

YOUTH AND DEVELOPMENT IN KENYA

by Mr. S. Kihumba,
Executive Secretary,
Board of Adult Education, Nairobi, Kenya

Thank you very much Mr Chairman for inviting me to say a few words to the gathering. I was very sorry to have missed the opening session of the Seminar, which I notice from the local press was a very interesting occasion.

Before I begin my remarks I should like to bring greetings from the youth of Kenya and also from their parents, that is, their leaders, who are supposed to give them guidance, as you have been discussing. I welcome the opportunity, as a Kenyan Senior Civil Servant, of coming to Malta; I think that it is the first time that a Kenyan official has been able to come here. When I accepted the invitation to come and participate in this seminar I had only a very vague idea as to what the seminar was or what the objectives of the seminar were. At first I thought I was coming to meet my counterparts in the other parts of the Commonwealth, but I was very pleased when I found a lively group, a group that seems to have a purpose and a group that seems to have some expectations about the seminar. I hope at the end of the seminar we will not be disappointed.

I am sure Dr Maraj has done his best to expose you to some new ideas. Nevertheless during the few addresses which I have listened to, there has been a lot of emphasis on youth as a problem; on youth as a form of threat to the social structure; on youth as a force which is working to transform society overnight. Without being rude to whoever spoke before me, I think we need to be a little more positive. We need to be optimistic, and not assume pessimistically that youth are a threat to international stability. I have a different way of looking at it. I like looking at it in a positive manner, that youth is a force that can contribute not only to international understanding but to national development. I think this is the basis of my address today. I will proceed to analyse how I come to believe it.

Now you know in the country I come from, Kenya, religion is part of the foreign culture, the culture of the British who came to colonize Kenya, so that religion does not have its roots in the African culture as such. We have one leg in the Western culture and one leg, which I think is more firmly established, in our own culture. So I came across religion when

I went to school, and it was compulsory that I should take religion as a subject in order to get some education. My attitude, after passing my oral examinations, is a tendency of assuming that I will doubtless go to Heaven. My attitudes reflect a conflict within our own society; whether to abandon our traditional beliefs or to take on the Western way of life and Western philosophy. This is a conflict within our organization. In an attempt to resolve it we analysed the Prayer Book and we analysed the Bible and we found that there is a lot which is said about God, that God has created the world, God created the Universe and God has done so much for man, in return for which we want to feel repentant for our sins. But if we look at it in a different pattern we can believe that God wants to be recognised as having achieved something in creating the universe. He wants it to be appreciated that He is doing a lot for man and for the universe, and He also wants to be encouraged to do more for man and the universe.

I think these three qualities - recognition, appreciation and encouragement - are also reflected in society. The youth of today feel that they want to be recognized as part and parcel of the social system. They want to be recognized as an economical force. They want to be recognized as a political force. And not only that, they want it to be appreciated that they have something to contribute towards the stability of that structure and its gradual improvement, or its gradual evolution, into something new. Above all, and most important, they want to be encouraged in the belief that they can contribute something which is recognised, by those who are very experienced, by those who dictate the customs and the folk lore, the national objectives, as being of real value to the progress of that particular society. They seek this recognition not only from their parents but from the people who are taking charge of society.

Does the youth problem, then, arise from the youth themselves or from the leaders? Can it be that the leaders also need some guidance, also need some encouragement, also need some enlightenment? May it not be, as somebody has already said, that youth problems do not always spring from youth themselves, but from their seniors? I think the seniors also need a form of encouragement. They also need a form of appreciation. I think this one can call a chicken-and-egg argument. We should not accept a one-sided story, to the effect that youth is a negative force unless it is harnessed and controlled and retrieved to fit within certain ideologies, or

certain beliefs which are held in certain areas or at certain times. I think we need to make a reciprocal arrangement between the parents or the seniors and youth to ensure the existence of a form of communication.

I have heard a lot of complaint about the lack of communication, that there is no communication between young people and their seniors. In fact, the communications are there, but inadequate time has been given to a study of the problem faced by their parents or the seniors of how to give enough attention to the different problems of youth of today. I do not know the problems of youth in the nineteenth or in the eighteenth century, or in the time when no history was written, but I suppose they existed in much the same way. We all agree, of course, that young people today mature much earlier. Not only that, besides the class room, as somebody has mentioned, there are other channels of education which nobody has been thinking very seriously about, that is, radio, television, newspapers and international communications, channels which give greater access to knowledge and greater access to experiences in other lands.

This exposure of young people to external influences upsets the teacher's preconceptions of a typical student, because the student today tends to be far ahead of, or at least far better informed than, the youth of a couple of decades ago. I think this is the most important development in modern times: that the youth today are ready to take personal responsibility in society, in their own countries, at a much earlier age. Unfortunately, planners and the leaders have not come to grips with this particular issue and do not always appreciate that there is a force which is ready to be utilized. The planner has continued to insist that you must be at school until you are 16, after which we can take you seriously, but you may feel that you are already mature by the age of 10. You know that there is a war in Vietnam. You are already aware that there is an international community. This change in young people has not been taken into account by the planners. Before the 1950s, young people used to get into employment during the early ages between 10 and between 16. They therefore had no time to involve themselves in matters outside their own immediate environment. In other words, their energy was fully occupied, fully utilized; but now between those ages of 10 and 16 there is a marked vacuum. This may explain how some people have got the idea that youth is a negative force, although I believe that youth is preparing itself to contribute, not to destroy.

I should like now to illustrate the steps which my government and many other governments in Africa are taking to contend with this problem, or at least to bring the youth of African continents into the main stream of development. We have a somewhat different problem in our area to that in Malta, in that in Kenya only 60% of the children ever go to school at all. That leaves 40% of the children who are doomed to illiteracy until they are adults. By the time the fourth year of school is reached so many have dropped out, for various reasons - because they cannot afford their school fees, for example - that only about 40% end up with a minimum four-year education. That gives us a rather different problem from what you have in Malta. We therefore tackle our problems in a somewhat different way. We have been accused in fact of concentrating on the educated few. This is in some ways inevitable. It is a reflection of the limited resources in terms of finance and personnel which we have at our disposal. Since our main commitment, of course, is to develop our national manpower the accusation of having concentrated on the educated few might have some weight, but of course it does not take into account all our problems in Africa.

One way in which we are attempting to meet the problem is through the National Youth Service. The National Youth Service in Kenya is today taking approximately 7,000 young men and women for a two-year orientation course. This is not a formal course, that is, they do not get diplomas or certificates at the end of the course, but servicemen have the opportunity of acquiring certain skills like road construction or building, there is formal education for those who want to continue with a formal education, secretarial training is given, including typing and accounts, and after the two-year period they get a certificate issued to show that they have undergone a short introductory course of training. These people are very great favourites for employers. They are normally taken up either in government or in the army, or in private industries. This has been going on since 1964 when the President decided to have a formal National Service for young men and women who have completed seven years of education. The scheme is generally considered to have succeeded in fulfilling its purpose.

Another scheme is that of the village polytechnics. Village polytechnics are a new concept which is still at an experimental stage. Try to imagine the rural parts of Kenya. These are quite different from those in Malta. To us a rural area is an area with forests, with wild animals. It is an area which is completely underdeveloped. It is an area where people

live in disease, without medical facilities, without schools. Nevertheless, it is an area where there is high potential. There may be mineral potential, there may be agricultural potential, and this is untapped. It is, therefore, the feeling of our government that the youth of Africa should be channelled to the rural areas. They have the education, they have the vigour, they have the imagination, and they have the drive. So to attract young people to the rural areas we need to take technology into those areas, and one way in which this is being done is through the village polytechnic. The village polytechnic is the main source of technology in rural areas for the young men, for the young man and women. They have started with the young man. They do not have any for women as yet because they are only two years old but I think in the coming two years there will be village polytechnics for young women. These polytechnics have little buildings where there are facilities for teaching farming, which is a most important aspect of rural development. There is an administration block. There is a store to illustrate the use of co-operative organization. There is a work-shop where they learn maintenance of farm implements, maintenance of machinery such as tractors. The young man undergoes a two year course, after which it is felt that he is in a position to be engaged in some form of agriculture. I do not want to go into vital issue of why go back to the land if you have no piece of land on which to farm. I think that is beside the point for the purpose of this address. Under this system we have 180 village polytechnics in a country of approximately three million young people aged between 15 and 22. That can give you an idea of the scale of the operation, but that is only scratching at the problem.

Another aspect of youth involvement is the new Industrial and Apprenticeship Training Act, which was passed in 1970, so that it is hardly two years old. The Kenyan Government sought the help of the British Government in setting up this industrial training scheme. The main concept of the Industrial Training Programme is to consolidate the efforts of the private sector and the Kenyan Government into a national policy to try and help young men and women to go into skilled industrial jobs through some organised form of training. The employer will be expected to contribute a percentage of the total cost of each apprentice and the Government will also contribute a percentage of the same total cost. What has been difficult, I think, is to decide exactly how much industry will take and whether, for example, the electrical industry should also be involved in training for welding; or in training for mechanics. For example,

in sugar plantations, you need electronics, you need mechanics, you need chemists, you need all sorts of skills. Should that industry be involved in the training of the specific skills it requires, or should training be designed round the skills, leaving it to each industry to adapt electricians or mechanics to its particular needs? These important administrative problems are still being tackled but the scheme offers one chance for youth to be trained for industrial development.

Another activity which may be of interest is our Rural Industrial Training Centres, I.D.C.s. Industrial Training Centres, I think six in Kenya, are being established, in co-operation with the I.L.O., the International Labour Organization. The main purpose of these rural industrial development centres is to assist the youth, and those who are not exactly youth, who need some form of orientation towards small-scale industrial enterprises, to give them some training in managing and keeping accounts for small industry or cottage industry. These centres will assist enterprising young people who want to take industry to their rural areas. Well, of course, this is a challenge in the sense that one has to become a capitalist; we do not like using the word "capitalist", but I think we need to encourage investment in rural areas instead of concentrating in urban areas. We want to tempt the industrial entrepreneur into the rural areas. These industrial development centres are specifically colleges of capitalists, if we may borrow from Karl Marx, colleges for industrial businessmen, industrial establishments. They will provide another chance for men and women to engage in wholesale industrial enterprises or commercial enterprises.

In terms of other youth facilities there is the National Scout Movement. In Kenya, scout movements are extremely popular. They give opportunities for the young to explore the nooks and corners of the country and to climb the mountains. We are lucky to have very high mountains, like Mount Kenya, which is about 18,000 feet above sea level. I am not quite sure how many members they have at present but I know it is quite substantial, perhaps about 10,000, and our own Minister of Agriculture is the Chief Scout. They receive an annual grant from the Kenyan Government to organize expeditions, to organize "nights out", I don't know what the official phrase is, they call them "nights out". This is an excellent opportunity for youth to know their country.

Recently the President declared that the young women of Kenya should form a battalion of the Kenyan Army, and now

there is a wing of the Kenyan Army composed of women. This is another area in which the President has encouraged the youth of Kenya and particularly the girls to participate in the security and in the affairs of the State. It has given a lot of encouragement to those who are still at school and it has also given a lot of encouragement to those who want to participate fully in decision making in Kenya.

If I might summarise, I think the most important aspect of youth and development is that every government should endeavour to formulate a national policy on youth, involving youth in all forms of constructive and progressive development and co-ordinating youth activities in support of national development. I think it most important that youth should be engaged in constructive and progressive activities, not in what do you call picketing and agitation. The aim should be to examine in consultation with youth leaders new areas of involvement, and to work in close co-operation with the Government. There has been, for example, in the university of our country an attempt to bring the college students closer to the administration and to examine and protect the welfare and interests of young people with special reference to their physical fitness, to encourage freedom of expression and creative thinking and the full development of their mind, both academically and spiritually.

We heard yesterday an account of the measures which are taken in respect of delinquent youth, so-called delinquent youth. This should be examined with a view to studying the background psychological causes of delinquent youth. Indeed, there are ways and means of establishing new opportunities for young people which will offer opportunities for safe and general development, and, of course, to recognise and harness the potential of young people towards constructive development and to inspire the young people to participate fully in all forms of national development. This should be the basis of the national youth policy which should be formulated between the Government and the youth organizations.

I think, Mr Chairman, I would like to make my address very short. I think later I might be able to tell you exactly what I do as the Executive Secretary of the Board of Education. Perhaps I may mention this in a sentence or so. The Board of Education of which I am Secretary is not really a Board of Youth Development. In Kenya we have a National Youth Council and the Executive Secretary of the National Youth Council is a member of the Board of Adult Education. The Board of Adult

Education was conceived with the idea of looking at education in its broad sense. In some countries they tend to emphasize the eradication of illiteracy. Now illiteracy is not always a handicap to development. It may be a short-term hindrance but we still can develop in spite of illiteracy, and this is the feeling of the Kenyan Government. Previous Secretaries to the Board have been senior school teachers and senior executives in the Ministry of Education, but they concentrated so much on illiteracy that the Government felt that an undue proportion of available resources were being channelled into this activity. So I came to my post with the object of looking at adult education from the vocational point of view, from the in-service point of view, and from the economic point of view. We take primarily the age groups from 15 to 45 because these are the nation builders. A nation which is in a hurry cannot afford to ignore parents or executives in business and in government. It is the Kenya Government's belief that adult education should concentrate on giving that group of between 15 and 45 the skills necessary for national development, which may or may not include the skills of literacy.

My responsibility is to bring together the various Ministries, the Ministries of Finance and Economic Planning, of Agriculture, Health, and Commerce, as well as industry and private organizations like the university, to work as a team towards formulating a national policy for adult education.

Thank you very much.