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**CENTRES OF EXCELLENCE;
PROGRAMMATIC AND FINANCIAL CONSIDERATION,
AFRICA**

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Commonwealth Youth Programme Regional Centre for Africa

Draft proposal: Towards a Centre of Excellence in Youth and HIV/AIDS

"Excellence is to do a common thing in an uncommon way."

— Booker T. Washington (1856-1915)

"The principle is competing against yourself. It's about self improvement, about being better than you were the day before." - Steve Young

Background

Progress in youth development interventions is built on the recognition that every stakeholder has something to contribute to the active improvement of the sector. Service improvement and efficiency in an organisation's chosen field of work is a driver towards the development of the organisation, its structures, its partnerships and its processes to ensure that it is counted among the best, if not the best, in its chosen field of operation.

Excellence is the state or quality of excelling. It is superiority, or the state of being good to a high degree. Excellence is considered to be a value by many organisations, and a goal to be pursued. Denoted by the Greek word *Arete*, in its basic sense it means "goodness", or "virtue" of any kind. Excellence is bound up with the notion of the fulfilment of a purpose or function; the act of living up to an organisation's full potential.

An organisation that seeks to achieve excellence as defined above and be counted among its "peers" as the best or one of the best in the field will be termed a CoE. A centre of excellence, for the purposes of this paper, is defined as a virtual centre of learning, research and applied experiences for expansion (scaling up) of the body of knowledge in a particular field for the benefit of the Commonwealth.

Rationale

The need to further engage young people in the HIV/AIDS response was a key element of discussion at the 2007 Commonwealth Heads of Governments Meeting (GHOGM), which took place in Kampala, Uganda. UNAIDS Deputy Executive Director Deborah Landey joined Uganda AIDS Commission Director General Dr David Kihumuro Apuuli and youth representatives Johnah Josiah of Kenya and Mobafa Baker of Trinidad in a plenary session at the meeting, focusing on the health of young people.

During her intervention, Ms Landey discussed the importance of engaging young people in the HIV/AIDS response. She pointed out that

- Almost half of all new infections (three thousand a day) occur among 15-24 year olds.
- This group also has the highest rates (more than half a million a day) of other sexually transmitted infections.
- In a number of countries for example Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, and Zambia, young people are waiting longer to have sex, are using condoms more, and have a lower rate of HIV.
- There are signs that some of this is also due to targeted education and information

programmes specially designed for young people. By contrast in the UK, where there has been a reduction in focus on HIV/AIDS, this has led to complacency, ignorance and a resurgence of the disease.

- Relatively few countries track information on young people's sexual behaviour. This, coupled with the general dearth of information about HIV prevalence trends among young people, makes it extremely hard to assess precisely what and where the problems are, and how to deal with them.
- Information needs to be disaggregated *within* the youth cohort.

The Millennium Development Goals and the Declaration of Commitment made at the 2001 United Nations General Assembly Special Session on HIV/AIDS both highlight the critical need to prevent HIV infection in young people. The Declaration of Commitment calls for HIV infection rates in persons 15 to 24 years of age to be reduced by 25 percent in the most-affected countries by 2005, and by 25 percent globally by 2010. It goes on to say that by 2010 at least 95 percent of young men and women aged 15 to 24 years should have access to information, education and services necessary to develop the life skills required to protect themselves from HIV infection.

Past and current interventions in HIV/AIDS have been in areas including prevention, treatment and care, effect mitigation, stigma and discrimination. While these intervention areas have had a significant effect, several gaps still exist. Services and responses are skewed due to gender/socio-cultural factors and lack of education; disproportionate budget allocations to care and treatment have posed a challenge in priority setting for most governments; there is insufficient intervention in the area of further education for out of school youth; there is decline in prevention efforts in some countries as well as inadequate numbers of youth on antiretroviral treatment programmes.

There is consensus that strategies for addressing HIV/AIDS have to be multi-sectoral and developmental. Critical among all the various strategies in combating the effects of the disease is the building of intervening organisations' capacity to a level where they are able to command ideas, resources, participation and impact. To achieve this, the required focus is continued learning, dissemination of applied and empirical research, partnerships and continuous development.

CYP Africa – A Centre of Excellence in HIV/AIDS

To be a Centre of Excellence in HIV/AIDS, CYP Africa will develop an understanding of HIV/AIDS intervention programmes at all levels – international, regional, national, and organisational – in areas of prevention, care and support and mitigation. A clear identification of where CYP Africa has excelled and areas for improvement is imperative. The Centre of Excellence will have two purposes:

- Perfecting what has been done best – scaling up, and
- Developing initiatives which can qualify us to be a centre of excellence.

CYP Africa has set its focus on mobilising resources, sharing experiences, and coordinating participants and stakeholders that are directly or indirectly involved in youth programmes with a focus on HIV/AIDS impact and risks:

- young people and youth representatives, such as the National Youth Councils
- ministries responsible for Youth Affairs
- other ministries including health and education
- civil society organisations

Objectives

The Centre of Excellence in HIV/AIDS initiative has two main aims: to reward excellent HIV/AIDS intervention practice, and to further invest in those practices so that programmes deliver substantial benefits to stakeholders. The Centre's core objectives and activities in this regard will include to:

- Provide a resource centre which collects, collates and maintains up to date information on HIV/AIDS epidemiology, interventions and lessons learned with an emphasis on Youth
- Conduct and provide specially tailored short term courses both directly as CYP Africa and through partnership: including with the Diploma in Youth Development Work partners; the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) mainstreaming programme to Youth; University of Zambia and youth organisations.
- Provide a website and newsletter in support of the above (E-letter and hard copy).
- Assist youth and youth allied organisations with resource mobilisation for HIV/AIDS efforts.
- Provide technical support through having a cadre of available staff in HIV/AIDS at the centre

CYP Africa will simultaneously be developing a coherent broad based HIV/AIDS Strategic Framework to manage and address the responses, through an integrated approach from all programme areas – Youth Work Education and Training; Youth Enterprise and Sustainable Livelihoods; and Governance, Development and Youth Networks. In this regard the centre will focus on prioritising HIV/AIDS responses across all programme areas to achieve a coordinated effect and impact.

Functions

The functions of the centre will be three-fold – mobilisation, coordination and dissemination. The main products in these functions are information/knowledge and partnerships. Specific activities include to:

- Provide technical support in the integration of HIV/AIDS programmes
- Support the Planning and Policy Formulation Process
- Support and provide advocacy in the process of resource mobilisation and allocation
- Develop resource centre, documentation and dissemination capacities in the CYP
- Strengthen the CYP human resource and technical capacity
- Provide a central resource mobilisation mechanism for addressing HIV/AIDS as a threat to development in the Commonwealth
- Promote advocacy and support for youth programmes to ensure that there is awareness of the trends in the epidemic that will lead to appropriate responses in resource allocation.

A Centre of Excellence can represent either a physical place in an educational institution or a virtual space on the Internet. It can be a formalised, documented relationship between partners – who in their own right may be centres of excellence. CYP will function as a catalytic and technical support institution that will provide a central coordinating mechanism for technical information, advice and support to partners. CYP will further strive to promote political advocacy, assist promote the role of civil society and the private sector towards the recognition of the role of the Youth and HIV/AIDS.

Partnerships and Resource Mobilisation

Partnership of CYP Africa with internal Commonwealth structures such as the Social Transformation Programmes Division (Health and Gender Departments), and CFTC; is essential.

Further partnerships with National AIDS Commissions, regional bodies such as AU, NEPAD as well as sub-regional entities like SADC and ECOWAS; and international development partners like UNDP, UNICEF, UNFPA, other civil/regional programmes e.g. SIDA Eastern and Southern Africa HIV/AIDS Team, the World Bank and UNAIDS; is a sure step in achieving this aim.

Ultimately however there has to be a reasonable resource base that combines this knowledge base with tangible interventions such as the diploma programme and CYCI that provide a response to the needs of the young people. An incremental process may be undertaken which

may initially see the establishment of a pool of resources to facilitate the provision of technical support training (based on notable capacity building modules) providing HIV/AIDS based interventions and responses through various institutions such as the Ministries of Education, youth organisations and National Youth Councils.

This process may be long and therefore requires progressive, dedicated human, technical and financial resources. Current funding of CYP programmes makes the achievement of such a standard difficult to comprehend. A separate budget line is recommended to enable CYP RCA and indeed all other regional centres to develop themselves into CoEs in assigned areas. The starting point for CYP RCA in this direction include the finalisation of its own work place HIV/AIDS policy and the progressive integration of HIV/AIDS intervention programmes into all strategic planning areas. A separate budget line similar to the current funding arrangements for RAB will provide a capital base to ensure the gradual self-sustainability of such a centre.