



Service as a **Strategy**

Youth and Community Development

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February 2004



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Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) is a non-profit social change organization that supports the development of innovative, high-quality youth civic engagement policies and programs both in the US and around the world. Founded in 2001, ICP is dedicated to creating opportunities for young people to change their communities for the better and build essential skills for future success. Funded through a multi-year grant from the Ford Foundation, we partner with individuals and organizations around the globe to stimulate innovation around two civic engagement strategies: national youth service and service-learning. At ICP, we believe that well-structured youth service programs can provide innovative solutions to social and environmental issues, while helping young people develop skills for future employment and active citizenship. For more information, visit www.icicp.org.

Introduction

Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP)¹ has written this paper to demonstrate how civic service programs² are one of the few proven and effective strategies for empowering young people to address the issues identified in the World Bank's strategy paper on Children and Youth and help to achieve the Bank's central goal of reducing poverty. Rather than providing programs that deliver services to young people, structured service programs allow young people to play an important role in addressing the development priorities in their communities. Creating the opportunities and infrastructure for these programs requires a commitment of resources over time.

The Bank's strategy paper identifies five key issues affecting youth prospects worldwide:

- lack of adequate education and life skills
- unemployment and precarious work
- violence and crime
- risky behaviors
- limited empowerment and exclusion

Structured service programs address these issues by:

- providing 'hands-on' learning opportunities where youth develop transferable skills and competencies,
- creating a pathway to further training and employment,
- offering constructive alternatives to negative behaviors,
- empowering youth to actively address urgent social, economic, and political issues in their communities.

Background

At 1.7 billion, today's youth comprise the largest generation ever to enter the transition to adulthood.³ In many developing countries, three-quarters of the population are under the age of 30. The values, attitudes, and skills acquired by youth—and especially the choices made by the current generation of young people—will influence the course of current events and shape the future in fundamental ways.

At the same time, there is increasing concern about the status of young people, particularly in countries transitioning from war where many demilitarized youth possess limited education and life skills. For many youth, limited access to em-

ployment or further education and training opportunities translates into disempowerment and often results in an increased sense of fatalism and weakened initiative. In the absence of opportunities, risky behavior such as drug use, unsafe sex, and gang violence all too often fills the void and perpetuates the cycle of poverty, unemployment, illegal activity, lost production, and lost opportunity.

The causes for the problems that youth face worldwide are complex and the solutions will not be simple. Nevertheless, it is imperative to engage youth in the process. Although the concept of 'youth as resources in development' is increasingly acknowledged, the practice of engaging youth in development activities as full partners is still not fully accepted. International experience has shown that service organizations for young people, while building citizenship skills, can help society to appreciate young people and help young people to view themselves as a resource for change, rather than as a troubled, at-risk group. The examples below illustrate how the ingenuity, solidarity, and creativity of millions of ordinary young people can be directed towards critical social, political and economic issues around the world.

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The Case for Service

Lasting change best occurs when communities support youth *and* youth contribute to their communities. Youth should be viewed not as 'clients' or a set of deficits that need to be addressed, but as essential protagonists in tackling development needs. Around the world, young people are mobilizing for civil rights, organizing for environmental justice, and advocating for school reform. They are serving on agency boards, raising consciousness through the arts, and providing neighborhood-based services. These efforts challenge portrayals of youth as 'victims of poverty' and 'problems' in society, as well as the typical focus of professionals on youth needs and deficiencies. An investment in youth service has human, social, and economic benefits that positively impact the development of individuals, communi-

ties, nations, and society as a whole.

Human capital formation—the knowledge, health, skills, energy, and creativity individuals use to solve problems and earn a living—is one of the strongest engines for economic growth in developing countries. Young people who volunteer are 50% less likely to abuse drugs and alcohol, become involved in delinquency, or drop out of school.⁴ A study by James L. Perry and Ann Marie Thomson found that participating in national and community service has direct benefits to skills development and satisfaction, educational opportunity, self-esteem, and physical and mental health. The authors further argue that national service is an efficient and effective way to solve community problems. In all but one of the 14 studies cited, benefits exceeded costs when national service was applied as a problem-solving approach.⁵

When youth are positively engaged through service, research indicates that social capital and citizenship increase. Social capital refers to basic codes of conduct, trust, and cooperative behavior among individuals and groups—the intangible foundations of a free society. Service fosters trust between citizens and helps develop norms of solidarity and reciprocity which are essential to stable communities. Apart from the tangible goals of their activity, working together helps bridge differences that lead to greater trust and respect among persons who may otherwise never come together. Research suggests that when networks of voluntary organizations are created which link different interest groups, the increased interaction leads to improved understanding and increased tolerance of diversity.⁶ The participatory aspect of service can contribute to a heightened understanding of the forces which shape governments and societies, leading to greater transparency, accountability, and improved governance. At the Worldwide Workshop on Youth Involvement as a Strategy for Social, Economic and Democratic Development in 2000, Harvard's renown professor of Public Policy, Robert Putnam, offered, "All our societies need more social capital...and in my view the single most promising area of initiative is

youth service."⁷

Service also has an important economic impact. In countries where empirical studies exist, the contribution of volunteering is estimated to be between 8% and 14% of GDP.⁸ In the United States, President Clinton established AmeriCorps in 1993, a program that allows American citizens of different ages to volunteer for a period of 12 months to strengthen American communities through service. A cost-benefit analysis of AmeriCorps estimates that for every US \$1 spent, the country receives between US \$1.60 and US \$2.60 in return.⁹ On an individual level, service contributes to capacity building processes by helping the individual to develop marketable skills, providing access to workplace networks, and boosting confidence and self-esteem.

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Youth Service As A Strategy For Poverty Reduction And Human Development: Lessons Learned

1. Youth Service in Education/Training

School enrollment rates have increased worldwide, but the quality of education is undermined by limited resources, outdated curricula, irrelevant skills training, poorly trained teachers, and limited access to new knowledge and technology. School completion rates remain low in many countries, and many girls and boys do not achieve basic literacy or numeracy before they drop out of school. In Africa, as few as 5 percent of young people attend college. Youth service projects enable schools to address social needs and enhance educational quality at the same time.

During the 1990s, Argentina experienced major social and economic changes, which eventually led to the dramatic 2002 financial crisis. As the gap between rich and poor widened, organizations of civil society took a leading role in fighting poverty and corruption and in offering alternatives to renew political practices. Educational institutions, in turn, faced a growing social demand, but teachers were often overwhelmed and unprepared

to deal with these pressures. With schools playing an increasingly larger role in the community, the new concept of the school as 'community center' is seen by many as putting the quality of education at risk. Service-learning has done much to alleviate this situation.¹⁰

Service-learning is a method whereby students learn and develop through active participation in organized service. Through service-learning activities, students have the opportunity to apply their knowledge and practice their skills in real world situations while developing good citizenship practices. When high school students teach unemployed adults how to use a computer, the adults improve their chances of getting a job,

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and students improve their own skills through practice. Fourth graders improve their writing skills and learn important civic participation skills by sending letters to newspapers about the need for recreational facilities in their community. Undergraduate economics students practice their skills by working with micro-enterprises to provide technical assistance to enterprising people who lack institutional supports.

Service-learning was a virtually unknown pedagogy in Argentina in the early 1990s. ICP has been working the Latin American Center for Service Learning (CLAYSS) to develop and strengthen service-learning programs and strategically build the field in the region.¹¹ Today, service-learning is practiced by approximately 5,000 Argentine schools (13 percent of the total) and almost 100 universities. In the experience of a growing number of teachers and students in Argentina and other Latin American countries, service-learning is allowing schools to achieve a better balance by enabling them to attend to social needs and enhance educational quality at the same time. All of this results in greater learning for the students as well as in greater overall benefit to the community.

2. Youth Service and Unemployment

Youth unemployment is a problem that affects all countries. The International Labor Organiza-

tion (ILO) estimates that 74 million youth are currently out of work. In the next 10 years, more than 1 billion will join the working age population. In many developing and transition countries, one-third to one-half of 15-24 year olds are unemployed. In many countries, youth lack the necessary skills to earn a livelihood. In others, large numbers of highly educated youth are unable to find jobs. Lacking opportunities in the formal economy, youth can be more attracted to risky behavior or militant movements. Structured service programs not only provide constructive alternatives to negative behaviors, but provide 'hands-on' learning opportunities where youth develop transferable skills that can be applied to future employment or further education while actively contributing to the development of their communities and nation.

South Africa achieved democracy in 1994 after years of struggle against apartheid. Young people played a significant role in this struggle and made many important sacrifices. Nine years after the advent of democracy, young people are the most seriously affected by 'post-apartheid' social and economic challenges. The most severe of these challenges is unemployment. It is estimated that 62% of economically active young people are unemployed.

Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF) is the single largest investment that the South African government has made in support of the development of young people in South Africa. Its mission is to facilitate and promote the creation of jobs and skills development of young people. Umsobomvu has chosen to invest at least half of the funds allocated to skills development in establishing a national youth service program, viewing service as a pathway to economic opportunity. The program model uses service opportunities to enable young people to develop their skills in order to access employment or generate income themselves. The program design aims to ensure that both the young people participating in service and the communities in which services are rendered, benefit from the service initiatives.

In many countries, youth lack the necessary skills to earn a livelihood, or large numbers of highly educated youth are unable to find jobs.

Service activities undertaken by the young participants over a period of 12-15 months included: the labor intensive construction of a road with culverts and drifts necessary to control run-off, the construction of a multi-purpose center, the development of municipal food gardens, supporting the work of an underresourced clinic running primary health education, care and counseling projects, the provision of support projects for youth at risk in outdoor education, and the repair of infrastructure in a conservation area. Through their service, participants developed a set of core skills in project planning, needs assessment, budgeting, evaluation, self-assessment and management, negotiation, and conducting meetings that can be transferred to income generating activities at the conclusion of their term of service.¹²

ICP has been working to strategically build the service field in Southern Africa and recognizes that UYF is making a serious attempt to break new ground in terms of generating employment through youth service.¹³ The program is quite distinctive in its efforts to not only counter unemployment but also to contribute to national development and economic growth.

3. Youth Service and HIV/AIDS Prevention

HIV/AIDS is a major threat to the lives of young people. About half of new infections occur in youth under 25 and almost 12 million youth currently live with HIV/AIDS. Aside from the high infection rate, the pandemic has orphaned 13 million children under age 15. The next generation of adults will face greater poverty and stunted economic and social growth. The State of the World Report estimates the economic benefit of a single averted HIV/AIDS infection is \$34,600 for a poor country, and the social benefits are even greater.¹⁴ Mobilizing young people in the fight against AIDS has enormous potential. Young people could become involved in home care, peer education, care for orphans, and public awareness campaigns while developing transferable skills for future employment and education.

At the current rate of infection, more than 50% of South Africans under 15 years of age—about 6 million young people—will contract HIV

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and could die of AIDS. More than 60% of South Africa's new HIV infections occur before the age of 25. In February 2002, Nelson Mandela announced the establishment of a national youth service corps that will work to reduce the spread of HIV/AIDS. Known as groundBREAKERS, the corps is an important new component of

loveLife, South Africa's leading national HIV prevention program for South African youth. The core function of the groundBREAKERS is to "help young South Africans take an active role in reducing the spread of HIV while developing skills to build healthy futures."¹⁵

The groundBREAKERS are young people between the ages of 18 and 25 drawn from communities across the country who give one year of service in loveLife. The year includes a 'learnership' development program of task specific training in loveLife's HIV prevention initiatives as well as a structured curriculum of personal and professional skills training. The training will help the groundBREAKERS find work at the end of their involvement with loveLife, either in the private or public sector.

Currently there are 700 groundBREAKERS combating HIV/AIDS. After completing her term of service, one volunteer remarked, "I feel like a new person. I was just sitting at home and hoping to find a job some day. When I got involved at the Y-Centre I started working with young people. I've developed as a person and can face the world without fear. Now I want to go into business. I want to open a project that will help young people and give them financial empowerment. I also hope to get them some skills training."¹⁶

In a country where AIDS is hindering the development of the state and many young people feel disempowered in an environment where they are unable to find employment or attend institutions of higher education due to economic restraints, groundBREAKERS is successfully combating HIV/AIDS while providing

Through service, participants develop skills in project planning, needs assessment, budgeting, evaluation, self-assessment, and negotiation.

volunteers with a sense of efficacy and transferable skills for future employment and education.

4. Youth Service and Nation Building

Poverty and deteriorating health trends are disrupting social and family structures. Young people are being abandoned by their families and forced into military service or abusive labor practices at alarmingly high rates. Intra and inter state conflict produces millions of internally displaced people and refugees, and drastically undermines the values of democracy, social equality, and economic opportunity. Peace can be agreed upon by high-level leaders gathered around negotiation tables, but such accords must be matched by initiatives on the ground which promote the ability of society to deal with and overcome conflict in the short, intermediate, and long term. Structured service programs not only provide constructive alternatives to military service and street gangs, but foster relationships within society and can play an important role in reconnecting divided peoples. In addition, it affords young people the opportunity to become actively involved in the nation-building process.

Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) has experienced dramatic changes in recent years. Ethnic conflict, the collapse of a socialist regime, and the split of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have hindered development progress. Today, BH faces economic stagnation and a severely disrupted social structure. It is estimated that there are still 305,000 Bosnian refugees living outside the country and 819,000 internally displaced people.¹⁷ The bitter legacy of war (1992-1995) has left a suspicion of change and widespread feelings of pessimism about future prospects.

Many young people in BH feel marginalized, excluded and ill-prepared to participate in community life. BH parliament does not have any members under the age of 34 and according to the 2003 UN Agencies Report on Youth, 95 percent of young people in Bosnia and Herzegovina believe they have little or no influence on political events in their country.¹⁸

In such dire circumstances, service helps catalyze positive changes. By investing their time, skills and passion, volunteers play an important

role in nurturing the well-being of their communities. Service programs provide an outlet for disenfranchised youth to transform relationships within the communal social texture, change the policies and values of their nation, and bring hope for the less fortunate members of the community. It also helps to address needs that cannot be met due to the lack of human and material resources.

OSMIJEH, the Association for Psychosocial Help and Development of Voluntary Work, has become the national volunteer center for Bosnia and Herzegovina. OSMIJEH has mobilized over 6,000 youth that include all members of society. Muslims, Serbs, and Croats work side-by-side; local people interact with refugees and displaced people. Young volunteers help reconstruct rural villages, tutor in elementary schools, and care for disabled children and isolated elderly. Youth run radio programs, help with translation, and organize public events, elections, seminars and conferences.¹⁹

Through service programs in BH, youth work with different groups in different settings to address needs that the young government alone cannot. Their increased interaction with all members of society fosters bonds of trust and helps to reconnect divided peoples. Through their services, volunteers develop new skills, learn about the functioning of various institutions, and often become aware of needs in other communities. Perhaps most importantly, service programs in Bosnia and Herzegovina help to combat feelings of hopelessness by providing young people with opportunities to become actively involved in the re-building of their country. ICP is working with OSMIJEH to foster youth service policy through our small grants program.

A Successful Service Strategy

The task of launching a high quality youth service initiative that will have a serious impact on both the youth participants and national development objectives requires substantial levels of sustained funding and only makes sense when they offer young people a real opportunity to change their social and economic circumstances.

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Since service programs focus on empowering the local population, they are adaptable to many different situations. However, our experience has shown that the most successful service programs contain similar elements:

1. Project plans linked to national and community development goals.
2. Appropriate incentives to support the participation of young people in ways that are consistent with positive youth development.
3. Identification of future opportunities which the participants can access beyond the project, and ensure that these opportunities are realized.
4. Structured learning programs to develop the skills, knowledge and attitudes necessary to access opportunities beyond the project.
5. Implementation through effective partnerships.

The World Bank and Youth Service

The World Bank has a comparative advantage in the following areas to promote service programs as an effective way to empower young people to address urgent social, economic and political problems while providing them with transferable skills for future employment or education:

1. Facilitating youth service policy discussions with governments to promote the authentic engagement of youth in addressing the needs of their world.
2. Researching the surrounding social, political and economic framework.
3. Providing financial support for the development of service programs and policies and the necessary infrastructure for programs to succeed through government grants, social funds (on a competitive basis to encourage innovation).
4. Developing partnerships to establish a training and technical assistance network.
5. Evaluating ongoing programs for impact, sustainability, cost-effectiveness, and replication.

Conclusion

The needs of children and youth worldwide are overwhelming. In their efforts to reduce poverty around the globe and address the Millennium Development Goals, donors, practitioners and policy makers have offered an array of solutions. All too often the solutions include programs that deliver services to young people, but fail to see young people themselves as important social protagonists who can be mobilized to address many of the priorities for development in their communities. The examples above highlight just a few of the many structured service programs around the world that help to establish a culture of citizen engagement and empower young people to address urgent social, economic and political issues in their communities while developing transferable skills and competencies in the process. Service programs are proven, realistic, and effective. The World Bank should invest in youth service program development, the creation of an enabling policy environment, research, and training.

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As a non-profit organization dedicated to developing and strengthening policies and programs around the world that promote civic engagement through service, ICP can assist Bank staff with the formulation of a strategy paper and provide technical assistance to assist with the development of an investment plan in the area of youth service worldwide. Working in over twenty countries on six continents, ICP has been involved with many of the programs cited above. ICP has worked with universities, NGOs, national and local governments, and several multilateral organizations such as the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), International Association for National Youth Service (IANYS), International Council on National Youth Policy (ICNYP), United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Volunteers (UNV), United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and World Bank.

Endnotes

- ¹ ICP is a Washington DC- based non-profit social change organization specializing in the development and support of innovative service programs and policy worldwide. www.icicp.org
- ² Civic Service can be defined as an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary compensation to the participant. (Global Service Institute (GSI) working definition of service- <http://gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/gsi/>). This formal, programmatic focus in defining civic service does not include many other forms of volunteerism, such as informal systems of care. Informal, mutual aid and kinship networks are commonly found in less industrialized countries and tend to be the dominant or major forms of “volunteerism.”
- ³ The United Nations General Assembly defined ‘youth’, as those persons falling between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive. This definition was prepared for International Youth Year, held around the world in 1985.
- ⁴ Inter-American Development Bank “Regional Plan of Operations: Youth Service in the Americas.” 2003.
- ⁵ Perry, James *Civic Service: What Difference Does It Make?* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2003).
- ⁶ Institute for Volunteering Research. “Volunteering and Social Development: A background paper.” New York, 1999.
- ⁷ Ford Foundation “Workshop on Youth Involvement as a Strategy for Social, Economic and Democratic Development” Costa Rica. 2000.
- ⁸ UNDP “Volunteerism and Development” Essentials October 2003.
- ⁹ Karasik, Judy “National and Community Service: Ten years of National Service” Research report. Washington DC: Innovations in Civic Participation. 2003.
- ¹⁰ Tapia, Nieves Marta and Mallea, Maria Marta “Service-Learning in Argentina” from *Service Enquiry: Service in the 21st Century*. First edition. 2003.
- ¹¹ Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario (CLAYSS) www.clayss.educaciondigital.net/index.htm.
- ¹² Foley, Penny “Youth Service for Employment: The Umsobomvu Youth Fund initiative in South Africa” from *Service Enquiry: Service in the 21st Century*. First edition. 2003.
- ¹³ Umsobomvu Youth Fund (UYF) <http://www.uyf.org.za/>
- ¹⁴ UN “State of the World Population- Making 1 Billion Count: Investing in Adolescents’ Health and Rights.” 2003.
- ¹⁵ quoting John Samuel, Chief Executive of the Nelson Mandela Foundation, from <http://www.lovelife.org.za/corporate/index.html>.
- ¹⁶ quoting volunteer from loveLife <http://www.lovelife.org.za/corporate/index.html>.
- ¹⁷ UNV “Volunteering in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” 2002.
- ¹⁸ UN “Agencies Report on Youth.” 2003.
- ¹⁹ Huzejrovic, Vahida “Youth Volunteering in Bosnia and Herzegovina.” *Voluntary Action: The Journal of the Institute for Volunteering Research* Volume 5, Number 2. Spring 2003.



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