

# The Concept of a National Youth Policy

“A national youth policy provides broad guidelines, from which action programmes and services can be developed, to facilitate meaningful involvement of youth in national development efforts that will respond to their various needs and problems ... a source of guidance to planners, whether on micro or macro economic planning level or human resource development, health services or any development planning, whatsoever”.

The Honourable Pendukeni Iivula-Ithana, Namibian Minister of Youth and Sport

## Ⓐ Definition and Scope

According to the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Oxford University Press) a “policy” is “an agreed position, and/or a course of general plan of action to be followed by government, party or individual”.

A national youth policy represents a practical demonstration and declaration of the priority and directions that a country intends giving to the development of its young women and men. A national youth policy specifically represents a gender-inclusive statement that encapsulates the elements of vision, framework and realistic guidelines from which strategies and initiatives can be developed to facilitate meaningful youth participation and development within a country.

One African worker with young people attending a CYP Africa Centre youth policy formulation workshop (Windhoek, 1993) summarised it well when he stated

*“a national youth policy is a statement outlining our vision, the values and principles that guide us, the issues that challenge us and the initiatives, programmes and delivery mechanisms being planned and implemented to improve the socio-economic well being of our youth”.*

Since they lack an explicit gender dimension, the following general quotations from around the Commonwealth, whilst helping to clarify the definition and scope of a national youth policy, should be modified in any adaptation to incorporate gender equity and equality:

*“a National Youth Policy represents a basis and framework for youth development within a country, a starting point for all groups seeking to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of young people”.*

Dr. Richard Mkandawire, Regional Director, CYP Africa Centre

*“this policy document is intended to induce young people and their organisations, government and other authorities in the country to take a more active role in the construction of the present and future of our society”.*

National Youth Policy, Malta

*“the purpose of this policy document is to establish formally, clearly and firmly, the identity and status of the Malawian youth as a distinct sector of government policy, and to create a direction for youth activities and programmes for various interest groups”.*

National Youth Policy, Republic of Malawi

*"the purpose of a national youth policy ... is to establish a national framework to meet the needs of all young Australians. It will ensure better co-ordination of youth policy development and programmes and service delivery across agencies. The statement encourages recognition of young people and the contribution they make to the community".*

National Youth Policy, Australia

*"the enunciation of youth policy is a manifestation of political will and commitment of the nation to the cause of all-round development of youth and their integration with other sections of the society. While it addresses major concerns and issues crucial for young people, it provides validity and direction to youth programmes and services and spells out the strategy and broad guidelines for their planning and implementation. It also incorporates suitable measures for channelling the energies and potential of youth for national development".*

CYP Asia Centre, Regional Policy Consultation Statement, 1992

Ham and Hill have also provided some useful statements in clarifying the concept of a "policy", namely:

- *"a course of action or inaction rather than specific decisions or actions".*
- *"a web of decisions and actions that allocate values".*
- *"a set of inter-related decisions concerning the selection of goals and the means of achieving them within a specified situation".*
- *"a stance which once articulated, contributes to the context within which a succession of future decisions will be made".*

Ham, C. and Hill, M. *The Policy Process in the Modern Capitalist State*, 1984, p11

## Ⓑ Purpose

In response to the question "why do we need a national youth policy?", the resulting summary of responses emanating from a United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific workshop on Youth Policy Formulation in 1981, remain very relevant today. A national youth policy:

- ★ *"Provides Parliament with an effective means of declaring to the nation the importance of youth in national development.*
- ★ *Acts as a sign and symbol of the commitment of the nation to the priority it attaches to youth.*
- ★ *Provides a rallying point, a means of challenge and appeal to the youth generation to mobilise their resources and participate effectively in national development.*
- ★ *Provides an appeal to all citizens to give priority attention to youth concerns, to generate a new spirit of cooperation between young and old.*
- ★ *Demonstrates the distinctive and complementary roles of governments, NGOs and youth groups in youth development – a framework for common goals and the development of a spirit of cooperation and co-ordination.*
- ★ *Provides a call for a concerted effect by all Ministries and departments of government to promote youth needs and responses.*
- ★ *Identifies the priority needs and aspirations of youth.*
- ★ *Provides through both the processes of formulation and subsequent discussion, an example for how youth can engage in the decision-making process of the country".*

In addition, other benefits have been identified by countries who have engaged in the process of formulating and adopting a national youth policy, namely:

- ★ communication of a nation's vision for its young men and women – clear directions and priorities;

- ★ a basis for equitable distribution of government resources to meet the needs of young women and men, particularly those most disadvantaged where young women are often over represented;
- ★ a collective strategy to address problems and issues affecting young men and women;
- ★ an opportunity to main-stream youth policies into other sectional ministries;
- ★ provision of a basis and mechanism for monitoring and evaluation of youth policies and programmes;
- ★ raising of the national profile of young women and men, their needs, concerns and aspirations, and those agencies specifically committed to their development; and
- ★ encouragement of strategic and forward planning.

Finally, it is important to realise that a national youth policy is not necessarily about spending more money - it is about trying to ensure that services and programmes (government and non-government) affecting young women and men are provided appropriately, effectively, efficiently and equitably.

*In summary, a national youth policy represents a nationally agreed and gender-inclusive formula to meeting the needs, potential and aspirations of young women and men.*