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NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE PROGRAMMES  
FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA

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National Youth Service Programmes  
for Women and Girls in Africa

by

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Over the years Government programmes for women and girls in Africa have been for the most part Adult Education programmes developed under or in association with Adult Education Agencies, Ministries of Social Welfare, Agriculture or Rural Development or Community Development and some Voluntary Agencies. These programmes have concentrated mainly on nutrition education and cookery, literacy, agricultural innovations and skill, environmental health and child-care, needle-work etc.. Broadly speaking, the goals of these programmes are based on the principle of self-help and leadership development. They are run in local communities usually under the leadership of official social workers and increasingly are an integral part of an overall drive towards national policy for community living and rural development.

During the last five years there has been a developing consciousness as to the role of youth in national development. Rapid social change and the large numbers of young people in the countries' population have created a sense of urgency on youth questions. There has been a conscious attempt to adopt a positive approach to the youth as representing valuable human resources for the nation. Human resources development is today an integral part of development planning. Major emphasis is placed on employability and this has resulted in increased attention to vocational training for school leavers; pre-vocational training for drop-outs and those with minimal or no education; skill training and self-employment projects. A good deal of this activity has been undertaken mainly by voluntary youth organisations and the private sector, but the new emphasis on national youth schemes represents a more organised effort on the part of governments to mobilise "youth power" in the service of the nation.

In discussing the programmes which have emerged as a result of this more comprehensive undertaking on the part of the government, the picture becomes clearer when it is agreed in principle to keep these programmes distinct from other more general government responsibility for adult education. Even where the content in both types of programme (i.e. those for youth and those for adults) may tend to overlap, it is useful to keep the "youth aspect" central to this discussion. One can then be more specific regarding the programmes themselves and in regard to the contribution actual and potential which can legitimately be expected.

This makes it necessary to be critical of the normally accepted reference to "women and girls". How useful it is to continue to adopt a description which groups women and girls in one unit. It would better serve the purposes of this paper to refer to girls as a term inclusive of young women but distinct from the adults normally catered for in adult education classes and community development schemes.

### Uneducated Youth

From information available to me on specific programmes for girls, it is clear that at present not much is being done in the countries I visited. One appreciates in the first place that planning for national youth services is relatively new, and there is limited application of the idea even where boys are concerned. Many countries have not as yet defined their policies. Others, while being conscious of a need for a policy, at the same time hesitate to embark on an operation which is bound to cost money and will therefore place further demands on already overburdened national expenditure and an over-full labour market. Those few countries where the schemes are already in operation, with very restricted participation by girls, are haunted by an over-hanging fear that the youth may not be absorbed in gainful employment at the end of the period. This difficulty of finding work restricts policy and determines from one year to the next whether another set, say 500 youths, are to be invited to volunteer for training. Thus it cannot be said that the idea of national schemes based on a defined policy is in the true sense of the word established.

At the recent ILO debate on special schemes for youth, emphasis was placed on training for employment and on the need to develop leadership and opportunities of service to the nation. Taken together, these two factors emphasise the need to prepare youth for productive work. This is not necessarily a contradiction in terms of society's view of women's place in the home, but is a relatively new one from the standpoint of traditions of women's work in adult education. Ways must be found to minimise any conflict, conscious or unconscious, between the objectives in the schemes and the traditional approach and way of life in the society.

Traditional African society does in fact place on women a responsibility for economic activity. Many women, especially in West Africa, are already engaged in petty trading and private business. School leavers and girls without schooling also engage in petty trading. Middle school leavers sometimes find employment in catering jobs or in the market gardening enterprises of older women who are self-employed. The job of "turning over" or making a profit, however small, out of initial allocations from the family income is widely accepted as woman's responsibility. Enquiries into the reason why women work establish the prominence given to the need to supplement the family income. In a recent questionnaire on the economic situation of women, the answers showed that women are counted upon to make a sizeable contribution to the family income. Answers to questions on the proportionate size of the woman's contribution were described as either average or large - never small. Thus there is a clear tradition in relation to women's earning power. However, much of this economic activity is domestic, in the sense that it has to do with the individual and the needs of her family, as distinct from national goals for increased productivity and questions of imports and exports.

The training element is also new. Most women working in the home or in private business acquire their skill in trading over the years. There is little tradition of training. Many young girls have neither the funds nor

the education to seek training before employment. The financially successful business woman is probably in the 35-50 age group or older, and many of them are illiterate; parents and the community are not used to spending money on girls' training. Girls become rural workers, factory workers, housemaids or peddlers without any training. Petty trading seems to be widespread because most of these girls are forced at last to rely on their own resources.

However, there is a limit in the extent to which retailing and cottage industries can absorb the rising numbers of uneducated youth. Unless youth programmes include training for girls to augment their income, many of them will, on completion of the period, be back at the beginning of a sheer hard struggle for existence, which they are no better prepared to face and from which they initially sought to escape in their drift to the city. Where training opportunities do exist, it is her future role as wife and mother which receives most attention. Domestic science characterises the education of the majority of girls. On leaving school, wage seekers among them tend towards the less skilled occupations. Employers consider them a poor economic risk, exposing the industry to maternity laws and frequent job shifts. These views are not infrequently reflected in the girls' own attitude to work, their low expectations and general lack of ambition.

One difficulty posed by the training element in the schemes is the low level of educational attainment. A very large number of girls will not have had any opportunity to attend school. In spite of the ambitious goals set by African ministers of Education in 1961 which call for 6 years of compulsory education by 1980, today in some countries still less than 10 per cent of the children of school age are in primary school. A factor which complicates the situation is the rapid increase in the population. A recent report of the United Nations Secretary General gives the following figures :

Expected changes in the main functional groups (in millions)

1970-1980

(Medium variant)

World Population	More Developed Regions	Less Developed Regions
School-age groups (5-14 years)		
1970: 836	196	640
1980: 1,021	199	822
Increase: 185	3	182
% increase: 22.2	1.5	28.5

See : "Trends in Social Situation of Children". (United Nations Doc. E/CN.5/448), p. 29.

This means that in the less developed regions, including Latin America, by 1980 there will be 180 million more children than there are now, trying to get an education, while there will be an increase of 3 million in the more developed regions. Thus, even in the more developed regions there is also a problem.

In the less developed countries, the number of qualified teachers is nowhere near sufficient to handle a system of universal primary education, nor are there enough adequate teaching materials. In Africa in general, seven out of ten children leave school before they reach the sixth grade, and too often those who do achieve primary education are blocked from further achievement by the lack of secondary school facilities. This inadequate provision has far reaching social effects, particularly among rural youth.

In a world that is becoming more and more technological in job orientation, and where the tendency increasingly has been to place a premium on training and skill for employment purposes, and to treat as rejects the illiterate and unskilled, it is difficult to envisage a future with any prospect for a large mass of illiterate young people unless new, bold measures are attempted.

In spite of this critical state of affairs, to date there are few programmes for girls, particularly for girls in rural areas. Most of the out-of-school programmes for urban girls are being done through non-governmental organisations.

The prevailing atmosphere is more ineffective than hostile. As one member association of the World YWCA has written: "Various private concerns including the YWCA have been trying to secure some training for girls. In 1966, we sent a deputation to the Government recommending that it should extend vocational training to our girls. Although our representatives were well received, nothing substantial has as yet been done" (1970).

Some countries do make provision for girls in their programmes, but the latter constitute only a small percentage of the total enrolment. A paper prepared by the United Nations Social Development Division states: "The exclusion of girls may be explained by the link with military training, which is restricted to men in many countries". On the other hand, another reason for restricting training to men only is that of economy. The difficulty of finding competent leadership for girls' activities has also been advanced as a reason why there are few schemes for women. The impact of training is also said to be less observable. Cooperative enterprises set up by young men shoe-makers and farmers have given convincing proof of the effectiveness and long-term benefits of their training. On the other hand, even when girls have been encouraged to set up their own cooperatives on completion of training at the age of, say, 18, another two years finds them married perhaps into another community, and with a consequent dispersal of the earlier initiative in running a cooperative.

Finally, on the financial side, the resources set aside for youth services are too scanty to make it possible to set up separate camps for young women, and in many cases the admission of young people of both sexes is liable to create special difficulties.

### Educated Youth

The Director General of the ILO in his report on the World Employment Programme, 1969, draws attention to the two categories proposed for youth schemes: a) those which emphasise training and productive employment for unskilled unemployed youths, and b) those which focus on service to the community by educated young people. These educated youth already possess secondary or higher education or special skills which can be used in service to society.

In Africa at present the problem of under-employment or unemployment of qualified young people is not yet serious. It is true that hardly any vocational guidance is given in schools and other institutions of formal education, but appreciation of the need for such guidance is gaining importance as a result of the increased attention being given to vocational training and manpower planning requirements. Much progress still needs to be made and it is doubtful that as yet efforts to provide for vocational guidance are being seriously made in many countries. Nevertheless, youth with an academic background have some reasonable prospects for finding jobs and forging ahead in their careers. The way is open for vocational guidance to assist these young people in their choice of careers and where choice is restricted to see in the available openings the nature and value of the contribution of their particular job to the overall development plan. For the time being, the majority regard education as the doorway to permanent life in the city. A return to the rural areas is regarded as a "come-down". Programmes for the second category of youth schemes are often instituted in the hope that many of the participants will subsequently settle in the regions where their service was performed. This objective calls for careful study. Previous attempts to encourage "back to the land" movements by young people have been directed chiefly at rural uneducated, and have been singularly unsuccessful in their long-term results. Now with more attention to the complexities of rural development in a technological age, a clearly defined rural policy is essential for development. Programmes for educated youth make a significant contribution both by identifying development tasks and setting youth to work on them and by concentrating on rural projects which will highlight the urgent need for policies for rural development. Experience is relatively new in this field. Concentration of industry in the cities has denuded the rural areas of a viable way of life. Urban slums have developed and placed heavy demands on social welfare work. Voluntary organisations have gained valuable experience of work in these conditions, but by comparison the approach to work in rural areas is neither well documented nor widely shared. Early obtuseness on "back to the land" policies is giving way to more insight on the situation of rural youth and their development needs. Programmes for service to the nation can do no better than concentrate their maximum efforts in this field.

The UNESCO experiment in the Upper Volta area deserves serious study because it demonstrates a pattern of work which is based on sound principles of community development, and at the same time brings together the expertise of professional workers and the identification of the amateur secondary school volunteer in a working relationship. One can foresee development along these lines in programmes for educated youth. There are increasing examples of this kind of work being developed by voluntary organisations. Leadership is in the hands of young people who have first to be taught the skills they need for sharing their knowledge among their peers.

Extra time and patience will be required of Agricultural Officers, Health Officers and other Regional Staff who are, as a rule, already overburdened with ongoing work. Valuable assistance could be given by international experts working on development projects. Could not the counterpart idea present in every project be stretched to include also a temporary amateur service force, i.e. national service volunteers? This would give the project an important dimension and broaden the scope of its development service.

In the newly launched International Volunteer Service scheme, more consideration could be given to the contribution which such a scheme should make in the development of national voluntarism. So far it seems that there is to be on one hand a scheme for international volunteers for development in developing countries parallel to plans, on the other hand, for developing national service. The point of inter-action, if any, is not clear. In practice, some national youth service programmes, e.g. in Jamaica and Zambia, have used the services of both national and international volunteers. Suitably qualified volunteers could be an asset in assisting the experts to take on added responsibilities.

Some illustrations of young volunteers at work with unemployed or educationally deprived youth: in Montserrat, a group of school leavers have turned themselves into responsible youth leaders for the school children of their area. St. Vincent has revived its plan for a village project and is trying to develop local leadership in the area. Its programmes include cooking, health, recreation and educational tours, all designed to help the rural women. The YWCA of Puerto Rico is an active member of a new community recreation/action programme which offers to disadvantaged young men and women from 16-21 years the opportunity to acquire knowledge and skill to enable them to engage in gainful occupation and at the same time to help the participants of the programme to develop their potential for satisfactory living and personal independence. This project has the double purpose of improving the quality of recreational leaders and giving essential service to the community. The Zambia Adult Literacy Programme is designed as a three way partnership in which the illiterate community, the educated community and Government play their assigned roles. Finally, the YWCA of Cochabamba is working with the Official Health Centre visiting different poor areas of the city and helping the nurse with vaccinations, talking to mothers about home hygiene, and helping with the installation of latrines. A training Course for volunteers was made before starting this work.

### Special Problems for Girls

Beyond the customary vigilance which must always be present to ensure equal access of girls whether through mixed or separate programmes, the chief concern is for a broader perspective for women's education. Even where domestic science does not dominate the school curriculum, the weight of tradition is felt in that many girls know little about any form of work outside teaching, nursing and the medical profession. Social work has a few professional women, but the majority are in clerical jobs. There are few examples of women workers in jobs calling for scientific and mathematical skills or in administrative or supervisory positions. There is a desire to work, but much should be done to educate women in the value of their work in economic and social development. National service programmes related to rural development will offer many opportunities for openings by the assistance which the creation of modern agricultural settlements will require, such as social surveys, increased food production, better housing projects, health and environmental and other public services. Girls need wider horizons on these jobs. During the service period, they should develop more constructive attitudes calculated to raise the morale and the reputation of women workers. This is an educational task for national service programmes designed for educated youth.

### Relationship between the two Categories and Schemes

A comprehensive plan for national youth service should both include the two categories of youth schemes and look for ways to establish an operational relationship which will link both educated and uneducated youth in service to the nation. This is a valuable way to tackle widespread criticism of the alienating influence of education.

### Guiding Principles

Out of the opportunities and difficulties presented by youth schemes, some principles emerge which could direct programmes for girls:

1. Avoid undue disruption of the traditional way of life in the society, while tackling the obstacles which these traditions represent for girls.

Family life must be recognised as a powerful force in society. Home-making, including budgeting, nutrition, health, child care, clothing and textiles, and social education including oral expression, reading and writing are basic for young people in any society. Girls with this training are more likely to meet the rising expectations of boys who have been exposed to similar training in youth schemes. This is a strong case for parallel schemes for girls.

2. Girls must be assisted to cope with their duty to supplement the family income. The majority will need to be self-employed, but some new openings are also necessary, as trading, market-gardening etc. cannot be expected to absorb the large numbers of young people between the ages of 16 and 25.

In addition to basic education, the programme should offer specific training for which some community services could be organised. For example, larger scale farming, making and storing of fertilisers, crop improvement, child care, services for farm workers, cooperative services for marketing delivery, food processing, of vegetables, fruit preservation, laundry, cottage industries relating to clothing and household equipment in their bulding, maintenance and repair work, elementary book-keeping and accountancy.

Training in group responsibility, teamwork and the setting up and maintenance of group services will give girls some initial orientation to their future communal tasks. Day to day living in the "camps" during training periods can be utilised for giving practice in this training, and such training will increase the employability of the trainees and also be a valuable asset to the home.

3. Policies for rural development are essential to youth service schemes. The social context of the rural areas offers many opportunities for constructive work and affords a good solution to the problem of the drift to the towns.

4. Training for educated youth should be identified with these developments. They can be prepared to assist with nutritional surveys, e.g. on food consumption and data processing. They should be related to studies on local practices, be taught how to help people improve their diets and health. They should assist uneducated youth in team work in development tasks and the setting up of communal services. Housing projects and the mechanisation of agriculture and fishing offer fruitful opportunities for engaging the services of volunteers (educated youth) and trained uneducated youth. Functional literacy programmes on foods and food services could be developed for women.

5. Vocational guidance is essential. A beginning can be made through a miniature youth employment service, using educated volunteers and one professional officer or social worker who will organise the implementation of a plan for community services by new trainees.

6. Financial assistance in the form of sheltered workshops subsidised by government, initial cash loans for individuals or for bulk buying. The clerical services in book-keeping, storage and sales etc. will create openings for jobs in rural areas.

7. An important function of the programmes is to educate youth in their citizenship roles, which encompasses more than giving voluntary service in development tasks and contributing through work to the nation's economic growth. There is a need for these programmes "to create consciousness of what the country stands for, its place in the African continent and in the world, the ideals of its government, the national development plan and the need for overall development". Programme content includes knowledge about the institutions, cultural patterns and political theories that are representative of the community's way of life.

It is important to remember that training in citizenship is also for development purposes. Since concepts of development vary, there are differences in methods according to the manner in which a country interprets its ultimate national goals. Different ideas of citizenship and the needs of citizens are evident in the programmes. In some cases, priority is given to physical health, regular meals, good exercise and discipline. In other places, the country's need for defence gives priority to military training. Where the youth sector is recognised as an important political resource, programmes are a means of encouraging youth in their support of a particular political ideology.

In addition to preparing girls for their role as home-makers, more attention should be given to their need to understand their role as citizens.

Development education is a crucial area which needs careful study, without which we cannot clarify our concepts or give fundamental direction to content and methods for youth programmes. The findings of the recent ECA meeting on Education and Development Training gives weight to these questions and will be important for our discussions.

"If education is to be a part of the process of development, then we need to reverse the tendency which makes it a teaching process rather than a learning process. Educators need to be animators rather than experts, and students will be the subjects instead of the objects of the educational process".

(Dr. Neehall. Asian Consultation on Development)