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2006 Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting:
Policy Brief

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Policy brief for the Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting, 22-26 May, 2006, Nassau, The Bahamas

Executive Summary

This year the CYP will seek a mandate from ministers to deepen its programme areas in the fields of Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GDYN), Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL) and Youth Work Education & Training (YWET). These new rubrics represent the condensation of the last triennium's programme areas which focussed on Youth Enterprise Development, Youth Networks and Governance, Youth Participation and Youth Work Education and Training. There is likely to be much discussion on how the CYP's financial resources can be improved in light of the increasingly heavy burden it carries. The argument is compelling, and without increased levels in pledges it becomes difficult to see how the CYP can move forward substantively. Attendance at this year should be quite high. The programme promises to be intense, dynamic and interactive, which bodes well for meaningful exchange.

Executive Summary

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1 Status, representation, recent meetings

Since first convening in 1992 both member-state representation at and relative levels of ministerial interest in the Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting (CYMM) have increased steadily. The last gathering took place in May 2003, in Gaborone, Botswana. 37 countries sent delegations. This was slightly lower than at the 2000 CYMM in Honiara, Solomon Islands where 39 countries were represented. However, ministerial level attendance was comparatively greater-with 23 national contingents headed by a relevant minister, as compared with only 16 in 2000.

Consonant with the Commonwealth's emphasis on centralising young people in governance processes, each member-state is invited to include at least one 'Youth representative' in its delegation. Since 2003 such representatives have, at the discretion of the head of their national delegation, been able to participate fully in the meetings. This year is expected to show further rises in both the levels of country representation and ministerial attendance. That national governments perceive a heightened utility in attending these events can be explained largely by two factors.

In recent years the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), has tried to ensure that delegates gain extended opportunities to discuss their experiences of designing and implementing youth development programmes. Ministers responded positively to an innovation, first introduced in 2003, which allowed for Ministerial Workshops and roundtable discussions on a range of conceptual and substantive questions. These provided the space for a greater dynamism and interactivity than was previously possible through the conventional plenary structure. This new approach will continue in Nassau. A key component of the Commonwealth's wider ethos and comparative advantage rests in this model of supportive information exchange. The CYMM tends to fulfil this requirement well.

Second, though hampered by significant budgetary constraints and continually encouraged to focus efforts on project management, the CYP has nonetheless built a credible capacity for research. Through strategic partnerships with key youth development stakeholders (among which the UN Youth Unit and World Bank will be giving reports to the conference) it is aware of and tends to be highly responsive to emergent ideas and approaches to youth development. The CYMM agenda generally reflects this and thus enables governments to access and engage with the cutting edge of youth development work efficiently.

Nevertheless, it should be noted that the absolute rise in attendance masks some key disparities. National delegations range from full complements of Ministers, senior officials, Youth council representatives, and members of relevant civil society groups, to, in some cases, a single official attached to their country's local High Commission. The relative depth of participation is often less a function of resource constraints (ABC countries tend to be comparatively underrepresented) and more an indicator of a member state's general level of commitment to the Commonwealth as a forum and/or youth development as a national priority.

The theme this year-“**Youth Empowerment for the Eradication of Poverty, Crime and HIV/AIDS**”-is a logical extension of the last meeting, which was organised around “**Young People: Development Partners Against Poverty and HIV/AIDS**”. The move towards acknowledging young people as active and valuable partners in the fight against these continually pervasive problems, rather than as simple beneficiaries of government initiatives, clearly is now entrenched.

2 Record for policy

The 1998 CYMM held in Kuala Lumpur was a seminal moment for Commonwealth action on youth development. After three years of preparation the now central *Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment* (PAYE) was finally adopted (and then subsequently endorsed by the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) in 1999. The PAYE was developed originally to provide a pan-Commonwealth strategic framework for youth development. Its guidelines and action points provide a jointly shared policy paradigm for national governments and the intergovernmental Commonwealth, (through the work of the CYP) to invest in and increase the social capital of the young Commonwealth.

Increasingly PAYE-based action has come to be viewed as a major vehicle for the Commonwealth’s broader attempt to attain the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The MDGs’ focus on the reduction of poverty and combating the spread of HIV/Aids has inevitably prioritised some PAYE objectives at the expense of others. This is set to continue. 2003 saw CHOGM recognise that, with more than 50% of Commonwealth citizens below aged 30, attempts to achieve the MDGs would need to be responsive to this reality. Consequently programmes formulated through the PAYE prism are bound to become even more intertwined with the broader MDG effort.

Historically, CYMMs have engaged with Commonwealth youth policy on two interrelated levels. On a national level, it is difficult to assess the extent to which within any one triennial cycle CYMM agreements have genuinely informed and motivated youth policy. One early success revolved around a PAYE-led initiative for member states to develop (with technical assistance as and when required of the CYP) their own national youth policies. As of 2006, over 45 countries now have, or are in the process of developing, youth policies. African countries, in particular, have embraced the idea, with 20 out of 21 Commonwealth African member-states having adopted a policy. Governments have noted that the *process* of developing a policy itself has often proved useful in catalysing a dialogue with young constituents.

Nevertheless, youth development work (both in national and pan-Commonwealth terms) is persistently and pertinently critiqued for its often woolly nature. Without an empirical framework through which youth work practitioners can assess both the depth of need and the scale of a specific project’s success or failure, work in this area is bound to remain both piecemeal and hamstrung by the limitations of the qualitative frameworks currently employed to identify and review youth development targets.

It was recognition of this fact that led the 1998 Kuala Lumpur CYMM to endorse the development of a Youth Development Index (YDI) to accompany the formulation and pursuit of PAYE targets. The CYP and Commonwealth Secretariat as a whole were mandated with the task of organizing a series of *viable* youth development indicators that could transform the PAYE from a good idea into a powerful instrument for transformation. A fully developed YDI (based on the Human Development Index model) offers astonishing potential. Leaving aside the popular cynicism towards statistics, armed with clearer localized indicators and assessments youth ministries, development agencies and civil society groups would be much more able to explain and justify the level of financial support needed from national treasuries and the main international donors in pursuit of their strategic aims.

Up to now some good progress has been made. A recent project in the Caribbean (with funding assistance to the tune of USD \$ 260 000 from the Organisation of American States) has sought to put together a computerised system to collect and organise data on young people. However the financial obstacles remain daunting. Current estimates cost the full development of the YDI at roughly USD five million. To put this in perspective, the CYP on average subsists on an annual budget of USD *four* million. Further work on the YDI is thus dependent on the CYP's ability to build and maintain strong supportive links with better funded youth development agencies. Fortunately, this is happening, and there remains even greater scope for collaboration. In late January 2005 key UN agencies, intergovernmental organisations and the World Bank gathered in Coimbra, Portugal to review the World Plan of Action on Youth. It was decided formally that the CYP should take the lead to develop the YDI.

It is this second level of policy-mandating and reviewing CYP progress-that takes up the majority of CYMM time. The YDI issue, in particular, helps highlight the increasingly fraught tightrope that up to now CYMMs are obliging the CYP to walk. As a subdivision of an organisation dependent on contributions from often under-resourced member-states, it is entirely correct for the bulk of the CYP's efforts to lie in brokering and implementing programmes that contribute to youth development on the ground. There have been, with reference to the PAYE framework some notable successes. Working through the *Youth Enterprise Development (YED)* strategic programme mandated in 2003 (which itself evolved from the original 1998 PAYE core area of work on *Youth Empowerment*), the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative (CYCI) has had a profound and positive impact on the lives of thousands of young citizens. In India over 7500 businesses have been created. A pilot project in Malawi and Namibia is also yielding results with recipients of credit testifying to the transformative impact it is having on their lives. The flagship 'Diploma in Youth Development work' continues to thrive also. Currently delivered through the 2003 mandated *Youth Work Education and Training (YET)* programme, it helps raise the credibility of youth work and provides a body of quality assured trained professionals to ensure youth development work remains up to date with the best ideas available.

Nevertheless it is critical that governments truly understand the constraints under which the CYP is working and the conditions under which it can optimise performance. There is

a tendency for each subsequent CYMM to ask more of the CYP in the context of continually emerging needs. With virtually nil budgetary growth since 1995, it is difficult to see how this trend can continue if the CYP is to continue delivering meaningful results. Ministers will consider the Strategic Plan for 2006-2008. It suggests the condensation of the current mandate (with some adjustments) into three deeper programme areas-*Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL)*, *Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GDYN)* and *Youth Work Education and Training (YET)*. Ministers would do well to take the hint and avoid overburdening the CYP. Otherwise diminishing marginal returns are likely to become more apparent.

The CYP stands apart from most other Commonwealth Secretariat divisions in terms of the number of regional and national programmes it plays a direct role in implementing. Nevertheless as the YDI project reveals, it also possesses the capacity for high quality research and the potential to act as a catalysing agent for broader youth development initiatives. Many other divisions of the Secretariat perform a similar role-using their extensive networks with the wider multilateral landscape to flag up salient issues facing member-states (the cross-divisional advocacy work performed by the Commonwealth with regard to small island states is a good example). Perhaps it is time for the CYMM to formally recognise and endorse this increasingly critical aspect of the CYP's work.

It's easy to forget that the CYP is a tiny organisation in absolute terms. Their network of regional offices can often suggest a greater presence and capacity than is accurate. Within the current fiscal climate, their ability to act as a service delivering development agency is therefore quite limited. There is much more space however for the CYP to exploit its comparative advantages (an excellent multilevel pan-Commonwealth network, a wealth of knowledge gained from a long record of programme delivery and a high degree of international credibility) to contribute substantively to the formulation of *extra-Commonwealth* youth development initiatives that might in the long term yield significant benefits for member-states. The question at hand is not about abandoning project delivery in favour of a brokerage/policy unit model, but rather one of more openly validating this sphere of the CYP's work. For too long it has been perceived as a discretionary and/or incidental extra.

3 Agenda for 2006

The current draft agenda, which will be confirmed or amended on the eve of the conference, is as follows:

1 Pre-meetings (Monday, 22 May-Tuesday, 23 May)

- (i) The Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus (PYC) and Regional Youth Caucuses (RYC) will hold meetings.
- (ii) Pan-Commonwealth Regional Advisory Board (RAB) will also convene.
- (iii) Three thematic workshops (each run twice) will focus on the CYP's strategic priorities and a further four will reflect on the 2005 CHOGM mandate and the primary themes for this year's CYMM.

Opening ceremony and reception (1800-2100 on Tuesday, 23 May)

National delegations, PYC and RYC representatives, partner organizations and observer groups will be in attendance. The official photograph will be taken at this point.

Opening remarks (Wednesday, 24 May)

2 Adoption of Agenda

3 CYP progress reports 2003-2006 (0930-1045)

- (i) CYP Performance and Evaluation Report: A Summary Report by the Commonwealth Secretary-General
- (ii) CYP Performance and Evaluation Report 2003-2006
- (iii) Report from the Pan-Commonwealth Youth Caucus

4 The Way Forward (1115-1600)

- (i) Key Paper by the Commonwealth Secretariat- *The Commonwealth's Response to Youth Global Challenges in the 21st Century*
- (ii) CYP Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE) 2006-2015
- (iii) Youth Development Strategies-The Malaysian Experience
- (iv) CYP Strategic and Operational Plans 2006-2008
- (v) CYP Budget Performance and Resource Provision

- (vi) Programme Priorities for 2006-2008.
 - (a) Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GDYN).
 - (b) Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods (YESL).
 - (c) Youth Work Education & Training (YWET).

- (vii) CYP Planning Cycle

5 Reports from Collaborating Partner Agencies (1630-1730)

- Commonwealth of Learning (CoL)
- Commonwealth Youth Exchange Council (CYEC)

- UN Youth Unit (UNYU)/UNICEF
- World Bank (WB)
- Commonwealth Advisory Body on Sports (CABOS)

6 Ministerial Thematic Key Papers (Thursday 25 May-0900-1045)

Four thematic papers and two presentations on cross cutting issues

- (i) Crime and Violence
- (ii) HIV/AIDS the Challenges for Young People
- (iii) CHOGM Mandate on Respect and Understanding
- (iv) CHOGM Mandate on the Digital Divide

- (a) National Youth Policy and National Youth Councils
- (b) Youth Mainstreaming

6A Ministerial Workshops on CHOGM Mandates and 6 CYMM Theme (1115-1230)

- (i) Crime and Violence (repeat of RAB session)
- (ii) HIV/AIDS the Challenges for Young People (repeat of RAB Session)
- (iii) CHOGM Mandate on Respect and Understanding (Repeat of RAB Session)
- (iv) CHOGM Mandate on the Digital Divide (Repeat of RAB Session)

6B Ministerial Workshops on Youth development(1400-1530)

- (i) Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE)
- (ii) Youth Development Index (YDI)
- (iii) Youth Mainstreaming
- (iv) National Youth Policy (NYP) and National Youth Councils (NYC)

6C Plenary Session (Reporting Back on Ministerial Workshops) (1600-1640)

6D Consolidating Workshop Outcomes into CYP Strategic and Operational Plans (1640-1720)

7 Commonwealth Youth Development Awards-2005/2006 Winners (1720-1730)

8 Financial Reports (Thursday 26 May-0900-1030)

9 Conclusions and Recommendations (1100-1245)

- (i) Communiqué
- (ii) Message to CHOGM 2007

10 Any Other Business (1245-1300)

- (i) Youth Forum at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (16CCEM)-Presentation by South Africa
- (ii) Venue for CYMM 2008
- (iii) Meeting of Interim Committee

4 Comments on numbered agenda items

1(i)&(ii), 4(vi-c), 6B(iv)

In her key paper entitled ‘Governance, Development and Youth Networks (GYDN)-Programme Priorities 2006-2008’ Amanda Shah rightly reminds us of Article 12 of the International Convention on the Rights of the Child (ICRC), which states that “young people have the right to participate in decisions which affect them; states have a corresponding responsibility to ensure this right is upheld; [and] the views expressed by young people should be taken into account”. Matthew Albert, a Commonwealth Youth Caucus representative for the South Pacific, puts it more boldly, “If youth are the leaders of tomorrow, we should be leaders of today also”.

Through collaboration with member-states the CYP has sought to satisfy the right and desire of young people to help design and implement development strategies in a series of ways. In intergovernmental terms, the Commonwealth Youth Caucus (CYC), composed of regional representatives has had full speaking rights at ministerial meetings since 2003. Perhaps more significantly the Regional Advisory Boards (which represent the final level of corporate governance for the CYP) also make provisions for youth representation. In some senses therefore, it would be fair to say that Commonwealth agencies have slowly begun to exemplify the principles of youth governance that it has espoused in the most recent years. However, the question of ‘youth representation’ needs to be unpacked further.

The provision of technical assistance to enable youth ministries to develop National Youth Policies (NYP) has been a priority of the CYP for some time. A common theme that emerges in national consultations is the question of youth participation. Throughout the Commonwealth and beyond, the most popular means of accommodating young people in political life has been through the establishment of National Youth Councils (NYC). In ‘National Youth Councils (NYC)-Programme Priorities 2006-2008’, Armstrong Alexis describes these as “agencies that help that help young people to identify, match and meet their needs with the offerings of government and other service providers. Despite this commonality of aim, there remains a real plurality when it comes to how NYCs are structured, funded and perceived around the Commonwealth. Some are clearly autonomous and enable young people to freely articulate their views on government policy while others are specifically designed to illustrate a government’s supposed commitment to youth participation and little else.

Cognizant of this diversity the CYP has prepared a blueprint for the establishment of any new NYCs. While acknowledging that a single model might be inappropriate its argument comprises two generalisable prongs. The first is that NYCs, though funded by governments should be allowed complete freedom to formulate and advocate positions, irrespective of their critical content. Second, is an emphasis on the democratisation of the NYCs-with strong youth organisations at grassroots level, regional groupings of more local units and then a final super-structure. Theoretically this would allow for rigorous

political contests at every level, ensuring that the eventual executive both possessed the necessary political flair to negotiate with governments and also could bring greater weight to such interactions by claiming a direct political mandate.

Ministers are encouraged to press the CYP to investigate how links between the Commonwealth Youth Caucus and *democratic* NYCs can be streamlined and strengthened. One solution might be to make recent experience as a senior national youth representative a formal precondition for competing to gain a place within the CYC. As it stands, chairs and other senior members of NYCs *have* been involved with the Youth Caucus. However their participation is hit or miss, depending on how successfully the CYP has managed to counter the generally widespread ignorance of the Commonwealth among young people in any one locality. Consequently, while the CYC has been lucky to attract a series of very talented young activists, their status as 'representatives' is often more implied by a history of engagement than by any proper mandate. The potential danger here

is that the CYP's much vaunted 'spiral of development' which argues that young people's participation in governance enables them to develop as active citizens benefits only a small pool of self selected individuals. While it's true that history is made by those who turn up, there is required a greater systemic effort to ensure that the CYC is comprised of youth representatives with a clearly identifiable constituency to whom they are accountable.

4(iv),(v), (vii) and 8.

It is not insignificant that in his circular letter dated 3 March 2006 the Secretary-General makes specific mention of the increasingly tight financial resources available to the CYP. Pledges to the programme were last examined in 1995. This time round there is (by necessity) a real push from the CYP for a full and frank discussion on both the level of pledges, and non payment of pledges. Previous CYMMs have suggested that CYP staff secure extra-budgetary resources to cover any shortfalls. Their record on this has been patchy. On the one hand, governments and academic institutions have often revealed themselves to be fully committed to aiding the delivery of the Diploma in Youth Work. Indeed, there is a good chance that at some point in the future the programme may become self sustaining. Other ventures have not fared so well.

The last CYMM examined the role of the Corporate Sector as a Partner in Development. CYP has had little success, and not for want of trying in attracting corporate funding. Particularly within the developing Commonwealth, firms remain dubious about either the potential of young people to form a viable market (which might repay any early investment), and ignorant about the Commonwealth. Furthermore, even where extra-budgetary resources have been secured, negotiations take up an inordinate amount of time, while a negative experience of outsourcing fundraising makes it unlikely that the CYP will take that risk again. One solution might be for youth ministries to develop a closer partnership with the CYP to raise funds from within their respective economies. Ministries could exploit their stronger visibility and deeper links with the corporate sector to channel funds into locally based CYP projects. Nonetheless, it is crucial to raise the

core budget if the CYP is to have any chance of fulfilling the rather grand mandates that CYMMs have a tendency to come up with.

5 Interaction with other bodies

The CYP has sought to counter its financial weakness by developing partnerships with a series of central development agencies. Particularly strong at the moment are the links between the CYP and the UN-system as development of the Youth Development Index moves forward. As the Commonwealth begins to reflect more seriously on the potential of ICT for a range of development paradigms it will be particularly interesting to hear the contribution of the Commonwealth of Learning (CoL). Many of its programmes have anticipated this growing excitement and of all the Commonwealth agencies they have the longest history of using technological advances to further their strategic aims.

6 Other issues

The CYP faces a series of challenges in the next two years-exporting the CYCI model to the broader Commonwealth, further developing the Youth Development Index and completing its integration into the mainstream Commonwealth's managerial and governance cycles. The success of the organisation up till now is largely down to the talents and commitment of staff who have skilfully leveraged its reputation and comparative advantages to establish a reputation among governments and agencies as a desirable youth development partner. Unfortunately the CYP will soon be losing key staff. Zimbabwe's withdrawal from the Commonwealth means that Mr Takawira, current Director of the CYP will not have his contract renewed. Furthermore, the 'staff rotation' policy that requires Commonwealth personnel to leave after two successive contract terms will mean that both the Deputy Director and a senior programme adviser are set to move in December.

Staff rotation was first introduced with the laudable aim of 'releasing experienced people to contribute to development in their own countries and enabling the Secretariat to introduce new skills aligned with current programme demands. Put more bluntly, it was meant to get rid of the dead wood. However the crudeness of it means that more talented and dynamic staff members are also lost. In the context of financial pressure which means that salaries for replacements are often offered at a lower rate and position responsibilities rationalised the Secretariat runs a tremendous cross divisional risk of no longer attracting the best and brightest. Furthermore in an organisation staffed by a bit more than 200 people, the development of strong networks with other organisations is crucial to its success. In a culture where the maximum tenure is six years (and many new staff choose to leave before this) that becomes more difficult.

For a small organisation like the Pan-Commonwealth Office of the CYP the effects on programming could be disastrous if such a wealth of institutional memory and political savvy is lost. The ideal situation would be for the current deputy director and senior adviser to be vertically promoted after Mr. Takawira's departure, thus minimizing losses. Since this is unlikely, ministers are encouraged to gain strong reassurances from the Secretary-General than any replacements have a strong background in programming and

a real depth of intergovernmental experience. The size of the CYP means that recruitment of new staff is too important to get wrong.

Author, Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit, acknowledgements

Born in Trinidad, Frank Soodeen is currently interning at the CPSU with responsibility for the upcoming 'Summer Conference for Young People'. A graduate of Edinburgh University, he is currently completing postgraduate studies in Ethnicity and Multiculturalism at Bristol. The Commonwealth Policy Studies Unit (CPSU) began its work in 1999. It seeks to identify major policies for the Commonwealth; research and formulate solutions for policy makers in governments, business and NGOs and spread its findings as an independent body. Output is publicly available on its website: www.cpsu.org.uk

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