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Article — Digitized Version

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Intereconomics

Suggested Citation: Uhlig, Christian (1966) : The economic significance of voluntary youth services in developing countries, Intereconomics, ISSN 0020-5346, Verlag Weltarchiv, Hamburg, Vol. 01, Iss. 4, pp. 17-21,
<https://doi.org/10.1007/BF02933674>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/137608>

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The Economic Significance of Voluntary Youth Services in Developing Countries

By Dr. Christian Uhlig, Hamburg

We are aware of the economic situation in developing countries. These are countries whose per capita national product is far below that of the industrial countries of Europe or North America, whose financial resources available for direct development are extraordinarily tight, whose knowledge and readiness to develop often bear no relation to essentials resulting from the general situation, but whose populations, and hence the number of people available for productive work, are, in general, growing at extraordinarily high rates. All such countries find themselves confronted with a basic imbalance which manifests itself in a dangerous gap between the ever-increasing demand for work and supplies, on the one hand, and production rates which grow slowly, if at all; this gap tends to widen.

Development Through Self-help

For these unfortunates of our modern world it is necessary that a rapid, efficient growth in national product should be achieved by modernising their agriculture and by greater industrialisation. However, there are often serious obstacles to overcoming poverty. Tom Mboya, Minister of Planning in Kenya, in a speech about the role of African socialism in Kenya's planning, expressed the problems confronting developing countries as follows:—

"... we should like to grow as rapidly as possible, raise our economy from a subsistence to a market economy; develop our land and introduce modern methods of agriculture; we should like to industrialise; to Africanise; to create more jobs; we should like to have universal elementary education; develop our system of further education; build hospitals and convalescent homes; and reduce the housing demand. But to do these things quickly and all at once would require more funds and sources of aid than we dispose of or can procure in the short term ...".¹

¹ African Socialism and its Application to Planning in Kenya, Republic of Kenya, Nairobi 1965.

In most cases, attempts are being made to solve the problem by extensive capital, training and technical assistance from developed countries.

Meanwhile, however, it has become obvious to all—Mboya's remarks refer to this, too—that even a very intensive flow of the most varied types of foreign aid cannot compensate for the lack of domestic contribution. Just recently it was stressed anew by Raul Prebisch, Secretary General of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, that basically, developing countries will have to solve the major part of their problems by their own efforts.² The much-quoted remark made by Ragnar Nurkse: "Capital is made at home" has hitherto lost nothing of its point. And Albert O. Hirschman is not the only one to have pointed out that in many developing countries still held in sway by tradition a far greater amount of potential development capital is tied up in unproductive types of investment (as, for example, livestock, hoards of gold, etc.) than would at first be expected.³ It is the duty of responsible economic bodies in charge of development in each country to make full use of every possibility for the profitable mobilisation of domestic resources. One very important measure in this respect is the development of a voluntary youth service on a national scale.⁴

The Control of Youth Unemployment

An organisation of this type⁵ which attempts to attract youth to long-term joint endeavour on a very

² See Raul Prebisch: Exportsteigerung als Voraussetzung des Wirtschaftswachstums in Entwicklungsländern. In: WIRTSCHAFTSDIENST, 45th year (1965), p. 525 ff.

³ See A. O. Hirschman: The Strategy of Economic Development, New Haven 1958, p. 37.

⁴ See the latest enquiry by the International Labour Office: Special Manpower Mobilisation Schemes and Youth Programmes for Development Purposes. In: International Labour Review (1966), 1st issue.

⁵ Voluntary national youth services of this type in developing countries must be distinguished from development services organised by developed countries for development aid (Peace Corps, Deutscher Entwicklungsdienst, etc.).



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wide range of projects connected both with civic and vocational training and further training in closed camps has particular appeal for many developing countries for numerous reasons:

First, these countries are generally faced with a situation of rising unemployment, particularly among the young; with a youth labour service of limited duration it is possible, at least in the transition period, to ease the situation and, if the organisation is good, a positive contribution can be made to the national product with a relatively low outlay. Simultaneously, by implanting certain basic professional skills there are greater opportunities for these young people to be absorbed later into industry or agriculture.

Secondly, the majority of these countries still have, to a great extent, a tradition-based social structure, in which tribal ties, religious/magic duties or racial and linguistic origins determine the behaviour of the people. Such behavioural characteristics often obstruct seriously the formation of a modern community even where this is desired and necessary. The concepts of "nation", "national awareness", "individual independence", "personal responsibility", or "development awareness" are still absolutely new and without meaning for the members of many young nations. Another task facing any youth service is, therefore, to create an informed community awareness, such as is essential for the functioning of a modern State and to ensure such awareness becoming firmly rooted in the youthful members of society. Mixing young people of different tribes or religions, different races, languages and origins in community

camps, where they work to achieve goals of common interest, should promote mutual understanding, awaken interest in national aims and hence create a young elite having the interests of the State at heart.

There is another aspect which should be emphasised: one top-priority aim in all such countries is economic development. But as was again stressed by R. F. Behrendt recently, such development can only be achieved if society is in a state of constant readiness to act energetically and is prepared to modify its culture. It is necessary to set up "active cells for the process of social development", embodying the necessary "development urge" and to allow these to bear fruit for the good of the community. Youth—being less affected by traditional old-fashioned institutions and customs—is predestined to act as the "new" power and driving force in development.⁶

The third aim of youth services is to organise young people in order to offer them further possibilities of training and education within the framework of the organisation. It is a well known fact that the number of illiterates in these countries is extremely high (in Africa, for example, the average is between 50 % and 70 %). The available schools and training schools are far from sufficient for a speedy elimination of illiteracy and for instilling the basic specialised or technical knowledge necessary for professional life. In this field, the youth service needs to assist young people who would otherwise be unlikely to have any opportunity of obtaining the knowledge and experience so important for a future profession.

Fourthly, it must be mentioned that youth services can play an important educational role in the fields of order, discipline, cleanliness and hygiene. In many such countries, the readiness to pay proper attention to State authority—as opposed to tribal authority—is not yet highly developed. In the same way, there is often a lack of understanding for the most primitive precautions of hygiene and sanitation. Proper community education could set certain basic standards here.

In setting aims for these youth organisations first place must be given, in general, to aspects of job creation and youth welfare. However, these are closely connected with simultaneous training to become good, reliable citizens and economically active members of society. This same idea underlies both the appeals to register for youth service in Kenya and the law on youth camps in Senegal, the draft bill on a Civic Service in the Central African Republic, the law on the construction of youth camps in Congo-Brazzaville or the report on the National Youth Service in Zambia.⁷

These countries are mentioned merely as examples. There are very various types of youth services in many African and Asiatic countries. However, the development and form of such services has recently become a very real topic—more so in Africa than anywhere else. In June 1965, in order to obtain an exchange of information about the essential aims and

⁶ See R. F. Behrendt: *Soziale Strategie für Entwicklungsländer* (Social Strategy for Developing Countries), Frankfurt/Main, 1965, p. 186 ff. and p. 224.

⁷ See Government of Kenya: *National Youth Service (NYS)* Oct. 1964; ILLI Inter-African-Labour Institute: *Symposium on Unemployed Youths*, CCTA, Dar es Salaam 1962, p. 103 ff.; for Zambia, see: *Report of the Working Party on the Establishment of a National Youth Service*, Jan. 1964.

corresponding experience of such youth services in African countries, the International Secretariat for Voluntary Youth Services called an African Conference in Abidjan. 18 countries from Black Africa took part and it was resolved that a permanent secretariat for youth service questions should be established.⁸

Possible Fields of Work

What specific economic contribution can be made by such youth services? Some basic conclusions can be drawn from the aims listed above.

To begin with, the youth services will assume a productive activity by directing unemployed youth towards jobs where (after completing their training) they can make a measurable contribution to the growth of the national product. By channelling into productive activity resources which hitherto have lain fallow and by making very economical use of additional financial resources, i.e. in essence by "human investment", certain projects can be brought to realisation which might never have been possible under other circumstances.

However, there is a further point of view to be considered: productive assets are created also when youth services are intensely active in youth training and education and preparing young people to become efficient links in the chain of production; where they make an essential contribution to the civic general education of youth and where they make an overall endeavour to inject young people with a desire for development—this being one of the most important prerequisites for any successful development scheme. It is true that the result of such contributions cannot be counted in shillings and pence; they are investments towards the faster development of the entire economy and the results of such investment cannot be picked out and attributed specifically, although from the point of view of the economy they are of inestimable significance. Therefore on no account this contribution of youth services must be overlooked when attempts are made to evaluate the usefulness of such organisations.

We shall mention below a few of the directly productive activities which—according to the different reports and opinions on youth services—can be attempted by such services. Since present-day youth services can largely base themselves on the traditions of the youth labour services of the twenties, a short description should be given of the work done by these. For example, it is interesting to list the open-

ings for youth as found in a report about the earlier Bulgarian labour service—one of the first of this type after World War I. This labour service was intended to be used

"for the construction of roads, railroads, canals, piped water supplies, dams, buildings, for the establishment of town and country settlements, for land improvements, the correction of river-beds, for draining works in swampy territory, the construction of telegraph and telephone lines, preparation of fuel, forestry work and afforestation, cultivation of farms, fruit and vegetable gardens, for silk culture, poultry breeding, cattle breeding, fishing, for work in mines and factories, for the conservation of foodstuffs, for the manufacture of cloth, the weaving and manufacture of clothing for hospitals, etc."⁹

This is an extremely comprehensive programme which could be realised only if the organisation had a sufficiently large membership and body of leaders, as was the case after some years, perhaps, in Bulgaria where Labour Service was compulsory.

But given the circumstances of developing countries, it would seem utopian to expect youth services to be capable of performing from the outset and by their own efforts quite specific tasks such as the manufacture of textiles, the conservation of foodstuffs or even economic farming, unless fully functioning arrangements and the necessary experts for planning and supervision were available.

It is a matter of experience that earlier labour services concentrated upon those tasks which could be performed with relatively little expert knowledge, but using the labour at their disposal. These were mainly tasks of general use to the community in the field of infrastructure, i.e. tasks which increased the national capital. For example, in a report on the pre-war Polish voluntary labour service the following are listed as tasks which had been performed: the construction of roads, railroads, correction of river-beds, land improvement, the construction of sport fields and summer camps.¹⁰ Although we shall not go into the political transformation of the idea of labour service by the National Socialists, we find that specific economic results of the former German labour service were the construction of Autobahns, works to con-

⁸ See *Marchés Tropicaux et Méditerranéens*, No. 1025, 2. 7. 1965.

⁹ See: *Der obligatorische Arbeitsdienst in Bulgarien* (Compulsory Labour Service in Bulgaria), Schweizerische Zentralstellen für Freiwilligen Arbeitsdienst: Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten, Zürich-Leipzig, p. 15 f.

¹⁰ See: *Der freiwillige Arbeitsdienst in Polen* (The Voluntary Labour Service in Poland). In: *Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten*, idem, p. 87.



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serve the coastline, land reclamation, land improvement, etc. The work of the American "Civilian Conservation Corps" in the thirties was similarly in the field of infrastructure; it was concerned in particular with conserving the country's natural resources. Mainly in connection with ground protection—i.e. soil conservation—(which was becoming urgent there at that period) youthful volunteers constructed thousands of dams and terraces and sowed millions of square yards of grass, planted millions of trees and cultivated thousands of acres of woodland.¹¹ Our most recent recollections of the positive economic results of a youth labour service are in connection with the construction of railroads and, above all, an Autobahn (the "Autoput") in Yugoslavia.

Special Tasks in Present-day Developing Countries

If we now consider programmes for making use of youth services in the developing countries, we can see that, in general, they are limiting themselves to the performance of essential communal tasks and works in the field of infrastructure. However, they also envisage, to a certain extent, special tasks in industry and, in particular, in agriculture as, for example, in crafts, the cultivation of vegetables and fruit, cattle-breeding, etc., although special tasks such as these do not, in general, serve directly to promote production growth but rather to raise the standard of training and education of youth.

The National Youth Service in Kenya, for example, has undertaken the following tasks:

- ☐ Construction of irrigation works and dams;
- ☐ Planning of nature and wildlife preserves;
- ☐ Construction of roads and dwellings;
- ☐ Afforestation and forestry work;
- ☐ Construction of drainage canals and sanitary installations in towns and in the countryside;
- ☐ Fire-watching services in forests and country areas;
- ☐ Opening up land and tse-tse fly control;
- ☐ Works for the general conservation of natural resources (land conservation, etc.).¹²

The youth service in the Central African Republic is intended to be used when catastrophes occur, for field cultivation and harvesting, for works in the public interest and for road maintenance and safety. This service, which is developed on the Israeli "Nahal" principle, is considered the most successful of its type in Africa.¹³ In the Republic of Senegal, the law speaks in comprehensive terms of "the invest-

ment of human capital in National Construction".¹⁴ The Zambia Youth Service also considers the construction of roads as one of the short-term tasks to be performed—mainly trunk and link roads improving connections between agricultural districts and market centres. Provision is also made for this service to be used in opening up new land and in land conservation and also for helping indigenous farmers to market their products. The planned Tanzania railroad and the land improvement project in the Kafue basin are mentioned as possible projects for the long-term employment of youth.¹⁵

In addition, the Zambian report also contains detailed comments on the potentials of girls for such work; girls should be stationed in separate camps. It is thought that they could manufacture clothing (uniforms) and many types of furniture, cultivate and process foods, smoke, dry and salt fish, breed poultry, manufacture crockery, perform all types of social work, help in hospitals and make a contribution to Community Development Projects in Country districts.

A Critique of the Development Contribution

There is no doubt that the development of a youth organisation of this type is a heavy investment for a developing country, even when the costs are calculated with extreme care. Basic equipment, such as administration, training camps, clothing, tools, etc. have to be procured and qualified leaders and instructors have to be taken on for training purposes. It is also necessary to prepare projects suitable to be carried out by young people.

The danger here—and this comment seems justified by the experience of many African youth service organisations—is that the aims are too comprehensive, giant organisations are planned and corresponding equipment set up. The only result is an overly large administration and installations of which no use is made, but which rapidly lead to the total exhaustion of available financial reserves because funds intended for use over a long term are spent in a very short period. Even with an organisation planned on a smaller scale there are, in the preliminary stage, no real earnings to be set against the high initial investment. Organisations planned on too large a scale, which probably have no chance of functioning to full capacity even in the long term, will probably turn out to be completely unprofitable from the outset; they will constantly swallow up disproportionately high subsidies and may rapidly fall into the category of those much-criticised "silent monuments to development".

However, provided the organisation is set up with a reasonable balance, that no over complicated proj-

¹¹ See: "Civilian Conservation Corps Camps"—Arbeitsdienst in 13 Staaten—idem, p. 136.

¹² National Youth Service (NYS)—idem.

¹³ See J. M o u l y : The Young Pioneers Movement in the Central African Republic; International Labour Review; idem, p. 19 ff.; on the "Nahal" principle, see C. R o s s i l l i o n : Economic and Social Work for Young People during Defence Service; The Israeli Formula; idem, p. 66 ff.

¹⁴ See ILI Symposium; idem, p. 121 ff.

¹⁵ See Report of the Working Party on the Establishment of a National Youth Service; idem, p. 20 ff.



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ects are selected and, above all, that such projects are clearly and properly planned, and given the circumstances described in developing countries with regard to insufficient employment for youth and the acute deficiency of development funds, it can be anticipated that the mobilised and hitherto underemployed youth will be able to make, in their proper fields, a considerable direct contribution to the national product. In this way heavy initial investment for organisation will ultimately be offset by a considerable real profit.

Nevertheless, it is most unlikely that direct profits will ever fully cover expenditure. However, if we recapitulate once again the aims of youth services with regard to their share in national, civic, general and professional training, the evaluation of their productive economic contribution changes. It is difficult to express in terms of money the results of such an investment in education and training. However, it has already become very clear to us in Germany that these types of investment must also be counted as paying investments, both for the individual and for the community.¹⁶ In the same way, if we consider the

¹⁶ See on this subject recently: H. Berg: *Ökonomische Grundlagen der Bildungsplanung* (Economic Bases of Education Planning), Berlin 1965.

advantages that developing countries could derive from efficient communal education directed at developing national awareness and responsibility, the prevention of illiteracy, improvement of professional training and, above all, the creation of a reliable wish to develop the economy—taken together, these amount to considerable positive contributions in economic terms. Indeed, the qualitative results of a youth labour service, which find their quantitative expression only at a later date in the form of a more rapidly and smoothly growing national product, will be far in excess of the tangible net value added by the organisation.

Of course, the economic contribution of youth services to development must not be overestimated. It would be quite wrong—indeed fatal—were one to assume that the establishment of such organisations could solve the problem of unemployment in the long term. It can be stated, however, that all in all, a youth service organisation—provided it is organised in a reasonable and rational manner and provided it is not made use of for purely ideological or prestige purposes—can be expected to make a positive contribution to the economic, social and political development of any country.

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World Business Trends

Expansion of World Trade Continuing

In 1965 world trade has vigorously expanded. Measured against export data of all countries—except East-bloc states—it increased by about 8% according to an initial calculation made by the International Monetary Fund. However, the growth rate was considerably smaller than in 1964 when it reached more than 12%. This decline clearly reflected a slowing down of international economic growth. In the second half of 1965 the expansion rate of world trade was again somewhat higher than before. In part this should be attributed to the consequences of the American dock strike in 1965, but over and above this in several countries import requirements have again increased more rapidly.

Last year's declining tendency of world trade expansion was mitigated by an accelerated import increase in North America (+15% after +10% in 1964), where economic growth was continuing without restraint. In all other important economic areas, however,

imports were rising more slowly. Above all the slowing down of business activities in West European countries (+8% after +12%) had its consequences as more than 50% of world imports—including the intra-European exchange of goods—fall to the share of these countries. Even more pronounced was the slowing down of the import increase in Japan (+3% after +18%) as a consequence of sluggishness in this country's economy. But also in primary producing countries, for which only fragmentary data are available, imports in 1965 seem to have increased less (approximately +4 to 5% after +11%).

Slagging demand affected the individual economies' exports very differently. The relative losses were particularly heavy in North America. In 1965 exports of the United States and Canada increased by a total of a bare 4% only (after +15% in 1964). In Japan, on the other hand, the export boom has even increased again

(+27% after +22%), while the European countries experienced a slight slowing down only (+11% after +12%). Besides, this had been solely caused by the development of the intra-European exchange of goods while exports to the rest of the world even rose at a considerably higher speed. As against that export proceeds of primary producing countries obviously increased considerably less (approximately +4 to 5% after +10%).

In 1965 the primary producing countries' export development was prejudiced by the fact that their export prices did not continue their upward trend of the two previous years. Besides, also their export volume obviously increased at a somewhat smaller rate. Anyway, from January to September, 1965, it was about 4% above that of the preceding year's corresponding period, after in 1964 the increase had amounted to approximately 5%. This slowing down may well be explained with the development of raw material consumption. Obviously the influences of cautious stocking that temporarily played a role in some