

# Experiences in Youth Policy and Programme Development in Commonwealth Africa

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*The youth constitute a considerable proportion of African populations. As such their impact on the continent's development process cannot be overemphasised. In turn the impact of the development process and policies on the youth ought to facilitate their positive contribution to the efforts of nation-building and economic advancement. Capturing the youth into the development trajectory of the continent still remains an elusive task.*

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## Introduction: The Socio-Economic Context of Youth in Africa

The emerging picture of the development experiences of African countries over the past three decades is rather abysmal. Not only are the countries of the region going through a period of an unprecedented economic crisis, but they are also going through a period of redefinition of their political destiny. Multi-party democracy is taking shape in a number of countries, amidst economic ruins.

Since the beginning of the 1980s, African countries have witnessed a continued deterioration of their national economies. This has arisen as a consequence of both external events beyond the nations control and ill-conceived policy decisions of member governments. The past decade has seen escalating external debt, falling prices for raw commodities and adjustment policies that have exerted a toll on the poor. For many countries in the continent, economic development has either stagnated, declined or slowed down. Food production levels, over the past two decades, have also continued to decline. Traditional food surplus countries such as Tanzania, Malawi and Zambia are now food

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deficit countries. Average incomes in these countries had fallen by 20 percent during the 1980's. In many urban areas, real minimum wages have declined by as much as 50 per cent.

In several African countries, the health delivery system is almost in a state of ruin. Doctors are increasingly frustrated because drugs and essential medical equipment are simply not available. In Zambia, for instance, the real value of the drugs budget in 1986 was one quarter of its 1983 value. Real expenditure per head on education fell in the majority of the countries (Chinery Hesse, et al, 1989). In Zimbabwe the real per capita expenditure on health fell by almost 30 percent from US \$3.60 to US\$2.10 between the 1990/1991 and 1992/93 financial years (SAPEM, 1994). Not only are drugs and essential equipment not available, but also health structures are disintegrating (broken hospital windows, doors, rusty corrugated iron roofs, immobile ambulances resulting in patients being taken to hospitals on wheelbarrows or oxcarts). Child immunization programmes are in disarray. The historical decline in infant mortality rates has stopped and the incidence of malnutrition has increased.

For many countries in the continent, there is evidence of deterioration in the human condition. Throughout the 1980s to the 1990s, for instance, with the onslaught of drought, and wars in Mozambique and Angola, malnutrition among many families, especially among those under five years of age, has continued to soar. Poor households in the urban sector have been hit the hardest. Most urban households have grossly inadequate incomes to meet even minimum dietary needs (Clark J and D Keen 1988). Table 1 shows the social and economic indicator for selected Commonwealth countries in Africa.

Young people and other vulnerable social groups, such as children, have borne the blunt of this crisis. The services that are most required by young people are the ones that have been curtailed most by governments. Prestigious development projects, and military expenditures rest intact while public expenditure on goods and services such as clinics, education, food and fuel subsidies, services which the poor and most young people are most dependent upon, have been curtailed.

**Table I: Social and Economic Indicators in Selected African Commonwealth Countries**

Country	Real GDP per capita (US\$) 1991	GNP per capita (US\$) 1991	Life expectancy at birth (years) 1992	People in absolute poverty			Adult literacy rate (%) 1992	Public expenditure	
				Total (%) 1980-90	Rural (%) 1980-90	Urban (%) 1980-90		Education (as % of GNP) 1990	Health (as % of GNP) 1990
Botswana	4,690	2,580	60.3	43	55	30	75.0	8.4	3.2
Kenya	1,350	340	58.6	52	55	10	70.5	6.8	2.7
Lesotho		570	59.8	54	55	50	78.0	3.8	1.2
Malawi	800	230	44.6	82	90	25	45.0	3.4	2.9
Mauritius	7,178	2,380	69.6	8	12		79.9	3.7	2.0
Nigeria	1,360	350	51.9	40	51	21	52.0		1.2
Zambia	1,010	420	45.5	64	80	47	74.8	2.9	2.2
Zimbabwe	2,160	670	56.1		60		68.6	10.6	3.2

Source: Human Development Report, 1994

### Demographic Trends

It is particularly important that governments in Africa pay attention to the needs of youth because Africa is a continent of young people. In Zambia, for instance, 67.5 percent of the total population is under 25 years, and 36.2 of these (under 25 years) are youth (10-24 years) while 30.3 percent constitute the child population below 10 years. The same picture is typical of other African countries, where fertility rates are high, with consistently high population growth rates. The average fertility rate of the African continent as a whole, has been estimated at 6.2 births per family (UN 1977). This is partly due to the low rate of contraceptive prevalence in the region estimated at 16 percent for the eligible mothers (UN 1991).

Unless something is urgently done, the region's population is set to double by the year 2015 (UN 1994). This will bring enormous pressure to bear on the capacities of governments to provide social services to society.

In addition, although Africa's population is largely rural, the region's rate of urbanisation of about 5 percent per annum means that there will be many more people living in the cities by the year 2000 than is the case now. This implies

that urban youth problems are poised to increase enormously from their present scale and governments will need to commit more resources to resolve them. Table II below provides demographic indicators for selected Commonwealth Countries.

**Table II: Population Growth for Selected Commonwealth Countries**

Country	Annual Population Growth Rates	
	1980-85 (%)	1985-93 (%)
Gambia	3.8	3.7
Ghana	2.3	2.9
Kenya	3.5	3.7
Lesotho	2.0	2.1
Malawi	3.2	3.3
Nigeria	3.2	2.9

**Source: World Bank, 1994**

### **The Concept of Youth in Africa**

A useful starting point in understanding problems associated with youth policy and programme development is to understand the concept of youth. Sociologically youth denotes an interface between childhood and adulthood. Many organizations consider the ages between 1 - 5 as early childhood with the child category falling between 6 - 14. The youth, on the other hand, are viewed as those between 15 and 24. The United Nations, for instance, has adopted the definition age category between 15 and 24 as youth. Other international organizations such as the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) define youth as the age category between 15 and 29.

Legally the minimum age at which one attains the age of majority or becomes an adult varies. At common law the age at which individuals are regarded as competent to handle their own affairs is traditionally fixed at 21 although the trend is to lower it to 18. However 21 remains the age at which many of the trappings of legal adulthood are assumed in many countries. Minimum ages

often vary, not only by sex, but also according to the purpose of the age limit - for instance, marriage, civil majority, criminal responsibility, voting rights, military service, access to alcohol, consent to sexual intercourse, consent to medical treatment etc (Paxman and Zuckerman, 1987).

Individual countries also have varied definitions of youth. Many countries in Africa follow either the United Nations or the Commonwealth definitions. There are countries in Africa which stretch their youth definitions from 15 to as far as 35 years age limit. (See Table III)

**Table III**      **Definition of Youth Age, The Age of Majority, and the Age of The Right to Vote in Commonwealth Countries in Africa**

Country	Youth Age	Majority Age	Voting Age
Botswana	12-29	19	21
Ghana	15-35	18	18
Malawi	14-25	18	18
Malta	18-30	18	18
Namibia	15-30	21	18
Seychelles	15-30	18	18
Sierra Leone	15-30	18	18
Tanzania	15-35	18	18
Zambia	15-25	21	18
Uganda	18-30	18	18
South Africa	16-30	21	18
Lesotho	12-35	21	18
Zimbabwe	15-30	21	-
Cameroon	-	-	18
Nigeria	12-30	18	18
Swaziland	12-30	21	18
Cyprus	-	-	18
The Gambia	12-30	18	18
Kenya	15-35	18	18
Mozambique	18-35	18	18
Mauritius	14-25	18	18

These definitions of youth among organizations and among countries, have been changing continuously in both spatial and temporal terms. This is due to many varied factors, such as the cultural context, physical development of the individual, social upheavals etc. Take for instance a 13 year old Yao girl in Malawi getting married soon after puberty; is she a child, youth, or an adult? What of a thirty year old man among the Nyakyusa of Tanzania who, although married, may still be dependent of his father for most of the decisions related to his welfare and that of his immediate family? What of a 12 year old refugee boy who in the process of running away from war torn Angola, has lost all his parents and is alone in one of the campus in Zambia, receiving rations as an individual and as a household in his own right. Is this person a child, youth or an adult? What of child soldiers in Liberia and Sierra Leone? Are they youth or adults?

The definition of youth in terms of chronological age is clearly problematic. In many countries in Africa, children are taught various traditional skills and begin to help out in the family, at an age which many cultures in the West would find unacceptable. For instance at the age of 10, many young girls in many African Communities are able to undertake a wide range of productive tasks in the home, such as helping out with the preparation of meals, fetching water and firewood, taking care of younger siblings, etc. The boys too, at this age, are able to assist their parents in a wide range of tasks, such as house building, repairing, trapping animals, hunting etc.

In the wake of wars in the region, many young people in countries such as Sierra Leone, Rwanda, Burundi, Liberia and Angola are able to use the gun at such an early age of 10. They get killed and they kill. Many young people at this age are roaming the streets of the burgeoning African cities, sourcing a livelihood entirely on their own. These individuals cannot be ignored in our categorization of youth. They cannot be ignored in any intervention programmes earmarked for youth. Yet the majority of these young persons are children.

From the foregoing discussion, it is apparent that the definition of a youth in the African context assumes operational meaning only when considered in relation to other factors and variables. Hence it is difficult to arrive at a universal definition of youth that applies to all countries. A youth in the USA, may be quite different from a youth in Africa and a youth among the Yao of

Malawi may be quite different from a youth among the Lozi of Zambia or a youth among the Yoruba of Nigeria.

When addressing problems of the youth we should therefore realise that we are dealing with a continuum of problems and with a range of characteristics and behaviours, that cut across age segments. A 15 year old youth may well have many characteristics and behaviours and problems found in someone who is 12 years old. It is thus apparent that the definitions of youth child and adulthood in most countries tend to operate independently of social and biological factors. As demonstrated, one might be an adult, but socially perceived as a youth, or one might be a child, but socially perceived as a adult.

### **Status of Youth in African Society**

The Africa youth are at the crossroads of transition from traditional to modern society. The old institutions of socialization of youth are reeling under the onslaught of urbanization and socio-economic transformations. In many respects the youth of Africa are living in economies that are not able to fulfil their expectations.

The youth in Africa are as a consequence caught up in a double crisis. The crisis of growing up in a "detrribalized" or "de Africanized" environment (see for example Gluckman 1977, Marwick 1965). They no longer subscribe to the values and norms of their parent's ethnic groups. Through the influence of western media; radio, television as well as the print media the youth of the region are part of a global culture, a culture that is radically different from that experienced by their parents at independence nearly three decades ago. At the root of all these changes is the changing role of the family, which is now far less important in the individual development of young people. The parents are finding it increasingly difficult to fulfil their role of providing advice and nurturing the young into society. The absolute nature of their authority is attenuated by the authority of other institutions including the media.

Secondly, the youth of the region are caught up in a crisis of growing up in economies that are in a crisis. Economies that are not able to sustain and fulfil their expectations. These are young people living in a culture of poverty.

In order to effectively deal with youth problems, there is an urgent need to rebuild the bridge of communication between the youth and the older generation based on mutual trust. Moral judgements alone will not succeed in dealing with problems such as prevention of AIDS among young people. The youth must be seen as responsible participants who are ready to contribute to the task of development.

### **A case for a needs assessment of youth in policy development**

One of the most critical and first step in the formulation of a national youth policy is to understand the prevailing needs and problems of young men and women in the wider socio-economic and political context of a given country. This, therefore, entails the gathering of data and information on key issues and concerns affecting the lives of young men and women in any given country. Unfortunately, in many countries in the region, there is dearth of data and information on youth needs and problems. Most data available from government and other sources are not segregated along age segments and in many instances they are not data or information specifically earmarked for facilitating youth programmes. Not surprisingly therefore in many cases existing programmes for youth do not reflect the real names and problems of young people. Where programmes are in place, they are sometimes based on what professionals or politicians think is appropriate for youth, or they are based on experiences imported from the North. They are generally not based on any scientific analysis of the prevailing local situation.

As many social scientists have observed, many development projects in Africa are based on Eurocentric models. Western ideas and institutions are perceived as a panacea to development, while traditional, or indigenous ideas and institutions are perceived as backward or pseudo scientific, archaic, fallacious and not so useful. One is not suggesting that Western ideas and institutions should be dispensed with. There are a wide range of ideas, concepts and innovations that Africa has benefitted from the West. Ideas and programmes that are promoted for young people however must reflect the practical realities, needs and aspirations of the African society.



## **Youth policies in Commonwealth Africa**

In this section an attempt is made to generalize broad areas of concern for youth policies in Commonwealth Africa. Any discussion on youth policies in the region can only be, but general, because youth policies have come into vogue only recently. Indeed besides Nigeria, Mozambique, Cameroon, Ghana, Zambia, Malawi, Namibia, Seychelles and Botswana, all nineteen Commonwealth Countries in Africa are still in the process of formulating their national youth policies. However, it must be acknowledged that most governments in the region have in place various programmes and measures which are usually not explicitly part of a youth policy. In a number of countries in the Africa region, ministries of Education, Health, Labour, Sports, Justice, etc deal directly or indirectly with youth related programmes. However, most of these programmes are not part of an articulated and coordinated national youth policy, as a consequence, conflicts of interests and duplication of efforts between ministries and departments dealing with youth affairs are common. A number of questions can be raised as to why governments are seemingly not paying adequate attention to youth issues and why seemingly most governments have simply no youth policies in place.

Indeed during the Commonwealth Youth Ministries Meeting that took place in Trinidad and Tobago, in May, 1995 ministers expressed concern that out of the 51 Commonwealth countries, only a limited number had a National Youth Policy. Even among the few that purport to have a National Youth Policy, most so called Youth Policies, are simply exercises in rhetoric with limited capacity to have genuine impact in transforming the lives of young men and women.

Ministers at the Trinidad and Tobago meeting recognized the need for their governments to have effective policies if current problems encountered by young men and women are to be adequately addressed. In a message to Commonwealth Heads of Government, who met in Auckland, Newland, on 10 to 13 November 1995, ministers stated:

"We propose that all Commonwealth Governments should make a special commitment to youth development. This should take the form of the development, refinement and implementation of National Youth Policies as instruments of change".

Many government may have the desire and commitment to formulate national youth policies. However, they may simply have no capacity on how to go about formulating a national youth policy. The Commonwealth Secretariat through the Commonwealth Youth Programme has in this regard developed an integrated package of assistance to governments requiring advice and support in the process of national youth policy formulation.

**The package includes five basic components:**

- A Commonwealth Handbook of Guidelines on the formulation, implementation, management, monitoring, review and updating of gender-sensitive national youth policies. Preparation of other resource material, such as a module on youth policy development, to be delivered through distance education.
- Training on use of the package by local youth representatives and regional consultants who will assist capacity-building in member countries for national youth policy development and programme establishment.
- Technical assistance for member governments wishing to formulate and implement national youth policies or to upgrade existing policies.
- Policy consultations, preferably in the wings of other CYP and Commonwealth meetings if appropriate, to exchange experiences and good practice.
- A regional national youth policy progress review to assess policy impact and effectiveness.

**The dual character of African youth**

The dual character of the African economies impact on the position and role of youth in Society. Most of the African economies are characterized by a large agriculture and basically rural economy and a small urban sector.

It is estimated that approximately 64 per cent of the youth in Africa reside in rural areas, while in Asia and Latin America the figure is put at 30 to 40 per

cent respectively. For the majority of the countries in Africa, the rural youth could constitute as much as 75 to 80 per cent. The only exception to this would be countries such as Zambia and South Africa.

One of the pitfalls of most development efforts in Africa is that they have an urban bias focus. Rural areas hardly receive adequate financial or technical support. As Nyerere, the former President of Tanzania has wittily remarked, *"While the Americans have been to the moon, in Africa we are still trying to get to the village"*.

The problem of course is that the route of getting into the village (either through national development plans or in real physical terms, such as road networks, bridges etc) remain poorly charted. Government marketing policies are generally biased towards supporting the urban consumer, and so are the various essential infrastructures and services required to stimulate rural development.

### **Rural youth as a focus for national youth policies**

The vast majority of young people in rural areas are either unemployed or underemployed in agriculture or in various rural development activities which are perceived as relatively less lucrative than what can be offered in an urban environment. In the wake of Structural Adjustment Programmes basic social services and amenities, such as recreational facilities, medical, education and other services have been severely curtailed. The evidence of cuts in expenditure is particularly clear in education in the countryside where poorly maintained school buildings, shortages of teachers, teaching aids and equipment (including chalk, pencils, exercise books) abound. There are many schools in Africa where children sit on mud floors or under trees for their lessons, where teachers are paid sporadically and then only a pittance. These signs are more common in rural areas than in urban areas.

With increased pressures for parents to make a contribution towards their children's education, through payment of school fees, and school uniforms, parental burdens have increased considerably in recent years. Among some poorer households this has intensified pressures not to send their children to school, or to withdraw them early. Where there is a choice in not sending a

male or female child to school generally most parents opt to send their male children to school. In the end female children are generally disadvantaged.

The emerging picture in rural areas, therefore, is one of not only increased illiteracy among young people, but also increased under and unemployment. The increasing numbers of young people who drop out of school are thrown into economies that are unable to accommodate them. A situation that has further been compounded by the quality of education that many young people receive while at school.

Due to lack of equipment and basic facilities, education at both primary and secondary school levels remains theoretical and textbook based, a type of education that is oriented towards white collar jobs, rather than one that has a bearing on the practical realities of the local environment where the students come from; an educational system that prepares young people in skills that would help them and absorb them in rural based employment, including self-employment.

Not surprisingly, therefore, in most countries of the region, the young people who are already affected by poverty or deprivation in rural areas have their minds set against rural based occupations, by virtue of the nature of education they are exposed to and the attitudes of the teachers who themselves have misconceived ideas about what is possible from earning a living in rural areas. Many of these teachers teaching are themselves in rural schools, not out of choice, but because they are unable to compete successfully for places in urban areas.

The circumstances for the female student in a rural setting are even worse. She is usually under pressure, not only from the home, where parents make demands on her labour in productive work for the household, but also from the teachers as well who themselves having been unable to attain any appreciable technical qualification, besides teaching, are not the best role models to motivate female youth to aspire for higher academic qualifications, or for that matter to provide technical skills that could lead towards self-employment for young women. If anything teachers in many schools would rather prepare young females for motherhood, hence in some schools in Africa female pupils continue to be taught separately "Home Economics" or "Domestic Science" courses.

Throughout the region evidence indicates that female youth tend to have relatively limited opportunities compared to male youth (who proceed on with their education at both primary and secondary school, as well as tertiary levels).

### **The "Detribalized" urban youth: A focus of youth policies**

The rural youth is a transient youth. In many countries in Africa, rural areas do not provide the same challenges, opportunities and expectations as the urban areas. Many young people in Africa especially the illiterate, semi-illiterate and school drop outs, see migration as a solution to their economic plight and as a means for social mobility. In many societies in Africa, migration into urban areas has become a rite of passage. Before most young rural people marry, they make it a point to migrate to urban areas in search of new opportunities.

For many young people, unfortunately, the urban area is not able to fulfil their dreams. There are simply not enough employment opportunities available to absorb them. The bulk of the youth in urban areas, therefore, becomes part of the unorganized or informal sector, living in the squatter, slum or shanty areas or so called "compounds". Many of these youth turn into "wandering street youth".

Many young people have resorted to working on the streets to make a living. Some of these young people live in make shift homes (made from such materials as cardboard boxes, plastic papers, rammed earth houses, abandoned buildings, etc.) Some of them come from unstable families that are in the process of breaking up or from those that have done so already. The overriding characteristic of the vast majority of the street youth that are driven on the streets is violence in the home and poverty.

In some cases, some of the street youth have virtually divorced themselves from their parents, earning their livelihood by a set of ingenious variation of petty trading, casual work, borrowing, stealing, pick-pocketing and other illegal activities.

A number of such street youth resort to accohol, (including illicit alcohol such as Kachasu), while others use drugs, such a Marijuana (Dagga) Valium and Mandrax. Glue and petrol sniffing are also on the increase.

Most youth in urban areas as a consequence have turned out as agents of their own socialization in the street where they spend most of their time. The language they use in the streets, their dressing styles reflect their experiences which are very different from that of their parents or the wider society.

These are youth who have effectively escaped from the norms of their society; as a consequence, they tend to be aggressive and quick thinking as a way of survival. Such youth are therefore, less inclined to be involved in begging because begging assumes an inferior position. They would rather steal or pick-pocket people in the street than beg. Begging is perceived as less aggressive and less fun. For most youth, begging lacks an element of adventure.

It is not only the so called street youth in urban areas that are facing the current of the unemployment problems. There is a whole army of school leavers who are now swelling the ranks of the unemployed. This has arisen because job prospects for many young people are increasingly on the decline. As the number of young people who leave school with qualifications increase, so does the competition for scarce job become greater. In turn, the level of educational achievement required to secure a job becomes higher. Indeed in many countries in Africa even university graduates are increasingly seeking jobs that were traditionally for school leavers, such as bank clerk, policemen, military personnel etc.

The past three decades have seen rapid expansion of the education system. It is estimated that the total enrolment in formal education in Sub-Saharan countries, increased fivefold between 1960 and 1983, while female enrolment increased sixfold over the same period. "Gross enrolment ratios increased from 36 to 75 percent at the primary level, from 3 to 20 per cent at the secondary level and from negligible to 1.4 percent at the tertiary level" (ILO, 1996:4). In many cities in Africa in the 1990s, street vendors are therefore not simply illiterates; or primary school leavers, but also a sizeable proportion of secondary school leavers many of whom are also involved in cross border trading.

Some of these young people are those who have either been squeezed out of the formal sector employment, or those who are trying to supplement rapidly dwindling formal sector wages. Falling real incomes in the formal sector have

also reduced the purchasing power of urban consumers for informal sector goods and services.

Within the informal sector itself young women have not fared well as the young men. Young men tend to dominate in the more lucrative trades and businesses, such as electrical and mechanical repairs, tin smithery, carpentry, and related trades such as grocery stores, tailoring and other small manufacturing enterprises, while young women operatives tend to concentrate in petty trading in food and related items. Their products are normally highly perishable.

For many young men and women, operating and establishing themselves in the informal sector is a long and difficult process. Entry requires capital, skills and an understanding of the culture of the informal sector. Many young men and women therefore, enter the informal sector initially as apprentices rather than as fully fledged entrepreneurs.

Many of the young men and women in the informal sector work hard and long hours, yet they usually earn less than basic needs income. A problem that is compounded by the absence of proper training in running a business and lack of access to credit. Most businesses by young men and women in the informal sector are run on the basis of trial and error, and many financial institutions are generally unwilling to render credit facilities to young people working in the informal sector. As a consequence many of the youth fall prey to unscrupulous money lenders, who in some instances charge interests rates in excess of 100 per cent.

There are unfortunately not many programmes which have both strong training and credit components for potential young men and women entrepreneurs in Africa. There is an urgent need for governments in Africa to introduce innovative policy measures to strengthen the viability of the informal sector as a source of youth employment.

### **Health and welfare of youth in Africa: An important area of focus**

Current problems of unemployment among young men and women are very closely linked to their health and welfare. Not only due to cutbacks in health expenditure per capita, but also due to the very serious socio-psychological

consequences arising from lack of a job. This is reflected among the unemployed in the development of a sense frustration, guilt of identity, and social rejection which in some instances has driven young people towards self-ruin (as manifested in increased drug and alcohol use/abuse).

In both rural and urban areas in Africa there is evidence of the deterioration of the health services being provided. Not only are drugs not available, but even health structures are almost in a state of ruin. Child immunization programmes are in disarray and infant mortality rates are on the increase, doctors are not returning to their countries after completion of their training abroad. When they do they leave shortly for lucrative and better paying jobs in other countries.

Young people's health and welfare conditions have in this regard deteriorated considerably over the past decade. Not only do they have limited access to increasingly scarce health resources and services, but also are increasingly getting exposed to a wide range of health and behavioural related problems. For instance, the very fact that they are relatively autonomous from parental control has meant that they are able to mix relatively more freely with peers of the opposite sex than many of their parents were able to when they were at a similar age. In many instances, as a result, many young people find themselves in social environments which put them at greater risk than their parents and elders experienced when they were at the same age. Not surprisingly, therefore, in many countries in the region premarital sex and teenage pregnancies as well as abortions are on the increase. Given the sensitivity of this whole area, no accurate estimates of the extent of the problem are known in most countries.

In the past decade health problems of young people have been compounded by the appearance on the scene of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Evidence shows that the majority of those infected by HIV are young adults in the age category of between 15 and 40 years, the most economically productive group.

This can be clearly seen from Table IV which shows the age and sex distribution of AIDS cases in Zambia.



**Table IV: Age and sex distribution - AIDS cases in Zambia reported (1984-1992)**

Age Group	Male	Female	Not Stated	Total
0 - 4	246	222	5	473
5 - 14	19	26	0	45
15 - 19	47	296	1	344
20 - 29	767	1,436	1	2,205
30 - 39	1,358	1,175	4	2,537
40 - 49	606	265	2	837
50 - 59	144	47	0	191
60+	36	12	0	48
Not stated	185	220	3	408
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,408</b>	<b>3,700</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>7,124</b>

Source: GRZ, Bulletin of health statistics, 1994.

It is unfortunate that so far in the Africa region, there has been rather limited direct involvement of young women and men in HIV/AIDS prevention and care programmes. Young men and women only come in as either specimen at national workshops or other international fora or as merely recipients of HIV/AIDS services, yet they comprise a major component of the regions population at risk of getting AIDS. Their voices are not heard and they are usually not involved in planning or decision making that relates to their concerns.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme, Africa Centre has pioneered some novel approaches in addressing the problem of HIV/AIDS among young people in Africa.

In September 1993, a Commonwealth Regional Workshop on Positive Living Networking in Support of HIV/AIDS for youth in Africa was held at the regional Centre in Lusaka. The success of that workshop has been measured in the establishment of national and regional networks on positive living. The

purpose of these networks is to share information among young people living with the virus and to facilitate awareness among those at risk. In spreading the AIDS awareness campaign among the youth, the value of learning from peers has been recognised to possess special advantages. Young men and women in Africa are more willing to discuss sexuality with one another than with their elders because of the sensitivity which surrounds the subject. Positive living national networks are already operational in Uganda, Ghana, Namibia, Zambia and Kenya. Another outcome of the positive Living Workshop is the establishment of the Positive Living Ambassadors (PLA) Programmes.

The programme involves:

1. The identification of young people (Ambassadors of Positive Living) who have proven record or education and outreach campaign commitment in the area of HIV/AIDS in their communities/countries.
2. The identification of the country's specific needs in IEC among young people in the area of HIV/AIDS.
3. Making arrangements with member governments in the region through CYP Africa Centre's contact points, and the national AIDS control and prevention programme officers to draw up a Programme for the visiting Ambassadors of Positive Living.

**The general terms of reference for the Ambassadors include the following:**

- A. Creation of awareness among young people and general public that those living with the virus can still lead a useful and productive life and that good health practices and constructive behaviour can be achieved. This is achieved through:
  - (i) Visiting and talking to students in schools, universities, youth clubs/organisations, etc;
  - (ii) Participating in radio/television talk shows, press briefings etc;
  - (iii) Assisting existing young (PLA) support groups through sharing of personal and country experiences, and where possible afford them greater visibility in order to counter the fear, ignorance and prejudice that they face. Where such youth support

groups do not exist, exploring possibilities of establishing them.

- (iv) Initiating dialogue and increased visibility of HIV/AIDS youth concerns within ministry or departments of youth.

- B. Facilitating linkages and dialogue between ministries or departments of youth with national AIDS control and prevention programmes.

Todate, more than 15 young people, from Botswana, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya, Malawi and South Africa have participated in the Positive Living Ambassadors Programme. They have visited 8 Commonwealth countries in Africa. The Commonwealth Youth Programme, Africa Centre is convinced that this Programme has the potential of influencing sexual behavioural change among young men and women. Very few young women and men have seen an HIV positive person, let alone listened to his or her side of the story; how, he or she is coping living with the virus; what his or her future hopes and plans are; etc.

Many men and women are deluded into believing that AIDS is for certain social groups of people, such as prostitutes, the poor, drunkards, etc. Hence, when they are confronted face to face by an HIV positive young person, telling his or her side of the story, they are usually overwhelmed and are more willing to listen and to re-examine their sexual behaviours.

CYP, Africa Centre would like in this regard to expand the Positive Living Ambassadors Programme to more countries within the Africa region, and also to expand and also to encourage the formation of HIV/AIDS youth networks and or support groups at the national or regional levels. HIV/AIDS networks at the national level have the potential of creating not only greater visibility of the growing problems of HIV/AIDS among young people in Africa, but also they could facilitate positive behavioural change among young men and women living with the virus and those at risk.

It is CYP, Africa Centre's intention to expand this Programme in assisting the establishment of national HIV/AIDS youth networks and to afford the Ambassadors an opportunity to dialogue with key policy makers in the ministries of youth and health to ensure that youth HIV/AIDS concerns are given greater visibility, than has so far been the case at the national level.

### **Young sex workers and teenage parents**

Young women and men in many countries in Africa are becoming sexually mature and physically capable of parenthood at a significantly earlier age than many of their parents did. Early parenthood particularly for young women is becoming an issue of concern, especially for adolescent mothers, since this is a leading cause of ill-health and death of young women in many parts of Africa, especially in circumstances where the mother is undernourished and does not have access to good health. In the absence of appropriate family planning services, many young women resort to illegal abortions as a method of their fertility regulation. Such abortions which are often badly performed in poor conditions of hygiene, have in many cases resulted in severe complications, sterility and even death, resulting in enormous psychological and social stress for individuals and families.

Alarmed at the magnitude and seriousness of this problem, NGOs in some countries have begun to target young women in their projects. Once such project is TASINTHA (We have reformed) in Zambia. It is co-ordinated by a qualified medical doctor who runs a counselling and training centre for young mothers and sex workers, most of whom are picked from the street. Small grants are given to recruits at the end of their training to enable them go into income generating ventures as an alternative to their previous activities.

To effectively tackle the problem of teenage pregnancies, serious attempts should be made to introduce sex education in schools. Young men and women should be taught about the dangers of pre-marital sex and be given appropriate counselling services that address their needs. At the moment, attempts at introducing sex education in schools are being resisted in many quarters especially by the Church. Recently, for instance, the Kenyan Government was forced to withdraw from introducing sex education in schools because the churches opposed the idea.

### **Preparing youth for life and work**

In many parts of Africa, there is today an out cry that the type of education being provided rarely equips the youth with the knowledge, skill and attitudes which enable them to achieve their full potential as individuals and members of society. Many young women and men in Africa lack functional literacy

skills even after leaving primary school, hence, they are unable to cope with the demands of their local communities and the changing society. Vocational and occupational training is frequently irrelevant to the needs of young people and often fails to address the manpower needs of local communities. Responsive community based training programmes which support the concept of volunteerism, income-generating projects and entrepreneurship are not available to most young people.

In a limited number of countries in Africa focus has been directed at the establishment of rural trade schools where youth are trained in such skills as carpentry, welding, blacksmith, brick-laying, etc. In these countries, once the trainees graduate from trade schools, they are sent to peri-urban areas to establish themselves as rural craftsmen.

The success of these schools however, depends on whether the skills and crafts learnt by the young people are actually in demand in a given community and whether the craftsmen can find an employer or can acquire capital to purchase the necessary tools, facilities, etc, to become self-employed. In countries where rural trade schools have been established, the common practice is to offer start up capital to graduating craftsmen to start their own businesses. However, before such support is provided, feasibility studies are essential in the areas where craftsmen intend to establish their enterprise to ensure that the local economy will support the business venture.

### **A framework for implementation of youth programmes**

From the foregoing discussions, it is apparent that the identified problems and interventions for youth cuts across sectors. The ministries of Health, Education, Community Services, Labour, Justice, etc. are in many cases directly and indirectly involved in addressing the identified problems and interventions. Clearly therefore, a machinery ought to be put in place to co-ordinate and monitor, the various youth related programmes that might be place.

In some countries in the region, youth ministries or departments have tried with some degree of success to put in place co-ordination mechanisms through the establishment of Youth Councils or Youth Commissions which have been given the necessary political support from the office of the President or Prime

Minister. When such high profiled political support is given, there is usually evidence of success of the work of such institutions. Most youth councils or commissions are created by an act of parliament which provides them with the legal mandate to source funds, plan and co-ordinate the work of all youth organizations and plan and co-ordinate the long term development of national youth policies.

Botswana, Cameroon, Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe have youth councils, which have the mandate to co-ordinate and advise government on all matters pertaining to youth activities. While South Africa has a National Youth Commission it is also through the Youth Councils and National Youth Commission that the youth are afforded the opportunity to participate in planning as well as implementation of programmes that concern them.

Most of the Youth Councils have a Secretariat, which is the functional organ that operates the day to day running of council activities. The Secretariats' work is usually facilitated by an executive committee and standing committees drawn from a wide cross section of government and non-governmental organizations. The most common set-up includes a combination of some of the following committees:

Education, skills training and literacy; Agriculture, Environment and Rural Development; Health and Welfare, Women in Development; Small and Medium Scale Industries, Recreation and Sports, National and International Youth Exchange; and Planning, Research and Evaluation.

It is through these committees that project ideas are initiated and action is activated. Both youth workers as well as youth themselves should be given equitable opportunity to participate in these committees so that adequate feedback is provided to policy makers on the experiences of those who are affected by the programmes. Unfortunately, while the issue of youth involvement in decision making is constantly raised at various national and international fora, rarely is provision made to allow youth a say in planning of their own affairs. The establishment of committees, with a wide range of representation of government ministries and non-governmental organizations, as well as youth themselves should be seen as essential for dialogue that will ultimately provide stimulus to the designed policies and programmes.

## **Conclusion**

From the foregoing discussion, it is evident that the problems of youth in the Africa region cannot be ignored and be dispensed with. The increasing youth population, and the strain this has engendered on education and health institutions, employment opportunities and recreational facilities requires carefully designed policy intervention measures that address the specific problems that affect young men and women.

Any designed National Youth Policy should not only be viewed as a historic document by the Government, but as a document of national development significance that sets out a general framework for addressing the historical and contemporary needs of young men and women for each country.

In particular national youth policies should address the task of satisfying educational and training needs of the many out-of-school young men and women and the transformation of the majority of current youth organizations which were launched as "anti-colonial youth groups" into developmental youth organizations that could make it possible to harness and channel the energy, vitality and aspirations of the youth into national development efforts.

It should however, also be appreciated that the formulation of a national youth policy is one thing, and implementation quite another. The latter depends on the political will and commitment governments have towards the formulated policy. Unfortunately, experience in the Africa region, reveals that most Ministries or Departments of Youth which are charged with the responsibility for developing policies and programmes for the majority of the youth have relatively little status and are usually given limited resources compared to long established Ministries, such as those dealing with education, agriculture, health, defence, etc.

Not only are such Ministries under-staffed, but also the majority of the staff are more often than not inadequately trained. Such important skills as planning, research and evaluation among others, are characteristically absent among staff employed in Youth Ministries and Departments. Any government set on the course of formulating a national youth policy, will need to provide adequate resources, both human and financial to ensure that the delineated

policies and programmes are able to adequately address young people's problems and concerns.

The youth of Africa face the year 2000 surrounded by daunting problems. However, the fact that the youth form the bulk of the populations in most countries of the region is also cause for guarded optimism. The youth have great potential to act as a positive force for development in their societies. But, this potential can only be realised through improving the environment in which the youth are growing up.

This cannot be achieved without clear policies and programmes focusing on the youth and their active participation. Empowerment, human resource development and Youth Policy development should be taken up by Commonwealth Governments as flagships for the emancipation of African youth from the shackles of poverty and past detrimental legacies of African and colonial traditions and practices.



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