

CHAPTER 4

YOUTH: SOME SPECIAL ISSUES

4.1 THE CONCEPT OF GENERATIONS

Before proceeding further to discuss the methodology of evaluation it will be useful to look at some of the special issues which might relate to the evaluation of youth programmes.

In all societies there is a differentiation into generations, generally based upon age differences. However, the nature of this differentiation varies widely from one society to another. In some of the most simple societies, young people are perceived as children until they pass through the initiation ceremony admitting them to adulthood, whereupon they become full members of their particular society. This transition from child to adult may be a relatively brief process in a society where adult roles are clearly defined and not subject to continuing change.

In more complex societies, the notion of a formal transition from childhood to adulthood tends to disappear. The initiation ceremony is replaced by a lengthy process of learning about the complex diversity of adult roles which the individual may take and in achieving skills to fit these roles. In such a society the actual point of transition to full adult status will often vary from one sphere of social activity to another. Thus the individual may become an adult for purposes of voting at one age, for purposes of military service at another age, for purposes of entering into legal contracts concerning property at another age, and for purposes of defining responsibility within the criminal code of the country at still another age.

One result of this increasing complexity of the transition between childhood and adulthood is the recognition of a particular group, generally labelled "youth" and constituting young people who have an ambiguous status somewhere between the child and the adult. The Commonwealth Secretariat noted in a summary report for the Ministerial Conference on Youth held in Zambia in 1973 the following approach to definition:

"For the purpose of the Secretariat's studies and seminars, 'youth' was understood to comprise in broad terms, the age range from 12 to 25 years. It was, however,

recognised that the age range and other characteristics denoting 'youth' would vary from country to country, and could well vary within a country over a period of time, especially in societies undergoing rapid change".¹

One other result of this situation is that the age of entry to full adult status has tended to be further postponed during the recorded history of the developed countries. We will comment below on the approach of the Canadian Government to this issue.

A side effect of the differentiation by generation is the extent to which young people tend to be separated off from the rest of society. One increasingly hears such terms as "adolescent subculture" or "generation gap". The young person tends to be forced by society to become dependent upon his or her peers, to develop a separate pattern of social life from the rest of society, and to seek goals within that separate life which are at variance with the adult society as a whole.

This brings us to one of the key questions which must be asked in relationship to the design of youth programmes. Development and recognition of different generations is inevitable but the separation off of the youth generation which has occurred in many societies is not inevitable. We can devise programmes which will heighten the separation of the youth generation or we can devise programmes which will strengthen their integration with total society. In actual fact it is probably desirable that we reach a compromise in which the opportunity of young people to differ from and to challenge the position of their elders is perceived and yet, at the same time, young people maintain a loyalty to continuity with the historical traditions of their society.

On either side of such a balanced position, one finds conformity and stagnation of the total society at one extreme and revolution at the other. The striking of the compromise which maintains a stable but adaptable society is, in fact, the challenge which underlies the planning of all youth programmes.

Thus when we come to judge the goals and outcomes of a programme we must avoid falling into the position of judging the success of any programme by the extent to which it duplicates the values and characteristics of the older generation in those who will be responsible for the future. Essentially in a changing society one must ask how far the youth programme is succeeding in preparing young people not only to handle change but to provide responsible leadership for change.

This suggestion is extended and admirably expressed in the report of the Commonwealth Ministerial Meeting on Youth referred to earlier, in these words:

"Every participant agreed, for example, that means should be sought to establish an effective dialogue with the younger members of society and that procedures and

programmes should be devised to bring youth into active and responsible participation in national development. Ministers accepted the principle that provision for youth should form an integral part of national development plans and programmes and should not be seen as emergency or palliative measures separate from the overall development process.

“For these ends to be achieved positive attitudes must be engendered on both sides, mutual confidence has to be developed, the two-way generation gap bridged. These objectives will not be easily achieved; but to await the ideal moment before beginning to act means to delay action indefinitely.”

4.2 THE IMPACT OF CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT

It would be difficult to comment more concisely upon the impact of change and development on youth than in the words of two recent reports. Firstly we quote here from the Summary Paper to the Commonwealth Ministerial Conference on Youth referred to above. This quotation presents clearly and concisely the key problems facing the majority of Commonwealth countries:

“The place and status of youth within society varies a great deal between countries.. Increasingly, disparities appear between the age at which physical maturity is attained and that at which young people are accepted as having reached adulthood. It is not unusual to find that young people are perceived by the older generation as unable to make a positive contribution to planning, decision-making or administration. They are often restricted, not only in their educational and economic opportunities, but also in their day-to-day life styles. These restrictions are commonly imposed by the traditional attitudes of older people. While a society remains largely free from outside influences, these restrictions often are accepted, but where a society is exposed to external forces hastening the pace of change, they are obvious sources of frustration and anger among the young.

Changes in the status of women

Changes in the status of women, which are coming about in countries throughout the world, also create tensions and difficulties for all young people, and especially for girls. Young women increasingly seek better work opportunities than in the past but are often frustrated by unhelpful attitudes and inadequate opportunities for education and training. At the same time, they are often accorded less opportunities than their male contemporaries to participate in community life or national development.

The heterogeneous nature of ‘youth’

While Commonwealth and regional discussions can have a practical value they cannot take into account all the complexities of the situations prevailing in individual countries. When detailed plans are to be constructed, generalisations about ‘youth’ must be expanded into sufficient detail to enable particular groups to be identified. At this stage ‘youth’ can no longer usefully be regarded as a single homogeneous group.

Categories of ‘youth’ can be constructed in different ways to suit different purposes and, indeed, various systems of classification will be necessary when comprehensive planning is undertaken. For example, when considering questions of providing

facilities for training and employment it may be desirable to begin by classifying young people according to their educational background:

- (a) those with no schooling;
- (b) those with incomplete primary schooling;
- (c) those with primary schooling only;
- (d) those with secondary schooling;
- (e) those with trade or technical training;
- (f) those with tertiary education.

Other factors, however, will have to be taken into consideration if programmes are to be devised to meet the various needs of groups within these broad classifications. When establishing a programme for urban youth, for example, it may be important to take into account not only the educational background but the special needs of —

- (a) those from families long resident in the city;
- (b) those who have migrated from other cities;
- (c) those who have migrated from rural areas;
- (d) transients.

The population problem

It has been said that 'Youth are a problem primarily because there are so many of them.' At the present time, young people not only comprise at least 60 per cent of the Commonwealth population, but their number is continuing to increase. In the regional seminars, attention has been drawn to the urgency of establishing effective family planning programmes on a national basis. Obviously, family planning is a long-term programme in so far as its impact upon youth matters is concerned, and the very real political and social problems raised by proposals for population control must be appreciated. Nevertheless, unless the rate of population increase can effectively be reduced at an early date, many countries will face escalating problems of providing education, employment and adequate nutrition for their people.

Youth in distress

Young people who are frustrated by the lack of any means to achieve their aspirations, whether these are legitimate or unrealistic, can be a threat to the stability and social well-being of a society. If they do not merely seek refuge in apathy and dissociation from their community, they may retreat into drug-taking (including alcoholism), indulge in delinquency, vandalism and other anti-social behaviour, or become political dissidents and rebels. At the very least, such deviant behaviour represents wastage of human resources and distress to the young people concerned, and, in reality, nation building cannot be effected without these young people, who are an integral part of the future of their country.

Deviance may result from specific handicap and other individual factors. Most educational systems lack the resources to diagnose, assess and provide for those with learning difficulties and other personal problems. As a result, these young people are likely to 'drop out' of the education system and add to the number of young people in distress. Nor is deviance limited to those who have had some contact with the formal school system. The difficulties in organising preventive and curative facilities for out-of-school young people in distress are formidable but none the less real. The development of appropriate techniques and suitably trained personnel to meet this increasing problem presents a major challenge to Commonwealth countries severally and jointly.

Traditional practice has been to establish punitive, legalistic or welfare-oriented programmes for young people in distress, treating them separately from the general youth population. There is now a growing concern, however, that these programmes

often operate only to accentuate or to confirm the alienation of the young people concerned. More attention must be given to the prevention of deviance and distress among youth, and to developing new treatment patterns which will foster the re-integration of alienated youth. Programmes for such young people should be organised within the context of normal developmental programmes wherever possible.

The problems of alienation and deviance are indeed complex and it has not been possible within the framework of the Secretariat's youth study programme so far to devote adequate attention to this specific issue. It has become evident, however, that a substantial part of this problem arises out of the difficulties in generating enough satisfying employment opportunities, and that the provision of suitable jobs must be one major component of long term planning for the prevention of personal distress as well as the promotion of economic well-being.

Leisure activities

Leisure is an element of life in most societies and young people should be enabled to make use of their leisure time in an enjoyable and satisfying way. Throughout the Commonwealth many programmes have been designed with a wholly recreational emphasis; such programmes can, of course, play an important part not only in providing for positive use of leisure time but also in fostering wider interests and influencing attitudes. In rural areas programmes of this kind can be of especial value, since one of the reasons why young people abandon country life for towns and cities is the lack of social amenities in the villages. Some provision can be made at low cost, in the form of a meeting place and basic recreational and sporting facilities. In addition to its intrinsic value, this type of programme can help to make contact with the mass of the rural population who are often unaffected by development-oriented activities, and, indeed, who may regard such activities with suspicion. Apparently minor and purely social programmes can become growth points for subsequent activities with inbuilt elements of vocational training or cash-earning potential.

While recreational programmes can serve a useful purpose, in the overall planning of youth programmes the need must be born in mind for a balance to be established between those of a purely recreational nature and those aimed, for example, at training the individual in various skills, with a view to either personal development or more appropriate employment.

The need to influence changes in attitudes

The Challenge posed by the need to undertake planning for and with youth is immense. Not only must ways be found by which young people can enjoy relevant educational experiences and achieve an economically productive way of life; ways must also be found to help them develop a strong sense of national identity and international awareness which will enable them to find a secure and satisfying role in the life of their communities, reducing the possibilities of frustration and alienation.

Countries must face not only the need to provide services and resources, but also the more difficult tasks of influencing positive changes of attitude in people of all age-groups.

Among the major factors influencing changes in attitudes there may be included:

- (i) changes in population size, age-distribution within populations, distribution of population as between rural and urban areas;
- (ii) changes in the physical environment and nutrition;
- (iii) the impact of instant communication, resulting in young people becoming aware of life styles different from their own and developing personal aspirations which are difficult to satisfy;
- (iv) the increasing uncertainty of older members of the community about their established customs and beliefs which transfers itself to their successors,

contributing to the current problems of disillusionment, disengagement and delinquency, manifested in destructive actions (such as drug-taking, violence to self and others) and mental illness."

Next we turn to the report of the Canadian Committee on Youth. This Committee was commissioned by the Canadian Government to examine "the aspirations, attitudes and needs of youth, and the Government's present role in this area". This Committee was concerned with examining the place of the youth generation in a developed and affluent society — one in which the "generation gap" had become a major factor and the entry of young people to full adult status was being postponed for an undue period of their life. Their summary report expresses the situation and recommends a response to it in these terms:

"The attempt to 'define' youth is in many ways a pointless exercise, for this age group exhibits all the heterogeneity of any other age group within this country. However, it is evident that young people perceive themselves as a distinct group, not on the basis of age but rather on the basis of the commonality of their situation and attitudes; i.e., that they are facing for the first time a morass of institutions (educational, occupational, recreational, governmental) which they find unsatisfactory and unresponsive. And they are seriously challenging the traditional wisdoms and premises inherent in these institutions. Although, for example, students and young workers express their discontent in differing terms, the essence of their statements is sufficiently similar across the country to permit one to speak in a generalized way of 'Canadian youth'.

"However, if, as the report demonstrates, these dissatisfactions and new attitudes are not a function of age but of larger societal changes forecast first by the young, then the major objective must be to deal with their critique in terms of the whole society. For to treat their critique as a 'youth problem' and respond only by the formulation of a 'youth policy' or a 'youth department' would be to further isolate and frustrate youth by precluding their avenues to effect and change the whole society into which they are moving.

"Youth perceive social institutions differently from adults and this difference in perception is one of kind rather than of degree. For example, youth are questioning traditional family patterns while experimenting with other community relationships as is demonstrated by the growth of living co-operatives. Youth would like to find, somewhere in society, institutions capable of filling these and other roles as youth themselves define the roles. They are not necessarily rejecting society, but they are challenging the way society defines and treats them.

"There are several ways for the adult community to 'deal with' the gap between the perceptions of the adult and youth communities; it can insist that youth conform to its model, or ignore it, or provide outlets either real or token, or it can work with youth to transform the very basis of the relationship between the two groups. The first of these options has predominated to date, partially because of the unwillingness to change but also because attempts at change are often unco-ordinated ad hoc efforts which fail to bring youth closer to institutions. The results are visible: withdrawal of youth as a group into an artificial 'youth class' in which the peer group increasingly replaces the rest of society as the premise of learning, and withdrawal of individual young people into their own minds where psychic experimentation provides the freedom, flexibility and novel perception denied by society. The Committee believes that, unless changes are made, the trend towards separation will increase with force and rapidity over the next 10 years.

"What appears to be setting in among many young people in this country is a 'great refusal'. Their confidence in the existing order is being undermined on two fronts; not only are they challenging many of the values inherent in our society, but also the traditional motives for participation in the 'system' are increasingly unavailable, such as incentives for a good job through education. This 'refusal' which ranges all the way from disenchantment to rejection is manifested in the growing absenteeism in high schools, the decline in university enrolment (relative to predictions), and the increase in drug-use among all classes of young people.

"But this growing refusal by youth to participate in society on the predefined terms of that society is accompanied by the search for new styles of living and new working relationships with the rest of society. The separation of youth from society is not an imperative imposed by youth. There is a demand by young people for more integrated relationships between themselves, their immediate environment and the collective political and social goals and activities of Canadian society. For this closer relationship to be established, society must demonstrate a willingness and a capacity to change. Youth also demands a certain rationality in the way society relates to them, as a preliminary proof of willingness to change."²

4.3 THE QUESTION OF GOALS

One of the most difficult tasks in front of both planners and evaluators is in the area of decision about goals. The planner of a youth programme is faced with the problems of determining goals which are appropriate to the society in which he is operating and to changes which are taking place in that society. The evaluator has to ask the questions of how appropriate are the goals, how well do they relate to the present development of this society, and how far do they come to grips with the changes which are taking place.

In a society where change is extremely rapid, this problem becomes far greater. The goals which are appropriate for a youth programme in a developing country with massive unemployment will become quite inappropriate if that country becomes increasingly affluent and moves towards full employment. However the goals of a programme do become enshrined in the institutionalization of its organizational structures and resistance to change is all too common.

The programme which is out of step with the rate of progress in a country is a potential source of frustration and disillusionment on the part of young people. The importance of adequate evaluation and of responsiveness to the changes suggested by evaluation cannot be underestimated.

4.4 INDIVIDUAL GROWTH AND EVALUATION

One final point which must be stressed, even though it should be self-evident, is that young people are passing through a stage of life characterized by extremely rapid growth. This very process of growth means that individual

young people will be learning new knowledge and new skills, maturing both physically and emotionally, and gradually moving towards adulthood. This process will occur irrespective of whether young people are involved in any formal educational or other community programme.

Obviously the growth process will be accelerated, perhaps directed, and hopefully maximised by educational or other community programmes. Whenever one sets out to evaluate a youth programme one is almost inevitably examining the extent to which young people are being helped to grow as a result of the programme. It is therefore of importance that any evaluation we do distinguishes between that growth which takes part as a result of the programme being evaluated, and that which would have occurred as a result of other influences and which bears no relationship to participation in the programme under assessment.

This may mean applying a process of evaluation or measurement not only to the young people taking part in the programme but also to a similar control group. Two examples of evaluation studies of this kind are summarized in Section B of this volume (see under BRITAIN : Payne, Drummond and Lunghi; also Roberts and White).

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. *Commonwealth Youth Ministers' Meeting, Lusaka, Zambia, 1973.* (Commonwealth Secretariat, London, 1973).
2. Canadian Committee on Youth, *Summary – It's Your Turn* (Information Canada, Ottawa, 1972.)