
5. NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICES AND SIMILAR INSTITUTIONS

The UN defines National Youth Services as "...one of the means employed, in addition to the usual formal and informal education and training programmes, for the implementation of national youth and development policies. It is concerned with the all-round development of young people, male and female, according to their individual needs and capacities and the needs of the country, so as to enable them to participate more effectively in national socio-economic development." (1)

Common characteristics

National Youth Services vary from country to country, in emphasis, size, location, etc., but all share to a large extent this basic orientation towards instilling into the minds of young people commitment to the aims of national development and giving a sense of direct participation. They are mainly concentrated upon the rural areas and often have a semi-military form of hierarchical organisation. They are usually located in special camps and have a preponderance of young male, as opposed to young female, participants. As most of these participants will have only completed primary school, or not even that, they provide general and civic education, mixed with varying degrees of vocational training and community development work. Schemes range from the Kenya National Youth Service which is highly capitalised, spending at least half its time upon public works projects, dam or road construction, etc., which are included in the National Development Plan, and which would otherwise be carried out either by private contractors or other government departments, to the cost-minimising Young Pioneers of Malawi, who concentrate upon the establishment of small-scale agricultural settlements. There "...emphasis is placed firmly on the training of small-scale farmers using improved, low cost techniques, on motivating these trainees towards an improved form of farming or on organising facilities whereby the skills and attitudes communicated by the training programme can be

expressed." (2) In spite of these differences between organisations in different countries, however, it is still possible to point to features which merit closer scrutiny in all of them and which would have to be given very serious thought of any country considering setting up its own organisation.

Goals

The most basic question of all perhaps is whether National Youth Services represent the most effective way of fulfilling the goals set up for them. Obviously implicit in this question is the need for an evaluation of the costs and benefits of the present Services. What are the criteria for this evaluation? They will vary from country to country. In some the Services are seen as an alternative to formal schooling for the general education of young people. In others the prime motive is a means of giving the young people some vocational training and aiding their transition into productive employment. In still others Service graduates are seen as a 'vanguard' or a 'spearhead' of rural progress. Their task is to learn a more modern, effective method of farming and to instil this, and a positive attitude towards national development, through local rural communities. The implementation of the development plan, the avoidance of social unrest, are among other objectives.

Criteria for Evaluation

As the aims of the different services vary so will the criteria upon which to evaluate them and the other institutions with which their contributions to national development - whether conceived in terms of economics or more as a socio-political force - have to be compared. For example, if the service concentrates upon general education it should be compared to alternative sources of formal and non-formal education. If the accent is upon employment creation through vocational training, is Service training better or worse than other forms of vocational training, are graduates more or less likely to find employment than those trained in different ways - for example through a system of apprenticeships? The basic question though is always the same: is the amount of money, trained personnel and other resources which are devoted to the National Services being used in the

*Cost effective-
ness*

best way? The Services are usually highly capitalised and well endowed with other resources and yet only cater for a few thousand youths. Does the training which these few thousand in each country receive make a greater contribution towards national development in general, and the alleviation of the problems of young people in particular, than alternative actions involving a greater distribution of the same resources over a greater number of young people? This could be through either existing institutions or through new specially created ones, although that raises the question of what form they could and would take. Below, suggestions will be made as to the way in which existing or new National Services could be improved, but the foregoing points must always be borne in mind. It may well be that evaluation studies would reveal that a particular National Youth Service did not in fact represent the best and most effective way of achieving national aims for youth. In that case, of course, the following recommendations of ways in which National Youth Services may be improved would be irrelevant, except in so far as their implementation could so improve the Service or Services as to reverse the result of the comparative evaluation studies'.

Leadership and organisation

Because National Youth Services were often set up fairly rapidly, usually in the 1960s, there was no time for the initial specialised training of Service Leaders. In fact, there is still a shortage of trained Youth Leaders and those that do exist have often been 'converted' from related fields such as teaching within formal school education, military personnel, agricultural extension officers, etc.. While such persons will obviously have a background of contact with youth, it is suggested that they will be in need of a fairly radical reorientation of their outlook and methods to be effective as leaders within the youth services. These services emphasize the training of youth in social and civic awareness and responsibility, and as future leaders and agents of change in the traditional rural areas. Such attitudes will hardly follow from rigidly structured teacher/pupil, leader/led relationships

*Reorientation
of leadership*

within the youth services. The role of the leader within the service should be something similar to that of the service graduate within the community, i.e. leadership by example and from a base firmly rooted amongst those who are being taught and led, helping them to help themselves. Training of service leaders within one central or a few regional training centres will probably not produce leaders with these kinds of attitudes. Investigations should be carried out into the possibility of training leaders locally in the areas where they will be stationed with the youth service. Furthermore, because, as we have argued elsewhere in this report, on-the-job training is usually better than institutionalised pre-vocational or vocational training, this should take place amongst young people. (3) One of the consultants to one UN Report (4) even goes so far as to suggest: "As for the leaders and organisers they should be drawn from the mass of the young people themselves, who are better than adults at picking out their natural leaders and who accept them more readily since they have been chosen according to their own criteria and not those of adults." It is unlikely that governments will transfer such complete power of choice to the youth service participants but certainly some scheme whereby they at least have a say could be arrived at. Furthermore, schemes could be set up to choose future leaders from amongst present service participants. It will be suggested later that interchange between the different national services would be a good thing. This is especially true for these future service leaders, and the possibility of an exchange programme merits further scrutiny.

*Local
training*

*Peer group
leaders*

*Coordination
of national
youth pro-
grammes*

It is also suggested that there should be greater ministerial coordination in all aspects of a national youth programme. "That, to ensure the effective planning and implementation of a national youth policy and the appropriate functioning of a national youth service programme within it, suitable structures should be established for interministerial and intersectoral cooperation and coordination, and in particular, that there should be close cooperation between those responsible for national planning and those responsible for national youth service programmes." (5)

*Advantage
of small
units*

Obviously a movement towards new roles for service leaders and service participants would weaken the resemblance many of the youth services have to the military services with their rigidly structured hierarchical command systems, and would probably lead to the service being divided up into more numerous, smaller-scale units. However, this may be all to the good, as existing research has indicated, and further research may well verify greater effectiveness from smaller-scale units. "The successful training schemes are organised in small units, which are either autonomous or largely independent components within an overall programme, for example the agricultural settlements of the Malawi Young Pioneers. There would appear to be several pointers which suggest that for rural development training, whether for young people or for the agricultural population as a whole, the widespread centrally-administered programme does not produce the direct and personal contacts between trainees and those organising the training programme which are basic to the building of good morale and confidence, factors which are essential if technical skills are to be given a real opportunity of being applied. The need is for close personal contacts, identification between trainer and trainee. This again points to the desirability of flexible, mobile training teams moving to the trainees after the location has been determined at which trainees will be employed." (6)

Implications

Obviously to change from a large-scale, hierarchical organisation to one on a smaller scale, flexibly led and possibly with mobile elements, is a serious decision, not to be taken lightly and not easily implemented. Results from research looking into existing services organised on both scales would be helpful. Such studies, the UN suggests (Report op. cit.), might best be carried out by teams of international experts working for an international body. If such experts did confirm the advantages of smaller-scale units and more flexible organisations the question arises of how far the national youth services would remain separate identifiable organisations if such changes were carried out. This would revive the need for further evaluation studies, both of the services

and alternative facilities and might well lead to a major re-think upon policy towards youth organisations.

*Cooperation
between service
and non-
service youth*

The UN Report (op. cit.) suggests that there should be far closer cooperation and coordination between youth services and other youth organisations, including broader organisations also concerned with young people, than there usually is at present. In fact, the national youth services should be seen as only one element in an overall "National Youth Programme" Having youth services which concentrate often large resources upon so small a number of young participants can only be justified if those participants act as catalytic agents amongst the majority of young people. Much more attention should be paid to possible ways of achieving this. Should there be greater contact between service and non-service youth while the former are actually in service or only after they have graduated? What could be done through the running of local youth clubs, etc.? Would local or larger-scale meetings, seminars, conferences between all youth, service and non-service, be of any use? It has already been mentioned that service graduates could play an important role in subsequent leadership and training within the services, the same is probably true outside the services. But would they need further training for this more diffuse, less intensive youth work? Are there any facilities for giving them any training they may need for this new kind of work? Could international agencies/experts play a part here? The UN Report (op. cit.) points out that there is a lack of youth-work information and theory developed in, or applied specifically to, developing countries. "Knowledge about youth psychology and sociology, dynamics of group work and leadership and community organisation are not always well-adapted to developing country situations." International agencies and/or experts sponsored by them could play a major part here. Research into these areas could be initiated by them. Established youth workers, preferably from the developing countries, but if too few of these could be found, also from developed countries, could be sent to make reports, fact-finding missions etc.. Seminars, conferences and other meetings of youth workers in the developing

*Role of
service
graduates*

and alternative facilities and might well lead to a major re-think upon policy towards youth organisations.

*Information
gaps*

countries could be organised to discuss exactly these issues and exchange experiences.

Attention should also be paid to how the views of youth, whether in youth services or not, can be represented and put forward to the government planning bodies. Youth service graduates, as well as university studies doing some short-term community service work, could be of use here, helping non-service youth to reflect upon and articulate what they want from a national youth programme.

The Content of Youth Service Programmes

General Education

The content of youth service programmes will vary according to their aims, for instance improving the general and civic education of early school leavers or giving employment-oriented vocational training. Where the aim is to improve general education this should be taught in a different way from in ordinary schools in order to gain full advantage from the distinctive service environment. More research needs to be done into how this may best be done- what new teaching equipment and aims may be necessary- how the trainers themselves can be taught to make best use of these, etc.. Especially where service graduates are seen as a means of inspiring rural, social and economic development, teaching should always be practically based in the local communities and service participants should be encouraged to have an active rather than passive (taught) role in their studies. Again, contact in conferences, seminars or more informal meetings of service teachers and participants would be advantageous, as would interchange of information about teaching methods and resources used.

Vocational training

Where emphasis is upon vocational training great thought should be given to the best way of providing this. Do the community development activities undertaken apply, or complement the skills learned? And with all such training, ways must be found to keep trainers up to date and fully informed of all developments in their field. It should be discovered whether the youth services are more effective for teaching some skills but not others. For example, a service training in

*Skill
development
through
service*

agriculture followed by help in establishing a settlement - including grants of land, capital, etc. - may be a better way of helping young farmers than, say, specialised institute-based agricultural training courses which might leave the graduate without any aid as to finding capital or land. On the other hand, outside apprenticeship schemes in rural or urban skills or crafts which provide a guarantee of a job for the trained apprentice may be considered better than youth service skill or craft training which does not necessarily lead to a job upon completion of service.

Variations in the size and location of service training should be studied and, if thought necessary and possible, pilot or experimental schemes of various kinds could be carried out. These exploratory studies were often not carried out at the start of the youth services. "Many of these programmes were hastily set up in emergency conditions to help meet the problems created by unemployment among school leavers and the exceptional flow of rural young people to the cities. Because of the urgency, the plans often started off large-scale with no time taken for pilot experiments." (7)

*Evaluation of
achievements*

Now is the time for evaluating achievements to date and for setting up these experimental schemes to discover possible better alternatives. These may lead to a fairly drastic reorientation of the services and basic changes in the way they are organised. For example many are presently organised upon a camp structure - i.e. centred upon a few large-scale centres of intensive activity. Studies may prove that, where the services are required to provide leaders for rural community socio-economic development, this is best done by means of a more diffuse structure with participants firmly rooted in the community from the beginning. This is in direct contrast to the present usual situation where service participants are fairly isolated from real interaction with the local community, although they may be carrying out community projects (but for the community rather than with it), whilst undergoing intensive training. The rationale is that this intensive

training equips them for their later roles as leaders and 'spearheads of progress'. As mentioned before, this view is by and large untested, and the few studies which have been carried out would seem to indicate a need to move away from large-scale, intensive training as "...informal in situ training programmes (the Nyakashaka Scheme in Uganda, Tanzania's Ruvuma Development Association, and the Faith and Farm programme in North-Eastern Nigeria) have a particularly high rate of retaining trainees in the employment sought." (8) In view of the radical consequences this could have upon the organisation of the service programmes this is obviously an area which requires very careful and comprehensive study over a period of time.

Under-representation of young women and girls

One aspect in which existing youth services are certainly deficient is in their provision for girls and young women, who are greatly under-represented among the service participants. Ways in which more of them could be included should be researched. The present constraint could well be merely discrimination on the part of the service organisers, but if it were found to be due to apathy or negative attitudes on the part of the young women and girls themselves ways of overcoming this should be found. Could existing women's and girls' organisations play a recruiting role here? Could service graduates do more through their contacts with rural youth, in youth clubs etc.? If young women are seen to have a part to play in the development of agriculture and rural activities in general there need be less difference in their service training from that given to boys and men. In view of the poor position of women and the way they are often virtually ignored in development work in the rural areas. Female service graduates obviously have a most important, and also difficult, job to do in acting as initiators of progress amongst rural women. Even the UN would seem to hold different views vis-a-vis men and women in the youth services. The consultant whose quotation on the advisability of letting service participants choose their own leaders was presumably only thinking of male participants, as he goes on to say "it is for planners to decide in the light of local economic requirements on the type of training to be provided for girls and the number of girls to be trained." (9)

Initiators of progress

There may indeed be a case for planners to have a say but surely this is true for boys and young men, not just girls and young women.

International agencies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat could play a major part here in encouraging international exchanges of women's group leaders, female youth leaders and female service participants. Interregional or international - or smaller-scale seminars and conferences could also be important in increasing the awareness as to what needs to and can be done to bring young rural women more fully into countries' development programmes.

Follow-up Employment

In so far as the National Youth Services do not seek to be ends in themselves they must be evaluated in terms of how well they fulfil their own aims, whatever these may be, and especially in comparison to how well these aims could be met by alternative uses of the same resources.

Because of their rural orientation many of the services encourage and help their graduates to form settlements upon completion of service training and may help them, at least for a limited period, with grants, advice, etc. as well as the initial donation of land upon which to found the settlement. There is a great need of follow-up studies here - to see how far improved agricultural methods etc. learned during service are implemented after settlement. If the settlers tend to lapse could they be helped by later refresher courses or by special attention from agricultural extension workers? If there are female graduates amongst the settlers are they still regarded as equals or are they reverting to more traditional roles with the males taking the decisions etc.? How long can settlements be expected to continue as young people's communities? What happens when participants want to marry and have families? What role will wives/husbands have? More fundamentally, what is the relationship between the settlement and the surrounding community? Are the settlers really teaching by their example and are they really functioning as 'spearheads of progress'? If not, is this because of individual settlement deficiencies

*Impact of
rural service*

or because of basic structural factors which mean that the settlements in fact remain isolated from the rural community as a whole? Could this be rectified by changes in location, size, etc. of the settlements? Would it help to settle young farmers in their own areas, for example? How do service settlements compare to settlements which might be set up by other, non-service young farmers?

*Effectiveness
in rural
development*

Of course service graduates can only be an effective force in national and especially rural development if they enter into productive employment, which does not necessarily mean wage-employment. The numbers which stay in agriculture after starting in settlements or who find employment in other crafts or skills in which they have trained could be ascertained from surveys. Wood (10) quotes a source which estimates that of 157 Zambia Youth Service graduates trained in agriculture who left the service in December 1958, 136 were inducted into the Zambian Police. He comments: "...the effect of intensive orientation towards identification with the nation can be to accelerate alienation from the trainee's own culture and exaggerate the tendency for ex-trainees to look for 'national' employment in occupations such as the police or the army. While this trend is not in itself wrong, if it develops to significant proportions it must detract from the primary purpose of national youth services - to produce trained and motivated young people for rural development work." It would be informative to discover whether this varies between services and whether this is associated with the degree to which the service's activities and settlements are integrated within local communities, and whether the situation is the same in services giving more emphasis to craft or skill vocational training. In these what help is given to graduates to find jobs utilising their skills and how could this help be improved? What happens to the few girls and young women who complete service training, and for whom, presumably, openings are not readily available in the police or armed forces?

In a broader analysis, it would also be important to study to what extent the employment which Youth Service leavers have been able to secure, has been genuinely additional due to the new skills taught, or to what extent it has simply taken employment away from other groups, e.g. by preference shown by employers to the 'displaced' Youth Service leavers or due to pressure on employers by the authorities to show such preference.

References in Section 5

1. Report of the Interregional Seminar on National Youth Service Programmes. Organised jointly by the UN, the ILO and the Danish government, Denmark, November, 1968.
2. A.W. Wood: "Informal Education and Development in Africa", Institute of Social Studies, The Hague, 1974.
3. UN Report of the Interregional Seminar on National Youth Service Programmes, op. cit.
4. Gabriel Feral: "Content of the Programmes", UN Report, op.cit.
5. 4th recommendation to governments, UN Report, op. cit.
6. A.W. Wood, op. cit., pp. 302-303.
7. A. Callaway in "Employment Problems in Africa and Asia", Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting, Lusaka, 1973, p.21.
8. A.W. Wood, op. cit. p.300.
9. Underlining added. Gabriel Feral: "Content of the Programmes", UN Report, op. cit.
10. op. cit. p. 290.