

NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY

FOREWORD

This National Youth Policy is a result of broad consultations with all those concerned with youth development and the youth themselves.

Although this policy defines **◆YOUTH◆ as those falling between fourteen and twenty five years of age, the definition is quite flexible bearing in mind the variety of parameters that could be used in categorising the youth.**

The youth represent a vast human resource potential, which, if properly prepared and tapped can contribute positively to national development. If neglected however, the youth can spell disaster for the nation.

However, a number of issues impinge on the youth's contribution to national development. High illiteracy rates, unemployment, underemployment, lack of scientific awareness, a high population growth rate and the HIV/AIDS epidemic, are some of such issues affecting the youth that this policy proposes to address.

The policy therefore aims to empower the youth to face the social, cultural, economic and political challenges facing the nation.

The document gives a broad guidelines from which action programmes and services can be developed to facilitate meaningful involvement of the youth in the overall national development efforts. These programmes will also respond to their needs and problems.

It is the hope of the Ministry that this document will provide guidelines to all Government Ministries, religious Organisations, Non-governemntal Organisations (NGOs), the Private Sector, the Donor Community, the International Youth Organisations and indeed the General Public in our endeavour to build a better Malawi.

-Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture

INTRODUCTION

WHY A NATIONAL YOUTH POLICY DOCUMENT?

The purpose of this policy is to formally and clearly establish the identity and status of the Malawian youth as a distinct sector of government policy, and to create a direction for youth activities and involvement in various national development programmes.

WHY A POLICY JUST FOR YOUTH?

Currently, more than half of the population of Malawi is below the age of 25, which indicates that Malawi is a youthful nation; and that the youth are the nation today and tomorrow.

The youth are energetic, adventurous, industrious, strong, healthy and willing to learn. They are therefore an important human resource, but their full potential is underrealised, under-utilised and sometimes misdirected. Their well being and contribution is a major determinant of the current and future development of the nation.

WHY A POLICY NOW?

Malawi does not have a clear youth policy so far, although some programmes have been undertaken. Due to social, economic and cultural challenges facing the youth and youth work, it has become necessary to formulate a national youth policy. This policy therefore provides a framework with guidelines for the facilitation of meaningful youth development programmes and services with full participation of the young people themselves at all levels.

HOW IS YOUTH DEFINED?

This policy defines youth as all young people, female and male, from the age of 14 to 25 years. However, it is recognized that youth is not a chronological definition but also a term commonly used to describe roles in society ascribed to the young. This policy, therefore, will be flexible to accommodate young people less than 14 years and over 25 years, depending on their social and economic circumstances. The age definition, despite its limitation, offers certain statistical utility as well as the practical convenience of a definitive social group which has its own specific problems and needs.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES YOUTH ARE PRESENTLY FACING?

The Youth Profile in Malawi shows a lack of basic opportunities available to them, although they constitute a large sector of the population. This has been compounded by the presence of a range of adverse conditions that impinge on the youth. The most serious being poverty.

The situation analysis of poverty in Malawi estimates that 60% of Malawians live below

the poverty line. This is because the economic base at the national level has resulted in very minimal investment in real terms in the social sector by the Government. In addition, the inability of the educational system to prepare the youth for the challenges of after school life has also contributed to the enormous youth unemployment and under-employment as it favours white collar jobs.

The agricultural sector, which accounts for about 80% of the total labour force continues to lose its significance due to land pressure, while the labour market in the industrial and social sectors remains small. This has contributed to an increase in rural/urban migration, as well as an increasing rate of unemployment and under-employment of the youth.

Unequal access to the already limited opportunities has marginalised other youth groups such as young women, disabled and deviant youth. Breakdown of traditional cultural systems has also had a negative effects on youth development.

The absence of a coordinated approach to youth issues has resulted in the absence of programmes beneficial to the youth. Above all, the youth have not been involved in decision making on issues which affect them. This is happening at a time when the youth are becoming increasingly vulnerable in the following areas:

Inadequate vocational training

Homelessness

Unemployment and underemployment

Sexual harassment

Health related issues such as HIV/AIDS STDs

Unlicensed entertainment

Teenage pregnancy and early marriage

Crime and general youth deviance

Marginalisation

Youth non-involvement in decision making

Smoking, drug and alcohol abuse

Lack of sporting and entertainment facilities

GOAL

The youth policy seeks to develop the full potential of youth and to 'promote' their active participation in National Development.

OBJECTIVES

The National Youth Policy will seek to fulfil the following objectives:

- a. To institutionalize and facilitate youth participation in the formulation and review of legislative policies and general decision making machinery.
- b. To create more educational and training opportunities for youth at all levels and to re-orient and encourage the youth to use basic scientific and technological principles in order to stimulate innovative approaches to development.
- c. To promote a healthy living among the youth through the provision of appropriate awareness in Family Life Education Programmes.
- d. To create greater awareness among the youth of the dangers of HIV/AIDS and STDs, and also provide and promote the care of infected persons
- e. To provide appropriate social, vocational, physical and mental programmes for the rehabilitation of the youth with special needs
- f. To institute and promote environmental education and active participation in environmental conservation among the youth.
- g. To promote, preserve, and develop the variety of ethnic cultural heritage in Malawi
- h. To provide and sustain adequate recreational and sporting facilities for the youth in communities and schools for healthy minds and healthy bodies
- i. To promote civic education
- j. To promote collaboration and coordination between the private sector, government, NGO's etc, for the development and implementation of Youth Programmes at family, community, religious, local government, regional, national and international levels
- k. To set up and maintain data bank for easy and quick retrieval of information pertaining to the youth
- l. To mobilise internal and external resources for the development of youth
- m. To provide the medium for the youth to establish facilities for social empathy

Values

The National Youth Policy seeks to promote a sense of individual responsibility of the Malawian youth towards the community; based upon the following values:

- a. Active involvement of the youth in decision making and national development programmes
- b. Respect for human dignity and culture
- c. Promotion of the total well being of the youth; physically, intellectually, spiritually, culturally and morally, etc.
- d. Respect for the environment and for sustainable national development
- e. Pursuit of excellence in one's maximum potential
- f. Provision of equitable opportunities for the development of the youth's unique potential
- g. Promotion of national unity
- h. Respect for principles of democracy and human rights
- i. Promotion of a spirit of self reliance

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE YOUTH

Recognising the ability of the youth to make active and positive contributions to the development of the society, the policy seeks to encourage the youth:

- a. To promote the spirit of tolerance
- b. To take initiative to actively participate in the development process
- c. To promote and defend democracy
- d. To promote patriotism
- e. To conserve the environment
- f. To respect fellow citizens regardless of race, age, gender, ability and socio-economic status or political affiliation
- g. To respect the rule of law

RIGHTS OF THE YOUTH

The National Youth Policy recognises the rights of the youth which shall be founded on the sanctity of human life and dignity as follows:

- a. Freedom of expression
- b. Protection from any form of exploitation, discrimination and abuse
- c. Representation by fellow youth in decision making bodies
- d. Access to benefits of citizenship, such as education, training, employment, legal services, health care, recreation, etc.,
- e. Respect for individual and collective ownership of property
- f. Right to parental care
- g. Freedom to form lawful associations of their own

THE ROLES OF ADULTS WITH THE YOUTH

The National Youth Policy recognises the important role of adults and parents in guiding the youth as follows:

- a. To be good role models
- b. To provide for the physical, emotional, mental, moral, spiritual and economic well-being of the youth
- c. To accept the youth, recognise, acknowledge and promote their potential contribution to the society
- d. To cooperate with the youth in all development programmes

GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY

1. REVIEWING LEGISLATION

There are a number of laws affecting the youth, but these do not adequately address the needs of the youth. The Constitution, which is the prime law of the land does not have any specific provisions for the youth.

Laws such as the Handicapped Persons Act do not contain adequate protective and promotional provisions for the handicapped youth. The Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children's Act does not extend its operations and protection to young persons in the non-industrial sector.

Some of the laws however contain adequate provisions but are not enforced, examples being those affecting young offenders like the Probation of Young Offenders Act, Children and Young Persons Act and the Liquor Licensing Act.

- Provide relevant skill training programmes for youth with special needs
- Enhance collaboration in the planning and delivery of skill training programmes for youth with special needs

Employment

Encourage equal employment opportunities for the youth

Formulate more flexible rules and regulations that support the development of the informal sector

Promote small-scale enterprises for the youth

Enforce mandatory retirement age to allow upward mobility of the youth

Promote upward mobility of the youth in the formal employment sector

b) Science, Technology and Environment

Principles of Science, Technology and Environmental Conservation are very important as day to day undertaking of people all over the world. However, our society has tended to consider science, technology and environmental conservation as matters for the industrial advanced countries, when in fact many of such principles can be applied locally:

The National Youth Policy therefore provides for:

The review of policies of the school curriculum and the non-formal educational sector science be popularized among all categories of the youth and be encouraged as a utilit subject

The revival and encouragement of the use of basic scientific and technological principles among the youth in order to improve the quality and quantity of scientific and technological achievements

A mechanism within the system to identify and train as early as possible gifted youth in the field of science and technology

The encouragement of a multi-sectoral approach involving the private sector, government and NGOs, etc. to prepare the youth for basic scientific and technological research

Promotion of environmental education among the youth and their involvement in environmental conservation through the integration of environmental education in the formal and non formal curricula.

c) Population, Health and Nutrition

Malawi's population growth rate of 3.2% per annum is one of the highest in the world. As a result, there are a lot of pressures affecting the whole population, some of which face land shortages, land degradation, health and nutritional problems.

There is indeed an urgent need to address issues related to population, health and nutrition affecting the youth at an early stage. To this effect the following needs should be addressed:

Early Pregnancies and Child Bearing

Early pregnancies and child bearing generally have a negative impact on the physical and psychological well being of young people and lead to a higher population growth. It is therefore necessary to discourage such pregnancies amongst the youth by strengthening Family Life Education in both the formal and informal curricula and to allow girls to return to school after delivery.

Empowerment of Young Women

Constrained by the lack of adequate information and education, coupled with poverty, peer pressure and cultural practices, young women are often victims of circumstances beyond their control. Generally, there has been a significant lack of enforcement in laws protecting young women from sexual harassment, exploitation and abuse. Young women are also not supplied with information about the existence of these laws.

This policy therefore intends to provide young women with adequate information, education, income generating activity (I.G.A) skills and such other skills which will effectively enable young women to be more self reliant and able to make informed choices. Sensitization of the male folk on women's rights and gender is paramount.

FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION AND COUNSELLING

Lack of proper education regarding aspects of sexuality contributes to teenage pregnancies and related problems. It is therefore necessary that the following be encouraged:

Adult to youth, parent to child and youth to youth dialogue on sexuality

Religious Organisations NGO's involvement and participation on development and provision of Family Life Education Programmes to the marginalised youth

Incorporation of Family Life Education in the curricula for the school going youths

Provision of proper medical and counseling facilities and services to prevent and reduce early pregnancies

Provision of counseling services to discourage the youth from marrying before the age of twenty

Discourage cultural practices that promote promiscuity and early marriages

Smoking, Drug and Alcohol Abuse and Nutrition

Nutrition is vital for the proper development of a person. At present, the nutritional status of many communities is low due to cultural and social-economic factors. Some traditional, religious, cultural practices and beliefs affect decisions about nutrition. General lack of information and education on nutrition and poor eating habits coupled with drug and alcohol abuse also contribute to poor health amongst the youth. To this effect, there should be a multi-sectoral approach to combating the problem of malnutrition. More effort should also be placed on combatting the problems of smoking, drug and alcohol abuse which unfortunately are on the rise among the youth in Malawi.

HIV/AIDS and STDs

Incidents of HIV/AIDS and STDs are increasing at an alarming rate mainly through prostitution and casual sex amongst the youth. Some cultural practices and poor socio-economic status of communities have also contributed to this increase. There is therefore a need for a multi-sectoral approach to intensify AIDS awareness campaigns and promotion of behaviour change. Efforts will also be made to counsel, rehabilitation and care for HIV/AIDS infected youths and youth orphans whose parents were victims of the HIV/AIDS disease.

d) Social Services, Recreation, Sports and Culture

Sports and Physical Education

Realizing that Physical Education and Sporting activities are important to the well being of the youth, this policy seeks to promote and encourage these among the youth through advocacy of the following mechanisms:

To promote coordination among all sporting bodies in promoting sports and games for all categories of the youth

To facilitate the development, maintenance and renovation of sporting facilities in both rural and urban areas

To motivate and encourage the private sector, religious organisations and NGOs in the development of sports and games in the country

To establish a national sports and games week for the youth

Youth Guidance and Counselling

Noting that many young sportspersons do not reach their full potential due to the lack of self-discipline, the policy seeks:

To provide guidance and counseling training to coaches

To provide guidance and counseling services at all sports centre

Recreation

Realizing that the youth can properly utilise their leisure time at recreation centres where sporting and other facilities are available, this policy seeks:

To encourage the provision of recreational facilities such as entertainment centers, parks, libraries, etc.

To ensure that recreational facilities are accessible to the youth with special needs

Culture

Perhaps the most important heritage of any nation is its culture. Culture also serves as the rallying point of national identity. Malawi's culture is rich and diverse and its promotion and preservation, especially amongst the youth deserves serious attention. This policy therefore seeks:

To promote youth participation in cultural activities and thereby preserving it for prosperity

To incorporate into the school curriculum, traditional dances, games, arts and craft, playing of musical instruments both traditional and foreign

To encourage the teaching of the arts and crafts among all categories of the youth

3. PRIORITY TARGET GROUPS

This National Youth Policy provides the basis for developing opportunities for all the youth in Malawi. However, certain key groups are identified for specific support and affirmative action due to past discrimination they have suffered or other constraining circumstances.

Priority groups identified are:

Poor youth

Street youth

Out-of-school youth

Youth with disabilities

Semi-literate and illiterate youth

Deviant youth

Young women

4. FORMATION OF A NATIONAL YOUTH COUNCIL

Realizing the need for proper coordination of youth programmes which has been lacking in the country's development plans, the policy recognizes the important role of a National Youth Council. As a key institution, the Council shall ensure the effective implementation, coordination and evaluation of various programmes affecting the youth and, instill national pride in them. All of this is enshrined in the National Youth Council Act.

5. REVIEW OF THE POLICY

Review of the Policy Development of the youth is a dynamic process that has to respond to the needs of the nation. It is therefore essential that the National Youth Policy be reviewed and updated as required.