

Chapter 1

Background

1.1 Introduction

This chapter examines a broad Commonwealth definition of youth work and the contexts in which youth work is delivered. It also takes the reader through the role the Commonwealth has played in professionalising the sector. It concludes with the purpose and methodology of the baseline.

1.2 A Youth Work definition and contexts

Youth work is defined by the Commonwealth Secretariat¹ as

‘All forms of rights-based youth engagement approaches that build personal awareness and support the social, political and economic empowerment of young people, delivered through non-formal learning within a matrix of care.’²

It is a relational profession built around the skills and competencies of engaging young people in building their self-esteem, social connectedness, economic and social productivity, emotional, intellectual and ethical maturity, and autonomy,³ and supporting them in their self-empowerment within caring and supportive environments. Peer youth work involves young people themselves who have built systematic skills and competencies in engaging with their peers.

Youth work practice can be identified around the world in contexts of State provision, provision through voluntary agencies, and the non-governmental sector including faith-based groups. Youth work can be delivered through youth clubs, or in detached spaces where youth workers reach young people in their own natural surroundings.

Youth work is recognised as a distinct profession in some Commonwealth member states through policy and legislation that ensure the delivery of quality practice, including education and training for youth workers. In yet other member states, it is institutionalised through custom and practice, and has created equally rich traditions; in yet others, this recognition is still to become a reality.

Strong youth work can also be identified where there is no distinct policy supporting it. In these cases, policy measures could provide more systemic support to education and training for the profession, and for delivery of youth work services.

1.3 The Commonwealth’s role in strengthening youth work practice

The Commonwealth Charter reinforces the core rights-based values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It has an explicit asset-based view of young people

and recognises 'the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures' (The Commonwealth Charter, 2013a).

The Commonwealth understands professional youth work as a key dimension in enabling, ensuring and empowering young people (Harare Commonwealth Declaration, 1992). It considers youth work as integral to participatory nation-building, particularly in the context of the dynamic role that youth workers can play in addressing young people's welfare and rights in a responsive manner. The Commonwealth sees youth workers as ideally placed to provide an interface between young people and decision-making processes at all levels.

The Commonwealth is working to consolidate its previous work in this arena through a rights-based concept of youth work that is responsive to the requirements of young people and their expectations from youth services, while, at the same time, reflecting Commonwealth values and human rights conventions to the fullest. This is the basis of work with member governments and other stakeholders to strengthen mechanisms and procedures to professionalise youth work.

The Commonwealth has been supporting member states to set up education and training for youth workers since the 1970s. The 2007 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting committed to the Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE)(Commonwealth Secretariat, 2017), renewing this commitment to youth development work. This was further endorsed at consecutive Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings (CYMMs) thereafter.

Action Point 12 of PAYE pledged that the Commonwealth will work with governments to ensure investment in the education and training of youth workers, partner with youth workers' associations to draft codes of professional ethics with express linkages to human rights, and consult youth workers as partners in the policy-making process (Ibid., p. 40).

The Commonwealth's pioneering contribution to professionalising youth work was the Commonwealth Diploma in Youth Development. The Diploma has been delivered in almost 30 Commonwealth member states and continues to be delivered in some. The Diploma received several levels of support from the Commonwealth Youth Programme across the years, including external regional moderation, tutor training, and subsidies for students and for delivery. Later, it was devolved to universities.

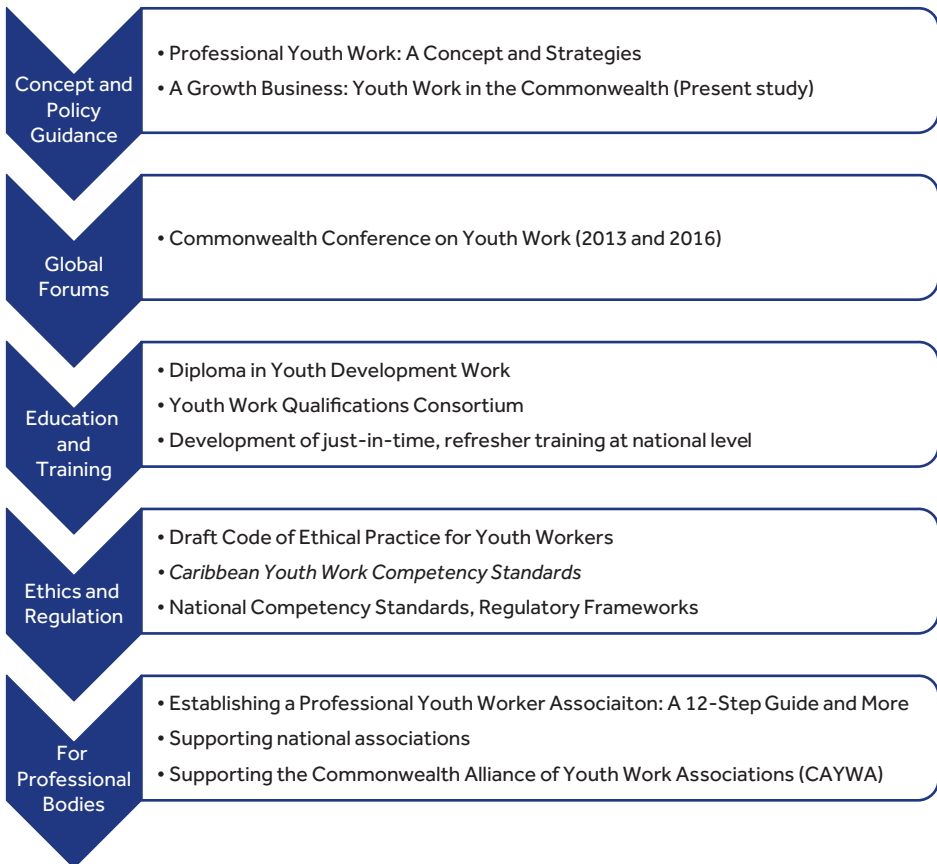
Presently, the Commonwealth is in the process of establishing an online, open-source Youth Work Education Qualifications Consortium. It is based primarily, but not exclusively, on a Youth Development Work Degree developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat in partnership with the University of the West Indies (UWI) based in Kingston, Jamaica. The course has been informed by the Commonwealth Caribbean Competency Standards for Youth Development Work developed by the former Caribbean Regional Centre supported by the Commonwealth Youth Programme. The material is to be offered to partners in the Consortium which constitute universities and youth work training agencies from across the Commonwealth and elsewhere.

The Commonwealth also supports governments with technical assistance relating to policy and legislation in professionalising youth work, in building short courses and outcomes frameworks to support ‘just-in-time’ and refresher training⁴ to offset diploma and degree qualifications, and in establishing youth worker associations that are a prerequisite for safeguarding the integrity and quality of the profession, and by extension, safeguarding the quality of services to young people.

Additionally, the Commonwealth supports the global collectivisation of youth work professionals through the emerging Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers’ Associations (CAYWA), an international association of regional/national/sub-national professional associations dedicated to advancing youth work across the Commonwealth (Annexure 1). CAYWA enables the cross-pollination of ideas and collegial support among youth work practitioners across the Commonwealth and beyond, and is developing into a unified global influence providing support to governments and all stakeholders in the youth work profession.

CAYWA’s work is informed by the *Draft Code of Ethical Practice for Youth Workers* developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat. Other Commonwealth guidance such as *Professional Youth Work: A Concept and Strategies* and *Establishing a Professional*

Figure 1.1 The Commonwealth’s youth work initiatives



Youth Worker Association: A 12-Step Guide and More, also continue to be globally instrumental in informing professional associations and stakeholder groups in designing youth work policy and practice.

The Commonwealth also hosted the Commonwealth Conference on Youth Work (2013 and 2016, both in Pretoria, South Africa) that enabled global dialogue, discussion and actioned resolutions around the professionalisation of youth work.

1.4 Purpose of the Survey

Youth Work in the Commonwealth: A Growth Profession establishes a baseline to inform planning and implementation of initiatives to professionalise youth work among Commonwealth member states. It is the product of dozens of practitioners, experts, academics, civil servants and government representatives from across the Commonwealth coming together to explore advances in youth work practice, education and training and legislation and policy. At one level, it provides a catalogue of the extent of recognition of youth work, and at another, an examination of the qualities and rights-based ethos of the various forms of youth work promoted and practised in member states.

The report presents a regional and global analysis. It includes an introduction, encompassing a brief historical overview of youth work as a Commonwealth-wide phenomenon and concepts around the key criteria for professionalism, followed by evidence of advances in professionalising the sector from across member states.

The report is intended to inform practitioners, managers and decision-makers of advancements and gaps in support of professional practice, providing a broad snapshot of youth work in the Commonwealth. As such, it will look to inform youth work practice globally, and help in improving standards and ethical awareness.

There has been no attempt to provide a 'last word' on the subject; neither has there been the ambition to generate an exhaustive encyclopaedia of Commonwealth youth work – that would be an unrealistic goal that would likely be out of date before it could come to press.

The baseline, instead, represents an instrument of orientation to gauge the character and position of youth work throughout the Commonwealth at a given point in time. On the social map of this family of nations, the survey presents a series of trig points for youth work that can help identify the best, most effective paths for future development and investment. It is a general guide to how these might be navigated in the most efficient ways to offer meaningful and impactful support to young people.

The baseline is a work in progress and designed as such. Youth work is a growth business, in a state of constant adaptation and evolution, just like young people. It constantly transforms in order to be responsive to what young people and societies want and need it to be within its frame of practice. In response to this environment, the survey looks to be organic, to have a kind of life. It hopes for, invites, and needs addition, amendment and development by practitioners, researchers and perhaps

you, to become what it can be; and what it can be is, like each generation of young people, ever evolving, never finished.

The baseline survey helps identify national strengths and gaps in professionalising youth work, so informing the Commonwealth's decisions as it takes steps to enhance individual youth work sectors and global practice.

While the primary purpose of this baseline was to assess the current contexts in professionalising youth work in the Commonwealth, the means of analysis and dissemination have also acted as a way of creating greater understanding on the dimensions of professionalisation, challenges of such initiatives, and dialogue around improving practice.

In the long term, this data will serve as a starting point for assessing further action in member states to put in place mechanisms and processes to further strengthen the delivery of youth work, and improve outcomes for young people. It will be a critical tool for the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Work Associations (CAYWA), an association of associations representing the profession, and young people, in advising member states on professionalising the sector.

1.5 Methodology and Data

This is a top-line survey punctuated by a solid conceptual discussion and qualitative data, including case studies.

The baseline is predominantly based on desk research, and relies on secondary data collected through a questionnaire designed at the Commonwealth Secretariat (See **Annexure 2**). The material was generated by staff of the Commonwealth Secretariat and by five regional consultants representing the five Commonwealth regions/region groups of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, Europe & Canada, and the Pacific. The consultants worked with 35 country consultants to gather top-line data on the status of youth work.

Secondary data was complemented by in-depth interviews with key stakeholders representing both governmental and non-governmental sectors (**Annexure 3**). In addition, members of the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Workers' Associations (CAYWA) and other youth work stakeholders contributed case studies of their experiences in enabling the professionalisation of youth work in their countries. All participating Commonwealth member states were notified of the baseline and the involvement of the regional and country consultants in the process.

The Commonwealth may embark on further in-depth research into particularly notable data or good practice that the baseline demonstrates or suggests.

Key dimensions that were surveyed related to

1. The existence of a collectively formulated and owned definition of youth work as a profession,
2. The existence of policy and legislative commitments for youth work as a profession,

3. The professional organisation of youth work practitioners,
4. The existence of a code of ethics and competency standards for youth work and other regulatory frameworks,
5. The existence of qualifications pathways for youth work education and training,
6. The existence of youth-work specific professional validation of education and training,
7. The existence of youth-work specific supervision of practice, and
8. Investments in youth work.

The survey identified the established, or emerging, processes for professionalising the youth work sector (emerging processes are indicated in the tables, but are not represented in the graphs). Some attempts were also made to assess the quality and impact of selected youth work practices in relation to the Commonwealth's rights-based ethos of youth work.

1.5.1 Sampling

Purposive sampling methods were applied in the selection of 35 member states for the survey. Selection was based on relative advances in professionalising the youth work sector given the survey's dimensions.

Table 1.1 illustrates the countries in the sample.

1.5.2 Research team

The survey tool was designed in-house at the Youth Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat with inputs from young people and five regional consultants who consolidated country reports for each region. The report writing was led by an internationally recognised expert in the field of youth work, Dr Brian Belton, supported by members of staff at the Secretariat.

Country-level questionnaire administrators were recruited through a network of scholars, professionals, consultants, youth work practitioners, young people and

Table 1.1 Country sample for baseline

Region	Countries							
Africa	Ghana	Kenya	Malawi	Nigeria	South Africa	Tanzania	Uganda	Zambia
Asia	Bangladesh	India	Maldives	Malaysia	Pakistan	Singapore	Sri Lanka	
Caribbean	Barbados	Belize	Dominica	Guyana	Jamaica	Saint Lucia	St Vincent	Trinidad & Tobago
Europe	Canada	Cyprus	Malta	United Kingdom				
Pacific	Australia	Fiji	New Zealand	Papua New Guinea	Samoa	Solomon Islands	Tonga	Vanuatu

educationists. The majority of the country-level questionnaire administrators were identified by the regional consultants, while others were sourced through the Commonwealth network of consultants and partners. CAYWA members were a strong part of the research and review team.

1.5.3 Use of data

The Commonwealth anticipates that the baseline will support member states to identify the best means of moving forward to ensure that qualified/competent youth workers provide professional youth work support to young people. The report will also provide member states with a preliminary indication of the types of youth work being practised, while highlighting selected innovative and empowering approaches. The focus is primarily on State (or nation-wide)⁵ sector activity. However, the document additionally provides good practice examples from non-governmental stakeholders who have been significantly influential in informing youth work cultures across the Commonwealth.

1.5.4 Key findings

Out of the 35 countries in the sample, 12 countries (34 per cent) had taken significant steps⁶ to professionalise the youth work sector. Only 11 (31 per cent) countries had distinct national-level policies that recognised youth work. Twelve countries (34 per cent) had youth workers' associations that help safeguard the integrity and quality of the profession, and 25 (71 per cent) could claim at least a diploma-level qualification for youth work professionals.

1.5.5 Limitations of the study

The study, by its very nature, does not set out to represent every aspect of youth work in the Commonwealth. Some limitations are as follows:

1. **Scope:** The scope of the study, while covering 35 countries has been at the level of a top-line survey focusing on State/national practice with selective analysis of qualitative elements of youth work from State/national and non-State sources where examples were made evident. This is not an exhaustive study of all forms of youth work within the Commonwealth, nor does it explicitly study areas such as the impact of youth work on young people's lives, even though other such studies are referenced.
2. **Availability of data:** Data was not always as readily available as had been expected during the design of the baseline. The broad lack of professional status for youth work resulted in difficulties in drawing conclusions; for example, around numbers of practising youth workers, or comparisons of youth worker remuneration. Where data was not available or could not be found, no accurate or responsible inference could be made. There were also situations where data existed, but it could not be accessed by either the country-level questionnaire administrators or the regional consultants. Again, where and when this was the case, no substantive conclusions could (or should) be made. The paucity of data

is a clear indication of the need for meaningful information gathering around youth work at all levels studied in this baseline.

3. **Interpretations of youth work:** Youth work, even where a broad understanding of the profession existed, is interpreted in different ways by different stakeholders, and is based, as in other professions, on different ideologies and goals. The study has attempted to analyse practice against the yardstick of asset-based and rights-based forms of youth work advanced by the Commonwealth.
4. **Interpretations of baseline questions:** While all attempts have been made to harmonise interpretation of survey questions across this wide diversity of researchers, full harmonisation of interpretation has not always been possible and may result in some divergences in responses.
5. **Constant change:** The data in this study is indicative of the status across member states at a moment in time. The legislative/policy status of youth work and commitments to youth work are constantly changing as this report is being written. Therefore data in the report cannot be conclusive.
6. **Intersectionalities:** This refers to implications of intersectionalities such as the experiences of **youth workers** as women, ethnic, religious or sexual minorities, youth workers with disabilities and so on, as well as implications of youth work **delivery** to young people from diverse and minority backgrounds such as young women, young people living with disabilities and young people from religious, ethnic or sexual minorities. Encompassing these intersections is integral to the delivery of professional youth work. While some case studies point to directions in engaging with diversity and difference, this has not been addressed adequately in the baseline largely due to the survey nature of the study. This is an area for further inquiry.

Notes

- 1 This definition is a reworking of the original appearing in Commonwealth Secretariat 2013b, p. 11.
- 2 Care is a critical component, though not the only component of youth work due to the need to recognise young people's developmental needs and evolving capacities, and the need to realise their developmental and safeguarding rights.
- 3 Ability to influence their wellbeing and society's wellbeing.
- 4 These have included technical and financial support for the development of the Challenger Deep framework in India, support to Sri Lanka's Professional Youth Workers' Association (PYWA) for development of a short course for refresher training, and support for assessor training provided to the Jamaica Professional Youth Workers' Association (JPYWA).
- 5 There are nation-wide or sub-national youth work practice/regulatory structures/mechanisms that are not necessarily State-led, such as in Australia, or New Zealand.
- 6 For the purposes of this study, 'significant steps' were identified as policy commitments to youth work, the existence of professional associations for youth work, and the availability of at least a diploma-level qualification for youth work.

Chapter 2

Introduction to Youth Work

2.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses youth work in greater detail and examines the implications of delivering for young people within a rights-based framework. While serving all young people within a framework that sees them as assets, youth work also has a critical place in addressing the needs and rights of young people in difficult circumstances, in preventing extremist thought and action, in creating peaceful societies, and also responding to specific social needs of young people in contact with the law, or engaged in substance abuse.

2.2 The nature of youth work

The Commonwealth's definition of youth work introduced in Chapter 1 indicates the holistic approach of youth work in ensuring young people's development as individuals, as collectives, and as contributors to community, national and global development. This also refers to youth work's unique role in youth engagement, and the facilitation of experiential learning/education and social empowerment.

This is a rights/asset-based approach that avoids perceiving young people as being essentially in deficit. That is, rather than responding to young people as lacking capacity, this approach emphasises, celebrates and looks to maximise and build on the talents and potential of young people. This means that youth workers regard young people as a social asset and resource whose potential can only be fully realised when they are recognised as young citizens with rights and, as such, personal integrity. This also means that young people need to be perceived and engaged as those ready to participate and contribute to making and developing their societies.

Youth workers are situated in the governmental, non-governmental, private and voluntary sectors and work with young people in a range of situations including centre-based contexts (youth clubs, schools, hubs and associations) and in detached settings (sometimes understood as 'outreach', or 'street work') that can take place where young people freely congregate (street corners, parks, bus shelters and so on) of their own volition. Youth work can also take place in hospitals, prisons and other institutions with which young people have contact. Some might argue that many or even all of these constitute 'types' of youth work.

In addition, the international and national NGO sector deploys a workforce variously tasked to meet the needs and nurture the development of young people. These personnel are not always youth workers. However, broadly speaking, many undertake youth-work like roles, including working for the empowerment of young people and promoting their participation in communities and society.

Figure 2.1 Youth work as a global phenomenon



Youth work is premised on the **willing participation** of young people. While this can be contested from a number of standpoints, this is what sets youth workers apart from teachers, justice and prison workers and others who work with young people in contexts where young people are **obliged** to attend agencies, institutions or centres.¹

In this study, references to youth work constitute the specific practice of engaging with young people through the fostering of empowering and enabling processes. This is reliant on young people's freedom from constraint in making decisions about their attendance, engagement and personal learning, wellbeing and development. This means they are less directed and more encouraged to find their own directions; instructions are displaced by questions while discussion of what is possible takes up the space that can potentially be dominated by attempts to impose didactic forms/systems of education.

As exemplified in Figure 2.1, youth work's purposes are advanced by **engaging with young people, and focusing on their empowerment as part of enabling processes, within welcoming, tolerant and caring local, national and global environments in which the freedom of expression is maximised.**

The following key tenets of youth work are based on the Commonwealth's *Professional Youth Work: A Concept and Strategies* that sets out the ethos of youth work the Commonwealth advances and supports.

The concept note elaborates these as follows²:

- a. **Professional care:** The delivery of youth work services in environments providing professional, detached care for young people. This is based on an associative, rather than personal, relationship with young people. Youth workers work **with** young people in order that they might **represent themselves better**.
- b. **Building personal awareness and expectation:** Building young people's personal awareness of their strengths and helping them deal with personal challenges, while building their expectation of themselves. This requires that youth workers

Figure 2.2 Key tenets of youth work



are able to support young people to detect interest in/care about their wellbeing and that they might develop the motivation to have expectations of themselves.

- c. **Social and political education:** Developing intellectual, personal and ethical means to interact, think critically, and develop in a social context. This can also be extended to mean the development of a collective consciousness among young people in order that they contribute to their advancement and the advancement of their communities, nations and the world. This requires both youth work practitioners, and young people they work with, to develop the ability to take and manage responsibility, as well as deal with the consequences of action.
- d. **Making professional judgement:** The youth worker needs to be able to make sound, evidence-based and non-partial judgements based on practice experience around each and every context of their interaction with young people.
- e. **A rights-based approach:** Human rights principles and the Commonwealth Charter frame all aspects of youth work advanced by the Commonwealth, including seeing young people as agents in determining the best youth work initiatives for them and foregrounding young people’s rights at all times.
- f. **Youth participation:** Ensuring that youth work promotes young people’s agency and they are enabled to participate in every aspect of decisions around youth work provision, and monitoring and evaluation of youth work outcomes.

However, to simply corral almost any extra-curricular response or practice that encompasses elements of non-formal practice into youth work would overlook the foundation of the nature of professional practice. A solicitor is not a barrister,

Figure 2.3 The place of youth work in difficult/extreme contexts



although the former can perform some functions and aspects of the latter's profession, and both share appreciably similar ethical boundaries. Ophthalmologists differ from optometrists and opticians in their levels of training and in what they can diagnose and treat, but they are all interested in eyes. **Because I do a bit of what you do, does not make me you.**

2.3 Youth work for all, especially the marginalised

Youth work, while it serves all young people in the rights-based perception that all youth are real and potential assets,³ also has its particular functions as a crucial empowering process in difficult or extreme contexts, such as in:

Youth work taps into something that was evident in traditional societies; the benefits of sociality and association which is the seedbed of basic political consciousness; it informs recuperation (the re-capture of something lost) and recreation (and opportunity to re-create or re-establish the self); youth workers build environments that can facilitate personal and social development, learning, healing and respite.

In the postcolonial Commonwealth, different interpretations and adaptations of youth work have appeared in different contexts and countries. Culture, economics, religion and politics fashioned and transformed provision. Social work was more

Figure 2.4 Social development, learning, healing and respite



influential in some places than others, while churches, NGOs' and State ambitions for nation-building altered and sometimes necessarily overrode the more broadminded aspects of what might be described as the 'spirit of youth work'.

Notes

- 1 Qualified youth workers are employed in schools, prisons, hospitals, residential centres and other non-voluntary, statutory circumstances. However, for the most part, the parameters of the roles they assume in these situations are founded on the dominant institutional, organisational or professional frameworks (correction, formal educational functions or social work aims and duties for instance). These practitioners bring youth work skills to largely non-youth work situations in which such approaches might help achieve practical, legal and ethical aims and obligations. Because there are examples of youth workers being employed in non-youth work institutions and agencies does not mean these institutions and agencies are made youth work institutions or agencies, with predominantly youth work related outcomes.
Youth work may also be understood more as a *fait accompli* than a choice to voluntarily participate in situations where no other provision exists; young people use clubs and agencies for the want of any other facility. However, by and large, globally, youth work tradition and theory is underwritten by the recognition of the voluntary participation of young people. To start looking at youth work without this grounding, to claim that practice might encompass a range of adult/youth interaction that is based on obligatory participation, would mean also bringing other defining factors, such as the essential informality of practice, led by and for young people for their personal and collective empowerment, into question. To claim that youth work in young offenders' centres (for instance) might be essentially youth led, for their personal empowerment, is to totally misunderstand the nature of correction and punishment by way of incarceration.
- 2 These key tenets reflect, and elaborate/ expand on the key criteria for professional youth work set out in the Commonwealth document *Professional Youth Work: A Concept and Strategies*.
- 3 See for example the work of organisations such as Concerned for Working Children which addresses survival issues through empowerment – <http://www.concernedforworkingchildren.org/about/>