their lives; by the respect that is shown for their civil and political liberties; by the provision that is made for those who are vulnerable and disadvantaged; and by the protection that is afforded to the growing minds and bodies of their children".

Jim Grant (Former Executive Director, UNICEF)

However, evidence to date shows firstly, that most Commonwealth countries are still to embark upon the above challenge. Hopefully, this Handbook and the accompanying Tool Kit will both act as a motivation and a source of guidance for this task. Secondly, experience so far in those countries with national youth policies demonstrates a number of potential pitfalls and limitations which need to be avoided and overcome, namely:

★ **Lack of political commitment**

it is vital that a national youth policy and national action plan are initiated and endorsed at the highest political level.

★ **A failure to incorporate gender considerations**

issues relating to gender imbalances which need to be redressed, particularly in the areas of employment, health, participation, as well as issues relating to the girl child, sexual abuse and violence against young women.

★ **Planning by the few for the many**

failure to adequately involve all relevant stakeholders, especially young women and men.

★ **Lack of organisation and process resource**

to undertake a thorough policy formulation exercise requires the commitment of financial and

technical resources. A national youth policy must be viewed as a document of national importance, and thus must be accorded priority in terms of resource allocation.

★ **Inappropriate language**

language used in the policy should be clear, concise, gender inclusive and easy to understand; phrases like "the nomothetic and ideographic role dimensions of their tasks and expectations in national development" fails to appreciate the need for a writing style that will capture the hearts and minds of young women and men. Reference to "youth" or "young people" can incorrectly imply that young women and men are a homogenous group.

★ **Confusion between a policy statement and action plans**

there is a temptation for lead youth ministries to use the policy document to state their programmes, services and intentions thus limiting its value as a guiding document for all agencies. The creation of a separate national action plan overcomes this problem, and allows a regular update of youth ministry role, activities and targets.

★ **Production of reports that remain on shelves**

this is usually due to a failure to give attention to:

- ① presentation, and ways to ensure the report appears attractive; and
- ② promotion and dissemination strategy which ensures all stakeholders (especially young men and women) become aware of the policy's content and intent.

★ **Using a statement to avoid action**

the production of a statement of intent is necessary, and relatively simple, but insufficient. Its translation into concrete initiatives and programmes is what really matters. Thus, the joint production of a national youth policy and a national action plan, and the determination of a regular process to monitor outcomes of the policy and plan are of central importance.

★ **Remains unknown by the majority of young women and men**

failure to communicate the existence, content and spirit of the national youth policy to its main audience.

It is the responsibility of each country to provide its young women and men with real opportunities to develop their skills, energy and enthusiasm; to reach their full potential; to exercise their individual rights and to encourage their full participation in community and national development. Young women and men are our present and our future.

The ultimate goal of a national youth policy is to provide guidance and a framework to achieve this vision. It should reflect the needs and aspirations of young men and women, and ensure the development of relevant strategies and actions. There is probably no more significant initiative in the development of meaningful work with youth, than the formulation and implementation of a national youth policy and accompanying national action plans.

Finally, the rationale and challenge for an effective and relevant national youth policy is captured and summarised by the words contained in the recent United Nation's statement, 'World programme of action for youth to the Year 2000 and beyond':

"Young people in all countries are both a major resource for development and key agents for social change, economic development and technological innovation. Their imagination, ideals, considerable energies and vision are essential for the continuing development of the societies in which they live. The problems that young people face as well as their vision and aspirations are an essential component of the challenges and prospects of today's societies

and future generations as well. Thus, there is special need for new impetus to be given to the design and implementation of youth policies and programmes at all levels. The ways in which the challenges and potentials of young people are addressed by policy will influence current social and economic conditions and the well-being and livelihood of future generations".

"If you want to build a ship, don't round up people, to gather wood and dish out work. But teach them desire for the wide, endless ocean".

A. de Saint-Exupery