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Re-thinking the National Youth Service Program in Zimbabwe

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WHITE PAPER

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Re-thinking the National Youth Service Program in Zimbabwe

White Paper

ISABEL MWONZORA-SIMANGO AND NTANDO DUMANI

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Re-thinking the National Youth Service Program in Zimbabwe: White Paper

1. Introduction

About the white paper

The government of Zimbabwe has announced its intention to re-introduce the National Youth Service (NYS) program which was discontinued in 2007. Although it had its successes, the previous NYS was faced with challenges and marred by controversy and this affected its sustainability and credibility as a truly national program for youth development, empowerment and nation building.

In principle, the NYS is an important intervention for youth civic and political development. The ideals of a national youth service can also be a potent vehicle for the personal development of youth and for their contribution to societal development.

The National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe which was adopted in 2000 and reviewed in 2013 by the government promises in one of its strategies in section 5.6.1 subsection (e.) to:

Provide for meaningful participation of the different youth target groups, particularly young females, young people with disabilities and young people in rural areas in the planning, designing, implementation, evaluation and review of the national youth training programs;¹

In the spirit espoused in this ideal, this white paper titled, *'Re-thinking the National Youth Service Program in Zimbabwe'*, explores the debates and conversations around the NYS and contributes to the *planning, designing and implementation* of the program. The White Paper also frames the contextual and conceptual issues of the NYS in Zimbabwe. Above all, the paper proposes alternatives in terms of design and approach for the re-introduction of the NYS looking at both the structural and substantive matters of the program. The paper presents its contents in a logical manner covering:

- i.** Contextualisation of the NYS,
- ii.** Conceptual framing of the NYS,
- iii.** Program Design,
- iv.** Stakeholder Participation in the NYS,
- v.** Governance of the NYS and,
- vi.** Sustainability of the NYS.

1 National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe reviewed in 2013.

Methodology

The white paper was developed through secondary research looking at various government, civil society and academic documents on the subject matter. The research also drew parallels from NYS programs of other countries and presents them in a way that broadens the conversations. One of the limitations in objectively exploring the subject matter was the limited publicly available information on the NYS from official government sources. As such, some of the information literature on the subject matter could not be easily triangulated with official sources. The development of this paper was supported by the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Zimbabwe office.

About Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung

Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung is a public interest foundation that focuses on the core ideas and values of social justice and democracy – freedom, justice and solidarity. In addition to the pursuit of political emancipation of the working class, social democracy strives towards a free society based on solidarity and offering everyone an equal opportunity for economic, social and cultural participation.

FES runs an annual Youth Leadership Training Program that cultivates and supports the development of the next generation of leaders in Zimbabwe. It brings together and develops the leadership capacities of youth aged between 20 and 35 years drawn from a broad political, economic and social spectrum – academia, students' movements, civil society, business, trade unions and mainstream political parties.

2. Contextualising National Youth Service

2.1 Overview

In Africa and most developing countries, governments are grappling with a growing youth population amid shrinking economies and rising unemployment. With the youngest population in the world, Africa's youth population is expected to double by 2045 (Page 2013). Africa generally and Zimbabwe in particular is headed for a deeper socio-economic and political crisis unless the youth, as a strategic national resource, can be empowered and positioned to contribute effectively to national development. Zimbabwe, like most African countries is a youthful country with more than 60% of its population under the age of 35.² Amid slow economic growth, high unemployment rates coupled with growing informalisation characterised by poverty vulnerability and precarity, the country is already mired in a crisis. Some have even dismissed millennials growing up in such adversity as a 'lost generation'³.

In response to these challenges, the concept of National Youth Service is again taking centre stage in many African Countries. According to Bodley-Bond and Cronin (2013):

"...out of the 49 countries that constitute the region of Sub-Saharan Africa 18 currently have active NYS programmes, and 20 programmes if the two regional initiatives are included. Further to this a total of 13 countries have either implemented programmes that have since been disbanded, are discussing the (re) implementation of a programme or are set to launch a programme."

Youths have an indispensable role to play in shaping society in the present and future which leaves it up to society to harness and direct their energy, ingenuity and innovation towards national interest and development. NYS programs can therefore serve as a potent vehicle for harnessing this potential and energy for youth development and for forging a healthy relationship between youth, the state and society. The case for such a kind of a program can be surmised in the assertion that:

"Any society that does not succeed in tapping into the energy and creativity of its youth will be left behind." - Kofi Annan

It is important to acknowledge that the National Youth Service is an emphatic process which shapes the youth's ability to relate to each other in their diversity as well as shapes their relationship with the state and with society.

Many countries have different curricula for the NYS as informed by their socio-economic and political context. Generally, the aim of the NYS programs the world over is, "...empowering youths through core values; steering participants toward national service; and facilitating career development through exposure to specific career options, as well as assisting in the improvement of academic qualifications".⁴

2 Zimbabwe 2012 Census Report.

3 Ndlovu, Mary. "Youth in Zimbabwe – A Lost Generation." *Zimbabwe: Mired in Transition*

4 Kingston, E. (2015). The effects of national service in Africa, with a focus on Nigeria. A paper presented at International Symposium on Civic Service: Impacts and Inquiry.

While the National Youth Service can be an important program for building a patriotic, well rounded young person who is an active citizen, there are concerns about the consequences of the re-introduction of the NYS in Zimbabwe. These concerns are well-founded based on the history of the previous NYS and its eventual graduates.

Overview of NYS programs in other countries

The National Youth Service programmes in Kenya, Nigeria and Ghana are the longest standing in the region, having been in existence for a cumulative total of 129 years (Kenya – 49, Nigeria – 40 and Ghana – 40).

Kenya

The Kenya National Youth Service Programme was established in 1964. The programme has vacillated between being a compulsory and voluntary programme over the course of its nearly fifty-year existence. Earlier this year, Kenya's Senate passed a law that will make service mandatory beginning in 2014 for all secondary school leavers. The shift is attributed to the low rates of participants and the need for vocational training in the job market. The NYS Programme has been playing an important role in providing this in depth training and compulsory service will help fill this need (Boniface 2013).

Nigeria & Ghana

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in Nigeria and the National Service Scheme (NSS) in Ghana were both established in 1973. The NYSC in Nigeria originally had a strong focus on promoting social cohesion across ethnic and racial divides as well as filling critical development needs with the skills of university graduates (Innovations in Civic Participation 2010d). However, today one of its key objectives is to "encourage youth to develop skills for self-employment" (Innovations in Civic Participation 2010d, Nigeria Programme Verification Form 2013). The Ghana NSS has been concerned with national and youth development since its inception, "the goal of the programme is to have educated Ghanaians contribute to the country's social needs while providing them with hands-on training in the sectors most pressing to their country's development" (Innovations in Civic Participation 2010b).

Source: Overview of the national youth service landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa: Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA).

2.2 History of the NYS in Zimbabwe

The Zimbabwean National Youth Service was introduced in the year 2001 and suspended in 2007 due to resource constraints. The NYS is popularly referred to as the 'Border Gezi Training' in reference to the late Border Gezi who was the Minister of Youth, Gender and Employment Creation when the program was introduced. The program was implemented first as a centralised program done at the Border Gezi Training Camp in Mt Darwin. It was later offered in various camps at provincial and district levels. To best understand the Zimbabwean socioeconomic and political context prevalent at the time of inception of the NYS program in Zimbabwe, it is to understand the rationale behind the program.

From its inception, the NYS program sought to instill a *"sense of responsible citizenship among the youth"* and to prepare them for *"the world and for work in their country"*⁵. In a country where the economy was backsliding, HIV/AIDS ravaging society and poverty fast entrenching itself at the turn of the century in 2000, the NYS was indeed a well-intentioned program. On paper, the NYS was presented as a program that would *"contribute towards the eradication of poverty"* and *"promote healthy life styles and personal well-being of the youths, with particular emphasis on prevention of HIV/Aids"*⁶.

On the other hand, the program intended to combat the influence of international media and cultural dilution which had resulted in *"diminished sense of national pride"* amongst Zimbabwean youth. This would be achieved by instilling the values of:

- National Identity;
- Patriotism;
- Unity and Oneness;
- Discipline and;
- Self Reliance.⁷

The rationale of the program then can be best understood in the political context of the of the country at the time characterised by a push back against perceived western interference in domestic politics of Zimbabwe. The NYS can be viewed as an attempt at re-asserting the ideals of the liberation struggle in tandem with the Fast Track Land Reform program which was presented as an anti-imperialist program and politically framed as the completion of the liberation struggle and dubbed *'the third Chimurenga'*. The conception of the NYS was coincidental or incidental to the birth of pluralist politics and its associated challenges in Zimbabwe as contending political parties sought to acquire and consolidate power. The National Youth Service then became weaponised and fell into a slippery slope of first being a push back strategy against perceived neo-colonial and imperialist machinations to a partisan paramilitary outfit for election campaigns.

5 Mutisi, M., 2019. Mainstreaming Peace Education in the University Curriculum. *Peace Education for Violence Prevention in Fragile African Societies: What's Going to Make a Difference?* p.307.

6 National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe adopted in 2000.

7 National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe adopted in 2000.

Seven years and an estimated 80,000⁸ graduates later, the First Republic administration of Robert Mugabe had transformed the NYS into fully fledged paramilitary training program churning out a militia force that was allegedly deployed to carry out a violent campaign against perceived opposition supporters. What had begun as a voluntary program had become a compulsory program for conscription of O' Level and A' Level graduates who would not be able to access job opportunities without having undertaken the training. This effectively created a paternalistic relationship between the youth and the state and by extension, the ruling party – ZANU-PF.

In a politically polarised society like Zimbabwe, the confrontations between NYS graduates and opposition activists became characterised by violence and other forms of human rights abuse. The blight of the NYS is in the impunity in which these human rights abuses were carried out. The creation of the Organ for National Healing and Reconciliation (ONHR) in 2009 during the GNU is testimony to a larger extent, to the footprint of violent confrontations some of which have been attributed to the NYS graduates.

Along the way, the noble intentions that motivated the creation of the NYS could no longer be recognised in the end product – the violent NYS graduate. With such a history, the mixed feelings with which the re-introduction of the NYS has been received are understandable based on this context.

2.3 Strengths and Weaknesses of the previous NYS

Understanding the strengths and weaknesses of the previous NYS is important in shaping the structural and substantive components of the NYS program. The strengths of the NYS can be seen in:

- i. **Gateway to public sector employment:** First, the NYS provided a gateway to public sector employment for a lot of its graduates. Whilst the majority could not be absorbed into the public sector, some of the graduates began their public sector careers soon after their completion of this program.
- ii. **Political leadership development:** Further, the NYS ignited in youth, political consciousness and groomed young leaders. While the political consciousness has been viewed as having been biased towards ZANU-PF, the awakening of that consciousness is a strength in itself. What can be done is to ensure that the building of civic and political agency through the NYS does not become a partisan indoctrination process.
- iii. **National Service:** The NYS created an 80,000 strong pool of youth ready to provide national service in times of need. This is a strategic resource that can make a huge difference in disaster relief for instance the climate change induced disasters like cyclones and droughts. The NYS graduates can also play a pivotal role in COVID-19 relief as the pandemic continues to deepen the already existing social and economic challenges and resultant social insecurity.

On the other hand, the weaknesses of the previous NYS have been a subject of public discourse for the past two decades.

⁸ According to a report given to parliament by the Deputy Minister of Youth, Indigenisation and Economic Empowerment in 2010, 80 000 young people graduated from the national Youth Service between 2001 and 2007.

- i. **Lack of transparency:** The secrecy which shrouded the NYS led to misinformation and speculation and this was fueled by allegations of human rights violations during the training itself and during the deployment of graduates to communities. Further, the government has been silent about the achievements, challenges and allegations leveled against the NYS.
- ii. **Partisanship and violence:** Without belabouring the point, the NYS, introduced as a national program quickly morphed into a partisan program⁹ which has been associated with political intimidation and violence. This is evidenced by the NYS graduates setting up bases in communities, including in schools. The unjustifiable motivation for the creation of a partisan para-military training to thousands of youths raised questions of legitimacy of the program. While ZANU-PF has always denied that the program is partisan, evidence on the ground points otherwise. For instance, the National Youth Service graduates¹⁰ have been institutionalised into a ZANU-PF structure just like the war veterans association.
- iii. **Divisive:** While the NYS had sought to promote national unity and oneness, it effectively entrenched polarisation in Zimbabwean society along political lines.
- iv. **Lack of a legitimate legislative framework:** Legislatively, the NYS is authorised by an Act of Parliament, the National Service Act introduced in 1979 and revised in 2001 (National Service Act Chapter 11:08). This was a colonial era legislation by the Rhodesian government to enable compulsory conscription of civilians for military duty during the liberation struggle. This in itself is a flawed foundation upon which to anchor the National Youth Service. This also explains the dominance of, and military orientation of the NYS as it was largely implemented by the Ministry of Defense and not the Ministry of Youth. The Act is also silent on key aspects of the National Youth Service including roles, obligations as well as accountability issues hence basing the establishment of the NYS on the National Service Act gave and continues to give *carte blanche* to the implementers.
- v. **Failure to create employment opportunities:** The failure to create employment opportunities to absorb all graduates of the NYS itself became a blight on the program which was advertised as a gateway to guaranteed employment for all graduates.
- vi. **Lack of viable exit plan:** The NYS lacked a clear and viable exit plan for graduates to enable them to be self-reliant as had been touted to be one of the key intentions of the NYS – to enable youth to be self-reliant. Training and releasing 80,000 unemployed youth into society without creating a viable exit plan nor organising them to be productive left them vulnerable to political exploitation and manipulation as they are a pliable and vulnerable group.
- vii. **Resource Constraints:** The final weakness of the NYS was the resources and infrastructure limitations. Amid a free-falling economy, the NYS became a huge strain on the fiscus until it was discontinued in 2007 due to lack of funding for the program. The program was costly and hard to sustain as it did not have its own revenue generation and sustainability strategies and relied squarely on the government for funding. Successful NYS programs like that of Kenya have various revenue generation strategies which minimises their reliance on the national fiscus.

9 Mhike, I. (2018). Political Violence in Zimbabwe's National Youth Service, 2001–2007.

10 The Herald Newspaper, 23 July 2018 reports that the National Youth Service Graduates Association is an affiliate organisation of the ZANU-PF Youth League.

2.4 The case for re-introduction of the National Youth Service

NYS programs the world over are key for youth employability, social and life skills development and can cultivate in youth a sense of national identity and pride, patriotism, selflessness and active citizenship. For countries with a huge demographic dividend of youth, tapping into it as a strategic national resource creates social capital endowed with ingenuity, energy, creativity and innovation. The lessons of the struggle against colonialism and the proliferation of technological breakthroughs have reinforced the assertion that the advancement of nations, polities and communities rises and falls at the back of its youth.

Zimbabwe is struggling with high unemployment levels. Youth make up a disproportionate majority of the unemployed and those engaged in informal, vulnerable and precarious forms of employment. While Zimbabwe's case is compounded by decades of economic decline, this reality is not peculiar to the country in an African continent where 85.8% of employment is within the informal economy.¹¹ To exacerbate matters, the onset of climate change and the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and societal ills like endemic corruption have resulted in various challenges facing youth, their communities and the nation at large.

This context calls for intentional interventions that bring youth to the fore of the socio-economic and political agency at various levels of society to contribute to the transformation of these seemingly intractable challenges. Further, a viable NYS should be able to build the national character in terms of values, the national social capital in terms of knowledge and skills. These are potent in dealing with the aforementioned challenges.

The National Youth Policy adopted in 2013 envisages the creation of a National Youth Service whose intention is espoused in its guiding principles in section 2.5 subsection (viii):

Youth service: *Youth should be given opportunity to serve their communities whilst developing their own skills; this is essential to developing patriotism and a sense of civic duty¹²*

Clearly, the framers of the National Youth Policy envisaged a National Youth Service which gives youth an opportunity to **serve their communities** and **develop their own skills** in the process. This is expected to foster **patriotism** and a **sense of civic duty**. These are key in shaping society generally and national development in particular.

Understandably, as discussed in preceding sections of this white paper, there has been mixed feelings following news of the proposed re-introduction of the NYS in Zimbabwe. Some have applauded this move, and others have vehemently opposed it. While the government has clearly articulated the nobility of the idea to re-introduce the NYS in 2021, it has not done enough to engage stakeholders and concerned actors whose arguments present citizens' abhorrence based on reminiscences of the previous NYS.

11 International Labour Organization

12 National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe

2.5 Opportunities and Threats for the proposed re-introduction of the NYS

The re-introduction of the NYS presents some opportunities and threats embedded in the socio-economic and political context of Zimbabwe. Some of the opportunities which can be leveraged on include:

- i. **Skills development for self-reliance:** The proposed NYS comes at a time when it is becoming clear that Zimbabwe's economy cannot facilitate the creation of jobs to absorb the estimated 30,000¹³ university graduates who enter into the labour market each year. This figure is a drop in the ocean considering that the majority of High School graduates fail to proceed to tertiary education. In addition, the World Economic Forum predicts that by 2022 the skills required to perform most jobs will have shifted significantly¹⁴. This means most of the skills that young people have acquired will rapidly becoming redundant and irrelevant hence the need for continuous skills development and re-skilling for the youth. As such stakeholders and especially government should craft strategies that empower these youths to be self-reliant and engage in entrepreneurial activities.

The government has over the years introduced youth funds like Kurera/Ukondla Youth Fund which provided loans to young people to start businesses. Recently, the Ministry of Youth has announced another \$120 million youth loan scheme for start-up capital through the Youth Business Starter Packs (YBSP) programme.¹⁵ The reality is that these strategies have not been successful with 84 percent¹⁶ of beneficiaries of the Kurera/Ukondla Youth Fund reported to have defaulted on loan repayments by 2014. This can be attributed to the reality that youths who receive these funds did not have the requisite skills imperative for them to succeed. The NYS can therefore become a vehicle for equipping youth with these vocational and technical skills to enable them to succeed.

- ii. **A positive economic outlook:** The government has come up with interventions which have been touted as successful like the Pfumvudza Conservation Agriculture Program which has strengthened food security. Riding on such successful programs, the NYS can be a viable vehicle for skilling youth and positioning them to benefit from such programs. With the International Monetary Fund (IMF) predicting that Zimbabwe's economy is likely to grow by 6% in 2021¹⁷, NYS presents an opportunity for youth to be organised and empowered to contribute to and to claim a stake in the economic growth.
- iii. **Nation Building:** Zimbabwean society is polarised and divided along racial, ethnic and political lines which calls for the promotion of unity and social cohesion amongst Zimbabweans in their diversity. The NYS can also be a good platform for nation building, building social cohesion amongst youth and across communities through community placements.

13 Graduates living in poverty by Jeffrey Moyo reports that approximately 30,000 students graduate annually from the country's institutions of higher learning. Officially, the country's unemployment rate is 10.7 %. In truth, however, some 80 % of the adult population of this country of 13 million people has no formal employment.

14 World Economic Forum Report on the future of jobs.

15 Bank unveils \$120m loan facility for youths reported by the Herald Newspaper of 13 July 2021.

16 The Chronicle Newspaper 08 October, 2014, 84 percent youth fund beneficiaries fail to repay loans.

17 International Monetary Fund reported a positive economic outlook, and GDP growth forecast of 6% for 2021.

- iv. **A fresh start:** The re-introduction of the NYS also creates an opportunity for a fresh start, to re-orient and rebrand it to embody the character and values that truly benefit youth and the nation. Government must ensure that it is rebranded so as to have a positive impact to the youths and to society in Zimbabwe.¹⁸

Despite the numerous opportunities than can be leveraged by the NYS, various real and perceived threats will hamper its success unless they are effectively addressed.

- i. **Checkered history of NYS:** The unpleasant history of the NYS will continue to cast a shadow of doubt and skepticism amongst society generally and youth in particular. Unless addressed, this will raise questions of legitimacy and sincerity of the government in creating a viable and truly national, non-partisan program. The credibility of the NYS also remains in doubt. The announcement of government's intention to re-introduce the NYS while silent about the negative consequences of the previous NYS creates uncertainty and public mistrust about the proposed re-introduction of the program. To address this, government ought to acknowledge the unpleasant history of the NYS and make efforts to understand its impact on the youth themselves and on Zimbabwean society. This will restore public trust and confidence in the program.
- ii. **High unemployment levels:** One of the objectives of the NYS is to prepare youth for employability through skills training. The expectation here will be that the youth will be able to get jobs upon graduation. That expectation cannot be met under the current conditions. This may create disillusionment by the youth and communities if the graduates do not get jobs afterwards as has happened before. The thousands of youth trained in paramilitary skills and sent back to their communities without anything to do will become a ticking time bomb and fertile ground for organised and sophisticated criminal offences and violence using their paramilitary skills against communities and citizens. This means the design of the program has to be carefully thought out to ensure a viable exit plan for the graduates upon completion of the training.
- iii. **Partisanship and political exploitation:** The timing of the announcement of the intended re-introduction of the NYS less than two years from the 2023 harmonised elections fuels speculation that the NYS will once again be used as a partisan training program to recruit, train and deploy the youth as a campaign machinery. This means that government has to engage stakeholders and dispel any fears about the potential for the appropriation and weaponisation of the NYS for political expediency.
- iv. **Resource constraints:** Resource constraints are also another threat facing the success of the NYS. The national fiscus is already constrained and will continue for the short term to medium term as the economy slowly gets back on track. This means that resources for implementing the NYS will have to be sourced elsewhere. Without effective partnerships between the government and stakeholders like the private sector, International Development Partners, universities, community organisations, implementation may be difficult.

18 Talent Gore opinion article in the Herald on Why national youth service is important featured on 03/03 2017.

- v. **The COVID-19 pandemic:** The onset of COVID-19 and the devastating social and economic havoc that it is causing can also derail the successful implementation of the NYS. NYS camps can easily become transmission hotspots for the virus unless measures are put in place to avert that. Further, COVID-19 might also hamper support from stakeholders as their operations are also heavily impacted.
- vi. **Youth exclusion:** The exclusion of the youth across the socio-economic and political contours of society in the planning, designing, implementation, monitoring and evaluation is also a threat that can hinder the successful implementation of the NYS. The National Youth Policy in section 5.6.1 subsection (e) on strategies for National Youth Service seeks to:

*'provide for meaningful participation of the different youth target groups, particularly young females, young people with disabilities and young people in rural areas in the planning, designing, implementation, evaluation and review of the national youth training programs.'*¹⁹

Without the involvement of youth in these processes, the NYS can become irrelevant or hijacked for purposes other than those that promote youth development.

¹⁹ National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe

3. Getting the Conceptual Framing of the NYS Program Right

Getting the conceptual framing of the NYS right is an important bedrock of the NYS. As the NYS is re-introduced, there is need to rethink its key components both procedurally and substantively including its Core Values and Principles, the Goals and Key Pillars, the Branding and Orientation as well as the Legislative and Policy Framework. This will guide the implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program to ensure its continued service to its ideals and intentions.

3.1 Core Principles and Values

The government of Zimbabwe has laid out principles and values that form the core of the proposed NYS. These are based on the provisions and the ideals of the National Youth Policy adopted in 2013. A lateral review of NYS programs in Africa and other parts of the world articulate the following principles and values are important for a viable National Youth Service²⁰:

- **National identity:** Forging a national identity is one of the key principles guiding NYS programs the world over. National identity refers to the collective sense of being that arises from national symbols, language, the nation's history and folklore, national consciousness, and cultural relics. National identity, like other social identities, engenders positive emotions such as pride and love for one's nation, and feeling of obligations toward other citizens Tajfel, Henri (1978). According to (Neiburg, 2001), national identity presupposes the existence of a collective psychological and cultural homogeneity among the citizens of each country, as well as the idea that each nation can be considered a collective individual, with characteristics analogous to the empirical individuals who are its inhabitants.

The NYS should therefore seek to foster positive national identity which will evoke national pride amongst youth and a sense of belonging. Embracing national identity does not only mean the projection of national character by youth but also means they are active agents in forging, shaping and projecting the national character. The projection of national identity promotes patriotism which is an expression of that pride.

- **Patriotism:** The expression and celebration of one's national identity is seen in practice as patriotism which is indispensable to the development of a positive relationship between the youth, the state and society. Patriotism is one of the oldest political virtues. It reflects a healthy love for what is one's own, gratitude for what one has been given, and reverence for the sources of one's being (Neiburg, 2001). It is an emotional connection to one's country which cannot be qualified rationally. Patriotism can be viewed as the presumptive duty to the political order or the state to which one has renounced natural liberty in the context of John Locke's social contract.²¹

²⁰ The majority of NYS programs place these values and principles at the core of their ideals.

²¹ John Locke's assertion is that men are naturally free and equal as part of the justification for understanding legitimate political government as the result of a social contract where people in the state of nature conditionally transfer some of their rights to the government in order to better ensure the stable, comfortable enjoyment of their lives, liberty and property.

In instilling patriotism, the NYS should be able to create an understanding that patriotism is love for country and love for all with whom national identity is shared. It is a higher order than political allegiance and lends itself as the ultimate unquestionable dedication to the wellbeing of one's country (the state) beyond the political actors that administer it.

- **Discipline:** Discipline creates a sense of control and power over one's course in life. This means self-control and restraint over one's actions. Discipline helps youth develop clarity of purpose in life and shapes one's conduct and behavior. One's ability to master control over their body and mind ensures focus in life and the efficient and effective execution of one's goals.

In a world with many distractions, youth easily lose focus and purpose in life. This reduces their ability to develop themselves and ultimately to contribute towards societal development. Discipline as a value instilled in youth is key to helping them develop habits, rituals and routines that enable them to be effective and efficient in executing tasks in their lives.

- **Volunteerism:** Volunteerism refers to the act of an individual or an organisation giving their time, expertise and labour to an individual or community. Volunteerism promotes positive active citizenship among youth as it encourages them to be more involved, engaged and to participate in the development of their communities. Youth who volunteer get more connected to the community and are likely to give back to their community as they grow. While volunteerism benefits those receiving the voluntary service, it also has positive outcomes for the volunteers themselves. Studies suggest that youth volunteerism contributes to identity development, enhancement of skills, increased self-esteem, development of empathy for others and other positive aspects of personal development.²²

With this in mind, the NYS can be a great space to impart in youth a spirit of volunteerism and also to enable youth to volunteer for various causes and in various communities in a coordinated manner. Volunteerism as a key principle of the NYS can enable the youth to have a rewarding NYS experience while at the same time contributing to their personal development and the development of their communities.

- **Service:** Service refers to the intentional decision and action of serving others and contributing to their welfare. It essentially means elevating the needs of the community above one's personal interests and needs. In this case, one uses their skills and knowledge in service of others.

As in volunteerism, service is an important value to impart in youth so that they value selflessness and put the needs of their communities and the country above their personal interests. This will enable them to serve the public with distinction in their various endeavors during and after undergoing the NYS training program.

3.2 Goals and Key Pillars

Overall Goal

In thinking about the overall goal of the NYS the cardinal principles that youth development and empowerment should be an end goal in itself should guide the conception. A youth empowerment program must impart skills, knowledge and values in youth and position them to fully reach their potential. The tendency by most institutions is to develop and empower youth not for their own growth and benefit but for a purpose determined by the institution. This cultivates a paternalistic and clientelistic relationship between the youth and the institution.

Obviously empowering youth has a direct and indirect positive benefit for society. The societal benefit however should be incidental to the program and not the end goal in itself. In line with this thinking a proposed overall goal of the NYS could be:

*The overall objective of the National Youth Service Program should be to produce a well-rounded citizen equipped with **knowledge, skills and values** that enables them to reach their full potential while **contributing to societal development**.*

At the core of youth development and empowerment are skills, values and knowledge. These are the tools with which youth can develop the nation and without which they are passive citizens. Acquisition of these three components contributes towards youth discovering themselves and their purpose hence they realise their true potential. In the process they contribute to the development of their communities particularly and the nation generally.

Key Pillars

The overall goal above presents key components which collectively make up a successful NYS modelled around a young person. These are components are:

- Knowledge;
- Skills;
- Values and;
- Contribution to societal development.

The assumption is that these are the key components necessary for the development of a well-rounded citizen. The pillars that make up a successful NYS inform the program components of the program design as well as the content within those components. This also informs the structure of the program.

Pillar	Components	Approach
Pillar 1: Values	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patriotism • National identity • Discipline • Service • Volunteerism • Equality 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Paramilitary training • Lectures • Field visits • Community placements • Disaster relief • Nation building
Pillar 2: Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational skills • Entrepreneurial skills • Leadership skills • Life skills 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Vocational Skills Training • Attachments • Community Placements • Apprenticeships • Lectures • Experiential learning • Enterprise development
Pillar 3: Knowledge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • National history and heritage • Political education • Civic education • Climate change and environment • Health and well being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lectures • Debates • Panel discussions • Appreciative inquiry • Field visits
Pillar 4: Societal development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community development • Community projects • Public affairs • National Processes • Public service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participation in public affairs • Involvement and engagement • Active citizenship and agency • Organised alumni network

3.3 Branding and Orientation of the NYS

The current brand identity of the NYS as forged by the First Republic is that of a compulsory, partisan and violent program. This identity was formed over time as discussed in the preceding sections of this paper. Whether this was an intentional processes of brand building or an unintentional consequences of things having gone wrong is a subject for debate.

However, what is clear is that the NYS needs a fresh start to re-orient and rebrand it to embody the character and values that truly benefit youth and the nation. To shake off the tag of violence attached to it, the NYS in Zimbabwe could learn from the NYS in Kenya which has over the years successfully rebranded itself from the ills of yesteryear to a viable national program. For example, NYS graduands in Kenya perform their military drills at the pass out ceremony holding white shovels in place of guns as a commitment to contribute positively to national development in a peaceful manner.

3.4 Legislative and Policy Frameworks for NYS

If the NYS is to be a viable program, there is need for a specific act which governs the National Youth Service as distinct from the National Service Act currently governing the program. The act will cover address the intentions of the program, the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders, the structure and character of the program, its principles and values as well as issues of accountability.

The previous NYS program began as a voluntary program and later transformed into a compulsory one. It is imperative for the government to consider the NYS as a voluntary program in order to uphold the constitutional right to freedom of choice and freedom of association and assembly. Besides, the NYS recruitment should be demand-driven rather than coercive.²³

Alternatively, if the NYS is to be compulsory, it can be designed in a way that it enables those who are not interested in paramilitary training and service to undergo a civilian service as an option. All this should be espoused clearly in a specific Act of Parliament governing the National Youth Service.

3.5 Recommendations

The following recommendations can help conceptually frame the NYS in Zimbabwe:

- There is need to carry out a comprehensive review or an audit of the previous NYS to explore its impact on youth and on society including the successes, failures and lessons that can inform the successful implementation of the new the NYS.
- Ensure the NYS is a truly national, independent and non-partisan youth program both procedurally and substantively open to all youth who qualify.
- Create an NYS that is youth centred and youth oriented, a program whose ultimate objective is the personal development of the young person in terms of skills, knowledge and values in a manner that enables them to be agents of societal development.
- Rebrand and re-orient the NYS to embody the character and values that truly benefit youth and the nation. The outlook of the NYS should be that of a non-violent, inclusive and accountable national program.
- Enact an Act of Parliament which specifically deals with the National Youth Service independent of the National Service Act which serves a totally different purpose.

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4. NYS Program Design

As the adage goes, “form follows function”, the design of the NYS should carefully consider the target group, recruitment procedures, as well as the key components of the program structure. The design of the NYS should enable the achievement of its objectives in a coherent, effective, efficient, impactful and sustainable manner.

4.1 Target Group

As articulated by the National Youth Policy, the NYS should, “provide for meaningful participation of the different youth target groups, particularly young females, young people with disabilities and young people in rural areas...”²⁴ This means that the NYS should target participants from different walks of life between the ages 18 to 35 as articulated by the government in its plans to re-introduce the program.

Entry Level

The ideal target group is A' Level graduates and O' Level graduates to cater for those who do not proceed to A' Level for various reasons. This is an ideal target group in that for those who drop out at O' Level, the NYS can help equip them with skills that enable them to be employable and to be self-reliant. For A' Level graduates, these are able to take a gap year as they prepare for their tertiary education and the NYS can add value as it exposes them to various skills and knowledge which potentially enhance their career paths.

In addition, most youth in these cohorts do not have pressing responsibilities and obligations as they have not yet started families and can afford to take some time to participate in the program.

4.2 Recruitment

Considering that youth are not a homogenous group, it is imperative for the recruitment to be carried out in a way that it does not leave anyone behind. This means that the channels for communication should be multiple including traditional and new media as well as through stakeholders and government departments. Further, the recruitment should be decentralised to enable access by youth and their maximum participation by stakeholders for transparency and accountability of the program.

4.3 Program Structure

A viable NYS program ought to have the following components in its structure:

- i. **Paramilitary Training:** Paramilitary training is one of the key components of NYS programs the world over. It is useful for instilling discipline amongst youth as well as ensuring the building of a youth cohort that is able physically to contribute to national service whenever the need arises.

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Paramilitary training is not peculiar to Zimbabwe only, in countries such as the United States of America, Greece, Israel, Singapore and Kenya, basic military and security training is part of the NYS. What is critical is the articulation of the motive of recruiting youths for the NYS and how the NYS graduates will be treated and deployed during or after their trainings.²⁵

The program should also have a comprehensive re-integration strategy for the NYS graduates into the community after undergoing paramilitary training.

- ii. **Civic Education:** The NYS should educate and build understanding of youth on their rights, their responsibility, their roles and their obligations in the socio-economic and political discourse of Zimbabwe. As embedded in the social contract, civic education prepares young people to be active citizens²⁶ at community level, national and globally. Education for citizenship is an important cog in building society. Citizenship has evolved historically and can be most simply expressed in terms of the relationship of the individual to the state. Sinclair (2001: 243) defines it as 'the particular nationality that someone has and the official status, rights, and duties that any citizen has because of it'.²⁷
- iii. **Vocational and Technical Skills:** One of the objectives of NYS is to enhance their employability through vocational and technical skills acquisition. This prepares them for the world of work and positions them to be effective contributors to economic development both in the formal and informal economy of Zimbabwe.

Zimbabwe's NYS ought to emphasise vocational training and partner with the public and private sector to facilitate acquisition of these skills practically.

- iv. **Voluntary Community Service Placements:** The NYS should provide an opportunity for youth to serve their communities through voluntary placements. Community service can be a great space to impart in youth a spirit of volunteerism and service which gives them a rewarding as they grow personally while contributing to the development of their communities. The NYS can partner with government departments, local government, community organisations, faith based organisations and NGOs to provide opportunities for community placements for the participants.
- v. **Decentralisation:** Considering the huge number of youth who might want to participate in the NYS, and in line with the devolution agenda, it is imperative to decentralise the NYS at least to district level. This will enhance accessibility of the program as well as meaningful participation by stakeholders at a local level to enhance local level accountability.
- vi. **Duration:** The duration of the NYS should be such that it enables adequate training and development without being disruptive to the youth as they try to build their lives, careers and families. A program that targets youth as soon as they complete their O' Level and A' Level examinations and runs for three months while they await their results or while they wait to enroll for university would be ideal and less disruptive.

25 Position paper - National Youth Service Reintroduction: A Promise for Political Violence in 2023 – Heal Zimbabwe Trust.

26 Fatima H. Eid - Journal of Case Studies in Education: Citizenship, community and national identity: young people perceptions in a Bahraini context.

27 Sinclair (2001: 243).

- vii. **Alumni of the NYS:** One of the weaknesses of the previous NYS is that it did not have an organised network or grouping of its alumni. An organised alumni grouping enables the members to remain engaged with each other, with their communities and with the NYS. It also fosters cohesions, continuous cultivation of the NYS ideals and collective agency. Above all, it makes it easier for government and other stakeholders to easily tap into the NYS alumni for service whenever the need arises.

This is already envisaged by the National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe in section 5.6.1 subsection (h.) in its strategies for National Youth Service sets out to:

*Promote volunteerism among the youth and establish a National Youth Volunteer Corps;*²⁸

The alumni of the NYS can be a foundation for the establishment of the National Youth Volunteer Corps.

NYS in Kenya

The National Youth Service Programme in Kenya is the Kenya National Youth Service, launched in 1964 to create a pool of trained, disciplined and organised youth to undertake work on important national development projects. Its primary roles are nation building through volunteerism and service in the military during a state of war or public emergency and the defence of the nation (Kenya Case Profile 2013).

The Kenya NYS was established and is regulated through an Act of Parliament – the National Youth Service Act Chapter 208 Laws of Kenya – which mandates the training and employment of youth in service of the nation, and the service of youth with armed forces during times of war. Up to the late 1980s, the programme was compulsory, however the compulsory aspect was discontinued in 1990, due to sustainability challenges. It then became a voluntary training programme with a market-driven focus. Following the passing of a new law by the Kenya Senate in July 2013, the programme will again become compulsory in 2014 (Kenya Case Profile 2013). The programme engages youth between the ages of 18 and 22 who have achieved at least a D+ in the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education. Participants must be medically and physically fit, unmarried and without dependants. Participants must also meet certain height requirements, as per the armed forces' strategy. Preference is given to orphans and disadvantaged youth. In 2013, one third of the participants were from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Participants complete six months of basic training (a paramilitary course), and then complete up to two years of service in various fields. Activities include constructing roads, airfields, dams and irrigation canals. After they complete their service, participants enrol in training and vocational institutes to take courses at diploma, certificate and craft levels.

Source: Overview of the national youth service landscape in Sub-Saharan Africa. Johannesburg, South Africa: Volunteer and Service Enquiry Southern Africa (VOSESA).

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5. Stakeholder Participation in the NYS

The success of the NYS is anchored on the involvement of various stakeholders in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the program. These stakeholders include government, universities, colleges, political parties, civil society, NGOs, youth organisations, local government, business, faith-based organisations and media amongst others. These stakeholders play a pivotal role in providing technical, intellectual, moral and financial support for the program. Lessons from Kenya show the value that can be created when various state and non-state actors come together to contribute to the NYS. The scope of the stakeholder support can be categorised into recruitment, partnerships, resources, placement opportunities, skills development, employment opportunities and collective accountability.

5.1 Recruitment

Stakeholders like educational institutions, NGOs, churches, community-based organisations, community leaders, local government and the business community interface with youth on a regular basis through various activities. These stakeholders can play a key role in the recruitment of youth for the program both as community level agents and as part of the selection committee to enhance transparency and inclusivity of the program.

5.2 Partnerships

The NYS ought to pursue a systems thinking Approach and view youth development and empowerment holistically, identifying individuals, organisations and institutions at all levels of society that hold a piece of the solution. NYS should strengthen collaboration amongst stakeholders and sectors to jointly achieve desired outcomes.

5.3 Resources

Stakeholders can also forge viable partnerships for funding of the NYS. NGOs already partner and complement government in various programs and can help in the sourcing and provision of funds for the program. The business community has also worked with government on a public private partnerships basis as well as with communities on a corporate social responsibility basis. These stakeholders can collaborate with the NYS to help develop and implement sustainable funding mechanisms for the NYS.

5.4 Volunteer Placements

Stakeholders are best placed to accommodate NYS trainees in their organisations and programs as a way of providing vacancies for volunteer placements and community attachments. They stand to play a pivotal role in the skills development of the trainees throughout their placements as they will supervise them on a daily basis throughout their experiential learning phase.

5.5 Employment Opportunities

Beyond volunteer placements, these stakeholders can help in employment creation and absorb the NYS graduates into their organisations. Such partnerships are key to ensure that the program remains viable as one that enhances youth's chances for employment.

5.6 Collective Accountability

Stakeholder engagement and participation in the planning, design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the NYS program stands to strengthen collective accountability. This is critical to building public trust and ensuring the program continues to pursue its stated goals and meet its intended outcomes.

6. Effective Governance of the NYS

In line with the Strategies for National Youth Service in section 5.6.1 (i) of the National Youth Policy, which envisages to:

Establish an independent body to monitor and evaluate the National Youth Training program in order to determine its impact and to periodically review the mandate, nature and form of the service.²⁹

The National Youth Service should be governed by an independent body at the apex, which monitors and evaluates its impact, mandate and service. This is an important foundation for promoting effective governance. The structure of the NYS should ensure inclusion of various stakeholders and should also be decentralised at least to district level to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and local level transparency and accountability.

The governance of the NYS should be guided by the principles of:

- **Equality and Equity:** Equality means each individual or group of people are accorded the same rights, resources, privileges, opportunities and benefits without discrimination. Equity recognises that each person has different circumstances and accords resources and opportunities needed to reach an equal outcome.³⁰

Zimbabwe is still grappling with social inequalities based on gender, social class, background, level of education and so on. The design and implementation of the NYS should take into account these inequalities and enable for all young people in Zimbabwe to have an equal chance at participating and to be treated equally during and after the training. Wherever necessary, equity should be employed including affirmative action to ensure all youth who qualify including disadvantaged groups have a fair chance of participating.

- **Diversity and Inclusion:** Youth are not a homogenous group. There are various cohorts of young people due to different cultural, social, economic, political and technological contexts. These youths have different needs, experiences, ideas and solutions to issues relating to them. There are young men, young women, youth with disabilities, urban youth, rural youth, educated youth, uneducated youth etc. Most programs and platforms for engagement assume a blanket approach to youth participation. This excludes and disenfranchises some cohorts of youth in the process.³¹

The NYS should create a space that recognises and celebrates diversity and ensures inclusion of various youth groups. This ought to be done through ensuring that measures are put in place to cater for the heterogeneity of youth in Zimbabwe and create an NYS program that works for everyone.

- **Transparency and Accountability:** The NYS should operate in a transparent and accountable manner, whilst ensuring that it is accessible to the youth and stakeholders.³²
- **Youth oriented and Youth centred:** The NYS should place youth at the core of its mission and empower them to actively and meaningfully participate in shaping it and in its governance. The NYS should not regard youth as passive recipients of the program but as active actors in its design, programming and governance.

²⁹ National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe.

³⁰ Equity vs. Equality: What's the Difference? | Online Public Health.

³¹ Politics and Participation: Tackling barriers to youth participation in Zimbabwe – a conference paper presented by Ntando Dumani at the Western Region Envisioning Platform in Bulawayo 2018.

³² National Youth Policy of Zimbabwe.

7. Guaranteeing Sustainability of the NYS

One of the key questions surrounding the success of the NYS is organisational and operational sustainability of the program. Providing a viable training program to thousands of youth annually requires social, economic and ecological considerations that are anchored on organisational and operational systems and structures that are fit for purpose. These structures and systems should enable the NYS to grow consistently and sustain that growth. The following strategies can strengthen the organisational and operational sustainability of the NYS:

- Developing strong organisational and operational systems which enable the NYS to effectively and efficiently carry out its mandate whilst remaining, independent, transparent and accountable. This should be underpinned by meaningful stakeholder participation at all levels of society and in all aspects of the NYS program.
- Establishing NYS Enterprises to for revenue generation and for skills training for youth. These enterprises can be in sectors that are critical for the self-sustenance of the NYS. For instance, clothing enterprises would enable the NYS to produce its own uniforms and related material, agricultural enterprises will enable the NYS to produce its own food for the training centres. Some of these Collective enterprises can be Youth Enterprises and cooperatives which are established and run by NYS graduates as part of employment creation and economic empowerment generally.
- Ecologically, the NYS ought to embrace policies and practices that protect the environment and promote climate action to enable the current generation to benefit from the environment without jeopardising the ability of future generations to benefit from the same environment.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the NYS can be a key intervention for youth civic and political development while availing a conduit for youth contribution to societal development. Clearly, the past experiences of the NYS have not been ideal hence the re-introduction of the NYS now should be a clear departure from the pitfalls of yesteryear. The NYS ought to develop youth to be well-rounded citizens equipped with knowledge, skills and values that enable them to reach their full potential while contributing to societal development.

To ensure, viability, sustainability, transparency and accountability, effective stakeholder participation at all levels and phases of the NYS should be cultivated. This ought to be carried out in a way that the NYS becomes inclusive, transparent, accountable whilst promoting equality and equity in its policy and practice.

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