

Realising the Potential of Youth

More than half of the Commonwealth's 1.7 billion citizens are young people. Over the past two years, the Secretariat – through the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) – has adopted a more comprehensive and integrated way of meeting their special needs. This is based on a three-pronged strategy for action in national youth policy development, human resource development and youth empowerment, which was endorsed in 1995 by Commonwealth Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs in consultation with young people.

Within these areas, the Secretariat and the CYP address a number of priority issues: enterprise and youth employment; young women and development; youth health and welfare; environment; literacy; social integration; and youth participation in peace and the prevention and resolution of conflict. These activities are carried out at the pan-Commonwealth level as well as through the CYP's four regional centres in Africa (Lusaka, Zambia), Asia (Chandigarh, India), the Caribbean (Georgetown, Guyana) and the South Pacific (Honiara, Solomon Islands).

Youth Policy Development

A coherent and comprehensive policy on youth is essential if young people are to feel an integrated part of society and be allowed to achieve their full potential. Less than one-third of the Commonwealth's member countries currently have national youth policies and many of these could be improved. Ministers Responsible for Youth Affairs in 1995 therefore urged member countries to have in place by the year 2000 youth policies which would adequately address the problems young people encounter.

The CYP developed National Youth Policy 2000 to help member governments to formulate and implement such policies by the turn of the century, and to review and update those policies already in existence. At

A Cornwall youth group won a CYP award in 1996 for organising a drop-in centre for young people





Students preparing for the CYP South Pacific Centre's diploma in youth and development

the pan-Commonwealth level, policy development workshops have been held to facilitate the sharing of experiences and good practice. At the national level, the CYP Regional Centres have been meeting requests for assistance in policy formulation and implementation.

During the period under review, 11 countries in Africa and three in Asia have requested or received assistance in policy development. Three countries in the Caribbean are discussing their policy requirements, and the South Pacific Centre has collaborated with the Government of New Zealand in a workshop on policy development. Four Pacific countries have been earmarked for assistance.

The CYP's package of support to governments on policy development includes a handbook of guidelines, *Formulating and Implementing National Youth Policies*, a Commonwealth Youth Charter and a series of information sheets and resource documents. Together, these items form a comprehensive 'Youth Policy Toolkit'. Teams of consultants, trained in the use of the toolkit, are available to assist national officials and others in the development of individual country policies for youth.

Human Resource Development

The CYP was one of the first agencies to provide training in the youth and development field to member countries through its pioneering diploma and certificate courses. Today, many graduates of these courses hold key positions in ministries and youth development agencies around the Commonwealth and are involved in policy formulation and implementation.

CYP's re-modelled Diploma Course in Youth and Development is now to include such subjects as youth policy planning and implementation, young people and conflict resolution, and health promotion. Other modules being developed are on Commonwealth principles and values, the principles and practices of youth in development work, promoting enterprise and economic development, gender and development, management skills, and sustainable development and environmental issues.

The core modules of the course have already received pan-Commonwealth academic validation and accreditation from the

University of Huddersfield in Britain. Accreditation is being negotiated with other partner institutions. From 1998, these courses will also be delivered through distance education techniques, where available, such as interactive audio and teleconferencing. The pilot cycle of the new distance education courses is targeting 2,000 youth workers in each of the four regions over two years.

The CYP is also looking for partners for the delivery of its new diploma programmes. Tertiary institutions such as the Indira Gandhi National Open University and the University of the South Pacific have a key role to play in delivering and accrediting these programmes. In the past two years, regional workshops to develop aspects of the diploma have been held with a total of 18 partner institutions, including the Commonwealth of Learning.

At the same time, the CYP can tailor its modular distance education courses to the specific needs of members governments. When the Government of Barbados expanded its ministry responsible for youth affairs and recruited new Youth Commissioners, a special diploma course in Youth and Development by distance education was conducted by the CYP Caribbean Centre in December 1996. Thirty-seven participants received professional training to enable them to deal with the challenges of their new responsibilities.

Empowering Young Women and Men

Empowerment for young people means increased participation in decision-making and greater access to resources. The CYP has a long history of supporting and tapping the enterprising nature of young men and women as a key approach to combating youth unemployment. Young aspiring entrepreneurs, however, need to be given greater access to credit and other resources to enable them to start up and expand their own businesses.

The Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI), launched in 1996, provides a package of assistance to potential young entrepreneurs. It is designed to help entrepreneurs find ways of obtaining credit easily from local agencies, set up savings schemes, and provide training and support to small-scale entrepreneurs. It is being developed as a model of good practice which can be promoted and eventually replicated in different countries with the support of the international donor community and other agencies.

Pilot projects were launched in Guyana, India and Zambia in 1996 and are being closely monitored by the CYP's Regional Centres. The

RECOGNISING OUTSTANDING ACHIEVEMENT

It's a familiar Friday night scene. The week over, young people head into town to meet up with their friends. They congregate in bus shelters, parking lots, anywhere there's a street corner or lamp-post. In the British city of Truro, Cornwall, however, you won't find young people hanging about. That's because everyone is at Zebedees.

Run by young people for young people, Zebedees is a drop-in centre offering a friendly, welcoming space to get together and socialise. On a typical Friday night between 70 and 130 people use the centre, which also provides information on youth issues such as alcohol, drug abuse and sexual health. In 1996, it was one of five youth projects to win a Commonwealth Youth Service Award worth £1,000.

The Commonwealth Youth Service Awards Scheme empowers young people to become more involved in national development. It recognises and rewards initiatives by young women and men which contribute towards the development of their societies. In 1996, five groups of young people from Britain, Canada, Malawi and Pakistan won awards for projects ranging from family planning initiatives to the integration of mentally handicapped young people into society. The awards have been granted annually since 1985. In 1997, the scheme was expanded to allow for up to five regional awards worth £1,000 each and three pan-Commonwealth awards worth £3,000 each.

The CYP works towards empowering young men and women



micro-enterprises being set up are in the manufacturing, trading, agriculture and service-oriented sectors. In Asia, for example, the pilot CYCI enterprises include bicycle repair shops, clothes repairing, nurseries (for children), retail outlets for groceries, electrical and household goods, bakeries and marble cutting. In the South Pacific, the scheme will be piloted from the Solomon Islands in mid-1997.

A Commonwealth Micro-Credit Financing Initiative has been devised to create awareness of the CYCI model and to help mobilise financial institutions at national and regional levels, and donors to assist governments in replicating the scheme. This initiative will be launched in 1997/98.

Besides empowerment through the CYCI, the CYP is committed to the principle of youth participation in policy formulation and implementation. Young women and men are involved in CYP's consultative and management processes at national, regional and pan-Commonwealth levels.



These youths in Lusaka, Zambia, received help from the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative

CYP is also working to empower young people to contribute to conflict resolution and peace-making by providing training opportunities in how to resolve conflict. Arising from a Commonwealth Youth Conference on Conflict Resolution in August 1995, a training module on Young People and Resolution of Conflict is being prepared using materials from the conference. A video on mediation skills has also been produced, together with an audio-tape on the South African experience on conflict management.

Youth networks are another way the CYP enhances the participation of young people in national decision-making. Among its network-building activities, the 'Ambassadors for Positive Living' form part of the HIV/AIDS Network in Africa and help to increase awareness about HIV/AIDS (*see next page*). Youth exchanges are important regional activities. In Africa, priority is given to the HIV/AIDS Youth Networks through the Positive Living Ambassadors programme. The Asia Region uses Regional Youth Exchange programmes to promote national harmony and unity. In the Caribbean, youth exchanges have been identified as important strategies for regional integration and skills development.

Empowerment also means access to information about government and its responsibilities to young people under global agreements. The CYP is collaborating with Unicef to produce in 1997 a user-friendly *Youth Rights Guide* on the human rights implications of conventions and summits for young people.

Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment

The mainstreaming of youth issues into all areas of government policy and service is another priority for the CYP. To help member governments, national youth organisations and even the CYP itself to achieve this goal, a Commonwealth Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment is being developed. The Plan will identify the mechanisms to be put in place and the targets to be achieved, it will highlight examples of good practice, and it will demonstrate how all these elements can be brought together and endorsed at the highest political level to achieve a society where young women and men are truly empowered.

The CYP also recognises that the needs of young women are distinct from those of young men and is an example of good practice itself in implementing the Commonwealth Plan of Action on Gender and Development (see page 29). Gender Focal Points have been established in all the CYP Regional Centres to ensure gender mainstreaming in all CYP activities.

From 1993-96, CYP also carried out a pan-Commonwealth research project, *Three Generations, Two Genders, One World*, which examined the changes in gender roles, values, attitudes and relationships of three generations of young women and men in a number of Commonwealth countries.

LIFE AMBASSADORS

Since he was diagnosed as HIV positive in 1991, 25-year-old Zambian David Chipanta has been on a mission. As a Commonwealth 'Ambassador for Positive Living', David has journeyed to Kenya, Malawi, Malta and South Africa to raise awareness about HIV/AIDS and to urge positive changes in behaviour. On a five-day mission to Malta in 1997, for example, David met with young women and men, 15 to 29 years old, in bars, cafés – anywhere young people would listen. The trip included a high profile press conference with Malta's Minister of Health.

David is one of ten young men and women across Africa who are part of the CYP Africa Centre's three-year-old 'Ambassadors for Positive Living' campaign. They visit schools, youth groups, churches, mosques, government officials and policy-makers and talk openly about the disease and its spread.

"The overall policy is to create greater visibility of the HIV/AIDS problem among young people and to put those issues on the agenda with a view to cajoling governments to put more resources into fighting the virus," says CYP Africa Centre Director, Richard Mkandawire.