
YOUTH POLICIES - SOME PRINCIPLES FOR CONSIDERATION

Prof. K. S. Murshid
Assistant Secretary-General
Commonwealth Secretariat

Mr. Chairman, the purpose of my paper is to review the arguments, the ideas and the proposals that have been placed before us by the lead speakers and delegates over the last three days. I shall be looking for common ground and for those propositions which have withstood the critical examination of this meeting. I hope that in the end I will be able to commend to your attention some of the principles which have already been defined in the course of our discussions and which might form the basis of a youth policy.

Why have a youth policy?

Delegates will recall that Mr. Sabanayagam commenced his paper with a challenging question: "Why should a country have a youth policy?". In part, his answer was that of the practical administrator - because urban youth is restive and unless the youth can be appeased, they will rock the boat and may even sink it. But he also demonstrated the concern of a social reformer - rural youth is grossly underprivileged and some better way must be found for meeting their urgent needs.

Peter Mandelson, speaking as a young person from a Western industrialised country, considered that a youth policy was necessary because there were areas of social policy where young people had special needs arising from their age.

The Diploma Course participants had three principal reasons why there should be a youth policy - first, the numerical importance of youth (Mr. Sabanayagam's demographic tilt); second, the contribution they can make to national development; and third, the needs and aspirations of youth cannot legitimately be ignored.

In fact, Mr. Chairman, there was no serious challenge made to the concept of a youth policy, although if I remember correctly, some delegates felt that the case of youth's special needs had not been fully established.

An Integrated Policy

The question of the integration of different aspects of a youth policy concerned Mr. Sabanayagam, Mr. Mandelson, and the course participants.

Indeed, Mr. Sabanayagam's point was that although India had several youth programmes - the NAEP, the NYK, the NSSP and the NCC - this plethora of initials does not spell out YOUTH POLICY. As he put it:

"The programmes have been organized without any well-defined overall objectives having been kept in view. Naturally, the programmes do not subserve any pre-determined objectives. They are sporadic and isolated from each other."

Peter Mandelson called on governments to fill in the gaps in youth programme content to provide a coherent youth policy.

The authors of "Partners in Policy" stated that the scope of a national youth policy should ensure that there are adequate administrative arrangements to integrate the youth policy with other national policies and to integrate the delivery of youth services across the separate government departments and the non-government organizations implementing programmes affecting youth.

The need to integrate youth policy with other related national policies is an important point. The Secretary-General, you will recall, at the inauguration of this meeting, asked the question. "Do we need a single youth policy or a set of policies? Do we need a single blue-print or a series of integrated programmes articulated to meet specific needs but consistent each with the other and with a total social policy strategy?"

Professor Hall gave his answer - the total community approach. He rejected ad hoc policies which were reactions to pressing problems as they arose. He asked us to resist the temptation to treat youth as if they alone formed the community. We should plan for communities including young and old.

I found the Professor's approach persuasive, but why has the community development approach not found more favour in the social service systems of the world?

Although the Professor based his case upon the experience of the Caribbean and saw in the region's history a partial explanation for current policy responses, I would suggest that the Caribbean is by no means alone in adopting policies which are reactive to specific situations and which may be categorised as rescue operations.

Throughout the world, both in the developed industrial countries and in the developing countries, we still have fences at the top of the cliff, but each year we are placing more ambulances at the bottom.

Perhaps the explanation lies in the contribution from our colleague, Dr. Onyanka from Kenya, who reminded us of the political imperatives.

If, nevertheless, Commonwealth countries are persuaded to search for a more integrated approach to youth policy, they will need to consider the training implications.

It is an indication of how well we have applied our minds to

the selected topic of youth policy that we have not given much attention to the question of the training of youth workers. Professor Hall proposed that the field staff of the Ministry of Community Development should be trained to look for linkages and relationships between various services, events, programmes, and to try to develop relationships. Clearly, if a community development approach is to be adopted, the training of all social service workers should be closely related. Perhaps such officers as social workers, student counsellors, community health nurses, recreation and youth workers should be given the same basic course in human services, with the specialist subjects which differentiate their respective callings being added as required. This would not only aid communication between community-based workers, but would also assist in the movement of social service workers between the various groups as age and changing interests might dictate.

Youth Participation

A recurrent theme in all of the papers presented has been youth participation. The young people's voice - the need for it to sound and the need for it to be heard was at the heart of Mr. Mandelson's paper.

The need for consultation and involvement of those affected by government decisions is, of course, generally accepted as desirable. But only rarely is it achieved to a satisfactory degree. Consultation can delay decision-making, it can promote confusion rather than achieve clarification and it can serve the needs of the articulate minority rather than the silent majority. These are some of the reasons advanced by administrators the world over to explain why policies for the benefit of the community are devised in offices in the capital and not in the meeting place in the village.

But youth has a further hurdle. Their very lack of experience, their tendency to think laterally and their disrespect for proper channels, for approved procedures and for due process make them uneasy partners for the administrators.

Some countries have adopted youth policies which involve compulsory service - sometimes military in nature but always involving some form of community work. Delegates will recall that Mr. Sananayagam did not favour the compulsory approach to community service, because in that way the necessary spirit of dedicated service was unlikely to be forthcoming.

I notice however that many countries with quite liberal attitudes to personal freedom accept compulsory education and compulsory trade union membership. Those countries which favour compulsory youth service need, I would suggest, to be particularly careful to ensure that they mobilise their young not only in body but also in spirit.

The involvement of young people in community service is for their benefit just as much as it is for the benefit of the

community that is served. If they are given the opportunity for commitment and total involvement, they will achieve personal growth and enrichment of life.

I recall that Peter Mandelson pointed out that the apathetic young of today are the apathetic old of tomorrow. Apathy is no basis for national development. An educational system which is based on instruction and which fails to engage the understanding or to develop the creativity of the young is an advance order for later rescue operations.

Diversity and the Policy Response

In designing our procedures for participation and consultation, and indeed in constructing our entire youth policy strategy, we must recognize the great diversity of the youth population.

I recall that Mr. Sabanayagam noted that the vitality associated with youth now lasts much longer and this may have led to the extension of the age range of our clients up to 35.

Of course, age is a very relative matter. A prime minister at 35 would be young indeed, but a footballer of these years would be coming down the hill fast.

In identifying the dimensions of the youth sector for the purpose of policy-making, I would, personally, prefer to work on the basis of 15 to 25, although I accept that many youth ministries will be concerned with the out-of-school activities of school-aged children.

Within that relatively narrow age range, there will still be closely defined client groups. As the Secretary-General pointed out, a young tradesman of 24 with a job and a wife and two children is more likely to identify with a married tradesman twice his age than with a 17 year old apprentice.

Let me here enter a special plea for the young women of the Commonwealth. Let us be sure that our youth policies meet their special needs. If the young find the transition from the relatively protected environments of home and school daunting and the search for work dispiriting, how much more so is it for the young women who have to face, in many countries, a discrimination which is based on sex.

The diversity within the client group dictates the need for a diversity in policy responses and the need for a very sensitive and delicate formula from those designing, implementing and administering youth policies. It brings to the fore once again the need for consultation and participation of the young and it emphasises the need for a policy which is both comprehensive and flexible.

Both these points are made in "Partners in Policy". As the students rightly put it, "a policy is not a strait-jacket and as youth workers we would expect that a national youth policy would take into account the following variables :

- regional diversity within each country
- the diversity of the youth population
- the necessary level of autonomy for youth
- workers who are interacting with young people"

I dealt earlier in this paper with the need for an integrated policy. The fact that there are many different types of need among many different categories of young people brings to the fore the need for policy integration and for a clear concept of the overall objective of youth policy. Otherwise we are back with what has been termed ad hoc and fragmentary approach.

All social policy systems and programmes need to be flexible because societies are organic - they grow, develop, change their contents and nature.

Policies must be able to adapt to ensure that they maintain relevance.

Policy and Programme Evaluation

A policy once established has its very existence as its main justification. The administrators tend to like what is, rather than the uncertainties of what ought to be. The politicians favour a status quo which does not upset existing beneficiaries.

Moreover, it is not always easy to establish that an ongoing programme has lost touch with reality.

That is why, I believe, Mr. Sabanayagam was right to stress the need for systematic evaluation of all youth programmes.

National Policies and the CYP

A further conclusion arises from this need for comprehensive, flexible and relevant youth policies. Youth policies must be tailored to the specific needs of individual countries - it would not be feasible, let alone wise, to produce a blueprint policy suitable for all countries. To do so would require the adoption of a degree of generality which would descend to the banal.

As Mr. Sabanayagam said in his paper, youth development is an extremely sensitive area. Countries of the Commonwealth must seek their own solutions on the basis of their own needs and their own experience. But the experience of other Commonwealth countries may well help them to decide that they should avoid certain courses of action or, more positively, adopt some other policy option.

It is not surprising in a meeting which has adopted a very constructive and positive approach to youth policy making

that comparatively little thought has been given to the obstacles which lie in the way. It is probably true to say that youth policy rarely receives the high rating it deserves in the national policy priority list. All the more reason, therefore, for the practitioners of this delicate art to seek help from each other in devising policies which will be convincing to those who determine financial and legislative priorities.

Both Mr. Sabanayagam and the course participants saw a role for the CYP in helping Commonwealth countries to develop youth policies.

Mr. Sabanayagam proposed that the CYP should, on request and with appropriate discrimination, secure the services of experts to assist in policy formulation.

The CYP does have the ability to do this, either through its own funds (it has £ 20,000 set aside in 1979/80 for Advisory Services to Governments and for consultancies and commissions) or through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation.

He also proposed that the CYP should continue to help in the exchange of ideas by following up on this meeting with further meetings at regional or sub-regional level. This too would be possible.

His third suggestion was that the CYP should act as a clearing house for information on the activities of other countries in the youth field. This is indeed one of the CYP's functions and the information we are gathering will have from the country papers provided at this meeting will be of great assistance in updating our present information and I hope that those representatives to this meeting who were not able to provide a country statement will recognize their value and send one to the Commonwealth Secretariat as soon as possible. We may well wish to publish the statements, in whole or in part, in the publication which will be produced as a result of this meeting.

The authors of "Partners in Policy" recommended an increasing emphasis on fellowships and short term national training courses. They will be pleased to know that there will be increased provision for fellowships in the 1979/80 financial year. I am less hopeful that we will be able to run more national training courses. However, should the funding of the Programme be increased, this will be one of the first priorities.

Conclusions

Summing up what I have presented in this paper, I suggest to you that we might agree that the following six principles or conclusions might be used to guide our thinking in the area of youth policy :

- (1) A youth policy is necessary;
- (2) The policy has to be integrative and not divisive;
- (3) It must provide for participation by the young in policy formulation, implementation and administration;
- (4) It must recognize the diversity of the youth population and the great variety of needs; the policy must therefore be comprehensive and flexible;
- (5) To ensure relevance is maintained, it must be continually evaluated;
- (6) Although each country must determine for itself the nature and content of its own youth programme, it should both learn from the experience of others and help others itself by providing information on its own experiences through co-operation through the Commonwealth Youth Programme.

Mr. Chairman, this is no prescription for a detailed youth programme, but I hope a useful set of principles to which we could all subscribe.

I hope that it will contribute to the new ideas, or the new variations on old ideas for policy which you will take back with you to your own countries. What you do with them there, in the words of the distinguished delegate from the Solomon Islands, will be your business.