

APPROACHING YOUTH POLICY



CROSS-REFERENCE
POLICY DEVELOPMENT

APPROACHING YOUTH POLICY

Considerations for National Youth Policy Development

A Commonwealth Youth Programme
Publication

This document is part of the series
CROSS-REFERENCE: POLICY DEVELOPMENT
A set of cross-cultural materials for
youth development

FOREWORD

With this document, focusing on the development of national youth policies, the Commonwealth Youth Programme launches its new publication series. Entitled 'Cross Reference' it seeks to support the development of youth initiatives in one country by drawing on the experiences of others. It is therefore appropriate that we begin with an overview of national youth issues and policies.

We hope that this document and the series are of value to readers.

RAJA GOMEZ

DIRECTOR

COMMONWEALTH YOUTH PROGRAMME

CREDITS

AUTHOR

Doug Smith

EDITOR

Laurie Dunn

SERIES EDITORS

Roy Chalmers and Warren Feek

TYPIST

Shanti Kathriaratchi

DESIGN AND PRODUCTION

edit – Editorial Information Technology

Telephone: 01-820 9288

ILLUSTRATOR

David Sim

ISBN NO. **0 85092 343 3**

ADDRESS

The Commonwealth Youth Programme

Commonwealth Secretariat

Marlborough House

Pall Mall

London SW1Y 5HX

United Kingdom

Telephone: 01-839 3411

NB. The views in this paper are not necessarily those of the Commonwealth Youth Programme. They are presented as part of CYP's contribution to the ongoing debates about national youth policy development.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	9
1 THE MAIN THEMES OF THE PAPER	11
Access, Power, Participation and Culture - The Raw Material of Young People's Lives	11
Class, Gender and Race - Young People and Society	14
Transition and Transformation - Growing Up in a Changing World	15
2 MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE SOCIETIES IN WHICH THEY LIVE	17
White and Male - All Young People are the Same	17
Western Values and Ideas - The Goal of Development	18
3 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT	20
4 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT	22
Social Structures and Young People	23
Economy, Society, Politics and the Law	24
Work, Income and Property	24
Education, the Family and Religion	27
Consent and Accountability	29
Rights, Enforcement and Morality	31
5 DEVELOPING YOUTH POLICY - AN OVERVIEW	33

INTRODUCTION

This paper has two main aims:

- to outline an approach that can be used in analysing the position of young people in different national settings; and
- to link such an analysis to the development of national youth strategies and policies.

The second of these two aims is crucial. The assumption underpinning this paper is that national youth strategies and policies which are not grounded in an understanding of the position young people occupy will be at best an irrelevance, and at worst a liability.

This paper does not, and cannot, provide a step-by-step guide to the development of national youth strategies and policies for young people. Such strategies and policies, and the process followed to develop them, will vary for different nations and for different groups of young people.

Even the very idea of ‘youth’ varies between different countries. One of the themes identified below is concerned with the extent to which youth, as a stage of life in relation to which strategies and policies can be developed, can be said to exist in a particular national setting. And if it does exist, which young people does it exist for and how are they identified? It is questions such as these, rather than answers, which constitute the core of the approach provided in this paper.

This approach, however, is more than just a series of questions. For the questions help offer a perspective and provide a way of thinking about young people and their societies. The questions are intended to connect to the experience and concerns of the reader. This ‘way of thinking’ is to consistently relate the questions and perspective to the position of young people and the characteristics of the societies in which they live.

The approach outlined in the paper is only one part of a wider and much more complex process. The creation of policy is essentially a political process involving the exercise of political power and the allocation of scarce resources. Any understanding of the position of young people and the creation of strategy and policy will need subsequently to connect to, and interact with, the wider political processes of policy determination and resource allocation. In doing this

it will inevitably be modified, if not compromised. Such modification does not necessarily represent failure.

The development of youth strategies and policies must be conducted within the context of a broad understanding of the potential and resources which exist in national settings, and be aware of the competition between groups making claims on those resources. By following through the thinking process which is presented here, those with an interest in young people and a responsibility to promote their concerns will be better equipped to engage in these wider processes.

The paper has five sections. First, the main themes of the paper, which are concerned with young people, their societies, and the process of change, are described. This is followed by the identification of some commonly held, but mistaken, assumptions about young people and their societies. The next section considers the international context which helps determine patterns of national development. Although this may seem rather remote from young people, international relations have an increasing influence on how individual countries are changing and the circumstances of young people within them. The focus then shifts in some detail to the national context and identifies the main national social structures, systems and institutions which help shape the lives of young people. The final section highlights some implications for the development of national youth strategies and identifies some of the elements which may help constitute a youth policy.



1 THE MAIN THEMES OF THE PAPER

A number of themes run through the paper which raise issues and help pose questions. Some of the themes refer directly to young people, some relate to the societies in which young people live, while a third group is concerned with the processes and outcomes of change. There are processes of transition as young people follow a pathway from childhood to the eventual attainment of adulthood. There are also processes of transformation as societies themselves change and develop in response to national and international forces. All of the themes are inter-related.

ACCESS, POWER, PARTICIPATION AND CULTURE - THE RAW MATERIAL OF YOUNG PEOPLE'S LIVES

A key issue in thinking about the position of young people concerns the extent to which they have access to resources which can be used to promote their position and development. Used in this broad sense, resources can mean different things.

- it may mean access to education, employment or social welfare benefits;.
- it may mean the resources which reside in a stable and supportive family structure; or
- it may be resources contained within political processes to which young people do, or do not, have access.

In whatever way they are defined and understood, resources lend advantage and counter disadvantage. They constitute the raw material of people's lives.

A resource can simultaneously promote freedom and impose constraint. Access to the benefits of education will usually involve the

“Power may be
thought of as the
ability to claim,
command and
consume resources”

constraint of regular attendance up to a minimum age. Family support will usually involve acceptance of family rules. The resources of politics are constrained within the boundaries of accepted political processes.

A central task is that of identifying the resources to which young people have access and which help define their position and offer potential for development. Alongside this, though, is the need to identify the constraints which accompany these resources, perhaps restraining the opportunity for development or channelling it in one direction rather than another.

Linked closely to resources is the notion of power. Power, in a broad sense, may be thought of as the ability to claim, command and consume resources, which in turn confer advantage on the power holders. A position of power offers enhanced opportunities for successful claims on resources.

The other side of this cycle is, of course, powerlessness and disadvantage. The key to understanding the position of young people is to ask what power do they have to claim resources which they can turn to their advantage? What power do they have to change and develop their own lives?

Answering these questions requires an understanding of the position of young people in the wider society. Power has always had an age dimension, at least in the sense that older groups have always attempted to exert authority over the young and claim resources for themselves. Power, however, is also related to other aspects of the society. Different groups of adults have different levels of access to power, and can claim more or fewer resources accordingly.

Inequalities arising from age exist alongside, and may be over-ridden by, inequalities arising from other characteristics of society - such as caste, class, gender or race. All of these things create and constitute structures of inequality, of advantage and disadvantage, and all help determine the position of young people.

The discussion of power raises another important theme, which is concerned with the processes of aging and maturation and how these fit into the wider society. The process of growing older is not simply a biological one. From the moment of birth through to eventual death, aging has biological, psychological and social dimensions.

The transition towards and entry into adulthood, which is the most important aspect of the ageing process as far as this paper is concerned, is primarily culturally determined. This is to say that social and cultural conventions primarily govern the process of becoming adult and that biological age is only one aspect of the overall process. If this were not the case, then how could governments, literally

overnight, lower the age of majority and, hence the legal point of recognition of full adult status? Biological aging has little effect on this - the important processes are social ones.

The broader questions which follow from this concern national definitions and understandings of youth. It follows that if the transition to adulthood is primarily culturally determined, then so are definitions of youth, and these will vary significantly between countries and, possibly, within countries.

For any given country we need to ask:

- is there such a thing as youth occupying a period in the life cycle between the dependency of childhood and the independency of full adult status?
- if there is such a stage, how are its boundaries defined?
- how do we recognise it and in what ways do we understand it?

“It may be the case that someone is not fully recognised and understood as adult until they are married; or perhaps had children; passed a driving test and own a car; or pole vaulted across a raging river!”

In attempting to answer these questions a number of different factors may need to be considered. Chronological age may be one marker of youth and, in many societies, will be the most easily recognised. However, there will be others. It may be the case that someone is not fully recognised and understood as adult until they are married; or perhaps had children; passed a driving test and own a car; or pole vaulted across a raging river!

In addition, all of these things will probably apply differently to men and women. For young men, adulthood may mean assuming the dominant role in the family, or gaining land or other productive resources. For women, adulthood may arrive on marriage and having children.

The starting points, the finishing points, and the routes between them will differ enormously. Only by understanding them for particular societies will it be possible to begin to get real insight into the position and lives of young people.

The final issue in this section is concerned with participation and interest. Participation refers to the extent to which young people themselves can take an active role in determining the routes they follow, and the eventual destinations at which they arrive. Participation is about the setting of the agenda for youth and subsequent action to fulfil that agenda.

The degree of participation which young people have will significantly govern the nature of the transition processes which are

followed and the destinations at which they arrive. The questions we ask must be directed towards establishing the extent to which, in any given country, genuine opportunities for participation can be said to exist. Set out in a rather blunt fashion - who decides, and in whose interest? Participation, then, is linked to interest. For part of the rationale underlying the emphasis on the participation of young people concerns a recognition of their interests and their right to pursue them. In the absence of participation by the young, who are the main people involved in these transition processes, and whose interests are taken as paramount - the young peoples', or those of the groups of adults who stand in by proxy?

CLASS, GENDER AND RACE - YOUNG PEOPLE AND SOCIETY

The structure of societies can be understood through the principal social characteristics which create consistent and enduring differences and divisions within the society. While the significance of each of these characteristics will differ, the primary characteristics are generally:

- class;
- gender; and
- race.

To this we need to add an understanding of the extent to which age itself is an important element in creating the social structure and, for some societies, an appreciation of caste and possibly tribe.

Class, gender and race, and to some extent these other characteristics, are bases around which primary social divisions emerge. These divisions create different patterns of opportunity for young people - young men compared with young women, young black people compared with young whites, for example. In effect, these divisions create different starting points and different finishing points in the lives of the young people concerned.

Moreover, they create different routes and different life processes which need to be followed in traversing those routes. The crucial point to grasp is that the structure of the wider society determines the life opportunities of the younger generations within that society. To understand the position of the young people it is necessary to have an understanding of the society as a whole.

TRANSITION AND TRANSFORMATION - GROWING UP IN A CHANGING WORLD

“Much depends on the nature of the transition to be made in the particular society - the starting point, the finishing point and the route.”

The point has been made previously about young people being in a state of transition. For them the transition is one from the dependence of childhood to the relative independence of adulthood. Much depends on the nature of the transition to be made in the particular society - the starting point, the finishing point and the route. To some degree or another the transition which young people are making is a movement towards a more or less developed status of citizen.

The principle of citizenship can be seen in the extent to which civic rights and duties exist, are embedded in the social structure, and are assumed on reaching adulthood. In this sense, the young person is moving outwards from a world dominated by family rules to a world dominated by civic rules.

If citizenship is seen as the creation of sets of rights and duties along political, social and economic lines, then societies can be characterised in relation to the extent to which citizenship exists, the form that it takes, and the directions in which change is progressing.

When seen in this way, the different dimensions of citizenship can be identified and societies and individuals plotted in relation to the extent to which it becomes achieved. In doing this, the society can be characterised, the destinations described, the nature of changes seen and the life trajectories of individuals understood.

The second dimension, that of transformation, is concerned more directly with economic change. It is important to recognise the nature and degree of economic change which is taking place in any society. For many societies the starting point in understanding this involves taking account of the international economic relations of which the society is a part. At the national level these can create significant differences between sectors of a society, particularly where there may be new emergent economic elements and older declining ones.

The important point in this is recognising that these large scale transformations are part of the wider processes by which the destinations for young people become changed - some disappear, new ones emerge. While it adds a huge complexity to the task of understanding the position of young people and the life circumstances surrounding them, it is necessary if effective strategies and policies are to be created.

This leads to the last point to be made in this section. All of this is likely to be wasted if the tests of relevance and application are not continually posed:

- how is what we are discussing relevant to young people?
- how can it be applied in terms of a practical approach to creating youth strategies and policies?

If these questions are lost to sight, then the debate becomes academic and confined to the committee room and debating chamber.



2 MISTAKEN ASSUMPTIONS ABOUT YOUNG PEOPLE AND THE SOCIETIES THEY LIVE IN

In our everyday lives we continually make assumptions about other people and how they will behave. The making of assumptions is not, in itself, necessarily undesirable - indeed if we didn't make them social life would grind to a halt. Imagine the problems if we could not safely and reasonably assume that the other driver will drive in the same direction and on the same side of the road as we are doing! In this sense, assumptions are a way of reducing uncertainty.

For our present purposes, though, it may be necessary, as a part of the learning process, to step back into uncertainty. This involves identifying some commonly made assumptions which, in reality, cannot safely and reasonably be made. Such assumptions can distort our view of the position of young people and result in serious weaknesses in any final policy that is developed.

In many ways this is a challenging task, for the most compelling assumptions are either those we do not know we are making, or those which we make because it serves our particular purposes. This should serve as a cautionary note about the close links between interests, assumptions and power.

WHITE AND MALE - ALL YOUNG PEOPLE ARE THE SAME

There are four major assumptions made about young people, either implicitly or explicitly, that need to be challenged.

The first is that young people are male. In the English language this assumption is virtually embedded in the use of language itself - for example, the very word 'youth' conjures up images of young males; we never speak of female youth. In understanding the position of young people it is vitally important to recognise the way in which gender creates and forms life experiences and opportunities. The failure to recognise gender not only means ignoring half the population, but it also means that the view developed of the other, male, half is biased and distorted.

The second assumption is that young people are white. Whilst warnings about this assumption may be more appropriate for the western nations, it does have a wider application. For it links to the further assumptions that what is provided for white young people is necessarily right for all, or that it is only the white population which is important. Assumptions about race are as fundamentally distorting as those about gender.

The third assumption is that young people are defined solely by chronological age. Youth, it was argued earlier, is primarily culturally defined. Young people of the same chronological age in different societies may be at quite different points in their movement towards adulthood. A fourteen year old in the West is just over half way through secondary schooling; in other societies 14 year olds may be working full-time and shouldering heavy burdens of family responsibility.

The fourth and final assumption is that young people are homogeneous in their characteristics. Young people are divided by the same characteristics as divide their parents - such as class, gender and race. The fourteen year old daughter of a doctor has probably more in common with her father than with the fourteen year old daughter of a subsistence farmer. In this sense, young people reflect the divisions of the wider society, although sometimes in a modified form.

WESTERN VALUES AND IDEAS - THE GOAL OF DEVELOPMENT

It is not only assumptions about young people which must be questioned, for we also make unwarranted assumptions about societies. Three major ones have been identified below.

First, it cannot be assumed that all societies are like Western Europe or the United States in terms of their social structures, political institutions and processes, or values. Nor can it be assumed that they should be, or that the Western ways are necessarily better. They may or may not be - but that is a matter for investigation rather than assumption.

Similarly, it cannot be assumed that all societies are heading towards a future which can be seen in Western Europe or the United States. Even where common global forces are at work, the

trajectories of change being experienced within societies owe much to indigenous traditions and to the influence of national histories. Societies are, and will remain, distinctively different from one another except at the relatively superficial levels of the bottle of Coke and denim jeans.

Third, Western concepts of youth cannot be assumed to apply elsewhere. The position of young people is not globally defined by Western nations. It also follows from this that there are grave dangers in simply importing provision for young people from another society or another culture. What is right for the young people of Canada may be quite wrong for the youth of Britain, let alone Papua New Guinea.

This difference in the concept of youth highlights a further difficulty in using the approach set out in this paper. This concerns the extent to which our languages and concepts can cross cultural boundaries and still make sense. Do the concepts of work, or employment or the family mean the same thing to people from different nations and cultures - do they mean anything at all?

There is no easy solution to this difficulty. Meanings are in people, not in words, and it demands time, understanding and interpretation to ensure that we are unravelling the meaning of concepts for the people concerned.

With an awareness of these assumptions and wider difficulties in mind it is now possible to move on to the next stage of the process. This involves understanding the importance of the international dimension in determining the national position of young people.



3 THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The patterns of global development draw more and more nations into some form of direct or indirect relationship. For example, even those which choose to follow their own solitary path cannot avoid the environmental concerns which are now emerging. Other nations, less intent on a policy of separation, find their national economies and national structures increasingly influenced and determined by a wider set of relationships. These relationships help form the national conditions under which young people live, and within which they need to be understood.

There is no easy or quick way to characterise international relations. Some nations are more powerful than others, some more influential than others. The less powerful and less influential countries may well feel a threat to their national economies as international trading relations develop and patterns of domination and subordination emerge.

The penetration of national economies by multinational corporations, the growing international indebtedness of many countries, and the increasing awareness of the threat of cultural domination on the part of smaller countries, all form part of the international context. This context will often be crucial in determining conditions for young people in their own countries.

In the case of the young, attention is often focused on the moral dimensions - the threat posed to the moral welfare of the young by the breakdown of traditional forms of moral regulation and control. Less attention is given to the ways in which international developments can affect things like job opportunities, income and wealth, or the availability of education. Yet these are often of more direct importance to young people.

Of course, the traffic is not all one-way. Migration of many years has meant that most countries have benefited from an influx of new peoples, new ideas, new cultures, food, music and life-styles. Not all host nations have found it easy to welcome new arrivals. Racism in one form or another is an enduring feature of many societies today

and profoundly affects the lives of many young people.

In considering the international context it is important not to lose sight of the significance of the reactions against colonialism. If the First World War broke the bounds of the old empires and shifted the centre of world influence across the Atlantic Ocean to the United States, then the Second World War shattered completely the remaining claims to colonial empires. The achievement of political independence by many colonised countries has been a major feature of the last fifty years or so.

Alongside this needs to be considered what many would see as the growing economic dependence of emergent nations on the existing great powers. As far as this is the case, then, there is a general question over what the implications are for the nations concerned, and a specific question about the impact on young people. The answers to these questions are best seen in relation to the structures, systems, and institutions which constitute the national context.



4 THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

The national context is primary in understanding the position of young people. The main structures, systems and institutions which constitute this national context are considered below. The first task, however, is to highlight certain issues which need to be kept in mind when considering that national picture.

One of the major issues is that of transformation, and especially transformation brought about through economic development. In one sense countries are always changing, for economic development is a continuing process. Some changes, though, are more profound in their impact than others. Perhaps the greatest impact arises from the change from a subsistence to a wage economy and, often associated with this, from an agricultural to an industrial economy. In many instances a national economy will be characterised by sectors in decline as new ones emerge.

These types of changes often have significant implications for young people. The shift from a rural to an urban society is a case in point. Young people can often be in the forefront of migration towards cities - although not necessarily voluntarily, and not necessarily with positive intentions or beneficial consequences. Changes of this type can mean that young people occupy a different place, economically and socially, from that occupied by their parents and grandparents. The particular type of transformation, and its impact on young people, will vary between countries.

National images of youth can also be influenced by wider changes. As young people become detached from the more traditional customs of their societies it is more likely that they will be seen as a problem rather than a resource. This image of young people helps determine what might be called the national climate, which will be more or less sympathetic and supportive of them. Yet rarely is there a systematic attempt to understand this national image:

- what is it?
- who creates it?
- what events helped influence and shape it?
- what follows from it both for young people and for others?

The final issue to be identified is concerned with degrees of access to social and economic resources, which include such things as jobs, housing and education. Different groups have more or less access to such resources. Young people's access will often differ from that of other age groups, and there are likely to be differences between different groups of young people.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Social structures, in this context, refer to the main ways in which societies are organised. The principal building blocks of social structures are usually, though not exclusively, class, gender and race. It needs to be remembered, however, that different societies will be structured in different ways, and in some one or more of these features will be more significant than others.

The nature and degree of significance of each is a matter for investigation, not assumption. Some societies will be more divided along class lines than others; gender will have a different significance according to the society; racial or ethnic divisions will differ enormously; while caste may be a characteristic feature in other cases.

Divisions related to age are more difficult to deal with. The extent to which age becomes a principal mode of division will depend on factors which are beyond the scope of this discussion, but in one point age is clearly different from the others. Everyone will pass through and move beyond age divisions.

For the individuals concerned, any age divisions will be transient ones - they will move beyond them. The young will get older, but men don't become woman or black people turn white. But if there are consistent and enduring age divisions, there may well be enduring consequences for the organisation of the society and for the position of young people collectively. The existence of structured age divisions can have important consequences for youth policy.

ECONOMY, SOCIETY, POLITICS AND THE LAW

Economic, social, political and legal systems will help shape and determine the social forms taken by class, gender and race, and will influence the ways in which these divisions are expressed and experienced. There is a problem, however, in trying to identify systems which can be unambiguously understood and applied across a range of societies. What is the content of each system, and how do the boundaries of each become drawn?

The concept of the family provides a clear example of this difficulty. In most Western societies the family is seen as part of the social system. It has become a unit of consumption in that resources are brought into the family and used - for subsistence, pleasure, or comfort. To engage in productive activities individuals leave the family and go out to work.

Now this division and distinction will not hold true for all societies or even all families. In some cases the family may be both a unit of consumption and the basis of production. Productive enterprises, such as agriculture or small manufacturing, may be based on the family and located in or around the domestic household. In these cases it may be more useful to see the family as part of an economic system. In considering these systems, it is necessary to investigate how a system relates to the particular society, where the boundaries of it are seen to lie, and what can be counted as part of it. Such an investigation requires consideration of some of the main institutions which generally fall within the boundaries of each of the systems.

Understanding the connections and relationships between young people and these institutions will provide a consistent and systematic way of understanding the position young people occupy in any particular society.

WORK, INCOME AND PROPERTY

Three institutions can be identified which have the main economic impact within a society. They are:

- work;
- income and wealth; and
- property and land.

Work, along with employment, defines the way in which the great

“Where paid work is not available then the informal economy can provide a living through casual labour or activities often on the edges of legality.”

majority of people make a living. It can be conducted in many ways, such as:

- working within the family in exchange for board and lodging or a wage;
- working on one's own in a self-employed capacity; or
- working for an employer.

The worker may own the tools and materials with which the work is done, or they may be owned by someone else. The work may be done on the land as in agriculture, it may be done in an urban factory as with much manufacturing, or it may be done elsewhere such as sea fishing or working in service industries like hotels and catering. If jobs are not available, and there is no alternative such as family work, then unemployment, and no income, are the likely consequences.

Different societies organise things differently and this has consequences for young people. The age at which employment can begin, rules about minimum wages, health and safety and the extent to which employment guarantees security are different in many countries. Similarly, there are great differences in the extent to which progression to better jobs or more highly paid employment is possible, for in many societies those jobs simply do not exist. In other words, an important component of economic institutions is the occupational structure of the society. This affects young people.

The structure of the society will also be a powerful determinant of experience. While young people as a group tend to have different forms of access to work and employment than adults, access and roles also differ between young people. Jobs for the boys are usually different from jobs for the girls. In some societies black young people find it very difficult to get certain kinds of jobs compared with their white counterparts. Middle class young people will often find it easier to get good jobs than their working class contemporaries. All of these factors influence and determine the experiences of young people and define the nature of their circumstances and conditions.

The second cluster of economic institutions is concerned with income and wealth. Most income will come from employment. Different types of work offer different financial rewards, but young people usually earn less than adults. Where paid work is not available then the informal economy can provide a living through casual labour or activities often on the edges of legality. Otherwise, where it is available, young people will be dependent upon some form of state welfare benefit. All societies will contain some level of poverty,

“...Not many young
people hold wealth
of any great
magnitude”

notwithstanding debates about how you measure it, and in some societies it will bear heavily on the backs of the young.

The idea of wealth is slightly different from that of income. Wealth can be thought of as money in the bank or something equivalent to that, whereas income, generally wages, is money usually exchanged for work and labour. Income can be derived from wealth in a variety of ways, but for the purpose of understanding the position of young people it is of little direct importance because not many young people hold wealth of any great magnitude. Wealth holdings may, of course, be of very great indirect importance because, generally, people with wealth also have power and very often they have the power to determine the access of others to resources and rewards.

Societies are vastly different in their levels of wealth and income. What is considered ordinary in rich western nations may represent undreamed of riches in other countries, but it should be remembered that virtually all countries have great disparities in access to income and in wealth-holdings - even the poorest countries often have very wealthy elite groups. The same factors which govern access to jobs will govern access to income and, generally, to wealth-holding too. Income, in particular, is of great importance in understanding the position of young people in a society.

The final cluster of economic institutions is concerned with property and land. Although it is unusual for young people to have access to the ownership of property and land at an early stage in their lives, the pattern of ownership within their country can have significant implications for the opportunities which are eventually open to them. Ownership may be linked to accommodation needs, or it may be linked to production in some way. Both are important and connect to different needs.

In some societies acquisition of land, usually through the family, may be an important staging post on the route to adulthood. During periods of economic change, however, the role of land ownership within a society may change. The process of urbanisation usually diminishes the significance of small scale land ownership as its economic purpose declines and, increasingly, access to income takes place through paid employment.

The two elements of land and property tenure patterns which are probably the most important are:

- the overall pattern of land and property ownership; and

- the degree to which direct individual inheritance of productive land or property is a feature of the society.

The ownership of productive land and property are important aspects of the possession of power and influence and these, as with other forms of wealth, can have wider consequences for others living in the society.

EDUCATION, THE FAMILY AND RELIGION

Alongside economic institutions, and often closely linked to them, are the social institutions of the society. For the purposes of discussing and understanding the position of young people, three sets of institutions have been identified as the most important. These are:

- the family;
- the formal provision of education; and
- the religious context.

The family and the wider kinship system in many ways constitute the most basic building blocks of society. Families are a central life experience of young people, being simultaneously both the most important resource they have and also the most significant constraint. They probably represent the single most important influence on the development of young people, yet families can take many different forms and have different roles in the wider society.

Families can vary between the nuclear family, made up of parents and offspring only, extended families which include several generations, and families which are part of a more communal approach to the organisation of domestic life. Similarly, families have differing roles in different societies. For present purposes, the most important distinction is between the idea of families having only a major role in consumption, and those forming the basis production and subsistence activities.

An additional consideration revolves around the extent to which former family functions have now been taken over by other institutions - very often the state, and the wider transition from a society organised around familial rights and duties to one where civic rights and duties predominate - the transition to citizenship which was discussed earlier.

In considering the position of young people it is important to develop an understanding of both the position of the family in the society, and of the position of young people in the family. The type of questions that need to be asked about the family include:

- to what degree is the family engaged in production rather than consumption?
- how are productive resources such as land passed between generations?
- to what extent do civic duties take precedence over familial duties?
- how and in which ways is the family a resource for, or a constraint on, young people?
- is the form and structure of the family stable and fulfilling its role?
- is it adequately meeting the development needs of young people?
- what form do intergenerational conflicts and divisions take?

The second main social institution which has a great effect on young peoples' lives is education. Opportunities for education are one of the greatest resources which can be made available to young people and the experience of education can help transform the life opportunities open to them.

As societies have developed they have tended to create specialised institutions equipped to provide educational opportunities for young people. Educational institutions differ between countries in a great many respects and it is beyond the scope of this paper to identify more than a small number of key questions:

- does a developed education system exist?
- is it open to all or is it selective?
- at what age is it available and how much do you get?
- how well do different groups of young people fare within the education system?

- does the experience of education equip young people for the world they enter on completing their education?

The final area for consideration in this section is the religious context. The significance of religion varies enormously. There are societies where the significance of religion appears to have declined over many years and which are now largely secular. In other countries there is no separation between religion and the state and religious belief permeates many, if not all, aspects of life. In the majority of countries the significance of religion will be between these two outer points.

“In some countries religious influence is readily apparent. In others, which may be thought more secular, religion still remains significant.”

In considering the significance of religion it is important not to understate its continuing influence among the people of many countries. In some countries religious influence is readily apparent. In others, which may be thought more secular, religion still remains significant.

In many European countries, for example, the Catholic Church still has a profound and enduring influence which affects the lives of a great many young people. In thinking about the implications for young people all religions must be considered, for what is important in this respect are the social consequences of, rather than the content of, the belief and whether it is one which you personally subscribe to or approve of.

Finally, religion can both unite and divide societies. There are societies where one dominant religion exerts a powerful unifying force which draws together, at least in terms of religious belief, the whole population. Other societies can be strongly divided and in conflict, with religious divisions often playing a significant part in the history and continuation of the dis-harmony. In all of these circumstances young people will be greatly influenced and the role of religion in their lives must be understood.

CONSENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY

This section is concerned with the broader political arrangements of society. Political arrangements can mean two things:

- the formal ways in which a society organises its decision making processes and the exercise of political power; and
- the more informal sense where power is exercised but not necessarily through the medium of formal institutions.

In this latter sense, all arrangements, the family for example, can be seen as political arrangements. The questions to be posed here are quite simple, but potentially controversial - for questions of politics, tied inextricably to issues of power, never fail to generate great debate and emotion.

The first issue that needs to be addressed concerns the nature of the political institutions:

- is the political system and the kinship or family system fused or separated?
- to what extent are the political institutions representative of the population as a whole?
- what level of accountability to the population exists?

The general question, then, is over the nature of the political institutions, whilst the specific question concerns their relationship to young people and the level of access which young people have to them. This is an important area when considering the degree to which young people can effectively participate in the broader decisions which influence their own lives.

A second issue concerns the possession of political power and how it connects to other institutions within the society:

- who occupies the seats of power?
- how are these people related to the holders of other types of power?

For young people, and for everyone else for that matter, these questions relate to the possibilities of either achieving positions of power themselves, or at least of ensuring that they are occupied by people sympathetic to their cause.

The final issue concerns the level of popular involvement in the political process and the extent to which national politics reflect popular consent:

- to what extent is government performed through popular involvement, and with popular consent?

- do young people have an active role?
- are they part of any popular movement in the political process?

Levels of involvement and consent are always structured and restricted in a variety of ways - government would probably be impossible if this were not the case. Yet, in some countries, involvement and consent are clearly more restricted than in others, and the means by which involvement and consent are mobilised can differ significantly as well.

RIGHTS, ENFORCEMENT AND MORALITY

The final area to be considered for the way in which it influences the lives of young people is the law. Generally, within any national body of law there will be laws which define the scope of young people's lives. These laws define rights, duties and obligations and are very closely tied to the development of citizenship.

Included in such legal frameworks may be laws specifying ages at which compulsory education starts and finishes, minimum ages of paid employment, and the ages at which activities such as driving, drinking alcohol, or smoking tobacco become legally permissible. Many other areas of life will be defined by legal statute in this way.

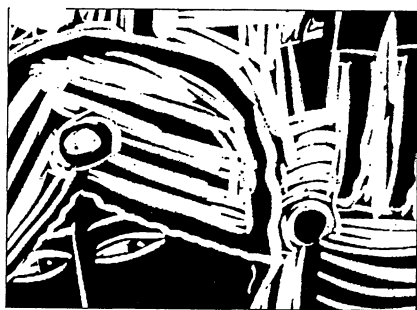
The questions that need to be addressed include:

- to what extent has a legal framework defining rights and duties and imposing constraints according to age been developed within a society?
- what areas of life does this framework cover?
- what is the content of each of the areas?

In the area of education, for example, some societies might start compulsory education at age four, whereas others might start at eight. Similarly, the age of leaving education will differ.

In thinking about the legal framework, though, there is a further issue - that of enforcement, or the extent to which laws are followed. It tells us little about the position of young people to read that they are required to receive ten years of formal education if we also know that the law is widely disregarded, or that the resources to provide it simply do not exist. The degree to which a law can be considered to be a real law should always be kept in mind when considering the legal framework surrounding young people.

One final consideration in respect of the law concerns the extent to which legal definitions are accepted by others, and whether these definitions come into conflict with other, perhaps more traditional, ways of seeing things. For example, the fact that the law might allow young people to drink alcohol or consent to sexual relations at certain ages does not mean that adults willingly accept the new rights their offspring are acquiring. In both of these cases, and many others, there are clear conflicts over the extent to which, and ways in which, young people are morally permitted to exercise their rights.



5

DEVELOPING YOUTH POLICY - AN OVERVIEW

The purpose in examining the various structures, systems and institutions of a society is to gain an understanding of the position of young people, the problems they face and the potential they have. This is not the end of the matter, however, for there is little point in simply gaining a more accurate understanding and going no further. The purpose must be to develop better and more appropriate youth strategies and youth policies; policies which are grounded in an understanding of the position of young people and responsive to their needs and interests.

It follows from this that youth policies need to be made to measure and tailored to fit. While it may be the case that the structure of some youth policies lends itself to being used in other national settings, the actual content of a policy needs to be determined in the light of the national circumstances of the young people concerned.

The argument is not against international learning and the exchange of ideas; it is against succumbing to the temptation to simply adopt other countries' policies when they might be inappropriate for the circumstances in which it is planned to apply them.

It will be useful, as a conclusion to this paper, to identify some of the things which are often included in policies and strategies, and which can often be used in many different contexts. In doing this the intention is not to offer a blueprint or a model, for there are different ways in which the creation of policy can be approached. By identifying some common elements of policies and strategies, however, it should become easier to link the analysis of youth to the development of policies for them.

In the first instance, there is generally an over-riding statement of the broad aims of the policy, setting out what the policy is intended to do and achieve. For young people these aims might be divided into aims about young people as individuals and aims about young people as a group in the society.

Aims will often be expressed in a fairly general way and could include things like promoting the welfare of young people and

contributing to their ability to develop independently towards full adult status. Very often youth policies in the broad sense are concerned with smoothing, and helping in, the transition from late childhood to adulthood.

In order to achieve these aims a series of objectives may then be identified and set out. Simply put, the objectives are the means by which the aims are realised. They are the links between aims, methods and outcomes. The objectives will be more specific than the aims and need to begin to identify concrete and attainable goals. If the aim is about promoting the welfare of young people, the objective would then begin to identify the practical content of this.

As an example, the aim of improving young people's general welfare might be promoted by health education programmes which have as their objective the discouragement of tobacco and alcohol use. There is no blueprint, though, because aims and objectives have to be designed in the national setting, drawing heavily on an analysis of the position and needs of young people.

The objectives might specify priorities or targets like particular groups of young people, or particular issues which effect them. For example, the objective of discouraging the use of tobacco might identify a particular group of young people who are likely to be drawn into tobacco use.

Linked to the objectives may be a statement about methods - how the work will actually be carried out. There are a wide range of methods available for putting youth policies into practice and any single policy will probably need to draw on most of them in one form or another. Examples of methods include:

- information provision;
- advertising campaigns;
- arranging meetings and seminars;
- working with small groups of young people; and
- individual help, support and counselling.

The important point, though, is that the methods must be appropriate to the objectives because they are the ways in which the objectives are put into practice.

To continue the smoking example, an appropriate method for

“The best policies in the world will fail if attention is not given to accurately and realistically costing the work.”

working with a group of young people identified as likely to use tobacco could be detached youth work on the urban streets where direct contact can be made. Inappropriate methods might be arranging open meetings, because nobody would turn up, or advertising in national newspapers, because the people you wish to reach do not read them. These examples highlight the importance of understanding the position of young people in order to be able to frame relevant aims, objectives and methods.

Going further, it may be necessary to specify the organisations and structures which will be needed to put these objectives and methods into operation. For some approaches a national headquarters may be required. Other aspects of policy may require more emphasis to be placed on local offices with maybe a linking regional office in between. The appropriate structure will be determined by the nature of the policy objectives and the selected methods. Central offices may be best equipped to organise national campaigns or communicate with workers across a whole country. Local offices may be the only way of directly reaching young people on the streets.

Organisations are people, and people will be needed to staff these offices and do the work, so there will need to be some consideration of staffing in the policy. Ideally the staffing section of the policy might specify the numbers of people to be involved, their level of skill and the contribution they would make to achieving the policy objectives, and where they are to be located. In all probability these people will need some training and this will need to be taken into account.

In our previous example, work on tobacco use might require a small number of managers and a larger number of fieldworkers. They may need to be distributed across a range of local offices and be trained in the medical consequences of tobacco use as well as in methods of youth work.

One of the hardest parts of a policy to develop is that which specifies exactly what work will be done with the young people. This means there needs to be something in the policy about the actual practice of the work which is being planned.

All of this work will demand resources, so these need to be specified. Naturally, the policy or programme will need to be costed and the finance raised from one source or another. The best policies in the world will fail if attention is not given to accurately and realistically costing the work.

Finally, how do you know what the issues are, where the young people are, and whether the whole thing is working effectively and

successfully? This means there is a need for some research and evaluation connected with the development of the policies and how they are working in practice.

Some of this work will have been carried out by working through the approach to understanding the position of young people which has been outlined in this paper. Work at this general level may need to be supplemented by more specific work in order to understand better the position of young people who have been identified as priorities by the youth policy.

The evaluation component should help to identify efficiency and effectiveness, and success and failure. If evaluation is arranged as a continuing part of youth provision then assessments and modifications can be made on a continuing basis. This will ensure flexibility in a particular policy or programme.

Not all policies will need all of these things, and there will be things not identified here which some policies will need to include. What all policies will need, though, is to be grounded firmly and unequivocally in a national understanding of the position of young people. For only in this way will it be possible to create policies which have any chance of success for the young people concerned. If they are not successful by that criteria, can they be successful by any other?



CROSS REFERENCE TITLES IN THIS SERIES TO DATE:

POLICY DOCUMENT 1
Approaching Youth Policy

POLICY DOCUMENT 2
Approaching Youth Unemployment

POLICY DOCUMENT 3
Approaching Drugs

TRAINING DOCUMENT 1
The Needs of Young People

FURTHER TITLES ARE PLANNED

© Copyright 1990

Printed and published by
The Commonwealth Secretariat

May be purchased from
Commonwealth Secretariat Publications
Marlborough House
London SW1Y 5HX

ISBN 0 85092 343 3

ISBN 978-1-84859-459-3



9 781848 594593