

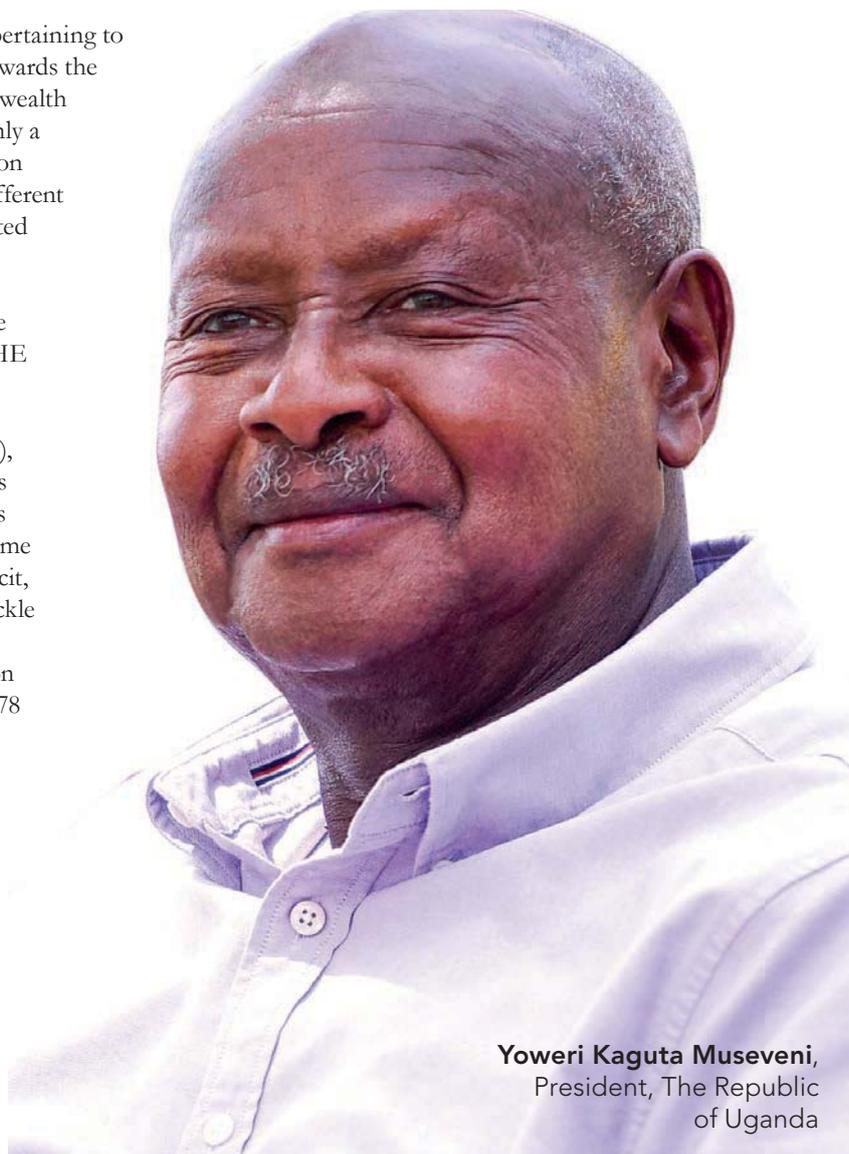
THE CRITICAL CONTRIBUTION OF YOUNG PEOPLE

Yoweri Museveni, President of The Republic of Uganda, describes how engaging and investing in the Commonwealth's considerable youth population is vitally important to member countries' development.

It is a pleasure for me to discuss issues pertaining to young people and their contribution towards the development of nations. The Commonwealth brings together countries that share not only a common history and language, but common values and aspirations. While we live in different countries and regions of the world, separated by thousands of miles or sharing common borders, we all share a common aspiration of turning our organisation into one where wealth is common and, therefore, truly THE COMMONWEALTH.

As we assemble for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM), we are reminded that improving conditions for the majority of Commonwealth citizens is still a major unfinished agenda. In the same way we have addressed the democracy deficit, together as the Commonwealth, we can tackle this development deficit.

Uganda has the highest rate of population growth in the entire Commonwealth, and 78 per cent of Ugandans are below 30 years of age. Uganda also has some of the most enabling youth programming frameworks and initiatives in the Commonwealth fraternity and this is based on my historical attachment to young people, right from my student days. I became convinced that well nurtured, well tutored and well guided young people are not only an asset to their society, community progress and transformation, but also an



Yoweri Kaguta Museveni,
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important link between the past and present – an important umbilical cord.

We need a critical mass of youth who are creators of wealth and not simply the guzzlers of what others produce. The youth must be at the centre of the production conveyor belt and not bystanders. We need a cadre of young people with progressive and analytical mindsets – a youth population with developmental and transformational revolutionary ideas, not simply spectators. Inclusive development is emphasised under the 17 Sustainable Development Goals.

We must all be cognisant of the fact that development does not come by accident, but that it is a result of a scientific and progressive well intentioned calculations and strategies. This notion must be inculcated into young people to enable them be thinkers, planners and agents of progressive change.

We must raise a generation that values integrity and hard work. This is because of our cherished belief that while we, the adults, are leaders of today, the youth are leaders of today and tomorrow. This thinking and practice contrasts the belief of many politicians who look at the youth as the leaders of tomorrow only.

It is important for all of us to learn from each other. What are the best practices? What is working elsewhere and how? Who is doing what and where? Whose philosophy is working and not working? We must have evidence-based programmes and interventions that ensure youth development, empowerment and progress. We must have the capacity to measure progress and ensure that at all times we are on course and impacting our society.

In Uganda, we have put in place a number of development interventions, for example; the Youth Livelihood Programme, under which young people have so far accessed over 85 billion Uganda Shillings; and the Green Jobs and Fair Labour Market Programme, which is designed to support youth in the informal sector to increase production and add value to their goods and services.

It is because of the above that our Government has continued

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to resource and finance the Youth Livelihood Programme, the Youth Venture Capital Fund, the Uganda Women Entrepreneurship Programme and Operation Wealth Creation. Since coming into power, the NRM (National Resistance Movement) Government has put in place structures that ensure meaningful engagement of young people right from the grassroot through Local Government Youth Council structures to the National Level in Parliament.



Private sector engagement in youth development initiatives is crucial. The private sector is critical in resourcing youth development and at the same time, the private sector is a beneficiary of a strong and consuming youth force.

Investment in Human Resource Development is crucial. Countries all over the world are developed by their own indigenous capital. The foundation for good human capital must start from pre-pregnancy, or when the baby is still in the womb, tracing the entire lifecycle. Immunisation, proper nutrition, hygiene, behaviour change, safe water and good lifestyle are vital. My Government has invested

in Universal Primary Education, Universal Secondary Education and now the Skilling Uganda Programme. Once the youth are empowered with education, training and working capital, they will undergo a dimensional metamorphosis. We, therefore, need to build a youth populous that is patriotic and resilient. It will help them to produce and market together, hence improving their skills and productivity and access to market. There is a need to nurture our youth so that they have families for procreation. This will encourage them to contribute to their country's development.

The health of our young people is a very important factor. A productive mind dwells in a healthy body. It is, therefore, imperative that we resource programmes that will enable our young people to be healthy and productive.

Infrastructural development must be at the top of our development agenda in the Commonwealth, to facilitate the production of goods and services. We need first class infrastructural assets to facilitate the creation of wealth.

Commonwealth societies must metamorphose and make the transition from peasantry to a middle propertied and skilled working class society. We no longer want a 'Commonwealth of beggars and peasants'; it must be a Commonwealth of equitable wealth and prosperity for all.

Finally, all these programmes and initiatives must be 'bedrocked' in an environment that enables free movement of goods, services and labour within the Commonwealth. We need to make the Commonwealth more open and borderless. We must always remember that the problems we face as the Commonwealth are not insurmountable. Like never before, our mission must be to ensure total metamorphosis and transformation of our economies. ●