

Formulating a National Youth Policy

“A call for action comes easily, but the analysis, development and implementation of a national youth policy do not”.

Guyana National Youth Policy

To achieve a credible and useful national youth policy will require a commitment to process, time and resources.

Ⓐ Process determination

The process for preparing a national youth policy needs careful consideration. The following tasks should be undertaken:

❶ Identification of co-ordinating agency

It is important that one agency take responsibility for co-ordination of the formulation and implementation process. Usually this will be the ministry responsible for youth affairs. This decision needs to be widely communicated to all stakeholders. The lead agency needs to appoint a team leader and allocate the necessary logistical supports (e.g. secretarial support, transport, communications).

❷ Achievement of broad based support

The importance of a national youth policy needs to be communicated widely. The formulation process must involve all the key players and achieve broad based consensus and commitment. Securing support from political, bureaucratic and youth affairs personnel is essential. The active support and encouragement of the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs is vital. The support from the highest political offices, e.g. President, Prime Minister, Leader of the Opposition Party), is also important. The value in achieving multi party support should not be underestimated. A national youth policy must also have an impact on all Ministries and NGOs whose services effect young women and men. Thus their awareness of the task and support from the outset, especially at the senior bureaucratic levels, must be achieved.

❸ Creation of a formulation reference group, task force or team

Many countries who have undertaken the design of a national youth policy state the importance of forming a national youth policy reference group, task force or team to oversee the formulation process. Experience has shown that it is ideal if such a reference group, task force or team should comprise representation from key ministries and agencies involved with youth affairs, as well as young women and men themselves. The allocation of person(s) to provide the “arms and legs” of servicing of the task force is essential to ensure the formulation exercise establishes and maintains momentum.

The formulation and adoption of a policy involves a series of key stages. Experience has shown that the following six stages are vital:

- A Process determination
- B Review of youth policy documents from other countries
- C Identification of needs and resources
 - ① Social profile of young people
 - ② Youth needs and attitudes study
 - ③ Survey of resources, programmes and services
 - ④ Gender analysis
 - ⑤ Consultation with key stakeholders
 - ⑥ Consultation with young women and men
 - ⑦ Formulation and dissemination of discussion paper(s)
- D Participatory planning workshops
- E Draft policy preparation and review
- F Adoption of policy

④ Determination of key tasks and a time-line

Agreement on the essential elements, tasks, responsibilities and time-line needs to be achieved from the outset. In addition, a budget will need to be allocated with key expenditure priorities established.

Ⓑ Review of youth policy documents from other countries

A number of countries (including 15 Commonwealth countries) have undertaken a national youth policy formulation exercise, and to benefit from their experiences and document output is sensible. The CYP Regional Centres and pan-Commonwealth Office, and UN Agencies like UNESCO, can assist in the provision of documents and appropriate contacts. However, some words of caution. Firstly, most existing policies fail to effectively accommodate gender considerations. Secondly, no national youth policy will be directly transferable from one country to another. Youth and cultural issues, needs, circumstances and expectations will vary. The essence of any “leapfrogging” exercise on the experiences of other countries is to “translate” not “transplant”; to “adapt” rather than “adopt”; and to engender rather than accept.

Besides national youth policies, it is vital that key international documents relevant to youth issues and needs should be studied. Important documents are included as Resource Documents within the Tool Kit.

Ⓒ Identification of needs and resources

A national youth policy is more likely to have long term effects if it is based on an understanding of the broad socio-demographic gender characteristics of the country, the expressed needs of its young men and women, and the resources available in the country to meet those needs. It is simply an exercise where a country catalogues their resources, deficits, opportunities and options.

John Ewen (1996) has identified five principal types of data useful in youth policy formulation, namely:

- ★ existing gender-disaggregated quantitative data e.g. census material;
- ★ existing gender-focused qualitative data e.g. reports, commissions, books, papers;
- ★ newly created gender-disaggregated quantitative data (gap filling);
- ★ newly created gender-focused qualitative data e.g. through use of surveys; and
- ★ information obtained through consultative processes.

The following two activities are essential:

- ① Review of other significant development documents in the country. A national youth policy must establish clear links between the development of young women and men and the overall national development plan.

An example of the bibliography used in the formulation of the National Youth Policy in Botswana is included within the Tool Kit as *Information Sheet No. 2*.

- ② Active consultation with, and participation by, young men and women.

The Commonwealth Youth Programmes document *Approaching Youth Policy* states clearly the importance of this stage:

“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?” (p36)

There is a temptation to just consult adults about young people, rather than to directly consult young men and women. Similarly, special effort should be made to consult on a wider basis than just articulate young women and men who are easy to reach.

This stage of the formulation process needs to include the following tasks:

1 Social profile of young people

Any determination of need must be viewed within the context of the overall socio-demographic characteristics of the country. Thus the preparation of a social profile may be a useful first step, if one does not already exist. As indicated in Section 2 above, a social profile should contain both quantitative and qualitative information. It could make gender-disaggregated quantitative reference to:

- * overall youth population figures and proportion of total population;
- * urban/rural and regional distribution;
- * rate of growth;
- * family structures;
- * ethnicity;
- * literacy and educational levels;
- * labour force participation and occupations;
- * income levels;
- * migration trends;
- * religious affiliation and participation;
- * recreation activities.

It could make qualitative assessment in terms of specific gender issues relating to disadvantages such as, illiteracy, lack of educational opportunity, unemployment, health problems, sexual abuse and physical violence, drug abuse, and crime.

The profile should highlight the information as it relates to young men and women in general, and to specific youth population groups.

2 Youth needs and attitudes study

This usually involves the use of one or more of the following research methods:

- * questionnaires
- * formal and informal consultation with young women and men (see below)
- * literature search on youth issues
- * collection of statistical information (see social profile above)

3 Survey of resources, programmes and services

The identification of current resources related to youth development in the country is a vital part of the needs assessment and the overall policy formulation process. It involves:

- * An inventory of services and resources

This represents a comprehensive statement of services, programmes and resources which are potentially available to young women and men in the country. When compared with the needs of young people, the gaps in programme/service provision and lack of access to programmes and services becomes clear. The preparation of an inventory may provide the basis for the production, publication and dissemination of a “*Directory of Services, Programmes and Resources for Young Women and Men*” – a useful resource document for other stages of the youth policy formulation and implementation processes.

The following types of information are often contained within such a directory:

- * description of programme/service;
- * target groups;
- * contact reference;
- * activities offered;
- * hours of service;
- * funding source(s);
- * planning for new services;
- * professional or voluntary leadership;
- * relationship to other services/programmes.

See *Information Sheet No. 3* within the Tool Kit for an example of a document for collecting such information.

* Service mapping

Service mapping is a means of compiling information on such issues as:

- geographical spread of facilities/programmes across country;
- location in relation to target groups;
- location in terms of access by transport;
- location of services in relation to other services.

4 Gender analysis

It will be important for special consideration to be given to a gender analysis of the roles, influences, opportunities and expectations that young women and men face in their society. Within the context of the country and its society, special attention should be given to:

- * the specific roles of young people;
- * access to resources; and
- * gender needs.

5 Consultation with key stakeholders

An effective national youth policy statement must have an impact on all services affecting young women and men. Thus the importance of consultation and liaison with those agencies (government and non-government) which have the potential to be affected and influenced by the national youth policy cannot be underestimated.

The concept of consultation is best understood from the following definitions:

- ✦ *"deliberate discussions between those proposing courses of action and those likely to be affected by them ..."*
- ✦ *"a process facilitating open discussion, deliberation and effective conference..."*
- ✦ *"making for deliberation, discussion or decision"*

A national youth policy is not just a policy statement for the lead youth ministry in the country. As stated earlier, a national youth policy must serve as a starting point for all groups seeking to be relevant to the needs and aspirations of young men and women.

6 Consultation with young women and men

The direct participation of young people in the process of policy formulation is vital. Therefore, any formulation process must structure opportunities for young women and men to be involved through formal and informal consultation and decision making sessions. The Tool Kit provides two useful Information Sheets to assist in structuring effective participation and consultation activities with young men and women.

The aim of any consultation phase is to ensure one's "listening net" is as wide as possible. It is important that contact and dialogue is not just established with "reachable" young men and women i.e. those young people found with traditional youth organisations, political parties and formal settings. Within such bodies, young men are often over-represented owing to the hierarchical nature of the organisational structure. It is important that the consultation process connects with unattached, alienated and marginalised young men and women. It is vital to utilise strategies that reach out to such groups. In order to ensure the full participation of young women, it may be necessary to develop non-traditional consultative structures.

7 Formulation and dissemination of a discussion paper(s)

Based upon outcomes from the above consultations and review, several countries have found it useful at this stage to prepare and distribute a discussion paper(s) incorporating the following:

- ✦ rationale, purpose and aims of a national youth policy
- ✦ demographics and activity profile of young men and women
- ✦ expressed needs and aspirations of young women and men
- ✦ major issues of concern
- ✦ current strategies, services and resources
- ✦ options for future policy, programme and co-ordination directions/mechanisms

Such a paper(s) should be distributed widely for reactions, and can be a valuable resource for the next stage. As part of this exercise, some countries have distributed a simple statement on youth issues and realities.

The above activities are interrelated and if carried out simultaneously will provide a source of thorough and conclusive information. Obviously the extent of available resources for the youth policy formulation exercise will determine the depth to which each task can be utilised.

D Participatory planning workshop(s)

Such an event(s) provides an opportunity for personnel from relevant agencies and ministries, and young women and men to come together to reflect upon the consultation and review stages, respond to the discussion paper(s), and discuss, debate and prioritise the key components of a national youth policy.

The quality of such an event(s) will often determine the eventual ownership and implementation of the final policy.

Such an event(s) ideally requires two to four days. As part of the workshop phase, a number of countries have benefited from the use of an outside resource person.

Access to such facilitators is possible through CYP's 'National Youth Policy 2000' initiative.

(E) Draft policy preparation and review

Following a planning workshop, a draft policy should be prepared and distributed for comment. Following such feedback, and with due consideration to presentation and format, a final version is usually submitted to the Minister responsible for Youth Affairs.

A pro forma response sheet is provided within the Tool Kit as Information Sheet No. 6 as a useful means to solicit comments from relevant agencies on the draft national youth policy.

(F) Adoption of policy

The significance of a national youth policy requires its adoption by the Parliament of the country. In most countries this has involved presentation to the Parliament by the appropriate Minister.

Facilitating the process

The process of national youth policy formulation will often require some degree of facilitation. This may include the following roles:

- * creating an atmosphere of energy and excitement
- * optimising the knowledge and expertise of participating individuals and groups
- * providing a brokerage role in terms of identifying and accessing relevant experiences and resources
- * encouraging collaborative efforts between relevant groups and networks
- * mediating between stakeholders
- * managing the process

