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8th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting
Young people at the centre of development

Introduction - Global Youth Situation

- **Our planet is currently home to the largest number of youth the world has ever known, 1.2billion** - 90% of whom live in developing countries. This number is set to rise drastically in coming years.
- **The Commonwealth is home to a population of 1.9 billion people, 60% of whom are young people under the age of 30.** Many of them are living in poverty, without employment, education and other necessities, such as access to health care or adequate nutrition – without the necessities needed to thrive.
- Globally too young people today are feeling the effects of high levels of unemployment and lack of adequate and quality education. As it stands, young people are three times more likely to be unemployed than adults. Between 2016 and 2030, 425 million young women and men will be incorporated into the labour force.
- It is clear we are facing a myriad of challenges to sustainable development – the economic and jobs crisis, climate change, stifled investment in education and healthcare, among others. This is not only a challenge to sustainable development, but youth development.
- As we discuss creating a development agenda beyond 2015, we must look not only to how to overcome these challenges, but to the key authors in writing our sustainable future – young people.

The case for young people being at the center of development:

- **Young people are effective agents of both change and development.** Young people have been contributing to development by addressing society's most challenging issues, whether it be coming up with innovative new jobs in the green economy and ICTs, developing non formal and peer led education in their communities, or helping combat HIV and AIDS through community based awareness raising projects, young people time and time again show themselves as powerful players within the global development framework.
- **Young people's contribution to development**, at local, national, regional and international levels is evident, and **should be recognized**.
- **We often hear the mantra – 'nothing about me, without me' – when we think of sustainable development, this mantra rings true.** *"Sustainable Development" refers to "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."*
- We cannot then talk about sustainable development and future generations without including young people meaningfully and fully in the dialogue.

What are the mechanisms for ensuring this?

- **For young people to be heard properly and to contribute to their optimal levels, they need open channels for communication with decision-makers.** Their potential as agents of economic, social and political change must be recognised and invested in. For this to happen a number of elements are essential:

1) Legal Framework: The development of cross-sectoral youth policies which ensure that youth issues become cross cutting and mainstreamed in employment, education, health and other policies is central. Ensuring youth policies are developed with and for youth, as well as in a youth friendly way is imperative. **The World Programme of Action for Youth** provides a blueprint for the development of policies at the national level in 15 key areas and should be utilised. Likewise, regional youth policies and programmes such as the Commonwealth Youth Programme are important tools in ensuring a framework for young people's participation.

2) Financial and capacity building support to youth structures: Youth organizations at all levels provide important forums for young people to participate in youth led and youth focused activities. They provide the tools for young people to develop skills in participation, leadership, project management amongst others and the breeding ground for a life time of civic engagement. Ensuring the youth structures are resourced through both operational and project funding as well as through capacity building for youth leaders is critical for youth empowerment and development.

That is why I warmly welcome the initiative to develop a Commonwealth Youth Council - providing a forum through which young people in different countries of the Commonwealth can work together with each other as well as stakeholders such as government, civil society and private sector is an important step in securing the voice of young people in development across the Commonwealth. Working together on common challenges and opportunities to create the future you want ensures that your voice will be strong in the development agenda.

3) Develop Enabling environments for youth participation - Development of inclusive and comprehensive participation mechanisms at local/national/regional and international levels

4) Highlight positive contribution of youth: the portrayal of young people in the media as trouble makers with no motivation or inclination to contribute to society is both misplaced and pervasive. One of my key aims as Envoy on Youth is to help change this picture – we know young people are innovative and creative, that they are agents of true change, and for their work to be supported we must ensure that young people do and how it is depicted reflects the reality of this innovation.

What is the UN doing to involve young people?

- Involving young people in the development framework:

Post 2015 development agenda

- The UN Development Group has been leading efforts to catalyze a “global conversation” on a new development framework post 2015 through a series of over 70 national consultations and eleven global thematic consultations (see <http://www.worldwewant2015.org/>). The global conversation is meant to stimulate

discussions with all stakeholders, share experiences from current initiatives and foster a shared vision on the necessary actions. The objective is also to review progress on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and discuss the needs for a new development framework post 2015.

Sustainable Development Agenda

In the follow-up to Rio+20, the Secretary-General has supported Member States along four main workstreams:

- Institutional framework for sustainable development
- Technical support to the open working group on developing SDGs
- Support to an expert committee on a sustainable development financing strategy
- Options for a facilitation mechanism that promotes the development, transfer and dissemination of clean and environmentally sound technologies

- Role of Envoy

- On the top of my own agenda is to promote the empowerment of youth and youth-led organizations and encourage the development of mechanisms for young people to participate in the work of the United Nations, including preparations for the post-2015 UN development agenda.
- In doing so, my work surrounds four guiding principles: Participation; Advocacy; Partnerships; Harmonization.
 - **Priority for first year** – increased focus on **employment and civic engagement** while ensuring an integration of the gender perspective across all work areas.
 - **Promote structured mechanisms of youth participation** at all levels - **Promote youth participation in Post 2015 agenda** at the regional and global levels.
 - **Promote the implementation of the World Programme of Action for Youth**
 - **Promote establishment of inter agency networks on the SWAP at national and regional levels** - Promote regional coordination mechanisms between UN agencies in 5 regions in 2013 – specific action in Euro Med region.

Closing message

- **The United Nations recognizes the urgency and necessity of involving young people meaningfully** as it develops its work. Likewise Member States across the world, including across the Commonwealth, are cognizant of the fact that for sustainable development to happen, to be able to create the future we want, we need to involve young people here and now in development processes.
- **Supporting youth structures, developing enabling environments for young people to influence policy and political processes, creating space for young people's voices to be heard** ensure that when we talk about sustainable development we talk about it with legitimacy.
- **I once again welcome the very important initiative of establishing the Commonwealth Youth Council, and urge all young people, ministers and policy makers to work together to ensure a sustainable future for all.**

Thank you.