REPUBLIC OF TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

TACKLING YOUTH UNEMPLOYMENT IN
TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO AND THE
CARIBBEAN

58th COMMONWEALTH PARLIAMENTARY CONFERENCE

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Abstract

As a growing dimension of the global jobs crisis, the world is currently experiencing a global youth employment crisis. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), over 75 million youth worldwide are expected to be unemployed in 2012, 4 million more than in 2007; global youth unemployment rates are projected to remain sticky at its high rate of 12.7% up to 2016; and over 6 million have given up looking for jobs. The issue of decent work for youth has also been placed centrally in discussions at the international, regional and national levels. In Trinidad and Tobago, although the youth unemployment rate has shown recovery in 2011, youth labour force participation rates have been falling. Although a number of discussions, initiatives and commitments are underway at the national, regional and global levels to address the global employment crisis, there is need for more intense and expeditious action to be taken at all levels to create and maintain decent work for youth, safeguard social, economic and political stability, accelerate a jobs-rich recovery from the global economic and financial crisis and prevent a recurrence of such a crisis.
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1.0 Introduction

The world was stunned on August 11, 2012 by the articulate performance of a nineteen year old javelin thrower who made history as the youngest-ever Olympic champion in javelin throw and the first person from the Western Hemisphere to win this competition in 60 years. In the words of the Chief Sports Correspondent of The Telegraph, “Here was a teenager from a little Caribbean island with no heritage in the throwing events becoming the youngest ever javelin winner in the history of the Games.” Thirty-six years after the country’s first ever Olympic gold medal was copped, Trinidad and Tobago and the rest of the Caribbean celebrated the outstanding achievements of a young man from a small and remote community, Mr. Keshorn Walcott, in a year when the country celebrates its Golden Jubilee as an independent nation. This stunning victory was complimented by other great performances by young men and women from the Caribbean region and the rest of the world at the London 2012 Olympics. Such sterling demonstration of excellence, determination and discipline in one sphere of life is a reminder of the valuable contributions of youth to progress and growth and development.

Currently comprising almost half of the world’s population, the present and potential value of youth towards economic and social development cannot be understated. The number of persons aged 15 to 24 years currently numbers 1.2 billion and has been growing over the past decade. This represents a “demographic dividend”. Noted for their hope, ambition, commitment, creativity and capacity for innovation, young persons are often seen as “the future” or “tomorrow’s leaders”. However, there is increasing recognition that young people are not only the future but an integral part of the present; not only beneficiaries but are partners in development. The theme of International Youth Day 2012 (August 12th) of “Building a better world: Partnering with youth” attests to this shift in development thought.

However, despite the recognition of the contributions of youth to development, the world is currently experiencing a youth employment crisis - a growing and worrisome dimension of the global jobs crisis. Young persons trying to enter the labour market or remain economically active continue to be placed in vulnerable positions often placed in the category of “last in, first out” or face challenges being numbered among the working poor, those in precarious employment or in informal employment. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO) over 75 million youth aged 15 to 24 years are projected to be unemployed in 2012 and the global youth unemployment rate, which currently stands at 12.7 percent, is expected to show no improvements up to 2016.

Over the years, youth unemployment has been regarded as an important policy concern in many countries. However, today, the global community has recognized that the youth employment crisis is a global challenge which requires immediate and vigorous action in order to prevent the grim legacy of a lost generation ‘scarred’ by unprecedented youth unemployment levels. The 101st Session of the International Labour Conference of the ILO, in Geneva in June 2012, adopted a Resolution which affirmed that “generating sufficient decent jobs for youth is of highest global priority.” This Resolution was supported by
comprehensive Conclusions which provide a framework for urgent and renewed action to address the crisis of youth employment.

Indeed, the 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference (CPC), which has as its theme “Ensuring a Relevant Commonwealth for the Future,” has recognized that there cannot be a future without the active engagement of the youth and the convening of a Workshop at the Conference to address the topic of Tackling Youth Unemployment is quite timely.

This Paper is prepared to facilitate Trinidad and Tobago’s active participation in the discussions at the 58th CPC. It seeks to provide an analysis of youth unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago and the Caribbean, review the actions that have been taken to address youth unemployment and provide recommendations to further tackle the problem. It first provides an overview of the current global youth employment crisis by reviewing global trends. It also reviews the current youth labour market situation in selected Caribbean countries, with specific attention to Trinidad and Tobago. Next, it outlines actions taken at the global level to address youth unemployment. It then examines actions taken at the regional level and in Trinidad and Tobago. The Paper ends with certain policy recommendations that may assist countries in addressing youth unemployment, taking into account the fact that there is no “one-size-fits-all”.
2.0 Situation Analysis of Youth in the Labour Market - Global, Regional and National

2.1 Defining Youth

The definition of “youth” varies from country to country and by sphere of activity. The United Nations (UN) defines youth, for statistical purposes, as persons aged 15 to 24 years. However, based on the UN’s Convention on the Rights of the Child, a child is defined as anyone under 18 years. Therefore it is sometimes argued that a youth should be a person between 18 and 30. The Commonwealth Youth Forum considers youth to be persons between the ages of 18 to 29 years and young people as those who are under 30 years. The ILO’s Key Indicators of the Labour Market (KILM) adopts the definition of young persons as those 15-24 years old who are not institutionalized. Thus the term “adult” or non-youth refers to those aged 25 and over under the KILM.

Some countries also find it important to distinguish between teenagers (13-19) and young adults (20-24) since their sociological, psychological and health problems may differ. In the Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development 2010, young people aged 10-14 were referred to in the report as adolescents and those aged 15-29 were referred to as youth. The National Youth Policy of Trinidad and Tobago indicates that for the delivery of services, youth in Trinidad and Tobago shall be a “person between the ages of 12 and 29 years who are becoming independent of parents and learning to master the biological, psychological, political, economic and social changes associated with this period of transition.”

Generally, based on research, a youth could be as old as 35 years (the maximum) and as young as 12 years (the minimum). However, for the purpose of this report, youth is defined as persons aged 15 to 24.

2.2 Analysis of Youth in the Labour Market - Global

According to the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) State of World Population 2011, there are currently 1.2 billion persons worldwide between the ages of 15 and 24 years, constituting almost one fifth of the world population. By the end of 2011, there were 1.8 billion persons worldwide between the ages of 10 and 24 years, comprising about 26 percent of the world population. Persons under 25 years make up 43 percent of the world’s population, reaching as much as 60 percent in some countries.

However, the global youth population is generally more susceptible to high unemployment, under-employment, and poverty levels. The recent economic and financial crisis has exposed the vulnerability and had unfavorable impact on the youth population as is evident from the following:

- globally, young people are three times more likely than adults to be out of a job;
• over one third of the 200 million unemployed persons worldwide are between the ages of 15 and 24 years;
• although the number of employed youth increased by 16 million over the period 2000 to 2011, the total youth population increased at a much faster rate, resulting in a reduction in the share of employed youth in the total labour force and in the total youth population;
• the global economic and financial crisis had a dire impact on declining youth unemployment rates that were experienced from 2002 to 2007. Since 2007, global youth unemployment had started rising again and reached 11.7 percent in 2008, but the increase in youth unemployment between 2008 and at the peak of the crisis in 2009 wiped out gains derived in previous years. Global youth unemployment rates are expected to reach 12.7 percent in 2012, up from 12.6 percent in 2011 and a 1 percentage point increase since 2008. This means nearly 75 million youth aged 15 to 24 will be unemployed in 2012, an increase of nearly 4 million since 2007. These rates are projected to remain at such high levels up to 2016. This is due largely to the youth labour market situation in developed countries where youth unemployment rates have not returned to pre-crisis levels.

2.3 Analysis of Youth in the Labour Market - Regional

The Caribbean accounted for about 0.6 percent of the world population in mid 2012, standing at 42 million. It is expected to grow by about 20 percent to 49 million by 2050. Approximately 64 percent of the population in the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) is below the age of 30. Population projections indicate a continuing demographic significance of youth over the mid-term. By 2020, 58 per cent will be under 30 years and by 2035 fifty percent. More than a quarter of the region’s unemployed is between 25 and 34 years of age, including graduates of secondary and tertiary institutions.

Like many other countries, unemployment rates increased during the period of the global crisis and have not yet returned to pre-crisis levels in many cases. In most countries, the youth unemployment rate is usually more than twice the national unemployment rate. A snapshot of the youth unemployment situation in two major Caribbean countries, Jamaica and Barbados, is presented in Box 1 below.

Steps have been taken in the region to deepen regional integration with the establishment of the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) which was initially implemented on January 1, 2006 with the introduction of the Single Market phase. The CSME is predicated on a strong sense of commitment to the goals of regional integration and on a belief in the ability of the region to fulfill one’s dreams and aspirations. The youth is identified as one of the major category of beneficiaries from the CSME as it is intended to afford free movement

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1 A regional association of 15 sovereign Caribbean states aimed at enhancing standards of living and work among small developing States through cooperation in foreign policy, trade and economic integration, human and social development.
2 Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, 2010
3 Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development, 2010
within the CARICOM region for work, establishment of businesses and investment purposes. To date, certain categories of persons, including university graduates and artisans, benefit from free movement of skills. This will make it easier for youth to access educational opportunities not available at home and respond to labour and skill shortages in other countries.

### Box 1
**Youth Unemployment in Selected Caribbean Countries**

**Jamaica**

Youth in Jamaica is defined as persons 14-24 years of age. The youth labour force increased by 4,900 persons from January 2011 to January 2012, largely due to the larger number of females aged 14 to 24 years in the labour force. A 2009 World Bank report estimates Jamaica's youth unemployment stood at nearly 27 per cent, almost twice the region's overall figure. For youths aged 14-19, the unemployment rate stood at 47% as at January 2012, relatively unchanged from January 2011. However, the unemployment rate for youths between 20 and 24 years was 30.1% as at January 2012 compared to 26.4% at January 2010. Youth unemployment rates are substantially higher than adult unemployment rates and female youths face higher unemployment rates than males.

**Barbados**

The unemployment rate in Barbados in 2011 stood at 11.2%. The male and female unemployment rates were 9.8% and 12.6% respectively. The youth unemployment rate for 2011 was 28.9%. Female youth unemployment rate was higher at 32.6% as compared to 25.7% for male youth. Some of the critical actions taken by Barbados to address its youth unemployment situation in recent times include development of a National Youth Policy, extension of the unemployment benefit from 26 weeks to 40 weeks and increase of the minimum wage for shop assistants (some of the most vulnerable workers) by 25 per cent.
2.4 Analysis of Youth in the Labour Market - Trinidad and Tobago

2.4.1 General Population Demographics and Labour Market Variables for Trinidad and Tobago

The population of Trinidad and Tobago is estimated at 1.23 million in 2012 with projections up to 1.31 million by 2015. The total labour force in Trinidad and Tobago has been relatively stable since 2004, leveling at almost half of the total population. However, since 2008, there has been a slight but steady decrease in the labour force. Labour force participation rates have also been decreasing since 2008. Accompanied by declining unemployment rates, the number of persons employed had continued to grow since 2000, and peaked in 2008, at which time the unemployment rate reached a record low at 4.6%. Thereafter, the unemployment rate rose slightly to 5.9 percent by 2010. In 2011, there has been some improvement with unemployment rates recorded at 4.9%. Table 1 presents some key labour market statistics for Trinidad and Tobago for the period 2000-2011.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Labour Force</th>
<th>Number Employed</th>
<th>Number Unemployed</th>
<th>Labour Force Participation Rate (%)</th>
<th>Unemployment Rate (%)</th>
<th>Employment Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>572,900</td>
<td>503,400</td>
<td>69,600</td>
<td>61.2</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>87.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>576,500</td>
<td>514,100</td>
<td>62,400</td>
<td>60.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>89.2</td>
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<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>586,200</td>
<td>525,100</td>
<td>61,100</td>
<td>60.9</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>89.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>596,500</td>
<td>534,100</td>
<td>62,400</td>
<td>61.6</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>89.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>613,400</td>
<td>562,300</td>
<td>51,100</td>
<td>63.0</td>
<td>8.3</td>
<td>91.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>623,700</td>
<td>574,000</td>
<td>49,700</td>
<td>63.7</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>92.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>625,300</td>
<td>586,300</td>
<td>39,000</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>93.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>622,300</td>
<td>587,800</td>
<td>34,500</td>
<td>63.4</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>94.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>626,600</td>
<td>597,600</td>
<td>29,000</td>
<td>63.5</td>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>95.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>620,900</td>
<td>588,400</td>
<td>32,600</td>
<td>62.6</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>94.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>618,800</td>
<td>582,100</td>
<td>36,700</td>
<td>62.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>94.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>611,600</td>
<td>581,900</td>
<td>29,700</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>95.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago
Compiled by: Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Trinidad and Tobago
2.4.2  Youth in the Labour Market 2000-2011

Overall, the non-institutional youth population has been fluctuating around 200,000 over the period 2000-2010 with a decreasing trend. In the year 2011, the non-institutional youth population stood at 186,800, the lowest ever for the period 2000-2011. Overall, there was a decrease by 26.1% in the youth population from 2000 to 2011. Males and females account for almost the same percentage in the youth non-institutional population with slightly higher figures for males.

The youth labour force in Trinidad and Tobago (representing persons who are willing and able to work aged 15-24 and comprising the employed and unemployed) comprised approximately one-fifth of the total labour force in 2000. In 2011, the youth labour force, which represented almost 14% of the total labour force declined by 33.6% from the year 2000 (Table 2 refers).

Table 2

Key Youth Labour Market Statistics 2000-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Labour Force</th>
<th>Number Employed</th>
<th>Number Unemployed</th>
<th>Labour Force Participation Rate (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Both Sexes</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Both Sexes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>130,700</td>
<td>79,700</td>
<td>51,000</td>
<td>100,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>122,800</td>
<td>75,300</td>
<td>47,500</td>
<td>95,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>120,800</td>
<td>71,100</td>
<td>49,700</td>
<td>95,200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>127,200</td>
<td>73,900</td>
<td>53,300</td>
<td>101,100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>128,500</td>
<td>75,700</td>
<td>52,800</td>
<td>105,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>131,700</td>
<td>77,500</td>
<td>54,200</td>
<td>110,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>129,400</td>
<td>74,700</td>
<td>54,700</td>
<td>112,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>123,700</td>
<td>73,800</td>
<td>49,900</td>
<td>109,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>116,500</td>
<td>68,300</td>
<td>48,200</td>
<td>104,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>107,300</td>
<td>64,200</td>
<td>43,100</td>
<td>94,700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>107,800</td>
<td>57,900</td>
<td>39,900</td>
<td>84,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>86,800</td>
<td>52,700</td>
<td>34,100</td>
<td>76,300</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago
Compiled by: Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Trinidad and Tobago

60% of youth in the labour force in 2011 were males as can be seen in Figure 1. Labour force participation rates for youth hovered around 50% over the period, peaking at about 54% in 2006 and steadily declining to 46.5% in 2011. Participation rates among male youth remained higher than that for females.
With respect to unemployment levels, Trinidad and Tobago has been experiencing declining youth unemployment rates over the past decade, reaching its lowest rate of 10.5% in 2008, a reflection of trends in the national unemployment levels. As at 2011, almost 35% of the total unemployed were young persons with the youth unemployment rate recorded at 12.1%, with that for females standing at 16.4% and males at 9.3%. This stands in contrast to the adult unemployment rate for 2011 which was 3.7% (Table 3 refers). The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognized the need to accelerate its efforts at generating decent jobs for young people and to address the issue of the significant declines in the youth labour force and youth labour force participation rates. It has also been recognized that the situation may have been worse without initiatives which started prior to the onset of the crisis and have been strengthened, which have cushioned some of its devastating labour market effects on an already vulnerable group. Some of these measures are highlighted in the following Section.

**Figure 1**

**Youth Labour Force by Sex**

2000-2011

Source: Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago

Compiled by: Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Trinidad and Tobago
Table 3
Youth Employment and Unemployment Rates 2000-2011

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>National</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Adult Unemployment Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>76.7</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>72.2</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>27.6</td>
<td>8.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>77.4</td>
<td>80.9</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>89.2</td>
<td>22.6</td>
<td>19.1</td>
<td>28.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>78.8</td>
<td>82.6</td>
<td>73.4</td>
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<td>21.1</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>26.4</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>81.9</td>
<td>76.2</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>24.0</td>
<td>7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>81.7</td>
<td>84.9</td>
<td>77.1</td>
<td>91.7</td>
<td>18.3</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>83.5</td>
<td>87.2</td>
<td>78.2</td>
<td>92.0</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>87.0</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>83.0</td>
<td>93.8</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>11.8</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>4.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>88.7</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>85.8</td>
<td>94.5</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>14.2</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>89.5</td>
<td>91.2</td>
<td>87.1</td>
<td>95.4</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>8.8</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>88.3</td>
<td>90.0</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>94.7</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>14.4</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>86.0</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>83.2</td>
<td>94.1</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>16.8</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>87.9</td>
<td>90.7</td>
<td>83.6</td>
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<td>12.1</td>
<td>9.3</td>
<td>16.4</td>
<td>3.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Central Statistical Office, Trinidad and Tobago
Compiled by: Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development, Trinidad and Tobago
There have been a number of initiatives at the global, hemispheric and international levels targeted at addressing the youth unemployment situation over the past decade. In the wake of the recent global economic and financial crisis, these efforts have been strengthened and accelerated. This Section seeks to highlight some of these measures.

3.1 Actions to Address Youth Unemployment at the International Level

Youth unemployment has been the main focus of many conferences and discussions, including at the level of the Commonwealth Heads of Government, the United Nations and the ILO and the Summit of the Americas, in which various recommendations to combat this problem have been brought to the forefront. Some of general considerations raised at these meetings include:

- Recognizing the importance of promoting pro-employment macroeconomic policies and fiscal incentives that support stronger aggregate demand and increase productive investment, which will improve the capacity for job creation and access to finance that would improve the overall employment situation, and by extension, employment for young people;

- Creation of a development agenda which places jobs and decent work at the centre. This will facilitate structural transformation, contribute to an environmentally sustainable economy and generate public and private investment in sectors that create decent jobs for young people;

- Focusing attention on education and training for young people and lifelong learning which foster a virtuous circle of improved individual employability, higher productivity, and better quality of employment, income growth and development. At the United Nations e-discussion on youth employment in 2012, the participants reiterated the point that there is a great need to improve the quality of education and training programmes, making it accessible to all young people. This would equip young people with a broad range of skills which are closely aligned with the needs of the local labour market. This would require tailoring the curricula more effectively to the labour market and including the development of practical skills. There should also be second chance opportunities or alternative training modalities targeted at disadvantaged youth and continuous learning services to ensure that young people remain marketable and maintain relevant skills;

- Importance of relevant and timely labour market information to support evidence-based policy making and tailoring of the education and training systems to the needs of the labour market;
importance of active labour market policies such as development of public employment services, wage and training subsidies or tax cuts to motivate employers to hire young people as well as to counteract the excess supply of young workers in times of crisis. In OECD countries, expenditures on Active Labour Market Policies (ALMPs) amount on average to 1 per cent of GDP, although this figure can rise to 2 per cent of GDP in some cases. Expenditures on ALMPs are the principal channel for tackling the employment crisis. These are some benchmarks that can be used by emerging and developing economies in designing the allocation of resources to ALMPs. Policy-makers in both developed and developing countries can also be encouraged by the fact that simulation models show that well-designed and well-funded ALMPs can have a positive impact on youth employment. Active labour market policies and programmes can significantly facilitate young peoples’ entry and re-entry into the labour market. Equally important are programmes that aim to offset the mismatch of technical skills among youth, such as vocational training programmes, re-training of unemployed or discouraged youth, workplace training schemes, the creation or improvement of apprenticeship systems, entrepreneurship training programmes and soft and life skills training programmes for disadvantaged youth;

need for a greater number of internships and apprenticeship systems in a broad range of disciplines and available to all segments of the youth population, particularly those who experience the most difficulties in accessing and completing education, such as young people living in extreme poverty and in rural areas, young women and youth with disabilities;

importance of strategies to improve social protection for young people and to tailor labour market reforms to their specific needs. Decent employment is not only about generating more jobs but also about improving the quality of jobs;

critical role of youth entrepreneurship in addressing youth unemployment and promoting their empowerment. An analysis based on an evaluation of entrepreneurship programmes from the World Bank’s Youth Employment Inventory of 2007 revealed that entrepreneurship promotion measures had the highest positive impact rating on employment creation among all programmes reviewed. There is also some limited evidence that entrepreneurship education embedded in secondary school curricula can change attitudes and promote entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to wage employment. Several participants of the United Nations e-discussion strongly felt that youth entrepreneurship is a promising solution to rising unemployment; and

need for broad-based partnerships to turn commitment to youth employment into a reality. Partnerships among governments, employers’ organizations, trade unions and other organizations can be instrumental in determining the most appropriate

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5 Report on Youth Employment adopted at 101st Session of ILC – The Youth Employment Crisis: Time for action
action to be taken at national and local levels for the promotion of decent work for young people. Social partners should also be involved in policy decision making, for example employment and economic policies, through social dialogue.

One commendable approach which has proven to be critical to the success of discussions on youth employment and development has been the involvement of young people in the decision-making process. For example, at the 7th Commonwealth Youth Forum held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago, in 2009 within the framework of the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, it was concluded that “there are over a billion young people in the Commonwealth today. As consumers, entrepreneurs and taxpayers, we as young people are catalysts for economic growth.” At this Forum, a call was made for the establishment of a Commonwealth Youth Economic Society (CYES) to encourage youth to engage in discussion about economic issues and policies, including the development of alternative methodologies for economic analysis. Subsequently, at the Regional Forum on Investing in Youth Employment, held in Port of Spain, Trinidad and Tobago by the Commonwealth Secretariat in May 2011, young people recommended creation of “the enabling environment to foster greater youth entry into the job market and for the inclusion of youth concerns and right-based solutions in employment policies and Youth Employment Action Plans.”

Additionally, in May 2012, the ILO convened its first Global Youth Employment Forum which brought together approximately 100 young leaders from all regions of the world to share experiences and views on the current employment situation, youth transition to decent work, and partnerships for more and better jobs for young people. This Forum preceded the discussions at the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference in Geneva in June 2012 which brought together the tripartite partners to discuss the youth employment crisis, seven years after the adoption of a Resolution concerning pathways to decent work for youth. The outcome of this discussion was a comprehensive framework for action, which outlines broad priorities to be addressed by Governments, the social partners and the ILO under the following areas to urgently address the youth employment crisis:

- Employment and economic policies for youth employment;
- Employability – Education, Training and Skills and School-to-Work Transition;
- Labour market policies;
- Youth entrepreneurship and self-employment; and
- Rights for young people.

3.2 Actions to Address Youth Unemployment at the Regional Level

In the Caribbean region, youth employment has featured prominently in discussion at the level of the CARICOM Heads of Government Meetings and the Council for Human and Social Development (COHSOD). At the Twenty-Seventh Meeting of CARICOM Heads of Government in July 2006, the establishment of a Commission on Youth Development was mandated with the task of undertaking “a full scale analysis of the challenges and
opportunities for youth in the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME); and making recommendations to improve their well-being and empowerment”.

The Report of the CARICOM Commission on Youth Development called for a number of actions, including:

- changing mindsets – recognizing youth as assets and not problems and working together with them to create the opportunities to develop their innovative and productive capacities;
- understanding adolescence and youth and the transitional nature of that particular period of life;
- recognizing the contribution of young people;
- increasing strategic investment in youth - The Report showed how reducing youth unemployment to the level of adult unemployment would significantly increase GDP for CARICOM Member States. For example, a reduction in youth unemployment to the adult levels would contribute a growth in the Saint Lucian economy of 2.46% of GDP. For St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the growth would be about 2.3% and almost 1% for Trinidad and Tobago; and
- recognizing youth as partners in development and not only as beneficiaries.

In March 2012, the Commonwealth Youth Programme Caribbean Centre, in collaboration with the ILO, hosted a Regional Seminar in St. Lucia based on the theme “Addressing youth employment challenges in times of crises.” The Seminar provided participating Governments, youth networks, Trade Unions, Employers’ Organizations and other relevant stakeholders with an opportunity to reflect on pertinent issues related to the global, regional and national youth employment landscape with particular focus on the formulation of viable youth employment policies in the Caribbean region.

3.3 Actions to Address Youth Unemployment in Trinidad and Tobago

Although unemployment levels in general, and youth unemployment rates in particular, in Trinidad and Tobago have been declining and may be among the lowest in the Caribbean region, the Government has placed job creation and decent work for all as one of its major priorities. With regard to youth unemployment, some of the issues of concern for Trinidad and Tobago include:

- high youth unemployment rates compared to the national unemployment rate and adult unemployment rate;
- declining youth labour force;
- higher female youth unemployment rate;
- youth underemployment;
- relatively low youth labour force participation rates; and
- youth who neither study nor work.
As noted earlier, the negative impact of the crisis on youth employment may have been worse in Trinidad and Tobago had it not been for a number of measures which were in place before the crisis and have been strengthened. New initiatives have also emerged in the post-crisis period to accelerate recovery, especially in the labour market.

In this Section, some of major initiatives pertaining to youth employment which have been implemented by Trinidad and Tobago are presented which are categorized under the areas of promoting employment, employability, entrepreneurship and equal opportunities for youth. Prior to this, elements of the Policy framework to support youth employment are discussed.

### 3.3.1 Policy Framework

#### Government’s Policy Framework for Sustainable Development

*Government’s Policy Framework for Sustainable Development* provides the national framework in which actions aimed at achieving ‘Prosperity for All’ in Trinidad and Tobago are pursued. The Framework is built on seven (7) development pillars, which are interconnected and which constitute the cornerstones of Government’s strategy for sustainable development in Trinidad and Tobago. With respect to youth, the Policy Framework seeks to strengthen the secondary school system to ensure that students move on to further education or to productive roles in the economy and to ensure that young people are literate, numerate, and possess critical thinking skills. In addition, the framework also seeks to strategically address the issue of school dropouts at the secondary school level and the need for improved performance at the Ordinary level on a school by school basis in order to meet the tertiary education target of 60% participation. A system of entrepreneurship and apprenticeship is also encouraged, whereby all major industrial firms will operate apprenticeship programmes for youth and engage interns from the educational system. The Policy Framework for Sustainable Development also focuses on involving the youth of Trinidad and Tobago “in an effort to harness the energy, imagination, intelligence and initiative of the youth, in overcoming the challenges facing them”.

#### Medium Term Policy Framework (MTPF) 2011-2014

The *Medium Term Policy Framework (MTPF) 2011-2014* is a development framework for Trinidad and Tobago which highlights the actions to be taken within the context of the National Vision, the Mission and the seven interconnected Pillars for Sustainable Development by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago over the period 2011-2014. In terms of employability for youth, the MTPF focuses on improving the success rate at secondary schools and diversifying the curriculum by incorporating new ways of learning and promoting technology adoption among youth. The MTPF also emphasizes the implementation of social support measures which involves basic education for out-of-school

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6 The seven development pillars are as follows: People-Centred Development; Poverty Eradication and Social Justice; National and Personal Security; Information and Communication Technologies; A More Diversified, Knowledge-Intensive Economy; Good Governance; and Foreign Policy
youth, workforce development for youth and programmes to support juvenile justice. With regards to entrepreneurship, the MTPF encourages youth participation in the agriculture sector with the continuation of the Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA). In addition to this, a Youth Internship Programme with 50 agricultural graduates on an annual basis to be trained and mentored by experienced agriculturalists in agribusiness entrepreneurship is to be implemented.

National Youth Policy

The National Youth Policy\(^7\) (NYP) is a broad framework that identifies the key issues affecting young people and creates specific courses of action to address these issues. In the case of employment, the NYP focuses on the development of a Youth Employment and Employability Policy. The Youth Employment and Employability Policy will facilitate actions including fiscal and other incentives that would encourage private sector organizations to increase their level of youth employment and create opportunities for youth in micro enterprises. The NYP also focuses on the expansion of employment agencies to facilitate the registration and placement of youth employees and the re-engineering and expansion of the national apprenticeship and service programmes to provide for greater focus on youth employability and to ensure co-ordination of efforts in the training of youth for employment. A Review Committee has been established under the Ministry of Gender, Youth and Child Development to review and amend the NYP for Trinidad and Tobago. The revision of the National Youth Policy has recently been completed.

National Business Incubation Policy

The National Business Incubation Policy harnesses domestic talent and promotes the training of individuals in entrepreneurial skills in a structured fashion. The policy aims to increase employment or self employment, including among youth, through the National Integrated Business Incubator System (IBIS).

National Policy on Tertiary Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Lifelong Learning

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has recognized that tertiary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) and lifelong learning play a pivotal role in the social, economic and cultural development of the country. The aim of the National Policy on Tertiary Education, Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Lifelong Learning is to expand and develop tertiary education to a 60% participation rate by 2015 and to strengthen technical and vocational education and training as part of a seamless system to allow for alternative pathways to further and higher education. This Policy also promotes learning and skills transfer, strengthens workforce competence, supports industrial development and promotes workplace readiness through the award of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ). It emphasizes the use of science and technology to

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\(^7\) Revision of the National Youth Policy has recently been completed and will be forwarded to Cabinet for approval.
provide education and training that are relevant, without barriers posed by location and other circumstances and equitable.

### 3.3.2 Major Initiatives

**Youth Employment**

- **Operation of the National Employment Service (NES)** - The NES is Government’s free public employment service which assists in matching job-seekers with employers in public and private sector organizations. The NES provides job counselling, placement and career planning. Citizens 17 years and over can apply for employment and employers can register and post vacancies.

- **Strengthening of the On-the-Job-Training (OJT) Programme** - The OJT programme is designed to provide young persons who are graduates of secondary, technical/vocational and tertiary institutions with work-based experience to develop the necessary skills and attitudes for their entry or re-entry into the world of work. The programme facilitates structured work-based training by engaging employers in providing the nation’s youth with jobs to develop relevant skills over a period of two (2) years.

- **Hosting of First National Youth Employment Forum** - March 27, 2012 marked a momentous day in Trinidad and Tobago as the first National Youth Employment Forum was convened under the theme “My work…My future…My Life.” The Forum targeted youth between the ages 15-25 and attracted approximately two hundred and sixty (260) young persons from across the country. The objectives of the Forum were to: create a space for dialogue among youth on issues, challenges and solutions impacting on their access to and creation of decent work; obtain the views of youth that will inform policies, programmes and projects focused on improving their well-being; identify and share good practices on youth employment policies, programmes and projects which may have been implemented and obtain suggestions on proposed actions; and strengthen partnerships among agencies/groups involved in promoting youth development. The Forum also provided the youth in attendance with information on employment, education, training and entrepreneurship opportunities in Trinidad and Tobago.

**Youth Employability**

According to the ILO “A solid formal education, as well as effective and relevant vocational training, labour market information and services and work experience are recognized as key factors in raising employability for successful insertion in the labour market”8. The

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8 ILO: Youth: Pathways to decent work; Promoting youth employment, Report VI, International Labour Conference, 93rd Session, Geneva, 2005
programmes and services offered in Trinidad and Tobago to enhance youth employability are highlighted below. It is important to note that these programmes adopt the criteria for raising employability of youth by providing education (basic, TVET and tertiary) and training, apprenticeships, on-the-job training and job placement after completion of the programme.

 cô Edûcation

 cô Reform of educational curricula from early childhood care and education to secondary school in keeping with the promotion of a ‘seamless’ system. The seamless system is being designed to eliminate all barriers to access to educational opportunities for all persons with a desire and capacity to learn.

 cô Free tertiary education – through the Government Assistance for Tuition Expenses (GATE) Programme, students are able to access tertiary education at the undergraduate level, free of charge, at both private and public tertiary level institutions (TLIs). Students pursuing post-graduate studies at public institutions are eligible for 50% of tuition costs per academic year, while those at private TLIs receive 50% of tuition up to a maximum of TT$20,000 and TT$30,000 per academic year for master’s and doctoral level degree programmes respectively. The GATE Programme has been extended to TVET education. Additionally, the Higher Education Loan Programme (HELP) provides a soft loan facility to students pursuing studies locally and abroad.

 cô Introduction of Workforce Assessment Centres – In May 2011, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago launched the establishment of Workforce Assessment Centres. These Centres serve as skills assessment and recognition facilities designed to increase access to and participation in post secondary education and training, using a system of Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR) to assess and certify competencies gained through non-formal means. A PLAR graduate receives a Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ) certificate. However where an individual’s skills level does not meet all the requirements of the occupational standard, the individual is issued unit awards in the respective skill area. The Centres provide assessment and certification in a range of occupational areas including cosmetology, data operations, welding, plumbing, masonry and carpentry.

 cô Wide array of Skills Development Programmes – Trinidad and Tobago is noted for a broad range of skills development programmes, many of which are specifically targeted at youth. These include programmes to ease school-to-work transition and to equip young persons with skills in areas required by the labour market. Many of these programmes include life skills components. Some of these programmes are: the Geriatric Adolescent Partnership Programme (GAPP), Military-Led Youth Programme of Apprenticeship & Reorientation Training (MYPART) and Military Led Academic Training
Programme (MILAT), Helping Youth Prepare for Employment (HYPE), Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA), the Youth Training and Employment Partnership (YTEPP) Programme and the Multi-Sector Skills Training Programme (MUST). Some insights into a few of these Programmes are provided in Box 2.

**Box 2**

**Examples of Skills Development Programmes for Youth in Trinidad and Tobago**

**Youth Training and Employment Partnership (YTEPP) Programme** – This Programme provides training in career enhancement services, inclusive of numeracy and literacy skills, vocational skills training and entrepreneurial and attitudinal training. The programme offers training to persons 15 years and over who are out of school and unemployed. The objectives of the Programme are: to provide training for 7,000 young persons annually, job placement for graduates, Micro Entrepreneurship Training, training for “at risk” socially displaced youth and to implement the Workforce Assessment Centres. For the period October 2010 to June 2011, a total of **7,267 persons** benefited from the Programme.

**Multi-Sector Skills Training (MUST) Programme** – The MUST Programme provides training in construction, hospitality and tourism for eligible citizens of Trinidad and Tobago. Construction sector trainees receive training at construction sites and on other construction-related projects. All trainees are certified to National Occupational Standards through the Trinidad and Tobago National Vocational Qualification (TTNVQ) Framework, the new national accreditation system for vocational education, which enables them to pursue further education and training. The MUST Programme targets nationals between the ages of 18 to 50 years of age who are either unemployed, motivated to achieve, displaced workers, differently-abled or are re-entrants into productive society. For the period October 2010 to June 2011, 720 nationals have been trained under the programme.

**Youth Apprenticeship Programme in Agriculture (YAPA)** - This Programme places young people as interns in a range of successful private and public sector agricultural enterprises to develop skills in farm management, production of crops and livestock, ornamental horticulture as well as gaining an appreciation of processes. During the period, participants cultivate and harvest short-term crops and also realize profits from the sale of their produce. YAPA targets young people between the ages 17-25 and consists of two phases. For the period October 2010 to March 2011, 303 youths were trained in Phase I and 38 youths in Phase II.

**Youth Entrepreneurship**

The Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been placing significant focus on the promotion of entrepreneurship as a means of employment creation, wealth generation and poverty alleviation. The critical role of micro and small enterprises and co-operatives in this regard has been recognized and over the past decade there has been more intense action at
encouraging the formation and growth of these enterprises. Small businesses account for more that 85% of all businesses in Trinidad and Tobago.

There currently exists a rich mix of policies and programmes, involving both private and public sector contribution, which has been propelling entrepreneurship in Trinidad and Tobago, with particular focus on youth in micro and small enterprises and co-operatives. These include:

(1) The establishment of the National Entrepreneurship Development Company Limited in 2002 to promote and facilitate the formation, growth and development of micro and small businesses. NEDCO currently provides financing to start-ups at a lower interest rate and more favourable conditions in terms of collateral requirements than the traditional banking sector. Through one of NEDCO’s programme, known as the Youth Entrepreneurship Success Programme or YES, persons 18-30 years can benefit from training which combines business and lifestyle development components to encourage youths to start their own successful businesses.

(2) The introduction of a National Integrated Business Incubator System (IBIS) which is a programme developed by the Ministry of Labour and Small and Micro Enterprise Development at the end of 2011 that aims to provide a unique mix of business development support, infrastructure and operational and financial support to assist the growth and success of new and existing micro and small enterprises (MSEs). IBIS assists MSEs specifically, by providing assistance in the areas of mentoring, infrastructural support, information technology, operational support, financing, and networking opportunities for access to local and foreign markets. It is targeted at start-up MSEs, existing MSEs and communities. Participants are selected using criteria which accords higher points to females, persons under 30 years and disabled persons. We have been able to implement the IBIS with the technical expertise provided by the Government of India.

(3) The Youth Business Trust of Trinidad and Tobago (YBTT) which is an accredited programme of Youth Business International which promotes entrepreneurship among young people between the ages of eighteen and thirty (18-30). YBTT provides loan financing as well as a mentorship programmes for young entrepreneurs.

In addition to the above, there are provisions for loan financing and technical assistance to entrepreneurs within the agricultural sector, loan guarantee mechanisms and financing for capital investment for medium enterprises and venture capital and equity financing. Efforts at promoting Co-operative development, especially targeted at non-financial Co-operatives, such as the establishment of Junior Co-operatives in schools have also been intensified, especially in the context of activities to commemorate the International Year of Co-operatives 2012.
Equal Opportunities for Youth

As part of its effort of promoting decent work for all, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago has been intensifying its outreach programmes aimed at educating persons on rights and responsibilities in the workplace. This is being complimented by actions aimed at strengthening the labour inspection functions to effectively enforce labour laws to protect all workers, including young persons from exploitation.

Additionally, an attempt is made to encourage both male and female participation in the range of skills development programmes, recognizing the higher levels of youth unemployment among females. The introduction of programmes such as the National Mentorship Programme and the National Youth Volunteerism Programme are aimed at enhancing the participation of young persons in national development while at the same time providing practical experience and inculcating values of selflessness and patriotism. Further, young persons are provided with opportunities to contribute to the decision-making process through their involvement in the social dialogue process, inclusion on a number of Boards and Committees under various Government Ministries and inclusion in training programmes on specialized topics such as green jobs and green enterprises organized by Ministries.
4.0 Call for Action

In moving forward to urgently address the youth employment crisis, countries are able to benefit from a body of knowledge and experiences which have been shared at a number of international, regional and national meetings on the subject. The challenge rests in the implementation of effective measures and the assessment of their impact on the youth employment situation.

Some possible areas for action which the Commonwealth should seek to promote in addressing the youth employment crisis include:

✓ Implementation of the Global Jobs Pact

The Global Jobs Pact was adopted at the 99th Session of the International Labour Conference of the ILO (June 2009) and provides an internationally agreed basis for policy-making designed to reduce the time lag between economic recovery and a recovery with decent work opportunities. It provides an avenue for realization of a shared vision of productive and balanced recovery that protects social justice, and enhances an equitable and sustainable world economy and globalization. It calls for coordinated global policy action to maximize the positive impact on jobs and sustainable enterprises worldwide. In light of high and sticky global unemployment rates and a lack of decent work opportunities, it becomes necessary for countries to collaborate to ensure speedy and widespread recovery.

To this end, the Global Jobs Pact should be implemented on a global scale. This would require commitment to implementing the Decent Work Agenda which is based on the following four strategic objectives:

- promotion of Standards and Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work;
- creation of employment;
- enhancement of social protection; and
- strengthening of social dialogue.

Where necessary, policy measures can be adapted to local and national situations. The Global Jobs Pact would allow countries to strengthen their response to the global employment crisis while pursuing economic, social and environmental sustainability, as it places employment and social protection at its core. Its policy measures are already tested and proven, thereby quickening the rate of recovery as time spent on policy design, development and testing is greatly reduced. Instead, efforts can be focused on tailoring policy measures to national and local situations.
**Implementation of Call for Action by the ILO**

The most recent comprehensive framework for action deliberated at the international level is an outcome of discussions at the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference of the ILO entitled “The youth employment crisis: A call for action.” Making reference to the 2009 Global Jobs Pact, the Call for Action provides guidance on the way forward to countries committed to improving the youth employment situation.

Some of the actions outlined in the ILO’s Call for Action include:

- implementing policies that promote full, productive and freely chosen employment;
- promoting pro-employment macroeconomic policies and fiscal incentives that support stronger aggregate demand;
- assigning the highest possible priority to youth employment in national and international development frameworks; developing, with the involvement of the social partners, integrated and time-bound national action plans for decent employment with measurable outcomes;
- prioritizing job-generating growth policies which respond to the current economic context and promote long-term financial sustainability, while recognizing that policy responses to support growth should take into account the diverse realities of countries;
- anchoring a job-friendly development agenda in industrial and sectoral policies that can facilitate structural transformation, contribute to an environmentally-sustainable economy, and greater public and private investment in sectors that create decent jobs for young people;
- ensuring that quality basic education is freely available;
- improving the links between education, training and the world of work through social dialogue on skills mismatch and standardization of qualifications in response to labour market needs, enhanced technical vocational education and training (TVET), including apprenticeships, other work-experience schemes and work-based learning;
- reviewing labour market policies and programmes to ensure they contribute as effectively as possible to job creation for young people;
- providing social protection to first-time jobseekers;
- ensuring that there is an enabling environment, including for small and micro-enterprises, cooperatives and the social economy, that supports youth entrepreneurship, taking care that there is no disguised employment;
- adopting a rights-based approach to youth employment; and
- developing and implementing mechanisms that apply adequate protection, including social protection, for all young workers to facilitate transitions into stable employment and decent work.
✓ **Building Policy Coherence**

Policy coherence requires that decent work, especially for young people, are placed at the centre of national development plans and that policy frameworks pertinent to the economic, social, financial, environmental and other spheres converge around this central goal.

✓ **Youth Mainstreaming**

In light of the relatively greater effect of recent economic shocks on youth unemployment, youth mainstreaming becomes mandatory to identify, measure and mitigate potential effects on youth. Youth mainstreaming is also necessary to identify the potential positive effects of policies and, by extension, their effectiveness in improving the youth employment situation. Youth mainstreaming is also important to identify the differing effects on males in relation to females given the gender gap that tends to exist in many countries.

✓ **Monitoring and Evaluation of Policies, Programmes and Projects**

Monitoring and evaluation is also important to achieve maximum impact, as it provides feedback on the performance of policies, programmes and projects, which can be used to make future improvements, maintain performance or shift focus. It becomes important to monitor and evaluate the effects of past policies and programmes used to reduce youth unemployment. This can help in the development of new policies and programmes built on the principles and design of past ones where it had proven to be effective, re-design of old projects to take into consideration new and emerging issues, or identification of past limitations and need for resources.

✓ **Strengthening Global, Regional and National Partnerships**

Global, regional and national partnerships are proving to be critical in placing youth employment at the centre of development. At the global level, the ILO has been playing a key role in international networks to build international consensus and influence the agenda of decent work for youth. The Commonwealth needs to continue to build strategic partnerships with other groups and strengthen existing alliances. At the national level, partnerships among Government, Employers, Trade Unions, Civil Society, Youth Networks and other groups involved in promoting decent work for young people should be fostered and nurtured.

✓ **Strengthening Social Dialogue on Decent Work Issues**

Social dialogue remains the cornerstone of good governance and democratic involvement. There needs to be the continuous engagement of the social partners (Government, Employers and Trade Unions) on decent work issues. In many countries, social partnerships have emerged over time and research has shown that in such countries (for example, Barbados and Mauritius) there were better responses to the global economic and financial crisis. In Trinidad and Tobago, steps are currently being taken to establish a social dialogue process with an appropriate institutional structure.
5.0 Conclusion

There is no contention that investment in our youth is investment in our future. In keeping with the overarching concept of sustainable development, it is mandatory that youth employment be accorded the highest priority on the agenda of the Commonwealth. Parliamentarians and those in public life play a critical role in keeping youth issues central to discussions on development and moreso sustainable development.

Additionally, it is important that the youth become actively involved in the discussions and the development, implementation and monitoring and evaluation of policies, programmes and projects. It should also be recognized that ‘youth’ is not a homogenous group and as such, consideration should be given to adapting initiatives to meet the needs of the young people. Special attention is required for those youth who may be considered ‘at-risk’ or ‘disadvantaged’ based on their geographical location, socio-economic status and environmental conditions. This also applies to young persons living in some of the world’s poorest countries.

Further, there is a need to utilize the technologies available via the range of social media, which attract many young persons, to keep them engaged and involved in decision-making at the highest political levels and at the regional and national levels.

The 58th Commonwealth Parliamentary Conference is called upon to commit to taking urgent action to address the youth employment crisis in order to protect a generation of young people who are willing, capable and interested in contributing to national and international development.