

REPORT ON PARTICIPATION AT THE 10TH COMMONWEALTH YOUTH MINISTERS MEETING ON BEHALF OF THE COMMONWEALTH HUMAN ECOLOGY COUNCIL (CHEC)

INTRODUCTION

The 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting took place from September 11-15, 2023, at Marlborough House, London, United Kingdom. The meeting contributes to broader social and sustainable development goals from a youth development perspective. Chaired by the Government of Pakistan, it will bring together Youth Ministers, senior government officials, youth representatives, youth workers and other stakeholders from across the Commonwealth. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the originally scheduled meeting for 2021 was postponed. Initially 10CYMM was scheduled to be held in Islamabad, Pakistan from 23 to 25 January 2023 to officially launch the 'Year of Youth', but it was later postponed to 11-15 September 2023 and relocated to London, UK due to severe flooding in Pakistan in September 2022, which caused widespread devastation.

I responded to the urgent call by the board for representation at the CYMM, and thanks to the facilitation of the Chairman and the Secretary of the Board, I was resourced to attend the meeting. As a board member representing the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC), this report provides a concise overview of the key discussions and decisions relevant to CHEC's work during the meeting.

KEY DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS - MINISTERIAL OUTCOME STATEMENT

Youth Engagement and Advocacy:

- The meeting acknowledged the significant role of youth networks, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders in promoting youth-led action for sustainable and inclusive development.
- The 10th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC) was celebrated, recognizing the contributions of past and present executives. The assembly was commended for ensuring that the voices of young people are included in Commonwealth decision-making processes.
- The Commonwealth's **Global Youth Development Index (YDI) Update Report 2023** was welcomed, noting persisting inequalities in youth development. There's a resolution to take actions to empower young people in marginal positions. The growing use of the YDI is acknowledged as a useful tool for assessing youth.
- There's an agreement to extend the '**Year of Youth**' initiatives until CHOGM 2024 to ensure maximum and sustained impact.
- The **5th Commonwealth Conference of Youth Workers** will be hosted by the Government of Malaysia in **2025**.

Digital Transformation and Youth Empowerment:

- The transformative potential of technologies on youth employment was recognized, emphasizing the need to bridge the digital divide and skills gap.
- The role of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in enhancing the youth dividend was acknowledged. The launch of the “**AI for Youth**” initiative was endorsed, aiming to empower young people to innovate, develop entrepreneurial skills, and generate employment within the Commonwealth countries. This initiative seeks to leverage the support of industry leaders, especially in small and vulnerable member states, focusing on research, infrastructure, capacity building, and ethical AI policy.
- Collaborations with industry leaders like Simplilearn and Intel were commended for offering digital skills training and capacity building to upskill young people across the Commonwealth. The formation of the **Commonwealth AI Consortium** was welcomed, aiming to accelerate the reach of similar programs across the Commonwealth.

Social Entrepreneurship:

The dynamic interplay of economic development and social responsibility was discussed, emphasizing the potential of social entrepreneurship as a transformative force within the Commonwealth. The meeting pledged to foster an environment that nurtures and scales socially driven ventures.

Youth Work and Professional Development:

- The importance of qualified youth workers was highlighted, with acknowledgment given to the **Professional Association of Lecturers in Youth and Community Work (PALYCW)** for their contributions.
- The UK Government was thanked for hosting the 4th Commonwealth Youth Work Conference. **Malaysia's offer to host the 5th Commonwealth Conference of Youth Workers in 2025 was welcomed.**
- The reports from the Commonwealth Alliance of Youth Worker Associations (**CAYWA**) and the **Commonwealth Youth Council (CYC)** were noted, commending their work in promoting youth work professionalization and youth leadership.

Mental Health and Well-being:

The escalating mental health challenges, especially among children, young people, and women, were discussed. The meeting pledged to support efforts to develop robust mental health policies, launch well-being campaigns, and empower the mental wellness of young people.

Climate Activism and Sustainability:

- Young people's commitment to environmental preservation and sustainability was acknowledged. The mainstreaming of youth considerations into the work of the **Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub (CCFAH)** was welcomed.
- The formation of the Ocean Youth Working Group is welcomed. This aligns with a focus on the environmental health of oceans and the role of young people in taking action on climate change and ocean conservation.
- The statement encourages investment in youth-led initiatives related to renewable energy, conservation, marine life, carbon-neutral projects, and waste management.

Marlborough House Commitment for Youth Development

The Marlborough House Commitment is an agreement by Ministers of youth to ensure the well-being, empowerment, and progress of young citizens in the Year of Youth.

Key commitments include:

- Establishing National Youth Policies and Legislations.
- Ensuring youth participation in policy development.
- Promoting social inclusion and equity.
- Enhancing youth participation and engagement.
- Safeguarding children and young people.
- Providing employment and economic opportunities for youth

ROUNDTABLES MEETINGS

A critical part of the Youth Minister Meeting were the discussion across the themes of the covering enabled by six pivotal roundtable events, each focusing on a distinct theme but converging on the overarching goal of youth empowerment and engagement. These roundtables were platforms for debate, exchange, and consensus-building. They facilitated a rich tapestry of perspectives, from government officials to youth leaders, weaving together a narrative of challenges, opportunities, and aspirations.

Each roundtable was structured to be interactive, ensuring that every voice, every concern, and every proposal was heard and considered. The culmination of these discussions was the drafting of a final outcome statement, a testament to the collective will and commitment of the Commonwealth nations to their youth.

This summarily discuss each roundtable, capturing the essence of the discussions below;

1. Youth Engagement Roundtable

The event was structured as an informal and interactive session, drawing participation from Senior Government Officials, youth leaders, and various stakeholders. The primary objective of this roundtable was to address the challenges young professionals face when trying to engage with Commonwealth accredited bodies. The Ministers and officials actively discussed and proposed policy recommendations. By sharing experiences, they aimed to

develop a comprehensive set of policy recommendations. Key points of discussion included the modernization of approaches to be more inclusive and the success stories where youth had made significant impacts.

2. Promoting Cross-Cultural Understanding within the Commonwealth

Chaired by Hon Jean Nepo Abdallah Utumatwishima, the Minister of Youth from Rwanda, this session delved deep into the dynamics youth networks face in fostering cross-cultural understanding. Participants discussed the specific barriers hindering youth-led engagements and sought ways to address them. They also highlighted nations or initiatives within the Commonwealth that have been exemplary in leveraging youth networks for fostering global citizenship and cross-cultural understanding.

3. Climate Change Mitigation and Youth Engagement

The primary focus was on enhancing education and awareness regarding climate change mitigation, adaptation, and impact reduction. The session aimed to identify strategies that would work in tandem with young people to promote effective and inclusive climate action. Sustainable development, active conservation, and nature-based solutions were also on the agenda. The discussion emphasized the role of youth in addressing the pressing environmental challenges faced by Commonwealth member countries. They also explored how climate change considerations could be integrated into national youth policies and strategies. The overarching goal was to foster collaboration among Commonwealth countries, especially between ministries responsible for youth and climate change.

4. Engaging Young Professionals in the Commonwealth"

Led by the Hon Mario Bowleg, the Minister of Youth, Sports and Culture from The Bahamas, this event addressed the challenges young professionals face when trying to engage with Commonwealth accredited bodies. The Ministers and officials actively discussed and proposed policy recommendations. By sharing experiences, they aimed to develop a comprehensive set of policy recommendations. Key points of discussion included the modernization of approaches for inclusivity and success stories of youth involvement.

5. Youth Empowerment and Sustainable Development

The event aimed to enhance education and awareness regarding sustainable development practices and the role of youth in driving these initiatives. The session focused on strategies to work with young people to promote effective and inclusive sustainable development practices. Active conservation, nature-based solutions, and the development of green and blue economies were also on the agenda. The discussion emphasized the role of youth in addressing the pressing developmental challenges faced by Commonwealth member countries. They also explored the integration of sustainable development considerations into national youth policies and strategies.

COUNTRY SPECIFIC COMMITMENTS

Here's a summary of the key commitments from the specified countries:

Kenya: Advocates for inclusivity in governance and the Bottom Up Economic Transfer Agenda, with a focus on youth financial inclusion.

The Bahamas: Aims to update the National Youth Policy by October 2023 and establish a National Youth Council by early 2024.

Jamaica: Expresses intent to host the next Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting.

Malta: **Continues to support youth participation in decision-making and the AI for Youth** initiative.

Australia: Launches an Office for Youth for a new National Youth Engagement Strategy.

Papua New Guinea: Provides support to the Commonwealth Youth Council with office space and young volunteers.

MY PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS

Complex Problem Solving: Emphasised the importance of integrating design thinking into the curriculum to foster complex problem-solving skills.

Personal Responsibility & Accountability: Advocated for instilling a sense of leadership within classrooms and empowering students through out-of-class work education, thereby fostering personal responsibility and accountability.

Commonwealth Scholarships: Stressed the significance of supporting the Commonwealth scholarships to promote equity in education.

Preservation of Indigenous Knowledge: Recognized the invaluable role of local communities in preserving indigenous knowledge and culture. Consequently, I recommended a comprehensive review of education policies to decolonize and incorporate cultural differences within educational curriculums.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The 10th Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (CYMM) provided a crucial platform to discuss and address the challenges and opportunities facing the youth of the Commonwealth. Representing the Commonwealth Human Ecology Council (CHEC), our participation ensured that concerns pertinent to human ecology were effectively communicated and integrated into the broader discussions.

My attendance at the CYMM enriched my understanding of the systems and operations of the Commonwealth architecture. This experience built upon my prior involvement with the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings People Forum in Rwanda. I am deeply appreciative of the opportunity to lead conversations on behalf of CHEC. I made the most of the reception sessions, attending all of them to network and foster valuable relationships that I believe will further CHEC's objectives.

CHEC stands out for its dynamic approach, especially in its respect and allowance for the participation of youth leadership at the Governor's Council. This progressive stance distinguishes CHEC among its peer organizations. I am inspired by the spirit of the Year of Youth and the 50th anniversary of the Commonwealth Youth Program. These milestones align with CHEC's forward-thinking initiatives.

I am dedicated to collaborating with the Chairperson of the Year of Youth, who is from Ghana, to develop programs that will elevate CHEC's reputation as a significant contributor to the Secretariat's Year of Youth ambitions.

It was an honor to represent CHEC, and I eagerly anticipate future opportunities to contribute to the organization in any capacity. Thank you.