

Caribbean Youth Development



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A paradigm shift in youth development policy

A Caribbean Youth Day lecture by Dr Ivan Henry to inaugurate a regional lecture series organised by the Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre (CYPCC)



Dr Ivan Henry

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I want to start by congratulating the Commonwealth Youth Programme and the current Regional Director for reviving the tradition of rolling out at least one innovative project per year for the development of Caribbean youth. I also wish to commend the Government of Barbados, through the Ministry of EYAS, and in particular, the Division of Youth Affairs, for always being at the front of the queue to run with any new ideas that promise to enhance its capacity to empower our young people. I am delighted to be the first contributor to this series of lectures, which are intended to bring about a paradigm shift in the Youth Policy environment. I thank you for the

opportunity to share my thoughts with you on a subject that has been my mission and my passion all my life, while working and living in several different Commonwealth countries. I also want to remind you that even though many of the references are to situations in Barbados to which the audience can relate, they also apply to all the other countries of the region, simply because we are one people.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most remarkable observations in ex-colonial, Commonwealth countries, and dare I say most countries of the world, is the willingness of service providers whose responsibility is to serve the people and to help them break free from the shackles that retard progress, to choose to take on roles that invariably enable them to shirk that responsibility. Built into every role in such countries are written and unwritten rules of behaviour, brought forward from a previous less egalitarian era that define the relationship between the dispenser and receiver of the service. It is essentially a political relationship with the balance of power tilted in favour of the dispenser.

This often manifests itself in strained relationships between:

- **rich and poor**
- **employer and employee**
- **shopkeeper and customer**
- **white and black**
- **man and woman**
- **old and young**
- **teacher and pupil**
- **parent and child**

Throughout childhood, during what is called the process of socialization, the nature of these relationships is learned and reinforced until it becomes the norm. Children learn what behaviour is expected of them and in most cases comply with the wishes of those who have authority over them.

Built into every role in such countries are written and unwritten rules of behaviour, brought forward from a previous less egalitarian era that define the relationship between the dispenser and receiver of the service.

By the time a child reaches adulthood in the Caribbean context, s/he fully understands who, in each of these role relationships, has the power to constrain the behaviour of the other, and to persuade him/her to act in particular ways even when it is against their own interest.

Even though some children may question the relationship between these linked roles during adolescence, so powerful are these norms and the sanctions at the disposal of the society, that most of them decide to give up the struggle and to comply by the time they reach the age of 25. These are the terms on which the vast majority of young people are fully integrated into the society as adult members.

THESIS

But does it have to be like this? From a sociological perspective there is nothing sacred or immutable about the status quo. Indeed it is easy to conceive of a situation in which the roles are reversed. The

truth is that the employer, the shopkeeper, the teacher, and even the parent could find themselves in a more egalitarian and even subordinate role relationship if the other party could (peacefully) amass sufficient resources to shift the balance of power in their favour. How feasible is this in our region?

The period we are now living through is one of those rare occasions in history when we have to acknowledge that the tide is turning in favour of youth. As you know we are currently experiencing a technological revolution that is forcing us to make a fundamental break with the past. It was Nicholai Kondratiev (of Soviet Russia) who reminded us that new civilizations emerge as a result of technological revolutions that offer solutions to serious challenges that threaten the survival of existing societies. For example the discovery of the stirrup enabled horsemen to ride out of their geographical confines, to stay in the saddle for much longer and plunder neighbouring tribes. It enabled the likes of Genghis Khan to conquer and unite previously weak and isolated tribes into one of the largest and most powerful empires the world has known. Similarly the harnessing of steam by Matthew Bolton, James

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Watt and William Murdock enabled the British middle class to convert displaced peasants into industrial workers and propel a collection of small islands off the coast of Europe into carving out the British Empire, on which the sun never set. Over shorter periods, industrial innovations revive sagging capitalist economies and prevent the collapse of Western economies as Karl Marx predicted. For this insight, Kondratiev spent 8 years in a Communist prison in the 1930's.

Today the microchip is transforming our world. The new technology is rapidly changing every area of our lives from manufacturing to the provision of services, from transport to entertainment, from communication to mass destruction in war. Above all, it has increased our access to information. And if information is power, then those who have access to information are in a prime position to amass power.

It so happens, that at this point in time, young people seem to have a



Directors of Youth and other stakeholders at one of several sessions organised by CYPCC throughout the year.

The problem is that in many cases these challenges are unique to us in the Caribbean and it is not in the interests of those who have historically seduced us into believing that they are our messiahs to come to our rescue. This time we are on our own; and much more than “subdued hysteria” and begging for help will save us.

mastery of the technology that far surpasses that of their elders. I am not sure if it is the methodology of intuitive learning associated with the new technology or the natural fascination of the young with novelties or the playfulness of the new gadgets. But the fact is that young people have an absolute advantage over their elders in using modern equipment. Whether it is computers, or ipods, or DVD's or robots young people are at the cutting edge of the use and development of these machines, which now dominate our lives. This is the new frontier for those who are privileged to experiment with the new technology. It is significant to note that Bill Gates only succeeded when he broke out of the constraints of the traditional educational methodology by dropping out of college and doing what he enjoyed in his garage.

It is that spirit of adventure, that sense of freedom, that method of learning through doing, that we want to engender in our young people. It is that feeling of going where mankind has never gone before that we want to foster among our youth. It is that belief

that they can break free of the shackles of convention that we want to develop among our youth. It is that problem-solving approach to challenges, an approach that has been systematically suppressed in our education system, that we want to cultivate among our youth.

I believe that there are a number of challenges that are ticking away like time-bombs in our Caribbean communities, which if not addressed as a matter of urgency have the capacity to wipe us off the face of the earth. I fear that the standard response is that if we do nothing, someone somewhere will find a solution and come riding in like a white knight in shining armour, on a white horse, to rescue us from disaster. The problem is that in many cases these challenges are unique to us in the Caribbean and it is not in the interests of those who have historically seduced us into believing that they are our messiahs to come to our rescue. This time we are on our own; and much more than “subdued hysteria” and begging for help will save us.

Recent research across the region, including some in which I have been personally involved in Guyana and Dominica for example, indicate that these issues include the following:

- i. Low self-esteem deriving from the lack of an authentic ethnic identity
- ii. The suppression of a culture, defined as a way of life, that works for those who subscribe to it
- iii. The erosion of the spiritual bedrock of our society
- iv. Strained and conflict-ridden gender relations
- v. Inability to cope with natural disasters
- vi. Persistent poverty
- vii. The unrelenting spread of HIV/AIDS
- viii. Failure to appreciate the psychological, social, economic, and health benefits of sports
- ix. The routine abuse of substances like alcohol and marijuana
- x. Failure to prepare for inevitable Caribbean integration

The small island states of the Caribbean are notoriously prone to natural disasters. Every year we are surprised by hurricanes, with insufficient resources to mitigate the impact of such disasters and recover quickly from them. Compare the response of Cuba to impending hurricanes.

Women in the Caribbean won their stripes during slavery, and continue to prove their worth by producing and reproducing the most valuable resources our countries have to offer. Their contributions to the economy and their ability to both mother and father their children are legendary.

The standard approach to these challenges is fraught with danger. Doing nothing is no longer an option. Let us consider them in a bit more detail.

(1) Low self-esteem: The importance of self-esteem in overcoming problems cannot be over emphasized. High-self esteem derives from a positive identity that finds reflection and reinforcement in one's ethnicity. The only ethnicity that the majority of us can categorically claim to be ours is an African identity.

That being the case, how much are we as a people, who are unmistakably of African origin willing to identify with Africa? And how much do we know of the positive contributions that Africa and Africans have made to world civilization over thousands of years? Why has our education system traditionally focused and why does it continue to focus on the achievements of Europeans and Europe?

(2) Culture

I distinctly remember Professor John Rex, one of the foremost Race Relations experts in Britain giving a keynote lecture in Birmingham in 1988 on the contributions to British Society by the various ethnic groups who settled in that great city after World War II. When it came to West Indians, all he could single out as distinctly Caribbean was the annual Carnival. Everything else, from religion to cricket was a variation on British culture. All the other groups were defining their uniqueness in cultural terms and using their culture as a way of life that defended them from racism and more important, that was helping them to create wealth and employment for their people. The link between culture, ethnicity and identity should now be clear.

Is "wuk-up" the only culture we can claim to be our own? How can our real culture that we know exists underground in a disjointed form, begin to work for us in the Caribbean? Have we got enough confidence to assert it and demonstrate that we are different, but equal?

(3) Spiritual Well-Being

There is currently considerable concern about the increase in violence and anti-social behaviour among young people. The National Commission on Law and Order in Barbados concluded that the erosion of moral values, underpinned by spiritual beliefs, were the causes of the escalation of such behaviour.

Even though conflict, manifesting itself in anti-social behaviour can draw attention to social injustice, the point needs to be made that no society can survive for any length of time without value consensus deriving from common spiritual beliefs.

Can we afford to let our children grow up without spiritual moorings for their social values?

(4) Gender Relations

Gender relations in the Caribbean are currently at an all time low. It is not because the conditions under which women live out their lives are worse. On the contrary it is because those conditions are improving. Women in the Caribbean won their stripes during slavery, and continue to prove their worth by producing and reproducing the most valuable resources our countries have to offer. Their contributions to the economy and

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their ability to both mother and father their children are legendary. Their educational achievement, measured in terms of their outnumbering men 2:1 in our major tertiary level institutions place them in a position to make and even larger contribution to what Hon. Dr. Ralph Gonsalves, the Prime Minister of St. Vincent and the Grenadines calls the emerging Caribbean civilization. And it is this very achievement, which has caused a violent male backlash, now being monitored by my colleague Diane Cummins and various women's organizations across the region.

It would appear that in the heads of men is a residual male chauvinistic culture, enshrined in the norms of the society that define women as subordinate, a conviction that is constantly colliding with a reality that demonstrates that in many cases a woman is the best man for the job.



Another training programme in the region attended by CYP.

What are the long-term implications of this conflict between male and female partners? And above all how can we resolve it?

(5) Natural Disasters

The small island states of the Caribbean are notoriously prone to natural disasters. Every year we are surprised by hurricanes, with insufficient resources to mitigate the impact of such disasters and recover quickly from them. Compare the response of Cuba to impending hurricanes. There is always a massive evacuation before and a massive

reconstruction campaign after the event.

Not even in the richest country of the region, Trinidad and Tobago, are we prepared for disasters. The recent earthquake was a sad reminder. It is patently obvious that we must do better if we want to survive.

(6) Persistent Poverty

One of the advantages of growing old, is the opportunity to witness how persistent poverty can be for particular individuals and groups. Over and above a profound theoretical understanding of why certain strata in society remain poor, I see it with my own eyes. I remember people being poor in the 1950's and find them again nearly 50 years later still caught up in a cycle of poverty. Our villages contain considerable evidence of people who have been by-passed by national progress. Despite the fact that they are intelligent people, despite the fact that they have been law-abiding citizens, despite the fact that they have worked hard all their lives, they are still trapped in a culture of poverty.

In many countries of the region every year thousands of young people come on to the job market with high expectations only to face a situation in which youth unemployment rates hover around 50%.

It is therefore not too difficult to predict what will happen to the unemployed youth, the boys on the block and even the army of "working poor" who eke out a living on the margin of our society.

Surely we can do better.

(7) HIV/AIDS

I do not have to tell you that the rate of HIV/AIDS in the Caribbean is the second highest in the world. I do not have to tell you that because HIV/AIDS is a disease that is primarily transmitted in normal sexual intercourse, every time you practice unsafe sex you run the risk of contracting the disease. And in a society where having a child is a rite of passage to adulthood, in which young people routinely count having a child as one of their major achievements, a society in which there is still a stigma attached to

childlessness, the pressure to have sex is considerable. Add to this the pressure from music and the peer group, which Richard Carter has been studying for many years. It should therefore not surprise you to hear that the rate of contracting HIV is now highest among youth, and that young women are contracting it at an alarming rate. Mother-to-child transmission in those jurisdictions where widespread testing and anti-retroviral treatment are not available poses another threat to our survival.

What advice can we give to young people who court death in the act of creating life?

On a daily basis they live through the trauma of the collision of their perception of reality and their dreams of the future with the established norms carrying all the cultural baggage from the past.

(8) Sports

No one who has read the works of C.L.R. James could fail to conclude that we have not even begun to understand the importance of sport in our lives. Once again Cuba has shown how sports could be a means of national development, with considerable spin-offs in terms of self-esteem, income, national pride, good health and social well-being.

In a region that is renowned for its sporting prowess, we find that only a small minority of young people are involved in sports. Talented young people are involved only as spectators, while obesity and related illnesses are on the increase. Professor Henry Frazer is constantly reminding of the financial and social costs of "couch potato" lifestyles. Research throughout the region is showing that a decreasing number of youth are getting involved in sports.

In 2007 the eyes of the world will be on the Caribbean as thousands of visitors descend on the region for ICC Cricket World Cup. How prepared are we to capitalize on this opportunity and to derive maximum benefit in all the areas of life that sports affect? How ready are our young people to cash in on this sporting extravaganza? And as an aside, what chance does the West Indies cricket team have of winning the cup at home?

I believe that hosting the World Cup is a major achievement for the region and it is not too late to fire the imagination of young people and mobilize them to get involved and derive some benefit from it.

(9) Substance Abuse

The traditional abuse of alcohol with all the social pathologies associated with it is now compounded by the abuse of marijuana. Whereas the alcoholic breadwinner worked all week and got stoned over the weekend, the modern drug addict is unable to hold down a job. In order to survive s/he has to resort to illegal and immoral means of earning a dollar, in our increasingly rigid cash economies.

In 2007 the eyes of the world will be on the Caribbean as thousands of visitors descend on the region for ICC Cricket World Cup. How prepared are we to capitalize on this opportunity and to derive maximum benefit in all the areas of life that sports affect?

What are the long-term effects of substance abuse among young people? Are we doomed to be over-run by the drug culture that can hold even governments to ransom?

(10) Caribbean Integration

It is patently obvious that Caribbean integration in an era of globalization is inevitable. It is a beautiful idea whose time is coming. But are we ready for the movement of large numbers of people and goods freely and efficiently throughout the region?

Are we ready to receive immigrant workers from neighbouring countries, even when they are descendents of previous migrants from the receiving countries? What kind of reception do the grandchildren of Mr. Alleyne

who went to Guyana or St. Lucia 40 years ago get when they turn up at Grantley Adams International Airport in Barbados? For that matter what kind of reception do returning nationals who were born in the country get when they return home after spending 30 or more years in Europe or America?

How ready are we for the CARICOM single market and economy? What will we have to sell to each other if we are all producing the same things? Even if we start producing goods and services for which each country has a comparative advantage, how are we going to get it from A to B? How can I get bananas that are overflowing in St. Vincent and St. Lucia to Barbados where I pay almost a dollar for a single one? What is the state of marine transport in the Caribbean?

Above all how many of our young people are being pointed in the direction of business as a career? How many of our young people have dropped out of education because they did not become the doctor or lawyer their parents and teachers had in mind while they were educating them?



Commonwealth Caribbean Youth Exchange 2006 .

What will happen to our young people who have been conditioned to get a job when those jobs are being done by people from neighbouring countries and from as far away as Asia at a fraction of the wages that the local worker expects?

My friends the extent of xenophobia, the fear and contempt for the foreigner, is so great across the region, that I feel that unless a massive education programme is introduced there will be blood on our streets.

I believe that nothing short of a crusade can save us from any combination of these disasters listed above.

What is needed is an army of change agents. We need people who are willing to think and act outside the box. We need people who, when they come to a cross-roads are willing to consider doing the opposite of what their impulse, based on the kind of socialization they have had, tells them to do. We need people who are strong enough to go in a direction opposite to the one in which the herd is rushing. The consequence of a significant number of people doing this is what Thomas Kuhn (in The Structure of Scientific Revolutions) calls a "Paradigm shift". This is when a scientific community succumbs to overwhelming evidence and shifts from one theory or perspective to another. There is now enough evidence for us to believe that the traditional way of educating and bringing up our youth is wrong...wrong...wrong.

I believe that young people, during the period of transition from childhood to adulthood are best suited for the role of change agent. As newcomers to adult society they feel most intensely the pressure to conform. On a daily basis they live through the trauma of the collision of their perception of reality and their dreams of the future with the established norms carrying all the cultural baggage from the past. And because they have no sentimental attachment to the status quo they would shed no tears to let it go.

The truth is that those of us who are products of a bloody and oppressive past have little to teach young people about coping with the challenges of the present or creating a brighter future. Frankly we just do not have the answers. What can we tell our children about a Black identity when we were brought up stupid under the Union Jack? What can we teach our youth who are confronted with the threat of HIV/AIDS during the child-bearing period of their lives? What can we say to them about creating wealth and employment through enterprise when we have spent our entire lives doing jobs? What can we advise them about the Caribbean when we do not know the neighbouring countries?

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, instead of telling children and young people, what they should do, we should encourage them to adopt a problem-solving approach to life, and create the conditions for them to experiment with solutions. My friends, I am speaking about a new approach to education that allows students to bring projects and problems to the classroom, instead of coming to slavishly follow a curriculum. I am speaking about interest-based education.

And where do we go from here? We cannot rely on the hide-bound and sacrosanct education system to change over-night. What is needed is a new institution that offers young people choice in areas of interest and exploration. All the ten challenges described above should be of consuming interest to them.

We therefore need a programme that is based on an honest admission that we want young people to participate fully in an effort to solve problems that really belong to them. We need to give them a sense of ownership.

At the same time we must release them from social bondage and empower them to take responsibility for their own salvation. We need to help them break out of the political and economic confines that have frustrated their development and that of their communities.

For example, let us take two vital social institutions from which young people are debarred. Consider politics. How can we justify telling young people to stay away from politics, when this is the primary institution through which the nation's resources are distributed? Why do you think that the needs of young people are not addressed? If you are not at the table when the cake is being sliced up, you cannot expect to get more than the crumbs that fall from it. Politics permeate every area of our lives and young people have the right to participate, particularly because they constitute the largest voting block in most developing countries.

I believe that an institution that is based on choice, that values life-long learning and encourages young people to think outside the box and to take responsibility for their own future is desperately needed in the Caribbean.

Another institution in which the participation of young people is minimal is the economy. Not only are they marginalized through unemployment, but also because they do not have access to resources to create wealth. And so most discussions with young people end with the admission that there is really nothing that can be done to change things.

The truth is that young people constitute the most powerful resource in any country. This huge reservoir of energy and creativity is dammed up by a culture of scarcity and regulated by money. If only young people could grasp the feasibility of volunteering their services for work done in exchange for other goods and services produced by young people in the same cartel, the problem could be solved. Instead of waiting for money to get things done, young people could apply their energy and talents to problems that confront them and use a local currency as a

means of exchange. I am here speaking of a sophisticated form of multi-party barter, which is known as Local Exchange Trading Systems (LETS) and which has been used extensively in Japan and Europe to reconstruct their communities after the destruction of World War II, when money was scarce.

I believe that an institution that is based on choice, that values life-long learning and encourages young people to think outside the box and to take responsibility for their own future is desperately needed in the Caribbean. I believe that this institution should be handed to young people to manage with appropriate contributions from other stakeholders and I believe that the proposed voluntary National Youth Service Programme that is being refined in preparation for implementation in many countries of the region is that institution.

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Redefining the OECS youth development agenda: Empowerment for sustainable development

By Henry Charles



Henry Charles is the Regional Director of the Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre

I must admit upon receipt of the correspondence inviting the Commonwealth Youth Programme to participate in

this conference I had some misgivings about the theme “Youth, crime and violence.”

These misgivings did not originate from any diminished perception of the significant contribution the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States has and continues to make towards the sustainable development of the member territories.

Instead the influencing factor was my own wariness with the apparent pervasive tendency on the part of too many policy makers to treat young people as problems to be addressed.

However notwithstanding my initial trepidation the decision to support and participate in this process is based on two important principles.

First it is historically important that yet another credible regional development agency has recognized the significance of becoming a partner in the regional youth development agenda. Secondly the conference itself allows a critical opportunity for sharing of ideas and grinding out strategies to help transform the regional youth development landscape.

Methodology

I must warn the thrust of this paper does not strictly conform to guidelines provided for submission of conference papers. It is not an academic analysis of any of the issues related to “Youth, crime and violence.”

The main thrust of the paper is to highlight the inadequacy of prevailing youth development policies and strategies and propose a paradigm shift.

This approach is anchored by the firm belief that a paradigm shift in the youth development strategy and agenda is urgently necessary if we are to address the many youth development challenges including that of youth, crime and violence.

Introduction

Within recent times there is growing panic among the citizenry regarding the negative manifestations of youth socialization and development. Throughout the Caribbean the widely held view among many commentators is that we seem to be facing a virtual crisis in youth development. Such concerns and opinions have dominated national and regional conferences and meetings, newspaper columns, the various ‘TALK SHOWS’ and other popular media. Let us juxtapose this against the virtual panic in the United States in the 1980s, when prophets of doom predicted that there would be a “blood bath across the US” with

youth crime being unstoppable. Of course history has proven otherwise and statistics bore out a drastic reduction in crime in the 1990s and early 2000. There were several cogent reasons for this that you can research.

Then and now Governments are under increasing pressure to formulate and implement effective strategies to manage this perceived crisis.

The youth development landscape

Faced with such overwhelming challenges Caribbean Governments have to large extent switched to panic mode. Most governments if not all have demonstrated some measure of concern for, at least the negative manifestations of these youth development challenges.

The truth is that, over the last two decades youth development in the Caribbean has assumed a far more complex and challenging character.

The prevailing economic, social and political ethos, as well as encroaching cultural influences in most regions have conspired to undermine the capacity of the state to perform its role as a medium to facilitate economic and social justice. They have also in many instances diminished the prevalence of traditional modes of socialization and indeed the once sobering influence of institutions such as the family, church, schools and of most civic organizations.

Yet despite this ever changing and challenging socio-economic, socio-political and socio-cultural environment none can honestly deny that many if not most young persons in the Caribbean have successfully managed the challenges posed

by this new ethos. It is not usually front page news but many young people continue to make significant contributions to the development of their communities and societies.

However, there must be concern that disturbingly significant numbers of young people are increasingly becoming the victims of social injustice, social exclusion, economic marginalization and political theatrics.

It is now well established that this prevailing socio-economic and, socio-political ethos is primarily responsible for the escalating youth poverty and unemployment and indeed other social and political challenges such as the alarming prevalence of HIV and AIDS among young people, youth violence and crime, drug abuse and drug trafficking among the many other social challenges, which threaten to destroy the very fabric of our societies.

Consequently despite the glowing success of many young people as alluded to previously the Caribbean youth development landscape is replete with manifestations of:

- Increasing hopelessness among many young persons.
- Increasing engagement of significant numbers of youth in risky behaviors.
- Increasing apathy and disinterest in issues related to personal, family and national development.
- An apparent disinterest in traditional civic and community based activities.
- Disproportionate trends of poverty among urban youth as a percentage of the employable population, and the related increasing poverty of rural youth affected by the failure of traditional rural-based sources of livelihood.

- Disturbing trends of disrespect and disregard for symbols of authority and officialdom.
- Reported underachievement and escalating social exclusion of young males.
- Adoption of non-traditional and often controversial modes of advocacy on issues of concern.
- Increasing impatience with and distrust of established procedures, bureaucratic systems and structures.
- Increasing involvement of young persons in socially deviant behaviors.

There are those who argue that many of these challenges are either the consequence of the pervasive influence of popular and often non-indigenous sub-cultures and norms that are socially degrading and or that these serve to exacerbate the problem.

Another very disturbing trend is the efficiency of criminal organizations, fundamentalists, and social and political deviants in varying incarnations who occupy the space created by the declining influence of the comatose guardians of our social justice, social order and civic responsibility.

GOVERNMENT'S SOCIAL-WELFARIST RESPONSE

Faced with such overwhelming challenges Caribbean Governments have to large extent switched to panic mode. Most governments if not all have demonstrated some measure of concern for, at least the negative manifestations of these youth development challenges.

However, with very few exceptions their response to the youth development challenges remains very much social-welfarist in nature.

This social welfarist approach to youth development is characterized by the following.

- Youth Development Agencies and structures created to implement and manage the youth development agenda are inadequately funded and accorded very little importance in Ministerial hierarchy. Very often it is only the sheer commitment and dedication of youth development workers which prevents the total irrelevance and collapse of the youth development architecture.
- The majority of youth development initiatives and activities are not informed by empirical data and fact but rather by myth and stereotyping.
- In most jurisdictions National Youth Policies have been formulated but these to a large extent have remained simply statements of philosophical principles and intent.
- A plethora of quick-fix youth enterprise programmes and diverse models and concepts of youth employment schemes have been implemented. Unfortunately many of these remain under funded and inadequately aligned to broader economic recovery or development strategy. The problem is further compounded by the absence of credible



Delegates at the OECS Conference on Youth Crime and Violence

mechanisms to facilitate proper evaluation of the impact of these initiatives on the lives of the most vulnerable and marginalized of youth. How then do we determine whether these are just feel good projects or whether they have any significant impact on youth unemployment and economic empowerment?

- Convening of Youth Parliaments is a very commendable initiative. However there is little evidence to suggest that the issues debated by the young parliamentarians inform or influence national development agendas.
- Most countries have adopted various models of youth participation, including but not limited to appointment of youth representatives on boards and various committees. However the optimum impact of these initiatives are usually devalued by the fluctuating dispositions of governments and often the disproportionate influence of more powerful social groups, and the lack of an effective policy and legislative framework to support meaningful youth participation.
- Commemoration of youth weeks and months is now a common feature of the national calendar in most countries. Though commendable these are not supported by appropriate strategies to ensure sustainability of youth support and active participation around the various themes.
- There are now many school based initiatives presumably to stem violent and socially deviant behavior among students. Yet many of these initiatives are not evidenced based nor are they treated as an integral component of the education system.
- Official reports confirm increased expenditure in law enforcement and penal services. Yet there is crying need for reform of the penal and juvenile justice systems.
- Ironically while many governments may have increased investment in sporting infrastructure, there still is a conspicuous absence of comprehensive sustainable sporting and healthy lifestyles programmes.
- A plethora of HIV and AIDS awareness programmes exist in the Caribbean. Yet many of these programmes are inadequately youth driven and asset-based in approach.
- Partnerships among youth development stakeholders are in the main ad hoc rather strategic in nature.
- There is a lack of strategic awareness and related urgency to support and promote the professionalization of youth development work.
- An uncanny tendency to hastily adopt some youth development strategies and concepts which have little or no relevance to our cultural heritage.

Governments and youth development agencies and indeed youth networks must adopt a strategic approach to youth development. This requires the formulation of a Strategic Youth Development Plan (SYDP) formulated on the basis of a broad based, democratic, consultative process.

Consequently whereas at the micro level there maybe some activity based success stories however from a macro perspective the impact and relevance of the prevailing youth development strategies remains at best speculative. It must be noted further that whereas some agencies have crafted and employed various evaluation tools and mechanisms to measure the impact of existing youth development strategies, in the main their application remains non-existent. This may very well be one of the reasons why the prevailing youth development strategy framework is overpopulated with 'feel good' activities, initiatives and projects which have little or no profound impact on the Commonwealth youth development landscape.

In the circumstances it would appear unless there is a paradigm shift in the youth development strategy the pursuit of economic empowerment, social justice and sustainable development will remain an “espwa mal papyi”. In the words of Haile Selassie it will remain “a fleeting illusion- to be pursued but never attained.”

THE WAY FORWARD – FROM SOCIAL WELFARIST TO TRANSFORMATIONAL MODEL.

The vision

“Prosperous societies populated by a citizenry co-existing in a climate of peace, social cohesion, economic viability, social justice and empowered to pursue self actualization and sustainable development; conscious of their cultural heritage and identity.”

The way forward

Given the complexities of youth development in the Caribbean conjoined with the inability of the existing social welfarist model to produce sustainable development outcomes, there is a compelling case for a paradigm shift in the youth development strategy framework and architecture.

Governments, development agencies and youth networks must bite the bullet and proceed to abandon their social –welfarist posture and adopt a transformational approach to youth development.



The Transformational model- characteristics and possibilities

The character of this transformational approach will be presented from two different but intrinsically linked perspectives. First there is the macro perspective which establishes the broad philosophical outlook and then at the micro level are the more specific programmes and initiatives which seek to operationalize the philosophical principles.

MACRO PERSPECTIVE

First, the transformational model demands an evidence- based approach to youth development work. The idea of youth development strategies being informed mainly by myths, emotions and stereotyping must be abandoned. These strategies should instead be based upon empirical data and fact. A good place for us to start would be to have a better handle on our Caribbean youth demographics – how many young women are heads of households without jobs; what is the youth rural base that is marginalized by failing agriculture, and so on?

Secondly a Rights- based approach to youth development must be adopted. Policy makers must disabuse their minds of the idea that young people are problems to be addressed and embrace the fact that they like any other citizen have a right to sustainable livelihoods; they have a right to advocate their needs, desires, fears and opinions; and they must be accorded

appropriate and adequate opportunities to fulfill their needs, aspirations and desire for self actualization.

Governments and their youth development partners must be committed to developing strategic and sustainable partnerships built upon mutual trust, respect and understanding for each others role and responsibility. Further every effort must be made to engage non-traditional partners such as the media, trade unions, credit unions and cultural development agencies.

Governments and youth development agencies and indeed youth networks must adopt a strategic approach to youth development. This requires the formulation of a Strategic Youth Development Plan (SYDP) formulated on the basis of a broad based, democratic, consultative process. This SYDP must include a clear vision, definable and attainable goals and objectives, precise outcomes and performance indicators and credible evaluation strategies. The vision and goals of this strategic plan must be aligned to the broader national development goals and clearly articulate a youth-mainstreaming approach in its design and operationalization. It must therefore, have built-in the implementation mechanisms that are appropriate to ensure the policies are transformed into action using young people themselves as key implementing agents in this process, as advocates for empowerment and as evaluators of outcomes.

Governments and their youth development partners must be committed to developing strategic and sustainable partnerships built upon mutual trust, respect and understanding for each others role and responsibility. Further every effort must be made to engage non-traditional partners such as the media, trade unions, credit unions and cultural development agencies.

I want to spend a few minutes exploring the role of the media in this paradigm shift. Sensationalism sells! This probably explains why we have seen a disproportionate amount of negative reporting and stereotyping relating to youth. The media should be impartial but they are not distant observers of social development. They have a part to play. I would like to see some more responsible investigative journalism celebrating youth achievements. Furthermore, I want to challenge the regional media to embrace a wider social agenda whereby they engage community youth in broadcasting, journalism and media work in order to channel positive energies and social consciousness towards nation-building. Let's start seeing community youth pilots where the media becomes a positive force in youth empowerment, not only in 'sensationalising' crime.

While due consideration must be given to the financial and budgetary constraints facing Caribbean governments, our youth development budgets must not be perceived as yet another line item but must be treated as an investment in our countries' sustainable development. Further, notwithstanding the dictates of international financial institutions governments must remain firmly committed to their moral responsibility to provide the enabling

While due consideration must be given to the financial and budgetary constraints facing Caribbean governments, our youth development budgets must not be perceived as yet another line item but must be treated as an investment in our countries' sustainable development.

environment for youth empowerment. It is a clear and present moral responsibility that cannot be abdicated.

But perhaps the most important consideration is for our youth development strategies to be anchored in the context of who we really are as a Caribbean people – using the pertinent features of our cultural heritage and identity and imbued with the requisite spiritually uplifting ethos.

MICRO PERSPECTIVE

Governments should consider the following:

- ü Engage in a process of reforming and re-positioning youth development Ministries and



Planning for youth development.

agencies to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Timeliness and relevance must become the bedrock of service delivery.

- ü In this regard it may also be appropriate to consider the suitability and capacity of Civil Service structures to efficiently and effectively deliver quality youth development services. Consideration should be given to the formation of autonomous para-statal bodies or joint venture entities to function as executing agencies for strategic youth development plans.

ü As already established, there is in the main a dearth of credible research on emerging trends of youth poverty, youth socialization and behavior. Therefore as part of the reform process consideration must be given to developing and enhancing the research capacity of Ministries, departments and youth development agencies. This will facilitate the documentation and presentation of credible data and analyses which should serve to enhance the policy formulation environment.

- ü Many of the traditional tools of intervention are becoming less and less effective. It is therefore necessary to consider, develop, adopt and implement new and more effective tools of intervention. Here the use of popular education and communication techniques and social marketing should be given due consideration.
- ü There is also an urgent need to adopt effective evaluation tools and mechanisms to assess and measure the impact and relevance of approved programmes and initiatives. This will assist in ensuring more efficient use of scarce resources and greater accountability.

ü There is little evidence that the various youth entrepreneurship and employment programmes as they are presently configured will achieve any sustainable and profound impact on youth unemployment and satisfy youth desires for economic empowerment and self actualization. It is therefore imperative that a more comprehensive and mainstreaming approach be adopted in the formulation and execution of these initiatives. Such programmes must of necessity reflect a capacity to navigate emerging global economic arrangements while at the same time providing adequate opportunities for youth entrepreneurs to progress from micro to mainstream enterprises and industries. It is also extremely important to explore and exploit the opportunities provided by the rich cultural heritage of our countries.

There is little evidence that the various youth entrepreneurship and employment programmes as they are presently configured will achieve any sustainable and profound impact on youth unemployment and satisfy youth desires for economic empowerment and self actualization.

- ü The existing avenues and mechanisms to ensure and facilitate youth participation are mainly ad-hoc and tokenistic in nature. Therefore appropriate legislation and policies must be adopted to ensure that youths are adequately empowered to participate as equals in the various decision and policy making forums and organs of the state.
- ü Too much of the vital youth resource is squandered in the abyss of existing penal and juvenile justice systems. Consequently the issue of penal and juvenile justice reform must be made a priority of our youth development strategy. In this regard governments should give due consideration to the World Bank's recommendation to establish "Second Chance" programmes for young people. Further there is an urgent need to invest more and better quality resources towards the establishment of effective social rehabilitation programmes.
- ü Stereotyping the victims of social exclusion fuels social instability and must be abandoned. Instead we must engage these young people in dialogue to formulate and implement programmes which will help reintegrate them into the main stream of society.
- ü Despite perceptions about our relative technologically underdeveloped status in the Caribbean, the emerging ICT environment must not be treated as a passing trend. This is a useful opportunity to advance sustainable development. Consequently there is need for a comprehensive policy and urgent action to expedite the access to ICT for expanding educational and business opportunities for youth and to increase space for advocacy and information exchange which can contribute in no small measure to further advancing our fledgling democracies. Our youth must be empowered to become developers, producers and suppliers of ICT products and services of globally acceptable standards.

Too much of the vital youth resource is squandered in the abyss of existing penal and juvenile justice systems. Consequently the issue of penal and juvenile justice reform must be made a priority of our youth development strategy.

Youth Networks should themselves consider the following:

- ü These are in the main ineffective, inefficiently managed and unattractive to significant numbers of youth at risk. This has served to undermine their ability to remain as effective advocates and representatives of the majority of young people. Consequently there is an urgent need to engage in a process of capacity building and re-positioning. In this regard opportunities must be provided to youth leaders to acquire new and cutting edge leadership and management skills and competencies.
- ü As indicated above in many countries the majority of youth are indifferent to the existence and functioning of youth networks. Consequently there is an urgent need for these networks to engage in a comprehensive mobilization and recruitment programme. Beyond this these youth networks must ensure there is adequate transparency and participation in their policy and decision making process to ensure sustainable youth participation.
- ü These networks need to also engage in a process of identifying adequate sources of sustainable funding for administrative and programming functions.

We can either allow our societies to disintegrate into laboratories of hopelessness, despair and social instability or help transform them into cradles of creativity, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

Conclusion

The proposals presented in this paper do not in any way represent an exhaustive list of initiatives and strategies. However I am convinced that the proposed transformational model of youth development provides a credible framework to effectively transform the youth development landscape and create an enabling environment for the sustainable development.



Young people in a Brainstorming session.

Finally I wish to re affirm the thirty plus year old commitment of the Commonwealth Youth Programme's Caribbean Centre to work in partnership with existing and emerging youth development stakeholders towards a more progressive youth development ethos in particular and the sustainable development of member territories in general.

We can either allow our societies to disintegrate into laboratories of hopelessness, despair and social instability or help transform them into cradles of creativity, social cohesion and economic prosperity.

The choice is ours!!

The case for a school for Entrepreneurship Development

By Dr Siddhartha Dash



Dr Dash is a Commonwealth micro-credit expert currently on assignment in St Lucia.

INTRODUCTION

A mountainous, forest clad 290 square miles island with a warm year-round tropical climate, second largest boiling lake in the world and the population around 71,000, Dominica is quite rich in terms of natural and human resources. Under the present political scenario and the commitment on the part of present leadership, Dominica Youth Business Trust (DYBT) can

really promote entrepreneurship culture in this island in a very big way. The recent announcement by the honorable Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit that EC \$ 2m will be made available to the Dominican Youth Business Trust (DYBT) during 2006/2007 fiscal year. The money will be allocated to training, skill development as well as to allow for an increase in the Loan Guarantee Fund of the DYBT.

My earlier experience of working with DYBT as a micro enterprise consultant is that now we must think big and start small. In order to bring a culture of entrepreneurship and to optimize its resources in Dominica is to go for a school for entrepreneurship and small business development and industrialize the country.

THE NEED

To overcome the obstacles and solve the problems of unemployment, small scale industrialization that hamper entrepreneurship development in the state, there is an urgent need to set up a Country level school for Entrepreneurship Development that can develop professionally trained officers to carry out ED related activities throughout the country. The present policy stress on technical education, skill building and entrepreneurship development and assures support for the establishment of an Entrepreneurship Development and small business Management Institute which would take up various activities related to entrepreneurship and industrial development in the state.

The proposed Institute, exclusively for Entrepreneurship Development would (i) motivate local youth to take up an entrepreneurial career, (ii) impart special training inputs to help them become successful entrepreneurs, (iii) create an environment within the country that would nurture entrepreneurship by providing timely support to new and existing entrepreneurs, and (iv) provide follow-up and counseling support to entrepreneurs for establishment and successful management of their enterprises. Setting up of such an Institute with entrepreneurship development as its prime objective, would remove the existing gaps in the system. The proposed school for Entrepreneurship Development assisted by a strengthened existing support system and supportive government policies, could work consistently towards the overall industrial and economic growth of Dominica.

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ENVISAGED ACTIVITIES OF THE PROPOSED INSTITUTE

To achieve the above objectives, the focus will be mainly on organizing different kinds of training programmes/ activities for potential and existing entrepreneurs, developing Entrepreneur Trainer-Motivators and 'change-agents' of organizations engaged in promoting entrepreneurship. The activities will be suitably modified periodically to keep up with the changing economic scenario of the state. Initially, however, the proposed Institute will undertake the following activities:

Research has clearly established that economic development of a particular society depends primarily on the entrepreneurial culture in that society.

(A) Programmes for Potential Entrepreneurs :

(i) Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs):

Since Entrepreneurship Development Programmes (EDPs) have to offer purposeful training intervention for different target groups, programmes may be organised for the following groups: Educated Unemployed Youth, Science & Technology Graduates, School drop-outs, Women, Disabled/Handicapped, Retired/ Retrenched Employees, Craftsmen and Artisans and Professionals.

(ii) Product-specific EDPs:

Experience has proved that potential entrepreneurs need some basic information about product composition and process in order to finally select a project and initiate the process of setting up their own enterprises. Experiences of leading entrepreneurship development institutions have been meaningful and rewarding in terms of encouraging results of EDPs, based on specific products. It may, therefore, be desirable to survey the demand pattern of certain products, based on availability of local raw materials and natural resources in the area and accordingly, organize such programmes. Given the available information, EDPs based on the following products can be organized in different regions of Dominica:

Tourism, Minerals-based, Export-oriented, Handloom and Handicrafts, Agro-based, Food & Food Processing and Service based.

(iii) Area-based EDPs:

Since the whole country is demographically divided into several divisions, it is advisable to organize separate programmes for each region.

Target group-based, product-based and area-based EDPs may be organized on the standard model syllabus of 6-weeks duration. (With or with out technical skill development inputs).

Experiences of leading entrepreneurship development institutions have been meaningful and rewarding in terms of encouraging results of EDPs, based on specific products.

(iv) Entrepreneurship Awareness Programmes:

Research has clearly established that economic development of a particular society depends primarily on the entrepreneurial culture in that society. In order to inculcate such a culture and to create awareness among people and motivate them to assume 'entrepreneurial identity' – a better alternative to 'wage employment' - short term awareness programmes focusing on the entrepreneurial opportunities available in the area should also be implemented. Such programmes can be of 3 to 7 days duration incorporating inputs on motivation, opportunities, government policies, available incentives, institutional network, etc., and be

information related to various business opportunities available in the area. They can be organized at various levels. The only difference between a 6-week EDP and an Entrepreneurship Awareness Programme is that while the former aims at 'New Enterprise Creation (NEC)', the latter focuses on 'creating awareness' among the people about entrepreneurship as a career option.

(v) Part-time EDPs:

These programmes could be organized for those who cannot undergo a full-time EDP due to time and other constraints (mainly employees and working people). The duration here would be 8-12 weeks and fees would be charged to meet a part of the cost of the programmes.

(vi) Identifying business opportunities:

As mentioned earlier, specialized programmes of short duration may be organized for potential entrepreneurs who desire to set up their own enterprises, but are unable to make a decision about selecting a product/service. The programme would focus on information about various aspects like availability of raw material and demand feasibility for a particular product. This programme is aimed at helping potential entrepreneurs select a product and assess its present demand as well as planning ahead for the future demand of a particular product indicating the potentiality of setting up an enterprise manufacturing the said product.

B. Programme for Existing Entrepreneurs:

The Institute would not only assist potential entrepreneurs, but also existing entrepreneurs in the state in improving their performance and in planning for diversification and growth. The following programmes are planned for these entrepreneurs, in all the six regions of the country. The programmes are as under:

(I) Performance Improvement Programmes (PIPs):

The main objective of a PIP is to strengthen the entrepreneurial abilities of the existing entrepreneurs as also their skills in functional areas of marketing, finance and general management so as to ensure an overall improvement in the operation of their enterprises.



(ii) Technology Up gradation Programmes:

These programmes would focus on familiarizing existing entrepreneurs with the latest technology available in their areas of operation, sensitizing them toward adoption of new technology, educating them about the support available from different organizations for acquisition of technology, and the benefits of such technology. Efforts would also be made to improve the managerial skills of these entrepreneurs in order to enable them to handle different technological trends.

(iii) Management Development Programmes:

These programmes are planned at improving the overall efficiency of the entrepreneur and his associates working as managers/supervisors in the enterprise. These may be functional and area-based programmes focusing on marketing, finance, personnel and growth management of the enterprise.

(iv) Export Promotion Programmes:

The proposed Institute, on a regular basis, would also organize export promotion programmes of at least one week duration for potential and existing entrepreneurs as well as trader-exporters in CARICOM. The programmes would aim at acquainting the participants with export potential of a product, export promotion policies of the government, financial support and procedures & formalities involved in exporting the product, etc in CSME.

Training programmes may also be organized for teachers of different educational institutions including schools, colleges, polytechnics and engineering colleges

(v) Growth Orientation Programmes:

Experience shows that existing entrepreneurs need direction not only to sustain their activities but also for growth/diversification. Programmes dealing with expansion, diversification and new production technology are also proposed for selected groups of product-lines

(vi) Quality Appreciation and Improvement Programmes:

Dominica is at the forefront in exporting handicrafts, and various other items to different countries. Specialized programmes are proposed to be organized to help existing entrepreneurs appreciate the need to develop quality products in order to meet international standards in a highly competitive CARICOM market. And information about required specifications to improve quality and also procedural aspects of obtaining quality certifications could be disseminated through them.

C. Entrepreneur Trainer-Motivators' Programmes:

Since the proposed Institute will be the nodal agency in the country for entrepreneurship development related activities, it should also facilitate development of manpower of support agencies and institutions engaged in entrepreneurship development activities in Dominica, by way of organizing Trainers' Training Programmes, entrepreneurship development orientation and appreciation programmes.

(i) Teachers' Training Programmes:

Training programmes may also be organized for teachers of different educational institutions including schools, colleges, polytechnics, engineering colleges, etc., to orient and equip them to carry out self-employment and entrepreneurship related courses.

(ii) Entrepreneurship Development Orientation Programmes for Support System Officials:

For effective development of new industries, there is a need to create a conducive environment within the state by way of bringing out attitudinal changes among support system officials so that they can appreciate and solve the problems encountered by the entrepreneurs. Extension motivation and other sensitization programmes can be conducted.

(iii) Entrepreneurship Education Programmes:

The proposed Institute should help in introducing entrepreneurship in the curricula of schools(CXE) and colleges for orienting and guiding students towards self-employment and entrepreneurship. Regular certificate/ diploma programmes in the field of entrepreneurship for prospective and existing entrepreneurs may also be organized by the institute.

Specialized programmes are proposed to be organized to help existing entrepreneurs appreciate the need to develop quality products in order to meet international standards in a highly competitive CARICOM market.

D. Research and Seminars/Workshops:

To keep abreast with the emerging industrial and economic scenario, new development as well as changing industrial policies in CSME, the Institute should organize research and studies-based seminars on selected themes, from time to time, for policy-makers, planners, administrators and prospective and existing entrepreneurs. For this purpose, seminars on topics such as 'Open Market Economy', 'Liberalization', 'Diversification', 'Competitiveness in Global Market', 'New Industrial Policy', etc., should be organized.

Land degradation, Desertification and Food Security: Facing the challenges of the 21st century



A Viewpoint in Observance of World Environment Day 2006
By Oronde Drakes - A 21-year-old University of Guyana Geography Student

On the 5th of June, Guyana joined the rest of the world in celebrating World Environment Day. The local theme for this international recognition and celebration of our environment has been designated:

It is my intention to present an insight into the possibilities of youth involvement in the areas of environmental protection, education, awareness and activism as, these are critical areas in addressing the environmental issues highlighted in the local theme.

Land Degradation can be simply described as the reduction of the quality of an identified area of land including all of its attributes such as soil, surface water, underground water, mineral and biotic (animal and plant) resources. It is the debasing of the land. Degradation not only affects the physical and chemical properties of land, but also social aspects such as aesthetics (that is beauty), job availability and food availability. If land is not utilized in a sustainable manner, degradation can occur making it no longer fit for a desired/identified use. Having such a broad range of effects and levels of effects, it is no wonder that land degradation is included in this year's world environment theme.

Desertification is a process which is prevalent in some arid/dry areas of the world and often occurs as a result of the unsustainable use of grasslands. In many cases, this unsustainable use has led to soil degradation and left the area unable to support crops and thus people.

Food security addresses the ability to provide an appropriate amount and nutritional value of food to one's people. Food insecurity has a number of spin off effects ranging from poor health and death of individuals to decreased agricultural outputs and productivity. Indeed food security or the lack thereof can affect the entire economy and political situation of a country.

The final definition is for the term sustainable. To utilise a resource in a sustainable manner implies that it is consumed in a structured approach which provides for the needs of the present while consciously ensuring that projected needs of future generations can also be met by the resource.

'Youth' (ages 15- 25) account for approximately 29% of our population and are the base from which the next generation of our leaders will emerge. As such, youth comprise a large percentage of the resource users of our country and impact our environment in a multiplicity of ways. Additionally, they will be tomorrow's environmental stewards and thus, must be made aware of and become involved in environmental issues today. The dynamism and energy of our youth are among the factors which can contribute to making tomorrow's world a better place to live in. Even the United Nations has recognised the importance of youth participation in environmental issues and decision making, devoting an entire chapter (Chapter 25) of its Agenda 21 to youth.

There is great scope for the involvement of youth in environmental education and awareness programmes. Youth organisations and clubs can become more involved in environmental issues by

integrating environmental education and awareness activities into their programmes and activities/projects. It must be noted that the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has initiated a number of environmental clubs in schools. Also, other organisations such as the Rotaract Club of Georgetown Central, Volunteer Youth Corps (VYC) and Gybernet have attempted to address environmental issues with different levels of community participation and success. However, it is my view that these and other initiatives have reached and will reach only small sections of the populace and more must be done to get the young people involved. Youths are among the greatest contributors to changeable/ correctable/ avoidable environmental issues in this country (chief among them being improper solid waste disposal/ littering) for example look at the deplorable state of the seawall on Monday mornings, or listen to the loud music played in public transportation. This regrettable fact can be remedied through youths helping to educate others (peer education). Peer education aids in spreading awareness of the undesired results of such environmental issues as land degradation, the necessity of food security and other environmental issues: currently issues which youth generally consider too abstract, long term or just unimportant in today's world of computers, video games, examinations and liming.

At the university level, young people can add to much needed data on our local environment by conducting appropriate researches/projects and participating in the field work of more seasoned researchers.

The involvement of young people at all levels of the decision making process is another necessity for increasing youth involvement as well as bringing about meaningful changes for the benefit of our environment. Decision makers should note that young people tend to listen to and be influenced by those of their own age group and this is one of the major reasons why youth involvement is necessary at all levels as environmental issues are considered. This means planning with youths, for youths. Young people must be involved from the conceptualisation to implementation and evaluation stages, thus moving beyond tokenistic and manipulative participation.



This youth enterprise courier service is also environmentally friendly.

The innovation and energy of youths should be channelled in the preparation of relevant messages to be used through popular media - to reach the greatest audience- and terminology and examples familiar to youth and to which they can relate. It is indeed surprising to observe that while the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sport and organisations such as USAID can recognise the importance of youth involvement in areas such as HIV/ AIDS, the same insight has not been seen in the theatre of the environment.

Environmental clubs can become a base for youth advocates. These clubs – especially those formed in higher institutions of learning, and outside of the education/school system - can be utilised as 'watchdog' organisations to agitate for environmental causes such as the implementation and enforcement of appropriate laws and behaviours for sustainable utilisation of the environment and its riches. These organisations can also act as the vehicles for attitude change towards the environment.

At the university level, young people can add to much needed data on our local environment by conducting appropriate researches/projects and participating in the field work of more seasoned researchers. This would provide more base line and comparative information on our local environment and aid in the assessment of techniques for the protection, preservation and sustainable use of our many resources. Engagement in meaningful campaigns on environmental management and the establishment of mechanisms for their monitoring and evaluation can also be achieved from the tertiary level.

Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihood

By Cecil Ryan

Cecil Ryan is a consultant
in Entrepreneurship Development

Since 2003, the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) has been placing emphasis on enterprise development as a strategy to reduce poverty among young people. Working in partnership with governments and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), CYP has implemented and promoted youth enterprise development programmes in its four regional centres: Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the South Pacific.

This work has led CYP to conclude that youth enterprise development is a very useful strategy for creating income opportunities for young people; and it empowers young people and adds value to their contributions. However, it is limiting for at least two reasons: it treats young people as a population sector separate from mainstream life; and income generation and employment creation for young women and men are not placed within the wider context of youth policy as part of an integrated social and economic development process.

Consequently, CYP is advocating for developing youth enterprises and promoting sustainable livelihood activities through its Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihood (YESL) programme area, as an alternative, more holistic approach. This strategic approach recognises that factors associated with poverty are interconnected and correlated. People with poor financial and social assets might be more at risk of contracting HIV/AIDS because they might be forced to engage in risky sexual behaviours to earn an income. This integrated, holistic approach is consistent with overarching Commonwealth principles relating to creating sustainable livelihoods and the role these play in promoting youth empowerment and socio-economic development.

Youth empowerment and development refer to strategies and outcomes to make young people self-reliant and secure in realising their livelihoods on a sustainable basis. Such strategies relate to the adequate allocation of resources by policy makers in the first instance, and in the second, the creation of a framework to enable, promote and sustain the effective participation of young people in policy formulation, programme implementation and decision-making about the use and allocation of resources for the provision of adequate food, decent shelter, good health, quality education, and adequate safety and security, in the context of general social development.

Scope of paper

This paper has been prepared to assist the deliberation among Youth Ministers and officials attending the Sixth Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM), which will be looking at strategies for youth empowerment for the eradication of poverty, crime and HIV/AIDS. It supports the call for the greater acceptance of, and commitment to the strategy of enterprise development and sustainable livelihood as a means of empowering young people to play a more active and participatory role in national, social, political and economic development in their respective countries.

The paper recognises that many Commonwealth countries, especially Commonwealth developing countries, find it difficult to mobilise resources for development purposes. It asserts that, to the extent that the energies of young people can be harnessed and channelled into activities that promote wealth creation and better living standards, any additional resources for youth development, will contribute towards greater social stability and economic prosperity for the entire society. The paper is premised on the belief that governments and other stakeholders in the Commonwealth are willing to implement and

fund new programmes through greater investment in enterprise development initiatives.

The paper also examines the situation of young people, noting their vulnerabilities versus their prospects, looking particularly at young people at risk – from gangs, crime, armed conflict, violence and HIV/AIDS. It proposes some specific programme possibilities as supplementary initiatives that could strengthen the basis for the sustainable livelihoods of Commonwealth young women and men at risk.



One of CYPCC's Achievement Motivation Training workshops.

Young people: vulnerabilities versus prospects

Generally, living conditions are extremely difficult for the majority of young people. Statistics show that in every country young people are the ones most heavily represented in the categories of persons who are poor, illiterate, unemployed, living with HIV/AIDS or at risk of contracting the disease, involved in armed conflicts, and engaged in crime and violence. This is the context in which this paper seeks to outline and find viable livelihood alternatives for young people at risk.

Finding viable livelihood alternatives begins with an understanding of the term 'livelihood.' Chambers and Conway (1992) defined the concept of livelihood as comprising capabilities, assets and

activities necessary to secure a means of living. They saw assets as “stores, resources, claims and access.” In a subsequent refinement of the term, Carney (1998) viewed livelihood as consisting of five classes of capital assets, namely:

- 1. natural assets, which includes natural resources in nature – clean air, spiritual and physical well being, and income which are basic to human existence;**
- 2. human assets, which include life skills such as work readiness skills, computer skills, and social analysis and general knowledge skills, and good health;**
- 3. social assets, which relate to social interactions and relations, social standing, identity and trust, networking connections and affiliations or associations;**
- 4. physical assets, comprising structures and facilities – transport, roads, housing and water, and related public services, and communication, and access to information; and**
- 5. financial assets, which include money, income or worth, access to credit, property, etc.**

Sustainable livelihood refers to the tangible and intangible assets that are necessary to reproduce life and living, where “tangible assets are resources and stores, and intangible assets are claims and access. A livelihood is environmentally sustainable when it maintains or enhances the local and global assets on which livelihoods depend, and has net beneficial effects on other livelihoods. A livelihood is socially sustainable which can cope with and recover from stress and shocks, and provide for future generations.” Sustainable approaches therefore place people and their livelihoods at the centre by prioritising their assets and their ability to withstand shocks, and establishing policies and institutions that reflect poor people's priorities rather than those of the elite. This conception recognises that “sustainable livelihoods are derived from young people's capacity to exercise choices, to access opportunities and resources, and use them for their livelihoods in ways that do not foreclose options for others to make their living, either now or in the future.” When applied in the real life context of young people, the basic preposition is that to be sustainable, livelihood activities for young people must be based on a holistic view and an approach that recognises that the provision of quality education, decent employment, proper health care for young people are integrally connected with the plans and programmes for the development of the entire society – the future security of the nation.

The situation of poverty among young people

Poverty is “a distorted human condition”. It is the absence and/or denial of access to resources and the processes and mechanisms that are necessary to organise and sustain life both physically and socio-culturally. In situations where poverty is extreme, hunger and malnutrition, ill health, high incidence of mobility and mortality from illness, unsafe environments, homelessness and poor and inadequate housing are some of the immediate manifestations.

The story of people living in poverty in the Commonwealth is primarily a story of young people. Based on data contained in the World Bank Development Indicators, 2004 and presented in the UN World Youth Report, 2005, it is estimated that “some 208 million young people are living on less than US\$1 per day and about 515 million live on less than US\$2 per day.” The report notes that “the overall figures indicate that almost one in five young persons (18 per cent of the 1,158 million 15 to 24-year olds worldwide) are living on less than US\$1 per day, while



Young people discussing sustainable livelihood issues at the 2006 Youth Exchange.

In many instances, changing weather patterns and worsening environmental conditions, coupled with changing market conditions and trading regimes for agricultural and primary products have made it uneconomical for small farmers to earn an income.

almost half (45 per cent) are living on less than US\$2 per day.”

The report further makes the point that “the largest proportion of the world’s poorest youth can be found in Asia, which accounts for 4 out of 10 young people living on less than US\$1 or US\$2 a day. Sub-Saharan Africa is home to 3 in 10 young people living on less than US\$1 per day, and to 2 in 10 youth living on less than US\$2 per day.” The report notes that four Commonwealth countries – India (67.7 million), Nigeria (18.6 million), Bangladesh (9.9 million), and Pakistan (3.8 million) are among the 10 countries with the largest concentrations of young people living on less than US\$1 or US\$2 per day.

Some people have criticised the use of these statistics to give global pictures and draw conclusions. In fact, it must be admitted that, as is done in World Youth Report 2005, comparing estimates of young people in poverty over time is fraught with difficulties. Nevertheless, as rough and imprecise as these statistics might be, they help to make the point that whatever has been done to date or is being done currently to eradicate poverty among young people is hardly sufficient to make a significant dent in the situation of poverty among the sector of the

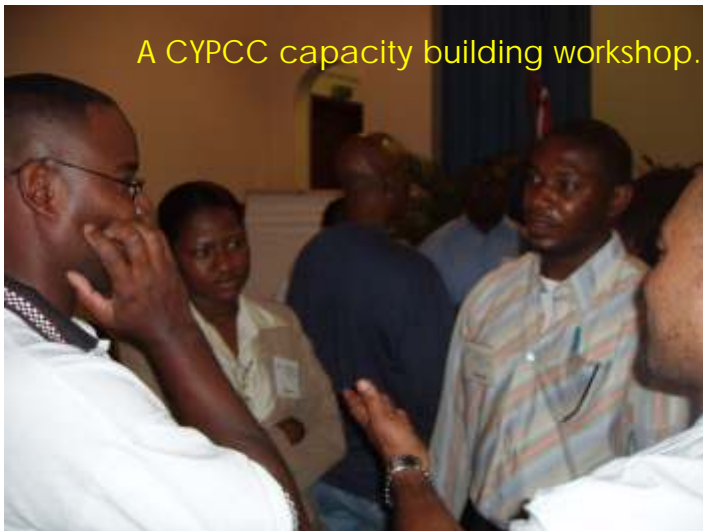
population that holds the greatest potential for development in these countries.

Poverty affects young people in ways that are very personal and very striking. Take, for example, the young girl living in extreme poverty in sub-Saharan Africa, who cannot attend school because she has to fetch water for her family. Or, a young father, who may not be able to pay for his anti-AIDS treatment because he cannot find work since there are no opportunities for employment in the local economy.

From many accounts, the situation of poverty is more extreme in rural areas than in urban areas. This may be a consequence of the scarcity of the means to sustain livelihood and income, and the absence of social services. In many instances, changing weather patterns and worsening environmental conditions, coupled with changing market conditions and trading regimes for agricultural and primary products have made it uneconomical for small farmers to earn an income. This places pressure on the survivability of the rural family, which often results in migration. Invariably, it is the young who are forced to migrate in order to

find work. This creates a cyclical effect that leads to greater poverty both in the rural and the urban areas, since over-population and conditions in the urban areas cannot sustain a further influx of people. This is especially so in poorer countries.

While there are a variety of different factors affecting a country's economic viability and prospects, poverty generally results from a lack of resources. It is maintained by a continuing inability to acquire the means to secure and reproduce livelihood requirements. In turn, it is the springboard for poor health, poor education and a lack of basic living necessities – proper food and nutrition, adequate shelter, clothing, and security. It becomes a vicious cycle and its effects multiply from generation to generation in a context where a family, a community, or ultimately a country is unable to devise strategies and programmes to halt and reverse the situation.



Based on the above, this paper makes the following three observations:

1. There seems to be an increasing level of poverty throughout the world, particularly in the group of developing countries in which some Commonwealth nations feature prominently.
2. The incidence of poverty has also increased generally and specifically among young people, thereby putting them at greater risk.
3. People will remain poor as long as they have only limited, or no opportunities to earn income. This applies in general, but is particularly true for young people.

The reduction of poverty among young people therefore requires a combination of co-ordinated responses from young people and policy makers, both of whose decisions and actions are critical. A multi-dimensional approach is necessary if efforts to reduce youth poverty are to be effective and successful.

Anti-poverty intervention strategies among young people

Policies and programmes aimed at eradicating poverty among young people must necessarily address the socio-economic, socio-political and cultural realities that they confront daily. These include high unemployment, low levels of education and limited educational opportunities, poor health and a higher than normal exposure to diseases especially HIV/AIDS, high exposure to and the propensity for involvement in incidences of crime and violence, and poor and inadequate housing.

Creating Income Opportunities for Young People

It is generally accepted that opportunities for income generation are the most direct route out of poverty. Some countries have pursued twin approaches. The first is to create job opportunities in the formal wage economy using state resources. These are generally of a short-term duration, where the primary objective is to build work place discipline among young people, by enabling them to acquire valuable work experience, while earning an income.

The second approach is to encourage private sector businesses to employ young people by providing incentives in the form of tax breaks. This can be seen as a sort of youth employment or empowerment service, which benefits government, business and the young people. In some situations this is seen as an apprenticeship programme through which participants are able to acquire or upgrade skills that would make them more work place ready or even strengthen the basis for them to start their own business enterprises.

In their report, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Youth and the Millennium Development Goals outlined a number of recommendations to eradicate poverty among young people as nations strive to meet the

UN's Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). **The following were deemed both timely and relevant:** Governments must create mechanisms that ensure young people are involved in the development of Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) and Country Assistance Strategies (CAS) through National Youth Councils or other fora for youth representation; governments should include young people in the implementation of new projects identified in national development and poverty reduction plans and strategies, as well as support existing youth-led development initiatives; development policies must prioritise the growth of rural areas, which have high percentages of unemployed youth and little public infrastructure, by engaging young people in creating necessary services and infrastructure; governments and the private sector must support agro-based micro-entrepreneurial endeavours of young people and invest in farming technologies that boost agricultural production.

Young people working to reduce the incidence of HIV/AIDS

HIV/AIDS now poses perhaps the greatest threat to the health and livelihoods of young people. For many Commonwealth countries, especially many developing countries in Asia, Africa and the Caribbean, HIV/AIDS has become the major cause of mortality among young people between the ages of 15 and 24. Many studies have confirmed that females are at greatest risk of HIV infection “owing to biological factors and the gender abuse and discrimination they face”. The 2004 report by the UNAIDS Inter-Agency Task Team on Young People, has indicated that “one third of women infected with HIV are between the ages of



Young Caribbean citizens meeting on HIV/AIDS issues.

15 and 24”. This high rate among women can be attributed to “factors such as greater biological susceptibility, gender inequalities, socio-cultural norms, forced and early marriage, financial insecurity, sexual abuse and the trafficking of young women”. The report further notes that in sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, “young women are two to three times more likely than men to be infected with HIV”.

Youth and the Millennium Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation, 2005

Young people are more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS infections than other population groups due to their age and the period in their life, which coincides and overlaps with their transition from protected

childhood to independent adulthood. During this period, they are subjected to pressure from many sources, but are required to make sensible choices; these decisions can affect the course of their lives – positively or negatively – forever.

The vulnerability of young people to HIV/AIDS is a consequence of a number of factors including the propensity to become engaged in risky behaviours that heightens their susceptibility to infections. This is linked to, and can result from peer pressure, lack of information, lack of power to negotiate for safe sex, an inability to calculate risks, impaired judgement because of intoxication, an inability to refuse unprotected sex, and the limited availability of, or access to condoms. In addition, it is worth recalling that young people have never lived in a world without HIV/AIDS, since knowledge of the disease is less than twenty-five years old. This adds a dimension of complexity to resolving this issue.

The heightened vulnerability of young people makes the case firmer for interventions that can halt the level of infection and the spread of the disease. There need to be urgent policies and programmes set in place that are specific to the local and national situations, which take account of the prevailing sociological and cultural norms and behaviours. **These should include:**

Targeted HIV/AIDS education that would empower young people to make informed choices and

decisions about their health; organised family and community supporting networks; affordable primary health care that is accessible and available; and ongoing international support in the areas of medical supplies and technical resources.

Based on the ideas of youth presented at international conferences on HIV/AIDS, the Ad Hoc Working Group on Youth and the MDGS has published a number of related recommendations which are important and critical steps to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS among young people. **They include proposals to:**

Encourage youth-led sexual reproductive health education in secondary schools, and integrate HIV/AIDS education into curriculum as a sustainable way of sharing information about HIV/AIDS, use youth expertise to create innovative and effective strategies for the prevention of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, malaria and all other diseases, including sexually transmitted infections (STIs), create, mobilise and strengthen teams of young peer educators to visit schools, places of worship, and other structures in their communities, link local youth employment networks to clinics in affected areas, further investigate the role of youth as caregivers, and how youth employment strategies can be part of scaling up delivery of medication and care services, resource conferences and existing youth structures as contact points, using them to incorporate youth in national strategies, advise on government policies, and distribute resources.

People Living With AIDS (PLWA) associations and other efforts to support those affected by the disease should provide channels for youth-focused services and participation.

The Report also recommended an additional set of actions for countries where the prevailing situation needs to be fast-tracked. They include:

1. establishing teen clinics and promoting peer-to-peer education on sexual and reproductive health, and encouraging young people in the community to take a role in the design and needs assessment required for these programmes;
2. encouraging community-based condom distribution for youth by youth.
3. funding and supporting youth-led media and awareness campaigns about scientific implications of some cultural practices.
4. encouraging youth-led sexual reproductive health education in secondary schools and integrating HIV/AIDS education into the curriculum as a sustainable way of sharing information about HIV/AIDS.

These were seen as ways of expanding access to sexual and reproductive health information and services, including family planning and contraceptive information and services, and closing existing funding gaps for supplies and logistics.

Ultimately, young people themselves will have to take responsibility for the choices and the decisions they make, but investments must be made on intervention programmes that make them aware of “the full range of prevention options, with emphasis given not only to developing healthy lifestyles, but also to sexual health and behaviour issues”. This includes “abstinence, delayed sexual debut, a reduction in the number of partners, and correct and consistent condom use”.

Involvement in armed conflicts

Armed conflicts are occurring in areas of the world where poverty is most extreme and where the situation of young people is most challenged. The UN World Youth Report 2005 noted that “In the past decade, an estimated two million children and youth have died in armed conflicts and five million have been disabled”.



Schoolchildren observe Commonwealth Day 2006 under the theme *Health and Vitality: A Commonwealth Challenge*

It is generally thought that in an environment that provides few viable options for employment, armed conflicts frequently offer young people the only way of generating an income. There is therefore a direct link between the absence of employment and involvement in armed conflict among young people. The no-income situation of young people causes them to be disproportionately involved in armed conflicts.

Conflicts affect both young men and young women, albeit in different ways, and have an overall negative effect on development in afflicted communities, regions and countries. As noted in the UN World Youth Report, "young people are most likely to be recruited as soldiers and constitute the majority in most armed forces." It is also common knowledge from television reports and documentaries, that many young men and women are captured and forced to operate in armed forces in many countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including some Commonwealth African countries. This generally leaves them open to sexual violence, the very high risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections, and prevents them from starting or completing their education.

Armed conflicts bring increased health risks to young people, especially women. They also increase cases of anxiety and depression, extreme stress, high-risk drug use and suicide, all of which weigh heavily on the affected communities and can act as barriers to socio-economic stability and development.

Young people and drug abuse

Drug abuse among young people is of growing concern generally, but particularly in developing countries, including several Commonwealth countries. During this transition period between childhood and adulthood, young people find themselves subjected to intense peer pressure and there is the tendency to want to experiment with a range of ideas and lifestyles. In the process, they may take bad decisions or make risky choices. Some of these decisions and choices are about the use or abuse of drugs and alcohol.

It has been reported that growing alcohol and drug abuse (which can also be a consequence of involvement in armed conflicts) has contributed significantly to increases in both mortality and HIV infection rates among young people. This is the case in both developing and developed countries, where consumption is mainly associated with higher income youth.

Programmes and policies to decrease and prevent drug abuse among young people must address the factors causing young people to use them in the first place. And such programmes must constitute and must be located in the framework of the countries' overall strategy to tackle poverty and facilitate social inclusion, ensuring that the benefits of economic growth are accessible to all.

In this sense poverty, family dysfunction, substance abuse and death of family members have been shown to be affect delinquent behaviour. These conditions are prevalent among young people in many of the less developed Commonwealth countries.

Young people and criminal behaviour

A recent article published in a newspaper in a Commonwealth Caribbean country reported that youth from as young as twelve years old have been identified as the main perpetrators of criminal activities. In many Commonwealth countries, young people make up the most criminally active segment of the population. **This stands to reason since:**

they can be influenced and pressured easily into negative behaviour, they are most likely to be without life skills and not productively engaged, and they are more inclined to be involved in criminal gangs.

In a background paper entitled Strategies and Best Practices for Crime Prevention in Particularly in Urban Areas and Youth at Risk, prepared for the Eleventh UN Congress on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice in 2005, the view has been offered that young people are most

It has been reported that growing alcohol and drug abuse (which can also be a consequence of involvement in armed conflicts) has contributed significantly to increases in both mortality and HIV infection rates among young people.

likely to commit violent acts against their counterparts of the same age and sex. It is argued that young people living in difficult circumstances are at greater risk to become involved in delinquent activities. In this sense poverty, family dysfunction, substance abuse and death of family members have been shown to affect delinquent behaviour. These conditions are prevalent among young people in many of the less developed Commonwealth countries.

Conclusion

Ideas and recommendations abound about youth poverty and how to reduce it. Many government ministries have already started to take them on board. The selected recommendations presented here speak to the seriousness of the situation and the urgency with which it should be addressed. It is clear that young people as a group are affected most Youth and the Millennium Development Goals: Challenges and Opportunities for Implementation, 2005

and in most immediate ways by the issues of high unemployment, high incidence of HIV/AIDS, involvement in armed conflicts, involvement in crime etc. It is also the case that across the Commonwealth, across localities, population groups and countries, there are wide disparities in living conditions linked to these issues and the resources available to address them.

These are not young people's issues; these are inter-generational, with national, regional, and international implications. To this extent, the successful implementation of the ideas in this paper depends on technical and pragmatic solutions conceived in the context of a holistic people-centred development approach at both the national and broader Commonwealth level.

Specifically, the paper wishes to propose the following as the way forward.

Creating youth employment:

The importance of youth employment is underscored by the fact that all the issues affecting youth rest fundamentally on their lack of assets or material means. Their housing status rests on it; their health status depends on it; the concept they have of themselves, and the state of the level of their independence, indeed their very ability to exercise their rights as a human being depend on their access to assets, as described above. Therefore youth employment must be given priority attention.

Actions to create youth employment must ensure that:

- a. employment opportunities for youth are flexible, especially for those most at risk;**
- b. working conditions are decent for all young people and are in accordance with national and international labour laws and ILO standards;**
- c. employment policies must ensure that jobs are meaningful, contributing to creation of more just and sustainable communities, and reinforce young people's self-esteem and self-worth;**
- d. action on youth employment needs to be integrated as a central platform for achieving poverty reduction. Treating the issue of youth employment as a fundamental block to poverty eradication is also a powerful mechanism for delivering the MDGs;**
- e. youth employment poverty reduction strategies should especially focus on young women, indigenous populations, and rural youth as those most marginalised within the current economic system;**
- f. governments and relevant local and international organisations must address the needs of young women and rural youth to achieve gender equality and the empowerment of women as well as to address pressures and problems arising from mass rural-to-urban migration;**
- g. opportunities must be created and sustained so that youth can participate in the fair trade movement, and further develop open trading and financial systems that are rules-based, predictable and non-discriminatory; and**
- h. partnerships between young people, the public and private sectors need to be established and reinforced.**

Micro-credit and micro-financing

According to Muhammad Yunus, founder and Managing Director of the Grameen Bank, “self-employment is the quickest and easiest way to create employment for the poor”. This, he insists, is a viable strategy to eradicate poverty, based on his experience in the area of micro-financing. For him, “a big step towards eliminating poverty is to make sure that we offer financial services even to the poorest person, that no one is rejected by a bank on the ground that he/she is a poor person.” It is on the strength of this argument and the experience and record of Commonwealth and other successful micro-financing initiatives that this paper recommends that Commonwealth governments:

1. Use micro-finance and skills development initiatives to reduce barriers for youth entrepreneurship, and create and strengthen youth entrepreneurship networks;
2. Maintain and broaden the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative based on its record of success.

Youth and information and communications technologies (ICTs)

The area of information and communications technologies (ICTs) is dominated by young people. From simple cellular phone usage to the more complex computer applications to information technology, young people are playing a leadership role. The Youth and the Millennium Goals Report made the points that: Young people see great potential for improving development efforts and providing meaningful livelihood opportunities through the establishment of tele-centres in both rural and urban areas. These tele-centres provide livelihood opportunities for many young people; Young people use ICTs to seek information about education and livelihood opportunities available to them; Young people appreciate the increased consultations on information technology policy and priorities; Young people play a critical role in the development of locally appropriate content. Many work to repackage information between old and new media types and to interpret it for local, national, and international audiences; ICTs enable young people to explore and define their cultures within the context of rapid globalisation; ICT training provides a context for skill development, socialisation, and community building for out-of-school or otherwise marginalised youth.

Local e-commerce may open more significant livelihood opportunities for young people than international e-commerce. Smaller scale e-commerce networks and ICT-enabled small and medium enterprises provide young people with the opportunity to develop professionally without having to relocate large distances from their families and support networks.

Worldwide ICT expansion has been possible due in part to the volunteer efforts and internship work of young professionals. Many have postponed or foregone potentially lucrative private sector jobs to train others in ICT.

It is convenient and natural therefore to see ICTs as a medium for dealing with a range of related issues. ICTs provide new opportunities for social interaction and networking among young people, for training and information exchange, and for job creation and income generation. The report of the Ad Hoc Group has pointed to a number of areas where young people can use ICTs for development. They proposed the following, which the present paper in turn recommends highly:

1. youth in urban and rural areas should have access to ICTs in order that they could be empowered as learners, developers, contributors, entrepreneurs and decision-makers.
2. governments should play a facilitating role in nurturing ICT-related youth enterprise through policy and investment in ICT infrastructure, and encourage, support and resource partnerships around ICTs.
3. Community cyber cafés and telecentres could be used as means to address multiple development needs, such as business training, and opportunities for education in reproductive and sexual health.

There are a number of principles that must guide these actions. Specifically interventions must target and promote strategies and measures that will: enhance the capacities of young people; cater to the basic needs of young people; ensure adequate protection for young people from exploitation, violence and abuse; strengthen the community; and provide ongoing educational opportunities for young people.



Another CYPCC training session.

How can Caribbean youth achieve sustainable livelihoods?

By Dr Marcia Potter



Dr Potter is a lecturer at the University of the West Indies.

Let me start out by saying a special welcome to all our visiting delegates to the British Virgin Islands. It is a pleasure to have been asked to address you under the theme for this year's youth exchange- "Sustainable Livelihoods: A Commonwealth Youth Development Challenge". I must thank the organizers and specifically the Honourable Minister for asking me to take on this challenge.

Over 10 years, the term "sustainability" became the buzzword at the United Nations' Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro. Since then attention has been focused on attaining a 'sustainable word'! The term has been used often and has different meanings for different people. I have heard it defined variously as a 'healthy way of living', 'the creation of livelihoods that empower individuals to earn enough money to provide basic needs', 'leading a life of dignity in a sustainable development and the need to ensure emphasis on human beings. The dialogue has evolved to a focus on livelihoods, sustainable livelihoods.

What are sustainable livelihoods?

A livelihood is much more than a job or an income gathering activity. A livelihood becomes sustainable when there is economic resilience, when one has skills, knowledge and confidence to work, reserve resources and a broad support network to weather the times of hardship and scarcity. A livelihood becomes sustainable when it can minimize vulnerability (i.e. coping with and recovering from shocks and stresses) and when there is economic productivity. It is not just about the individual but has a broader goal - it encompasses the household and community. It emphasizes social equity.

In summary then, "A livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stresses and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future."(DFID, UK)

(I want to make a point very early re: wealth/affluence and poverty as it relates to sustainability) Very often discussions around sustainability tend to focus on poverty and affluence. It is often believed that affluence leads to a lack of sustainability. However, this is not necessarily so. Poverty can also lead to non-sustainability. Conservationist attitudes can exist in both poor and rich environments or non-conservationist.

Sustainability has become for many countries by and large a fashionable term and movements toward sustainability have not emerged as serious and realizing much success. It seems sustainability remains an elusive dream.

A livelihood becomes sustainable when it can minimize vulnerability (i.e. coping with and recovering from shocks and stresses) and when there is economic productivity. It is not just about the individual but has a broader goal - it encompasses the household and community.

How can you as Caribbean youth focus this issue to safeguard the future?

Some governments have taken fairly serious action while others have not.

What are the challenges you face in order to achieve sustainable livelihoods?

How do you achieve a good quality of life within the context of our Caribbean realities, within the context of all the talk and no action? How do we deal with globalization and the absence of a level playing field in trade and economic activities? How can you take things forward?

I hope I can safely assume that you all are familiar with the Millennium Development Goals and have been following the progress of your individual countries in meeting these goals. The MDGs represent a global partnership that has grown from the commitments and targets established at the world summits of the 1990s. Responding to the world's main development challenges and to the calls of civil society, the MDGs promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases.

Development is often recognized by economic growth. It is assumed that the national wealth translates into better living conditions and economic participation for all citizens. Participation however, must not be tokenism, but rather empowerment that ensures capacity to impact decisions that affect your lives. However, in our quest to catch up with the world and achieve development through economic growth, a number of factors affecting our societies as a whole are left behind, lagging or untouched. We often forget the fundamental link between the environment and our livelihoods. We often forget that at the centre of sustainability are people as a whole!



Stakeholders at a briefing session.

The tension between developers and environmentalists is a constant feature of our landscape. Without sustainable environments there can be no sustainable livelihoods.

Many of our countries are rich in minerals and other natural resources; our economies are dependent on service industries, tourism and financial services. Our economies are therefore fragile and vulnerable. Just consider all the things that negatively impact these industries: natural and manmade disasters, terrorism, war in far and near places and the cost of energy. Just last week the rules changed with regard to carryon luggage. No liquids, no gels etc. What impact will that have on our livelihoods?

Our conversation efforts must not just concentrate on the physical environment but also on our social and cultural environments. Everyday, we must respond to the intrusion of other cultures and norms. For us in the Caribbean, the US media and its influences are omnipresent. Our youth are more conversant with "Fiftycent" than Bob Marley or David Rudder. You, as a regional group, have many things in common but will also celebrate the richness of your diversity. You must ensure that generations to come are able to recognize and enjoy the individual characteristics of each of our countries. We must pay attention to and respect our norms and traditions. We must document them regularly in all media and be constantly vigilant that all our people appreciate them. They will help us to be sure who we are as a people and that will protect our social fabric and in turn our livelihood.

Today, crime and person on person violence challenge us. Too many of our young people do not complete primary and secondary education and too many of our youth are in prison. Too many of our youth do not have what is required to be gainfully employed. We are battling substance abuse and lifestyle diseases such as HIV and AIDS while the so-called chronic diseases high blood pressure and diabetes and cancer are fuelled by our diet and lack of physical exercise. These conditions pose an increasing threat to our livelihood. Renewed health threats are emerging in the resurgence of diseases

increasing threat to our livelihood. Renewed health threats are emerging in the resurgence of diseases such as TB and Malaria. More recently, the threat of an influenza pandemic has brought into focus the need to prevent disease, develop public policies and enact legislation that promote health and quality livelihoods. In our global village, we are not safe from anything. Our ability to live and work free of illness ensures that we live longer, we are able to enjoy the fruits of our labour.

Other challenges facing us include the lack of adequate natural resources throughout our region and the threat of overpopulation in some areas. Further, we often seem focused on nationalistic attitudes and priorities rather than having a focus on regionalism. Europe has decided that competitiveness and sustainable economies could be enhanced by the creation of the European Union. Through the OECS and CARICOM, we have reaped the benefit of working jointly on problems and issues that affect our region. Yet we have a problem coming together as a region. The realities of globalization and interdependence are ever present yet we fail to come together. Our economies are significantly impacted by the WTO and the global economy. Our bananas went the way of preferential tariffs. In 1973, the world became aware that energy is more valuable than gold. The world felt the impact of the OPEC oil embargo. We are feeling the impact today of the war in the Middle East.



In addition, religious extremism pervades the world and in most major faith blocs we find intolerance and an inability to compromise. Even where rights are enshrined in constitutions, we discriminate and our prejudices inform our decisions and actions.

It used to be that all that was required to work was a strong back and a willingness to work, then a secondary school education. Today, the work requirements and the work environment have changed. Work still requires the basic skills of reading, writing and computation but a renewed emphasis is being placed on skills such as thinking/analysis and problem solving along with certain personal traits. Skills we seem to have lost somewhere along the way. In the 1970s, the personal computer was unveiled to the world and soon entered the work place. Work and every facet of life has not been the same since then.

A well rounded education, the ability to learn and the ability to apply knowledge and being computer literate are basic requirements. In the Caribbean, while there have been improvements in education, we are still lagging behind the developed world in many facets. This gap is only growing wider in a global economy where literacy, knowledge and specific skills are more crucial than ever to making sustainable livelihoods.

According to a World Bank report(2003), in the Dominican Republic, some 16 percent of adults are unable to read and write. In Jamaica, even though nearly every child completes sixth grade, one in three is still unable to read. This is also true of some of the other countries even though the figures might be different.

How then do you prepare for contributing to or achieving sustainable livelihoods? Let me share these thoughts with you.

Education is key. Our youth must see their education as important and vital to their existence. Our societies must see education as being more than the learning of information. According to The SCANS (The Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills) Report for America 2000- 'What work requires of Schools'- the five critical competencies needed are the:

**Ability to identify, organize, plan, and allocate resources,
Ability to work with others,
Ability to acquire and use information,
Ability to understand complex inter-relationships and systems,
and
Ability to work with a variety of technologies.**

The three-part Foundation needed to be able to use/achieve these competencies are:

Basic Skills: Reads, writes, performs arithmetic and mathematical operations, listens and speaks fluently

Thinking Skill: Thinks creatively, makes decisions, solves problems, visualizes, knows how to learn, and reasons.

Personal Qualities: Displays responsibility, self-esteem, sociability, self-management, and integrity and honesty.

Begin to cultivate moderation in your behaviours and in consumption of the goods that you can afford. Pay attention to new developments that can reduce energy consumption and that can save money and resources. Become serious about recycling waste.

Begin to practice conservation of your environment and property. Where the former generations and our leaders have failed you in taking the correct measures, you must take up the baton and endeavour to make things right.

Become advocates for the environment; demand that policies and legislation be put in place and not only put in place but monitored and enforced.

Develop healthy lifestyles- Avoid the lure of drugs and alcohol, eat balanced meals, exercise regularly, do not underestimate the value of sleep and recreation.

Cultivate maintenance habits to delay replacement of equipment etc. Change can be difficult. Changing

behaviours and attitudes is no easy task. As individuals you may not feel capable of doing many things to change the situation around you but you are not helpless. Start with a small group of persons in your home, community, school or workplace with similar views and ideas and build from there. (You can start an environmental club in your neighbourhood for example.) Get people to speak to your group or to the community, to guide good practice. You must decide to take charge of your destiny. Sustainable livelihoods do not happen by chance. You set goals and work towards realizing those goals. Nor is it the work of one individual; families, communities and nations must come together purposefully to ensure sustainable livelihoods for all.

A well rounded education, the ability to learn and the ability to apply knowledge and being computer literate are basic requirements.



A group of young people in training.