

Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice: Working with Youth Networks and Youth Representatives



Preface

Youth in the Commonwealth: In the Commonwealth, “young people” or “youth” refers to individuals who are under the age of 30. Over 60% of the Commonwealth’s total population of 2.5 billion, residing across its 56 member countries, is under the age of 30. The Commonwealth recognises individuals between 15 and 29 as valuable contributors to a nation’s progress and advocates for their empowerment to fulfil their potential. Young people possess the ability to drive transformative shifts and represent a crucial investment for both present and future endeavours.

Establishing a Code of Practice: The need for a code of practice is evident in the Commonwealth due to the lack of formal rules governing the engagement of youth in meaningful participation, as key actors in shaping policy, legislation on political, economic, social development issues, human rights, social equity and inclusiveness.

Young people are facing incredible challenges and even life-threatening risks, disproportionately carried by girls and young women in many parts of the world. These arise when accessing their rights, including to quality education, healthcare or decent work. They also arise in situations of conflict, or when young people flee home in search of survival, or move for better opportunities. Young people also suffer interpersonal violence, are affected by the slow onsets of climate change or frontline impacts of disasters. They experience intersecting forms of marginalization, and struggle with the brunt of a global erosion of human rights and impeded access to justice.

The way in which the shifting demographics in the world are leveraged, and how young people navigate their transition into adulthood, are critical for the progress of humankind and the health of the planet. With this large and increasing number of young people across the globe, it is abundantly clear that it is only by engaging and working with them, supporting them in standing up for their rights and creating the conditions allowing them to progress and play an active role, that the international community will be able to achieve peace, security, justice, climate resilience and sustainable development for all.⁽¹⁾

(UN Youth Strategy: Youth2030 Working with and for Young People)

Implementing the **Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice** is crucial in recognising the vital role of all youths networks and youth representatives, their visibility in spaces that make decisions that impact their lives; ensuring their voices are heard; their participation and inclusion must be actively encouraged and valued across the Commonwealth by all stakeholders.

Young people have a crucial role to play in the implementation of the 2030 SDGs Agenda, not merely as beneficiaries but as active partners and participants. They are integral contributors in shaping actions and policies under the 2030 SDGs Agenda. Amidst the Commonwealth Year of Youth, which prioritises not only improved policies for youth but also their active inclusion in decision-making processes,

The **Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice** provides guidance to governments and Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations with key areas to consider and comply with in facilitating their efforts for fostering inclusive, accessible youth participation. Enabling them to engage youth across the Commonwealth in a manner that respects and empowers them, fosters their effective participation in development processes, and promotes their engagement at all levels of decision-making. Ensuring the incorporation of youth related issues, within their policy developments, strategic implementation and initiative delivery.

Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice (CYCOP):

The CYCOP foremost is to protect and promote the autonomy of young people, and recognition of the value young people's views, experiences and ideas contribute in the Commonwealth and Global efforts towards sustainable development, innovation; inclusiveness, human rights and social equity, combating major global challenges.

There are many young people who have no or limited access to be heard and shape their futures, significant efforts are necessary to ensure those who are underrepresented, which include young people who are disabled, indigenous, living in rural areas, minoritised communities, are not left behind.

Participation Rights:

Children <18: Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) [2] strongly upholds the rights of children to be heard and actively involved in all decisions that impact them. Article 19 of the CRC [2] stipulates that a duty of care exists to ensure children are protected from harm.⁽²⁾

Youth: The full and effective participation of youth in decision-making was identified as a priority area in the World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY) [3] adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1996.⁽³⁾

There are many additional barriers to disabled children and young people's participation and representation and within the Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice it aims to increase 'meaningful participation' of disabled youth to ensure an accessible inclusive approach in youth engagement, leadership and influence.

Global Disability Children and Young People's Charter (GDCYPC) > Commitment 2: Ensure meaningful participation, representation in political and public life, and in decision making processes

'Nothing about us without us' must be taken seriously, ensuring government, stakeholders and decision makers include children and young people with disabilities to have our say on our futures, shape positive change and make improvements.

Remove barriers to children and young peoples' participation and representation in political and

public life at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Increasing opportunities for our effective participation with 'seats at strategic decision-making tables' to take charge of our futures, for positive change'.⁽⁴⁾ **(GDCYPC)**

These articles emphasise the significance of ensuring meaningful participation of children and youth promoting their safe engagement within Commonwealth and internationally.

Principles of the Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice

The principles (P1-P5) that are the hallmarks of responsible treatment, collaboration and inclusion of young people are:

Principle 1: Respect for young people

Commonwealth Charter values and principles:

'We recognise the positive and active role and contributions of young people in promoting development, peace, democracy and in protecting and promoting other Commonwealth values, such as tolerance and understanding, including respect for other cultures. The future success of the Commonwealth rests with the continued commitment and contributions of young people in promoting and sustaining the Commonwealth and its values and principles and we commit to investing in and promoting their development'.⁽⁵⁾

- Young people's dignity and worth is to be respected.
- Young people's voices are listened to, heard, respected and responded to.
- Interactions & approaches to youth are to be inclusive and accessible and grounded in respect.

Principal 2: Recognition of young people

- Young people are recognised as experts in their own lives.
- Young people are recognised as valuable contributors to national, regional & global progress.

Principal 3: Participation of young people

- Young people's participation is essential in shaping sustainable development.
- Young people's participation in decision making, shaping policy, and leadership structures is essential.

Principal 4: Safety and Safeguarding of young people

- Young people have a right to participate in society and Commonwealth Networks and Associations, civil and political spaces without any form of harm or abuse.
- Safe youth participation and engagement without any forms of discrimination, bias or mistreatment must be adhered to by Commonwealth Networks and Associations, organisations and Governments.

Principal 5: Transparency of young people's participation and involvement

- Pathways of involvement and progression in Commonwealth Networks must be transparent for young people.
- The participation of young people in policy, initiatives, and outputs must be transparent.
- Transparency regarding young people's representation in decision-making is required.
- The proportion of young people's involvement in programs, policy, initiatives, and outputs must be transparent.

Responsibilities of Commonwealth Networks

Responsible treatment, collaboration, and inclusion of young people in programs, policy, initiatives, and decision making is fostered and underpinned by the culture of Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations; having an obligation to encourage and support the implementation of the Principles of the Commonwealth Youth Code of Practice: Working with Youth Networks and Youth Representatives. To implement the Commonwealth Charter Values and deliver upon the Global Sustainable Development Goals 2030 engaging and facilitating the participation and representation of young people in the Commonwealth and Internationally is imperative, to foster responsible interactions and inclusion of young people, Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations will ensure:

Responsibility 1: Safety and Safeguarding

1. Networks must establish a culturally safe, accessible and inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse identities and experiences of young people.
2. Those working with young people are suitable and supported to exemplify safety and wellbeing values.
3. Ensure that processes for complaints and concerns are young person focused and are accessible.
4. Staff and volunteers must receive ongoing education and training to ensure they have the knowledge, skills, and awareness to safeguard young people from all forms of harm and abuse.
5. Environments prioritise safety and wellbeing, both offline and online, while minimising harm or abuse to young people.
6. Safeguarding policies and procedures document are reviewed regularly and all staff and volunteers are aware and understand their duty of care and safeguarding protocols for young people.

Responsibility 2: Representation

1. Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations will ensure at least two young person representatives are established within their decision-making assemblies.
2. Young person representatives will have the same voting rights as other assembly members.
3. Appointment of young person representatives will occur through transparent mechanisms.
4. The ideal appointment mechanisms recognised are: 1) open expression of interest advertisement via email lists, social media, and relevant webpages; 2) applicants not requiring nomination by existing network members; 3) preferential voting election by registered young people within the Network; and 4) voters are provided with candidate statements for each nominated candidate.
5. To encourage diversity of thought and lived experience in governance bodies, young person representatives serving on Commonwealth Network decision-making assemblies are limited to a maximum of two two-year terms (totalling four years).
6. Ensuring all communications and interactions are inclusive and accessible to young people, taking on board considerations for disabilities and impairments adjustments and additional access needs.

Responsibility 3: Person(s) in Position of Power (PiPP)

Person(s) in Position of Power refers to for example persons who are CEO's, Presidents, Chairs, General Secretaries, Senior Civil Society Officers or Government Official, Ministers in the Commonwealth.

- 3.1** PiPP ensure young people are respected, listened to and taken seriously and their contributions valued.
- 3.2** PiPP recognise and share their privilege by maximising opportunities and access to platforms for Young People to share their views, experiences and ideas and experiences to influence changes needed and action required in response to youth related issues.
- 3.3** PiPP value and respect young people's autonomy, their participation, skills and leadership.
- 3.4** PiPP aligns their conduct with Commonwealth Charter Values and Principals.
- 3.5** PiPP ensure young people engaging and participating are safeguarded against any form of harm or abuse.

Responsibility 4: Meaningful Participation & Engagement

- 1.** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations must provide flexibility for youth representatives, considering their education, caregiving, and early career obligations, access needs and requirements.
- 2.** Development opportunities that allow youth to build their capacity to contribute are essential to building the next generation of Commonwealth leaders and fostering meaningful participation and engagement of youth.
- 3.** Position descriptions of roles in Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations must describe role responsibilities and time commitments.
- 4.** Accessible communication for young person's, such as explaining acronyms when first used, supplying word document versions of agendas, providing easy to understand documents and ensuring availability of translators/interpreters, must become common practice within Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations.
- 5.** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations should aim to consult young people for their programs, initiatives or policies that impact young people.
- 6.** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations commit to dedicating a portion of their meetings to youth-specific or intersectional issues affecting youth.
- 7.** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations will prioritise integrating youth and intersectional perspectives into their strategic and work plans.
- 8.** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations strengthen and support local, national, regional and global partnerships and collaborations between youth networks and governments.

Responsibility 5: Transparency

- 5.1** Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations must annually disclose which members of their decision-making assemblies are young persons, the proportion of young persons within their decision-making assemblies, and the term of the young person representatives within their Network, Association or Organisation.

Responsibility 6: Respecting Diversity

1. Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations must implement policies and procedures to protect young people from discrimination of any kind, irrespective of the persons or their parents' or legal guardian's race, age, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, property, disability, birth or other status.

Expectations

It is the expectation that Commonwealth Networks Associations and Organisations will implement this Code of Practice in good faith and in keeping with the Principles of this Code. This Code is intended to be an instrument to support the meaningful participation of young people in Commonwealth structures. Where young people may encounter processes, procedures and cultural practices within Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations that are unaligned with this Code they are encouraged to seek and advocate for structural reform of these Networks procedures and practices to align them with this Code.

Accountability Mechanisms

Accountability Mechanism 1: Transparency is the primary mechanism to track the implementation and compliance of this Code. Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations are required to disclose:

- How young people participated in their work (policy, initiatives and outputs).
- The provision of any accessible accommodations/reasonable adjustments implemented to support the full participation of all young persons.
- How many young persons are members of their decision-making assemblies (e.g. executive committees), publicly, on their webpages and to the Commonwealth Secretariat.

Accountability Mechanism 2: Grievance Processes under this code allow young person representatives to appeal lack of compliance with this code first to the relevant decision-making assembly of the Commonwealth Network, Association or Organisation they are a member of and second to the Commonwealth Secretariat and the Commonwealth Youth Council if this first appeal is unsuccessful. It is essential to uphold Duty of Care for young people.

References:

1. **UN Youth Strategy: Youth2030 Working with and for Young People**
2. **UN, Convention on the Rights of the Child General Assembly resolution 44/25. 1989.**
3. **DESA, U., World Programme of Action on Youth (WPAY). 1996**
4. **Global Disability Children and Young People's Charter**
5. **The Commonwealth Charter**

This document is a tool for Youth Networks and Organisations and Youth Representatives to use as a Terms of Engagement for their Participation and Representation when engaging with Commonwealth Networks, Associations and Organisations.

You can contact us by email for more information

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