

Priorities for Sustainable Youth Development in Small State Countries



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Greetings! My name is Mairette Newman. I work at the Commonwealth of Learning in Vancouver Canada and I am an educator.

Although I share other presenters' concerns about climate change, limited resources and a perceived decline in youth civic and political engagement, I will use my two minutes to highlight three issues that are often overlooked.

Firstly, the most vulnerable among our SIDS youth - those from poor families, youth with disabilities, those living in geographically remote areas, all of whom have been further marginalised by the pandemic – need access to education.

Prior to the pandemic, one in five young persons in 15-24 age group were not in education, employment or training (UNESCO-UNEVOC Report 2020). For young people with disabilities the statistics are even starker; they have always been underrepresented in the workplace and higher education and the pandemic has compounded their challenges. It has left them more disconnected, less able to access support and by extension more vulnerable to mental health issues.

The second issue that concerns me is the mismatch between the skills with which our young people enter the job market, those required by employers, and those that lead to sustainable employment.

How do we ensure that Youth have access to training that equips them with skills and competencies that align with the labour market needs of SIDS and a rapidly evolving global economy? The ILO's World Employment Social Outlook Report (2018) predicts that climate change mitigation measures will cause job losses in several sectors and these will be replaced by jobs in low carbon, less resource intensive industries. Are we preparing our youth for jobs of the future - green jobs blue careers and opportunities in technology and artificial intelligence?

Finally, if they are to flourish, young people need an enabling environment and that in turn requires professional Youth Workers; I worry that we are not working fast enough to professionalise the Youth Work sector

The Youth Work sector relies on volunteers, part-time workers, 'accidental' or self-made youth workers; not enough Youth Workers in SIDS have formal qualifications. The absence of robust policy and regulatory frameworks together with limited resources, exacerbates the situation. Every country needs a

cadre of trained youth work leaders and professionals who can respond to the needs of their youth citizens.

Thank you