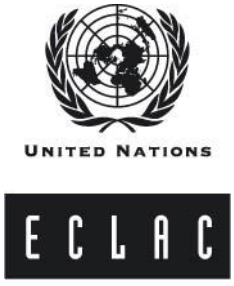
Policy brief

Implementation strategies for youth mainstreaming in sustainable development processes

Catarina Camarinhas



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Abstract

In light of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this policy brief provides an account of the current status of Caribbean youth policies and considers how youth mainstreaming concepts can be applied constructively to strengthen sustainable development planning and policies in the subregion. This document highlights the findings of an ECLAC assessment of National Youth Policies in the Caribbean. This assessment pointed to the need to secure the means of implementation as a fundamental key driver to achieve the 2030 Agenda. This includes support for the implementation of relevant strategies to promote young people's potential as agents of change and active citizens for peace and development. Different strategies are required to realise the demographic dividend in the subregion. These include strategies to empower Caribbean youth to achieve their aspirations, improve their capacities, and foster the human rights of all youth, which will ultimately contribute to more inclusive, resilient and sustainable communities and nations.

Introduction

This policy brief highlights findings from the *Caribbean synthesis report on the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on youth policies and programmes*.[1] The report provided a comprehensive review of the state of youth policies and programmes in the Caribbean, their operational status, and the involvement of youth[2] in guiding future implementation, including enhancing the understanding of the complex and multifaceted challenges confronting youth. The study adopted a consultative process with Caribbean youth, directors of youth, and development partners, on how to further support the implementation of the National Youth Policies (NYPs) in the Caribbean. This process culminated in the Caribbean Forum on Population, Youth and Development, held in Guyana in July 2018.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development,[3] including its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), underscores the need to include young women and men as "critical agents of change",[4] and promises to leave no-one behind. The Agenda aims to provide "children and youth with a nurturing environment for the full realization of their rights and capabilities"[5] in the expectation that youth "will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world".[6] It highlights youth employment as a particular challenge for sustainable development and refers to young people as being at particular risk of marginalization.

The integration of youth into sustainable development processes is therefore seen as a crucial step in the process towards achieving the global Goals set in the 2030 Agenda, and in laying the foundations for more egalitarian societies. The United Nations is committed to support member States in the implementation of youth policies that are rights-based, inclusive, participatory, gender-responsive, comprehensive, knowledge-based, evidence-informed, fully-resourced, and accountable;[7] and this policy brief provides key analyses and recommendations towards actualizing this commitment.

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1 Camarinhas, Catarina and Dwynette D. Eversley (2018), *Caribbean synthesis report on the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on youth policies and programmes*, ECLAC Studies and Perspectives Series – The Caribbean.

2 See Box 1 for the definition of youth in the context of this policy brief.

3 UN General Assembly, *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, 21 October 2015, A/RES/70/1.

4 *Idem*, para. 51.

5 *Idem*, para. 25.

6 *Ibidem*.

7 United Nations (2014), *Baku Commitment to Youth Policies*, 1st Global Forum on Youth Policies, Baku.

From the outset of his mandate, the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has made it a priority for the UN System to reset its focus on youth and to reorient and mainstream its activities towards youth. Building on the unique global convening role of The United Nations and its mandate to serve the world's peoples, The Secretary General launched in September 2018 *Youth 2030: The United Nations Youth Strategy*, aimed at guiding the entire UN-System, as it steps up its work to empower young people to realize their full potential and stand up for their rights and ensure their engagement and participation in the implementation, review and follow-up of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as well as other relevant global agendas and frameworks. Strategies for youth mainstreaming are, therefore, seen as an integral part of development processes, enabling young people and adults to benefit equally from, and contribute equally to, development outcomes.

Box 1
Who are Youth?

The concept of "Youth" may be applied differently according to culture and context to define the period of transition and growing independence from childhood to adulthood. It is often referenced as the age group in which individuals may leave compulsory education and find their first employment. This latter age limit has been increasing, since higher levels of unemployment and the cost of setting up an independent household puts many young people into a prolonged period of dependency. This also sets, depending on particular contexts, new interpretations and delimitations of the age group.

The United Nations, for statistical consistency across regions, defines "youth" as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years, without prejudice to other definitions by member States. Other organisations use different age ranges: The Commonwealth, for example, categorises persons 15 to 29 years old as youth and the CARICOM Youth Development Action Plan (CYDAP) presents a range from 10 to 29 years old. For this reason, when referring to activities of other organisations or at the national level, for example when analysing a National Youth Policy, "youth" may be interpreted in a more flexible manner.

ECLAC uses the terms "youth", "young people" and "young person" to mean those aged between 15 to 24, with the understanding that member States and other entities may apply different definitions.

I. Youth Development in the Caribbean

With almost half of its population under 25 years of age, the Caribbean is considered a youthful subregion. There are more young people in the subregion than ever before, creating unprecedented potential for economic and social progress. Youth possess tremendous potential to serve as agents of social and economic transformation – which is all the more critical given projections that populations in the subregion will age rapidly.

Investing in youth may strengthen important progress achieved recently in terms of health and social development attained in the Caribbean, and reinforce resilience and the achievement of sustainable development. Investing in Caribbean youth entails addressing, in a systemic manner, the multidimensional challenges posed to youth, including for example an education system that does not match labour market requirements, poverty, and access to adequate housing. Early marriage and pregnancy and limited family planning services are major contributors to the inability of girls and young women to complete their education and achieve their full potential. This must be equally addressed.

A. The Caribbean demographic transition

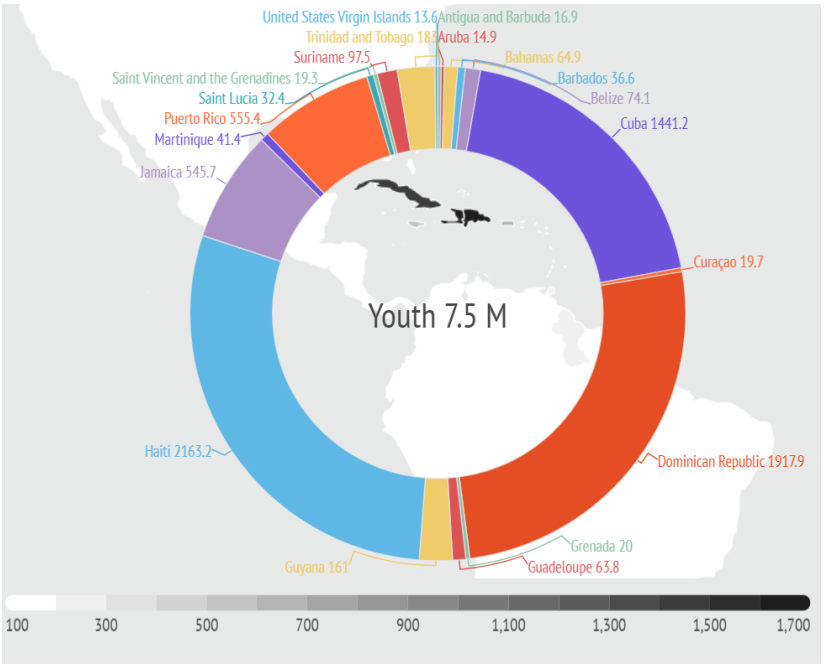
The Caribbean subregion is home to nearly 7.5 million youth comprising almost 17 per cent of the subregion's total population with the largest population of Caribbean youth residing in Haiti (2.2 million), Dominican Republic (1.9 million), and Cuba (1.4 million) (see Figure 1). The subregion is undergoing a demographic transition, with an ageing process that translates into a narrowing window of opportunity in harnessing the "youth bulge" or "demographic bonus". While this ageing process is, in itself, a positive trend, resulting from an increased life expectancy, it signals the need for urgency in mobilizing for youth development.

Realizing the demographic dividend requires getting more young people into productive employment and income generating activities. Most Caribbean countries are still in the vital demographic dividend period, the period when countries can benefit from the growth potential that results from the increase of the working age population (20-64) in relation to the inactive population.

This window may be fairly narrow for some countries: it will close in the 2020's for at least five countries,[8] while for the remainder the period will extend well into the 2040s and 2050s. This conveys a sense of urgency for investing in youth in the subregion.

Although globally observed, this demographic transition may vary greatly across countries in terms of its timing, speed and implications for sustainable development. Slower growth in the number of children and youth offers an opportunity to invest in human capital (health and education, including creativity) and productive employment. Governments should actively pursue this historic opportunity to invest in future economic growth and in the sustainable development of present and future generations.

Figure 1
Youth (15-24) population in the Caribbean, by country (2015)
(Thousands)



Source of data: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2018).

Lack of good employment opportunities poses a significant threat to the inclusion of youth in Caribbean societies, with youth unemployment in the subregion being among the highest in the world.[9] In fact, a quarter of Caribbean youth are unemployed – more than three times the adult rate of 8 per cent[10] – and gender differences are notable. As shown in Figure 2, among Caribbean countries, young females experienced unemployment rates of over 30 per cent in 2016, while male youth experienced rates of 20 per cent. Also alarming is the number of youth NEETs (Not Employed or in Education or Training). Data from the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggest that the

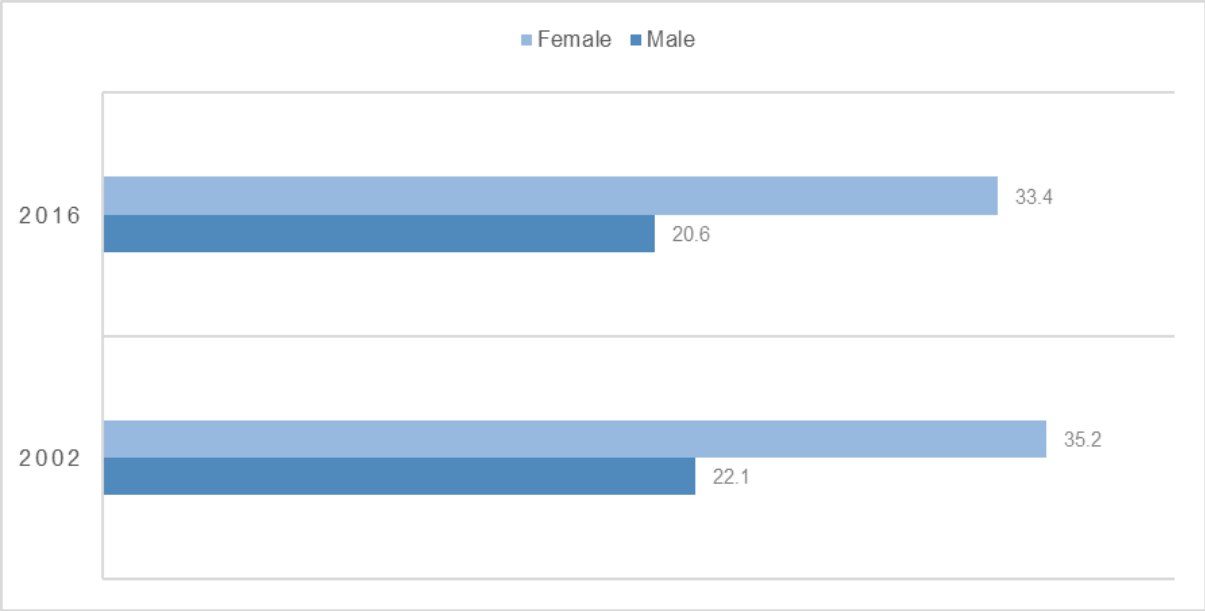
[8] Antigua and Barbuda, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, and Suriname. The period will extend into the 2040s and 50s for Belize, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guyana, and Haiti.

[9] Caribbean Development Bank (2015), *Youth are the future: the imperative of youth employment for sustainable development in the Caribbean*, p. 11.

[10] *Idem*. In some countries (for example, The Bahamas, Barbados, and Jamaica), youth unemployment rates are nearly three times that of those aged 30 and over.

proportion of youth not engaged in education, employment or training may vary widely across the Caribbean, with countries such as Bermuda (6.8 per cent) scoring fairly well in terms of social inclusion via the engagement of youth in socioeconomic activities and other countries, such as Trinidad and Tobago (52.2 per cent), registering more than half of its youth (15-24) as not fully participating in any of these areas of activity, which are of crucial importance for social inclusion and development.[11]

Figure 2
Unemployment rate by sex among 15-24 years old in the Caribbean, 2002 and 2016[a]
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of figures from the World Bank and the International Labour Organisation (ILO), in ECLAC, Linkages between the social and production spheres: gaps, pillars and challenges, 2017
Available at: http://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/42269/1/S1700768_en.pdf
[a] Simple average of the following countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Guyana, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname and Trinidad and Tobago.

B. Status of National youth policies

Twenty years after the adoption of the Lisbon Declaration on Youth Policies and Programmes, Caribbean countries remain committed to youth work and a progressive move to positive youth development and rights-based approaches is observed, including direct linkages to the World Programme of Action for Youth (WPAY, 1995), and subregional youth policy frameworks such as CARICOM's Youth Development Action Plan (CYDAP, 2012) and the Commonwealth's Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE, 2007). However, some critical gaps and limitations remain in Caribbean youth policy development and youth mainstreaming should be a critical consideration for all countries to ensure that the youth agenda is not pursued as a disjointed, but rather a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach.

[11] SDG Indicators Global Database, see https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/indicators/database/?indicator=8.6.1

Box 2
The Status of NYPs in the Caribbean

- Twenty-three out of the twenty-nine (79 per cent) CDCC Member and Associate Member Countries have some iteration of a NYP, be it recently passed, current, in draft, or otherwise incipient. Nineteen of the twenty (95 per cent) CARICOM Member and Associate Member Countries of CDCC have some iteration of a NYP.
- Five NYPs have accompanying Action Plans (Belize, Dominica, Grenada, Saint Lucia, and Montserrat).
- NYPs of four other CDCC Member Countries (British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, and Saint Kitts and Nevis) contain guidelines for the formulation of Action Plans and implementation mechanisms.
- Sixteen out of seventeen CDCC Member and Associate Member Countries (94 per cent) whose NYPs were available for review, provide for the establishment of, or support to, youth-led movements to ensure youth participation in decision-making and for policy support (cf. Annex 6).
- The majority of active NYPs were developed during the previous five years: Aruba (2015), Bahamas (2014), Belize (2012-2022), British Virgin Islands (2014), Dominica (2017), Grenada (2015), Guadeloupe (2014), Guyana (2015), Jamaica (2015) Montserrat (2013), Saint Kitts and Nevis (2017), and Saint Lucia (2016).
- Five CDCC members (Anguilla, Barbados, Bermuda, Trinidad and Tobago and Turks and Caicos) have mobilised for policy review, with the intention to complete updated policies in 2018.

Source: ECLAC (2018), Caribbean synthesis report on the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on youth policies and programmes, ECLAC Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean (Studies and Research Papers).

C. Critical areas for youth development

The social and economic challenges that Caribbean citizens experience today in many countries of the subregion affect young people in a disproportionate manner. This is as a result of limited opportunities for education and training, viable employment, recreational opportunities and other protective supports, and because of a complexity of factors associated with poverty and limited access to health and social services. These factors have escalated youth risk factors, and among other things, contribute to the Caribbean being a region with a high incidence of crime and violence, with youth both as perpetrators and victims.

As part of efforts to address these constraints, Caribbean countries have made encouraging progress in developing youth policy as a guiding national framework to manage commitments and successful outcomes for youth as detailed in the *Lisbon Declaration* (1998). Using the blueprint of the WPAY, and guided by common regional frameworks such as the CYDAP and the PAYE, there is clear evidence of a quiet surge towards professional youth development. This is characterised by research and analysis, strong partnerships that complement knowledge and fill the resource gaps in Youth Departments and Ministries. While there has been good progress on youth transformational agenda, there are still persistent trends. These include:

- Young people require more and relevant education and training to adequately manage the realities of longer and more complex transitions from childhood to adult life, partly as a consequence of a difficult labour market, but also as a global trend as life expectancy rises;
- Youth are disproportionately affected by high unemployment and are over-represented in marginal and precarious employment;
- Youth have high dependency rates with reliance on family structures and social support systems that are mostly inadequate;
- Increasing violence suffered and committed by youth results in significant health and social impacts with consequential effects on youth, families and economies of the subregion; and

- Increasing vulnerabilities of youth, in particular those that are affected by poverty as well as rural youth, to the impacts of climate change puts their resilience and futures at grave risk.

Countries have begun initiatives to promote the participation of youth at policy and decision-making levels and progress has been made in advocating for the protection of the wellbeing of youth. Recognising the important role of civil society in the implementation of the NYPs, many governments have adopted significant measures to promote the involvement of civil society groups in policy formulation, implementation and monitoring. Some Governments have taken measures to strengthen the institutional capacity of civil society, including the provision of funds and the removal of legal restrictions.[12]

However, there are also unequal experiences of grass-roots and community-based youth-serving agencies and of LGBTI and other marginalised youth populations. As such, the effectiveness and impact of youth policies and mechanisms of youth participation vary from one country to another. Notwithstanding, some of the current critical policy development constraints hindering Caribbean countries include:

(a) Inconsistent political support and funding mechanisms, including sustainability of resource mobilisation and inconsistency of budgetary allocations.

A serious lack of financial resources remains one of the primary obstacles to full implementation of the NYPs. Financial crises and dislocations impede efforts to implement coherent and strategic action for youth development.

(b) Limited capacity and weak institutional frameworks.

It is essential to promote the competencies and capacities of youth development practitioners, including their research capabilities. Though efforts at professionalisation are evident, cementing a professionalized youth development culture and environment remains a major challenge.

(c) The lack of coordination mechanisms and existing funding constraints often preclude more extensive collaboration between government and civil society groups.

Often, there are no legal frameworks, regulations or guidelines to facilitate partnerships with youth non-governmental organisations. Insufficient human and financial resources and a lack of technical capacity in both governments and non-governmental organisations also impede effective partnerships. The private sector remains under-involved in population and development activities.

(d) Inadequacy of youth groups and networks, including participation and roles of youth organisations.

Youth organisations, as well as national youth institutions, are not systematically mentioned and analysed, and their roles and structure are not adequately captured within the youth policy architecture, hindering the implementation of programmes and projects.

[12] For details and examples see Camarinhas, Catarina and Dwynette D. Eversley (2018), *Caribbean synthesis report on the implementation of the Lisbon Declaration on youth policies and programmes*, ECLAC Studies and Perspectives Series – The Caribbean.

(e) In many instances young people's contribution to youth development processes is minimal.

Too frequently Caribbean young people are simply the beneficiaries of services and products rather than strategic partners in the policy formulation, implementation and evaluation phases.

(f) The gender gap in participation and access needs to be addressed.

Priority areas in youth development, such as education, health, ICTs, employment and entrepreneurship, sports and recreation, are not gender-neutral. Special attention must be paid to how programmes are designed to ensure girls and young women can equally access and benefit from opportunities, as well as to ensure, where necessary, that measures are put in place to guarantee participation and access of boys and men.

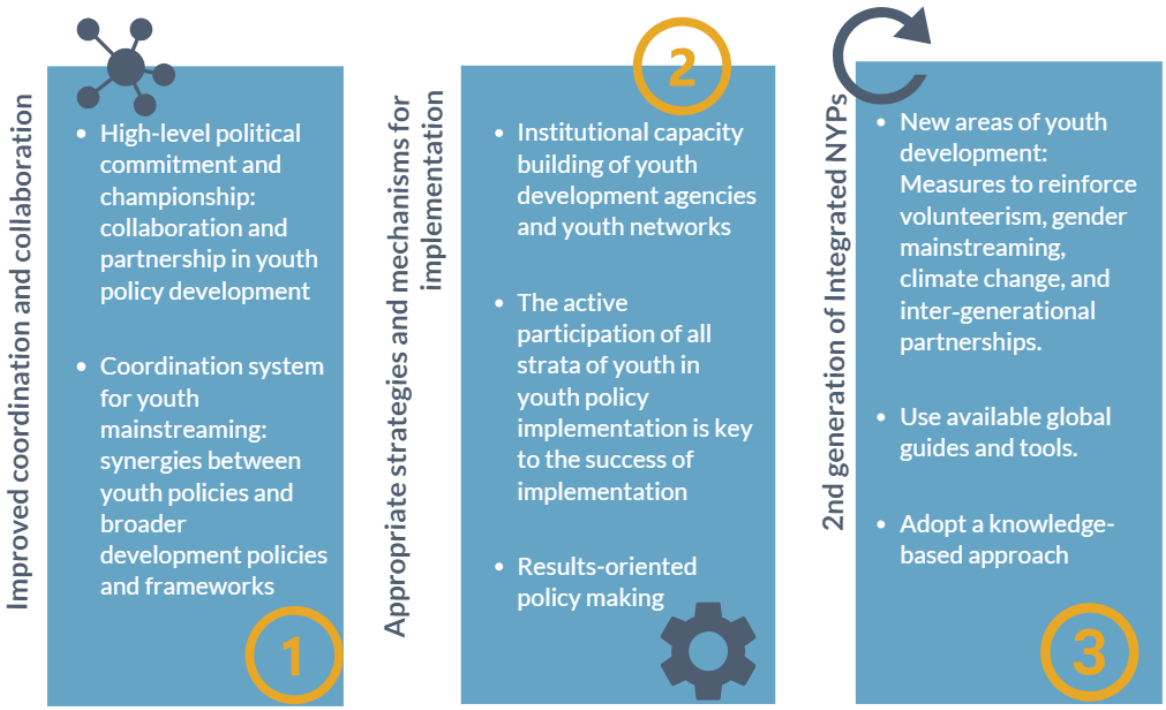
(g) Difficulties translating international and regional frameworks into tangible actions is hindering youth development.

The lack of monitoring and evaluation mechanisms (including well-defined targets, indicators and access to baseline data, as well as an adequate system to collect lessons learned), creates a perception that NYPs are idealistic reference frameworks, rather than operational policies for directing measurable action for youth development.

II. Policy recommendations for mainstreaming youth into sustainable development processes

In order to address key policy development and implementation constraints, the following implementation strategies (see Figure 3) are proposed, grouped by three key areas:

Figure 3
Key recommendations



A. Improved coordination and collaboration

1. High-level political commitment and championship

Ensure high-level political commitment and championing of policy implementation and investments.

This fundamental principle was an expressed commitment of governments under the Lisbon Declaration. Governments and development agencies should work together to agree on more consistent and targeted funding and programming for youth development priorities in a strategic youth development plan consistent with the active life and goals of the NYP. Strategic collaboration and partnerships in youth policy development should be reinforced among the Caribbean countries to enable inclusive and multi-sector multi-stakeholder involvement in youth policy development, with support from development partners, regional youth networks and academia.

2. Coordination system for youth mainstreaming

Promote and implement a coordination system for youth mainstreaming and improved synergies between different policy areas.

Coordination mechanisms should ensure that the youth agenda is not a disjointed, but rather a comprehensive and multi-sectoral approach, promoting strategic integration of the different sectors that will impact youth development. Efforts to promote the strengthening of youth mainstreaming may include:

- Support to the creation and regular functioning of inter-ministerial and multi-sector multi-stakeholder committees as well as national youth mainstreaming framework and reporting.
- Strengthening synergies between youth policies and broader development policies and frameworks notably as regards the linkages with the SDGs, the New Urban Agenda, regional articulation with SIDs and LAC agendas as well as with national development plans. In this regard youth policies should clearly articulate their relationship with other policy documents or strategies that impact youth.

B. Appropriate strategies and mechanisms for implementation

3. Institutional capacity building

Strengthen institutional capacity building of youth development agencies and youth networks so that they can play a more effective role in the youth development process.

This should include but not be limited to capacities in the following areas: research, strategic planning, public/private sector partnerships and stakeholder engagement, building resilience and managing vulnerabilities in the face of climate change, managing gender equality and mainstreaming in development, and managing effective community-based arrangements to achieve local solutions and national ownership of development.

4. Participation and active engagement of youth

Promote the participation and active engagement of youth in all phases of the NYP.

The active participation of all strata of youth, including the involvement of young people living in challenging circumstances and those in vulnerable groups, is key to the successful implementation of gender-sensitive approaches in all phases of formulation, implementation and follow-up and review processes of NYPs. Youth participation, engagement and ownership will contribute immensely to the relevance and inclusiveness of youth policies. Efforts to promote the effective participation of youth should:

- Ensure sustained recognition and resources for the roles and accountability of Representative Youth Organizations (Youth Councils etc.) within the National Youth Development Framework (National Youth Policy) including where appropriate, through legislative action.
- Ensure that this participation is extended to different policy domains, in particular through the inclusion of Youth Councils as partners in National Planning mechanisms, as well as other relevant bodies, such as the contribution of Youth advisory bodies to Ministers responsible for youth, as well as National Youth Think-Tanks/Research in Youth Development.

5. Results-oriented policy making

Ensure that effective results-frameworks are integrated in all policy development.

The persistent issue surrounding NYPs is their diminished relevance to young people and national development where they are not implemented in a way that can be measured, evaluated and revised as needed, using available evidence. Monitoring and evaluation (M&E) systems should be an integral part of robust NYPs, implemented through a transparent and inclusive process. To ensure this, governments should:

- Integrate appropriate M&E frameworks as a basis for NYPs to be kept up to date and revised. Although important, quantitative approaches alone are not sufficient for assessing youth policy. A qualitative understanding of the situation is vital, for example, through the involvement of diverse stakeholders, including youth organizations, in review processes. However, to assist in the democratic process of policy- and decision-making and to improve good governance in the field of youth policy, quantitative indicators would help in evaluating policy direction.
- Promote an evidence-based approach in order to have access to up-to-date disaggregated data that will inform the design, implementation and review of youth policies, programmes, and initiatives, including the creation of a central repository on youth data with standardized questionnaires and methodologies.
- Develop a Youth-led M&E System for youth development policies and programmes. This may be achieved through effective training in M&E and social auditing for representatives of national youth councils and youth and community platforms, with special attention to building capacity of under-served youth populations so as to achieve a cadre of National Youth Auditors to evaluate progress and report annually on Youth Policies and Programmes.

C. A second generation of integrated National Youth Policies

6. New areas of youth development

Update, reinforce or develop new areas of youth development within NYPs.

Reinforce key youth development areas such as: youth entrepreneurship in relation to emerging economic opportunities, green growth and the creative industries; volunteerism; gender mainstreaming; climate change; migration; globalization; and inter-generational partnerships, which need to be readdressed in youth policy development. Housing and territorial inequalities are areas of basic and fundamental youth development, at the source of many of the dependency trends that affect Caribbean youth and which remain untackled at policy level.

7. Knowledge-based approach

Adopt a comprehensive knowledge-based approach, integrating measures to develop and utilize appropriate tools, indicators and research methodologies to facilitate the development of evidenced-based, inclusive and integrative youth policies.

Promote specialized research to guide policy development, in particular on areas that require more attention, such as intergenerational relations; mental health and suicide among young persons; the role of youth during the relief, recovery and reconstruction process after hurricanes and other disaster-related situations; the effect of new social media platforms on girls and young females in migratory processes, including victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation; as well as the situation of specific groups of young persons, who by virtue of their age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, and migratory status, could be at risk. An adequate knowledge-based approach for youth development should also ensure youth participation within research teams and statistics units, in particular young female researchers and statisticians, who continue to be underrepresented in research and statistics fields.

III. Conclusions

A clearly defined, long-term policy framework for progressing youth development, that lends support to locally-driven sustainable development processes and realises the demographic dividend, is an essential catalyst for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda. Such policy frameworks need to be comprehensive in their formulation and must recognise the vertical (originating from grass-roots to national level) and horizontal (cross-sectoral) interlinkages of youth development through an integrated, coherent approach to the implementation of NYPs in alignment with the 2030 Agenda. Unless new mechanisms for accountability and empowerment are designed and implemented, it will be difficult to translate policy into action.

The Means of Implementation (MoI) are a core element of the 2030 Agenda and encompass concrete measures to facilitate the realisation of the goals and targets adopted by Heads of Governments in September 2015. These include a variety of issues such as: international development cooperation, international trade as an engine for development, debt and debt sustainability, addressing systemic issues and science, technology, innovation and capacity-building, and data, monitoring and follow-up. Integrated, national sustainable development strategies, supported by integrated national financing frameworks, remain critical in this process. Unlocking MoI for SDGs and creating an enabling environment and stronger accountability mechanisms are fundamental steps towards implementing 2030 Agenda, making use of young people's transformative potential as agents of change by systematically investing in meaningful youth participation.

NYPs must be strengthened by aligning them with government priorities and sustainable development directions. For many Caribbean countries, what is lacking is a clear strategy with development targets and budgets, based on national requirements, and aligned with the SDGs. Such strategies can provide objective guidance on the key youth issues, provide an accountability-matrix, and facilitate an annual review process.

By introducing and implementing the seven principles for a second generation of youth policies, as outlined in this policy brief, countries can elevate the importance of youth and capitalize on their potential for contributing to national sustainable development.

These seven principles are:

1. High-level political commitment and championship
2. Coordination system for youth mainstreaming

3. Capacity building for youth development and institutionalisation of youth work
4. Participation and active engagement of youth
5. Results-oriented policy making
6. New areas of youth development
7. Knowledge-based approach

Facilitating youth-led innovation can bring about important economic, cultural, social and environmental dividends, in support of the 2030 Agenda implementation. As highlighted in this policy brief, an integrated framework for youth development with adequate implementation mechanisms and support from all stakeholders, public and private, can improve the impact that young people have in the Caribbean. Cooperation between youth organizations, governments, civil society organizations, the private sector, international and regional organizations and academic institutions, making use of private investment opportunities and other public-private initiatives, should provide enabling environments to increase financing, improve legal and regulatory frameworks, and ensure proper training and research which may allow young innovators and their solutions to thrive. Such collaboration may, in turn, build synergies for implementation and help overcome the barriers that are currently preventing skilled and innovative young people from contributing their fullest towards achieving the SDGs.

Strategic collaboration and partnerships in youth policy development must be reinforced among Caribbean countries to enable peer-learning when articulating their youth development policies and strategies. Caribbean countries, supported by the UN system and other organizations such as CARICOM, the Commonwealth, the Caribbean Development Bank, other development partners, regional youth networks, and academia should work together in setting targets, defining budget requirements and supporting resource mobilisation for youth policies and programmes. The integration of youth development principles through strategic alliances will promote sustained and scaled-up investments that could amplify evidence-based programming interventions with and for youth as a central strategy in achieving the global goals of the 2030 Agenda.

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