

## CHAPTER 4

### YOUTH IN THE SERVICE OF COMMUNITIES

Youth in Cyprus form by no means a minority group: over 30% of the population are aged between 12 and 25 years. Despite this fact, and despite the valiant part played by young people in the fight for independence, society continues to accord most young people a lowly status. As has been noted, there are signs of discontent, although no violent rebelliousness has yet been experienced. Underlying the discontent is a desire on the part of youth to be considered as having an important place in society. If more severe reactions are to be avoided, it seems essential that more positive action should be taken to provide young people with wider opportunities to participate in the life of the society.

#### Participation

The extent of youth involvement in community life was found by the seminar to vary according to area of residence and among the various groups of young people. In the villages particularly, young people were allowed to play only a subservient role. The village councils were composed of adults, with, in the majority of cases, not even token representation by one or two younger members of the community. Decision making was carried out by the elders; young people were brought in to implement the required action, to perform the "donkey work", as it were. The need for a change of attitude on the part of the elders was recognised; it was also realised that such a change could only be effected by endeavour on the part of young people to demonstrate their willingness to participate, their ability to act with responsibility and their potential contribution to their community and their society.

The need for the involvement of young people in decision-making at the national level was also recognised. Through such

involvement youth would have an opportunity to set an example both to other young people and to their elders. The seminar believed that the role that youth could play in development was not recognised either by the establishment or by society at large, and that the situation could be remedied only by a fight for status by young people themselves. Youth could not be considered to be integrated in the community or society as a whole until such time as it was involved in the decision-making processes at all levels.

### The youth image

Though youth is, as has been noted, not a minority group, the image a society has of young people is all too frequently based on a minority of youth. The attention of the mass media is drawn to incidents which depict the less desirable attributes of young people and rarely are the more worthwhile characteristics brought into public view. The seminar agreed that the media might adopt a more constructive policy in focusing upon the virtues of the many rather than only on the vices of the few.

One proposal which emerged from the seminar as a means of publicising the part which young people are trying to play in community and national life was the production of a youth magazine or bulletin. At present, nothing of this kind is published in Cyprus specifically for young people. In addition to informing the general public about the activities of young people, it might also draw the attention of the authorities and other interested parties to the needs of the younger generation.

### Programmes for youth

The seminar agreed that overall responsibility for youth programmes should lie with the Government. There was, however, an important role also to be played by voluntary organisations, the Church and the political parties, all of which have done a great deal to assist young people through the provision, largely, of opportunities for recreation.

At the present time the most pressing need, it was felt, was not simply for the provision of facilities and the introduction of new programmes but rather for co-operation and consultation among the various bodies working in the youth field. In many areas an amount of wasteful duplication and overlapping takes place; in one village it might be possible to find three separate evening classes for the same subject being organised by three different agencies. Lack of co-ordination of this kind is not only prevalent

among such agencies as the voluntary organisations, the Government and the Church, but also within these groups. In the case of the Government, in particular, there seems to exist a great degree of overlap between one Ministry and another.

In order to improve co-ordination among the voluntary agencies and the Government, the establishment of a semi-official committee has recently been proposed. The committee would be composed of representatives of all interested parties, Government and voluntary. It was hoped that representatives from the voluntary organisations would include young people themselves so as to reduce the likelihood of further prescriptions for youth by adults.

The seminar also expressed the hope that, in addition to co-ordinating on-going activities, the committee would give attention to the planning, implementation and evaluation of programmes designed to meet those needs which are at present neglected. The need for detailed studies of youth problems and requirements was emphasised; without basic information of this kind planning for youth and development could not be efficiently undertaken.

The seminar considered that a further purpose of the proposed committee would be to encourage the participation of youth in the current activities and in community development projects. At the present time a large number of young people were unaware of the activities in which they might join, others had not been encouraged to do so, and for others, particularly rural youth, there were few opportunities anyway.

### Youth leaders

It was felt that the encouragement of young people to become involved in community development projects would be best carried out by qualified youth leaders, of which there was a serious lack. No training courses are available in Cyprus; any training is at present pursued overseas, and is therefore not wholly relevant to the particular needs of Cypriot youth. The seminar realised that the selection of young people for training in this field was an important issue, in view of the sensitivity which would be required in dealing with both the young people and the parents. The difficulties of persuading parents brought up in the village tradition to accept yet another agent likely to affect the attitudes of their children were very much appreciated.

The seminar believed that the proposed co-ordinating committee should also give attention to training policy for youth leaders and workers, bearing in mind the desirability of preparing young people to emerge as leaders for future youth activities. Consideration should be given, too, to the training of trainers, thus ensuring a multiplier effect for funds expended in this area.

### Service to the community

A co-ordinated policy for youth would, the seminar felt, lead to wider opportunities for young people to prove their worth. Apart from the educational and recreational aspects of the work of the youth centres, much good work was being done in the field of voluntary community service. In this way youth was beginning to play an important role in the development process. The Community and Youth Work Programme was in fact launched by the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance as part of the Second Five-Year Development Plan (1967-1971). Youth work has, since the drawing up of the Plan, been perceived as an integral part of community work.

The objectives of the Programme are:

- (i) the motivation of communities to take appropriate action for the solution of social problems, where necessary through financial assistance in the form of grants-in-aid; and
- (ii) the provision of services for the welfare of youth and the mobilisation of youth to establish their own institutions through which they could promote activities for self-development, as well as for the development of society.

A number of youth centres and youth clubs were established, the aims of which are:

- (i) to promote the progress and welfare of youth through opportunities for satisfying their basic needs;
- (ii) to train youth in citizenship and the assumption of responsibility; and
- (iii) to help develop youth culturally and socially and enhance their ability to participate effectively in the development of their country.

Not all young people are drawn into the activities of the centres, however, and there exists a need for more facilities, especially in the rural areas, and for a widespread attempt to be made to reach those young people who are at present not catered for. Moreover, in view of the fact that of the 26 centres now in operation, only eight cater for girls, the seminar felt that more centres should be created on a mixed basis.

Among the activities carried out by young people under the auspices of the centres and clubs are voluntary labour for building community facilities, such as play-grounds and sports-grounds, general assistance in improving the appearance of the villages, visits to and services for groups of people who are not wholly taken care of by government services (the elderly and the sick, for example).

As in many countries, most of the activities in community service are undertaken on a spare-time basis, as activities to be carried out after school or after work. The suggestion was made that a valuable contribution could be made by young people while actually at work or at school. The attention of the seminar was drawn to the paper prepared by Mr Alec Dickson for the Commonwealth Caribbean Regional Youth Seminar, in which a wide range of activities performed by young people are described.

### Voluntary organisations

The seminar approved the efforts made by the various voluntary organisations to improve the lot of young people. It was agreed that the Government should recognise the contribution of these agencies and should increase its support for their activities, not simply in terms of financial assistance but also by providing land, buildings, building permission, etc. The voluntary organisations, it appeared, were not interested in financial returns, and their involvement with young people was for essentially philanthropic reasons.