Youth Unemployment in the Caribbean: Social and Economic Backgrounds
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Acronyms

AIDS: Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
CARICOM: Caribbean Community
CDCED: Caribbean Group for Cooperation and Economic Development
CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency
COSHSOD: Commission for Human and Social Development
CYP: Commonwealth Youth Programme
DFID: Department for International Development
ECLAC: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
HIV: Human Immunodeficiency Syndrome
ILO: International Labour Organization
LAC: Latin America and the Caribbean
NGO: Non-Governmental Organization
NYC: National Youth Council
OECS: Organization of Eastern Caribbean States
UN: United Nations
UNDP: United Nations Development Programme
UNFPA: United Fund for Population Activities
Terms of Reference

The purpose of this paper is to provide the following:

a) a general perspective of youth unemployment in the Caribbean,

b) social backgrounds contributing to youth unemployment, including specific social, economic, demographic, gender-related, cultural and population-related problems,

c) a summary of existing policies, including

d) an enumeration of existing national, regional and international programs and policies geared towards youth development and employment generation.

Because of the lack of sufficient material and information on the issues addressed, this paper owes a great deal to, and certain passages are directly borrowed from, research by World Bank, ILO and CARICOM. However, the analysis is mine, and I take all responsibility for any errors.
Introduction

In his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that “happiness, a state we all pursue, is the full realization of our rationality. In order to be happy, to reach a self-sufficient, attainable, and final end, we should aim at the good.” However, “the full realization” of our potential presupposes the successful attainment of more basic requirements, i.e. necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and peace of mind, all of which contribute to a person’s eligibility to be a functioning member of society.

It would not be far-fetched to say that gainful employment, i.e. Decent Work\(^1\), is the medium through which one attains both these basic requirements and, further on, self-actualization. However, according to the International Labour Organization, 70 million young people\(^2\) are actively—but unsuccessfully—looking for employment. They represent nearly 40% of the world’s total unemployed. Unemployment levels for this age group are generally two to three times higher than for the more senior population. In some countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, it is as high as five times the rate for adults over age 45. Many of the young people who are employed find themselves in low-paying temporary situations with little or no job security.

Short spells of unemployment are a natural consequence of the process of job search (especially when a youth is entering the job market). Young people are, to an extent, disproportionately represented amongst new labour market entrants. For this reason alone, one would expect young people to face higher unemployment rates than adults. However, more extended periods of unemployment, which are becoming increasingly prevalent around the world, are the cause of more serious consequences, especially for young people. Since young people are more adaptable but also more impressionable than adults, the long-term scarring effects of long unemployment spells are likely to be of even more consequence than for older workers. Furthermore, health problems, drug addiction, and other forms of social anomie and social unrest are strongly linked to extended periods of unemployment (more on that later).

School-to-Work Transition

Potential young workers making the *school-to-work transition* face certain challenges. The traditional academic depiction of the school-to-work transition process presents students with a choice between the benefits of further education as opposed to employment (i.e. current income and projected future income), and it is assumed that students directly move from the academic ethos to gainful employment. However, this is not a realistic assumption. In the US, for example, three out of every four students face

\(^1\) Decent Work involves obtaining and maintaining productive and satisfying employment; decent working conditions; and, income security.

\(^2\) The conventional international definition of youth delineate those aged between 15 and 24 years old, i.e. from the earliest acceptable school leaving age to the age at which most people will have completed third level education. In some countries, entry into the labour market may occur before 15 years. In other countries, however, the transition between education and the labour market may not be completed until the late twenties or early thirties. Certain portions of this paper necessitates that “youth” therefore encompasses the age group beyond 24 and under 35.
multiple difficulties in effecting this transition. In her excellent paper on youth unemployment in Latin America and the Caribbean, Caroline Fawcett says that

Such a characterization does not adequately reflect the school-to-work process in Latin America, a process where youth may leave school, go to unpaid work or informal salaried employment, become unemployed and in turn, within a short period, face a whole new transition into unemployment. School-to-work transition in Latin America is an elusive and highly changing process, as youth may leave school, be unemployed, move onto salaried informal work, and then return to school. It is a state of limbo, where many Latin American youth are neither in school, nor in work for any significant amount of time. (Fawcett)

Figure 1 illustrates Fawcett’s findings:

![Diagram](image)

**Some Impediments to Labour Force Entry**

Beyond the trials of the school-to-work transition, certain groups face harder difficulties than the average youth looking for employment. These groups include:

- **Women:** In general, young women have a much harder time finding employment than young men. In the Bahamas, for example, young women are twice as likely to be unemployed than young men.
Education and Skills: Mostly in developing countries, a substantial number of young people are poor. Since there is little or no social safety net, many of them simply cannot afford to continue education (or even start the education process, in some extreme cases). These young people therefore enter the job market, frequently in the informal sector, where there is an abundance of labour already. Since they cannot afford the luxury of unemployment while conducting a proper job search, they usually end up with low-paying temporary employment that offers little or no security, little remuneration, and can be physically exacting and time-consuming to the point that continuing a job search on the side becomes impossible.

Furthermore, there is a “digital divide” where computer literacy has polarized employment opportunities. There is a relatively greater proportion of jobs in industries which presuppose computer literacy, and so the privileged few who can afford the education have access to better jobs, furthering the discrepancy.

Ethnic Minorities: While there hasn’t been much systematic collection of figures pertaining to ethnic minorities, the situation is obvious. Cultural differences and, more importantly, prejudices; religious differences; linguistic differences add to incompatibilities (or perceived incompatibilities) which result in, among other things, unemployment.

Youths with Disabilities: Once again, statistical evidence is hard to come by, but it is self-evident that disabled youths are placed in relatively tougher circumstances when looking for jobs.

The Caribbean Context

Definitions of the territorial scope of the Caribbean vary. According to World Bank (2000a), the ‘wider’ Caribbean region includes:

- The sovereign–state members of CARICOM
- Spanish-speaking Cuba and the Dominican Republic
- The semiautonomous states of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (Aruba and the Netherlands Antilles island of Bonaire, Curacao, Saint Marten, Statia and Saba)
- The British Overseas Territories, that is Anguilla, Bermuda, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, and the Turks and Caicos Islands.
- The US Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and territory of the US Virgin Islands
The territories of the Republic of France consisting of French Guyana, St. Martin, Guadeloupe and Martinique

The Caribbean is a multiethnic region with many cultural differences. There are English-speaking countries (e.g. Trinidad and Tobago), French-speaking countries (e.g. Haiti) and Dutch-speaking countries (e.g. Suriname). The majority of the population is of African descent although there are also people of European, Hispanic, and East and South Asian ancestry (e.g. Indians in Trinidad and Tobago and Guyana).

Historically, the Caribbean region has been strongly influenced by Europe and the United States. The countries of the English-speaking Caribbean have a combined population of around 6.7 million scattered over the Caribbean Sea.

Caribbean youth make up about 30% of the population.

**Defining Youth**

The United Nations’ definition of youth is 15-24 years old. The majority of youth policies in the Caribbean, however, see youth as beginning at 15 and ending at 30 years (Alexis 2000). The reason for this extended period of youth in the Caribbean is extremely high rate of youth unemployment.

Youth represents the transition from childhood to adulthood. For the purpose of our study, youth is defined as spanning between 14 and 30 years.

Much has been discussed about the problems plaguing Caribbean youth and subsequent youth unemployment. Not enough has been discovered about the underlying causes and contributions to the problems, and remedies that may be suggested to overcome those.

The youth played a critical role in the birth of the politically independent Caribbean, and most of them continue to manifest tremendous potentialities to overcome hurdles in order to attain high levels of personal and professional goals. However, factors capable of disrupting the process of positive attainments exist amongst youth, which in turn, coupled with a number of external factors, impede easy transition to employment.

Over the last two decades, most Caribbean countries experienced severe economic decline and stagnation. This was a result of a loss of their preferential treatment in agriculture products, depressed market for minerals, losses due to lack of market diversification, stagnation of the manufacturing sector in the face of increased competition, and the increasing vulnerability of the tourism sector. Many countries have been forced to implement structural adjustment and stabilization programs, with resulting cutbacks in health, education, housing, and social welfare programs. More recently, global economic recession, debt service obligations and declines in development assistance have severely impeded economic recovery and growth for most of the Caribbean countries.
Youth Unemployment Rates

Like in most parts of the world, unemployment in the Caribbean is primarily a youth phenomenon (Figure 3). Across countries in the Caribbean, youth unemployment rates double to quadruple the adult rates. According to the World Development Indicators, from 1996-98, St. Lucia had the highest unemployment rate in the Americas and the Caribbean, closely followed by Jamaica (among the countries for which data were available).

Caribbean-wide data indicate that St. Lucia, Dominica, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Jamaica, have the highest youth unemployment rates.

Youth unemployment is likely to be quite underestimated in high unemployment economies where non-availability of employment over a prolonged period influences “discouraged workers” to stop looking for work.

Youth unemployment in the Caribbean represents 40-60% (except Barbados) of the unemployed, even though youth comprise 20-30% of the labour force.

Youth unemployment rates are higher for female than males, although their proportion of the total labour force tends to be less. (Figure 2)

**Figure 2**: Youth and Adult Unemployment in the Caribbean

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Youth (15-24 years)</th>
<th>Adult Unemployment</th>
<th>Youth as Share of Unemployed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Antigua &amp; Barbuda</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>13.1%</td>
<td>12.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anguilla</td>
<td>13.7%</td>
<td>14.1%</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barbados</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>15.2%</td>
<td>20.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belize</td>
<td>18.4%</td>
<td>13.4%</td>
<td>25.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dominica</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grenada</td>
<td>23.9%</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>28.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guyana</td>
<td>21.1%</td>
<td>17.2%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamaica</td>
<td>25.4%</td>
<td>19.1%</td>
<td>31.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Lucia</td>
<td>30.6%</td>
<td>27.7%</td>
<td>34.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saint Vincent &amp; the Grenadines</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>30.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>17.9%</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: ILO (1999)

In the English-speaking Caribbean, the gender differential is greatest in Belize, followed by Bahamas, Jamaica, and Guyana.

The following chart shows the unemployment percentages throughout a comprehensive part of the Caribbean:
The Caribbean Office of the ILO gives us this analysis of the above population data:

The total labour force of the predominantly English-speaking Caribbean currently stands at approximately 2.7 million people. 26% of this labour force is between the ages of 16-24. Males make up a greater share of the labour force on average, between the ages of 16-24, across the region. However, there are country specific variations and the pattern becomes less pronounced in the 25-29 age group where female participants roughly equal that of males in Jamaica, Barbados, the Bahamas, Saint Lucia and the Netherlands Antilles.

The youth cohort looms larger in terms of unemployment. An estimated 404,000 persons or 15% of the region's labour force are unemployed. Of this, 51% or 204,000 are between the ages of 15-24. As a result, youth unemployment rates are substantially above the national averages across the region and average around 40% in the 15-19 age group and 30% in the 20-24 age group. Research reveals that the share of females in the total unemployment figure for youth is most consistently higher in the case of Jamaica across all three age groups between 16-29. The pattern is much more varied in other countries.

The overall figures show that these regional averages for youth participation and employment do not fully capture individual country experiences. In the case of Jamaica, for example, some 27% of the labour force is between 15-24 with another 30% between 25-29. Only a few other Caribbean countries have a comparable or higher proportion of
their labour force between 15 -24 years (Guyana, Barbados, Belize, St. Vincent and the Grenadines) to that of Jamaica.

As noted earlier, most countries are experiencing unemployment rates among the 15 -19 age group of around 40% or higher. (ILO Carib. 1997)

Figure 3 demonstrates the population structure of CARICOM nations\(^3\). (CARICOM 2002)

It is evident that a very substantial number of the population is aged under 15. This necessitates greater employment generation for future years, as this group will soon join the ranks of potential employment seekers.

**Specific Social Problems in the Caribbean**

\(^3\) The last available date was 1990
Beside the declining economic trends as mentioned already which limit employment opportunities for the youth, there are a number of social and cultural factors that not only add to the degrading economic situation but at the same time create insurmountable deterrent to the development of a healthy and positive labour force, therefore rendering a multiplier effect on the precarious employment scenario.

In the Caribbean, aside from the ever-growing problem of unemployment, there are specific negative societal conditions, behaviour among the youth, and outcomes of unemployment. All these add to the inculcating cycle of poverty and unemployment, which in turn breeds more poverty and unemployment for present and future generations.

Enumerated below are the major negative societal conditions, behaviour among the youth, and outcomes of unemployment.

? *Early sexual initiation*— The Caribbean Region is characterized by very early onset of sexual activity. According to the nine-country CARICOM study, one-third of school-going young people are sexually active.

The history of early sexual initiation dates back to the days of slavery, when there were no other recreational facilities except sex after a hard day’s Herculean physical labor at the plantation.

? *Forced Intercourse*— In the nine-country CARICOM study, almost half reported their first sexual experience had been forced. The proportion was high for both girls and boys: 48 and 32 percent, respectively.

? *Non or little use of contraceptives*— Despite high level of sexual activity among adolescents starting at a very early age, use of contraceptives remain fearfully low. Only a quarter of the CARICOM school-going sexually active sample are reported to use contraceptive and only negligibly more worry about getting pregnant or causing a pregnancy.

? *Adolescent and undesired pregnancy*— As a natural sequence, there is an alarmingly high rate of adolescent pregnancy. About 85 percent of children in Jamaica and St. Lucia are born out of wedlock.

The institution of marriage was neither encouraged nor allowed by the slave masters, whereas procreation was encouraged so as to add to the “slave-wealth.” The structure of households in the English-speaking Caribbean is also traced back to conditions of slavery. Families were discouraged, as they would be broken up in the sale of slaves, but women were encouraged to bear many children (capital production for the slave-owners). Thus, men were excluded from the family and were not encouraged to be participating fathers. The high number of out-of-wedlock births, the propensity for men to float among several partners, and the absence of expectations for men to be responsible partners and fathers persist today and leads to the unstable family situations of the present.
Unions between men and women in the Caribbean are common and are not disrespected in the society. Much as these do no represent marriages per se, children born from the unions are socially and culturally accepted in the Caribbean; furthermore, they are not necessarily considered to be children out of wedlock.

*Risky sexual behavior, HIV, AIDS*: Following sub-Saharan Africa, the Caribbean has the highest HIV/AIDS prevalence rates in the world—and data—suggests that for one-third of all new cases, the disease was contracted when the individual was 15-24 years. Out of the 12 countries with the highest HIV prevalence in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) Region, nine are from the Caribbean (World Bank 2000). The high incidence of HIV among youth has been linked to early sexual initiation and low condom use amongst young people.

Rough estimates show that losses to society from risky youth behaviors—such as promiscuity, drug-taking and the like—both in terms of direct expenditures and foregone benefits of alternative uses of resources, reach into billions of dollars. “While Caribbean Youth involved in crime and drugs or infected with AIDS remain a minority, it is the resources which must be diverted for their treatment and the loss of their creative potential and energies which make this minority of national and, indeed, regional concern.” (West Indian Commission, 1992).

*Physical Abuse*: Many young people in the Caribbean countries have a history of severe physical abuse in their lives, mostly in early childhood. Cultural norms sanction the practice of corporal punishment to discipline children.

*Sexual abuse*: Many Caribbean youths have had experience of sexual abuse earlier in their lives by adults outside the home or other teens, and also by adults in the home and siblings.

*School-leaving*: Across the Caribbean, more boys than girls tend to fall behind and leave school, much as rates of unemployment are higher for females than males.

*Crime and violence*: Based on homicide rates, the LAC region as a whole is the most violent region in the world. At 22.9 per 100,000 people in 1990, homicide rates for the Caribbean are almost double the world average of 10.7 per 100,000 (1990 being the last year for which sub-regional Caribbean data were available). Department of Corrections data reveal that young people (age 17 to 30) commit most offenses, with youth (15-24) contributing significantly to crime and violence. Consequently, young men also tend to be the main victims of homicides.

Rage is a common sentiment among Caribbean youth, with over 40% of teenagers reporting such emotions. However, the rage syndrome may be a natural outcome
of youths without any tangible employment opportunities for the present and lacking definite profitable engagements in the foreseeable future. Another factor that may be attributed as a cause to this apparent rage is that the Caribbean youths are exposed to vacationing youths from developed countries engaging in a variety of recreational activities, and indulging in luxury, while the Caribbean youths themselves are only providing services.

? Substance abuse and drug dealing: According to a United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) funded study, drug and substance abuse and youth involvement in drug dealing are significant problems facing at-risk youth in the Caribbean (Barker 1995).

Substance use and consumption of alcohol in the contemporary Caribbean are the legacy of colonialism, and the system of slave labor these fueled the sugarcane-based plantation economy. Historically, alcohol-drinking has been a social norm. Working in the sugarcane plantation with its consequent easy availability of rum made the Caribbean men dependent on it. For example, now and then, alcohol is not seen as a drug (Luther 2002), and many consider its consumption an integral cultural activity. As one Barbadian suggested, “We grow sugarcane here, everyone drinks rum, they always have” (Barker 1995).

However, during hard times of unemployment and economic privation, driven by hopelessness, youths tend to be totally dependent on alcohol. This leads to a number of adverse externalities.

? High rate of weapon and gun possession

? Social exclusion: At-risk Caribbean youth are deemed to be feeling powerless and excluded from the mainstream of Caribbean societies as social integration of youth involves the insertion into the workforce, political, social and cultural life as well as a smooth transition from dependence on the family to independence. (Morales 2001)

? Low self-esteem

? Ambivalence and hopelessness: Ambivalence may be a reaction to the hopelessness felt by many Caribbean youth who feel they have no chance for a happy and productive life. This prohibits them from being proactive in support of the public good.

Not only do the above factors deter the development of youth and their profitable absorption into a productive labour force, they impose astronomical costs to the societies and governments at large as well as individuals and their families.

Private economic costs accrued are the foregone earnings, non-monetary contribution to households and loss of returns to the family from private investment in the individual;
social economic costs amount to loss of returns from state investment in the individual in terms of tax revenue, lower future income, migration, underinvestment in future generations, social exclusion, secondary costs from criminality, substance use, etc. The Caribbean economies, already suffering from the effects of global recession, can hardly afford to bear these additional costs.

**Youth Development Policies and Programs in the Caribbean**

Over the years, concerns have grown over youth issues in the Caribbean and the need to promote youth as active players in national development. Without exception, Caribbean governments have responded by establishing ministries and/or departments to coordinate youth development activities and most have put in place policies and related programs. (Danns et al. 1997)

It is encouraging to note that governments, Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and, to a more limited extent, the private sector, provides services to youth. Typically, governments address youth issues through education, social safety net programs, job training, family services, sports and culture. NGOs are also active across the sector.

The programs play an important role in addressing the needs of specific groups of at-risk youth, including street children, children in inner-city communities, teenage mothers, young fathers, drug addicts, children with disabilities and other special-need groups. However, evaluation data on the effectiveness of these different interventions are generally lacking. These organizations are also plagued by problems common to civil society organizations in other countries—including lack of staff, limited space for programs, scarce and uncertain funding sources, and limited administrative capacity.

Various thematic areas where services are provided are:

- **Education**: Problems associated with out-of-school youth and joblessness have sparked demand for educational reforms in the Caribbean. In the Commonwealth Caribbean, a number of countries have responded by developing comprehensive reform approaches to education.

- **Training and Skill Development**: Given the high level of unemployment among the youth, training and skill development is the focus of many programs in Trinidad and Tobago. Several large youth-training and employment programs reach about 15,000 youth annually at a total cost of some TT$ 50 million. (World Bank 2003)

  Aside from several institutions under the auspices of various governments and NGOs, some training offered in the private sector is profit-oriented, small-scale and non-regulated by the government.

  Across the Caribbean Region, several safety-net programs target young people. These include school feeding, school fee assistance, grants to tertiary-education
students, welfare programs (including food stamps) and economic and social assistance. However, questions have been raised about the effectiveness of some social-protection programs directed to youth. Many Caribbean governments support family and youth services, although these programs tend to be poorly funded and inadequately implemented.

Community Sports and Leisure: “Youth work has traditionally been carried out as a means of providing young people with avenues for collective leisure, exploration, talent development, and service to community.” (Alexis 2000)

Art, theater and other cultural activities are increasingly used as vehicles to reach youth and deliver messages on youth development, self-esteem, personal development, sexual and reproductive health, and parenting.

National Youth Services: Youth volunteers are selected to provide services in poor communities targeting unemployed and out-of-school youths between ages 17-24. Through this process of “re-socialization” and development of appropriate work attitudes, the program, under the auspices of national youth services, aims to bridge the gap between school to career.

National Youth Councils: National Youth Councils (NYCs) are umbrella organizations or NGOs for youth volunteers. The NYCs provide services in their respective communities with an aim of promoting leadership skills amongst the youth.

Micro Enterprise Development: A not-so-successful attempt was initiated by some youth programs in support of entrepreneurship and business development. The Micro Investment Development Agency in Jamaica was used as a vehicle for delivering micro-enterprise credit among young people aged 18-25. Despite its best efforts, youth turnout for the facility was disappointingly low, amounting to only 10% of the total beneficiaries. The Community Development Fund established by the Social Development Commission had also focused on youth as the target group. Unfortunately it did not succeed in enlisting sufficient numbers of youth clients.⁴

Hewlett Packard, a private sector corporation, is reportedly getting a considerable number of youth clients through its Junior Achievement, a program initiated and funded by it in Saint Lucia.

The Barbados Youth Business Trust, an NGO with similar objectives, is also reporting success in enrolling youth entrepreneurship.

⁴ In response to these experiences and with the hope of making self-employment a viable alternative for disadvantaged youth, HEART Trust/NTA recently modified its program curricula to include entrepreneurial skills training as requisite part of all of its training programs. To expand the number of persons able to teach entrepreneurial skills, HEART Trust/NTA has provided training for trainers. The impact of these initiatives is not known at this point.
Both programs teach entrepreneurship, economic self-determination and business skills development in schools and aim to attain youth self-sufficiency in employment creation.

Finally, the Commonwealth Youth Credit Initiative, approved by the heads of governments—is a regional scheme created to respond to youth unemployment in the entire Commonwealth.

A youth-specific policy can be an effective tool for putting the youth issue firmly on the agenda of policy makers and creating ownership over youth development—particularly if the youth policy is approved through the representative wing of the government (i.e., Parliament in the Commonwealth) rather than receiving only Cabinet approval. But clearly, a well-worded policy is not enough. As countries move to involving youth as active participants in development, programs with systems in place, the analytical rigor to identify the needs of youth, and the flexibility to tailor activities accordingly, will be more effective. As always, with a cross-cutting issue, finding the right balance between coordination and implementation is another important element of an effective policy framework.

The adoption of an integrated approach to youth development programs and policies requires concerted action amongst several ministries; for example, among those responsible for economic policy, education and training, employment, enterprise, development, labor, finance, youth and community affairs, to name a few.

Existing analysis of youth programs and policies, however, points to the need to carry out evaluations and cost-benefit analysis of programs, confront tough choices in terms of targeting and prioritizing of issues to be addressed, define age-specificity of services, provide longer-term quality services, support programs that provide youth with access to caring, knowledgeable adults over the long-term, and create incentives from private-public sector collaboration.

Indeed, investments in youth have potentially high payoffs at the individual, familial and societal levels. Young people who contribute positively to society create positive externalities and improve the economic, cultural and societal environment for all. Policy-makers and governments thus have a catalytic role in ensuring that youth are exposed to a full spectrum of opportunities to enable them to become productive, healthy adults.

**Regional Programs**

The Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP) is the youth department of the Commonwealth Secretariat that carries out decisions made by Commonwealth Heads of Government. Operating out of a regional office in Guyana and having covered the Commonwealth Caribbean since 1974, the CYP has 18 member countries. The CYP’s main activities include training and empowering youth workers, providing technical assistance to governments on developing and implementing youth programs, supporting
the economic enfranchisement of youth, and acting as a regional repository of information on youth in the Caribbean. Commonwealth Governments provide the bulk of funding. But more recently, CYP has collaborated with the UNDP, UNICEF, UNAIDS and other partners. According to CYP staff, funding conditionalities have changed considerably over the years, having been more flexible in the past. At present, funding tends to be earmarked according to donor priorities such as HIV/AIDS.

The Caribbean Federation of Youth, which is based in St. Vincent, was formed to act as a representative body for youth organizations in the Caribbean and to address problems faced by youth at the sub-regional and international levels. The Federation’s mandate is to coordinate the work of national youth organizations in the Caribbean and assist them in policy formulation and management practices, and strengthen the integration process of Caribbean youth through networking, information sharing, and youth exchanges. The Federation operates through the direct support of National Youth Councils, which are responsible for implementing the Federation’s work at the national levels.

Led by its Commission for Human and Social Development (COSHSOD), CARICOM has recently become active in the area of youth development but have since worked hard to place youth issues on the regional agenda. Specifically, it established a Regional Strategy for Youth Development, which represents a framework for facilitating youth initiatives at the national level.

The strategy includes the following targets over the 2001-2006 time period:

a) all countries should have a youth statistical database and collect and analyze quantitative and qualitative data by 2003;

b) all countries should have systems for training/educating youth workers as well as begun to democratize and decentralize the youth function by 2003;

c) all countries should have NYCs operating and delivering services to youth by 2003;

d) all countries should have established mechanisms to provide youth with a voice in public policy making by 2002;

e) all countries should have begun to implement inter-sectoral community-based programs promoting economic participation, poverty reduction, and sustainable livelihoods and health families, communities and nations by 2003; and

f) in terms of promoting adolescent health, all countries should have begun to implement community-based projects aimed at raising awareness, changing behavior and empowering young people to educate/counsel their peers by 2002. CARICOM’s other efforts include a Youth Ambassador’s program, staging of model CARICOM conferences and support for cooperative initiatives, such as the Australian Caribbean Community Sport Development Program. (World Bank 2003)
International Development Organizations

International development organizations are active in youth development to varying degrees, with UNICEF playing a leading role due to its mandate on children and adolescents. Working at both at the regional, national and local levels, UNICEF organizes activities around the lifecycle through three types of programs: early childhood development (0-8 years), adolescent development and participation (9-18 years), and social policy and special care protection. Types of programs supported by UNICEF in OECS countries, for example, include health/family education (using the classroom as the primary medium for transmission of messages), HIV/AIDS (peer training in partnership with the Red Cross), and youth empowerment (capacity building of National Youth Councils). In the case of Jamaica, the UNICEF strategy is to promote cross-institutional collaboration in youth development through community level multi-purpose hubs that provide integrated services to adolescents (UNICEF 2002).

Other international organizations that support youth development include: the UNDP, which mainstreams youth throughout its programs (reform of classroom culture, entrepreneurship, social policy development, community development and information technology); the Pan American Health Organization, which supports integrated youth development programs;\(^5\) UNFPA, which funds adolescent reproductive and sexual health programs; the ILO, which funds work on child labor and job preparation; the European Commission, which addresses the youth development through education and health projects;\(^6\) the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), which supports youth development through a small grants program and an education project that addresses teacher quality and violence and discipline in schools; USAID, which supports HIV/AIDS programs, community-based life skills and other training for at-risk youth, and parenting programs; and the Department for International Development (DFID), which, while not supporting youth-specific projects, promotes youth development through education reform (access and quality of post-primary education), drug eradication and urban poverty and violence (Jamaica).\(^7\) (World Bank 2003)

Global Policy Framework

Approved in 1995, the UN World Program of Action for Youth provides a global framework for youth development. It identifies the following ten priority areas for action (to be carried out in two stages, up to the year 2000, and from 2001-2010): education, work, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug use, juvenile delinquency,

\(^5\) Current PAHO initiatives in the case of OECS, for example, are in the areas of tobacco use, HIV/AIDS, mental health promotion and health/family education.

\(^6\) Including technical and vocational training, education sector reform (programmatic as well as project, with a push towards the former), institutional strengthening of community colleges, social investment funds, drug programs, and education and health infrastructure projects.

\(^7\) Also noteworthy is UNESCO’s youth programs with in Latin America and the Caribbean support youth fora, formal education and the Infoyouth Network.
recreation, gender (girls and female adolescents), and participation. By 2000, according to a progress report on Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), of the 34 LAC countries, 27 had formulated a national youth policy, 30 had established a national coordination mechanism for youth issues, and 16 had implemented a national action plan for youth.

**Effectiveness of Youth Policies**

Worldwide, there is a dearth of information on the nature and effectiveness of youth policies, due most probably to the fact that the concept of youth development is new and has only been emerging recently.

However, it is not easy to measure the impact of these programs. As pointed out by Alexis (2000), even though the Caribbean has a solid track record of organized youth activity and numerous programs, it does not have adequate systems nor the data and rigorous analysis to monitor the effectiveness of these programs. The cross-cutting nature of youth and the multitude of programs in place to address youth also make monitoring and evaluation a challenge. But problems related to measuring the impact of youth programs are not limited to the Caribbean. Worldwide, very little exists in the way of impact evaluations of youth initiatives, due likely to the relatively young and underdeveloped nature of the youth development field. (World Bank 2003)

**Conclusion**

Poverty amidst plenty in the world is the biggest challenge facing mankind today. Of the world population of 6 billion, 2.8 billion people live on less than US $1 a day. Future geographic change will add to the challenge of poverty. In the next 25 years, roughly 2 billion people will be added to the world’s population, most of them in the developing countries.

About 3 billion people—nearly half the world population, currently have no access to sanitation, and 1.3 billion people have no access to clean drinking water.9

Young people between the ages of 15 and 25 total almost 1.1 billion and constitute roughly 18% of the global population. 133 million youth remain illiterate—comprising of 41% of the world’s unemployed. Some 238 million youth live on less than $1 per day. An average of 7,000 young people become infected with HIV every day.

During the last decade, i.e. 1990s, international warfare killed more than 5 million people. More than 300,000 child soldiers worldwide are still directly involved in armed conflicts, and a substantially larger number are dealing with human tragedies resulting therefrom.

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8 The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), assists in the implementation of the action plan by holding regional meetings and preparing studies and reports on youth.

We are living in a world of striking paradoxes, where, according to Stephen Miles, “assets of the 200 richest people in the world are greater than the combined income of more than 2 billion of the poorest—and the gulf between these two groups continue to grow.”

Aside from the above prevailing inequalities, a new threat to the world youth assuming considerable proportion is “globalization.” Globalization, apparently bringing people closer, is actually expanding the divisions between them and is thereby breeding inequality. Being local in a globalized world is a sign of social deprivation and degradation.

Globalization inevitably leads to exclusion. It is characterized by spatial segregation, actively increasing disparities that already exist between global elites and localized majority. “…The only certainty is that globalization is characterized by increasing market power, and there is always the danger that such power will be abused. Overly hasty privatization, unaccountable corporations and companies, a weakened public sector, and an imbalance between individual private interests and collective public interests are all symptoms of globalization that may have a direct or indirect impact on young peoples’ lives.” (Townsend 211)

Amidst these frightening scenarios, it becomes imperative for all stakeholders in the society, public and private both—including the civil society, to initiate positive actions towards creating a better world order. In March (6-12) 1995, for the first time in history, heads of State and Government gathered at Copenhagen, Denmark, “…to recognize the significance of social development and human well-being for all and to give these goals the highest priority into the twenty-first century,”—The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development.

The World Programme of Action for Youth to the Year 2000 and Beyond, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 1995—— the tenth anniversary of the International Youth Year (1985), signified the “United Nations’ commitment to young people, and international response to the call for more effective strategies aimed at meeting the needs of youth and addressing the challenges they would encounter in the next millennium.”

The United Nations, at the global pivotal position, adopted the Millennium Declaration at the dawn of the new millennium. Several heads of state and government gathered at the United Nations Headquarters in New York from 6 to 8 September, 2000, and reaffirmed their commitment to create “…a more peaceful, prosperous and just world.”

The Millennium Declaration, along with a number and variety of global issues, firmly resolved: “To develop and implement strategies that give young people everywhere a real chance to find decent and productive work.”

Subsequently, the Secretary-General’s Youth Employment Network clearly documents the need of young people for securing decent work, which would ensure conducive working conditions, reconciling work and family life, gender equality, equal recognition,
and enabling young women to make choices and take control of their lives. It emphasizes the youth’s ability to compete in the marketplace, keep up with technological advancement (or new technology). It lays down the importance of their fair share of wealth and not being discriminated against; it means having a voice in the workplace and in their community. It prescribes a path from subsistence to existence.

For millions of young women and men, decent work is the primary route out of poverty—— in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Employment provides the single most effective means of reducing poverty; not only through the income it creates for workers, but also because of the dignity and empowerment with which it is associated.

Ultimately, true happiness and actualization for millions of young people, not only in the Caribbean but all across the world, depend on the generation of employment for them. With the world population projected to grow by 110 million during this decade and with technological advances leading to further “rationalizations” of labour demand, some 500 million new jobs have to be created within the next 10 years merely to maintain the status quo.

This is, admittedly, a daunting task. Within the Caribbean itself, the quest for employment generation faces multiple social, economic, socio-economic, and geographical problems that need to be overcome.

These call for resolute and concerted efforts by various Caribbean governments backed by strong policy decisions.

The Caribbean region is united by a strong sense of cohesion and racial unity. However, individual countries are also separated by their various colonial histories. Because of their colonial past, they are differentiated by their language and culture. Because of the broader cultural history of this colonization, they face various social problems (for example, rampant sexism in the form of the male macho culture). Post-colonial Caribbean youth have found themselves locked in societies in which “the rhetoric of self-reliance of new vision for youth, of education as a vehicle for democracy, of youth entrepreneurship; all these promises did not materialize in viable amounts.” The islands are also limited by their lack of landmass, and the fact that travel between the islands needs to take place by air or by sea.

These disadvantages can be and are frequently turned into advantages. Their colonial past gives the Caribbean islands a uniquely international outlook. The fact that most of the world’s major languages are spoken there is a definite advantage—— in spite of the Caribbean’s small size, it is extremely well-represented on a global scale. The tourism industry offers opportunities for many other industries and generates cash flow. The fact that these islands are islands and not one continuous landmass means that cultural diversity is nourished.

Above all, the Caribbean people are of remarkable average intelligence. The positive outlook of the Caribbean islanders is globally acknowledged and appreciated fact, and
this in turn generates a vast amount of international goodwill. Because of their unique positioning on the world map, and because of the peace-loving nature of the peoples and governments, the Caribbean nations have no enemies and many friends.

The purpose of this paper is to enumerate the difficulties faced in the face of the problem of unemployment, and to review the progress already made. The purpose of this workshop is to determine what steps need to be taken in order to defeat unemployment and proactively implement said steps so that the problems, once gone, do not return.

The hurdles facing us are great. But there are even greater factors working to our advantage, the most important among them being the nature, potentialities, and capabilities of the Caribbean youths themselves. In the end, we can overcome that which we know and believe we can overcome. And the problem of youth unemployment, while great today, is surmountable.
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