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12th Commonwealth Youth Forum: Declaration by the Young People of the Commonwealth

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Declaration by the Young People of the Commonwealth

Twelfth Commonwealth Youth Forum

Kigali 2022



The Commonwealth



COMMONWEALTH
YOUTH FORUM

TWELFTH COMMONWEALTH YOUTH FORUM

Declaration by the Young People of the Commonwealth

Kigali
2022



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Introduction

“Taking Charge of Our Future” is young people’s response to the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) 2022 theme “Delivering a Common Future: Connecting, Innovating, Transforming” – reasserting the powerful potential of young people across the Commonwealth in shaping that future. Young people strongly believe in action, and are responsible and energised to chart their future. Therefore, they will continue to be the bold, compassionate and innovative voices of the Commonwealth, prepared to both advocate and act on these policy recommendations in order to successfully deliver the prosperous common future that the Commonwealth envisions.

This Declaration and supporting Action Plan (Annex 1) express current policy recommendations of young people from the Commonwealth. The proposed action is necessary if Heads of Government are to collectively deliver a common future. These recommendations have been gathered through national, regional, Commonwealth and global youth forums, and were finalised at the 12th Commonwealth Youth Forum (CYF). They represent a common framework to inform and inspire youth-led development at all levels.

We, the young people of the Commonwealth, convened in Kigali from 20 to 23 June 2022 for the 12th CYF, recommit to the values and principles enshrined in the Commonwealth Charter and the Commonwealth Youth Council’s Constitution. This year, when the Commonwealth family has focused the CHOGM agenda on the role and contribution of young people, we support the aims espoused in Article 13 of the Commonwealth Charter that recognises the critical role of young people in the future success of the Commonwealth.¹

As youth leaders, we pledge our ongoing commitment and support as partners and stakeholders in our own countries and across the Commonwealth as we all strive towards building a better and more sustainable future, as defined in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the accompanying Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

We also acknowledge that the COVID-19 pandemic has thrown the world into an economic and social crisis, disrupting all aspects of life across the Commonwealth and beyond. The global pandemic continues to pose considerable risks in employment, health and access to education for young people, especially those who are vulnerable as a result of their social and economic background.

By this Youth Declaration, we:

- i. *Recognise* that, to successfully transform our world, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development must be adopted and actualised by all governments and stakeholders, therein prioritising national and international policies that implement, monitor and achieve the 17 SDGs.²
- ii. *Acknowledge* the importance of young people's inclusive participation and positive contribution to building peace, culminating with the United Nations Security Council passing Resolution 2250 on Youth, Peace and Security and other accompanying guidelines for youth-led action on peace-building.³ Resolution 2250 represents a milestone for the meaningful empowerment of young people in all social, political and economic processes to formulate sustainable solutions to critical security threats of the 21st century.
- iii. *Recall and commit* to the African Youth Charter (AYC); the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Youth Development Action Plan; the Pacific Youth Development Framework (PYDF); and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Declaration on the Adoption of the ASEAN Youth Development Index, along with the policy recommendations put forward by young people participating in the 2017 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings.
- iv. *Acknowledge* the vital role and contribution of formal and informal national youth councils/bodies, national student organisations, youth organisations, youth movements, associations, networks and other youth-led entities, in helping build a safer and more stable, secure and productive society for young people. We also recognise the continued support of youth workers and the youth sector as a whole, together with ministries/departments of youth and other stakeholders, in furthering youth development.

We therefore call on governments, civil society organisations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international donor partners and other stakeholders in member countries to partner with the Commonwealth Youth Council to support the policy recommendations that follow.

Theme 1

Governance, Rule of Law and Youth Involvement in Decision-Making

CYF delegates highlighted the importance of engaging youth in decision-making to ensure that every decision taken to uphold good governance and the rule of law would be in sync with the Commonwealth Charter, which supports an “independent, impartial, honest and competent judiciary and recognizes that an independent, effective and competent legal system is integral to upholding the rule of law, engendering public confidence and dispensing justice.”

However, while rule of law and access to justice have become key outcomes and enablers of the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030, specifically defined in SDG 16 and tacitly implanted in other goals and targets, there is a lack of participation by young people in these discussions. Delegates noted that many youth leaders lack the opportunity to come forward with their ideas on global issues such as climate change, protection of human rights, lack of transparency in recruitment and discrimination in the work place, in order to take more proactive roles in decision-making.

Youth, as the leaders of tomorrow, play a significant role in sustaining the rule of law and ensuring good governance. In order to be able to fulfil this role, young people must understand the concepts and be acknowledged as vital and important to the development of legal and judicial systems. The CYF discussions focused on creating more opportunities for youth to engage decision-makers on critical governance issues that will affect future generations and on expanding youth training in this area.

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

1A: Rule of Law

1. Leaders of the Commonwealth to ensure full protection of the human rights of all young people and to be transparent in the interest of justice. We also call on local and regional bodies to enhance initiatives and stakeholder participation to promote the elimination of all forms of discrimination, which may further bar access to justice, and participation in governance systems.⁴
2. Governments to use people-friendly approaches to address legal, administrative, social, economic and cultural barriers that prevent access to justice, including the use of technology to provide access to legal services as well as enhanced delivery of justice services.⁵
3. Stakeholders at the national, regional and Commonwealth level to skill youth leaders in good governance and conflict resolution and empower young people as they continue to create spaces and platforms for engagement and learning on these issues.⁶
4. Governments to take concrete steps to strengthen child protection systems and eliminate child labour, child marriage and gender-based violence, and address issues of online safety and cyber-bullying.

5. Leaders to promote, protect and fulfil the human rights and fundamental freedoms of all young people in all their intersectional diversity, ensuring a human rights-based approach to youth policies and programmes that are participatory, youth-centric, non-partisan, gender-responsive, comprehensive, evidence-based, adequately resourced, transparent and accountable.⁷
6. Stakeholders to expand opportunities for youth to participate in national and international governance processes by adopting sustainable national strategies for public education on human rights, and by creating and supporting spaces for exchange and learning among young people and between young people, leaders and decision-makers.
7. Governments and stakeholders to take steps, legislative and otherwise, to ensure and promote young people's right to freedom of expression through peaceful, open dialogue and the free flow of information – including through a free and responsible media, as set out in the Commonwealth Charter.
8. National and local governments to empower, protect and support youth to be actively involved in conflict prevention, resolution and peace-building processes and initiatives, while also supporting youth-led organisations in their efforts to promote social cohesion, security, stability, respect and understanding.⁸
9. Governments to appropriately consider best practice in juvenile justice and peer mediation with services centred on restoration and rehabilitation. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring the justice system (accompanied by appropriate legislation, policy and training) meets the developmental needs of young people, including helping youth navigate the road from arrest, to incarceration, to preparation for release and finally reintegration into communities. The juvenile justice system should integrate a child rights approach for children in conflict with the law, based on the premise that young offenders can be rehabilitated and are fundamentally different from adults in terms of levels of development and responsibility.
10. Governments to include youth and youth perspectives on the adoption and monitoring of Commonwealth Anti-Corruption Benchmarks as a means of promoting the role of civil society in fighting corruption and preserving public service integrity.

1B: Youth Policies

Despite country-specific challenges in implementing youth policies and coordinating national youth development initiatives, there is a need to implement programmes to meet the needs of large youth populations. Therefore, youth departments of government need to be better supported or strengthened where appropriate, to coordinate national youth policy implementation, reduce duplication and enhance policy coherence across various government ministries and sectors. Organisations, agencies and communities must offer evidence-informed interventions and resources, built on a positive youth development framework that fully addresses the diversity of youth backgrounds, identities and needs.⁹

Therefore, the young people of the Commonwealth call on:

11. Governments to improve disaggregated data collection and analysis of youth populations by adopting a core set of indicators to monitor and report on youth development across multiple sectors and parameters; make available country-specific data in accordance with the Commonwealth Youth Development Index; evaluate the performance of national youth policy implementation plans; and conduct relevant research, including youth-led research, in priority areas.
12. Governments, in collaboration with youth leaders, to improve governance of youth by introducing or updating evidenced-based national youth policies and mainstreaming youth as a key component of existing and/or incoming national policies, ensuring these are time-bound, with allocated funding, and are accompanied by a robust monitoring and evaluation framework.
13. Governments and stakeholders to improve the resourcing (financial, human and technical) required to improve the quantity, quality and representativeness of youth participation across the Commonwealth,¹⁰ including strengthening the functional structures of youth representation at national level to provide meaningful participation in decision-making in areas that concern their development and future.
14. Governments and regional bodies to develop a regional youth mechanism to draw on and foster collaboration, coordination and synergies among youth-led organisations, governments, civil society organisations, the private sector, international and regional organisations and academic institutions to better represent and coordinate youth issues and priorities in the region, such as peace, climate change, education, capacity-building and entrepreneurship.¹¹

1C: Youth Engagement and Inclusion

15. Governments to renew their commitment to promoting active youth leadership in all member countries.
16. Governments in collaboration with youth leaders to strengthen the capacity of National Youth Councils to create opportunities for the inclusive and meaningful participation of youth in policy-making and programming.¹² In this vein, youth leaders agreed to work with partners and governments to deepen youth participation at all levels of decision-making, especially for marginalised youth groups.¹³
17. Governments to measure how youth are interacting with their communities to ensure that these grassroots mechanisms are inclusive and direct, and that youth are able to participate in activities important for youth development and are empowered socially and politically to contribute ideas and youth perspectives on important issues.¹⁴
18. Governments to commit to increasing the accessibility of young people to participate in their democratic processes as candidates for parliamentary and other national decision-making bodies. In doing so, limitations that prevent the involvement of young people should be identified and eliminated.
19. Governments to acknowledge young people as the future custodians of our roads and support opportunities for their involvement in shaping the culture and safe and sustainable development of our roads and mobility system through meaningful participation in decision making.

Theme 2

Human Capital Development

We, the young people of the Commonwealth, comprise more than 60 per cent of the Commonwealth population and recognise the significant contribution we can make to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where there are inclusive, equitable and accessible opportunities for all to participate and contribute. With that, there is a particular need to ensure society's most vulnerable and marginalised groups are not left behind.¹⁵ This includes, but is not limited to, persons with disabilities, young women, young migrants, indigenous youth, youth belonging to ethnic minorities, and any other vulnerable or marginalized youth who face discrimination based on any other ground or on multiple grounds.¹⁶

The urgency of advancing these youth-led efforts has been significantly increased by the COVID-19 crisis. The political and socio-economic impact of this global pandemic has not only exposed the weaknesses in the development sector but also worsened the realities of many vulnerable groups who already live insecure lives in challenging contexts. It is now more important than ever for all young people regardless of their background to be viewed as an opportunity, rather than a burden, to foster an inclusive, equitable society and drive transformative change.

Achieving this is therefore dependent on protecting all young people's health and well-being, guaranteeing a quality education and the freedom to participate, providing decent work opportunities and addressing the myriad of other challenges young people face. We urge all stakeholders to embrace our diversity, and call for the provision of quality resources and opportunities, to fully harness our full potential. Targeted efforts must be made spearheaded by technology, innovation and data-driven evidence, to ensure that all vulnerable and marginalised groups enjoy these same fundamental freedoms and equalities, as well as full participation in all social, economic, political and cultural spheres of life.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

20. Governments to recognise that vulnerable and marginalised groups are disproportionately affected in society and call for the elimination of stigma and discrimination through legislation and policies that challenge harmful attitudes and practices and grant young people dignity and respect.¹⁷ This includes through the active mainstreaming of gender and disability rights in all programming and policy-making.¹⁸
21. Governments to promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all young people in communities¹⁹ and commit funds and resources for active integration and social protection of vulnerable and marginalised groups, in order to allow for the full participation of all young people and ensure no one is left behind.²⁰
22. Governments to support and invest in the collection and use of quality disaggregated data to understand and address the scale, nature and challenges faced by young people, particularly the most marginalised and vulnerable groups, and develop evidence-informed policies.²¹

23. Governments to promote the leadership and representation of all young people²² through the support of youth-based organisations, youth leadership and development programmes, and mentorship platforms to ensure all young people have access to empowerment opportunities, information and resources.²³
24. All member countries to ratify and implement the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and Optional Protocol (CRPD), which offers standards of protection for the civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights of persons with disabilities. This also includes raising awareness and understanding of disability rights, inclusion and its challenges through the CRPD and the Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter.²⁴
25. Governments to invest in and improve accessible infrastructure, particularly around areas concerning education, sport, physical activity and mental health, which includes public spaces, housing, education settings, workplaces and recreation spaces, to reduce the barriers and challenges that hinder inclusive and equitable opportunities for young people with disabilities.²⁵
26. National and local governments to recognise and respond to the need for available, affordable and reliable assistive technologies, to ensure all young people, including persons with disabilities, can enjoy greater independence and fully participate in and contribute to society.²⁶
27. Member countries to recognise road traffic injury is the leading cause of death for children and young people aged 5-29 and to commit to implement and help meet the road safety related Sustainable Development Goals and the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety 2021-2030 target of reducing road deaths and injuries by at least 50% by 2030, to ensure the safety of children and young people in the Commonwealth.

Theme 3

Trade, Entrepreneurship and Employment

Facilitating Trade, Boosting Entrepreneurship and Tackling Unemployment

There are strong concerns about the way politicians (and policy-makers) have approached youth employment. Short-termism or “politicisation” has all too often led to temporary, short-lived and number-oriented policies, which often result in the creation of low-quality and precarious jobs. A longer-term perspective is required for sustainable solutions. There are also growing concerns about issues of job quality: precariousness, temporary work, poor remuneration and working conditions, informality, etc. More efforts are needed to promote and protect the labour rights of youth and create decent jobs as a powerful way of tackling inequality.

The availability of decent jobs is tied to government interventions, yet education curricula around the world have not been sufficiently able to provide the skills and competencies to provide solutions needed to reverse challenges related to youth employment. In order to achieve SDG 8,²⁷ youth need to be provided with technological tools, data and mentorship, as well as physical spaces, to develop their ideas and innovations. Equally, youth-serving organisations need to be provided with platforms, tools and resources to support future youth leaders.²⁸

Delegates noted that young people continue to be vulnerable in the labour market as well as in entrepreneurial endeavours, citing limited access to credit and high risk of exploitation.²⁹ Therefore, more emphasis should be placed on the transition from low-quality, low-productivity, self-employment to more productive, innovative, entrepreneurship and formal employment. The CYF discussions focused on the creation of decent jobs (in relation to both wages and sustainability), enhancing the employability of youth, supporting opportunity-driven entrepreneurship and self-employment, providing equal access to social security provisions, and ensuring the application of international labour standards for working youth.³⁰

Therefore, young people of the Commonwealth call on:

3A: Trade

28. National governments to support the collection of quality disaggregated unemployment data and standardising of indicators related to youth unemployment to track and measure the progress of employment initiatives.³¹
29. Governments and stakeholders to reinforce women’s economic empowerment by, *inter alia*, increasing women’s financial inclusion, the proportion of women in management positions across sectors, access to paid parental leave provisions, affordable childcare, equal pay for equal work and the ability of women to access, own and control land, businesses and other physical capital.³²
30. In this regard, governments to develop policies and programmes to enable improved pathways and support for the transition from school to work to enhance employment prospects, including initiatives to provide information about vacancies, job-searching and other employment

services.³³ Strengthening these programmes must include incorporating core workplace skills development and entrepreneurship training.

31. Government and private sector, to partner with youth-led and youth-serving organizations to engage and educate youth on macro-economic policy and represent youth perspectives on critical issues such as employment, fiscal policy and trade and business development.
32. Governments to promote and protect entrepreneurial start-ups, micro and small businesses and a healthy business environment through legislative frameworks, and develop national policies and strategies, with specifics regarding intellectual property rights, fair competition and anti-monopoly.
33. Governments to increase cooperation towards the creation of a business- and start-up-friendly intra-Commonwealth trade bloc and policies, building stronger regional and international links between young entrepreneurs and businesses.

3B: Employment and Economic Policies

34. Governments to develop and operationalise national strategies for youth employment and employability, as a distinct strategy or as part of a national employment strategy, through enhanced youth employment research and evaluation.³⁴
35. In particular, governments to support the full participation in labour markets of young people with disabilities, those living in poverty and those belonging to underrepresented demographics, in vulnerable and volatile communities and in rural areas, improving their access to employment. Their employment and employability needs should be assessed – promoting inclusive processes and protocols in recruitment and transparency in retention and promotion, and improving accessible, disability-friendly work environments with increased stakeholder awareness.³⁵
36. Leaders to consider the development of a "Jobs Mainstreaming Strategy" within the context of ongoing work and partnerships at the regional and international level in the area of youth employment.
37. Governments and education stakeholders to prepare young people for the jobs of the future by investing in skilling young people and ensuring that formal education transmits adequate skills that anticipate labour market needs. This preparation should also encourage, through informal education platforms, life-long learning, equivalencies and skills development, using information and communication technology (ICT) where appropriate, and using the growth of digital technologies across sectors, such as eSports, as a vehicle for investment and employment generation. Particular emphasis should be placed on the green, blue, orange and digital economies, acknowledging that certain economic sectors offer important opportunities to absorb young workers.
38. Governments to also address cross-cutting requirements for boosting decent jobs for youth in the green, blue, orange and digital economies, such as supportive legislation and economic policies, enhanced curricula and training, financial incentives, and the promotion and protection of youth labour rights in these sectors.³⁶
39. Governments to promote innovative approaches to education, including through increasing the use of ICTs and digitisation to prepare young people to meet the full potential of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and future engagement in economic activity.³⁷

40. Stakeholders, particularly those in government, to collaborate with youth-led and youth-serving organisations to raise awareness of youth rights to decent work and employment opportunities, as well as to educate youth on labour rights at the national and international level.

3C: Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment

41. Governments to develop a comprehensive policy framework to encourage and support youth entrepreneurship and self-employment, which in itself is a catalyst for job creation, and develop an enabling environment for sustainable enterprises and economic development.³⁸ This includes the introduction of entrepreneurship education into education curricula.
42. Governments to promote opportunities for and nurture creative, innovative and inclusive social impact entrepreneurship for and by youth, persons with disabilities, women and other vulnerable and marginalised groups.³⁹
43. Governments and business support organisations to provide accessible entrepreneurship incubation, business development services and support for commercialisation and trade targeted to youth ideas/businesses at the national and regional level.⁴⁰ In this way, governments should aim to reduce barriers to trade and encourage connectivity among youth businesses.
44. Public sector, private sector and non-governmental entities to collaborate on the development of activities for the promotion of youth entrepreneurship and the transfer of business knowledge, skills and investment.⁴¹
45. Governments to promote greater access to markets, capital, skills, information and technology for young entrepreneurs as well as greater integration into value chains and improved coordination between youth-led enterprises and lead firms.⁴²
46. Governments to consider fiscal incentives for youth-led enterprises and businesses that emphasise job creation that benefits young people.
47. Governments and financial institutions to promote financial inclusion and competitiveness of micro, small and medium enterprises, which will benefit young entrepreneurs. This must extend to enhancing business networks, information flows, access to finance, technology and innovation, markets and human resources development and improving the enabling policy and regulatory environment.
48. Heads of Government to include youth and youth business in the Commonwealth Connectivity Agenda in a deliberate way, and allow for effective participation of youth in relevant connectivity clusters to enable information-sharing and exchange of experiences and best practices.

Country and Area-Specific Responses Needed

49. Governments to further refine these recommendations into region-specific action plans with the support and input of youth and other stakeholders. There is a need for country-, state- and province-specific industrial policies that address issues of youth enterprises and decent jobs for young people to encourage the empowerment and advancement of youth and sustainable development across the Commonwealth.

Theme 4

Information and Communication Technology and Innovation

We the young people of the Commonwealth believe that we are in a strong position to contribute to and benefit from digital transformation and innovation. Strengthened ICT and innovation ecosystems lead to a more productive economy, the creation of decent jobs and access to markets, networks, finance and information. For ICT and innovation ecosystems to thrive, it is imperative that leaders invest in the development of the multiple components that together comprise the ICT and innovation economy. These include, *inter alia*, infrastructure, skilled talent, networks, regulations and policies among others.

Given the inequalities that exist between and within countries in the Commonwealth as regards access to technology for young people, it is essential that the approaches leaders take towards the strengthening of ICT and innovation across the Commonwealth are based on principles of equity and access-for-all.

Leaders should therefore work to develop and engender an enabling, inclusive environment that fosters digital transformation by driving, supporting and strengthening the design and implementation of appropriate legislation and policies, the development of infrastructure and support services, and sound capacity-building strategies and mechanisms to encourage innovation.

We the young people of the Commonwealth, therefore, call on:

4A: General

50. Governments and stakeholders to invest in the development and expansion of ICT infrastructure and support services, with the view to significantly increasing access to ICT, providing universal, affordable access to the internet, enhancing the creation and use of technology and technology-enabled services and using the growth of digital technologies across sectors, such as eSports, as a vehicle for investment and employment generation.
51. Governments and stakeholders to address the digital divide and inequalities that exist as regards access to ICT by focusing on strategies and policies that increase access for underserved and disadvantaged youth⁴³ while also supporting young people's ability to be critical and responsible users and producers of information⁴⁴ and technology.
52. Governments and educational institutions to explore and develop approaches that improve educational systems at all levels, by ensuring they are equipped to provide young people with the skills, competences and tools to

contribute to and benefit from digital transformation. This will include, *inter alia*, redesigning curricula, instruction and assessment that facilitates 21st century skills-building in line with the requirements of the future of work.⁴⁵

53. Governments and educational institutions to address youth skills gaps and inequalities by ensuring equitable access for all in adapting to the future of work. This involves strengthening technical and vocational, education and training (TVET) and life-long learning programmes for young people to equip them with relevant digital skills and innovation methodologies.
54. Governments and stakeholders to recognise that net neutrality and the right to privacy are critical issues that will ensure quality access to important technologies.⁴⁶ Leaders should therefore take action, legislative and otherwise, to develop and promote policies that engender data security, net neutrality and the free flow of information.
55. National and local governments to adopt enabling legal and regulatory environments that support ICT development, IP protection, cyber-security, innovation, ease of doing business and interoperability.
56. Governments to adopt e-government strategies that offer new opportunities for more direct and convenient youth engagement with government, and for the delivery of public services to citizens.
57. Government and other stakeholders to develop and implement digital strategies that promote youth and social entrepreneurship and financial inclusion.⁴⁷ This should include facilitating programmes that enhance sustainable, inclusive access to finance, enterprise funding and markets for youth-led innovations and solutions, expanding trade opportunities and making the regulatory environment supportive for young entrepreneurs.⁴⁸
58. Governments to strengthen youth ministries in the area of ICT and innovation by training staff in relevant technology and innovation methodologies as well as encouraging the application of technology and innovation in youth interventions.
59. Governments and stakeholders to promote an evidence-based approach to youth policy development through the use of technology, including access to up-to-date, systematic disaggregated data that will inform the design, implementation and review of youth policies, programmes and initiatives, supported by inter-agency collaboration at the regional and international levels; and the inclusion of youth within research teams and statistics units, in particular young female researchers and statisticians, who continue to be underrepresented in these fields.⁴⁹

4B: ICT Development

60. Governments to ensure that national infrastructure development is subject to community-based assessment and decision-making aimed at addressing local needs across spatial contexts (urban, peri-urban, rural), while promoting integrated fit-for-purpose territorial development.⁵⁰
61. Commonwealth member countries to secure an agreement that deems the internet as a basic public good. This agreement should form the basis for a coordinated initiative to address "internet poverty", within a specified timescale. The objective is to ensure that all Commonwealth citizens, including those from marginalised communities, can achieve common standards of digital literacy and benefit from the opportunities afforded by the internet.⁵¹

62. Commonwealth member countries to develop standard ICT syllabuses, to equip all young people with the skills to positively contribute in a digital world. These syllabuses should be tailored to the needs of individual countries and/or regions, and be available through all mainstream and alternative educational institutions. Young leaders should be involved in their development, from the outset, along with relevant ministries of education and corporate partners. They should be supported by a robust legal and regulatory framework, and input should be sought from employers and internet providers.⁵²

4C: Innovation

63. Commonwealth member countries and the Commonwealth Secretariat to establish a Commonwealth Youth Innovation Fund in order to tap into the innovation potential of young people across the Commonwealth, and to promote more solution-oriented cultures. This fund would provide young entrepreneurs with start-up grants to convert their ideas into practice and ongoing mentoring to guide the development of projects. This fund would operate across the Commonwealth, with input and contributions from public-private sector partnerships, academia and voluntary and non-governmental organisations.⁵³
64. National governments to support young entrepreneurs in transforming their ideas into viable, sustainable businesses through the provision of capacity-building and training on business modelling, access to markets and use of technology and innovation.⁵⁴
65. Commonwealth member countries to recognise the need to keep all Commonwealth nations connected by developing physical and digital platforms that enable young people across borders to exchange ideas, build consensus and reach decisions for a common way forward.
66. National and local governments to provide appropriate resources for higher education institutions to further strengthen joint research, capacity-building, professional development and mobility of students, faculty and staff.⁵⁵
67. Governments and other stakeholders to forge partnerships aimed at equipping young people with the skills and resources to be key agents in addressing the challenges they face by making investments including financial capital, mentorship and capacity-building training.

Theme 5

Environment, Climate Change and Sustainability

It is crucial to recognise the critical role of youth as important stakeholders and actors in global resilience. With impacts inter-generationally, but increasingly on the younger and future generations, the environmental sustainability crisis highlights the need to better harness energy, innovation and foresight in climate change planning, decision-making and action.⁵⁶ Intergenerational justice, fundamental to climate action, likewise demands that future generations inherit a natural environment unspoilt by human greed and depredation. There is increasing demand for innovative and inclusive arrangements that empower governments, youth and civil society to drive and be involved in more sustainable initiatives and lifestyles.

Innovation and transformation require courage from governments to implement difficult decisions and tough actions and laws, especially on industries that have driven economies traditionally, such as the fossil fuel, mining, oil and gas industries and even chemically powered agriculture. There must be convincing actions and evidence that governments believe and lead in the green and sustainability movement, in order to create effective and long-lasting changes and improvements in society. Furthermore, societies must be engaged in a just transition to greener economies and climate neutrality. This is an urgent call to change consumption and production patterns, in understanding and addressing the environment implications on the nation's work and job security.⁵⁷

The general lack of awareness of the climate crisis will require governments and ministries to intentionally include and champion topics regarding Environment and Sustainability on the agenda of meetings and national-level discussions, and especially in youth-related conversations.

There must be recognition and increased application of innovation and solutions, based on scientific research and the engagement of special groups of activists and people, including aboriginal populations across the world. There is significant untapped potential among these groups, of those who understand and practise proven environmental preservation solutions.

Leaders have noted that escalating climate change-related impacts, coupled with the intensification of geostrategic competition, exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, especially in small states. This is particularly true for the Pacific, where it has been identified as "the greatest threat to the security and prosperity of the region".⁵⁸

Implementable actions are needed in the following areas, recognised as having high potential to effectively create positive impact, adaptation and progress in the climate crisis and in the green and blue economies.

The young people of the Commonwealth call on:

5A: Goals, Ambition and Commitment

68. Governments to raise their ambitions and commitments, develop enhanced National Determined Contributions (NDCs), prioritise mitigation and adaptation, and lead radical institutional changes,⁵⁹ making advancement and implementation plans to fulfil commitments to international agreements such as the Paris Agreement.
69. Governments to develop and implement transformative climate “master plans”⁶⁰ and place the country’s environment and sustainability goals as being as important as those for the digital transformation.
70. Governments to mobilise public and private sources of finance to drive de-carbonisation of all sectors and advance resilience⁶¹ and to make significant progress towards commitments on climate finance, such as developed countries’ pledge of US\$ 100 million per year by 2020.

5B: Economy and Finance

71. Governments to substantially scale up climate funding support after 2020 to ensure society’s access to adequate funding for adaptation and mitigation.⁶² This includes the implementation of an operational Green Climate Fund (GCF) in each country.
72. Governments to transform economies to promote investment in Low-Carbon Development as an opportunity for innovation, employment, a cleaner environment and economic benefits to all, and to encourage sector engagement and the establishment of an enabling environment (including through the Pacific Regional NDC Hub and existing country-specific NDC Partnership Plans) to translate international commitments into national actions.⁶³
73. Governments to take effective steps to transform economies, reducing environmental impact through increasing bold legislative actions on polluting industries such as fossil fuel and mining activities, that might include reducing and subsequently removing subsidies and support, and increased taxes and restrictions. Effective steps should also be taken while supporting and promoting sustainable alternatives such as renewable energy and social entrepreneurship. This should be seen as an opportunity to create more sustainable and future-relevant jobs that will boost and support the economy for more people, including for young people and women’s groups, and with greater longevity.
74. Leaders to create capacity-building opportunities and access to environment and green technology.⁶⁴ This includes updating the education sector across mainstream, formal and informal learning with environment and sustainability-focused curricula, research and courses.
75. Governments to urgently address damaging industries, through the immediate creation and implementation of plans to remove fossil fuel industries without infringing the rights of any vulnerable communities. This includes an energy transition plan to accelerate the shift away from fossil fuels and towards renewable energy, as well as making significant gains in energy efficiency.⁶⁵

76. Governments to encourage innovation and nature-based solutions by advocating studies and collaboration between research bodies and indigenous communities to formulate green solutions across forestry, agriculture, oceans and food systems, including through biodiversity conservation and leveraging supply chains and technology.⁶⁶
77. Governments and institutions to recognise the significant potential for nature-based solutions to contribute to effective actions for resilience development while also improving sustainable livelihoods and protecting natural ecosystems and biodiversity.⁶⁷

5C: Promotion, Inclusion and Partnerships

78. Leaders to broaden inclusion and partnerships, whereby young people must be provided access to formal decision-making processes, especially the most vulnerable to climate changes (indigenous groups, the disabled, etc.), and structures, to allow young people to hold their government accountable to its commitments.⁶⁸
79. Governments to intentionally increase partnerships with small states, to better achieve and monitor progress towards climate crisis commitments. This includes the need for a long-term vision, a carefully considered regionalism strategy and, most importantly, a collective commitment to achieving this.⁶⁹
80. Governments to recognise the strategic value of small states and areas most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, such as the Pacific region. These areas are well positioned and should be leveraged on, to provide unprecedented opportunities to pilot and refine solutions that are most effective in addressing the impact of climate change.
81. Governments to promote and practise the fundamental principle of inclusivity and equality, particularly emphasising the role of women, ensuring increased representation at all levels, and of youth, in advancing regionalism, while acknowledging the need for urgent, immediate actions on the threats and challenges of climate change in the creation of regional declarations, such as the Kainaki II Declaration for Urgent Climate Change Action Now.⁷⁰
82. Leaders to encourage the strengthening and creation of collaborative partnerships, including public–private partnerships, through effective enabling environments, incentivisation, and support and training for resilient, green and low-carbon initiatives.⁷¹
83. Governments to increase promotional efforts, including for environmental policies and initiatives aimed at building the capacity of youth as a driving force for action to address the challenges posed by climate change, encouraging partnerships between governments and intergovernmental, non-governmental, private sector and youth-led organisations.⁷²
84. Countries to promote examples of actions that are progressing the goals of international charters such as the Paris Agreement and regional frameworks such as the Framework for Resilient Development in the Pacific (FRDP).⁷³
85. Leaders to promote the meaningful participation and engagement of youth in climate action inclusively to mitigate climate-related disasters, as well as to integrate sustainable natural resource management and human security into local, national, regional and international development strategies, while addressing the challenges related to demographic change; intensifying urbanisation; overexploitation of natural resources;

accelerating pollution; rising sea levels; conservation and sustainable use of oceans, seas and marine resources; and environmental degradation, aimed at ensuring a holistic approach to environmental, economic and social sustainability for future generations.⁷⁴

86. Leaders to promote and create policies that support and grow employment in sectors that are effective solutions for climate change. This covers organisations that aim to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, reduce consumption and build resilience against climate change.
87. Governments to mainstream and normalise sustainable campus practices that teach children and young people to become agents of change in their communities and in the world,⁷⁵ including supporting and encouraging the formation of green initiatives, clubs and activities in schools.
88. Leaders to amplify the voices of young people and the initiatives they lead, particularly in communities most vulnerable to climate change, and recognise smaller countries' involvement in international efforts and bodies, such as Republic of Marshall Islands' role as co-lead on the United Nations Secretary General Climate Action Summit's Youth and Public Mobilisation track.⁷⁶

5D: Strategy

89. Governments to formulate clear implementation plans around resilience, protection and adaptation strategies, to advance global efforts to address and manage the impacts and risks of climate change, particularly in the most vulnerable communities and nations.⁷⁷
90. Governments to advance new commitments and mitigation strategies to increase resilience at urban and local levels, on environmentally sustainable initiatives, such as carbon and emission ratings across all electrical products, accreditation of low-emission buildings, mass transport and urban infrastructure; and projects to raise resilience for the urban poor.⁷⁸
91. Governments to review and advance adaptation strategies to better help local communities and businesses cope with the necessary changes in types of employment and industries. Businesses will need resources and support to adapt and adopt new strategies to continue contributing to the economy.
92. Governments to create social and political drivers and policies to advance commitments in areas that affect people's well-being, such as reducing air pollution, generating decent jobs, strengthening climate adaptation strategies and protecting workers and vulnerable groups.
93. Governments to improve on risk and response strategies with young people and with other minority and differently abled groups. The development of climate crisis response strategies includes improving response frameworks that encompass accessible approaches and resources to ensure the removal of obstructions during evacuations that hinder those with any disability.⁷⁹

5E: Blue Economies

94. Governments to launch, grow and support new economic sectors that offer important opportunities to absorb young workers, including in the green and blue economy (relying on ocean resources and their sustainable use).

95. Governments to boost the creation of decent jobs for youth in the blue economy, by developing strategies, supportive legislation, stimulus and policies to promote employment, relevant training and entrepreneurship and the promotion and protection of youth labour rights.⁸⁰
96. Governments to prioritise the improvement and recognition of blue professions, through implementation of legislation on workers' care, protection and rights.
97. Governments to formulate strategies to mitigate and prevent the exploitation and unsustainable extraction and use of resources. Issues such as unequal fishing are prevalent, and there is a need to consider value chain aspects for a more equitable distribution of economic benefits within the sector.⁸¹
98. Governments to put in place structures that ensure youth can be involved inclusively with conversations and decision-making around the blue economy. More dialogues and conversations are necessary to ensure progress on the innovation and youth entrepreneurship fronts in the blue economy.
99. Governments to ensure that subjects and curricula related to the blue economy are on offer in mainstream institutions. Topics surrounding environment and sustainability should also include the study of ocean, water and marine lives.
100. Governments to ensure multi-sectorial participation across all stakeholders in the mechanisms and commitment towards the improvement of the Blue Economy, Small States, oil and gas and marine industries. These mechanisms should include methods, such as laws and constitutions, to hold parties accountable to damage and loss of social and economic gain on countries.

Theme 6

Health and COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the discrepancies in access to quality health care between and within member countries, and how a nation's lack of emergency preparedness and resilience to threats can critically affect a country's health system, economy and development.

All citizens, regardless of age, race or ability, have the right to access safe and decent health care. Additional commitment must be made urgently by governments, to ensure vulnerable populations, including young people, have access to universal health coverage, and are not disproportionately threatened by preventable and non-communicable diseases. Special attention must be made and initiatives created to cater to at-risk groups, such as women and girls, and vulnerable populations or those in vulnerable situations (such as those living with mental illness or disability, the elderly, homeless persons and people living in rural areas).

It is critical that public health programmes and efforts are well sustained and consistently prioritised, even in times of pandemic or crisis, in order to successfully reduce the negative impact and cost poor public health will bring to the Commonwealth and countries across the world.

Cancer in the Commonwealth is a rising concern, and will require enhanced cooperation and better collaboration between member countries to facilitate faster and more open sharing of knowledge, information and resources. With cervical cancer, which can be eliminated, collective action is required to ensure that immunity through vaccination across the Commonwealth is achieved. Progress must also be made towards the 2018 Outcome Statement of the Commonwealth Health Ministers Meeting, which also focused on negotiation of a fair price for HPV vaccination, sharing of pricing information and a review of procurement legislation, registration and procurement in aid of addressing cervical cancer.⁸²

It is imperative that we start to meaningfully involve and engage young people as valuable partners and co-creators of health programmes and solutions. Young people should also be a target group for effective, preventive, promotive and curative health services that do not cause financial hardship or impoverishment.

We the young people of the Commonwealth therefore call on:

6A: COVID-19 and Pandemics

101. Governments and agencies to meaningfully engage young people as partners in the COVID-19 response and ensure they are systematically included through knowledge-sharing, participation in decision-making at all levels, including budget allocations, and engagement in the implementation of response measures.
102. Governments to prioritise an equitable and socially just response and recovery from COVID-19, and to leverage the capacity of young people to build back better health systems.

6B: Health Services and Systems

103. Governments to affirm the role of young people in participatory governance for health system strengthening - recognising the imperative for youth to be empowered and engaged in planning and decision-making processes to achieve health for all.
104. Governments to accelerate progress towards universal health coverage and ensure universal and equitable access to high-quality, affordable, age-appropriate health care. This includes investing in the health and well-being of children, adolescents and young people to yield benefits now, across the life-course and for future generations.
105. Governments to ensure the sexual and reproductive health and rights of all young people are respected, guaranteed and promoted and that young people have access to affordable and youth-friendly health information and services, especially in rural areas.
106. Governments to scale up financing and resources for prevention, management and treatment of non-communicable diseases across the life-course. This includes supporting the development and acceleration of programmes that address the risk factors of non-communicable diseases, such as on enhanced physical activity. These services should be designed and delivered in partnership with young people.
107. Governments to ensure that all young people, regardless of gender, have access to HPV vaccination through effective implementation of an accessible national vaccination programme, to be delivered in conjunction with cervical screening programmes.
108. Governments to support and prioritise the collection of high-quality data on adolescents and young people that can be disaggregated by age, gender and other characteristics to guide action and improve health outcomes within and across countries.
109. Governments to support, mainstream and integrate civil society and youth-led movements into national, regional and International Neglected Tropical Disease programs⁸³ as well as increase domestic financing support and multi-sectoral action towards the implementation of these programs.⁸⁴

6C: Mental Health

110. Governments to increase financing commitments to mental health for children and young people. We call on governments to ensure that mental health is an integrated part of COVID-19 recovery plans and captured in all future emergency and preparedness plans.
111. Governments to promote and protect the rights of people with mental health conditions through legislative frameworks, and to develop national mental health policies and strategies, with specifics regarding child, youth, adolescent and mental health.
112. Governments to prioritise investments in the provision of accessible, affordable, non-discriminatory and confidential mental health services for young people when and where they need it, including in schools, online and via peer-to-peer approaches.
113. Governments to build the capacity of the mental health workforce, including expanding access to diverse training opportunities.
114. Governments to engage young people as key and equal stakeholders in the mental health response and in tackling stigma.

Conclusion

Despite global economic uncertainty, it is important for governments and stakeholders to support the youth sector through funding and human resource development strategies based on empirical evidence in both the planning and monitoring stages.⁸⁵ To achieve positive results for young people and societies in both the short and the long terms, efforts must be made to enhance inclusive youth voices and representation in decision-making. Equally, it is important to ensure young people have the tools they need to participate meaningfully.

Youth perspectives on governance, rule of law, democracy, human rights, climate change, trade, employment, education, technology and innovation need to be on-board as young people continue to be primary stakeholders in development efforts. In this context, the CYF offered a unique opportunity for youth to voice their opinions, share ideas and think together about what should be done to achieve the SDGs and to address the challenges they face. We welcome and encourage ongoing partnership and collaboration between the Commonwealth Youth Council, other Commonwealth youth networks, the Commonwealth Secretariat, member countries and civil society in an inclusive and sustainable way. These partnerships are paramount to deliver on a common future for our Commonwealth, to ensure that the policy priorities outlined above are implemented and to safeguard the future for young people.

The delegates of the 12th CYF thank the Government of Rwanda for hosting the 12th CYF and the 4th Commonwealth Youth Council General Assembly and look forward to the Government's continued support in promoting youth participation and engagement in the Commonwealth.

Notes

- ¹ Commonwealth Charter, Article 13: Importance of Young People in the Commonwealth (2013)
- ² United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (2017) Sector Paper: High Level Political Forum 2017
- ³ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015); A Guide to United Nations Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015)
- ⁴ World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) and Youth Forum (June 2019), Lisbon, Portugal
- ⁵ Commonwealth Law Ministers Declaration on Equal Access to Justice (2019), Sri Lanka
- ⁶ All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth Summit, Rabat Declaration (December 2019)
- ⁷ World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) and Youth Forum (June 2019), Lisbon, Portugal
- ⁸ Africa Region Commonwealth Youth Leaders' Forum: Final Statement (2015)
- ⁹ The Caribbean Youth Advocacy and Action Agenda on Violence Prevention (2019)
- ¹⁰ Clarke, D. and Azzopardi, P. (2019) UNFPA State of the Pacific Youth 2017 Report. Suva: UNFPA
- ¹¹ Caribbean Forum on Population, Youth and Development (2018)
- ¹² Clarke, D. and Azzopardi, P. (2019) UNFPA State of the Pacific Youth 2017 Report. Suva: UNFPA
- ¹³ Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials Meeting (Asia Region) Summary Recommendations and Conclusions (August 2019), Brunei Darussalam
- ¹⁴ ASEAN Secretariat (July 2017) First ASEAN Youth Development Index. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat
- ¹⁵ Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 8, CRPD Article 9
- ¹⁶ World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) and Youth Forum (June 2019), Lisbon, Portugal
- ¹⁷ Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter: Commitment 3, CRPD Article 9
- ¹⁸ All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth Summit, Rabat Declaration (December 2019)
- ¹⁹ All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth Summit, Rabat Declaration (December 2019)
- ²⁰ The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City

- 21 Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter:
Commitment 9, CRPD Article 9
- 22 Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter:
Commitment 5, CRPD Article 9
- 23 UNESCO Youth Forum: Youth Engaging with UNESCO (2017)
- 24 United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)
- 25 Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter:
Commitment 5, CRPD Article
- 26 Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter:
Commitment 6, CRPD Article 9
- 27 ECOSOC (April 2019), New York City
- 28 ECOSOC (April 2019), New York City
- 29 ASEAN Secretariat (July 2017) First ASEAN Youth
Development Index. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat
- 30 World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019)
and Youth Forum (June 2019), Lisbon, Portugal
- 31 Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meeting (Pacific Region):
Youth Leaders Forum Communiqué (2015)
- 32 12th Commonwealth Women's Affairs Ministers Meeting
(12WAMM) Outcome Statement (September 2019)
- 33 Clarke, D. and Azzopardi, P. (2019) UNFPA State of the
Pacific Youth 2017 Report. Suva: UNFPA
- 34 Youth Entrepreneurship and Self-Employment (YES) Forum:
Scaling Up Action and Impact on Youth Entrepreneurship and Self-
Employment in West Africa (November 2018), Dakar, Senegal
- 35 Global Disability Children & Young People's Charter:
Commitment 7, CRPD Article 27
- 36 Report of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human
Rights – Draft Plan of Action for the Fourth Phase (2020–2024) of the World
Programme for Human Rights Education (A/HRC/42/23) (September 2019)
- 37 6th Caribbean Youth Leaders' Summit: Port of Spain Statement
on Youth Economic Empowerment (January 2020)
- 38 Clarke, D. and Azzopardi, P. (2019) UNFPA State of the Pacific Youth 2017
Report. Suva: UNFPA; Global Youth Employment Forum (August 2019)
- 39 ASEAN Secretariat (July 2017) First ASEAN Youth
Development Index. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat
- 40 6th Caribbean Youth Leaders' Summit: Port of Spain Statement
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- 41 All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth
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- 43 All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth Summit, Rabat Declaration (December 2019)
- 44 World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) and Youth Forum (June 2019), Lisbon, Portugal
- 45 All-Africa Students Union 8th Africa Students and Youth Summit, Rabat Declaration (December 2019)
- 46 United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (2017) Sector Paper: High Level Political Forum 2017
- 47 The Abidjan Declaration: 4th Africa-Europe Youth Summit (2017)
- 48 9th CYMM Youth Leaders Forum: Declaration (2017)
- 49 Recommendations from the Caribbean Forum on Population, Youth and Development
- 50 United Nations Major Group for Children and Youth (2017) Sector Paper: High Level Political Forum 2017
- 51 Commonwealth Futures: Youth Perspectives, 1-3 December 2019
- 52 Commonwealth Futures: Youth Perspectives, 1-3 December 2019
- 53 Commonwealth Futures: Youth Perspectives, 1-3 December 2019
- 54 African Union Banjul +10 Outcome Document (2016)
- 55 20th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers: Nadi Declaration (2018)
- 56 Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), Suva, Fiji, 1–3 May 2019
- 57 Global Youth Employment Forum 2019, Abuja, 1-3 August 2019
- 58 <https://www.forumsec.org/boe-declaration-on-regional-security/>
- 59 The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City
- 60 The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City
- 61 United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- 62 Suva Declaration on Climate Change (2018)
- 63 Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), Suva, Fiji, 1–3 May 2019
- 64 The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City
- 65 United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- 66 United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- 67 Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), Suva, Fiji, 1–3 May 2019
- 68 The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City
- 69 Pacific Islands Forum in Funafuti, Tuvalu, 13–16 August 2019
- 70 Pacific Islands Forum in Funafuti, Tuvalu, 13–16 August 2019
- 71 Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), Suva, Fiji, 1–3 May 2019
- 72 World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) Lisboa Declaration

- ⁷³ Pacific Resilience Meeting (PRM), Suva, Fiji, 1–3 May 2019
- ⁷⁴ World Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth (2019) Lisboa Declaration
- ⁷⁵ The 8th Annual ECOSOC Youth Forum (2019), New York City
- ⁷⁶ Pacific Islands Forum in Funafuti, Tuvalu, 13–16 August 2019
- ⁷⁷ United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- ⁷⁸ United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- ⁷⁹ United Nations Climate Action Summit, New York, September 2019
- ⁸⁰ Global Youth Employment Forum 2019, Abuja, 1–3 August 2019
- ⁸¹ Global Youth Employment Forum 2019, Abuja, 1–3 August 2019
- ⁸² Commonwealth Health Ministers' Meeting 2018, Geneva, 20 May 2018
- ⁸³ Southern African Youth Forum, Statement on the Launch of the World Health Organisation, Neglected Tropical Disease Road Map (2021)
- ⁸⁴ Dar es Salaam Youth Declaration on Neglected Tropical Diseases (2020)
- ⁸⁵ Commonwealth Youth Senior Officials Meeting (Asia Region) Summary Recommendations and Conclusions (August 2019), Brunei Darussalam

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