

THE ROLE OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICES

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1. Preamble

1. The past decade has witnessed the creation of national service schemes for youth in many developing countries, both inside and outside the Commonwealth. A variety of approaches has been tried, with varying degrees of success; and, in view of differing conditions in every country, it is apparent that no standard pattern of scheme can be advocated. Certain policy considerations and problems, however, will be common to the majority of schemes; and this paper sets out to suggest possible answers based on the Kenya experience.

II Why have a National Youth Service? Is it worth its cost?

2. Common reasons for the creation of schemes include:-

- i. The assimilation of militant youth who have been actively engaged in pre-independence struggles and who, once Independence is achieved, require re-orientation to fit them for normal working lives. Such a reason may be politically pressing to a degree where it dominates all others at the start, but its nature is transitory, and it has no place in long-range planning.
- ii. The creation of a pool of trained (and possibly armed) manpower to support the Army/Police in defence/internal security. In Kenya, legal provision exists for the Youth Service to be employed with the military in the event of "war; insurrection, hostilities or public emergency", and it has been found in practice that a by-product of Youth Service training is to fit a substantial number of young people to go on to careers in the armed forces, Police and Prisons departments; but

these factors were not fundamental to the creation of the Service, nor do they affect its day-to-day operation.

- iii. The relief of unemployment. In an under-developed country with a rapidly growing population, the practical value of this reason is likely to be marginal - although its psychological value may be great.
- iv. Education and Training. It must be noted that the cost of keeping a youngster under national service is much the same as putting him through some form of secondary education (between £100 and £200 p.a.)
- v. Project work in aid of national development. Again, the cost of keeping a National Youth Serviceman differs little from paying the minimum wage to an unskilled workman; but there is the advantage that a disciplined corps of volunteers can be used in isolated areas where it would be difficult to employ ordinary labour.
- vi. Creation of a national spirit among youth - an important factor where a country has many tribes, and, for unity, must seek to move from a tribal to a national outlook.

3. The strength of a proper national youth service is that it can combine all these things in a single scheme; and that reasons (iv) and (v), taken together, make good economic sense.

III. How large should a Service be?

4. Obviously, this must depend on many factors. It is worth considering, however, that it may be false economy to make a Service too small - since, once basic accommodation, staff, transport, etc., have been provided, overheads do not rise in proportion to an increase in Servicemen and women.

5. For example, in Kenya we compute costs as follows:-

<u>Service strength</u>	<u>Cost per Serviceman per annum</u>
3000	K £ 151
4000	K £ 134
5000	K £ 127
7000	K £ 120

IV. How long should the Service period be?

6. Kenya started by stipulating one year; but experience soon showed this to be too short. Time is required for a man to:-

- (a) pass through basic recruit training;
- (b) serve in the field and make his contribution to project work;
- (c) be selected for a course of vocational training, and pass through that course; and
- (d) exercise his new skill within the Service, and gain experience in it.

7. Two years is a reasonable period to cover all this, and is now standard in Kenya. There is flexibility, however, so that a man can be released after only one year; or can volunteer for a third (or even a fourth) year where circumstances make it desirable.

V. What sort of discipline is recommended?

8. If the work and training programmes of a National Youth Service are to justify its cost, they must be efficient. If efficiency is to be achieved there must be discipline. A permissive approach to hundreds, perhaps thousands, of young people living en masse under camp conditions for long periods of time is useless, and could be dangerous.

9. Having regard to this, the Kenya National Youth Service sought to design a system which would achieve discipline without destroying the voluntary nature of the Service. The solution, which has now worked satisfactorily for five years, is as follows:-

- i. The Service is uniformed, and has a clearly defined rank structure.
- ii. All recruits are required to undergo two months basic training on joining the Service. This is designed to inform them about the Service's aims and organisation, give them basic skills in such matters as campcraft and first-aid; and, above all, to accustom them to accept constituted authority. As in Army basic-training, there is an emphasis on foot-drill; but no arms training is given.
- iii. The N.Y.S. Act and Regulations provide for offenders to be charged and punished under similar procedures to those used in the armed forces, punishments varying from an official warning through fatigues, fines and confinement for not more than 14 days, to dismissal from the Service. However, desertion carries no penal sanction; so that punishments are accepted in voluntary spirit since, in the last analysis, a person can always leave the Service rather than undergo them.
- iv. It is made very clear to Members that the Discharge Certificate given to them when they leave the Service will truly and accurately reflect their disciplinary record; and also that the Service will not recommend them for outside employment unless their record is good.

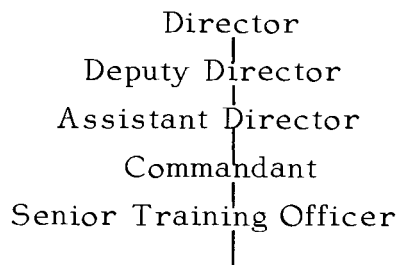
10. It is vital, of course, that officers set the best possible example at all times. Officers who fail to reach the standard required should be disciplined without hesitation - and, if necessary, be removed from their posts.

VI Where should the leaders come from?

11. In starting the Kenya National Youth Service, it was accepted as a fundamental premise that the establishment of good discipline, and good standards of character training, must have top priority. In selecting the initial cadre of uniformed officers, therefore, we sought men of strong character and upright personal lives likely to be able to exercise authority over young people by precept and example. It was also necessary that they should have the administrative ability to control funds, stores and transport.

12. We did not accept the view, advanced from certain quarters, that the running of a National Youth Service was an extremely difficult, almost esoteric, task for which all leaders must first undergo special training. In any case, we had no time in which to run courses - since the Service started under great pressure, and our first officers had barely time to unpack before the first intake of men arrived! In the event, we pinned our faith on the maturity and commonsense of the officers we chose - former soldiers, policemen, schoolmasters, hostel wardens, etc. - and were justified in doing so. Since not all of these had administrative experience at the level required, they were supported by half-a-dozen expatriate officers supplied by the British Ministry of Overseas Development, and by two Staff Officers (one British and one Israeli). The system worked well, and now, 5 years later, all save two of the expatriates have been phased out.

13. Once a Service is going, it will throw up leaders from among its own ranks and slowly become self-sufficient in this respect. In Kenya, over the five-year period, Servicemen have climbed the promotional ladder (set out below) as far as the rank of Senior Training Officer, and are providing very competent and responsible leadership at all junior levels.



Training Officer
 |
 Section Commander
 |
 Section Officer Grade I
 |
 Section Officer Grade II/ Sergeant (Volunteer)
 |
 Corporal (Volunteer)
 |
 Lance-Corporal (Volunteer)
 |
 Servicemen/ Servicewomen.

VII. How should the Volunteer's time be split between work and education?

14. As a working guide, a ratio of two-thirds work to one-third education is reasonable. However, it is the Kenya view that work and education cannot be regarded as existing in water-tight compartments. The Service's project programme is itself an education in good work habits, and these are more important than the impartation of any particular trade or skill. Furthermore, life in a project camp under isolated bush or desert conditions, is invaluable training in self-reliance.

15. The standard Kenya programme for each company of 100 recruits is as follows:-

<u>Month of Service</u> No: -	<u>Disposition of</u> <u>Company:-</u>
1)	
2)	
3)	
4)	
5)	
6)	
7)	
8)	
9)	
10)	
11)	
	basic training
	Project/Farm work
	Centralised full-time education

12)	
13)	
14)	
15)	Farm/Project work
16)	
17)	
18)	
19)	Centralised full-time
20)	education
21)	
22)	
23)	General duties
24)	

16. As the Company progresses, its numbers dwindle - since members are continually withdrawn to enter specialist courses for junior leaders, trade training, agricultural training, driving, plant operating, store-keeping, accounts and clerical work, health inspection duties, etc., etc. Thus, in its final months, a company may well have shrunk to no more than twenty or thirty men - who may be amalgamated into another company, or be deployed on general duties in a Unit Headquarters.

VIII. What kind of education should be given?

17. After six months in the field, each company is withdrawn to follow a three months' concentrated educational programme at a special Unit. Classes range from basic literacy up to lower-secondary. No attempt is made to prepare the men for the same examinations as are set to school-children. Instead, the aim is to eradicate illiteracy, and then to give courses in English language, basic mathematics, elementary science and civics. Instruction is related as closely as possible to the likely practical needs of the students in everyday life on leaving the Service.

18. Courses of basic agricultural theory are also incorporated, being designed to relate to the practical farming work which each Company undertakes during one or another of its periods in the field (the Service possesses its own farms ranging from a large sheep and cattle ranch to a high-fertility mixed farm). Men who show particular aptitude are sponsored to a six-month course at a Farmers' Training Centre, and then go back to one of the Service's farms for further practical experience in a supervisory role - following which they qualify for a special certificate and can either gain employment on private farms or go on to advanced training with the Government Agricultural or Veterinary Departments.

19. Men may also be seconded from their companies to attend formal trade training at a special National Youth Service Unit at the Coast. Here crash courses have been designed to enable large numbers of men to reach the standard of the Government Grade III Trade Test (a recognised labour qualification) within 12 months (inclusive of selection time, a mid-course holiday, and the final trade-testing procedures which are carried out in Nairobi). The trades covered include masonry, carpentry, fitting, turning, vehicle mechanics and electrical work. Instructors have been provided by the Geneva-based World Organisation for Rehabilitation and Training under a contract financed by the United States Agency for International Development, and Kenyan counterpart instructors are also being trained.

20. Although the greater number of N.Y.S. tradesmen come from these special courses (where the success-rate at first attempt varies between 80% and 90%), a steady stream of personnel pass the same tests direct from the Service's Field Units, all of which have developed on-the-job training programmes of their own. It is of note that girls also do well, and have successfully taken tests in such trades as fitting and turning which had never before been passed by women in Kenya.

21. In the Service's very large Central Workshops in Nairobi, a limited number of personnel are taken on from the Grade III to the Grade II Trade Test - which involves their extending their service period from two years to three in order to have time to complete the course.

Also controlled from the Central Workshops is the Service's Driving School (80% of Service vehicles are driven by volunteers - men or women - trained within the Service), and the Plant Operator Training School which carries out useful construction work on actual projects at the same time as producing men qualified to handle bulldozers, graders and similar heavy plant.

22. There are numerous in-service opportunities for volunteers to train in store-keeping, accounts and clerical duties, health work, etc., etc. as the Service operates with a minimum of salaried personnel and much of the responsibility of its day-to-day running must be carried out properly and efficiently by enlisted men and women.

23. The fundamental policy on which all the foregoing is based is the need:-

- (a) to generally foster initiative and a spirit of self-reliance,
- (b) to give those men and women who will return to their rural areas (about two-thirds of the total strength) skills which are likely to be useful to them - either in better farming, or in the development of small rural businesses and industries,
- (c) to give the remaining one third of the volunteers qualifications which will enable them to obtain a footing in the increasingly competitive urban economy,

and to achieve this through an integrated scheme of work and training.

IX. What kind of work can a National Youth Service undertake?

24. In Kenya, we took the following as our criteria :-

- (a) the Service was created for work - not for show.

- (b) in view of its relatively expensive nature, the Service should not be employed on minor jobs that are properly the province of community development and self-help groups; but should undertake tasks of real economic significance.
- (c) each project should be capable of providing sufficient work to occupy at least one Company (100 men). It was felt that detachments smaller than this would not be economical in terms of administration and supply.

25. Since efficiency on major projects was the aim, a reasonable balance had to be struck between hand-labour and the use of machinery. Through the United States Agency for International Development, a fleet of heavy plant (bulldozers, graders, scrapers, rollers, cranes, etc.) was obtained from American "excess" sources. Much of this plant was old (10 to 15 years of age) and this has created many problems in regard to spare parts. Nevertheless, it gave (and is giving) reasonable service and was certainly suitable for a new organisation that had to start from scratch in gaining project experience. The Service is now embarking on a phased programme to replace its old plant with modern machines.

26. Three types of project have proved particularly suitable for National Youth Service work in Kenya:-

- (a) Road-building. The Service began by constructing access roads in National Park, then undertook a 35 mile road across the Aberdare Mountains, then moved on to complete a £500,000 major road to service a new hydro-electric scheme. Its largest present project is a 300 mile road across the desert to link Kenya with Ethiopia.
- (b) Bush-clearing, both to combat tsetse-fly infestation and to open up new areas of land for settlement. The largest scheme so far has been the clearing of 14,000 acres of dense bush near Lake Victoria.
- (c) General earthworks needed, for example, in airport construction; or in controlling rivers by building anti-flood embankments.

27. With most projects, the Service works on behalf of Government Ministries or public bodies such as the National Parks. It bills them for work done, and pays the money back to the Treasury as an appropriation-in-aid. Some very large projects, such as major roads, are specially financed in their own right, and the Service undertakes them in liaison with the Ministry of Works and with firms of civilian Consulting Engineers.

28. The Service responds readily to national emergencies of any kind, and detachments can be rushed to assist in famine relief, etc., as necessary.

X. What status should a Youth Service have vis-a-vis other uniformed bodies?

29. Since members of a National Youth Service are not salaried, it is the more important that morale be kept high by all possible means, and that the volunteers should feel they enjoy parity of esteem with persons serving in the Armed Forces, the Police, etc. Equally, it is vital that the latter Services understand the functions of the Youth Service, and do not regard it as some sort of up-start rival. In Kenya, great care was taken from the start to foster understanding and co-operation; and relationships are now extremely good. On national ceremonial occasions (State Openings of Parliament and the like) the National Youth Service has clearly defined functions of its own such as ushering and control of seating. On National Parades, the Service provides both marching and mechanised detachments (the former carrying spades instead of rifles). The Director of the Service is accorded the same courtesies (from the use of a Flag Car to a seat on the Presidential dais) as are other Service Commanders. On a payment basis, the Service provides men and women for gate control, ticket selling, car park control, arena attendance, stewarding, etc., at Agricultural Shows, exhibitions and conferences. This is valuable, not only for morale, but for bringing the Service to public notice and, by demonstrating the high qualities of discipline and honesty possessed by the men, gaining the interest and confidence of employers.

XI. Conclusion.

30. There is nothing intrinsically difficult about creating a National Youth Service. Young people will respond with enthusiasm to tasks, no matter how difficult, which they can see are of benefit to their country. The hardships of living under tough conditions are accepted in a spirit of adventure. Discipline and esprit-de-corps follow naturally from the wearing of a common uniform, working for a common end, and from mature and honest leadership. Perhaps the most important factors are practical planning to suit the Service to the actual needs of the country rather than to imported ideas; flexibility in altering programmes in the light of experience; and commonsense in the handling of the young volunteers.