

Sierra Leone National Youth Policy

launched Monday June 30th 2003.



It is with profound pleasure and satisfaction that I welcome the launching of the National Youth Policy of Sierra Leone. There can be no question as to my Government's commitment to enhance and promote the interests and welfare of young people in this country.

The creation of a new Ministry responsible for youth and sports, and the cabinet adoption of the youth policy bear testimony to our conviction that youth empowerment is a country's best investment for a prosperous future.

It is my hope therefore that this youth policy will serve as a reference for State institutions, development partners and the private sector, in our combined efforts to enhance youth development, thereby providing a sound base for a stable and peaceful Sierra Leone.

May God bless the children and youth of Sierra Leone and give us the strength, courage and commitment to make adequate provision for their welfare.

H.E. Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.
30th June 2003.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- The revised national Youth Policy of Sierra Leone has been designed to mainstream Youth activities and contributions and to highlight Youth concern as critical input in the development process.
- The policy incorporates the following: the national Youth Development Policy, 1995; the recommendations of the National Youth Forum, 2000 and the national Youth Conference, 2001.
- This revised policy seeks to strengthen collaboration between Youth organisations/Youth servicing Agencies, NGO's, and all line Ministries that have youth related activities.
- The policy defines Youth as any Sierra Leonean (female and male) within the 15-35-age bracket. This does not exclude any young Sierra Leonean liable to Youth related needs, concerns and influences.
- The policy provides guidelines as to the responsibilities of adults, the state and the private sector to youths; and the responsibilities of youth to society generally.



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- The policy delineates the specific role of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the National Advisory Youth Council, and the Districts Youth Councils.

VISION STATEMENT

The National Youth Policy is anchored on the twin notion of youth empowerment and the creation of a responsible citizenry. Empowerment in a post-conflict context involves privileging and mainstreaming youth related activities in the overall process of national reconstruction. The ultimate goal is to reinvent the time-honoured notion of dignity in labour, instill national consciousness and patriotism in our young citizens, so as to lay the foundation for the emergence of a responsible citizenry in the service of a one and indivisible Sierra Leone.

1. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

This policy shall aim at creating a level playing field for youths to actualise their fullest potentials, be competitive nationally and globally, and to contribute as good, responsible citizens to the development of their country. The objectives of the policy will therefore be as follows:

- · To set up a mechanism in the Ministry of Youth and Sport where in state policy on youths would be designed, articulated, and implemented through well-defined projects.
- · To create a fast track process for the self-realisation of youths and their overall development as a strategy for coping with the economic, social and psychological damages of war.
- · To create reliable and efficient networks through which youths all over the country can easily and rapidly access valuable information that are beneficial to them or by which agencies serving them can reach them.
- · To collaborate with other ministries, institutions, and youth serving agencies in encouraging, and facilitating the employment of youth in the private and public sector.
- · To guarantee healthy and useful productive lives for youths through sensitisation on health issues, recreation and anti-drug abuse activities.
- · To work with the relevant agencies in the public/private sector in the fight against HIV/AIDS, and to sensitise youths and their communities on the implications of the disease for national development.
- · To enhance the empowerment of young women by incorporating gender sensitivity into all aspects of the youth policy and programmes.
- · To mobilize youths of all ages to replace the culture of violence with a culture of peace, dialogue and responsible citizenry through intensive campaigns; value education programmes and life skills training.
- To reinvent the dignity of labour as an integral aspect of youth culture and consciousness.

2. YOUTH PROFILE

Sierra Leone is well endowed with human and natural resources. The population of about 5.2 million in 2002 is growing at 2.6 per annum. By the year 2005, it is estimated that about 55% will be youths. In fact the age distribution of the youth population (1963, 1974 and 1985) suggests that youth population grew from 33.7% to 34% and to 35. =49% respectively, with the female population always exceeding that of male. School enrolment is at a dismal rate such that UNICEF estimated that about 67 percent of primary school age children are currently not in school.

A rather dated labour force survey (1989/90) estimated that unemployment rate was about 25% and the highest was among the youth, between the ages of 18 and 35. The poverty profile affirmed that young adults aged 15-24, are amongst the poorest of the poor.

Due to the war, an estimated 700,000 of the displaced with Sierra Leone were children and youth; some 9,000 were maimed, orphaned or separated from their parents. A sizeable proportion of them were combatants who currently live/make a living on the streets. Majority of these youths who were forced to flee their communities, trooped to Freetown, and other major cities like Bo and Kenema, and have become accustomed to city life. They are largely illiterate, school dropouts eking a living from petty trading, narcotic drug peddling, prostitution and theft. These youths are bunched in poor sections of cities, and the rising number of slums in the city centre, where they hourly feed western violence-prone/pornographic movies in ubiquitous video cinema houses. The 'new mind opium' is the regular viewing of European soccer on satellite TV. Nearly every other youth in urban Sierra Leone is an avid fan of one European football club, with school-going youth devoting very little time for studies.

Narcotic drug abuse and prostitution are becoming widespread among the youth. There is a causal linkage between the desire for a daily fix and the proliferation of petty crime and theft. Narcotic drug abuse and slow economic growth is a lighted fuse on a ticking time bomb. Available evidence on the prevalence of sexually transmitted disease, including HIV/AIDS, suggests that the incidence of HIV/AIDS is on the rise. According to the UN Population Division (Department of Economic and Social Affairs). Adults (15-49 years) living with HIV/AIDS in Sierra Leone number sixty five thousand (65000, approximately 3% of the adult population).

Another problem of concern is the increasing number of disadvantaged and disabled young people. It is estimated that children are disproportionately affected because they are more susceptible to social, cultural, economic and political upheavals.

The major national challenge facing the nation is two fold:

- To reduce the number of marginal youth
- To increase the number of mainstream youth.

3. DEFINITION OF YOUTH, YOUTH ORGANISATION AND YOUTH SERVICING AGENCIES WHO IS A YOUTH?

The policy defines youth as all Sierra Leonean female and male between the ages of 15 and 35. This age bracket is exposed to multiple influences and requires a variety of social, economic and practical support to realize their full potentials.

The policy recognises that there may be young people outside this age bracket that are exposed to similar circumstances as that of the youths within the specified age category. Such young persons will, within a given framework, be included in the implementation of various programmes identified in this policy. There will be flexibility in the implementation of the policy to accommodate young persons who may be below 15 depending on the nature of programmes being implemented.

WHAT IS A YOUTH ORGANISATION?

A youth organization is any organization set up and managed by individuals in the 15-35-age bracket, with a common developmental objective geared towards social/economic development.

WHAT IS A YOUTH SERVING AGENCY?

A youth serving agency is an outfit managed by adults or co-managed by youths and adults that provides services for the development of young people or specialized in activities that centre on youths.

4. 1 RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES RIGHTS OF YOUTHS

The policy seeks to stimulate recognition for, and enforcement of, the following rights of youths as embodied in the Constitution of Sierra Leone and other important national and international documents such as the National Education Policy, and the Lisbon Protocol of 1998.

- The right to Quality Education
- The right to participate in all decision-making processes relating to the welfare of the youth.
- Protection from human harmful drugs, use of firearms and all forms of exploitation (be sexual abuses or child labour).
- The right of youths (especially the girl-child) to decide about their marriage.
- The right to gainful employment either in the public or private sector on completion of formal, information or non-formal education.
- The right to participate in governance issues.
- The right to form Associations.
- The freedom of opinion, conscience and expression.
- The right to access appropriate information.
- The right to leisure, cultural and sports activities and to live in a good and healthy environment.
- The right to maintain child-parent relationship.
- With the above rights are associated responsibilities.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF YOUTHS

- Youths should strive to meaningfully contribute to the social, cultural, economic and political development of this nation.
- Youths must respect and maintain the laws of Sierra Leone.
- Youths must refrain from all forms of violence, substance drugs, and practice safe sex habits.

- Youths must strive to promote the policy of national reconciliation.
- To promote peace, security and development.
- To respect and protect public property.
- To promote gender equality and respect for the rights and dignity of girls and women.
- To discourage acts of violence, crime, exploitation and oppression of vulnerable groups.
- To actively participate in the fight against STD's (STI's) and the spread of HIV/AIDS.
- To honour and respect Sierra Leone's National symbols.
- To promote and defend democracy through active participation in the democratic process at all levels.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY

The National Youth Policy recognizes that youth women and men should be assisted to enjoy their rights and meet their responsibilities through the support of Parents/Adults and the State. Authority figures in society must take their responsibility seriously as key role models for personality development of youth, and the shaping of the nation. The public and private sector must also be cognizant of their responsibilities.

4.3 RESPONSIBILITIES OF PARENTS/ADULTS

- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to ensure that youths within the age bracket of 15-18 grow up in an environment of warmth, affection, security and stability.
- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians to enhance the physical and psychological, sociological and economic development of youths.
- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians and relevant authorities in society to ensure protection to the young without overpowering them.
- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians and relevant authorities to recognize the potentials of young persons and guide them to develop their abilities and talents.
- It is the responsibility of parents/guardians and relevant authorities to educate youth about human rights, and to ensure that the human rights of youths are not violated.

4.4 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE STATE

- It is the responsibility of the state to ensure that youth enjoy their constitutional and social rights.
- It is the responsibility of the state to provide an enabling environment complete with the necessary wherewithal to realize and actualise youth potential.
- It is the responsibility of the state to design, co-ordinate, evaluate, and monitor all youth-related activities/all stakeholders in youth affairs.

4.5 RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR

This policy seeks to encourage private sector initiatives. This should take the form of financial contribution, employment creation, and skills training.

5. KEY TARGET GROUPS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The National Youth Policy is sensitive to the multiple stakeholders that need coordination to attain the successful implementation of the desirable policies. Though the policy is specifically intended to meet the interests, need and concerns of all youths in the country



certain marginal youth groups are of primary concern because of the peculiar problem. These are:

- Girl-child; young women; sex-workers
- Unemployed young people
- Rural Youths
- Disadvantaged and disabled youths
- Youth diamond diggers
- Youth living with HIV/AIDS
- School dropouts
- Drug addicts

The various stakeholders in Youth development are primarily:

- Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of labour and Industrial Relations
- Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender, and Children's Affairs
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Development and Economic Planning
- Ministry of Information and Broadcasting
- Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security
- National Commission for Democracy and Human Rights
- Ministry of Tourism and Culture
- NaCSA
- UNAMSIL
- UNDP
- UNICEF - United nations Children's Fund
- United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA)
- World Health Organisation (WHO)
- All Registered Community Based Organisation (CB's)
- All registered Youth Organisations
- NGOs and INGOs

To achieve the various goals it is necessary to design a clear programme of action involving both the public and private sectors together with other interested parties.

6. THE FOLLOWING STRATEGIC AREAS HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED AS PRIORITIES

- Job Creation Opportunities
- Skills Training

- Information and Sensitisation
- Community Development Projects
- Presidential Award for Excellence
- Youth Consultation/Participation

The proper coordination of the activities of the stakeholders and Target groups would enhance the success of this policy.

7 IMPLEMENTATION MECHANISMS (SECTORAL LINKAGES)

The Ministry of Youth and Sports cannot single handedly implement the wide range of programmes identified in the Youth Policy. A holistic and comprehensive response to the needs, concerns, problems and opportunities reflected in the policy warrants the concerted efforts of various key Sectoral Ministries and Development Partners such as Health, Social Welfare and Children's Affairs, Lands, Housing and the Environment, Agriculture, Internal Affairs, Local Government, UNICEF, DFID and UNDP.

In order to ensure efficient and effective implementation of this policy, appropriate coordination structures and mechanisms must be put in place to avoid duplication and to maximize resources.

8 THE ROLE OF THE MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS

The Ministry of Youth and Sports shall oversee the implementation of the Youth Policy. The Ministry shall facilitate the monitoring of various programmes as articulated in the National Youth Policy, including playing an advocacy role.

The Ministry shall initiate linkages and collaborative efforts within relevant government sectors. This ministry should play a pivotal role in the professional training of youth workers both for Government, relevant NGO's, and Youth Organisations.

The Ministry shall initiate the review of the National Youth Policy in the course of its implementation in consultation with key stakeholders working in all youth linked sectors.

Each relevant government sector will be required to create a youth focal point. The youth focal point will, on a regular basis, provide guidance, monitor youth-related programmes within the ministry, and work with other members toward promoting youth participation in the decision-making process.

9.1 THE NATIONAL YOUTH ADVISORY COUNCIL

The Council will play a supportive role in the implementation of all youth related programmes. The Council will be headed by a National Co-ordinator who will report directly to the Minister of Youth and Sport on all matters relating to youth development in this country. It will serve as a channel of communication, for all issues including Government policy and programmes, to all affiliated Youth Organisations. The National Youth Council will be the central meeting place for all Youth Organisations in the country.

9.2 DISTRICT YOUTH COMMITTEES

District Youth Committees will be set up in every district. They will be tasked with the following:

- To identify major youth concerns, needs and opportunities in their district.

To identify projects/programmes that can be recommended for funding and support.

To promote collaboration and cooperation amongst Youth organisations operating within the district.

To plan, develop and implement projects and programmes that are beneficial to young people.

To collect, collate and compile data pertaining to Youth in the district.

The membership of District Youth Councils will be drawn from Youth Organisations; NGO's operating in the district, Youth workers, and ex-officio members from Youths clubs in the district. The district Youth Committees will report directly to the Co-ordinator of the National Youth Advisory Council.

10. POLICY REVIEW

This policy will be reviewed every three years to incorporate new approaches to youth empowerment.

CONCLUSION

This policy will be implemented through an action plan that will provide details on the strategies to be employed and the areas of priority. Only a comprehensive national strategy and a coordinated networking among key target groups and stakeholders would produce the desired results. Youths have lots of every and potential that Sierra Leone can harness for development but this can only be realised in an environment where the Youth Question is at the top of the national agenda. Sierra Leone can only hope for a brighter future if she prepares the youth for responsible leadership and positive result-oriented activities. This underlines the need for a policy that is inclusive of all categories of youths spelling out rights, responsibilities, and expectations. The Government, through the Ministry of Youth and Sports, must create the ideal enabling environment to tackle unemployment, drug-abuse, homelessness, and create, a positive working culture in the minds of our young women and men if we are to lay to rest the rather nihilistic notion that puts premium on violence as agent of social change. This is possible in the context of a national policy that creates a level playing field for all youths - ' new civilians' drop outs; sex-workers; illicit miners; school going; and the disabled/disadvantaged-to realise their dreams and aspirations in post conflict Sierra Leone.

POSTSCRIPT
Minister of Youth and Sports.



(Hon. Dr. Dennis Bright)

This document constitutes a major landmark in our collective attempt to privilege and empower youth as responsible citizens in the nation-state project. It is broad in its scope and inclusive of all categories of youth; from the marginal to the mainstream. Indeed we have come a long way in designing, strategizing, and now creating a framework within which to right the mistakes of the past.

A national youth policy, with explicit rights and responsibilities, should of necessity be predicated on a clear vision of the kind of women and men that will inherit the burden of the governance in the nation-state. If we differ in the kind of society we want for our children, let us agree on the qualities of the individuals who would should the national burden.

A premium on the kind of youth we want to see, on the quality of the future citizens of a one and indivisible Sierra Leone is crucial to our collective survival as a nation.

This is an opportunity to register our sincere thanks and appreciation to our main collaborators; such as the Commonwealth Youth Programme, UNICEF, and UNDP, whose inputs have made the planning and development of this Youth policy possible.

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