

The Organisation of African Youth and partners recently convened for a High Level Youth Policy Dialogue on Sustainable Development Goals from 19th-21st August 2014 in Nairobi, Kenya. This was an African youth event, open to international youth, with the aim of gathering and strengthening political commitment for governments to support prioritising investment in youth development in the post-2015 era. The meeting sought to cultivate on recommendations made by young people and create political goodwill for African countries to champion the youth agenda at the intergovernmental negotiations (September 2014-September 2015).

This policy dialogue was designed as a platform for young people to lobby their government at the highest decision making level to ask them to recognise the Post-2015 Agenda and presented a perfect opportunity to target inclusive and sustainable growth that devotes more attention to higher standards and to outcomes that improve the quality of young people's lives.

The new framework must put young people at the core of the targets and indicators aimed at poverty reduction, enhanced access to clean water and modern energy, quality education, urban development, decent jobs, sexual and reproductive health, healthcare and improved agricultural technologies.

Messeh Leone, Coordinator at the Commonwealth Secretariat's Commonwealth Youth Council, presented at the event, asking Why a Youth Goal in the Post 2015 agenda?

Messeh highlighted that 1.8 billion People are aged 10-24 - a quarter of the world's population. 87% of young people aged 15-24 live in a developing context. 2.6 million young people aged 10-24 die each year; from mostly preventable deaths.

You can download his speech in full [here](#).

Therefore, it is essential for designing specific interventions that address the unique vulnerabilities of young people and enable them to realize their hopes and aspirations.

Young people are crucial stakeholders in the pursuit of successful Post 2015 Agenda. Youth form not only a crucial constituency, but a serious issue for the Post 2015 Agenda, and - to overcome youth growing disenfranchisement - the Post 2015 agenda should provide in a specific framework that sets out and champions the ever-growing needs of young people.

The impact of the decisions governments will make in the Post 2015 Agenda will be felt by the world's children and youth for years to come. Youth are not only the main benefactors and beneficiaries - or victims - of good or bad Post 2015 framework but we will also be major decision makers in shaping the Post 2015 agenda in the next 15 years.

Young people worldwide are denied the right to participate actively in the political, social, and economic processes of their respective countries both as beneficiaries and as contributors to a better world. Youth involvement in politics has largely been limited to mobilising young people through violent and non-violent means to support adult candidates for public office. This must change. It is unjust to only allow youth to decide on the political direction of their communities as voters without allowing them to be part of the solution by standing as candidates for election.

Recent political upheaval and emerging youth social movements evidence just how deep the disenfranchisement of youth from political and economic life is. Youth should not only be addressed as a constituency, but also a burning issue that our world needs to address. Our re-engagement should be of utmost importance to you in the Post 2015 Agenda. In this regard, addressing inequities and disenfranchisement amongst youth through a **dedicated youth inclusion and development goal in the Post 2015 framework should be our number one priority.**

Addressing youth unemployment can not only be limited to a goal or targets on employment. There are a number of other issues that need to be addressed to secure gainful employment for youth. A youth from a poor family or community is highly unlikely to secure a decent job. Youth constitute over half (50.8%) of the total labor force yet 75.8 million young people are still unemployed with a large proportion of those who work forming part of the working poor. A dedicated youth goal on Post 2015 Agenda will oblige states to provide the enabling environment and resources to engage and empower youth to be able to secure decent work for young people and allow them to be productively employed, as the only way to meet a goal on employment.

Young people were left out in the Millennium Development Goals hence the massive youth crises in the world today. Young people were mentioned only once in the Millennium Development Goals, in the context of employment, and worryingly, are so far similarly under-represented in the post 2015 framework drafts. Again, youth are being left behind in the Post 2015 framework. Unfortunately, the call for a youth goal has been ignored, with little or no research conducted to understand the importance of a goal for youth in the Post 2015 Agenda. Without a youth goal, no one address targets on youth inclusion and development---our focus will be diverted, and poor youth excluded in the process.

The Commonwealth Youth Development Index publishes important facts on the situation of young people and highlights massive disparities of youth in developed and developing context. The Commonwealth engagement with young people from across 53 Commonwealth countries about their perceptions on the Post 2015 Agenda, shows young people clearly want a specific goal on youth - but they are currently let down by those who are supposed to advocate on behalf of youth hence the current Post 2015 framework has not kept pace with the reality of young people's lives.

The current focus on youth in the Post 2015 Agenda isn't adequate to address the many challenges faced by young people. The argument about creating universal goals does not hold. SDGs should be about supporting the most vulnerable and excluded groups. Youth are still denied access to education and health. Youth are unemployed---with little or no opportunities. There is the need to create a specific goal for youth, as the same for women, to address the specific needs of excluded youth, which could not be address by other goals or left out in the Post 2015 framework.

Worryingly, the post 2015 process, while giving much verbal support to young people's inclusion and development, has not yet resulted in meaningful recognition of young people capabilities and needs. The goals on Post 2015 Agenda will determine which development areas will be prioritised with goals and targets in the

post 2015 framework, and will therefore receive the most attention and investment.

Young people around the world are deeply concerned about a lack of a specific goal on youth in the Post 2015 Agenda and are calling for state and non-state actors to take action now, before it's too late. Young people cannot wait for another 15 years to be recognised as key to development. This is why Commonwealth believes that a specific goal on youth is so important.

Young people have the passion, energies, skills, talents, resources and determination to help create a better world. We believe it is vital to utilise today's young people, the visionaries of tomorrow.

Engaging today's young people not only gives them a role in implementing the post-2015 agenda, but invites young people to hold leaders accountable for their promises.

What difference will a Youth Goal make in the Post 2015 Agenda?

A Youth Goal will make a difference in many ways, including but not limited to the following three focus areas, coined as the ABC of a Youth Goal:

A: Action ---a goal on youth will pave the way for youth to have a stake in the planning and implementation of the Post 2015 Agenda. The youth will likely to be engaged and involved where there is a specific goal, which mainly seeks the interest of young people. Global action will be mainly focused on the goals. Let's be pragmatic - the MDGs gave governments and donors a very clear picture of where to allocate resources and take action to achieve progress in development. That kind of intentional, structured investment and global action will help build the capacity of youth, shine light on young people's needs.

B: Balanced Sustainable Development—a Youth Goal will create the balance between developed and developing world by engaging and empowering young people who are mostly excluded and lack opportunities. We cannot call for universal goals in an unequal world---the Post 2015 Agenda should seek address inequalities and opportunities for all, and youth should be considered a top priority. A youth in Europe, will complain that she/he has not had holiday, but a youth in Africa worries about where the next meal will come from. Sustainable development should be about creating a level playing field where people regardless of their age or background can be able to benefit and contribute to the world we want. Not just sustainable development, but sustainable development that is balanced, fair and equitable. SDGs should take sides with the most excluded and vulnerable, youth who are still struggling to survive in a challenging world.

C: Commitment to the most excluded: SDGs can only leave no one behind, when the needs and interests of specific groups ---the most vulnerable and excluded are addressed. Political will and commitment is likely to be focused on the goals hence will therefore receive the most attention and investment. Without a goal for youth, little or nothing will be done to address the needs of youth in the Post 2015 Agenda.

A specific, goal on youth inclusion and development will position young people to contribute significantly and commit to all aspects of national development.

Why the Commonwealth on Youth Inclusion and Development in the Post 2015 Agenda?

The Commonwealth represents over 2 billion people in our 53 member countries, including some of the world's largest and smallest countries, and representing enormous diversity in growth and development. Sixty percent of our population is under 30 years of age, with many of our countries experiencing a youth bulge.

The Commonwealth Youth Development Index (YDI) is the first attempt to aggregate global youth-specific data, and devising a tool that is capable of being used to practical affect within the diverse global context of the Commonwealth. The YDI identifies and analyses key trends in youth development across the Commonwealth. The report lists the key findings and provides a breakdown of youth development according to each of the indicators. It explores the key factors that correlate with youth development, not just in the Commonwealth, but around the world.

The Commonwealth has had a focus on the social, political and economic empowerment of young people for 40 years - over 60% of the population of the Commonwealth is under 30, and that proportion rises to over 70% in several countries. The diversity of the 53 member countries of the Commonwealth provides a unique lens on global development, especially for small states. It's critical to understand that 87% of young people live in developing countries, so the voices of those young people must be heard.

At the Commonwealth Youth Ministers Meetings, the young people have a seat at the table with full speaking rights, and at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting, the Commonwealth Youth Leaders engage directly in a dialogue with Heads on issues of concern and opportunity for young people.

In April last year, Ministers responsible for Youth from the 53 Commonwealth member countries called for a specific Youth Goal in the post 2015 development framework, and this was further noted by Heads of Government at their biennial meeting in November last year. Youth leaders from across the Commonwealth have also called for a Youth Goal, based on an analysis of the UN High Level Panel Report, and also as an outcome of deliberations at Government Meeting.

What will a Youth Goal addressed?

A Youth Goal will seek to answer the youth question. This will allow for the creation of a better defined youth development framework that should, ideally, culminate in the formulation of an international development agenda on the specific empowerment and participation of youth.

Economic inclusion of young people ---it not just about gaining jobs, but about having space in the economic market ---how many youth own business and how many youth are CEOs of major companies?

Political inclusion of young people ---e.g., Middle East (Arab spring is evidence that youth needs political space). This should include, for example, a target on governments to address the gaps that exist in too many countries between the legal age of majority and the age of eligibility to run for office.

Social/civic inclusion of young people---It is not just about attending meetings and conferences, but about creating spaces for youth to lead the change we want---how many youth NGOs are there in the world that can really influence global agenda?

Cultural --culture is a big issue for young people. FGM, Early marriage, school dropout, child labours in farms, instead of being in schools. Will these issues be addressed in a universal goal? Tribal politics is another issue----are likely to be excluded on the basis of tribe.

Is the Commonwealth alone in this ask for a Youth Goal?

No: In fact, the Commonwealth has been involved as a result of strong call by young people across the world, asking for a youth goal. However, too often their voices go unheard. We believe that the views and aspirations of young people should be communicated and channelled to policy makers.

As suggested in the *UN Statistics and Indicators* document, “a goal may draw on other themes but be tailored and limited to priorities for that group. A youth specific goal will provide a greater focus on the inclusion and development of young people, as well as institutional strengthening in ways that benefit young people. A twin-track approach will also ensure a continued mainstreamed/ cross-sectoral approach to youth development, by retaining the youth specific targets and indicators in other goals.

This morning, you heard the Kenya government representative, in his keynote address support the call for a Youth Goal. All the 53 member governments of the Commonwealth support the call for a Youth Goal.

And other institutions also see this as deeply important. UN Habitat has support the call for a specific goal on Youth the World Conference on Youth in Sri Lanka. The Youth Declaration from the World Conference on Youth also calls for a Youth Goal.

The UN President of the General Assembly at the ‘*High Level Event on the Contributions of Women, The Young and Civil Society to the Post-2015 Development Agenda*’ (6-7 March 2014) called for:

- Full participation of young people in the post-2015 development agenda will be essential for its successful implementation.
- Young people’s participation is required at all levels and in all spheres, and post-2015 agenda should incorporate goals and targets that empower the young.
- They do not recognise young people as assets to society - ready, willing and able to make a contribution to national development

- They position young people as beneficiaries of development, when they should also be recognised as partners and leaders in development.

What can youth do to secure a Youth Goal?

Youth can lobby with their country's leadership to ensure they clearly comprehend what is at stake here. Youth can aim to ensure your country is lobbying for a Youth Goal at every opportunity, and especially calling for it in their submissions to post 2015 processes at the UN.

African youth need to create or strengthen an African Regional Youth Council to be able to relate with youth in other parts of the world. The Youth Council should be a democratic youth-led platform, with elected youth leaders to serve as the legitimate and recognized official voice for young people in Africa. This will enable African youth to promote African youth issues and to participate actively in the planning, implementation and monitoring of SDGs at national, regional and international level. The Commonwealth Youth Council will be happy to support this effort.

By combining efforts, and working in mutual support, African youth can help create the world we want. We cannot afford to wait another 15 years, the time is now and we must act now.

Youth are calling for a specific Goal on Youth Empowerment and Participation and as well as targets and indicators on other relevant areas in the Post 2015 Agenda.

We challenge African Youth to think outside the box by championing the call for a specific goal on Youth inclusion in the Post 2015 Agenda. The highlight of this meeting will be that African Youth are calling for a specific goal, and the strengthening of an African Regional Youth Council to be the official voice for youth in Africa.

Young people, NGOs and governments are encouraged to support a strong recognition of Youth in the post-2015 agenda in subsequent negotiations until the post 2015 framework is finalised.

This goal would allow young people to contribute to all other goals as partners not beneficiaries.

Without a Youth Goal. What is the alternative—a lost generation of young people.

Share this message with your leaders across the world to take action.

Thank you!