

# Youth, Peace and Sustainable Development

Edited by  
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# Youth, Peace and Sustainable Development

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Responding to youth problems is an essential part of socio-economic development in Sri Lanka, given its history of violent, youth-led insurgencies over the past three decades in the North-East and Southern parts of the country. Youth unemployment, especially among educated youth, is seen to be a crucial contributing factor in such unrest. Improving knowledge of patterns of youth exclusion and the strengthening of structural approaches to youth integration can serve as an important component of addressing root conflict causes and supporting peace building efforts in Sri Lanka. A more conflict sensitive policy and program formulation of existing and/or proposed youth policies is needed to ensure sustainable social integration of youth.

It is in this context that this publication can serve as an important reference for concerned stakeholders. The publication is an outcome of a joint collaboration between a numbers of national as well as international partners. The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) and the Social Policy Analysis and Research Centre (SPARC) of the University of Colombo, Sri Lanka have both been engaged in youth related research over the last couple of years, looking at the issue of youth integration in Sri Lanka both from an academic as well as practitioner's angel. The two organisations worked complementary to each other in their youth program focus and on many occasions collaborated in their efforts to advocate for policies and program formulation among government and Donor officials.

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S.T. Hettige  
Markus Mayer  
Colombo  
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## Preface

Violent political conflicts have not only disrupted public order but have also hampered socio-economic development in many developing countries. While material deprivation and social exclusion have been key factors contributing to social and political unrest, a range of exogenous and endogenous circumstances have constituted the wider context of conflict and discontent. Even a cursory glance at the above factors and circumstances reveals that there are no simple explanations or ready made answers to the problems that beset many developing countries affected by internal conflicts and socio-economic problems.

Issues of peace and sustainable development have long been subjects for wide ranging discussions, debates and analysis. When we add youth to the equation, the issue becomes even more complex. An international conference on youth, peace and sustainable development held in Sri Lanka three years ago, brought together scholars from a number of countries in the Asian region to deliberate on the theme and draw empirically grounded conclusions that can guide further deliberations and policy interventions. It was felt that the material drawn from different countries could provide a reasonable basis for comparative analysis.

Historical experiences and contemporary circumstances have varied widely across countries, despite some commonalities like the impact of colonization. The above variations that are alluded to in the papers dealing with different countries have made the lived experiences of youth to diverge in significant ways. In countries where social and political conflicts have persisted, many youths have been directly involved in such conflicts. These conflicts in turn, have created cleavages among youths, reinforcing their regional or sectarian identities, preventing the emergence of a broader identity at national level.

Persisting conflicts have absorbed vital resources that could have been used for improving social infrastructure and augmenting productive investments. Gross inequalities in education, health, transport, etc. have persisted due to inadequate public investments in these and other sectors. Many disadvantaged youth have suffered as a result and their discontent has in turn fuelled social and political conflicts.

In countries where there has been rapid economic growth, successive political regimes have been able to contain violent conflicts involving youth, though the policies adopted have not necessarily prevented social and cultural segmentation among youths. In poorer countries tensions among youth groups based on ideological, ethnic and class divisions threaten peaceful coexistence.

Understanding of diverse youth constituencies in terms of their identities, socio economic profile, aspirations, ideological orientations and world views, is critically important for formulating policy responses to address youth issues. It is equally important to explore how diverse policies impact on youth groups. Many of the papers in the present volume deal with the above in different national contexts. It is hoped that this publication will engender a wider discussion as to how a conducive policy environment can be established in different national contexts in order to create opportunities for participation and empowerment of youths. Exclusion and alienation of disadvantaged youth can be detrimental to peace as well as sustainable development, both of which are important goals widely shared by people whose lives are adversely affected by conflict and socio-economic deprivation.



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## Introduction

Sustainable development is widely accepted today as the ideal development model that every country should adopt. The main principles of development strategy are embodied in agenda 21 adopted by 188 countries at the 1992, UN convention in Rio de Janeiro. Free-market development strategies pursued by most countries in the world today do not necessarily conform to the principles enshrined in the Rio convention. While the fastest-growing developing economies like China and India have not deviated from the conventional development path, developed countries in general have not cut back their consumption levels to reduce their use of natural resources, in particular non-renewable sources of energy.

Youths as producers and consumers play a highly significant role in the development process. In fact, many young people in the developing world are on the move today, looking for employment opportunities in more developed countries. They leave poor countries, to migrate to more affluent countries that offer higher income opportunities and better standards of living. It is noteworthy that youth constitutes the most dynamic consumer group. Young people are usually in the lead in today's consumption spree, buying more electronic gadgets, designer clothes, fast-food, soft drinks, alcohol and cars than other age groups.

In the developing world, where a vast majority of the population is still living at or below subsistence level, modern, western-style consumption is confined to a small minority of affluent people, often living in large cities. As is evident in countries like China, rural people, in particular youths, migrate to large cities where wealth is increasingly concentrated. In those developing countries, such as Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, the Philippines and Indonesia, where the domestic economies are stagnant, youths tend to migrate to countries that offer greater income opportunities.

As is well known, the demand for non-renewable resources like petroleum is increasing rapidly in the developing world. The integration of developing economies into the global economy opens up opportunities for labour-intensive production for export. Since WTO rules require developing countries to open their markets to foreign imports, traditional import-substitution production activities become

unviable. For instance, local agricultural products and handicrafts can no longer compete with cheaper imports.

The re-structuring of economies under global economic pressures and new trade regimes does not necessarily conform to the principles of sustainable development. Increasing consumption is a pre-requisite for economic growth. In the developing world, people are eager to adopt modern consumerist life-styles. Increasing consumption, in turn, exerts pressure on natural resources such as land, water, fuel and forests.

Youth's connection to peace is even more complex. Youth participation in internal and trans-national conflicts is highly significant. A close examination of such participation seems to suggest that it is a product of the interaction between the spread of modern ideas and constraints imposed by existing economic structures and cultural institutions.

Even though the development process in the non-western world did not follow the development trajectories of the developed western countries, western colonial expansion was instrumental in the diffusion of modern ideas in almost all parts of the globe. On the other hand, the ground realities in the underdeveloped world did not correspond to western ideas and values. Consequently, many of the indigenous social, cultural and political movements that emerged in non-western countries sought to bridge the gap.

It is significant that the ideas and values that spread from the west to the rest of the world were not uniform. For instance, liberal and Marxist ideas were in conflict with each other. Marxist analysis that highlights class struggle, exploitation and alienation persuaded under-privileged youths to join revolutionary movements. Socialist ideas helped form new world-views among such youth who, in turn, tended to reject all forms of discrimination, exploitation, exclusion and marginalisation. Social and cultural hierarchies embodied in caste, ethnic, linguistic and religious formations also became the targets of attack from radical youth movements. In fact, most of today's radical, often violent, political movements are scarcely based on class struggle. A close examination of the complex backgrounds of many such conflicts would point to deeper structural roots, both global and local. Youth engaged in such movements may have their own rationalisation for their involvement, ranging from a particular world view embodying perceived injustices, collective grievances and

personal miseries to a highly idiosyncratic logic connected to personal or family experiences. The leaders of radical movements naturally analyse collective grievances and personal miseries in ways that best suit their own political agendas. It is significant that all radical youth movements present themselves as liberation movements, fighting for liberation from domination, exploitation, oppression, marginalisation and exclusion.

Escalation of violent conflict drives many affected people away from areas engulfed in conflicts. When radical youth movements are involved in armed conflicts, younger people become more vulnerable. They are often suspected of having links to radical movements and become the targets of security forces and counter-insurgency groups. Such situations lead to mass exodus of refugees from conflict zones. It is estimated that about a million refugees have fled the conflict in north-east Sri Lanka. Most of them have ended up in western countries as asylum seekers. While most of the refugees have settled down abroad as migrants, some of them continue to be active members of the radical movements they left behind.

Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict, dominated by disaffected Tamil youth, has ravaged the country for more than two decades. It continues to be the biggest hindrance to social and economic development of the country. While scarce material resources are devoted to waging war, the loss of economic opportunities is equally damaging. The results are persisting poverty, poor social and economic infrastructure, brain drain, economic stagnation and loss of valuable human life. This is not an experience exclusive to Sri Lanka. In other countries where such conflicts continue to rage, the consequences are broadly similar.

Peace is obviously a pre-requisite for sustainable development, though it is not a sufficient condition, as there are other factors that facilitate or hinder development. If a sizeable segment of the youthful population is disillusioned and has turned to violent means to achieve its objectives, young people are likely to be sceptical about resolving conflict through peaceful means. Similarly, if disaffected youth feel that their problems are caused by discrimination, they are unlikely to perceive lack of economic development or under-development as the main reason for lack of opportunities. When such perceptions persist, youths are less likely to be pre-occupied with peace and development.

What is observable is a vicious cycle of conflict and underdevelopment. It is not easy to transform such a state of affairs into a peaceful environment conducive to development. Such a transformation requires rational thought and action on the part of conflicting parties. Yet, charged with negative emotions such as hatred, mistrust, revenge, and hopelessness, youths, caught up in violent conflict, would not readily respond to rational appeals. Therefore, intractable political conflicts persist in many parts of the world.

The present collection of essays is the result of an international conference on the theme 'youth, peace and sustainable development' held in Colombo in October 2004. The papers presented dealt with a range of issues. Not all the papers are included in the volume for want of space and other editorial reasons. The papers covered a wide range of geographical areas as well as important aspects of the theme.

The papers are organised into four sections: conceptual and empirical considerations, youth and education, youth employment and youth empowerment. Included in the four sections are ten papers. While some of the papers are country-specific, others deal with issues that have a wider geographical coverage.

# 1

## CONCEPTUAL AND EMPIRICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Role of Youth in Peaceful and Sustainable Development: Problems and prospects	03
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# **I. Role of Youth in Peaceful and Sustainable Development: Problems and prospects**

*S.T. Hettige*

## **1. Introduction**

Youth, as a socio-political constituency, plays an increasingly significant part in modern societies. This is clearly evident from the fact that almost all radical political movements around the world are, by and large, dominated by youth activists. On the other hand, public discussions and research reports on such social issues as drug abuse, smoking, suicide, violence and even racial and religious discord point to a disproportionate involvement of youth.

Given the above background, it is timely to pose and examine the question of how youth can play a catalytic role in peaceful and sustainable development. This question is also important in view of the fact that what we witness today in many parts of the world is not necessarily a process of peaceful and sustainable development. In fact, violent political movements and insurgencies dominate the landscape of many developing countries, hampering any kind of development. However, it is doubtful whether the neo-liberal economic policies that guide the development process in many countries today can lead to sustainable development. On the other hand, peace and sustainable development, no doubt, remain the most cherished goals for the general population in countries affected by violent conflict and widespread poverty. How do young people fit into this picture? It is necessary to examine how young people can play a catalytic role in peaceful and sustainable development, participating in the mainstream political and development processes. In this regard, what should be noted is that youth does not constitute a homogeneous category. Young people are often differentiated in terms of class, ideology, ethnic identity, aspirations and, political participation. Different youth groups have divergent experiences with education, politics, the media, the labour market, public institutions and the development process. The situation has become even more complex in recent years due to economic liberalisation that has led to a further differentiation of opportunity structures.

Rising unemployment among educated youth has persuaded policy makers and educational institutions to focus their attention on the

issue of the employability of youth. However, it is not clear if we are simply talking about new skills and capabilities. Some commentators have argued that the so-called new skills have become critical because opportunities to acquire such skills are very unequally distributed, both socially and spatially. Such new skills thus have formed the basis of new forms of social exclusion rather than integration.

As regards political participation, there are some fundamental questions that need to be raised. To what extent do violent youth political movements reflect alienation and frustrated aspirations? Or to what extent do they indicate a lack of internalisation of basic democratic values? To what extent do violent youth movements reflect their respective views of the world?

Following a discussion of the issues mentioned above, this chapter attempts to offer an assessment of the ideological and behavioural tendencies among young people that either facilitate or hinder peaceful and sustainable development. The chapter also attempts to develop some empirically grounded theoretical insights that seem to be critical for an understanding of the nature of the current development and political processes and their implications for integration and exclusion of youth in a process of peaceful and sustainable development.

## 2. Youth, Opportunities and Conflicts

It is not realistic to treat youth as a monolithic category, unless we confine ourselves to the demographic meaning of the term. Youth as a category is highly differentiated in modern societies, particularly in the developing world. This differentiation is based on a range of factors such as class, ethnicity, religion, ideological orientation, place of residence, education and livelihood and other aspirations. In fact, young children become aware of different circumstances between them and others from an early age; being born and brought up in different family situations, being exposed to different social and cultural practices in their communities and being enrolled in diverse educational institutions. The formation of identities, world views and life goals, that often precedes the onset of youth is affected by a complex array of factors, depending on the nature of the circumstances they find themselves in, ranging from living conditions to peer groups in the community and institutions such as schools. The already-formed identities, world views and life goals tend to determine how young people relate to the wider processes of social, economic and political development in a country.

Widespread and persisting violent conflicts in many parts of world, leading to loss of life, material resources and livelihood opportunities have brought home the fact that there is a collective global responsibility to help resolve such conflicts peacefully. Similarly, the environmental destruction, increasing pollution and depletion of natural resources that have accompanied the pursuance of goals of economic development in the developed as well as in the developing world have raised the issue of sustainability of development. Once again, a global consensus is emerging among development practitioners that emphasises the need to ensure the sustainability of development that takes place in different countries.

On the other hand, violence and development are not necessarily unconnected phenomena. In fact, there has often been a symbiotic relationship between the two.<sup>1</sup> While development leading to intense resource competition or depletion has fuelled conflicts among different stakeholders, persistent violent conflicts have dampened development initiatives, creating misery for large population groups.

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<sup>1</sup> For an analysis of the nexus between development and violence see Hettige, 2000.

This does not, of course, mean that violent conflict is always linked to development or lack of it. Nor is development always hampered by violent conflict alone. These issues though important, are outside the scope of this chapter and, therefore, will be dealt with only in passing where relevant.

Youth as a social category is highly differentiated in many societies. This is true in both subjective as well as objective terms. In fact, they are differentiated both vertically and horizontally. Social class as well as rural-urban disparities not only separate them into different worlds but also provide them with highly unequal opportunities – vertical differentiation. The impact of horizontal differentiation on youth is no less significant and the impact is clearly evident on how young people form their identity, their views of the world and perceptions of the world around them. Many young people continue to be socialised within mutually exclusive communities and institutions and often do not have many opportunities for social interaction and cultural exchange across group boundaries. Additionally, they are situated within a political economy that provides unequal life chances to different groups and communities, giving rise to various forms of social exclusion and inclusion.

Unequal access to life chances facilitates intense and often unfair competition among youth groups, be they class, regional or ethnic. The resultant sense of relative deprivation among disadvantaged youth often gives rise to unrest and discontent among them. This in turn, can determine their likely behavioural responses, ranging from suicide to violent politics. Some young people are more pragmatic and adapt to the given circumstances. For instance, they may lower their aspirations and accept whatever opportunities are available.<sup>2</sup> It is the diversity of their responses that raises questions about the prospect for peaceful and sustainable development.

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<sup>2</sup> It became evident from a recently concluded field study that youth aspirations are similar across social classes and ethnic groups but that expectations vary widely across social classes. Underprivileged youths tend to have lower livelihood expectations in comparison to those of privileged youth (Hettige 2003).

### 3. Prospects for Peaceful and Sustainable Development

Although a large majority of Sri Lankan youth has stood up for peace, a minority has been actively involved in violent politics. This is true for both the south as well as the north. What is significant is that their violence has been directed largely against the state, although their perceived rivals or critics have also been at the receiving end. The largely state-focused nature of youth violence is a manifestation of the perception that the state is the main source of redress for their grievances. In other words, they appear to believe that, with state power in their hands, they could effectively address the grievances of their political constituency. It is significant that young people who have joined violent political movements have been, by and large, those from disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds, irrespective of their ethnic identity (Obeyesekere 1974).<sup>3</sup> These are people who are unable to find solutions to their livelihood and other problems in an open, competitive market. In a situation where economic liberalisation has facilitated the expansion of the private sector, thereby ensuring its greater significance, disadvantaged youth no doubt feel that state power is indispensable for them as a mechanism to influence the distribution of opportunity. This point will be returned to later in the paper.

Youth does not constitute a monolithic socio-economic group or a political constituency. Even disadvantaged youth do not constitute a single constituency. In this regard, ethnic and ideological differences are highly significant. Disadvantaged youth belonging to different ethnic groups do not often perceive a commonality of interest that transcends their group boundaries and usually consider themselves to be in competition with each other. This is a critical issue in a country like Sri Lanka where competition for public resources and political power has evolved into a violent conflict that threatens the unity of the country. A large section of the youth population is divided on ethnic lines. In other words, they are not active participants in the peace and reconciliation process.

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<sup>3</sup> This study was based on statistical data collected about young people who were detained by the law enforcement authorities following their involvement in the 1971 youth rebellion in southern Sri Lanka. This pattern did not seem to have changed much in later uprisings.

It is doubtful whether some of the current trends among Sri Lankan youth would facilitate a process of sustainable development. Of course, these trends are very much influenced by dominant values and pragmatic economic considerations. For instance, migration to urban areas and foreign lands looking for income opportunities is encouraged by development policies that facilitate unequal distribution of wealth. When rural livelihoods become unattractive because of low and uncertain income at a time when consumer needs are expanding at a rapid rate, more and more people are encouraged to abandon livelihoods that may be more sustainable in the long run. As empirical data shows, more and more youth take great risks by trying to migrate to other countries illegally. There are others who join criminal gangs and engage in organised crime as a way of making a living. As evident from the available data, economic crimes figure prominently in crime statistics in the country (Hettige 2004).

#### **4. Liberal Economic Reforms and their Consequences**

One of the main stated objectives of liberal economic reforms in Sri Lanka in the late 1970s was to create more employment opportunities for unemployed youth. Yet the kind of employment opportunities created was not in keeping with the aspirations of a majority of unemployed youth. Their aspiration was to find employment in the state sector. When the state sector became less significant in the context of economic reforms, a large part of the youthful population continued to be unemployed. They in turn began to put pressure on successive governments, to absorb them into state institutions. This pattern has persisted to the present.

Liberal economic reforms had the potential to create employment in the private sector. Such reforms should have been accompanied by reforms in such areas as education, language policy and social security. Yet, nearly three decades since the introduction of economic reforms, no effective policies have been implemented. What has taken place instead is a rapid, market-led transformation in the education sector, giving rise to a wide gap between private and public educational institutions. Similarly, no effective measures have been taken in the area of language policy. Most young people remain monolingual<sup>4</sup>, while the expanding private sector demands a high

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<sup>4</sup> A recent analysis of G.C.E. (Ordinary Level) results in the English language given in Table 3.2 showed a remarkable disparity between Colombo and peripheral areas in the country. This points to a highly unequal distribution of opportunities for acquiring English language skills (Hettige 2003).

level of proficiency in the English language. On the other hand, for the same reason, the linguistic divide between Tamil and Sinhala youth constituencies remains intact, in spite of the lip- service paid by policy makers over several decades. In other words most young people in the country are competent only in their own language and very few have a working knowledge of a second language. This is in spite of young people's desire to be bilingual or trilingual (e.g. ILO-STWT 2003).

**Table 3.1 Sri Lankan population (10 years and above) by literacy in the main languages**

Ethnic group	Language		
	Sinhalese	Tamil	English
Sinhalese	89.0	1.7	10.4
Sri Lankan Tamil	12.0	86.6	16.7
Indian Tamil	6.9	67.0	5.5
Moors	25.9	72.3	12.9
Malays	61.3	54.5	44.2
Burger	68.5	16.8	77.2
Other	37.2	47.8	38.3

Source: Department of Census and Statistics, Census Report 1981

**Table 3.2 Percentages of students who failed at O/L examination in English**

Education regions	1995	2000
Sri Lanka	63.55	70.16
Colombo	28.84	34.35
Kandy	63.03	65.49
Kurunegala	62.71	62.84
Galle	62.19	67.15
Kalutara	59.74	66.42
N'Eliya	67.66	80.45
Monaragala	79.5	83.61
Puttalam	Not available	81.49

Source: Unavailable

**Table 3.3 Rate of unemployment by educational attainment**

Level of education	1973	1978	1981	1986	1998
No schooling	7.9	4.	NA	4.7	2.2
Primary	14.1	7.2	4.8	5.0	6.0
Secondary	37.1	21.9	NA	NA	46.3
G.C.E. (OL)	47.4	29.2	24.5	28.5	28.2
G.C.E. (AL)	44.4	31.2	34.8	34.8	17.3
University	16.2	8.2	9.7	7.6	NA

*Source:* Department of Census and Statistics, Colombo, report 1974-1987 and 1996

The most significant issue that remains unresolved to date is the lack of integration of life-skills into general education. The result is that education in Sri Lanka effectively de-skills the country's young population. There are, of course, opportunities for acquiring vocational skills after leaving school. In other words, it is school dropouts who go for vocational skills. These are usually young people who are either too poor or do not have the aptitude to continue with general education. Those who are too poor usually look for income opportunities, often working in the informal sector. They rarely acquire skills during their working life, and often remain unskilled labourers. Those school leavers who can afford to remain unemployed and follow vocational training courses end up as skilled workers, often self-employed, in the informal sector that provides no job security or other forms of social security such as health insurance or old age pensions. Available data show that about a third of employed people are casual workers.

Those who continue to remain within the education system usually secure educational certificates and look for regular employment in the formal sector. Most of them prefer state-sector employment as such employment offers job security, pensions and social recognition. This tendency is strongest among university graduates, most of whom have completed their education in the vernacular.



**Table 3.4 Preferred sector of employment**

	Sector	Frequency	percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Valid	Government sector	329	65.7	70.1	70.1
	Un-organised private sector (Informal sector)	8	1.6	1.7	71.9
	Organised private sector (Sri Lankan)	68	13.6	14.5	86.4
	Organised private sector (Foreign/joint venture)	36	7.2	7.7	94.0
	Self-employment	20	4.0	4.3	98.3
	Overseas	7	1.4	1.5	99.8
	NGOs	1	.2	.2	100.0
	Total	469	93.6	100.0	
Missing	No response	32	6.4		
Total		501	100.0		

Source: IMCAP 2004

In spite of the continuing emphasis on general education that absorbs the largest share of public expenditure on education, most children leave school before they acquire educational certificates. These young people have neither educational certificates nor specialised vocational or life-skills. They would then swell the ranks of unskilled workers. This is no doubt a major issue from a development point of view. A majority of the country's youth remains unqualified or unskilled. They join the informal sector as pavement hawkers, security guards, sales assistants or construction workers or leave the country for employment in the Middle East, Europe or East Asia. Some take up illicit economic activities such as drug peddling, prostitution, stealing, or extortion.

When we look at those who succeed in receiving educational certificates, the vast majority of them have become misfits in the new economy. Those who acquired qualifications from state-funded educational institutions cannot fit into corporate business enterprises that demand attributes that these youths do not possess. On the other hand, there are those who possess such attributes that they have acquired from private or overseas educational institutions.

The education sector in Sri Lanka is already polarised. On the one hand, state-funded educational institutions at different levels

continue to accommodate the vast majority of children and youth in the country. On the other, many private educational institutions have been established in the cities and towns, catering to the affluent stratum of society. These fee-levying institutions offer instruction in the English medium and prepare pupils for international examinations. When these pupils complete their education, they easily find their way in to private firms and other national and international institutions that demand a good working knowledge of English.

In spite of the recognition by the authorities of the need for English language skills, the state education system continues to remain ill-equipped to impart such skills to pupils.<sup>5</sup> The result is that most educated youth in the country remain monolingual, having done their studies in the vernacular even at university level. This situation hampers social and spatial mobility of young people. This is a serious situation in view of the fact that the linguistic divide is also at the root of the country's ethnic conflict. The vast majority of youth belonging to both the majority community and the minorities remain divided and socio-culturally segregated. The ethno-linguistically segregated school system prevents social interaction among youth across the ethnic divide which contributes to the formation of parochial identities and the perpetuation of cultural prejudices and stereotypes. Each group perceives the other as a threat and a competitor for opportunities and resources. Such perceptions have been reinforced by the lack of access to opportunities in the private corporate sector for youths who lack English language skills because their education has been in the vernacular.

The private, corporate sector in Sri Lanka has traditionally been dominated by the westernised urban, upper and middle classes. Many of the firms have roots that can be traced back to the colonial period. In more recent years, these and other firms have established external links because of business requirements. Such linkages require them to work in an international business language like English. Moreover, computerisation of business activities has necessitated the use of IT in office management and other business activities. It is this situation that demands office workers to be at least computer-literate. So, if one intends to join the private corporate sector as a white-collar

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<sup>5</sup> A recent initiative by the government to allow schools with facilities to provide English medium classes has come up against major obstacles because of the lack of competent teachers. Most of these schools have reportedly abandoned the project and switched back to instruction in the vernacular.

employee, one needs to be computer-literate and fluent in the English language. This is in fact the minimum requirement. As is well known, other attributes such as personal contacts, school/ college background and extra-curricular activities can be as significant.

Even if one leaves out the other attributes, English language and IT skills are critical for entry in to the private corporate sector. State-funded educational institutions that most young people are dependent on are not able to provide such skills. Realising the need for such skills, these youths have tended to look for such skills outside the state education system. The increasing demand for English and IT among youth has given rise to many private tutorials in English and computing. The quality of their instruction is not always good. In fact, most of these private classes do not make much of a difference in helping disadvantaged youth to acquire such skills. English language competencies remain very unequally distributed both socially and spatially.<sup>6</sup>

In the emergent, liberal economic environment, the private sector is recognised as the engine of growth. The state is supposed to take a back seat, facilitating the takeover of production and service-sector activities by the private sector. The expanding private sector is supposed to create income and employment opportunities. Yet recruitment to private-sector firms depends on attributes that the vast majority of youth do not possess. The demand for personnel in the private sector is increasingly met by young people from private schools or returning from overseas after completing various university and other courses. Meanwhile, more and more young people securing educational qualifications from state-funded educational institutions join the ranks of the unemployed, or already over-staffed state institutions.

Young people educated in the vernacular often found employment in the state sector in the past. Employment opportunities in the state sector have declined over the last two decades because of the circumstances mentioned above. This situation has put pressure on the political establishment compelling them to *ad hoc* measures like

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<sup>6</sup> Disadvantaged rural youths and their parents have accepted the need for acquiring English language and IT skills. A recently concluded study (GQL 2000-2003) points to the fact that even poor parents spend a significant part of their income to provide their children with private tuition. Yet, most of these youths do not seem to acquire the level of competency required to compete for private sector employment.

mass recruitment of graduates for jobs that do not exist in the state sector.

Liberal economic reforms have brought the private corporate sector to the forefront in the economy over which the state has little control. The same reforms have also facilitated the expansion of private education on which affluent families depend today. It is this sector that generally provides the skills that are in demand in the private sector. Access to such skills is a major factor determining the patterns of exclusion and inclusion in the employment market today.

It is significant that the new skills demanded by employers are supplied almost exclusively by private and international institutions that cater to upper and upper-middle class families. On the other hand, the desirability of and the need for such skills is widely accepted in society, giving legitimacy to the new ideology. This is evident from the fact that children and young people from even non-affluent families strive to acquire such skills by attending private classes, outside the public school system. Yet most of these children do not reach the level of competence required to compete with those who graduate from private and international schools or overseas universities. Hence the high rate of unemployment among young people who have received their education in the vernacular.

Young people who depend on public educational institutions find it difficult to achieve their employment goals because of the reluctance of the private sector to absorb them. On the other hand, they cannot find employment in the state sector either. This situation naturally frustrates them, compelling them to join agitational campaigns or resort to personal or political contacts to get in to state institutions. Agitational campaigns have often produced tangible results as recent regimes have recruited entire batches of university graduates to the state sector.

In other words, today there is a strong relationship between social class and the sector of employment that youths join. Those from affluent families who have attended private and international schools generally join the corporate, private sector. Young people who have been educated at state-funded schools and universities are largely excluded from the private sector and therefore they look for employment in the state sector. There can, of course, be exceptions to this general pattern. For instance, unskilled and semiskilled workers recruited to private sector firms have usually attended

public educational and training institutions. But they occupy lower-rung positions and, are not necessarily considered to have achieved upward social mobility. Those who end up in the expanding informal sector are products of the state-funded education system. Many of them are early school drop outs.

## **5. Employability of Educated Youth: Blaming the Victims**

Persisting high rates of unemployment among educated youth have given rise to a debate about their employability. The debate has focused attention on graduates from local universities. While some have argued that university graduates remain unemployed because they lack the necessary skills and are not ready to take up challenges in a corporate business environment, the stereotypical view of graduates is that they are looking for secure, unchallenging and pensionable jobs that give a sense of security, stability and importance. A close examination would however reveal that what we observe here is the existence of two almost exclusive sub-cultures, derived from different class situations, or what Bourdieu (1991) called social fields. When the corporate workplace is characterised by a sub-culture derived from the westernised upper middle class, political and recruitment process in the state sector have ensured that the state-sector offices are dominated by a lower-middle class culture with a strong national orientation. Even a casual observation of the two work environments would attest to the above fact.

An average youth leaving a public educational institution would find the corporate work environment unsettling, threatening and too challenging. With no resources to fall back on, such as family property, well-to-do family members, strong networks of relations, friends and acquaintances, he or she looks for a secure position that guarantees present and future sustenance for his/ her family even at a minimal level. This tendency became evident recently when several thousand graduates left more lucrative private-sector jobs in favour of low-paying, yet supposedly more secure state-sector employment.

Vernacular-educated youth from lower and lower-middle class backgrounds are willing to sacrifice more lucrative yet challenging jobs outside the state sector in favour of more secure but low-paying positions that carry greater social prestige in rural, underprivileged communities.

What is noteworthy here is that this employment preference among vernacular-educated youth from rural lower and lower middle class backgrounds points to a particular pattern of social mobility in Sri Lankan society. In fact, state-sector employment facilitates intra-generational mobility. Some of them, over a period of time, achieve upward mobility within the institutions where they are employed. They are thus in a position to provide their children with the necessary cultural capital, including credentials needed to join the private corporate sector. So, their children achieve intergenerational mobility. They often join the upper-middle class which their parents failed to do.

Disadvantaged young people today, unlike their counterparts in the previous generation, are faced with severe competition for valued positions. In fact, the former can hardly face the competition with youth hailing from privileged urban middle class families. In the past, disadvantaged youth were only looking for state-sector employment. When more and more state enterprises were privatised, employment opportunities in the state sector became scarce, forcing young people to look for employment in the expanding private sector. On the other hand, affluent parents could prepare their children for private-sector jobs by sending them to private or overseas educational institutions. Since the private education sector has expanded rapidly over the last two decades, today there is no dearth of potential recruits for private sector positions. The result is that the disadvantaged youth with their educational certificates secured from state-funded educational institutions, are effectively excluded from the more lucrative, private corporate sector. While the latter demands certain skills, access to such skills is very unequally distributed, both socially and spatially.

The state-funded education system provides basic education, while pupils are compelled to secure additional skills from private sources. This situation naturally favours those who can afford to pay for such additional skills or credentials. Those who are adversely affected by this situation are the lower and lower-middle class. It is these youth who have a tendency to join radical political movements. Since disadvantaged youth get excluded through market competition, at least some of them rely on the political process for redress. The shape of these political movements depends on such factors as their commitment to democratic values, availability of democratic space and their perceptions of the world around them. The latter depends on both their lived experience as well as ideological orientations. As the National Youth Survey conducted in 1999 showed, the vast

majority of youth perceived their society as unjust. A majority of those interviewed were also committed to an egalitarian ideology. It is also significant that a large proportion of youth felt that economic development benefited the privileged stratum of society, marginalising the poor and the powerless.

**Table 4.1 Favoured ideology among Sri Lankan youth**

	<b>Capitalist</b>	<b>Socialist</b>	<b>Other</b>	<b>Non contributed</b>
All groups	10.5	62.0	5.2	20.6
<b>Provinces</b>				
Western	10.0	57.4	6.8	25.8
Central	8.0	61.7	4.3	22.1
Southern	13.0	53.6	6.4	27.0
Northern	17.1	71.3	5.5	6.1
Eastern	7.7	86.1	2.1	4.1
North Western	10.2	64.0	4.4	20.3
North Central	12.8	77.2	2.2	7.8
Uva	8.4	58.1	7.8	20.7
Sabaragamuwa	11.0	61.4	4.0	23.2

*Source:* National Youth Survey 1999

## **6. Democratic Values and Political Participation**

Sri Lanka's recent experience shows that youth political movements are capable of fitting into the democratic process as well as engaging in extremely violent politics of a brutal nature. It is disadvantaged young people with aspirations for upward mobility who have played a dominant role in youth politics in post-independence Sri Lanka. Their main objective appears to be to gain political power in order, firstly, to redress the grievances of their respective political constituencies and, secondly, to put in place policies and programmes to give effect to their vision of society.

Why do young people engage in violent politics? There is no simple answer to this question. In this last part of my paper, I wish to advance some arguments based on some of the empirical data drawn from recently completed studies.

## 7. Sense of Injustice and Youth Violence

It is a widely articulated view in Sri Lanka that the sense of injustice felt by disadvantaged youth agitates them, often leading to intolerance and organised violence. Any attempt to suppress such violent uprisings leads to an escalation of violence and counter violence, often producing extremely brutal forms of terrorism and counter-terrorism. Some of those who are involved in such violence have tended to explain the phenomenon in terms of the failure or the suppression of the democratic process. In other words, the lack of democratic space is given as the rationale for organised violence aimed at achieving political objectives. In this regard, it is significant that nearly a third of the youth interviewed as part of the national survey on youth in Sri Lanka felt that it is justifiable to use violence to achieve political objectives (See Table 6.3).

**Table 6.1 Do you consider Sri Lankan society as just? (by educational attainment) %**

	Yes	No	Don't know
No schooling	22.2	55.6	22.2
Grade 1-5	27.1	61.9	11.0
Grade 6-11	24.2	67.3	7.7
G.C.E. (OL)	17.4	75.6	5.6
G.C.E. (AL)	14.7	76.8	8.0
Degree or higher degree	12.7	79.7	6.3

Source: National Youth Survey 1999, CASS University of Colombo

**Table 6.2 Do you consider Sri Lankan society as just? (by sex) %**

	Yes	No	Don't know
All groups	20.7	71.2	7.4
Male	22.9	70.0	6.4
Female	17.8	72.6	8.6

Source: National Youth Survey 1999, CASS University of Colombo



**Table 6.3 Perceived legitimacy of use of violence in political struggles (by ethnicity) %**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Proper</b>	<b>Not proper</b>	<b>Do not know</b>
Sinhalese	31.0	62.0	3.0
Tamil	32.0	60.0	6.0
Moor	22.0	71.0	6.0

*Source:* National Youth Survey 1999

It seems unreasonable to explain political violence entirely in terms of the absence of democratic values and ideological motivations. In a situation where democratic institutions like the established political parties and media institutions do not appear to function in keeping with democratic principles, and when hierarchical and authoritarian values pervade the social fabric, youth who are exposed to modern ideas of equity and social justice may not necessarily see much merit in being committed to democratic values themselves. Perceiving the *status quo* as one that undermines democratic values and secular ideals, socially and politically-conscious youth may turn to radical political movements to use them as vehicles for bringing about change even through violent means. Once encapsulated within a violent political movement that demands uncritical loyalty and commitment to its cause, its youthful members tend to treat violence as a legitimate means to deal with their opponents, be they rival political groups or the agents of the state.

The point that needs to be emphasised is that violent youth politics cannot be explained in terms of a single causal factor. What is involved appears to be a complex array of factors and circumstances. These factors and circumstances may contribute to youth violence in varying degrees and in various combinations. When some of these factors and circumstances converge at a particular time in a particular context, they are likely to produce a very high level of discontent and unrest leading to a rupture in the socio-political fabric. This has happened in Sri Lanka on a number of occasions. On the other hand, when radical youths perceive a real possibility for achieving their social and political objectives through democratic means, they are likely to reject violence in favour of democratic politics.

## **8. Conclusions**

This chapter has been an attempt to discuss some of the issues relating to the role of youth in peaceful and sustainable development. As has been argued, their role in the process is not unproblematic. The nature of young people's role in sustainable development may be more determined by forces over which they have little control than by their own agency. In this regard, the process of globalisation guided by neo-liberal ideology can be critical. For example, there is a strong tendency among rural youth to migrate to urban areas and foreign countries when conventional livelihoods like agriculture, rural wage employment and cottage industries become untenable. On the other hand, urban land and housing markets dominated by foreign and local capital cater to more affluent strata of society, leading to the neglect of low income housing. This results in the proliferation of irregular settlements which become breeding grounds for drug addicts and criminals. Many young people in such settlements come under the influence of such anti-social elements.

In rural areas, disadvantaged youths are not in a position to make use of educational and other opportunities available in more developed urban areas and, therefore, lag behind their more affluent counterparts in terms of acquisition of the skills and capabilities demanded by the emerging new economy. It is this sense of relative deprivation that can encourage them to find political solutions, rather than rely on individual initiative.

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## II. Charting the Directions of Youth Transition Research in the Philippines<sup>1</sup>

*Clarence M. Batan*<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Introduction

In recent years, studies on youth transitions have become more frequent in developed countries. This phenomenon is most notable in the English-speaking world and in some European countries (1997: 2). The main aim of these studies is to understand the strategies through which institutions structure the process of growing-up. Using a transnational perspective, is it appropriate to think that similar phenomena could be observed in non-western societies<sup>3</sup>? Wyn and

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<sup>3</sup> Quah and Sales (2000) used these categories to establish distinctions between two sociological activities in the 'western' and 'non-western' spheres. The western sphere refers to the sociology and sociologists working in North America, Europe, Australia and New Zealand and the non-western sphere covers the highly heterogeneous practice of sociology in the geographical expanse outside North America and western Europe (ibid: 12). In this paper, I also refer to western societies as developed nations, and non-western as the developing world. I recognise the limitations of using these categories but for purposes of analysis, I find these distinctions significant on two counts. First, it clarifies the perspective from which I am coming; and second, it situates the discourse in a dialogic mode that explains the practice of youth research between the developed and developing countries.

White (1997:94) suggest that, "regardless of the nature of the formal and systematic processes, all societies are experiencing increasing divisions between those for whom legitimate livelihood is achievable and those who become marginalised."

The persistence of social inequality in any given society, therefore, is expected to be salient in the lives of young people, especially in this vulnerable period when they move from childhood to adulthood, from dependence to self-reliance. Consequently, youth transition as a sociological discourse has become an important dimension in youth policy and development discussions in both western and non-western societies. However, most studies on the subject have been produced in the developed world. Coming from a non-western world, I contend that most of our beliefs about youth transition as a process have been, and are still being, heavily influenced by western frameworks, which could distort perceptions about the real social dynamics on what it is like to grow up in the context of a developing nation.

My thesis is that while we can learn important lessons from western literature on youth transition, there is a need to examine our understanding of this concept in the context of our history as a developing nation. Only through this process of rethinking youth transition would local researchers from non-western nations be able to give adequate attention to the processes of youth marginalisation and exclusion in our respective societies.

Thus, this paper gives a review of selected youth transition studies on western societies. It illustrates the lessons to be learned from these studies by underlying specific dimensions within which parallel research in the Philippines could be carried-out. It is divided into three parts. The first section gives the reasons behind the urgency of understanding the processes of youth transition in the developing world. This is where I attempt to explain the social location of youth in non-western societies. The second section provides a thematic description of selected youth transition studies conducted on western societies. Then, in the third section, I analyse the state of Filipino studies relative to western studies and discuss the ways in which youth transition in the Philippines should be re-thought in the contexts of their similarities and differences. In so doing, the paper aims to demonstrate how youth transition as a concept, is to be re-examined in the Philippines.

## **2. Methodology**

This paper uses content and thematic analysis of selected western youth transition studies and local youth studies in the Philippines. The main objective is to highlight the lessons from these studies by identifying the salient ways in which a western framework or approach could be adapted or modified in the study of youth transition in the Philippines.

## **3. Locating Youth in a Non-Western Developing World**

In the analysis employed in this paper, I am acutely aware of the oversimplification involved in making binary distinctions. But for the specific purpose of this paper, I contend that this categorisation is useful. In my view, this approach brings to the surface, the tensions underlying the epistemological questions of how we come to classify the world. Bourdieu (1987:2) explains that, "agents are both classified and classifiers, but they classify according to (or depending upon) their position within classifications."

Starting from this view, I classify youth from non-western societies in relation to their western counterparts, recognising that the social world in which they are rooted, is a multi-dimensional space of power and capital which they themselves continuously shape and negotiate with. I argue that, similar to the notion of 'social class' (ibid), 'youth' is a symbolic construction orientated within the political and economic struggles of collective interests.

Hence, 'knowledge' about the experiences of western youth should be understood within specific socio-historical and economic contexts. The experiences of western youth must be understood within the western context. In spite of globalisation, youth culture is not uniform and young people in non-western countries have different experiences from youth in the west. For instance, Arnett's (2002) assessment of adolescents in western countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century gives a clear account of the difference of the social location of western youth compared to their counterparts in other regions of the world. He explains:

“Every society in every era has its own problems and challenges that young people must confront. But Western societies are generally stable, affluent, and democratic, and these features make the West of the 21<sup>st</sup> century an exceptionally promising time and place to be young” (ibid:337).

This observation implicitly suggests that growing-up in developing societies is qualitatively different, unquestionably more difficult, from the experience of young people growing up in western societies. As highlighted in recently published world youth reports by the United Nations (2004, October 2005), the situation of youth in the developing world is undoubtedly tied into the fundamental social problems of their respective societies, especially in this time of globalisation.

The United Nations argues that rapid globalisation and technological change offer new threats and limited opportunities to the 500 million young women and men entering the workforce within the next decade (ibid), especially in developing societies. This encompasses the issue of youth transition happening in three important social spaces of growing-up – the family, school and the world of employment. In response to this global problem, the United Nations urges the governments to come-up with relevant youth policies to mitigate these transitional problems.

This issue appears to be more salient in the developing world because even in these depressed societies, formal schooling remains the best predictor of employment. This means that formal educational qualifications tend to be highly-valued and are increasingly mandatory for entry into employment (Webb *et al.* 2002: 111-112), wherever young people in the world are situated. However, because a large majority (about 85%) of the world’s youth reside in developing countries (Fussell and Greene 2002; Xenos 2000), their situation is more precarious and urgently needs effective programmes to encourage and facilitate the realisation of their full potential.

Young people in the non-western developing world are situated in a unique social location, where the pervasive structural problems (e.g., weak governance and economy) of their respective countries make transition into adulthood more difficult and challenging.



Although recently, there has been a serious attempt<sup>4</sup> by academics to understand these transitional problems, much empirical research work remains to be done.

#### 4. Youth Transition Studies in Western Literature

Theoretically, youth transition studies in Western societies have greatly enhanced our understanding of two of the most important sociological areas of inquiry: social inequality and social reproduction. In the 1970s, the classic youth studies such as Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990/1977) *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*; Berg's (1970) *Education and Jobs: The Great Training Robbery*; Bowles and Gintis's (1976) *Schooling in Capitalist America: Educational Reform and the Contradictions of Economic Life*; Collins's (1979) *The Credential Society*; and Willis's (1977) *Learning to Labour: How Working Class Kids Get Working Class Jobs*, continuously influence the practice of contemporary youth research. Generally, these classic studies illustrated the role of schooling and work in the lives of western youth. They powerfully document the nature and problems of the educational system and its relations to employment during the 1970s. Although varied in their approaches, each of these classic works offers a social glimpse and an empirical grasp of the wider social structure in which western youth were positioned at that time. Hence, they reflected both the stability and dynamism of structure, processes of social inequality, and forms of social divisions that formed the foundation of the relationship of youth with society. These classics have generated numerous debates on diverse youth issues and concerns.

There are two important research dimensions addressed in western literature on youth transition studies. These are: (a) the salient factors that challenged and changed the traditional pathways in achieving adulthood; and (b) the relationship of the various forms of capital to the educational and occupational opportunities and outcomes of young people.

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<sup>4</sup> In the Asia-Pacific region, recent academic conferences discussed issues on youth transition such as the Philippine National Social Science Congress V (May 15-17, 2003), which had *What's with the Filipino Youth: Perspectives from the Social Sciences* as its theme; and the upcoming 15th Biennial General Conference of the Association of Asian Social Science Research Councils (AASSREC), with the theme, *Asian Youth in Transition* on November 10-15, 2004 at Canberra, Australia.

Wyn and White (1997) in their analysis of western youth transition, identify three key areas of research concern. These are: "(a) the failure of the education-work nexus in industrialised countries; (b) the struggle to achieve a livelihood; and (c) the development of the capacities for social practices which will enable full participation in society" (ibid:94). Some notable research findings in these youth transition studies are the following:

1. There is general agreement that western youth faces new challenges that were not present in previous generations. Traditional pathways into adulthood are blurred because of the changing structure of contemporary society. Examples of these are the collapse of good entry-level jobs that required only secondary education, and attachment of women to the labour market. Empirical studies (e.g. Chisholm 1990; Hogan & Astone 1986; Thiessen & Looker 1999a; Wyn & White 1997) suggest that there are diverse, multiple dimensions in the process of becoming an adult.
2. Social class and other factors such as gender, ethnicity, locality, and family structure (and its interacting dynamics) remain significant determinants of young people's lives in western societies (e.g., Andres 2002; Furlong & Cartmel 1997; Kerckhoff 1990; Lowe 2001; e.g., Musick & Bumpass 1999). It is in these studies that issues of social inequality and social reproduction are clearly illustrated.
3. Educational and employment systems vary across societies. Youth transitional experiences are contextualised within these educational and labour market structures, which influence the specific patterning of their life-trajectories in each society (Kerckhoff 1990; Nurse 1998; Thiessen & Looker 1999b).
4. Empirical evidence documents that various types of capital such as cultural (DiMaggio 1982; Dumais 2002), social (Coleman 1988; Furstenberg & Hughes 1995) and human (Andres & Looker 2001; Looker 2001) are strongly linked to school success and educational outcomes.
5. Studies on young people's educational and occupational aspirations and expectations continuously reflect the high value given to professional jobs (Furlong *et al.* 1998; Lowe & Krahn 2000; Mortimer & Johnson 1998). However, these perceptions vary according to gender, social class and locality (Andres & Krahn 1999; Andres & Looker 2001). The actual educational and occupational achievements of these

youths are mediated by the access to and quality of their institutions (Caspi *et al.* 1998; Coté & Allahar 1994; Davies 1999; Lehmann 2003; Pallas 1993; Thiessen & Blasius 2002; Thiessen & Looker 1999a).

6. Methodologically, the life-course has been used as a sociological perspective that convincingly documents the patterns, regularities, variations in western youth's life (Heinz 2001; Käyhko & Tüüpanen 1997; Kerckhoff 1990). Also, longitudinal studies (Looker *et al.* 2001) and population perspective (Hogan & Astone 1986) are recognised as important methods in studying youth transition.
7. Youth studies, particularly on school-to-work transition, are taken seriously by western governments. These studies (Brown 1980; Galaway & Hudson 1996; Thiessen & Looker 1999b) are used to inform youth policies and related development programmes.

The above findings show the richness of research on youth in developed countries, particularly in the field of transition studies. In the next section, I will explain the issues that situate the state of research on youth in the Philippines. Emphasis is given to the wide-range of studies that have offered pieces of information about Filipino youth in recent years relative to the western studies dealt with above. As would be surmised in this discussion, there are similar issues besetting western and non-western youth transition studies. However, in charting the direction of youth transition research in the Philippines, there are important dimensions that should be given adequate attention so that the processes of youth marginalisation and exclusion in the Philippines may be highlighted.

## **5. Rethinking Youth Transition in the Philippine Context**

Generally, studies on Filipino youth have remained highly segmented and somewhat uncoordinated (Batan 2002, 2003; Peña-Alampay *et al.* 2003; Philippine Social Science Council 2003). This is reflected in the diversity of issues, concerns and approaches that local Filipino social scientists have employed in studying young Filipinos. Numerous Filipino youth surveys have been conducted since the 1980s (Ateneo Youth Study 2001; Episcopal Commission on Youth 2002; McCann Erickson-Philippines 2000; Corazon M. Raymundo & Cruz 2004;

Corazon M. Raymundo *et al.* 1999; Social Research Centre 1986; Social Weather Stations 1996, 1997) but the findings of these studies are yet to be integrated systematically so that they can help to explain the process of growing-up in the country. Unlike the western studies cited above, Filipino social scientists have not been fully engaged in deducing these youth findings relative to the nature and dynamics of Philippine institutional structures, and empirically explaining how these processes actually reproduce social inequality.

Statistics show that, at present, young people comprised 15.1 out of the 76.5 million Filipinos enumerated in the 2000 census. This number is expected to double in 33 years. Their proportionate share of the total population remains at 20% with an annual growth rate of 2.1% (Erica 2003). But their life situations are more precarious than they were for their parents' generation: "three out of ten are poor, two in five are in school, three in every ten are gainfully employed, while the proportion of 'idle youth', (those who are neither in school nor working) are increasing (Philippine Commission on Population, 2003: 2). This reflects the more intense structural challenges that confront youth in developing societies compared to their western counterparts. However, when it comes to contextualising this particular issue of youth transition, there are similarities between developed and developing countries.

First on the transnational level, the effects of globalisation, and the changing nature of the labour market have also affected the lives of young people in developing countries. For example, there is an observed increase in the number of people working abroad, particularly for Filipino young females (Erica 2003). This is an evidence of the feminisation of migrant work in the Philippines, and the growing participation of young Filipino females in the global labour market.

Second, the 1994 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey (FLEMMS) showed that most of the Filipino youth (88%) possessed reading, writing and numeric skills. They also exhibited the highest functional literacy rate among all age groups (Philippine Commission on Population 2003: 9). In addition, the Young Adults Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFS) done in 1994 and 2002 showed there was an increased proportion among those 15-19 years old who were in school between 1994 (male 61.3%; female 63.9%) and 2002 (male 65.2%; female 71.7%). This shows that females had higher educational attainment than their male counterparts. In fact, young females are more likely to have a college education than

males, regardless of age (Ogena & Berja 2003). This gender-shift in access to education and work is a major feature of youth transition in western societies and evidence suggests it has also occurred in the Philippines.

Third, despite the success of the effort to equalise access to formal education, this has not promoted equal access to labour and employment. The claim that schooling has reproduced social inequality (Aronowitz & Giroux 1994; Bourdieu & Passeron 1990/1977), and that the educational system is likened to 'a training robbery' (Berg 1970) garnered enough academic attention in western societies. What is significant in the Philippine context is that the entire educational and political systems are products of its U.S. American colonial history. Ironically, the Philippines has inherited a system of education, which in some respects has evidently failed in developed societies (Berg 1970; Collins 1979; Livingstone 1999). In the Philippines, this education-labour mismatch has taken its toll on young educated Filipinos (Morada & Manzala July 11-13-2001). "Labour statistics show that the Filipino working youth accounted for 20% of the total number of employed persons. On the other hand, 1.48 million or nearly half (47%) of the 3.13 million unemployed persons in the country in 2002 were youths, indicating the lack of job opportunities for young entrants to the labour force. Unemployment rates for young people have gradually increased for the past six years" (Erica 2003). In addition, gender and locality continue to exert influence to this labour situation. "Young Filipino women registered a lower labour force participation rate or LFPR (38%) than young men (58.7%). This gender disparity is more pronounced in the rural areas, where women's LFPR was 35% as against young men's LFPR of 64 percent" (ibid.). Moreover, the significant number of idle youth, who are neither working nor studying, is evidence of a systematic social exclusory process occurring in Philippine educational and labour institutions.

Fourth, like their western counterparts, Filipino youth have high educational aspirations and want to have professional jobs in the future. It was revealed in a focus group discussion at the University Centre for Women's Studies (2003) that the common aspiration among Filipino adolescents and youth is to finish their education. "Education is seen as the key to all the other things aspired for – a successful career and financial stability" (Philippine Commission on Population 2003:19). On the other hand, occupational aspirations of Filipino youth are mainly professional jobs (e.g., business manager, teacher, doctor, engineer, etc.) (Social Weather Stations 1996, 1997). However, one should not discount the underlying fact that although

most Filipino youth share optimism in what they think the future holds for them, these educational and occupational aspirations change over time as they realise the consequences of their social locations.

The fifth comparative factor is the effect of media and technology in the lives of contemporary youth around the world. In the Philippines, the McCann-Erickson study (2000) found that media has become the source of authority regarding what is right and what is wrong; and what is important to Filipino youth. This finding is supported by the YAFS 3 (Corazon M. Raymundo & Cruz 2004), which reported mass media as the new surrogate parent. Media in the Philippines are more expansive, have more variety in form and content, and are more accessible, especially to youth. In contrast to the experiences of western youth, the internet is a medium used only by 6% of Filipino youth with no difference between males and females. According to YAFS 3, the internet creates a technological divide (*ibid.*), between those who are in school and not, and between rural and urban areas with those living in the latter enjoying more technological access.

While there are perceptible similarities in the studies of youth between young Filipinos and their western counterparts, there are other areas in social life that make transitions in the Philippines somewhat distinct. These are in the social realms of the family as an institution, and its kinship practices; and the church with its religious beliefs affecting the values and moral formation of young Filipinos.

Family serves as the primary agent for socialisation that carries the ultimate responsibility for the well-being of children. But unlike most developed countries, in the Philippines, with respect to family structure, more than eight out of ten Filipino youth are still raised by both natural father and mother. Only 8% are being raised by one parent with a partner, and a mere 6% by other people (Corazon M. Raymundo July 11, 2003). However, more and more Filipino youth are passing through transition from childhood to adulthood not under the care of both parents, either because of work or a change in their family situation, brought about by either separation or death. The YAFS 3 found that 17% of young people were not raised by both parents, which is a slight increase from the 1994 data of 16% (Philippine Commission on Population 2003:13). Related to this is the practice of the culture of care within the Filipino kinship system that encompasses extended and shared help to the young. This unique social arrangement generates different meanings with respect to being independent or being away from home. For instance, Filipino

youth who left home to work in a different place are culturally bound to support their families including other relatives. This extended-family dynamic gives transitions among Filipino youth a distinct feature that might differentiate their paths to adulthood compared to western youth.

The overwhelming importance of religion for Filipino youth is another area that merits close attention. "The religiosity of Filipinos whether expressed as a belief in God, relating with the supernatural or the cosmos, or practising a religion or belonging to a church is well known. Not surprisingly, data from the 1996 World Values Survey undertaken by the Institute of Social Research of the University of Michigan and conducted in the Philippines by the Social Weather Stations, show Filipinos to be the most religious people in the world" (Philippine Social Science Council 2003:15). Almost eight out of ten young Filipinos are Catholic with slightly more females than males belonging to other religions (Philippine Commission on Population 2003:16). 86% report being brought up in a home that is religious and 82% considered themselves as being a religious person (Philippine Social Science Council 2003:15). Although recent surveys on catholic youth show some decrease in what religious involvement means for young Filipinos (Ateneo Youth Study 2001; Episcopal Commission on Youth 2002), it is important to consider religious belief as a significant variable related to adolescent upbringing affecting transitions. In western societies, which are mostly secular, youth transition studies do not offer much discussion about religion. However, in a society like the Philippines, where religion and its practices play a major socialising role in the cultivation of values among its young people, there is a reason to expect that transitions are being influenced by this factor.

## **6. Conclusion**

The above research findings that contextualised what is known about the Filipino youth in relation to their western counterparts offer some insights. However, these studies have to be systematically re-examined. With the structural problems confronting Filipino youth, marked by limited access to employment and livelihood, academics and researchers looking at youth issues are urged to move beyond description, develop more explanatory analysis of why transitions proceed in this manner, and are strongly encouraged to take a more

critical stance on this issue. Filipino youth transitions should be critically investigated in the context of the changes and current challenges in the history of the Philippines and the nation's institutional structures. I further contend that this recommendation calls for a conscious rediscovery and reconstruction of the measures and categories of youth transition that would reveal both the structural and institutional barriers that hinder the process of growing-up in the Philippines. In so doing, this academic exercise will generate more relevant insights about the diverse paths of Filipino youth transitions and highlight their links to the systematic process of youth marginalisation and



social exclusion.

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# 2

## YOUTH AND EDUCATION

Learning in the School Context: Youth as critical thinkers or functionaries in the knowledge economy	45
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# **I. Learning in the School Context: Youth as critical thinkers or functionaries in the knowledge economy**

*Siri Gamage*

## **1. Introduction**

There is a challenge facing teachers, teacher - educators and educational reformers. Do we continue with a narrow technocratic model with no relation to a progressive ideology and social consciousness (indeed the governing ideology is either conservative or liberal); do we adopt a modernist model that supports and reinforces existing power structures, discourses, languages; do we use a critical-radical model which has a close relation to a liberation/emancipatory ideology and political action.

I argue that in addition to teaching a curriculum (common or contested), schools have responsibilities to produce 'public intellectuals' who are capable of engaging in socially relevant criticism of the problems and issues existing in society. Teachers, instead of viewing themselves as powerless, can in fact play a critical and constructive role in advancing a critical discourse among their colleagues as well as among the young people under their care. To achieve this, they need to permeate the 'social integration discourse' and embrace a 'socially critical approach'. Students will then be able to break free from hierarchically imposed discourses and pedagogies that make them socially-invalid outcasts, and develop critical abilities which enable them to contribute to a vibrant democracy and society.

The main thrust of my argument is that a 'social justice model of education' and 'democratic schooling framework' is far superior to the 'integration model' or 'managerial/technocratic model' espoused by funding agencies, policy-makers and some academics. The social justice model can provide a broad-based, contextually sensitive and relevant, individually-rewarding education compared to a narrowly defined skill-based education. School education must prepare young people to achieve broader objectives such as social harmony, flexibility in the workplace, interpersonal relations and communication, global citizenship and belonging, empowerment of marginalised groups,

alleviation of social inequality, and critical thinking and reflecting abilities.

We may argue that the school education system in Sri Lanka - a two-tier system consisting of private and public - is designed to 'reproduce' the existing economic and power structures and relations as well as the inequalities and injustices associated with these. An essential aspect of this modernist project is the construction of a 'modernist subject', the 'social mobility discourse', 'globalisation discourse' and 'social integration discourse' adopted by politicians, policy makers, funding agencies and academics are part of this project as the epistemological paradigms and critiques embodied in these discourses are essentially 'modernist'. In this paper, the main argument is that we need to adopt a 'postmodernist critical education perspective' in order to address the learning paradigms and needs of the young population in Sri Lanka.

Learning is a process that has to be assisted by teachers, schools, learning instruments and goals. Learning occurs in a context - global/national, social, economic, political and cultural. Motivation for learning is not found among all young people. Young people who come to the classrooms have mixed abilities. They have varying degrees of contextual pressures. Structures and organisations put in place may not necessarily work for the advancement of learning goals. Learning goals, approaches, methods and curriculum may not be suitable for the context. What knowledge, learning, teaching approaches and methods are necessary for this kind of education?

We can approach the issue of 'youth and learning' from several perspectives:

- How to fit in with the globalising higher-education and employment market?
- How to enhance the public education system for producing young people with not only the skills and knowledge required by national and international agencies but also as 'public intellectuals'?
- How to address the circumstances -individual, contextual, and educational - of those who are not achieving the expected level of excellence.
- How to create a society with less conflict and more harmony by using education, teaching and learning.

This paper contributes to the understanding of youth issues in terms of learning within the formal public education system in Sri Lanka. The public school system in Sri Lanka makes a significant contribution to the education of the nation's young people. Learning processes and outcomes by children who go through the public education system in Sri Lanka have been the subject of critical comment and public policy over the decades. For any serious consideration of the learning processes of the young people, we have to examine the social contextual factors and public discourses on education. In the paper, I explore the contextual, epistemological, ideological and pedagogical constraints for effective learning. I examine the role of public schools and teachers in educating the young in Sri Lanka to be critical thinkers, and propose a democratic schooling framework based on the postmodernist/poststructuralist and critical education literature.

## **2. Hypothesis, Methodology and Data Sources**

This paper is not based on a hypothesis-testing, sociological piece of quantitative research. The argument advanced here is that the kind of education received from the public education system is not helping most of the young people to enter the world of work or further-education successfully. A few do well but most do not. In this context, what are the possible ways to improve this situation? What teaching and learning approaches and methods can be used to support students? What can teachers do? What can schools as a whole do? What can the government do? The two competing discourses in Sri Lanka are either appreciative of public education as it helps a section of youth to enter higher education and employment OR critical of the same for various reasons such as poor quality or standards, incomparability, inequality and injustice. The paper proposes another discourse based on postmodernist and critical education theories.

The author argues that we need to move beyond the binary division and embrace alternative approaches to learning and schooling in order to address the structural, epistemological, pedagogical deficiencies, and controversies. Data for the paper came from reviewing relevant literature, personal observations and feedback from teachers and students obtained during visits by the author to Sri Lanka.

### **3. Section I**

#### ***Globalisation, education and learning***

Globalisation has to be viewed as a process with two faces. That also applies to education. Globalisation is associated with several defining features. Expansion of capitalism and the integration of economies provide expanded employment and training opportunities. Among other features are the internet and other communication methods, diaspora networks, a deregulated global labour market, out-migration and expanding educational opportunities such as those made available through international schools. Other features are the diminishing role of governments and the increasing significance of multinational companies, a higher cost of living and lack of price controls, privatisation of government enterprises, quality-control, efficiency and redundancies. The social costs of globalisation are tremendous, e.g. impact on traditional values and norms. Other aspects include the demise of the welfare state and the introduction of economic rationalist policies and practices such as the user-pay method for services, higher taxes and increased competition. Increasingly, even education is not considered as a public good that the state has to provide free-of-charge that young people are entitled to. In the emerging context, the social obligations of citizens are emphasised over the responsibilities of the multinational corporations. Learning outside public schools is made possible for a fee e.g. Internet cafes, private tutorials, international schools. While the doors for learning are increasingly opened, they are closed more and more because many young people cannot meet the costs or do not have the English language requirements.

When we examine youth and learning in a globalising world, it is not sufficient to look at what learning is necessary to 'fit into the requirements of the global and national economies' as if they are benign entities creating only good for society. Globalisation processes and agencies create greater inequalities as much as they assist some sections of the population to fulfil their aspirations. We need to examine the characteristics of young people who are rejected by globalisation processes, what kind of learning is suitable to enable them to not only 'fit in' but also to acquire a critical and realistic knowledge and understanding of what is happening around them. In other words, we have to problematise 'learning' in the globalising

context and reflect on the realities more than on the rhetoric – whether it comes from the politicians, policy-makers, entrepreneurs or the media.

Globalisation and associated processes create winners and losers. To some extent, the winners also come from the public education system. In Sri Lanka, education has helped some young people to be socially mobile and enter the professions and other positions in the dominant authority system and its various arms, as well as to go abroad. However, it has excluded or disqualified many more from the same recognition/success and thrown them into the margins of society and the economy resulting in, not only considerable frustrations, but also radicalisation in thought and action leading to periodic violence.

In recent times, youth and learning/education have received attention from the authorities and intellectuals in Sri Lanka not necessarily because of an intrinsic desire on the part of decision-makers to alleviate inequalities and injustices created by the existing power relations, the globally-orientated economic structure, and the managerially-driven education system, but because of the fact that in the opinion of many, those who missed out on the liberalised economic miracle took up arms against the state and engaged in anti-social, violent activities. The aim of recent studies is to find ways of teaching and learning in order to avoid conflict and violence. While this effort is commendable, we need to examine as a matter of fundamental interest the different ways that the existing power-relations, economy and education system exclude youths - leading to injustices and inequalities.

Some argue that the expansion of international schools creates inequalities and has detrimental effects on public schooling. 'If one considers social inequality to be one of the reasons for youth revolts in the 1970s and 1980s, it is pertinent to examine how these (international) schools can aggravate social inequality and ultimately lead to harmful social effects which may be costly. Thus, it is relevant to examine whether these schools will hamper the policy of government since the 1930s to use education to improve social mobility and ameliorate social inequality' (Kularatne 1995:22).

## ***Modernist discourse and the postmodern/poststructuralist critique of education***

If we employ a postmodernist perspective, we can question the modernist foundations, assumptions and functions of the social sciences including education. It problematises education theory and practice and their epistemological basis while examining social and political factors that impact on public schooling. It questions the categories used in current educational discourses such as those found in the disciplines, e.g. knowledge, learning, educated subject. It also provides tools of analysis for us to examine critically the power relations within schools and in the social context. Some postmodern writing provides a different kind of conception and explanation regarding social change compared to the modernist conception and explanation. Postmodern/poststructuralist writings provide us with a reconceptualisation of modern institutions such as schools and universities.

According to Usher and Edwards (1994:26-28), a significant merit of postmodernism (PM) is the strong critique it presents of modernist assumptions, ideals and processes including education. It requires us to be sceptical about received wisdom in education irrespective of whether it is liberal, conservative or progressive. Postmodernists charge that education is located in the modernist tradition. PM 'suggests a way of looking differently at education as a social practice, at educational processes such as learning and teaching, and bodies of knowledge and the way they are organised and transmitted'. However, postmodernism does not provide 'a new definitive perspective from which a new set of prescriptions and techniques for organising teaching and learning can be generated'. The remaining question, then, is whether it is only a perspective.

As an intellectual position, postmodernism is a process of reflecting on the condition of modernity and postmodernity. It questions the assumptions of modern condition and the means of achieving knowledge. It recognises 'the need to problematise 'systems' of thought and organisation and, indeed to question the very notion of 'system' and systemic explanation. Postmodernism 'encompasses a condition, a set of practices, a cultural discourse, an attitude and a mode of analysis' (Usher and Edwards 1994:7).

Recently much discussion and reflection have taken place on the nature of social changes, especially in relation to the economic,



political, cultural, and technological, media, community and individual dimensions. A popularly-used term that encapsulates these changes is 'globalisation'. However, before this term and the concept came into common parlance, various theorists explored the social changes from their own perspectives and provided detailed commentaries. Postmodernist/poststructuralist writers are in one such category. Critical education theorists, e.g. Giroux, McLaren, & Hill, who write in the Marxist and political economy tradition are in another category. They have not only attempted to understand and explain the changes but have articulated an ideology and strategy for addressing the oppressive outcomes of these changes on people, especially those in the education field. While critical education theorists who write from a Marxist line of argument assert the importance of economic factors and processes as driving forces of these social changes, postmodernist/poststructuralist writers have emphasised the centrality of cultural factors and processes.

"Postmodernism should be taken seriously (although perhaps in a playful way) because it directs our attention to the centrality of culture in the changes taking place at all levels - from the everyday practices and experiences of different social groups to more 'rarefied artistic, intellectual and academic activities. (It) signifies the changes that are taking place in the production, circulation and consumption of culture. In postmodernism, cultural practices and media are seen as having an unprecedented impact and a central role in framing sensibilities and identities eg. Aestheticisation of everyday life as the culture spreads throughout the social formation.... This centrality signals a new cultural paradigm. Hence, it represents a break with the past in terms of a changed culture, and a change in the cultural and other spheres of life and the way the place of the cultural is understood." (Usher and Edwards 1994:13)

Postmodernists criticise the notion of human progress based on scientific knowledge as a meta-narrative. Foucault himself questioned the rationalisation and humanistic grounds upon which modern society is based, i.e. the story of the steady progress of society based on reason towards more humane 'enlightened' forms of governance. According to Foucault modern forms of governance re-position people into tighter forms of regulation and self-regulation indicating a discontinuity or a rupture (Usher and Edwards 1994:83).

Popkewitz and Brennan show the role of modernisation and social sciences in the regulation of individual behaviour:

"Modernisation was not only in physical landscape. It separated the person through forms of individualism into attributes and behaviours that could be supervised and observed to ensure progress. Social sciences were inscribed in the process of modernisation to make objectivist knowledge the classificatory criteria through which individuals were disciplined and self regulated." (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:5-6)

They broadly follow Foucault's views on the breaks in modernity. As progress is not generated by the application of scientific principles embracing all sectors of the population, they argue that another conception of change must be considered. It is a system of reasoning (knowledge) that can generate principles of action and participation, e.g. one involving different interpretations of schooling and educational reforms.

"If we take the 'current moment' in history and societies around us, we observe the emergence and growth of service sector employment and post-industrial social formations. Centres of consumption replace factory and large scale manufacturing enterprises (eg. shopping malls). The postmodernists claim that emerging from this development is a breakdown of modern, production-oriented identity as the cultural sphere becomes overloaded with consumption possibilities." (Usher and Edwards 1994:8)

There is a questioning of the modernist notion of a legitimating centre upon which beliefs and actions can be grounded eg. science and faith provided such a centre, an 'authorising' position from which control could be exerted and socio-cultural hierarchies legitimated through a process of 'mastery'. Postmodernists question the notions of mastery, and emphasise the de-centralisation of knowledge involving multiple sources - including the popular media - not only the text.

Based on Foucault's views, Usher and Edwards (1994:85) state that modernity's liberal-humanist paradigm accustoms us to seeing knowledge as distinct from, indeed counterpoised to, power. Knowledge is a (disinterested) search for truth, which power gets in the way of and distorts. Knowledge is the means of liberating oneself

and others from power. This discourse of knowledge, power and truth provides a range of messages: truth is the basis for emancipation and progress; truth is gained from knowledge which faithfully reflects and represents the 'real' world; that such knowledge is only possible in the absence of power. Anything, which does not satisfy these conditions, is rejected as 'falsehood', 'mere belief', 'wrong-headed', and 'ideological'. Thus, other ways of constructing knowledge and truth are marginalised. All other forms of knowledge and truth, for example, religious truth, truth of literature, are suppressed or debased.

Modernity's discourse of power, knowledge and truth is brought into question (subjected to reversal) by the notion of *power-knowledge* espoused by Foucault. He argues that knowledge is always found in relation to its uses, in relation therefore to a form of power. Power requires knowledge of the objects over which it is to be exercised effectively. The two are correlative, they are always found together in 'regimes of truth'. Each society has its regimes of truth, its general 'politics of truth'; the types of discourse, which it accepts and makes it function as true. Knowledge, therefore, does not simply represent the truth of what is but, rather, constitutes what is taken to be true. It is what *counts as true* that is important. Countering the modernist assumption that truth is an outcome of methodologically-controlled rational investigation, he emphasises the 'production' of truth, a complex process operating at a multiplicity of levels. Thus, rather than taking changes in knowledge as the progressive unfolding of truth, it is necessary to examine the complex exercise of power (or the forms of power and associated struggles) which is immanent in such changes (Usher and Edwards 1994:85-88).

Foucault's views help us to understand that the subject is disciplined through the rules of knowledge, and the two interpretations of power, 1) as sovereignty, 2) as deployment. According to Popkewitz and Brennan (1998:18), Foucault focused on productive characteristics of knowledge whereas Marx focused on productive characteristics of labour. According to Foucault, we need different intellectual practices to explore the changing foci and strategy of power or the deployment of power. Historically the state and social sciences re-visioned individuality through 'civilising processes' that produced boundaries and permissible paths for the new citizen. This, he refers to as the productive aspect of power: how individuality is constructed for disciplining.

Discipline, in both a power and knowledge sense, is manifest in the workings of the institutions of modern social formations. As knowledge changes, so do the practices aimed at framing behaviour. Disciplines, as systemic bodies of knowledge, are regulatory regimes of 'knowledgeable' practice. Power operates through 'knowledgeable' discourses and practices. Foucault has explained how regulation and control are maintained through knowledge discourses or disciplines in place of coercion (Usher and Edwards 1994:92, 93).

Between modernism and postmodernism, there is a divergence of views concerning the construction of ideal subject (person). Usher and Edwards describe the modernist subject as follows:

"The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on the humanist idea of a certain kind of subject who has the inherent potential to become self-motivated and self-directing, a rational subject capable of exercising individual agency. The task of education has therefore been understood as one of 'bringing out', of helping to realise their potential, so that subjects become fully autonomous and capable of exercising their individual and intentional agency. Thus, education is allotted a key role in the forming and shaping of subjectivity and identity, the task of making people into particular kinds of subjects." (Usher and Edwards 1994:24-25)

Reviewing Foucault's work, Ball claims 'that schools, like prisons and asylums, are fundamentally concerned with moral and social regulation' (Ball 1990). His book provides case studies relevant to Foucault's concern with technologies of power and domination.

'Governmentality' is a term used for analysing educational institutions. Foucault uses it 'to describe the change in technologies of, and attitudes towards, governing which developed in Europe in the eighteenth century. This involved a greater emphasis on the state's ability to manage its resources (including its population) economically and efficiently, and a concomitant increase in state intervention in the lives of its citizens' (Danher et al 2000:xii). 'The concept of governmentality facilitates a recognition of the productive effects of power in which social relations repeatedly constitute and reconstitute power through subject positions in history' (Fendler 1998:59).

According to Popkewitz and Brennan (1998:20) governmentality in education provides a way to consider the concept of power as deployment, and focus on techniques of the self and institutional technologies that perpetuate the art of government e.g. institution of schooling and its micro technologies of power/knowledge. According to Foucault (1991a as quoted by Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:21), modernity was characterised by the "governmentalisation of the state". Concepts of population and family were used as instruments. Social regulation is achieved by the state through various institutions including education. In other words, education is assisting the state in its task of governing the population. Here we can examine how certain practices are normalised by discourses and discursive practices like examinations.

The discipline of writing was central to the development of modern world. Schooling and universities became central to the development of new forms of governmentality with new strategies, tactics, and techniques of power. The institutions of formal education have become central to 'disciplining' in most, if not all, other fields (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:22). 'Education, both schooling and university sectors, has become so central to the development of new forms of governmentality, exemplifying new strategies, tactics, and techniques of power. They have become central to disciplining' (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:21-22).

While Foucault did not specifically focus on educational institutions in his investigations, his work directly or indirectly addresses educational issues. He discovered the centrality of education in the construction of modernity. In other words, modern forms of governance and social discipline are secured through education. In modernity, education replaces premodern coercion and subjugation. In this respect, education is not simply that which goes on in schools but is an essential part of governmentality, a crucial aspect of the regulatory practices of a range of modern institutions. This reconceptualisation of modern institutions is largely achieved through rethinking first, the role of discourse through which practices and objects are constituted and defined and second, the relationship between power and knowledge (Usher and Edwards 1994:84).

Foucault wrote about histories to show how the person is made into a subject through particular rules and standards in particular institutional patterns (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:12) for example, prisons and asylums, the clinical medical gaze, sexuality. Those who

follow postmodernist, poststructuralist perspectives have explained how the same happens in educational institutions.

Ball describes 'educational sites as generators of a historically specific (modern) discourse, that is, as sites in which certain modern validations of, and exclusions from, the 'right to speak' are generated. Educational sites are subject to discourse but are also centrally involved in the propagation and selective dissemination of discourses, the 'social appropriation' of discourses. Educational institutions control the access of individuals to various kinds of discourse. Foucault's view on this cannot be any clearer:

"But we know very well that, in its distribution, in what it permits and what it prevents, it follows the lines laid down by social differences, conflicts and struggles. Every educational system is a political means of maintaining or modifying the appropriateness of discourses with the knowledge and power they bring with them." (Foucault 1971:46 as quoted by Ball 1990:3)

Poststructuralists claim that 'there are changing conditions in the construction of power that are not adequately articulated through Marxist theories. Foucault's work challenges the hegemony of Marxist theories about issues of power and the politics of social change' (Popkewitz and Brennan 1998:3). **Power means the construction of expert systems of knowledge that construct and normalise individuality.** Individuals are disciplined and self-regulated by the classificatory criteria. Individuals are located in discursive spaces (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:13). Foucault's work is concerned with how the subject is constructed in power relations.

Thus, poststructuralism anchors itself in a critique of Enlightenment faith in *reason*, as the faculty that regulates the social and moral order. Poststructuralist theories reject the idea of universal truth and objective knowledge, delivered through the proper use of reason, and assert, on the contrary, that truths are always partial and knowledge is always 'situated' - that is, produced by and for particular interests, in particular circumstances, at particular times. Poststructuralist work also challenges belief in progress as the inevitable result of scientific and philosophical rationality (MacLure 2003:174-175). 'Kuhn and Foucault shifted the focus of inquiry from the intentions of people to the changing principles through which knowledge itself is structured.....The study of knowledge as a social practice is called a

'decentring of the subject'. The objective is to understand how the subject is constituted within a field that relates to knowledge and power. It is not to eliminate subjects seeking to change the worlds but to give historical specificity to the systems of ideas that enclose and intern the 'reason' and the 'reasonable person' as alternatives are sought' (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:10-11).

If the assertion of power based on knowledge is used to reify (reduce) individuals (persons) and groups to subjects who are unable to think beyond (feel, act) their constructed subjectivities (identities, selves) what are the implications of such a view for education and learning? We have to reflect on this in specific contexts.

The postmodern moment constitutes a challenge to existing concepts, structures and hierarchies of knowledge allowing for problematising epistemological structures and hierarchies. This can be achieved in terms of purposes, contents and methods, debates over curriculum, pedagogy, and organisation of education. It is critical of foundationalism, of totalising and definitive explanations and theories.

Postmodernism is characterised by a multiplicity of perspectives and local contingent truths. Postmodernists claim that dominant discourses hide these under a liberal and humanistic guise. Teachers and students have to explore how this happens in teaching and learning.

We can map how various discursive fields are constructed, for example, teacher-training, health education, early-childhood education, international and comparative education, social-justice education, gender education, education for rural and isolated people and education for students from lower socio-economic-status backgrounds. We can then critique these from PM/PS perspectives and develop alternative conceptions, perspectives and strategies for constructing a desired subject - not as desired by the institution but by the individual and communities who are subjected to power-knowledge regimes and have become subjects or subjectivities.

PM/PS teach us to be critical of our identities, knowledges, institutional procedures and power- relations and the categories of thought and action we are accustomed to using. Some of the questions emerging here are:

Are the institutions channelling institutional energies in a certain direction?

Whose desires do these directions serve?

Are they limiting multiplicity of spaces and voices and, if so, in what way?

What are the socially-constructed desires of the subject characteristics, for example, competencies prescribed by the educational authorities?

***Education and learning: Is it an emancipatory or regulatory practice?***

Drawing from Foucault's writings, Usher and Edwards provide us with an account of the 'themes and issues in education theory and practice which postmodern approaches problematise' (1994:84). A major theme is the centrality of education in the construction of modernity in Foucault's thought. 'Modern forms of governance and social-discipline are secured through education.... In this respect, education is not simply that which goes in schools but is an essential part of governmentality, a crucial aspect of the regulatory practices of a range of modern institutions' (Usher & Edwards 1994:84).

A postmodernist approach makes it possible to understand and explain the oppressive functions of education. Ball highlights the creation of powerful subjects by education. 'Education as the primary institutional experience of virtually all young persons is fundamental to a Foucauldian analysis of modern society' (Ball 1990:5). 'But education works not only to render its students as subjects of power, it also constitutes them, or some of them, as powerful subjects' (Ball 1990:5).

Usher and Edwards (1994:31) argue that education is heavily influenced by humanistic discourse and the values of the Enlightenment reflected through their search for definitive knowledge, totalising explanations and the elimination of difference.

"Historically, education can be seen as the vehicle by which modernity's grand narratives, the Enlightenment ideals of critical reason, individual freedom, progress and benevolent change, are substantiated and realised. The very rationale of the educational process and the role of the educator is founded on modernity's self-motivated, self-directing,



rational subject capable of exercising individual agency. Postmodernism's emphasis on the inscribed subject, the decentred subject constructed by language, discourses and desire and the unconscious seems to contradict the very purpose of education and the basis of educational activity." (Usher & Edwards 1994:2)

As Marshall suggests (1989:108-109), rather than being emancipatory, humanistic progressive forms of education may represent 'Ever and more subtle refinements of technologies of power based upon knowledge which has itself been produced within or used by the discipline of education. This knowledge, constituted in practice, comes in turn to legitimise practice...power is still exercised in the search for normal and governable people' (Marshall as quoted in Usher & Edwards 1994:94).

"The human subject therefore has a paradoxical position in relation to the human sciences, as it is both an active knowing subject and an object being acted upon. It is both a subject and object of knowledge. Educational discourses elaborate this paradox, where 'students' become objects of knowledge and thereby subject to power which, at the same time, in certain ways, constitutes them as powerful subjects, with some being constituted as more powerful than others." (Usher & Edwards 1994:94)

A review of these ideas show that education creates unequal power relations, and the so-called emancipatory knowledge acquisition through the study of various disciplines/subjects can in fact make the subject or student an object of power as well as a powerful subject.

How does this operate in our classrooms? Through the pedagogies (of power) used by teachers? How does this operate in our educational institutions? How far do learning processes in our educational institutions make the student a subject of power and regulation?

What are the technologies of power based on knowledge that operate in the education field? How do they oppress the teacher and the student? What arguments have been constructed within relevant discourses to show education's humanist, emancipatory, progressive nature? Can we examine these in social-justice discourses as currently operational within our education institutions and their social

context? We can examine these also in competency based education discourse.

According to Simola *et al* "Education as a social apparatus is itself a game of power and is dependent on other relations of power....it is one of the modes, in our culture, by which human beings are made subjects" (Simola et al in Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:69).

Popkewitz and Brennan write that "we can think of educational studies, then, as a social mapping of the region and its inscribed boundaries. The regional focus enables an understanding of how particular rules and standards of truth cross institutional patterns... Curriculum becomes, from this point of view, part of a discursive field through which the subjects of schooling are constructed as individuals to self-regulate, discipline, and reflect upon themselves as members of a community/society" (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:13). Examples of this are the teaching community and community of intellectuals.

This implies a functionalist position rather than a critical one. Instead of citizens who function as public intellectuals working to improve democracy (as critical-education theorists propose), they become normal, good citizens who follow the rules and standards and receive rewards in return. Consensus and cohesion are to be ensured by this rather than conflict and tension which can lead to change.

Postmodernist thinkers seek to change the discourses and practices that construct reality in a certain way (e.g. modernist), and advocate the value of alternative discourses and practices that construct reality differently or a different reality. They believe that the educators have a unique role to play in this.

"The value of being located in the postmodern is the greater possibility for disruption of the 'given'; and in education there are far too many givens in need of disruption. The emphasis on methods and techniques is itself a product of education's humanistic discourse. More than ever, then, education needs a critical scepticism and a suitable degree of uncertainty." (Usher & Edwards 1994:31)

It is not helpful to see 'the teacher only as a pawn in a game of power or simply as an independent individual agent' (Simola *et al* 1998:85). In this view neither complete determinism, nor complete

autonomy is indicated. How new information technologies are related to constructing the student and the teacher in schooling, refocussing of curriculum control through new information technologies, changes to teacher-student relationships are other areas covered in terms of teacher identity.

Foucault's work offers an important critique of humanism, specific conceptual apparatuses for developing a more politically effective intellectual' (Popkewitz & Brennan 1998:27-28). According to Fendler (1998:44-45), what is teachable (teaching desire or desire for education) has changed significantly. Pedagogies and assessment techniques designed to cultivate the intellect, discipline, behaviour, and social responsibility are not enough now. Aspects of the self-made teachable include love, pleasure, feelings, wishes, fears, and anxieties - constituents of the private self. Educational goals now require students to be 'motivated' and to have a positive attitude. Teachers now have to address these desires.

### ***Technocratic vs. democratic schooling***

The State has entrusted formal education institutions with the task of providing education (knowledge, skills etc.) to the populations of societies. Contemporary social theories interrogate how educational institutions actually do this, and importantly how power and dominance are constructed by way of various discourses and discursive practices. They question the ability of the formal education institutions to do the job in a socially critical and responsible way. In fact, some theorists suggest that formal education institutions create a different kind of inequality based on dominant power relations, disciplinary discourses, assessment, examinations, and the production of 'educated subjects'. Likewise, there are various debates about the meaning and purpose of education. 'Scholars using the emerging discourses of feminism, postcolonialism, and cultural and literary studies are rethinking fundamental relationships between language and experience, pedagogy and human agency, and ethics and social responsibility as part of a larger project for promoting democratic schooling in a social-cultural-educational world of human making' (Leach & Boler 1998:149-150). Postmodernists and critical education theorists also present us with alternative paradigms of thinking on education.

During a recent talk delivered at the University of New England, Australian Clive Graham commented on the end of the welfare state

and the emergence of the knowledge economy in western societies. He said that ideas for making money are driving the economy. Definitions of what constitute knowledge have been broadened to include the needs of the economy and the state. Our education system separates thinking from doing. However, the new economy does not buy this. The education system has been democratised but it is rooted to the past rather than the future. The usefulness of the disciplines is being questioned. They may have a use in academia, but not necessarily in the real world. Trans-disciplinary contextualisation of knowledge is needed. This is in the interest of the student as well as the economy. Graham advocated rethinking pedagogy for innovation and advantage (application). If our aim is to encourage student participation in learning, we have to connect our pedagogy with the knowledge economy. Pedagogy should be contextualised, made innovative and transgressive. Pedagogies that produced workers for the regulated welfare state are no longer suitable for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The teacher is no longer the fount of knowledge. The issue is what ideas in education/pedagogy are making people rich? There is a need to develop critical thinking with practical applicability (Graham 2003). A teacher in the audience responded by saying that the one-to-one interactions between the teacher and the student in schools are still very important. The implication of Graham's view is that the knowledge we provide through the education system should be relevant and linked to the knowledge economy. Should all learning be directly linked to the knowledge economy? Will that kind of education remove the existing inequalities in society and the economy? Or is he advocating an innovative extension of the modernist discourse and pedagogy of education to suit the changed circumstances?

There is a counter-view to the kind of argument put forward by Graham, especially based on justice and equity grounds. It highlights the deficiencies in the management or technocratic view of education and learning. According to Garcia, 'It is not the role of the schools to prepare for specific jobs. Rather, schools must teach academic skills that develop students' intellectual abilities and that involve students in learning activities that enhance human relationships, critical thinking, and civic responsibility' (1999:87). Schools equip students with the intellectual, cultural and social capital necessary to pursue a wide range of post school opportunities' (Collins, Kenway & McLeod 2000:39).

Hidden curriculum is a powerful means by which education and schooling maintain the *status quo* in societies with all its inequality and social injustice. According to the proponents of 'socially critical orientation' to curriculum, education must engage with social issues and give students experience in working on them, for example, critical reflection, social negotiation and organisation of action. School should be a special place where students can develop social life through action (Kemmis, Cole, and Suggett 1983:9).

According to Lovat,

"There appears to be a widespread view that something is 'wrong' with present education...The solution to this, we are informed by the politicians and others, is to make education more like the corporate sector, more technocratic and more managerial...Yet, in both general society and educational contexts injustices and inequalities, particularly in terms of gender, class and ethnicity, continue to be perpetuated and these are becoming more entrenched. Many of the gains made in these areas are under threat, and schooling contributes to maintaining the status quo of a society where 'differences' become 'disadvantages' which are held to be 'natural' and 'justified'." (Lovat 1992:243)

Some writers 'argue for replacing the discourses of management and efficiency for a critical analysis of the underlying conditions that structure school life' (Aronowitz & Giroux 1993:38). To Lovat (1992), the dilemma confronting us is having to choose between educating teachers to enable future generations to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to build a principled and democratic society vs. producing an agency for the reproduction and legitimation of a society characterised by a high degree of social and economic inequality and reinforced by management discourse. Teacher education programs have not given teachers the conceptual tools in order to view knowledge as problematic, as a historically conditioned, socially constructed phenomenon.

Arguing against technocratic model of education, Kanpol states that 'A technocratic mind-set at best is beset upon students. The limitations of this methodologies-only teacher-education are clearly evident the moment a pre-service teacher is met with a population of students in which these so-called "methods" do not work' (Kanpol 2001:81-182).

Contextualising learning/education or making learning relevant to

the context is an important theme emerging from this exposition of ideas about education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We can raise some related questions from these ideas:

- What knowledges should be taught, why and how?
- Should schools cater for the needs of the knowledge economy, if so, how?
- What should be the nature of the relationship between the teacher and the student?
- What should be the nature of the pedagogy suitable for effective learning?
- How can we change, develop, amend schooling (and the learning provided within schools) to address the concerns of the context (economic, political, social, cultural, historical)?
- What is the place of democratic schooling in all this?
- How can we develop applicable 'critical thinking' in young people in schools?

There is no doubt that in the Sri Lankan context, the state plays a significant, in fact the key role, in determining the curriculum, educational reforms, salary levels and pedagogy. The educational policies, programmes and administrative set-up designed and managed by the state over the decades embrace a management and technocratic discourse. At the same time, when we focus on the theme 'Youth and Learning' in the school environment, we can see that there are competing discourses in society. Examples of this are the discourses on international and public education, free and quality education, social integration and conflict-prevention, national identity and maintenance of culture, English and Swabhasa education, unemployment and education.

Going by the comments made by Graham, we have to ask whether Sri Lanka needs an education system that simply caters to the knowledge economy (or globalised or open economy) or an education system that provides a broader education and learning opportunities where critical thinking and student empowerment are encouraged and social justice parameters are addressed. In this paper, my focus is on the latter - although I recognise the importance of the former as a necessary requirement in the globalising era. I focus on the role of schools, teachers, curriculum, pedagogy, and ideology in learning where emphasis is placed on the context and its impact on education. Learning is not an isolated act; it happens in a specific historical, economic, political and cultural context, so it is necessary to examine

learning in context, the changing context of 'globalisation'. In doing so, I emphasise the need to consider school and school education (or the teaching-learning process) as a contested terrain rather than as one which is totally and exclusively determined by the state or the economy.

Some of the general questions we can pose here are as follows: Are our educational institutions organs of the state or public spaces? Are our educational institutions sites for self and social transformation? Are they sites for democracy and active citizenship? Do they address social inequalities or do they in fact create social inequalities? Are they emancipatory public spaces or regulatory spaces using technologies of power to define and classify the subject - the young students? What are the technologies of power and domination used in regulation? Are teacher-education programmes serving to reproduce technocratic and corporatist ideologies? What should be the basis of counter-hegemonic, emancipatory education? What is required to develop prospective teachers as critical theorists rather than classroom managers who are able to affirm the discourse of freedom and democracy? In order to find answers to the foregoing questions it is necessary to look at the discourses on education prevailing in Sri Lanka. Let's look at the Sri Lankan context next.

#### **4. Section II**

##### ***Sri Lanka's school education - Literature review***

I will begin this examination by raising further questions applicable to Sri Lanka. Are the governmentality and associated technologies of power employed in the schools defeating the purpose of learning? For example, is the heavy emphasis on examinations as the main form of assessment, an instrument or technology of power that deprives young people of a broad-based education and learning opportunities? Is it depriving them of their childhood and youth? Is education developing a deficient personality devoid of characteristics desired by the parents, employers, and the community at large? Is it producing a subject desired by the state for its own governmentality and regulation?

Writing about free education and the deteriorating quality of schools, Abeysekera and Uyangoda pointed out that what remains in the

country is the mythology of free education.

"If the existing system of school and university education were to continue for the sake of preserving the concept of free education, its immediate victims would be the vast masses of persons of lower and middle class backgrounds, whose children are destined to receive a low quality, substandard and goal-less education through the public education system...Our real problem now with Sri Lanka's 'free education' is not whether education is free of fees or not, but whether Sri Lanka's younger generation receives a quality education... The examination orientation of the existing free, public education system has paradoxically given rise to a lucrative private sector in school education, which still remains an informal sector, although it operates within a well organised network." (Abeysekera & Uyangoda 1997:2)

Quoting from Balasuriya (1989) Udagama says, "Our education system is a disaster as far as the creation of a common Sri Lankan identity. The educational system is examination oriented, individualistic, competitive and largely theoretical; our academic curriculum neglects personality development, social concern and service" (Udagama 1990:12). Quoting Hewage, he writes that 'The schools did not develop the basic value of respect and concern for the human person, in spite of the stress on religious education. Our school model, too, could not accommodate our various cultures, ethnic groups and languages in a meaningful way and as a result the system alienated and marginalised rural youth and youth especially from minority groups' (1990:12). 'The present malaise in our society may be turned into a problem and a national challenge. If we are ready to learn from our past mistakes, misunderstandings and wrong concepts of education, the opportunity should be grasped now. We have to redefine aims and goals of education for the whole nation' (1990:12). Comparing to the system we inherited from the British, he emphasises the need for a political education to develop a cohesive society.

On the impact of international schools, Kularatne says (1995:21-22):

"Education in Sri Lanka has entered a new phase with the introduction of International schools. Highly affluent parents are better placed to opt for education in international schools



and they no longer depend on the effective performance of the heavily subsidised national education system.... Students from higher social backgrounds who study in these institutions have an edge over those who study in Sinhala or Tamil medium, mostly from a rural backgrounds. In addition to the language factor, most government schools are under staffed with shabby buildings and poor learning resources. These schools inevitably reinforce and exacerbate the disparities between different socio-economic classes of the country. This also leads to a deterioration of the public schools system and distorts the national education policy in Sri Lanka."

The point to consider here is the role of school education (public and private/international) in accelerating social inequality, disadvantage, marginalisation and stresses. A recent contribution from a leading international school in Colombo to a newspaper supplement on international schools gives further insights:

"An international school in a Sri Lankan environment, but, devoid of the stress and unrest of the Sri Lankan youth who go on a rampage at the mere spark of misguidance to destroy the peace of our society. No brawls amongst students, no black eyes or bruised limbs are evident, this being proof of the harmony prevailing in school, encouraged by the environment created, to train the students to discipline themselves with no orders from above as the school anthem proclaims." (2003:13)

The question is, why can't public schools create such environment? What is making public schools places of discontent, intellectual decadence and relative lack of teacher-student motivation? In this regard, comments made by Jayasinghe are relevant:

"Education is not merely preparing students for examinations and helping them to obtain high grades but the overall development of the students. Education is a life long process. In a rapidly changing world education should equip the 'school leaver' with appropriate skills, values and powers of reasoning which will facilitate his adaptation to the modern world...We have to design our system of education making sure that the end products will be well-informed responsible citizens of Sri Lanka and yet be fully aware of what is going

on in the world. Any system of education today should contribute to the goal of creating a world which will protect the environment and which is free from terrorism and war and hunger and poverty.” (Jayasinghe 2003:15)

Referring to the stress levels of students, he states:

“Recent surveys and research show that a lot of students are under tremendous pressure to perform. Stress levels are high due to the volume of homework, assignments and deadlines. Some students even refuse to participate in extra-curricular activities for fear of falling grades. This has robbed them of their childhood. I am fully aware of the fact that lot of work has to be done - yet too much stress on a child on account of studies is counter productive in the overall process of education.” (Jayasinghe 2003:15)

After an analysis of the data from the National Youth Survey, Gunawardena believes the education system reproduces the hierarchical social structure<sup>b</sup>:

“Largely, the National Youth Survey Data points to a situation explained by the “correspondence theory”, rather than the “human capital development theory”, where the hierarchical social structure is reproduced through the school system with benefits from education, accruing mainly to the more privileged. The extent to which “resistance” exists in education cannot be ascertained due to the type of data collected by the Survey.” (Gunawardena 2002:115)

Nonetheless, as argued in this paper, through further research it is important to examine the extent to which resistance to an education system which reproduces the *status quo* in class, power, gender and cultural terms continues. Questions about exam orientation highlight the need for alternative teaching and assessment approaches and methods<sup>c</sup>. The meaning of education, its goals and competencies need to be broad-based in order to cater to contextual factors impacting on the learning processes. As Udagama says, we may have to redefine our aims and goals of school education to make it more appealing and useful to the young people who are being subjected to regulation. We need to find ways to make them critical thinkers.

In Sri Lanka, there is a recent academic, policy and public discourse on youth, with implications for education and learning that can be called 'integration discourse' (Hettige and Mayer 2002:7-8; Uyangoda 1995: 11-14). It is based on a functionalist approach and seen as a way to explain, understand and overcome conflicts between youth and political authority. It advocates greater space for youth participation in the economy, development projects, the political system, and other social institutions while engaging in a critique of where things have gone wrong in terms of youth mal-integration.

*"Soci(et)al integration refers to the creation of space for youth and youth activities in the construction of community and in community development. To formalise structural mechanisms through which youth become integrated constructively into society is rarely formulated into the objectives of development initiatives. Rather active decision-making outcomes imply the belief that social integration follows economic integration, and that as long as economic integration cannot be realised, there is no valid space for alternative efforts at social integration."* (Hettige and Mayer 2002:8)

Political and social integration has been based on the assumption that the state has a responsibility to look after the future of youth. 'Sri Lanka's traditional approach to social integration has been anchored on a generalised social welfare policy. The basic assumption in that approach is not a complicated one: it is an obligation of the state to distribute its surplus among practically all social classes. If the state does not ensure for different social strata - from rural peasantry and students to urban entrepreneurial elements - access to state resources, the state easily runs the risk of attracting anger and hostility of these affected social groups' (Uyangoda 1995:12). Integration discourse is related to free and fair education' often counterpoised with criticisms of international schools. Here public education is perceived as a right of every child, and there are various arguments and criticisms about the deteriorating standards or quality and the need for reform. The government has implemented some reforms already but there is a long way to go in terms of their success. The need for state-funded public education to maintain national identity and culture, give opportunities for all children to higher and further education and employment are key planks. The system is perceived as exam-oriented, narrow, and preparing students for limited higher education places rather than the globalising knowledge economy

and expanding private sector. The integration discourse embodies a critique of the inequalities as well as deficiencies. This discourse has close parallels to the views articulated by Graham (see the section on technocratic and democratic education).

### ***Feedback from the teachers and students***

In this section I examine social contextual factors related to the education of young people based on relevant literature and the interviews/survey information obtained from teachers and students. Here we need to ask what factors contribute to better learning by youth<sup>d</sup>? What obstacles and challenges are there for the youths for better and effective learning? What are the views of teachers and students regarding the learning process in public schools?

According to a graduate teacher who travels about 100kms a day from Colombo to Galle for work, 'Globalisation has produced a modern class whose members are enjoying a luxury life. They can spend a lot of money. On the other hand, most people in society are poor and unsatisfied with life. They don't get proper food, which gives nourishment. Some children faint when they go to school. If asked whether they had breakfast they say they didn't have dinner last night (Gamage 2002). Among the teachers, those with a single income are the most disadvantaged and struggling. The same teacher angrily pointed out the differences in salaries between professionals and the teachers. In particular, he was critical of the salary differences between graduate teachers and university lecturers. 'Teachers are engaged in a constant struggle to match their identity/status, which are derived from Sinhala social organisation, with material accompaniments considered necessary by the society and its values'. On how the role of the teacher has been devalued, the deputy principal of a teacher-training college said, 'Those in education had a good status, especially graduate teachers. Now it is the other way around' (Gamage 2002).

In the words of a university academic, 'along with the open economy, the service sector develops, for example, tourist hotels, supermarkets, communication centres, and international schools traditions change with globalisation. People have transnational contacts and networks. English has become the link language (Gamage 2002). While hinting at socio-economic disparities, these contextual factors show the constraints under which teachers work and the situation of learners. Pressures faced by children from disadvantaged economic and

social backgrounds can be enormous, and can negatively impact on learning.

The social context within which the learner lives may not be suitable for learning. The following words from a teacher who used to teach in a remote location are revealing:

"I decided to come to my original village because the society in the settlement was unsuitable for us. We couldn't move with that society. We belong to the society of educated people. Over there, we had to move with a lot of uneducated people. The latter's lifestyle is to earn some money, eat, drink, and gamble. The methods that people over there invented for earning and spending money are ones that don't suit us. We had a problem in bringing up our child. Those who grow up in that society don't learn."

Referring to the social context in the village of his birth where the teacher moved subsequently, he said:

"It is difficult to get along with village society. People have become mechanised like computers. Children are always either in the school or in the tuition class outside it. Cost of living is high and people have to do something to earn a living. After formal studies, one can't get a job straight away. No help is available from the government either. In this situation, when the JVP invites them to join, they do so."

Private tutorials outside school hours supplement school education. They address the weaknesses in the school education system and claim to perform the job better, i.e. preparing school children for ordinary level and advanced level examinations conducted by the government. One academic said, 'I thought for a while that I would not give private tuition to my child. But when looking at the kind of homework brought from the school, I wondered. As we both work, we don't have time to examine child's work carefully. Now we get four tutors for four subjects. We spend Rs. 3000-4000 on them. For one lesson, we pay Rs. 125-150. Until the child sits O/L examination, we have to do this. In the school, there is no individual attention. Weak children don't get attention. They are pushed down to the bottom. It is the dropouts who join the JVP in the south and the LTTE in the north and east' (Gamage 2002).

Hierarchical teaching styles in schools as well as higher education institutions in Sri Lanka, as is the case in many other Asian countries, affect learning quality and outcomes. It is even visible in universities. According to a university lecturer, 'The teaching process is also very hierarchical. Students don't question the teachers. There is no dialogue or free flow of ideas. No reading habits. Lack of English is not the only reason. Students go through past papers and prepare for examinations. Someone has told him that there are students who get their degree without reading a book. Critical thinking is not facilitated or promoted. More than the facts, opinions dominate (Gamage 2002).

In the current context, the existence of what is considered as a radical political consciousness among students, primarily with the tutelage of JVP activists, is a factor to examine. How far this is a result of the irrelevance of formal school and university education, and the decreasing value of the educational qualifications obtained from the government education institutions needs to be examined. The author's view is that in the absence of an education where the knowledge and skills gained are valued by the professions and/or other public-private institutions with the capacity to obtain recognition and employment, it is inevitable that the young people embrace counter-ideologies, discourses and sources of knowledge, which are different from the modernist discourses promoted by the state and affiliated institutions including academics, teachers and politicians? However, the issue here is whether the informal education provided by the JVP activists is a counter-education or a supplementary one<sup>e</sup>?

Unlike the assumptions of modernist social theories, where the acquisition of knowledge and skills is considered value-neutral, the point of this paper is to highlight and promote a 'counter discourse and pedagogy' where teaching and learning are considered as a process with political meaning and implications.

Students in high schools are aware of the changes going on in society and their impact on education. After a talk on globalisation, students asked following questions (1998):

- Can we enter a rapidly changing world with the educational system we have? Is our educational system capable of a rapid change to coincide with globalisation? Some said that the older generation dislike the fact that Sri Lanka is subject to globalisation.

- Why limit HSC to three subjects?
- Will our value-system and culture be affected by globalisation? Their view was that in a rapidly changing world, culture and ethics deteriorate rapidly.
- Why don't we get a suitable education system that is capable of building our personality?

These questions show the gap between a fast-changing society and a public schooling system that is not moving with the times. Teachers in the public schools have reservations about the new developments. Teachers who were following the postgraduate diploma in education at a public University in Sri Lanka expressed critical views on the role of public and international schools (2002):

- They expressed the need for qualitative improvement in education rather than exam-orientated, quantitative improvement. In the international schools, there is constant improvement of the curriculum.
- Some considered international schools as a threat to national identity-maintenance. They contribute to the deterioration of values. For example, they don't teach the Sinhala language or Buddhism. They put at a disadvantage students from public schools when competing for employment. Employers prefer those from international schools as those from public schools get a second class education. This impacts on free education, and the concept of education for all.
- The international schools provide a contrast or a model for the government schools. 'The standard of education in international schools is better; they have better facilities, resources, instruments, teaching aids'. One teacher said that the improvement of English language teaching in rural schools is better than criticising international schools.
- Some pointed out the weaknesses of public education system. One teacher said, 'Even though common goals have been introduced into the public schools, they haven't been implemented, and it is sad to see this situation'. Another said, 'Because the education is exam-oriented, real goals are not achieved'.

Some other questions to explore are:

- What are the learning needs of young people in the schools?
- How do we create learning situations that create inspiration, excitement, involvement, imagination, creativity, and critical reflection?

- What are the features of student-centred teaching/learning and teaching to context?
- What is the value of learning acquired from schools?
- What are the alternative learning approaches and methods that can provide useful knowledge and skills to the youths?

## **5. Section III**

### ***Youths as critical thinkers: postmodernism, critical theory and pedagogy in school education***

In this section, I draw the ideas discussed thus far together and provide some directions for teachers, teacher-educators and young people in schools as critical thinkers. Since the 1970s, critical theory has influenced educational theory. The assumptions of critical theory run counter to the orthodox Marxist and neo-Marxist interpretations of education, i.e. the reproduction of inequality (race, class, gender). The critical theory approach emphasises the need to adopt the language of social change and transformation, as well as emancipatory practice.

According to Lovat (1992:250-252):

- The critical theory approach can elaborate the influence of the dominant socio-political and economic ideologies upon the values, attitudes, content, and strategies being propagated in educational settings.
- It provides knowledge and strategies such as those within critical pedagogy, to allow for the development of contestation and resistance and the restructuring of social contexts and relationships to promote equity and justice.
- It insists that theory and practice are indivisible, and enables teachers to place their own practice and experience at the centre of their enquiry.
- Unlike other 'theories', critical theory deals directly with everyday 'problems' and situations, and seeks to resolve them by providing people with knowledge and power by which they can gain control over their own lives.
- (It) is a 'way of thinking' which incorporates an explicit, analytic approach to the study of curriculum, pedagogy, evaluation and language, to develop understanding that the taken-for-granted



beliefs are not as 'natural' as they are assumed to be.

- It is committed to seeking understanding beyond the level of superficial objective appearances to expose the hidden social relationships, which lead to oppression and domination.
- It rejects positivism and says all facts are socially-constructed, determined and interpreted, and therefore can be changed, through human interactions and institutions, e.g., in educational achievement, progress, ability, performance indicators, quality and , management.
- Emancipation and empowerment are important terms and provide overall objectives of critical theory. Through exploring, and opening up for reflection, the relationships and nature of power, ideology and hegemony, critical theory can offer insight into how a greater degree of freedom and autonomy could be implemented.

According to Giroux and Kanpol, critical theory uses the language of critique and possibility. It advocates that teacher-educators and teachers move beyond the boundaries that separate the personal from the political, theory from practice, and the private from the public sphere. It asserts the importance of identity as a social consideration that is forged in history (Giroux in Kanpol 1999). Critical theory can be connected to a form of action that leads to social change. If theory distances writers and readers from social action, then what use is the practical import of critical pedagogy? (Kanpol 1999:187).

### ***What is critical pedagogy?***

'Critical pedagogy is a broad and diverse field of theory and practice drawing on aspects of the modernist perspective of the later Frankfurt School, feminism, Freirean pedagogy, postcolonial discourse as well as postmodernism to construct a radical approach to education' (Usher & Edwards 1994:214). Giroux and others have put forward a number of useful explanatory concepts, e.g. border pedagogy.

"These positions largely argue for education, and more specifically schooling, to provide a 'voice' for those excluded others oppressed in modern social formations. The oppressed, whatever the nature of their oppression - class, gender, ethnicity, colour, sexual preference, etc. - must, it is argued, be given the opportunity to participate fully and equally, the oppression they face being made explicit as a basis for moving to a more democratic social formation... The

grand narrative of emancipation is deepened within critical pedagogy to encompass the structures and experiences of oppression. In carrying out this role, educators become cultural workers and education a form of cultural politics... For critical pedagogues therefore, the principal issue is the introduction of heterogeneity and the recognition of difference into educational practices." (Usher & Edwards 1994:214-215)

According to Kanpol,

- Critical pedagogy refers to the means and methods that test and hope to change the structures of schools that allow inequalities and social injustices.
- It is a cultural-political tool that takes seriously the notion of human differences, particularly these differences related to race, class, and gender.
- It seeks to un-oppress the oppressed and unite people in a shared language of critique, struggle, and hope to end various forms of human suffering.
- It considers the link between university professors and public school teachers as both vital and necessary for social change and transformation.
- It incorporates a moral vision of human justice and decency as its common vision. ....Critical pedagogy, then is indeed a moral, and even to some a spiritual, enterprise (Kanpol 1999:27).
- It is passionate about positioning teachers, students, and administrators in places where they can be the creators of their own meaning-making systems. These systems could undercut experiences of oppression, alienation and subordination and transform these encounters into joyful expressions of fair and just social relations' (Kanpol 1999:185).

"Part of creating a critical pedagogy in teacher education is to move beyond mere critique or cynicism to a position where action can occur, where students can joyfully respond to structural constraints in a timely manner and in ways that create opportunities for democratic hope and critical citizenry. The move from cynicism to action, from critique to praxis, from passivity to activity, from reaction to pro-action becomes a possibility only when teacher education students and faculty members realize the historically constructed contradiction between what we say we want as a governing philosophy and what we really do in our classrooms. We

must own up to this contradiction. We must confess.” (Kanpol 1999:182-183)

Ideas of several other critical theorists who have expressed views on critical pedagogy are also useful here:

- ‘Critical pedagogy seeks to transform consciousness, to provide students with ways of knowing that enable them to know themselves better and live in the world, more fully’ (bell hooks 115).
- It is democratic in its intent, but critical when democracy is thwarted...
- It is critical of the pedagogy of transmission where knowledge is reduced to a culture of great books. Teaching and learning not seen as implementation and mastery. Argue for the parity of canonical and popular text (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991:37).
- It questions all social action and institutions, on whose interests are being served - as the world is a place where contradictions of power and privilege exist.
- It advocates that ‘As a pedagogical practice, the text has to be read not simply as a study in the production of ideology but as part of a wider circuit of power that calls into play broader institutional practices and social structures’ (Aronowitz & Giroux 1991:28).
- It suggests that educators must examine the development of pedagogical discourses and practices that demonize others who are different (through transforming them into absence or deviance) - (McLaren 1992:214).
- The invitation posed by critical pedagogy is to bend reality to the requirements of a just world, to decentre, deform, disorient, and ultimately transform modes of authority that domesticate the Other, that lay siege to the power of the margins’ (McLaren 1994:218).

Some comments by Giroux and McLaren in the context of schooling are also informative. Language of critique is important but we need to move beyond this to a critical pedagogy and ideology. We need to re-think democratic alternatives to the reproduction of *status quo*, e.g. schools as producers of obedient workers for the state (or the economy). We need to be critical and move beyond the discourses and social relations of domination. We need alternative approaches to organisation, curriculum, and classroom social relations. ‘Radical imaginary represents a discourse that offers new possibilities for democratic social relations’ (Giroux & McLaren in Popkewitz 1987:268-269).

### ***What lessons are there for teacher-educators?***

As Kanpol points out, 'Presently, teacher education departments do extremely little to foster a liberative education for their students... teacher education does little more than provide the potential teacher with a set of strategies to conquer discipline problems and prepare lesson and unit plans with clearly defined behavioural objectives'. We have to do better than this. We need to change the technocratic mind-set, and methodologies-only teacher-education forced upon students. The limitations of this are evident the moment a pre-service teacher is met with a population of students in which these methods do not work (Kanpol 1999:181-182, 269).

Critical and radical theorists write in a difficult language but we have to understand that it is a language of hope that provides tools for countering other languages constructed by the disciplines, and by academia. The issue of language or terminology can be overcome if there is a desire to learn the tenets of postmodern and critical theories and their implications for teaching-learning processes.

## **6. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The foregoing examination of the directions and leads from contemporary social theories and the debates among Sri Lanka's academics and others is helpful for a careful analysis and understanding of the nature of issues faced by Sri Lankan youth in the context of learning and education, especially in the formal school sector, and the strategies needed to address these. We observed that the postmodernists and critical-education theorists have not only explained social changes but also advance an ideology and strategies to address oppressive outcomes in education. Postmodernists and poststructuralists emphasise cultural factors and processes rather than economic factors such as changes in the production, circulation and consumption of culture. They examine the impact of media and cultural practices on identification and learning.

Foucault's ideas about the power-knowledge nexus, modern forms of governance and how they re-position people into tighter forms of regulation and self-regulation are useful. They help us to reflect on the processes of teaching and learning in the school sector and the extent to which this is happening. We learn that education is not simply

what goes on in schools, but is an essential part of governmentality or crucial aspects of regulatory practices. Adopting a critical view about the nature of knowledge imparted in schools is important. If this is the case, limiting youth issues to the 'economic integration discourse' or the employment issue is not wise. As Foucault suggests, knowledge is not free from power and it is always found in relation to its uses - and to a form of power. What is the form of power that schooling and the knowledge imparted via schools reinforce? What are the forms of power that determine the nature of knowledge and learning by youth in the schooling context? Are they to the benefit of young people or someone else? If it is not in the interest of youth, what strategies should be used to change the power relations in and out of the schools? What are the uses of learning and knowledge gained from schools? What knowledge is desired by young people? As Ball says, if education renders some students as subjects of power and others powerful subjects (1990), how does this create inequality in society to the extent that many young people who are constituted as subjects of power start to rebel? It is evident from the preceding review of literature that there is a need to train 'educated subjects' seeking to change the knowledge provided to them rather than leading them into a self-imposed powerless position. As Simola says, teachers should not be seen as a pawn in a game of power either.

For political and historical reasons, Sri Lanka's education system segregates various groups in society (rather than integrating them) into categories such as minority Vs majority, class, status, gender, and locality. As Udagama states, 'The education system, laid the foundations among other factors, for a divisive society and a nation at war. In a plurinational state, all cultures need to be represented in the education system. But our sectarian religious and language policies in education tend to keep our children in separate entities' (Udagama 1990:13-14). Even the current reforms in the education field seem to be preserving the society's *status quo* in a fundamental way while attempting to address the issue of conflicts and inequalities in a rather peripheral or symbolic way. If it is not already made a requirement, learning about each other's cultures, histories and languages should be made mandatory. The contested nature of the histories should not be viewed as a reason for not learning inter-culturally. It is only those who have a vested interest in trying to maintain a hegemonic system and ownership claims who will argue otherwise. It is not correct to argue that youths resort to violence because of the lack of suitable employment alone. There are a range of factors leading to this phenomenon including alienation, lack of recognition and

acceptance, feeling of not belonging or powerlessness, and identity differences. Education can play a crucial role here. 'We have to think of educating the human person before we think of educating the civil servants, the medical doctors and now the business executives' (Udagama 1990:15). We need to explore and implement ways of constructing 'multicultural subjects' via the schools who are able to empathise with their fellow citizens irrespective of class, ethnic, gender, cultural, political, and locality differences.

The author argues that it is necessary for those who miss out in the existing public education system and their intellectual, political sympathisers to develop and adopt a socially critical discourse in order to articulate the aspirations of the young people whose interests are not served by the existing education arrangements.

Critical pedagogy politicises teaching, enabling teachers to step back and ask questions of their practices, processes, content and context. Smyth (1987) suggests we should at least ask the following questions:

- Where do the ideas I embody in my teaching come from historically?
- How did I come to appropriate them?
- Why do I continue to endorse them now in my work?
- Whose interests do they serve?
- What power relationships are involved?
- How do these ideas influence my relationships with my students?
- In the light of what I have discovered, how might I work differently?

It should be clear by now that it is not possible or wise to focus on young people's learning process without linking it to the teaching process. Teaching and learning are two sides of the same coin. Without effective teaching, the learning process can suffer. For example, if the teacher does not consider the situational contingencies of the learner in the teaching process, the learning can suffer to the detriment of the learner. Increasingly, there is emphasis on 'student centred teaching', 'teaching to social context', in worldwide education literature. Garcia and Mifflin emphasise the need for a metamorphosis in schools:

"Our next generation of young people, and ethnic and racial minority children in particular will continue to be vulnerable if our schools do not successfully complete the

required metamorphosis. The future lies in understanding how a diverse population, with many individuals at risk for underachievement, can attain social, educational, and employment competence. As always, the new ideas, the energy, and the resources for our society's future reside in our youth." (Garcia 1999:290)

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## Endnotes

- <sup>a</sup> This is a revised version of a paper presented at the International Youth Conference, Colombo, Sri Lanka in October, 2004. The conference theme focused on the role of youth in sustainable and peaceful development. The panel looked at the learning process for youth within and outside the established education system. Some questions posed included, how schools can adopt new strategies that play a catalytic role in developing other essential capabilities of young people such as interpersonal communication skills, sensitivity, self-confidence and tolerance. Whether the youth learning nurtures a language and discourse that articulates their aspirations and concerns was another question examined.
- <sup>b</sup> This shows that the underlying assumptions of Sri Lanka's education system are modernist rather than postmodernist. Furthermore, the critique of the modernist construction of knowledge and subject through the education system as we discussed earlier are applicable to the Sri Lankan context.
- <sup>c</sup> In recent years some steps have been taken by the government to introduce innovative assessment methods including project based ones. Effective implementation of these at the school level has the potential to improve the teaching-learning process.
- <sup>d</sup> Several factors impacting on the learning process are: Staff-student ratio, Status of the teacher and salary, Teaching ideologies and methods (teacher focussed or student centred?), Curriculum and its relevance, Skills, knowledge, qualities of the learner; their suitability to the employment market, Quality of education in schools, Economic difficulties, and those from the home front, Personal motivation and the role of peers, teachers and mentors, Facilities, aids, etc. e.g. libraries, access to internet, photocopying, telephone, newspapers, Learning difficulties in subject areas, and hierarchical/traditional teaching approaches and methods e.g. content/exam oriented.
- <sup>e</sup> It is possible that the JVP-led political education in and around education institutions assist students to learn the dominant state curriculum better rather than providing a critical alternative knowledge and understanding or even an oppositional curriculum. In the 1970s it provided a popular political education for a counter ideology. This area requires further research and reflection.



## **II. Youth Aspirations for Education, Vocational Qualifications and Livelihoods in the Context of Economic Liberalisation in Sri Lanka**

*Nishara Fernando*

### **1. Introduction**

Until 1977, the post-independence Sri Lankan economy was highly regulated by the state. Exports were then dominated by three cash crops: tea, rubber and coconut. The country also had a well-established welfare tradition. This situation changed after the United National Party Government came to power at the 1977 general election with a two-thirds majority and launched a package of liberal economic reforms, particularly in the areas of trade, labour-market finance, exchange rates, and domestic and foreign investments. Liberalisation meant a major reorientation of the Sri Lankan economy to integrate it into the world economy and to enable it to draw investment capital from the rest of the world (Lakshman 1996).

Along with these trade reforms, import controls were removed to facilitate the flow of foreign goods into the country. These reforms also allowed the import of new and heavy machinery and sophisticated equipment and raw materials free of duty. The opening-up of the share market to foreign buyers led to a significant expansion in trade activities. Exchange-rate reforms, such as an initial devaluation of the rupee and the relaxation of exchange controls in respect of current account transactions and capital transactions, were introduced. This resulted in a steady expansion of the private sector leading to many new employment opportunities for those who were equipped with new types of skills in the fields of tourism, information technology, accountancy and management and foreign languages.

There was a gradual liberalisation of foreign exchange transactions in the early 1980s in relation to areas such as overseas travel, medical care, business, professional membership fees and registration and tuition fees for overseas education. Exchange controls were further relaxed in respect of expenditure on education and travel abroad. This, in turn, enabled affluent parents to send their children either to foreign universities to follow internal degree courses or to register to follow professional certificate or degree courses in accountancy,

management (CIMA), marketing (CIM), IT and other fields, under external programmes offered through Sri Lankan institutes by paying the relevant examination fees in foreign currency. For instance, the Royal Institute in Sri Lanka conducts tuition for the external degree programmes of London University, which provides the syllabus and study material and is responsible for setting examination papers and for marking answer scripts.

Foreign direct investments were promoted by establishing the Greater Colombo Economic Commission (GCEC) that later became the Board of Investment (BOI) under BOI Law No. 4 of 1978 (BOI 2004). This was done because Sri Lanka could not generate sufficient investments on its own, particularly in the short term. It was necessary to look outside the country for investment capital (Hettiarachchi 1998).

Significantly, foreign investments were not allowed under the BOI in two areas. One was the education of students who are citizens of Sri Lanka under 14 years of age, and secondly the awarding of local university degrees. Nevertheless, a number of international schools, particularly in the Colombo Metropolitan region (Gateway, Lyceum, Wycherly etc) were established following economic liberalisation. These were established as private companies under the Company Registration Act no 17 of 1982. These schools prepare students from wealthy families, primarily for London O and A Level qualifications, which are vital prerequisites for registering for either internal or external foreign university degree programmes. Since the establishment of international schools, their enrolments have been rising steadily. A survey of the international schools in and around Colombo conducted for this study revealed that the number of students enrolled in these schools increased rapidly, from a few hundred in the late 1980s to nearly 10,000 by 2001. The numbers have increased further over the last several years.

Foreign education consultancy services such as the Australian Education Consultancy Service and the American University of Higher Education and several foreign technical and vocational educational qualification institutions\*, also emerged as BOI projects registered under the Company Registration Act. Within the new economic environment, local and transnational employers create new demands for vocational and professional qualifications. Consequently diverse educational and training agencies, both state-funded and private, market-driven agencies have proliferated not only in Colombo and its suburbs, but also in regional towns such as Matara, Kandy and Kurunegala. Young

people who invest in these different systems of education and training end up having different life-chances (Hettige 2000).

It is against this background that the paper covers the following questions:

- a). What are the current aspirations of young people in different social groups (class, gender, age and ethnicity) with regard to education, qualifications and livelihoods and the means to achieve these?
- b). How do the aspirations of youth in different social groups match or reflect changing economic and social realities?

Though the study is based on an extensive field survey carried out in nine Grama Niladari (village officer) (GN)<sup>1</sup> divisions, Park Estate, Vogan Estate, Thimbirigasyaya, Madugalle, Padeniya, Hambegamuwa, Neluwa, Uddappuwa and Nachchaduwa, the focus here is on the overall picture. Attention is also paid to significant local variations where relevant.

This paper comprises several sections. Following the introduction, there is a brief section on research methodology. Section II will introduce the reader to some socio-economic characteristics of the selected GN divisions, while section III deals with the main characteristics of the sample youth population. Section IV looks at aspirations of youth for education, vocational qualifications and livelihoods in general and specific variations in relation to research locations, age, gender and class. The final section presents the conclusions.

## **2. Research Methodology**

### **2.1 Study design**

Cross-sectional study design was considered to be well-suited for studying the aspirations and expectations of Sri Lankan youth.

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<sup>1</sup> A Grama Niladari Division is the smallest administrative unit in the country. \*e.g. Singapore Informatics offers a Bachelor of Information Technology Degree in association with the University of Southern Queensland Australia, London Tec International offers a Bachelor of Science in Computer Studies Degree programme in association with the University of Sunderland, UK.

*"A cross-sectional study is extremely simple in design. One decides what one wants to find out, identifies the study population, and selects a sample (if one needs to), and contacts respondents to collect the required information"* (Kumar 1996). Surveys are often cross-sectional studies that are employed to collect standardised information from a specific population, or a sample of the population. Survey methodology is well-suited to descriptive studies as well as to exploring aspects of a situation or seeking explanations and providing data for testing hypotheses. This study is focused on the aspirations of youth in the spheres of education, qualifications and livelihoods. Thus, we felt it was appropriate to use the survey method for this study.

## **2.2 Sampling procedure**

It was decided to select six locations from the rural sector, which are ethnically homogeneous (four Sinhalese villages, one Muslim village, and one Tamil village), two from the estate sector (one up-country estate and one low-country estate) and one from the ethnically-mixed urban sector. The composition of the selected sample corresponds to the national sectoral population distribution. All the study locations were selected purposively. A household list was obtained from the GN of the selected location in order to identify the families with at least one unmarried youth who belongs to the age category of 15-29 years. In the second stage, identified families were divided into three strata (lower, lower middle and upper) on the basis of focus group interviews that were conducted with key informants in the respective villages. Finally, the number of families for the survey were selected randomly by using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) random number menu from each class stratum disproportionately (please see figure 1, 2 and 3 for more information) by the researcher. The selected names of families were given to the enumerators to conduct interviews. The random number table book was used to select the relevant youth when there were more than one youth in a chosen family.



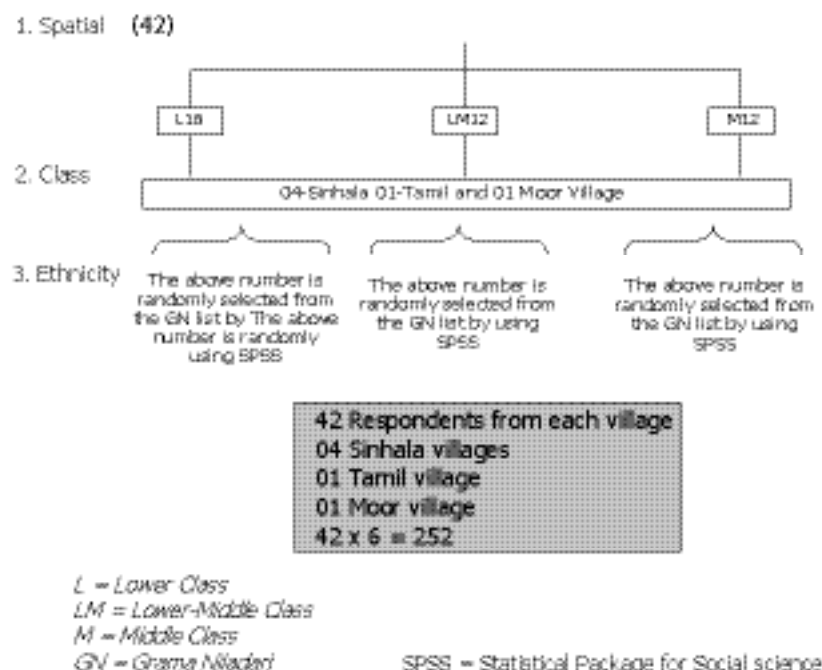
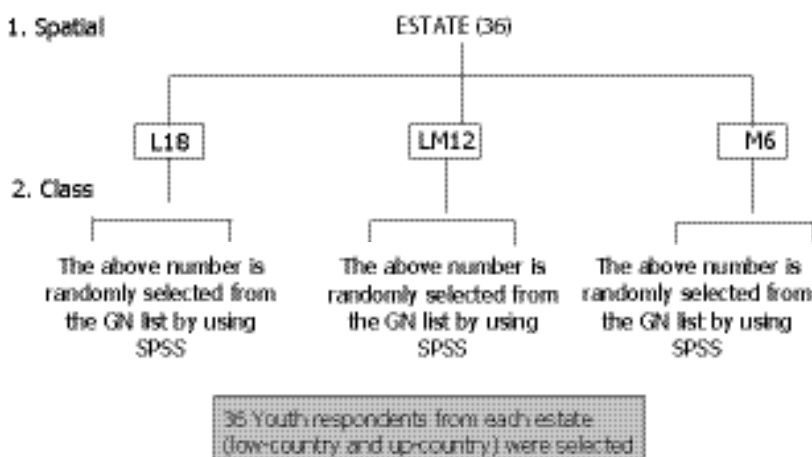
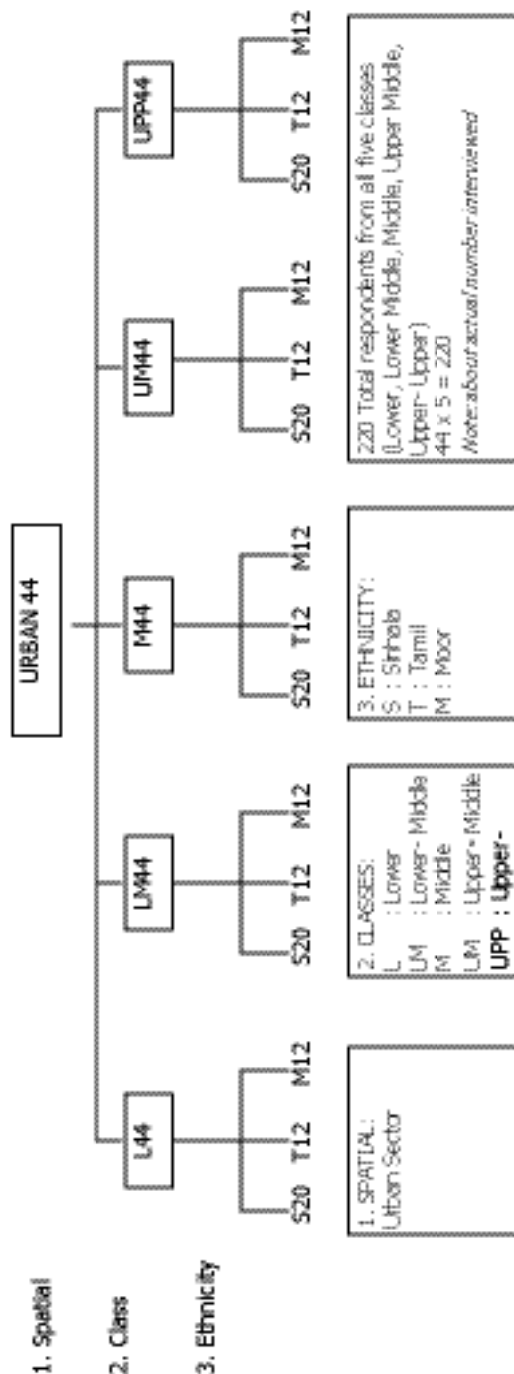
**Figure 2.1 Rural sampling tree****Figure 2.2 Estate sampling tree**

Figure 2.3 Urban sampling tree



GV = Grama Niladhari SPSS = Statistical Package for Social Science

### **3. Research Instruments and Administration**

An interview schedule that consisted of open-ended, pre-coded and multiple-response questions was used to collect the relevant data. Interviews were conducted by trained enumerators by face-to-face interaction with the respondents. The structured-interview schedule was used to reduce variations between interviewers.

A pilot survey was carried out in two separate locations to test the interview schedules and try out sampling procedures. Some of the questions were revised after the pilot survey. Graduate research assistants employed as field enumerators were given training on sampling procedure, selection of youth using random numbers, interview schedules, and ethical issues and interviewing techniques.

In the main survey, the enumerators paid an initial visit to the selected households to inform the head of the household and family members about the study. Thereafter, they interviewed both parents/guardian as well as the selected youth separately without any obstruction or interference from other family members. However, this was not easy in some cases even though the requirement was mentioned before starting the interview. Some of those selected for the survey were not available in the household at the time of the main survey because they were working away. Some of the upper and upper-middle class youth were studying or employed abroad. These families were dropped from the sample and other families were selected to replace them. Some upper and upper-middle class families were unwilling to cooperate with our field enumerators. The researchers could not find households to replace them.

### **4. An Introduction to Selected Research Locations**

#### **4.1 Thimbirigasyaya**

Thimbirigasyaya is a multi-ethnic locality within the city of Colombo. Residents do different kinds of jobs, ranging from daily-paid labourers to company directors. Unlike in the other locations; the residents of Thimbirigasyaya have easy access to a range of facilities provided by public as well as private institutions in the areas of health, education,

banking and recreation. However, access to some services and facilities is determined to a large extent by social class.

## **4.2. Padeniya**

Padeniya, a Sinhala, Buddhist village in the North Western province, is about 125Km from Colombo. It is in the Wariyapola division of the Kurunegala district. The closest town connected by a paved road is the developing town of Wariyapola, just 5 km from Padeniya. People come to Wariyapola not only to obtain the services of government institutions, but also other services, both public and private, such as banks and hospitals. Villagers also travel to Kurunegala (25 km from Padeniya) for commercial purposes.

The majority of the villagers are cultivators. Others engage in various service sector activities including ritual services such as drumming. Work mainly relates to rice cultivation on small plots of land. There are also a few coconut estate owners who own more than 6 acres of land each. A handful of families have at least one member working as clerks and teachers in the government sector. A few others own hardware, textile and grocery shops.

## **4.3 Madugalle**

Madugalle, a Sinhala, Buddhist village, in the Central province, is about 180 km from Colombo. This village is in the Udadumbara division of the Kandy district, close to Udadumbara, a developing small town, 14 km from Madugalle. Ududumbara is the closest town connected to Madugalle by a paved road. Villagers come to Ududumbara not only to obtain the services of government institutions, but also to make use of other institutions such as banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Kandy (62 km from Madugalle) for commercial purposes, even though Mahiyanganaya, another developing commercial centre (36 km from Madugalle) is closer to Madugalle.

The village population comprises both cultivators as well as several artisan groups. Most work is related to vegetable cultivation. There are also a few rice and tobacco cultivators all of whom are entirely dependent on rainwater, cultivating these crops on small plots of land, the sizes of which range from 0.25 acres to about 1 acre. There is also a handful of families with at least one member holding salaried

employment such as samurdhi<sup>2</sup>/labour officers, soldiers and police constables. A few villagers own rice mills and grocery shops.

#### 4.4 Neluwa

Neluwa, a Sinhala, Buddhist village, in the Southern province, is 125km from Colombo. It is in the Neluwa division of the Galle district. The closest town is Hiniduma, 14km from Neluwa. It is connected by a paved road. Local people travel to Hiniduma to obtain services of both government and private institutions such as banks and shops. Villagers also travel to Galle (64km from Neluwa) for commercial purposes.

A majority of the residents of Neluwa are agriculturalists. There are also some families engaged in traditional service activities such as washing clothes. Most work is related to small scale tea cultivation on small plots of land, sizes of which range from 0.25 acres to about 5 acres. There are also several rice cultivators all of whom are entirely dependent on rainwater. A handful of families have at least one member doing salaried work such as samurdhi/labour officers, soldiers and police constables. A few others run grocery shops, telecommunication centres or record bars.

#### 4.5 Hambegamuwa

Hambegamuwa, a Sinhala, Buddhist village in Uva province, is about 220 km from Colombo. It is in the Thanamalwila division of the Monaragala district. Thanamalwila, a developing town, 32 km from Hambegamuwa is the closest town to Hambegamuwa by a road that is partly gravel and partly paved. People come to Thanamalwila not only to obtain the services of government institutions, but also to use the services of banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Embilipitiya (56 km from Hambegamuwa) for commercial purposes.

Most work in Hambegamuwa is related to rice cultivation on land irrigated by the Hambegamuwa tank. They also engage in *chena* (slash and burn) cultivation and grow maize, gram, green gram, millet and other crops on highland plots. The size of *chena* plots range from 0.25 acres to about 5 acres. A few families run small

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<sup>2</sup> Samurdhi is a national poverty alleviation programme in Sri Lanka sponsored by the State. A Samurdhi Officer is a village level functionary attached to this programme.

dairy farms, mainly to produce milk to prepare curd and there is a handful of families with at least one member doing jobs such as clerks and teachers in the government sector. A few families own grocery shops.

## **4.6 Udappuwa**

Udappuwa is a predominantly Tamil rural village, in North Western province, 112 km from Colombo. This village is in the Mundel division of the Puttalam district. 20 km from Udappuwa lies Chilaw, which is the closest town connected by a partly gravel, partly paved road. Villagers come to Chilaw not only to use the services of government institutions, but also for other services, such as banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Puttalam (38 km from Udappuwa) for commercial purposes.

Most work in Udappuwa is related to marine fishing. There are also a few families who run prawn farms. A handful of families has at least one member working as a clerk or teacher in the state sector. A few others own coconut estates.

## **4.7 Nachchaduwa**

Nachchaduwa, a Muslim village in North Central province is, about 210 km from Colombo. This village is in the Thirappane division in the Anuradhapura district. 14 km from Nachchaduwa lies Sawasthipura, a small developing town. Sawasthipura is the closest town to Nachchaduwa connected by a paved road. Villagers come to Sawasthipura not only to use the services of government administrative institutions, but also for other services, both public and private, such as banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Anuradhapura (15 km from Nachchaduwa) for commercial purposes.

Most work in Nachchaduwa is related to foreign employment (Middle East) and business activities (foreign employment agencies, brick making, shop keeping or rice merchants). There are also a few fishermen who use the Nachchaduwa tank for fishing. A handful of families has at least one member engaged in regular employment, such as nursing and teaching, in the government sector. A few families own poultry farms.

## 4.8 Park estate

Park Estate is a private tea estate in the hill country, managed by Udupussellawa Plantations Limited. It is in Central province, about 186 km from Colombo. This estate is in the Nuwara Eliya division of the Nuwara Eliya district. Kandapola, a famous vegetable wholesale collection centre, is half a kilometre from Park Estate. It is the closest town to Park Estate, connected by a paved road. Villagers travel to Kandapola not only to use the services of government administrative institutions, but also the services of banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Nuwara Eliya (11 km from Park Estate) for commercial purposes.

Most jobs are based on wage work such as tea plucking, factory work and other activities. There are also a few families who own small vegetable plots. There is a handful of families with at least one member engaged in non-estate jobs such as teaching and clerical work, in both government and private institutions in the area.

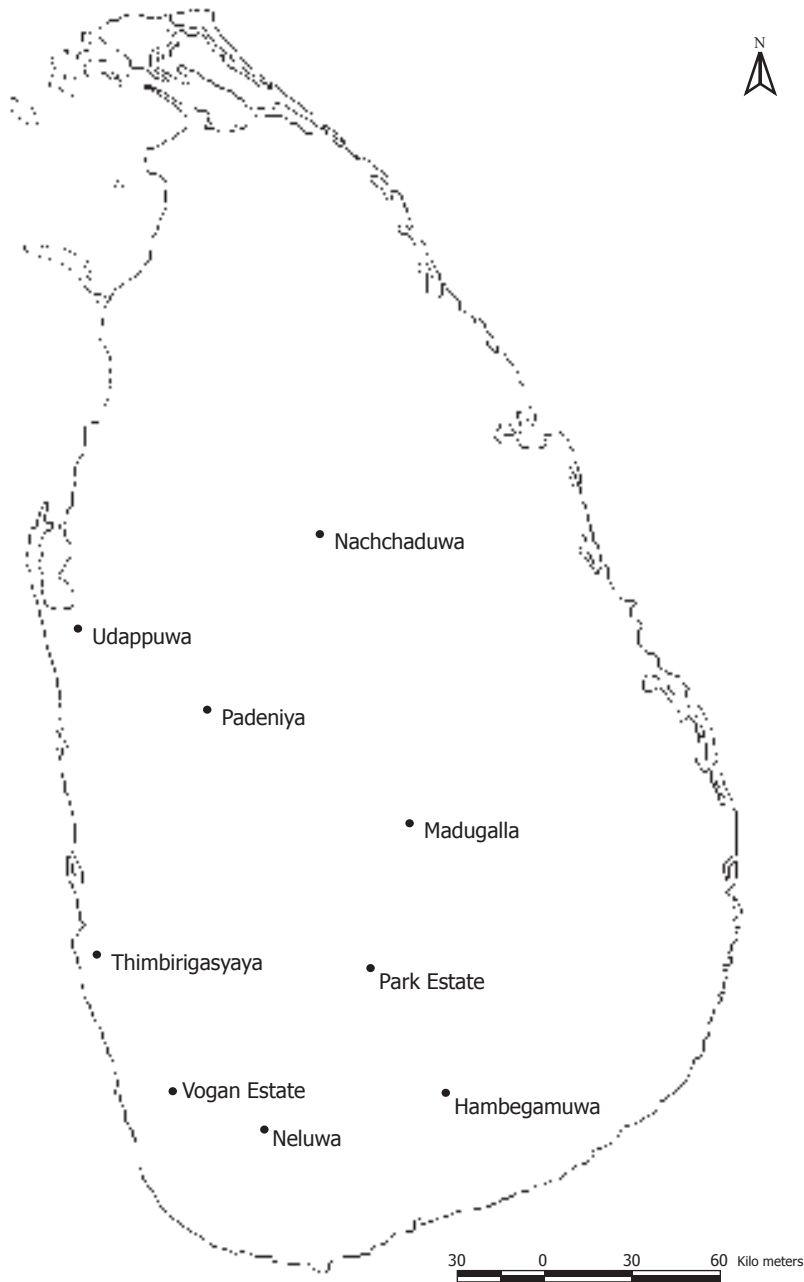
## 4.9 Vogan estate

Vogan Estate is a low-country, private estate, managed by Kotagala Plantations Limited. It is in Western province, about 68 km from Colombo. This estate is in the Mathugama division of the Kalutara district. The developing town of Mathugama is 7 kilometres from Vogan Estate. It is the closest town to Vogan Estate connected by a paved road. Villagers travel to Mathugama not only to use the services of government institutions, but those of banks and hospitals. Villagers also go to Kalutara (26 km from Vogan Estate) for commercial purposes.

Most jobs in Vogan Estate are based on wage work such as tea plucking, factory work and other estate work. A few families own small poultry farms. Several families have at least one member engaged in non-estate jobs such as teaching and clerical work in government and private institutions.

What was provided above is a series of brief accounts of the field locations selected for the present study. Map 4.1 shows the spatial distribution of these locations in Sri Lanka (see map 4.1). The map shows that we have not selected field locations from the north and east of the country. This was because of the security situation that prevailed at the time.

Map 4.1 Study locations





## 5. Demographic and Socio-Economic Background of the Sample Youth Population

At the outset we will provide an overview of the demographic and socio-economic characteristics of the sample youth population. There were 501 youths in the total sample. While the urban youth sample comprised 35% of the total sample, the estate-sector youth population constituted about 15%. The remaining 50% was drawn from the rural locations.

The upper and upper-middle class youth household sample comprised 7%, whereas 36% of the youth belonged to the lower class. The remainder was drawn from middle class.

There is a slightly higher proportion of male (51.1%) respondents in the sample population compared to their female counterparts (48.9%).

The age composition of the sample shows that an equal percentage (41%) belong to the age cohorts of 15-19 and 20-24. The remainder belonged to the age group of 25-29 (18%).

A majority of the sample are Sinhalese (nearly 53%). The ethnic proportions do not match the national proportions. For instance, the national proportion of the Sinhalese is about 74%. Similar differences are evident with respect to other ethnic groups as well. This is because the sample was selected by applying the purposive sampling technique and communities were selected considering the ethnic composition of the location. This did not, however, apply to Colombo where the population is ethnically mixed.

As is evident from Table 5.1, about 50% of the youth population is reported to be unemployed<sup>3</sup>, while 30% of those interviewed were employed. And only 20% were at school or studying at the time of the survey.

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3 Self-perceived definition of the interviewed youth regarding their employment status.

**Table 5.1 Socio-economic profile of the sample youth population**

Category	Number	Percentage (%)
Urban	178	35.5
Rural	251	50.1
Estate	72	14.4
Upper	23	4.6
Upper middle	23	4.6
Middle	113	22.6
Lower middle	161	32.1
Lower	181	36.1
Male	256	51.1
Female	245	48.9
15-19	203	40.9
20-24	204	41.2
25-29	89	17.9
Sinhala	264	52.7
Tamil	152	30.3
Moor	85	17.0
Schooling/studying	100	20
Employed	150	29.9
Unemployed	251	50.1

## 6. Youth Aspirations<sup>4</sup> for Education

Education is often seen as a means of obtaining employment, which in turn facilitates upward social mobility for individuals irrespective of their caste, class, religion and ethnic identities (Hettige 2000; Gunawardena 2002). Access to employment is often dependent on access to formal education and other qualifications. The link between the two is that a good quality education often leads to better employment which, in turn, contributes to the upward social mobility of individuals. It is possible that young people may have

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<sup>4</sup> 'aspiration' in the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary is: "Strong desire or Ambition"

high aspirations for education because of the universal free education available in Sri Lanka since 1944. On the other hand, one could argue that some young people may lower their educational aspirations because of the prevailing unemployment rate, particularly among university graduates. At the same time, the difficulty of obtaining decent employment may give rise to high aspirations for further education. When questioned about their aspirations for education, two-thirds of those interviewed (65%) said they wanted to go to university. Meanwhile the other one-third is divided among GCE A/L and O/L (22.5% and 11.5% respectively) qualifications. This situation is demonstrated by the following statement of a poor urban squatter youth:

"My aspiration is to pass A/L's and get into the university to follow a commerce degree. My parents invest a lot of money in my education with great difficulties. They hope that I would do something to get out of this poverty trap by getting a government job in the future."

There are significant variations in youth aspirations for education by location, gender, age and current activity status. For instance, a significant proportion from Nachchaduwa (81%) and Vogan estate (81%) want to go to university, even higher than the overall average (65%) compared to young people in other places. A considerable proportion of those in Colombo (32%) and Neluwa (29%) want to get A/L as against other youths. A slightly higher proportion of females want to go to university (67%) compared to their male counterparts (63%).

The relationship between age and youth aspirations for education is notable. For instance, aspiration for university education decreases with increasing age. In other words, aspiration for university education is higher among young people who belong to the age cohort of 15-19 (nearly 70%), compared to other age groups. This is also confirmed when one looks at the variations between current activity status with regard to the above question, as it shows that a significant proportion of school pupils want to go to university (82%) compared to unemployed (65.5%) and employed youth (53%) (see Table 6.1).

**Table 6.1 Youth aspirations for education – by location, gender, age and current activity status (%)\***

	Literacy	Primary	O/L	A/L	University
<b>Overall</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>22.5</b>	<b>65</b>
<b>Location</b>					
<b>Thimbirigasyaya</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>11.8</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>55</b>
Hambegamuwa	-	-	19	21.4	59.5
Neluwa	-	2.4	4.9	29.3	63.4
Madugalle	-	-	15.4	15.4	69.2
Park Estate	-	-	13.9	16.7	69.4
Udappuwa	-	-	7.1	21.4	71.4
Padeniya	-	-	7.3	19.5	73.2
<b>Vogan Estate</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>11.1</b>	<b>5.6</b>	<b>80.6</b>
<b>Nachchaduwa</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>11.9</b>	<b>7.1</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>Gender</b>					
Male	-	1.2	15.4	20.2	63.2
<b>Female</b>	<b>0.8</b>		<b>7.4</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>66.8</b>
<b>Age</b>					
<b>15-19</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>8.9</b>	<b>21.3</b>	<b>69.8</b>
20-24	0.5	1	12.9	22.8	62.9
25-29	1.1	1.1	13.6	25	59.1
<b>Current Activity Status</b>					
<b>Schooling</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>82</b>
Employed		0.7	18.2	28.4	52.7
Unemployed	0.8	0.8	10.8	22.1	65.5

\* Column %

There are high aspirations for university education among youth in general. Is there a relationship between the household class position of the selected youth and their aspiration for education within the selected research locations? As for class variations, in all locations except Padeniya, a higher proportion of young people who belong to the middle class and above want to go to university compared to those classed as lower-middle and middle class. When one looks at middle and lower class youth aspirations for education, one can see a widening gap between middle and lower class youth with regard to aspirations. It narrows down in some places like Madugalle and Vogan estate, while the gap widens in some other remote locations like Hambegamuwa and Park Estate. For instance, a significant proportion of middle class youth in Hambegamuwa want to go to

university (73%), while, only 47% of those who belong to the lower class want to. On the other hand, a considerable proportion of lower class youth of Hambegamuwa want to get A/L (41%). On the other hand, this gap narrows in relation to the middle and lower class youth of Neluwa. For instance, nearly 73% of middle class youth want to go to university, while only 68% of lower class youth have similar aspirations. This could be because of lesser class disparities among the three classes in the location when compared with other locations (See Table 6.2).

**Table 6.2 Youth aspirations for education\*- by household class position (%) \* \*\*b**

	Location**								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Upper</b>									
O/L	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
University	95.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Upper middle</b>									
A/L	4.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
University	95.7	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Middle</b>									
O/L	2.3	20	9.1	-	-	-	-	16.7	16.7
A/L	27.3	10	18.2	28.6	9.1	25	-	-	-
University	68.2	70	72.7	71.4	72.7	75	100	83.3	83.3
<b>Lower middle</b>									
O/L	15.9	-	18.8		28.6	5	11.8	16.7	16.7
A/L	56.8	25	12.5	36.4	7.1	25	17.6	25	8.3
University	27.3	75	68.8	63.6	64.3	70	70.6	58.3	75
<b>Lower</b>									
O/L	27.3	5.3	16.7	12.5	11.8	11.1	16.7	11.1	5.6
A/L	43.2	21.1	16.7	25.0	41.2	16.7	-	16.7	5.6
University	27.3	73.7	66.7	56.3	47.1	66.7	66.7	72.2	83.3

\* Youth aspirations, which are only O/L and above was considered to construct this table.

\*\* Locations – 1 = Thimbirigasyaya, 2= Padeniya, 3= Madugalle, 4= Neluwa, 5= Hambegamuwa, 6 = Uddappuwa, 7= Nachchaduwa, 8 = Park Estate, 9 = Vogan Estate.

\*\*\* Row %.

A majority said (53.3%) that they do not have sufficient means to realise their educational aspirations. In other words, only 46% said that they have sufficient means to fulfil their educational aspirations.

When we examine the relationship between the household class position of those selected and the availability of sufficient means to realise their educational aspirations in relation to their selected research locations, some interesting patterns emerge. For instance, a significant proportion of middle class and upper class youth from Thimbirigasyaya, Padeniya (70%) and Neluwa (71%) said that they have sufficient means to realise their educational aspirations. In other words, a sizeable minority of relatively well-to-do youths do *not* have sufficient means. This shows how difficult it is to realise educational aspirations even for those who belong to a well-to-do group. When we look at lower class youth, the picture is worse, as nearly two-thirds in all locations, except Padeniya, Madugalle and Neluwa, do not think that they have sufficient means to realise their educational aspirations (See Table 6.3). In other words, locational variations are highly significant.

## **7. Youth Aspirations for Vocational Education**

The changing economic situation after economic liberalisation led to a substantial increase in employment opportunities at home and abroad, particularly in the Middle East, for young people with vocational skills (See Table 7.1 & 7.2). This, in turn resulted in a significant increase in demand for vocational training courses. Various state institutions such as National Apprenticeship and Industrial Training Authority, National Youth Services Council, Department of Technical Education and Training and Vocational Training Authority, and a host of private and non-governmental organisations are engaged in providing vocational training in response to this demand. In addition to these formal sources, there are informal sources of training in various vocational trades. However, there is no information on trends in the sphere of vocational training in the informal sector. It is noteworthy that all these training centres set out to provide school leavers and other young people with skills that enable them to find decent employment.

**Table 7.1 Best prospects in local employment\* (1999-2000)**

	<b>Year 1999- Rank</b>	<b>Year 2000 (Jan-Jun) Rank</b>	<b>Year 2000 (July- December) Rank</b>
<b>Service Occupations</b>			
Salesman	1	3	2
Housemaid/household worker	2	1	1
Cook	3	2	3
Baker	4	4	4
Waiter	5	5	5
Craft & Related			
Mason	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Carpenter	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>2</b>
Welding & Lathe work	3	4	3
Tailors	4	3	4
Automobile body repairs/ tinker	5	6	-
Industrial sewing machine op- erators	-	5	5
Electrician	-	-	6
Plant & machine operators			
Drivers Heavy/Light vehicle	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1</b>
Operator-Crane & hoist	2	-	3
Cleaner	3	2	2
Machine operators	4	5	6
Farm & forestry machine op- erators	-	3	4
Three wheel driver	-	4	5

Source: Labour Market Information Bulletin 1999-2000, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission, Colombo. \*The above ranking is based on the newspaper advertisements survey conducted by TVEC. The ranking was done on the basis of the number of advertisements

**Table 7.2 Occupations in high demand for local employment (2003-2004)**

<b>Job category</b>	<b>Rank *</b>
<b>Driver (H/V &amp; L/V)</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Cook</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Mason</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Fitting, Milling, Welding etc.</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Carpentry</b>	<b>5</b>
<i>Computer related</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>Mechanic (Diesel/Petrol)</i>	<i>7</i>
Bakery	8
Secretary/clerk	9
Hotel related	10
Printing	11
Electrical/House wiring	12
Juki & other sawing machine operators	13
Tinkering & Painting	14
Other (Fibre related work, Upholster etc)	15
Electronics (T/V & Radio)	16
Hydraulic operators/Mechanic	17
A/C & Refrigerator	18
Beauty Culture	19
Plumber	20
Auto Electrician	21
Sawing machine technicians	22
Typist	23
Draftsman	24
Mechanic (Three Wheeler & Motor Bicycle)	25
General Maintenance	26
Other machine operators	27
Gem cutting & Jewellery making	28
Millwright	29
Out boat engine mechanic	30

\* The above ranking is based on the newspaper advertisements survey conducted by the researcher. The ranking was done on the basis of the number of advertisements (Fernando, 2004).

In relation to youth aspirations for vocational qualifications, a majority of youth aspire to follow computer related courses (32%), while another significant proportion aspires for courses in tailoring and dressmaking. It is noteworthy that 24% of the interviewed youth do not have aspirations for vocational education. On the other hand, only a negligible proportion of youth aspire for mechanical, carpentry & masonry and motor mechanic trades which are in high demand for both local and foreign employment.



Locational variations among young people who have aspirations for vocational qualifications are worth mentioning. For instance, a significant number from Thimbirigasyaya and Padeniya (61% & 56% respectively) want to get computer-related qualifications, significantly higher than the overall average of 31% when compared to other places. This shows that a demand for computer-related vocational qualifications is prevalent among young people in more urban and suburban areas. A significant proportion from more remote villages want to do tailoring and dressmaking courses.

A slightly higher proportion of the age cohort of 15-19 want to get computer-related vocational qualifications compared to other age cohorts. This is further confirmed when one looks at the disparities within the current activity status variable concerning youth aspirations for vocational education, as a significant proportion of those at school want to get computer-related vocational qualifications (57%).

An equal percentage of males and females want to get computer related vocational qualifications (42% and 42% respectively), while a larger proportion of females want to do dressmaking courses (41.2%) compared to their male counterparts (2%). In other words, nearly all the females interviewed want to acquire traditional skills (but also computer-related skills) as they do not like mechanical, carpentry, masonry work (See Table 7.3).

When one looks at youth aspirations for vocational education by class within the selected field locations, some important patterns emerge. For instance, a vast majority who belong to the middle, upper-middle and upper classes from Thimbirigasyaya (87%, 86% and 85% respectively) want to get computer-related vocational qualifications compared to lower-middle and lower class youth in the same area (49% and 47.4% respectively). A similar pattern also emerges among middle and lower class youth in Neluwa, Uddappuwa and Nachchaduwa. Aspiration for computer-related vocational qualifications is generally lower irrespective of class differences among those in Hambegamuwa, Park Estate and Uddappuwa, which are the most remote areas in the sample. Nevertheless, one can observe a widening gap between middle and lower class youth in terms of aspirations for computer-related vocational qualifications. On the other hand, it appears that more young people from a lower class background in most of the locations except Padeniya and Madugalle want to do skills training in trades such as mechanical, carpentry,

**Table 7.3 Youths' aspiration for vocational qualifications – by location, age, gender and current activity Status (%)\* Column%**

	Computer	Motor mechanic	Tailoring				Carpentry & Masonry	Driving	No Aspiration
			Dress making	Mechanical					
Overall	31.7	6.6	17.0	1.6	3.6	4.2	24.2		
Location									
Thimbirigasvaya	61	10	8.1	2	-	2.4	-		
Padeniya	56	8	-	8	12	8	-		
Madugalle	40	13.3	-	-	7	16.7	-		
Neluwa	44	-	12.5	3.1	6.3	-	-		
Hambegamuwa	31	2.8	22	5.6	14	11.1	-		
Udappuwa	21.2	15.2	54.5	3	3	-	-		
Nachchaduwa	18.4	3	47.4	-	10.6	11	-		
Park Estate	31	21	41.4	-	-	3.4	-		
Vogan Estate	27	6.1	45.5	-	3	6.1	-		
Age									
15-19	43	10.3	18.8	1.8	3.6	6.1	-		
20-24	41.4	5.9	30.3	2.6	4.6	3.3	-		
25-29	38.7	11.3	12.9	1.6	8.1	9.7	-		
Gender									
Male	42	16	1.7	4.5	10	13	-		
Female	41.7	2	41.2	-	-	1.5	-		
Current activity									
status									
Schooling	57	5.8	18.6	2.3	2.4	5.8	-		
Employed	33.3	12.7	12.7	5	9.9	5.9	-		
Unemployed	39.1	7.8	29.2	0.5	3.2	5.2	-		

motor maintenance, tailoring and dressmaking trades than training in computer technology (See Table 7.4).

(77%) of those interviewed said that they had sufficient means to realise their vocational educational aspirations. It is evident from the class variations in the research locations that a significant proportion of middle class and above in the selected locations, except in Madugalle had sufficient means to realise their vocational educational aspirations compared to lower class youth (See Table 7.5).

## 8. Youth Aspirations for Livelihoods

When one looks at the overall picture, it is clear that nearly one-third of the sample (34%) aspire to professional (B)<sup>5</sup> careers, while another one-third aspires to professional (A) careers and only one-tenth aspire to executive, managerial and administrative occupations. This shows that more young people aspire to jobs that have high status, social recognition and a reasonable income. On the other hand, it is significant that a negligible proportion aspire to craft and related work or agriculture and fisheries (See Table 8.1). In general, young people have high livelihood aspirations

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<sup>5</sup> **Note: 'Professionals A'**

- 1) Physical, Mathematical and Engineering Science Professionals e.g. Physicists, Engineers etc.
- 2) Life Science Professionals e.g. Zoologists, Biologists etc.
- 3) Health Professionals e.g. Medical Officers
- 4) Teaching Professionals e.g. Professors
- 5) Business Professionals e.g. Accountants
- 6) Legal Professionals e.g. Lawyers
- 7) Other Professionals e.g. Newspaper Editors

**'Professionals B'**

- 1) Health Professionals e.g. Pharmacists
- 2) Teaching Professionals e.g. Teachers
- 3) Business Professionals e.g. Auditors
- 4) Legal Professionals e.g. Other Legal Officers
- 5) Other Professionals e.g. Librarians

Table 7.4 Aspiration regarding vocational qualifications as a youth – by household class position (%) \*\*

		Location*								
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Upper</b>										
Computer		66.6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Upper Middle</b>										
Computer		86.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Middle</b>										
Computer		87	40	36.4	60	33.3	50	57.1	20	40
Motor mechanic		8	40	18.2	10	-	25	28.6	-	20
Tailoring & dressmaking		-	-	-	-	22.2	25	-	60	-
Mechanical		-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Carpentry & masonry		-	-	-	-	11.1	-	-	-	-
Driving		-	-	-	-	11.1	-	-	-	-
<b>Lower Middle</b>										
Computer		48.7	75	36.4	70	36.4	27.8	6.7	40	17
Motor mechanic		-	-	9.1	-	-	16.7	-	50	-
Tailoring & dressmaking		10.3	-	-	-	3.3	50	53.3	10	58.3
Mechanical		5.1	12.5	-	-	9.1	5.6	-	-	-
Carpentry & masonry		-	12.5	9.1	-	18.2	13.4	14	-	8.3
Driving		2.6	-	27.3	-	9.1	53.3	7	-	-
<b>Lower</b>										
Computer		47.4	50	50	8.3	25	9.1	12.5	28.6	31.3
Motor mechanic		18.4	-	12.5	-	6.3	9.1	6.3	7.1	6.3
Tailoring & dressmaking		15.8	-	-	25	31.3	73	50	57	50
Mechanical		-	8.3	-	8.3	6.3	-	-	-	-
Carpentry & masonry		-	16.6	12.5	16.7	12.5	9.1	12.6	-	-
Driving		5.3	16.7	12.5	-	12.5	-	19	7.1	6.3

**Table 7.5 Sufficient means to realize vocational aspiration of youth – by household class position (%) \*\***

	Location*								
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
<b>Upper Upper</b>									
Yes	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Upper middle</b>									
Yes	100	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
<b>Middle</b>									
Yes	97.4	100.0	45.5	90	77.8	75	100	80	100
No	2.6	-	54.5	10	22.2	25	-	20	-
<b>Lower middle</b>									
Yes	74.4	87.5	27.3	100	81.8	72.2	100	40	100
No	25.6	12.5	72.7	-	18.2	27.8	-	60	-
<b>Lower</b>									
Yes	76.3	66.7	50	100	43.8	54.5	87.5	64.3	68.8
No	23.7	33.3	50		56.3	45.5	12.5	35.7	31.3

\* Locations – 1 = Thimbirigasyaya, 2= Padeniya, 3= Madugalle, 4= Neluwa, 5= Hambegamuwa, 6 = Uddappuwa, 7= Nachchaduwa, 8 = Park Estate, 9 = Vogan Estate. \*\* Row %.

**Table 8.1 Youth aspirations for livelihoods – by location, gender, age and current activity status (%) \*\***

	Livelihood Area*										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>
<b>Location</b>											
Thimbirigasyaya	22	42	18	3	1.3	6.3	2.5	-	-	1.3	6.4
Padeniya	10	20	22	7	12.2	7.3	2.4	-	17.1	2.4	-
Madugalle	3	20	34.3	-	11.4	5.7	5.7	3	3	11.4	3
Neluwa	11	38	14	-	5.4	-	8.1	-	8.1	5.4	10.8
Hambegamuwa	7.1	26.2	31	5	-	2.4	17	2.4	5	-	5
Udappuwa	2.5	12.5	70	-	2.5	-	5	-	-	-	7.5
Nachchaduwa	-	29	61	-	3	-	7.9	-	-	-	-
Park Estate	3	29	54.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	3	3
Vogan Estate	-	23	57	-	3	3	9	-	-	3	3
<b>Age</b>											
15-19	8	35	33.3	2.1	2.1	4	7	-	3.2	3.2	3.2
20-24	12	29	37	2	3.2	2.2	6.3	1.1	2.2	1.1	4.3
25-29	12	23	30	4	7	7	5.8	-	4	4	6
<b>Gender</b>											
Male	11	31	26	2.5	3.3	4	10	1	5	4.2	3
Female	10	30	43	2	4	4	1.8	-	1	0.4	5.4
<b>Current activity status</b>											
Schooling	8.3	41.7	30.2	3.1	2.1	2.1	3.1	-	3.1	3.1	3.1
Employed	11	21.2	33.6	3	4	6	9.5	2	4	3	4
Unemployed	11.3	31.3	35.7	1.3	3.9	3	2.2	3	1.7	1.7	4.8

\* 1= Executive, managerial and administrative, 2= Professional (A), 3= Professional (B), 4= Technicians and associate professionals, 5= Clerks, 6= Travel, restaurant and sales workers, 7=Protective service workers, 8= Agriculture and fishery workers, 9= Craft & related workers, 10 = Plant and machine operators and assemblers, 11= Elementary occupations.

\*\* Column %

Variations by location, age, gender and current activity status in relation to livelihood aspirations are interesting. A significant proportion of youth from locations other than Thimbirigasyaya and Neluwa, aspire to professional (B) category jobs. By contrast those in Thimbirigasyaya (42%) and Neluwa (38%) aspire to professional (A) occupations. None of those from Padeniya, Neluwa, Udappuwa, Nachchaduwa, Park Estate and Vogan estate want to work in agriculture and fisheries, confirming the general pattern of unwillingness to work in agriculture and fisheries as their main income earning activity since they are more interested in blue-collar and white-collar jobs.

A majority of those in the 15-19 group aspire to professional (A) level employment (35%) while those in the age category 20-24 aspire to professional (B) level employment (37%). A majority of females in the sample aspire to professional (B) level employment such as teaching, when compared to their male counterparts (26%).

When considering the variations by current activity status, it is significant that a majority of school pupils aspire to professional (A) level employment whereas unemployed and employed youth aspire to professional (B) level employment. As for class differences one can observe some significant variations. For instance, more upper-middle and upper class youth aspire to executive, managerial and administrative positions and middle class youth aspire to professional (A) related occupations. Finally, lower-middle and lower class youth aspire to professional (B) level occupations (see Table 8.2). In other words, it can be concluded that the class background has a significant effect on livelihood aspirations.

**Table 8.2 Youth aspirations for livelihoods – by household class position (%)\*\***

	Livelihood Area*										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
<b>Overall</b>	<b>10.6</b>	<b>30.5</b>	<b>33.9</b>	<b>2.2</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>3.7</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>2.8</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>4.1</b>
Upper	53	37	11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Upper Middle	78	22.2	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Middle	9.2	37	28	1.8	5	8.3	3.6	1	2.8	1	4
Lower middle	3.3	31.3	40	2.7	1.3	2	5.5	1	2	4.7	7
Lower	6.0	26	39	2.4	5.4	3	9.6	-	4.2	2	3

\* 1= Executive, managerial and administrative, 2= Professional (A), 3= Professional (B), 4= Technicians and associate professionals, 5= Clerks, 6= Travel, restaurant and sales workers, 7=Protective service workers, 8= Agriculture and fishery workers, 9= Craft & related workers, 10 = Plant and machine operators and assemblers, 11= Elementary occupations.

\*\* Column %

## 9. Youth Aspirations for the Sector of Employment

Sector of employment has long been a significant issue in Sri Lanka. The unemployment rate among educated youth is much higher than among those with little or no education. This is partly because those

with educational qualifications are more selective in the type of job they seek. Moreover, educated youth in Sri Lanka tend to prefer government jobs that guarantee job security, regular income, social prestige and freedom. In this study those interviewed were asked if they were looking for government jobs.

When we look at the overall picture, it is clear that a large proportion want government jobs (70%). A slightly higher proportion of females (74%) want state-sector employment compared to their male counterparts (67%). As for the current activity status, the vast majority of school pupils (81%) aspire for state-sector employment followed by unemployed youth (70%) (See Table 9.1)

**Table 9.1 Youth aspirations regarding the sector in which they prefer to be employed – by age, gender and current activity status (%) \*\***

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Overall</b>	<b>70.1</b>	<b>1.7</b>	<b>14.5</b>	<b>7.7</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>1.5</b>	<b>0.2</b>
15-19	72	2.2	14	8	3	2	-
20-24	75	1.1	12	7	4	-	0.5
25-29	60.2	2.0	17	9	8	4	-
Male	67.4	2.1	16	10	4	1.2	-
Female	73.1	1.3	13	5.3	5	1.8	0.4
Schooling	81.3	1	10.4	3.1	2.1	2.1	-
Employed	62.3	2.2	18.1	10.1	4.3	2.9	-
Unemployed	70.2	1.7	14	8.1	5.1	0.4	0.4

\* 1= Government Sector, 2= Un-organized private sector (informal sector), 3= Organized private sector (Sri Lankan), 4= Organized private sector (Foreign/Joint venture), 5= Self employment, 6= NGO; 7=Others

\*\* Column %.

Youth aspirations regarding the preferred sector of employment among different classes in the selected locations vary. For instance, more upper-middle and upper class youth in Thimbirigasyaya prefer to work in the organised private sector (71% and 67% respectively), while those belonging to the other three classes (middle, lower-middle and lower) want state-sector employment (62%, 61% and 65% respectively). However, this pattern changes in relation to other locations as the aspiration to state-sector employment is strong in these areas and remarkably stronger in remote and disadvantaged locations like Nachchaduwa and Hambegamuwa, irrespective of their class differences (See Table 9.2).



**Table 9.2 Youth aspirations for preferred sector of employment – by household class (%) \*\***

Locations																					
Thimbirigasyaya					Padeniya				Madugalle				Neluwa				Hambegamuwa				
Class*					Class				Class				Class				Class				
1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3		
Government Sector	14.3	5	62	61	65	60	83	67	91	100	82	77	70	44	91	86	88				
Un-organized private Sector	-	-	-	2.4	2.7	-	-	5.6	9.1	-	-	8	-	13	-	-	6				
Organized private Sector (Sri Lankan)	71.4	67	19	22	22	30	8.3	6	-	-	-	15	10	19	-	-	-				
Organized private Sector (Foreign/joint venture)	5	5	7	15	-	10	-	17	-	-	18.2	-	20	19	9.1	14	6				
Self-Employment	-	10	10	-	8.1	-	8.3	-	-	-	-	-	-	7	-	-	-				
Overseas	10	10	2	-	3	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				
NGO	-	5	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-				

\*Class – 1= Upper, 2= Upper Middle, 3= Middle, 4= Lower Middle, 5=Lower.  
 \*\* Row %.

**Table 9.2 Youth aspirations for preferred sector of employment – by household class (%)** \*\*  
(continued)

	Uddappuwa			Nachchaduwa			Park Estate			Vogan Estate		
	Class			Class			Class			Class		
	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Government Sector	75	85	78	100	93	89	83	83	88.2	67	73	94.4
Un-organized private Sector	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Organized private Sector (Sri Lankan)	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	6	17	9	-
Organized private Sector (Foreign/joint venture)	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	17	6	-	18	6
Self-Employment	25	15	22	-	-	-	-	-	-	17	-	-
Overseas	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
NGO	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

\*Class – 1= Upper, 2= Upper Middle, 3= Middle, 4= Lower Middle, 5=Lower.

\*\* Row %.

## 10. Conclusions

In this paper an attempt has been made to examine (a) the aspirations of youth in different social groups (class, gender and age) with respect to education, qualifications and livelihoods and the availability of means to achieve these, and (b) how aspirations in different social groups match/reflect changing social and economic realities. On the basis of the analysis presented above several major conclusions can be drawn.

Nearly two-thirds of those interviewed want to go to university. Furthermore, aspirations for university education are significantly higher among those from more remote locations. As for class variations, in all locations except Padeniya, a higher proportion of those from the middle class and above want to go to university compared to those from the lower-middle and lower class. When one looks at middle and lower class youth aspirations for education, there is clearly a widening gap between the middle and lower class with regard to aspirations, although it narrows down in locations like Madugalle and Vogan estate. The gap widens in some locations such as Hambegamuwa and Park Estate.

Even though nearly two-thirds of those sampled want to go to university, when questioned as to whether they have sufficient means to realise their educational aspirations, more than half of them said they do not have sufficient means to realise their aspirations due to economic and social deficiencies.

Youth aspirations for vocational qualifications showed some interesting patterns. A majority want to follow computer courses, while another significant proportion wants to do courses in tailoring and dressmaking. On the other hand, over one-fifth of those interviewed did not have aspirations for vocational qualifications. Moreover, only a very small proportion wants to take up mechanical, carpentry, masonry and motor-maintenance trades, which are in high demand for both local and foreign employment. An equal proportion of males and females wants to get computer- related qualifications and none of the females in the sample wanted non-traditional jobs like masonry, motor-maintenance and carpentry. More than two-thirds of those who had vocational training aspirations said they had the financial means to fulfil their vocational training aspirations.

What are youth aspirations for livelihoods? One-third of those in the sample aspired to professional (B) careers, while another one-third aspired to professional (A) type careers. Only one-tenth aspired to executive, managerial and administrative occupations. This shows that more young people wanted jobs that give reasonably high social status, recognition and a reasonable income. A negligible proportion wanted to do craft and related work or agriculture and fisheries.

More upper-middle and upper class youth aspired to executive, managerial and administrative positions and middle class youth aspired to professional (A) category occupations. Finally, those from the lower-middle and lower class aspired to professional (B) level occupations. It can be concluded that the class background of young people has influenced their aspirations.

Finally, with regard to the preferred sector of employment, dealt with also in other studies like National Youth Survey (2002) and School to Work Transition by ILO (2003), a large proportion of those interviewed, irrespective of age, gender and location differences, wanted to work in the state sector. Overall, there is a clear aspiration gap between rich and poor with respect to education, vocational qualifications and livelihoods. It appears that those from the lower class have reduced their aspirations in keeping with the changing opportunity structure in the country. Given the increasing cost of education, lower class youth do not seem to have sufficient means to realise their aspirations. Hence, the apparent rationale for lower aspirations.

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# 3

## YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

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# **I. University-to-Work Transition in Sri Lanka: Selected insights on the perceptions and experiences of social science graduates**

*Dinusha Pathiraja & Vatsaladevi Vasu*

## **1. Background of the Research**

Graduate unemployment has been the subject of a long-standing public debate in Sri Lanka. This is not surprising as graduate unemployment has been a major social issue over the last several decades. This issue has become more contentious and critical in recent years. On the one hand, the rapid expansion of university education has resulted in a substantial increase in the output of graduates by local universities<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, the contraction of the public sector and the weight of economic reforms have virtually closed down many conventional avenues of graduate employment. The worst-affected category is that of arts graduates who have been virtually shut out of the expanding corporate private sector, which is referred to as the engine of growth and the creator of employment in the new liberal economy. The result is growing unemployment among arts graduates contributing to widespread social unrest and political tensions.

The persisting and increasing unemployment among arts graduates is often perceived as a result of the shortcomings of the graduates themselves. Private-sector employers often allege that graduates do not have the skills and the temperament required to fit into a private sector firm. The critics also argue that the courses the graduates have followed have not equipped them with the desired attributes. These points of view appear to have had a major impact on the thinking of policy-makers and international donors. The increasing emphasis on the need for university reforms advocated by donors and policy-makers is indicative of this impact. The main point that is usually stressed is the need to introduce and implement reforms that would enhance the employability of university graduates, in particular arts graduates.

The issue of graduate unemployment has been much discussed and

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1 See *Sri Lanka University Statistics 2002*. Colombo: University Grants Commission

remedial measures have often been suggested by various people without paying much attention to the perceptions, experiences and grievances of graduates themselves. This is not desirable in the context of a modern democratic polity. Those who are targeted by a package of reforms should be given an opportunity to express their views, on the basis of their own lived experience, both within and outside the university.

It is against this background that the present qualitative study of university undergraduates and graduates in the arts stream at the University of Colombo was carried out in November and December 2003 as part of the ILO School-to-Work-Transition project in Sri Lanka. Interviews were conducted using a set of clearly laid-out guidelines to ensure the uniformity and comparability of the data collected. This paper discusses the main findings of the study, following the same structure as the overall report, dividing the analysis into aspects related to education and employability, job-search and equal opportunity as well as employment and expectation of decent employment.

The sample of respondents interviewed during the course of this study came from the University of Colombo. The respondents may not be fully comparable to a sample of students and graduates drawn from provincial universities, given the fact that this university is in the capital city where the undergraduates have access to various resources outside the university. However, as the University of Colombo has launched far-reaching reform efforts to improve undergraduate education in the social sciences over the last 4-5 years, empirical insights into the experiences of students at Colombo University should be of great interest to other Sri Lankan universities, which are increasingly trying to implement similar reforms.

## **2. Sample Profile of the Respondents**

The sample selected for the survey was purposive rather than random because of various constraints that were perceived in the planning of the survey within the given time-frame. However, the selection process ensured the appropriate recognition of important features such as gender, language proficiency and subject background of the students interviewed. The graduate category sample was divided into four groups, namely undergraduates, job-seeking graduates, self-employed and employed graduates.

Table 2.1 Sample specification by gender and categories

Medium of study	Female under-graduates	Male under-graduates	Female job seekers	Male job seekers	Female self-employed	Male self-employed	Female employed	Male employed
Sinhala	6	6	6	6	6	6	6	6
Tamil	6	6	6	6	4	8	6	6
English	3	3	2	2	3	1	3	3
Total Number of Interviewees: 48 Sinhala students/ 48 Tamil students/ 20 English medium students								

The sample of graduates was purposively selected from those who had completed their degree programme within the period of 1997-2003. The reason for this purposive selection was to get a thorough understanding of the successes and shortcomings of the new reforms that were introduced to the arts faculty curriculum in the year 1998. These reforms were introduced with the main aim of improving the employability of arts graduates and it has revolutionised the existing curriculum. The opinions of students about this new system can provide a starting-point for a better understanding of the skills and training most useful to equip arts graduates to compete in the job market later on. A comparison of the old and the new syllabuses is given below:

The aim of this categorisation was to identify the obstacles faced by graduates in the process of transition from university to work. These four categories are representative of the obvious stages that each graduate has to pass through in this process. The sample was further divided among three language categories to represent all graduates who pass out of the arts faculty having completed degrees in the Sinhala, Tamil or the English language. Finally, an equal gender balance was also ensured in the selection process.

Looking at the sample, it becomes obvious that there are English-medium undergraduates and graduates of other two media. The reasons for this are two-fold. The first is the meagre number of undergraduates who are brave enough to follow a degree study programme in the English medium<sup>2</sup>. The second was the difficulties faced in finding English-medium graduates for categories such as job-seeking and self-employed. This is because almost all of the English-medium graduates were employed (half-time or full-time) even during their undergraduate years. Finding self-employed graduates was generally extremely difficult, as most of the females (of Sinhala and Tamil-medium categories) seemed unwilling to take up self-employment. Only females in the English-medium category seemed to opt for self-employment. The reasons for this will be analysed later in this paper.

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<sup>2</sup> The University of Colombo has a policy that accommodates any undergraduate who wishes to follow any degree programme in the national languages or in the English language. However, this theory is put into practice on a superficial level owing to scarcity of lecturers who can hold lectures in the English medium. At most times, English-medium undergraduates are those who come from a background where they have had access to the English language well before they entered university.

**Table 2.2 Comparison of the old and the new systems of study at the Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo**

<b>The Old System</b>	<b>The New System</b>
Limited choice in the selection of courses	Emphasis on choice and diversity of courses
Limited flexibility in planning the academic programmes	Students can control their course load, duration of their courses etc
Inadequacy of common foundation (or core) in the education across disciplines	A strong foundation course structure for all undergraduates
Strong disciplinary boundaries The emphasis on depth of specialisation over breadth across disciplines	The possibility of multi-disciplinary courses, even inter-faculty courses Combination of specialisation with general distribution of courses
Difficulty of upgrading and changing syllabi	Courses flexible (only a brief outline needs to be approved, lecturer develops details alone)
Large classes	Smaller classes possible through alternate selection, repetition of courses, etc
Inadequate accountability of staff	Detailed course description binds lecturer and makes her/him accountable
Emphasis on rote learning, even absentee learning	Student participation and continuous assessment as significant features

Source: Parakrama, A. (1999). *Some Important Guidelines on the Course Unit System*, In: University of Colombo, Faculty of Arts, and Handbook for Undergraduates. Colombo.

### **3. Education and Employability**

The majority of Sinhala and Tamil-medium interviewees had chosen the arts stream because of the lack of choice of subjects at their Advanced Level Examination (A/L)<sup>3</sup>. These interviewees said that they faced 'regional constraints' in the selection of a stream of study and were sometimes forced to study arts subjects to enter university.

<sup>3</sup> The Advanced Level examination is the final exam done at the secondary school level to select students into the university. The students can select their streams of study i.e. Science, Mathematics, Accountancy, Arts, Languages etc through which they are selected to enter into university.

These regional constraints were the unavailability of subjects in any other stream other than arts and the scarcity of teachers qualified to teach science and mathematics subjects. These undergraduates and graduates also said that they had financial constraints within their families, which meant that their parents could not afford the extra tuition that is required to study these subjects. A gender differentiation should also be noted at this point, as it seemed that the majority of the females of the Sinhala and Tamil-medium categories had chosen arts subjects as they felt that teaching was the best career option for a girl. It appears that most of the undergraduates and the graduates in the Sinhala and the Tamil-medium categories were conforming to the gender-roles that were dictated to them by peers and society.

Although the vast majority of the English-medium interviewees were from leading schools in Colombo and other main cities in various districts such as Kandy and Kurunegala, there was a minority who came from rural backgrounds and schools. While most of their family backgrounds were not ones that constrained them in supporting any stream of study that they opted for in their A/L, 100% of the interviewees had opted for arts subjects as that was where their interests and enthusiasm lay. Their schools have had other A/L streams and both females and males have chosen to do arts subjects to enter into university.

The lack of choice that fashioned the selection of the stream of study of most undergraduates was overcome in the selection of subjects at the university, up to a point. Many had selected to study subjects that were either of interest to them (international relations, sociology etc) or those subjects that students were already familiar with from their A/L stage (geography, Islamic civilisation, economics, English etc). The selection of a special or a general degree programme at the end of the first year has led to another bottleneck among most of those who study in the Tamil and the English- mediums. For Tamil-medium undergraduates, subjects like political science, economics and international relations are the only options available if they want to specialise and for English- medium undergraduates the available options are sociology and English language & literature. If there are students who want to follow any of the other courses either in Tamil or in English for specialisation, they have to be granted the approval of the specific department. Even once the approval has been granted the students have to follow lectures in Sinhala, but are allowed to do their assessments in Tamil/English.

The reason for this is that the university cannot afford to hire lecturers who are competent in teaching various subjects in Tamil/English media. There is also the question of the incapacity of the existing junior faculty members who do not have a good command of the English language. It is only the senior faculty cadre who can attempt to teach at least in English as a link language to students of all media but the shouldering of this responsibility is not taken by any of the senior faculty except for those in sociology and English language and literature. The recognition of these incapacities have in no way reduced the frustration and the anger felt by students of all media who vehemently point that if some attempt is made by the existing faculty cadre, this situation can be overcome at least to a certain extent.

### **3.1 Opinion on the new course unit system**

There was a consensus among all respondents that the old system of syllabi was uninteresting. Those who had followed the old system, in all three language categories, said that a year-long academic period with only a paper-based exam at the end of each academic year did not kindle a stimulus among students to get really involved in what they studied. They also said that, since this system provided a lot of free time to arts students, they became labelled as those doing 'easy' subjects rather than 'difficult' subjects such as law, science or mathematics, which required the intense involvement of the student throughout the academic year. This poor opinion in academia that those who do arts are doing easy subjects was supported by the opinion existent in society that those who do arts are of a lower level of intellect than those who do other subjects like mathematics.

The introduction of the new system (popularly known as the Course Unit System) has been greatly welcomed by all arts-degree students. The undergraduates have said that the course unit system produces *creative* arts graduates, meaning that in the process of doing continuous assessment in an academic year, comprising written and oral assignments, research, presentations and take-home papers, the undergraduates have to use their creative abilities to the maximum.

Also, the previously-held poor perceptions of arts graduates has improved somewhat, as arts students have become hard-working, enthusiastic and confident and are also very busy during an academic year. They are no longer viewed as idling about in the university. This perception is also gradually seeping into society and

most people have now become aware that arts graduates do work just as substantial as that done by students of mathematics, law, or computer studies. These courses fall in line with the introduction of inter-faculty courses under the new system and add diversity and colour to the existing arts subjects. The arts subjects too have been diversified in keeping with the changes that are currently taking place in academic circles. These diversifications are further enhanced by interactive teaching methods, discussion classes and applied-skills training where applicable (which was mainly lacking in the old system).

Nonetheless, the new system has also received its fair share of criticism from undergraduates and graduates. Most of them say that they feel over-burdened with continuous assessment and even with all the changes, there is far too much attention paid to theory rather than applied skills. Many suggested the introduction of an internship component to final-year undergraduates doing either a special or a general degree. As most of the special students are nonetheless required to do a dissertation at the end of their special-study programme, they said that it would be far more interesting to do the dissertation during half of a year and in the other half of the year, to do an internship at an organisation. Also, most of the graduates who have followed the new system said that the knowledge they gain is wide rather than deep. This, they felt, was a disadvantage for their knowledge expansion. Taking these factors into consideration, it is clear that further reforms are also required to the new system of study.

### **3.2 Relevance of the degree programmes for employment**

The applicability of a degree programme to employment is relative. This relativity is dependent on the nature of employment a graduate is engaged in. In the narrow sense of professionalism in Sri Lanka, for those who do an arts degree in any medium of study, there is no professional sphere that can readily absorb them. Also, the arts degree that is received from university is mainly concerned with academic knowledge, often without consideration of applied skills or learning. There is no component in the arts degree which takes account of skills-development or vocational training.



However, the present arts degree includes the teaching of English to all undergraduates except for those who have been exempted from a placement examination that is compulsory to university entrance. The end-result of this is a certificate in English and this certificate, though secondary to the degree transcript, adds value to the undergraduate education.

Also, as graduates are equipped with the knowledge gained at foundation courses such as computer studies, mathematics, philosophy (e.g. identity, culture and politics), poverty analysis and social integration etc., it can be argued that these courses have broadened their knowledge-base. Complementing this knowledge is the experience graduates in the new system have got in presentation skills, report-writing, proposal-writing, dissertation-writing and research. These are covered in the methods of assessments in various course units under the new system. It was the view of all employed graduates that, while the subjects learnt at university would have been useful in engaging in academic study, even if a graduate does not go into academia, the experience they received better equips them to do their jobs.

The employed graduates were unanimous in saying that the university gave them a wealth of experience and gave them a view of society in general. All the interviewees said that doing the degree was an uphill task as the lecturers ensured that the students earned every point they scored. Therefore, graduates had cultivated perseverance, dedication, initiative and creativity that enables them to carry out their work successfully in whatever career they choose.

### **3.3 Job search and equal opportunities**

Undergraduates, except for English-medium interviewees, do not seem to be involved even in part-time employment. Also, it is not possible to consider even the employed undergraduates as those in transition. The inference here is that those who are in transition are those who are equipped with their arts degrees moving into the world of employment. What will be considered, therefore, are their experiences in applying for jobs, getting jobs and actually maintaining their jobs with the knowledge and skills acquired at the arts faculty.

## ***Applying for jobs***

The majority of the job-seekers, self-employed and employed graduates of all three categories had applied for jobs through paper advertisements or notices seen in the university notice boards etc. However, a large share of these graduates said that they did not even receive a letter of acknowledgement of their application from most organisations (mainly private sector). This factor had brought disappointment among many graduates about the value of their arts degree as opposed to those having other Sri Lankan degrees or foreign degrees. There was a general feeling that employers considered any degree other than an arts degree in Sri Lanka more favourable. However, employed graduates pointed out that once an arts graduate is given the opportunity to work, employers were quick to note that they were often more competent than most other graduates including foreign degree holders.

## ***Avenues through which jobs are found***

In finding employment, Sinhala and Tamil-medium graduates had followed different paths to those followed by their English-medium counterparts. Sinhala and Tamil-medium graduates said that they have acquired jobs through formal measures such as newspaper ads, facing competitive exams, formal interviews where their language capabilities, computer literacy and qualifications were scrutinised at length. Only a minority in this category had been able to acquire jobs through political affiliations or through the government-sponsored *Tharuna Aruna* or *Sarasavi Saviya* career guidance programmes for graduates.

The English-medium males and females who were employed had secured their jobs mostly through contacts that they had made during their undergraduate years. The majority had faced informal interviews and said that their qualifications were not really checked but their word was taken for being qualified. It was interesting to find out that no one had political affiliations or support from politicians. Also the majority had not even heard of *Tharuna Aruna* or *Sarasavi Saviya*. Therefore, it seems that being competent in English opens more doors for graduates than for those who are not so competent in English. However, the strength of those who have done their degrees in the English medium is their bi-lingual ability, an attribute that monolingual Sinhala and Tamil-medium graduates do not possess.

Another important characteristic of graduate employment was the professional qualifications that especially some of the English-medium female graduates had acquired (e.g. some of the female graduates are lawyers and the degree for them was a secondary qualification). Though it was a secondary qualification, each one considered it an asset in their line of work giving them an edge over others who had no degree qualification.

### **3.4 Employment option and expectations of 'decent work'**

In the analysis of job expectations of undergraduates and graduates, a distinct differentiation can again be made between the opinions of Sinhala and Tamil-medium categories and the English-medium category. This differentiation can be analysed on the basis of language aptitude and familiarity with computer usage as well as along gender lines. This however, does not mean that these three categories did not have similar opinions on certain issues, such as self-employment, which most arts graduates from all backgrounds do not seem to desire.

#### ***Sectoral preferences***

A majority of Sinhala and Tamil-medium interviewees have said that they prefer jobs in the public sector as such jobs guarantee a pension after the service has ended, provides job security and does not have the intense competition that exists in the private sector. This factor, in their opinions, made it possible for them to get into jobs in the public sector easily with their degree qualification rather than attempting to find a job in the private sector, which employed only those who are fluent in English and are computer-literate. Also, in general, almost all of Sinhala and Tamil-medium undergraduates and graduates were aiming for administrative work, lecturing at the university and other kinds of jobs that fall in line with their degree programme. They felt that it is advisable to wait as long as it takes to find employment that was worth their degree qualification.

English-medium undergraduates and graduates preferred private sector employment and envisaged no problems in attaining such employment as they all were fluent both in English and in computer usage. They also seemed to feel that the private sector suited their temperaments better than the bureaucratic, white-collar jobs in the public sector. Also, all the English-medium interviewees said that they

would readily accept any low position in a private-sector firm as they lacked the work experience to secure managerial positions in their first employment. Unlike those in the other two media, those who had studied in the English medium, did not stress that they want to find work that falls in line with what they have studied for the degree, saying that the degree only provides an academic qualification and in the private sector there is no place for academic work. However, they too seemed to prefer permanent employment on the whole, pointing out that, though NGOs are an option for part-time or contract-based work, it does not provide either the perks or the security that a private-sector job offers. They did not seem disheartened by the competition in the private sector, saying that though what they do may not fall in line with what they have learnt, the holding of a degree itself provides enough security and prestige in the private sector for promotions.

A distinct gender-based limitation was self-imposed in the categories of Sinhala and Tamil-medium female undergraduates and graduates, who felt that teaching was the best option available for females as it gives them time to look after family and children and also because it does not entail tedious working hours that are a characteristic of private-sector employment. Along these lines of thinking, the most desired position was that of a university lecturer. In the case of some of the English-medium female graduates too, teaching was considered as a secondary source of income rather than a permanent position. Most of these females however did not plan to teach academic subjects that they have studied at university, rather to teach subjects like literature, drama or music that have been their interests for a long time.

However, most of the English-medium females had done English language and literature as a subject and it has invariably contributed to the professional qualifications that they have acquired in order to teach these subjects. It is interesting to note that the sole English-medium self-employed male is also engaged in teaching drama and music. These findings therefore point to the fact that, in the job market of Sri Lanka, there is a lot of scope for graduates to take up teaching positions, be it private tuition or teaching in a school. This is because of the flexibility and social merit awarded to those who engage in teaching. This command of respect becomes doubled when a person has a degree to complement such teaching. Therefore, teaching has become a lucrative as well as an appropriate line of employment for females.

### ***Self-employment as an alternative option***

A large proportion of interviewees of all three categories did not seem to consider self-employment as an option for 'decent work' unless in a dire circumstance of not finding employment. There seem to be personal and social-value reasons for this rejection. On a personal level, arts graduates did not show an interest towards setting up any sort of business on their own. This may be because they lack both the knowledge and the experience that is required for such a venture; however, some of the Tamil self-employed males were involved in family-run businesses. Vocational training is not a component of the arts faculty curricula; therefore, interviewees do not seem to have even considered such an endeavour. The low social recognition given to those who are self-employed or to those who have received vocational training may be the reason for this reluctance to engage in self-employment.

In considering the prominent role that parents play in the life decisions of their children in Sri Lanka; the taking up of self-employment will actually be considered an insult to the degree qualification achieved. It is mainly this narrow opinion that has contributed the refusal of graduates to acknowledge self-employment as decent work. The effort that has to be put to building up self-employment - poor financial support, no experience, having to face risks and challenges - makes self-employment unattractive to graduates in such a social set-up.

## **4. Conclusions**

This study, carried out using qualitative techniques, has dealt with a number of issues relating to the careers of university graduates, starting with their pre-university educational background and looking at their experience of finding employment. What is evident from the data is that arts graduates, in particular, those who have completed a general arts degree, experience serious difficulties in finding employment after graduation. Given the fact that most graduates are already in their late 20s, the lack of prospects for finding desirable employment without further delay is a major source of frustration and disillusionment. It is significant that many male undergraduates opt for a general degree in order to shorten the period of their stay

in the university. But this then has negative outcomes as general degree graduates find it harder to find employment, making their situation worse in the employment market.

Another important aspect of undergraduate education is that general arts graduates are often the least motivated, partly because of the lack of future prospects for them. These graduates pass out as the most ill-equipped to meet the challenges of the employment market. The higher rates of unemployment among them are at least partly a reflection of this state of affairs. As discussed earlier, many arts students have ended up in the arts stream by default. Their schools did not offer them any option because of the lack of facilities for teaching other subjects. Many such students would have moved into another stream if they had the opportunity. On the other hand, a sizeable proportion of arts students have deliberately chosen their subjects out of their own interest and commitment. These are the most academically and socially-orientated students, who deserve encouragement and support. These are the students who are likely to make a significant contribution to the development of liberal arts disciplines within and outside the university.

Two other issues relating to undergraduate education have been touched on: a) the **medium of instruction** and b) higher education reforms. As for the first issue, the most widely held view is that the replacement of *swabasha* (national languages) with English is not feasible or acceptable as most students entering the university from rural areas do not have even a basic knowledge of English and also, teaching in English will hamper their learning and progress. On the other hand, all respondents recognise the importance of English, both in education and employment. They strongly believe that students should have the opportunity to learn English during their undergraduate years and that they do not think they have this opportunity today due to the shortcomings of the English teaching programme at present.

Another issue that is critically important is the position of the Tamil medium. The Tamil medium was introduced to the arts faculty in the early 1980s due to the strong demand from displaced students in the north and east. Steps were taken to introduce Tamil-medium instruction without adequate resources and this situation has not improved since then though the number of students has increased substantially over the same period. Today, Tamil-medium students have many complaints regarding their studies. The lack of qualified

teachers, the lack of books, unavailability of certain important and popular courses in the Tamil medium, the lack of opportunity to specialise in certain fields while Sinhala-medium students experience no such restrictions.

Many Tamil-medium students perceive this situation as unfair discrimination and it is certainly not a healthy development in view of the current ethnic crisis in the country. On the other hand, this is an issue that cannot be easily resolved because of resource and practical constraints, but needs to be addressed on a priority basis. Introduction of the English medium as a link language of study is the popular option at present, although probably more among Tamil-medium students, whose options are otherwise much more limited. But the biggest surprise in the views of undergraduates and graduates, including those who are studying in the English medium, was the opposition to providing the degree only in the English medium. The primary arguments supporting this view were:

1. Considering the university is a national one, the degree should be given in the national languages, thereby giving the opportunity for those who come from the length and breadth of the country to qualify.
2. The university does not have the human and other resources to make a shift to English medium, as the majority of the junior faculty cannot teach in English except for some of the senior faculty members.

As for **university education reforms**, once again there is virtual unanimity that reforms are needed. There is however no agreement as to what kind of changes should be introduced. Respondents in general feel that more effective teaching methods should be adopted (e.g. using power point presentations, video showing etc). Most of them expressed strong opposition to conventional teaching methods such as dictating notes by lecturers.

Many respondents wish to have opportunities to establish contact with the world of work while they are still in the university. Short-term internships with outside institutions during vacations would address this issue, if properly planned and implemented. There is also the general view that skill development should be part and parcel of university education, in particular, in the area of computing. This could be linked to internships as a requirement of the final year programme, as suggested earlier.

It is significant that **employment aspirations** of undergraduates and graduates have not changed much over the years in spite of the harsh realities arts graduates face when they leave university. Most of the graduates wish to have white-collar jobs in the state sector, though they are willing to accept similar jobs in the private sector. They are aware that there are not many jobs to go around in the state sector. They are also aware that they are not readily accepted in the private sector.

They feel that the private sector does not want to recruit arts graduates. This situation leaves arts graduates with not much of a choice. Since they cannot wait indefinitely for jobs, many tend to look for at least some form of self-employment. Even here, they tend to engage in activities that are in keeping with their preferences. For instance, most of the self-employed graduates are occupied in private teaching. It is widely held that self-employment is preferred to being unemployed as a transitory phase, until they find regular employment in the public sector which usually ensures job security and offers old age pension, in addition to social prestige to those who occupy state-sector jobs.

The sample of respondents was drawn from the main metropolitan university in the country. Undergraduates in Colombo, if they wish, could have access to many resources outside the university, to acquire various skills and other qualifications. Yet, not all undergraduates make use of these opportunities because of poverty, but often also indifference. More awareness-raising on such opportunities combined with support programmes for students from a more disadvantaged background, could go a long way to improving the exposure of students to additional learning experiences.

Given the fact that even the graduates drawn from the University of Colombo in general are experiencing serious problems in finding employment, one is justified in concluding that the problem of graduate employment in the country is a major structural problem. This problem is partly related to the general education system, and partly related to the educational programme of the university. No serious attempt has been made to address these structural problems, in keeping with the changes that have taken place in the employment market. The present employment market is not ready to accommodate arts graduates in the way that arts graduates expect or desire. Rapid expansion of state-funded university education over



the last two decades, and in particular, the establishment of provincial universities, has only contributed to an aggregation of the problem.

The above issue adversely affects the lives of thousands of young people, in particular those from underprivileged rural backgrounds. Growing unrest and disillusionment among educated youth with high social aspirations contributes to social and political unrest at a time when what is most needed is social and political stability. The issue is also relevant from a broader human resource development point of view. In other words, how to make use of the talents and capacities of young people for their own advantage as well as for the benefit of the country is a question of critical importance.

However, there appears to be no serious policy debate or policy development aimed at addressing the issue. Policy development leading to systematic programmatic interventions can no longer be postponed if we are to avert serious consequences of a widening gap between a large segment of the educated young population in the country and the fast changing local employment market.

However, it is also important to keep in mind that the identified problems of graduate education are rooted in wider educational structures and processes, and cannot be exclusively addressed within the university system alone. While curricular reforms, skill development programmes, and internships for undergraduates outside the University can be very useful in improving the employability of arts students, policy interventions at school level are critical. In fact, the development of skills and basic competencies should take place within the general education system so that new entrants to the university come prepared to face the challenges of higher education.

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## **II. Malaysian Youth in Transition: Between government policies and grassroots aspirations**

*Rashila Ramli and Nor Azizan Idris*

### **1. Introduction**

Any country which is concerned with its development will focus on its human resources. The development of human resources calls for the deployment of programmes that will produce skilled labour in various capacities for numerous sectors. One of the targeted groups will be the youth of the country. As a rapidly developing country, Malaysia is no exception. The government recognises the need to harness the potential creative energy of young people. With a keen eye on its economic future and in an attempt to sustain its social stability, the country is galvanising and moulding young people with the principles and character to carry on the momentum of success. Policies and programmes have been designed to engage youth in national development. The goal of the country is to become a developed nation by 2020.

From another perspective, young people today face many more new challenges. They also have more choices and information. Generally, they enjoy a higher level of affluence and tend to be technologically savvy. However, while this profile may fit urban youth, there is a large segment of rural youth in Asia whose basic needs are not met. The problems of drug and substance abuse, human trafficking, and pornography are closely associated with youth, both in the urban and rural areas. The transition faced by youth is a concern to many actors, especially governments and non-governmental organizations. However, to handle these problems, it is important to know the aspirations of youth.

In order to shed light on Malaysian youth in transition, this paper takes a two-fold approach. First, it seeks to identify policies and programs initiated by the Malaysian government for the development of youth based on secondary sources; and second, to hear narratives of youth leaders with regards to their aspirations for their future, and thirdly to explore the usage of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) among urban youth.

## 2. Malaysian Backdrop

Malaysia's socio-political history is framed by ethnic, religious and cultural differentiations. As of 2000, the population of about 23.3 million, with a literacy rate of about 84%, comprises three major groups – Malays (*Bumiputera*, which literally means 'sons of the soil'), Chinese and Indians. About 43% of its population is rural. The *Bumiputera* are further segmented into sub-groups such as the Malays predominant in West Malaysia, and the Melanaus, Bajaus, Kadazans, Iban and Muruts in Sabah and Sarawak. The Chinese likewise have their sub-groups based on clan identities such as Hokkien, Cantonese, Teochew, Hakka and Hainanese. Sub-groups in the Indian community are the Malayalees, Punjabis, Tamils and Bengalis. The existence of diverse cultural and religious beliefs poses a challenge for the Malaysian government to maintain peace and stability in order to develop the country. From 1957 to 1969, the country experienced teething problems in nation-building. An ethnic riot took place in 1969 because of socio-economic imbalances between Malays and Chinese. The government of the day had to rethink their development strategy in order to cater for the needs of a multi-ethnic society and alleviate the growing income disparity.

In order to address the problem, the New Economic Policy (1971-1990) was introduced with two main objectives: to eradicate poverty, and to restructure society in order to remove the identification of the ethnic groups with certain economic functions. This twenty-year plan envisaged a redistribution of wealth based on growth where the indigenous people or the *Bumiputera* would own 30% of equity shares by the year 1990. The restructuring of society includes affirmative action on behalf of the deprived indigenous Malays. Examples of these preferences are access to education, employment and economic subsidies in some sectors. Realising that the development of a country depends largely on a good workforce, emphasis was given to education. The basic thrust of this policy persists today. Despite its shortcomings, the policy has contributed positively to national unity and economic prosperity in the last 30 years (Faaland, Parkinson & Saniman 1990 and Norhashimah Mohd Yassin 1996). Two decades of sustained economic growth in Malaysia has resulted in a significant reduction of poverty throughout the country. The national incidence of poverty dropped from 32.1% in 1980 to 6.8% in 1997, with a decrease from 16.3% to 2.4% in urban areas and from 39.5% to 11.8% in rural areas over the same period (Economic Planning Unit 1999).



One group of citizens singled out by the government is youth. In Malaysia, organisations define youth as young Malaysians aged between 15 and 40 years old. However, in the National Youth Policy which was formulated in 1985 and revised in 1995, the main target of its programmes is young people in the age bracket of 15-25 years old. The youth of Malaysia have a critical role to play in the country's effort to achieve the status of a fully developed country by the year 2020. Malaysia's development plan, known as Vision 2020, aims to develop all aspects of the country including natural justice, political stability, systems of government, quality of life, social and spiritual values and national pride and confidence.

As Malaysia's GDP grew at an average rate of 8.4% from 1991 to 1997, young people were considered major contributors to economic success. Rapid economic growth resulted in ample employment opportunities that contributed to higher income and improved quality of life, especially among the poor.

### **3. National Programs for Malaysian Youth**

According to the organisers of INFOSOC Malaysia 2003 (a conference organized by the National IT Council of Malaysia), there are more than one billion young men and women in the world today and this number will increase to 1.2 billion in the next decade. Furthermore, apart from Singapore, ASEAN countries have a high proportion of youth (18.9%).

The Malaysian national government has demonstrated its commitment to youth through an increase in funds for youth and development. The allocated budget for youth programmes rose from RM1.05 billion under the Sixth Malaysian Plan to RM2.74 billion under the Seventh Malaysian Plan (a five-year planning document issued by the government) that began in 1996. Despite this financial commitment, however, youth remains one of the most vulnerable groups in society. Such vulnerability was demonstrated by the impact of Malaysia's recent economic recession particularly on youth (ESCAP 2002).

In 2000, there were 10.1 million Malaysians aged 15 to 40 years, an increase of 2.7 million since 1991. The proportion of those aged 15 to 24 increased from 18.8% to approximately 19.9% from 1991 to 2000. The 25 to 40 year age group grew slightly from 23.4%

to approximately 23.6% of the total population in those years. Malaysia's corresponding total populations for 1991 and 2000 were 17.6 million and 23.2 million inhabitants, respectively. Technically, *Bumiputera* formed the majority of the youth population at 57.9%. Of that majority, 47.2% of young people were Malay *Bumiputera* and 10.7% were non-Malay *Bumiputera*. Of the remaining 52.8% of youth, 24.9% were Chinese, 7% were Indian, 7% were non-citizens of Malaysia, and 3.2% belong to other groups (ESCAP 2002:5).

Unfortunately, 67.5% of the unemployed in Malaysia in the year 2000 were young people (National Census 2000). Further demographic detail shows that the majority of those aged 15 to 24 years old and 25 to 40 years old lived in urban areas at 53.5% and 56.5% respectively. There were equal proportions of males and females in both age groups in rural and urban areas. Those who live in the rural areas tend to be handicapped by limited access to education and ICT facilities, and lack of job and employment opportunities. To add to the problem, at least 100,000 leave school annually and enter the labour force. The economy is unable to absorb these new entrants to the labour force, who are less skilled and experienced, and this explains why there is a high preponderance of youth among the unemployed. However, given the economic growth of the country, their unemployment is often transitional.

The well-being of youth is very high priority on the national agenda. Youth policy is an important instrument for promoting greater participation of young people in determining the direction of development. Identification of the current needs of young people and shaping the programmes that affect them is essential to the effective formulation and implementation of policy in which youth can play a positive and active role.

In order to develop youth's potential, the Malaysian government has embarked on a multi-dimensional approach to youth development. Cohesion across the approach to youth is built by introducing a national ideology, called *Rukun Negara*, the creation of the National Education Policy, and the emphasis on multi-level social interactive programs within the context of the National Youth Policy.

*Rukun Negara* consists of five principles that are meant to guide citizens in their interaction with one another and with the state. The five principles include belief in God, loyalty to king and country, suprem-

acy of the constitution, the rule of the law, and good morality and ethics. These five principles form the basis of Malaysian core values. These core values link the interaction between the state and citizens, and among citizens of the country. These principles are established so as to instil a sense of belonging and loyalty among the diverse ethnic groups, especially the younger generation of Malaysians. *Rukun Negara* conceptualised the type of society that Malaysia should aspire to; achieving a greater unity of all her people; maintaining a democratic way of life; creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared; ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions; building a progressive society orientated to modern science and technology (Loo 2003).

Before independence in 1957, there were three systems of education: the vernacular Malay, Chinese and Indian school system, the English school (public and private) and the religious schools. The differences in terms of objectives, curriculum, and emphasis did not lead toward greater unity among the people. Therefore, upon independence, the Ministry of Education addressed the situation and made several recommendations. Based on the Razak Report (1956) and Rahman Report (1961), the National Education Policy was formulated. The salient items within this policy which have a direct bearing on creating unity among the younger generation are: the usage of the Malay language as the medium of instruction; the utilisation of a standard curriculum for all schools; and the provision of facilities for all students to continue schooling up to secondary level.

The implementation of the Malay language as the national language gave rise to debate. On one hand, the government sees the language as a unifying factor for all communication among the citizens. On the other hand, some sections of society see the move as denying the growth of different cultures and languages in society. Despite differences in opinion, the policy has been implemented for over 20 years. Malay has grown into a language which is widely used not only for day-to-day communications but also within professional and business circles. However, the government also recognises the need to foster usage of different languages especially the English language. Furthermore, the Chinese and Tamil schools still continue to operate. At present, there are also private schools, colleges and universities. Since the cost of education has risen, the government has established the National Education Fund to be accessed by students from all ethnic groups. In 2003, a total of RM2 billion was allocated for the fund.

For young people in schools, there are many co-curriculum activities, promoted either through the school system or by many non-governmental organizations. Activities such as cross-country running, camping, and various sports are seen as means of promoting cohesion and an active lifestyle among the youth. Many organisations such as the boy scouts, girl guides, Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance have members from diverse ethnic backgrounds. As for the older youth (age 26-40), many join sports and welfare organisations. The recent campaign to stop the war against Iraq was made possible by active participation of NGOs of all ethnic groups across the nation. The media plays a very important role in promoting youth activities in Malaysia. As a source of information for the public, the media (both electronic and print) actively promotes inquiry among youth on domestic and foreign news.

#### **4. The National Youth Policy**

Within the government, the Ministry of Youth and Sports coordinates the national youth policy of Malaysia in cooperation with other youth-serving ministries and youth organisations, especially in partnership with the Malaysian Youth Council, which is the principal non-governmental youth coordinating body. The MYC currently has 35 national and state youth-affiliated organisations including student organisations, socio-economic organisations, religious organisations, uniformed organisations and state youth councils. For example, the socio-economic organisations include the Federal Land Development Authority (FELDA) Youth Council involving youth living on plantations; the 4B Youth Movement; the Tamil Bell Youth Club; and the Young Malaysians Movement including a mix of ethnicities. The religious organisations that form part of the MYC are the Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia, the Malaysian Hindu Youth Organization, the Young Buddhist Association of Malaysia, the Young Christian Workers, the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Methodist Fellowship of Malaysia and Puteri Islam. The government recognises the right of national youth movements to organise on a non-governmental basis for political and non-political purposes.

Acknowledging the critical importance of children and youth, Malaysia has emphasised at the national level the training of youth to upgrade their skill in various job categories and entrepreneurship, has increased their participation in sports and cultural activities and has

developed their leadership qualities as well as providing them with the skills needed to increase their contribution to nation-building. The National Youth Policy was first introduced in 1985. It was replaced by the Youth Development Policy in 1997 following a study on youth problems commissioned by the Ministry of Youth and Sports in 1994. Under this policy, six strategies were formulated:

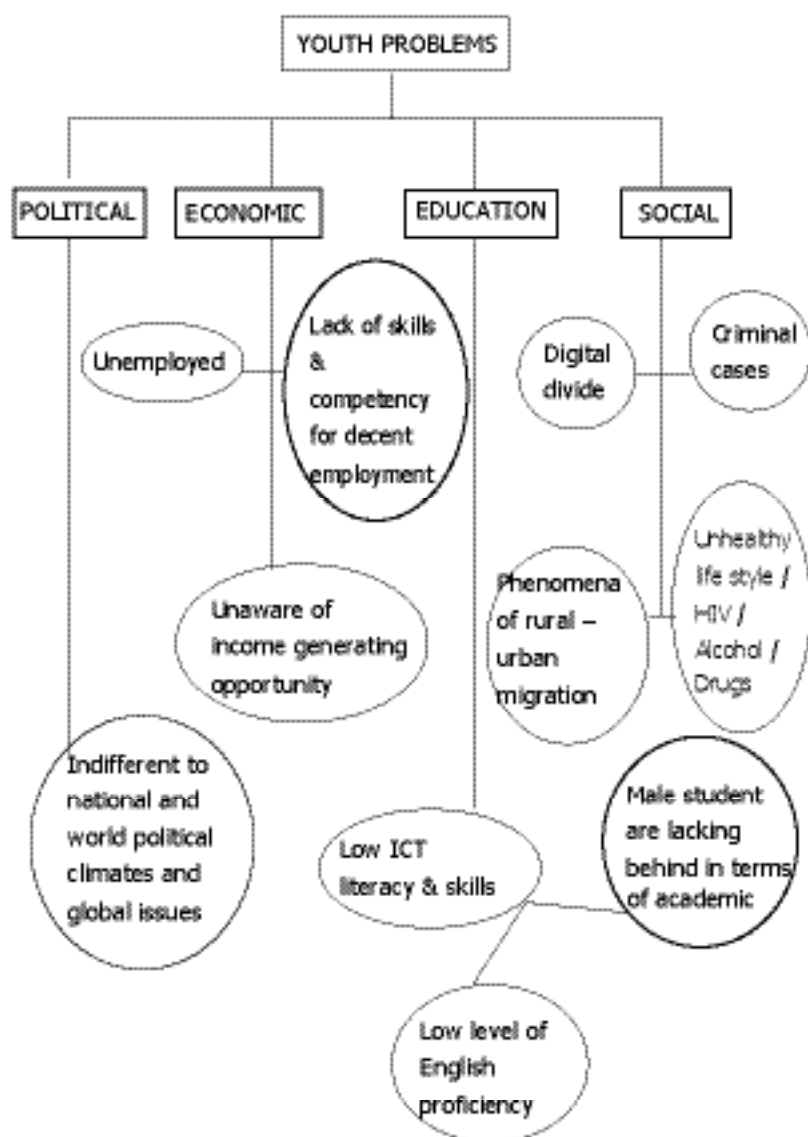
- To increase effort toward knowledge accumulation
- To instil appropriate values and positive attitudes
- To equip youth with vocational skills and entrepreneurial spirit
- To improve physical infrastructure
- To encourage healthy social interaction
- To build cooperation between youth groups and government agencies.

The reason for such strategies is to address the problems faced by Malaysian youth, as independent surveys and media reports have brought to light the disturbing news that many young people appear to lack the drive to be a part of Malaysia's success story. Instead, many were falling victim to various social ills. Youth may encounter difficulties in adjusting to new situations. The majority of social problems are related to behaviour, life-style or sexuality<sup>1</sup>. Promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, running away from home, delinquency and substance abuse are problems that often occur among young people. It is generally believed that such problems have escalated because of changing familial structures, which result from the migration of young men and women from rural to urban areas. Other contributing factors are believed to be exposure to mass media that comes with the growth of communication technology.

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<sup>1</sup> For example, the majority of the HIV and AIDS case occurred among males at 95.4% and 93.6% respectively. Young people have been most affected by the epidemic. Those aged 20 to 29 years and aged 30 to 39 years accounted for 39.3% and 43.1% of all HIV cases and 21.9% and 43.9% of all AIDS cases, respectively (ESCAP 2002:41).

**Figure. 4.1** Categorisation of youth problems in Malaysia



Source: [http://www.cornerstone-msc.net/infosoc2003/main\\_print.cfm](http://www.cornerstone-msc.net/infosoc2003/main_print.cfm)

Figure 4.1 depicts the various problems faced by Malaysian youth. These problems need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner. There has to be cooperation between the various ministries, NGOs, youth organizations, educational institutions and parents/guardians.

Between 1995 and 2000, the 15-24 years cohort has increased by 1.6% to a total of 4.37 million or 17.5% of the country's population. The 8<sup>th</sup> Malaysian Plan indicates that while 2.3 million youth have joined the workforce, there is an estimated 7.8% who are unemployed. Some may be temporarily unemployed (between jobs) while others may be waiting for the start of an academic programme either in a local or private institution.

Within the sectors that are employing Malaysian youth, there has been a shift towards the professional, technical and managerial sectors compared to the agricultural and related fields. The percentage of youth working in the sales and service sectors has increased from 10.5% and 9.1% in 1995 to 10.5% and 11% in 2000 respectively. There is a slightly higher percentage of youth working in the urban areas (52.4%) compared to the rural areas (47.6%), because there are more job opportunities in urban areas. The government is also establishing community colleges for those who want to further their education while working. There is also a trend of increasing mechanisation on agricultural land, thus requiring less manual labour. In order to address the problem of youth unemployment, the government has created programmes where young graduates could register with government appointed agencies or training centres in order to enable them to learn complementary skills. Furthermore, they are given a small monthly allowance of RM500.00 (USD120.00) while they are completing their programs or courses in these centres.

To implement the National Youth Development Policy, the government formulated the following strategies: efforts to create positive and creative attitudes and values; preparing youth by giving vocational and other training and entrepreneurial knowledge; engaging youth in volunteer activities thus preparing them for future responsibilities; encouraging partnership and co-operation between government agencies, the private sector, and non-governmental organisation on youth issues.

At the institutional level, by strengthening the institution of the family and by stressing the role of parents, Malaysia has endeavoured to inculcate moral and spiritual values in young people. Malaysia has

embarked on a development programme for youth called *rakan muda*. It has been implemented with the close collaboration of government agencies, the private sector and NGOs.

In order to further implement the National Youth Policy, the Malaysian Government has initiated many programmes such as the National Social Service Program. This programme attempts to combine leadership training and recreational activities. A total of 3,100 youth had participated in the program by 2000. Another programme called *Jalur Gemilang* program involved 22,000 youth. The organisers of this programme invited well-known speakers to give motivational talks to enhance patriotism among young people. Another programme is called the *Program Bela Negara* (National Defence Program). This programme was created in order to educate youth on the issue of the financial crisis that had hit Southeast Asia in 1997. The goal was to empower Malaysian youth with information and inculcate national pride that would allow them to enhance their productivity and usage of local products. Other programmes initiated by the government focus on the development of skills, entrepreneurship, a healthy lifestyle, and sports activities.

The latest programme is called the National Service Program. It was endorsed by the cabinet in 2002. This programme is different from the National Social Service Programme and the National Service Programme established in Thailand and Singapore. This program has three objectives:

- To inculcate patriotism
- To overcome racial polarisation
- To instil character-building

This programme was implemented in February 2004. There were seven intakes which coincided with the availability of venues at universities and teacher-training colleges. The programme lasts for 3 months. Approximately 100,000 youths (new school leavers) took part in the programme which is estimated to cost RM 600 million. The curriculum is divided into three parts: one month of military training, one month of civic consciousness and character-building, and the final month on community services. The programme is meant to be fun, culturally sensitive, and not overly religious. The selection will be reflective of the racial composition – Malay 53%, other *Bumiputera* and others 13%, Chinese 26% and Indian 7%. It will also reflect gender – male 50.5%, and female 49.5%. All states and districts



will also be represented in the programme (SEDAR 2003). The selection will be done randomly by computers at the Department of Registration. The programme will target new school leavers who may be looking for employment, or those who are considering post secondary education.

Many actors such as activists, commentators as well as policy makers have raised concerns about the programme. First, many questioned whether a three-month stint will be sufficient to achieve the three objectives stated earlier. Second, opposition parties expressed their concern about the courses on patriotism. They indicated that patriotism should not be equated with supporting the incumbent government. Non-Muslim parents also expressed fear that the religious component will turn out to be an emphasis on Islam. The third major concern expressed by parents is the possible disruption of their children's other studies. Safety is also a concern, especially if weapons-training is included in the curriculum. Finally, there is the question of the transparency of the selection process. Will those who have access to channels of power be exempted from the programme?

Although there were some reservations about this programme, surprisingly, in a survey conducted by the National Service Department, a majority of the pioneer batch of trainees supported this programme. According to the survey, 86% of the respondents felt that National Service had increased understanding between participants of different races and religions, and 78% said it had enhanced their love for the country. 83% thought the programme had improved their discipline and resilience and 75% believed National Service could help foster unity among the people. In addition, 87% of the trainees felt they had gained invaluable experience and learned new skills; 79% felt the programme had developed their leadership skills; 77% said it had taught them the importance of voluntary work; and, 76% said they had gained the spirit and patriotism to defend their country (*New Straits Times* May 25, 2004).

Another aspect of the Malaysian government approach to youth development is to encourage the participation of young people at international level. There have been various initiatives in fostering networks with Commonwealth states, ASEAN members, Japan and South Korea in order to create opportunities for young people to develop and upgrade their leadership skills. Exchange programmes such as Asia Youth Ship has been attended by at least 550 youth leaders. In relation to this, Malaysian Youth leaders have been elected

to international youth bodies such as Asian Youth Council, World Assembly of Youth (WAY) and World Assembly of Muslim Youth. In fact, from 1994, the presidency of WAY was held by a Malaysian for four years. An international presence is considered important especially in the uncertain world of today. Youth interactions can bridge the gap caused by cultural and religious differences.

The Malaysian Government has placed special emphasis on the training of its youth. The numerous programmes and the budget allocated for the programmes are strong indications of the government's commitment to developing the potential of the country's human resources.

## **5. View from the Grassroots**

A study was conducted by the authors in 2003 in which 55 youth leaders were interviewed to ascertain their views on problems faced by youth in their community, the reasons for the problems and their aspirations as youth leaders. These intensive interviews were conducted between the months of July and September, 2003. Tapes were then transcribed; from the transcriptions, analysis was conducted to elucidate responses to the three main questions.

Youth leaders identified a number of problems faced by youth in their communities. Some of the major problems are as follows: indifference to programmes catering for their interests, involvement in drugs and illegal motorbike racing, too materialistic, aimlessness and irresponsibility. In most of the cases, the problems are related to the fact that youth are easily influenced by their peer group. For instance, involvement in drugs is among the most pressing problems the government has to tackle. In 1999, the National Drug Information System (NADI) reported 35,359 drug users in the country. Of this total, the 16 to 24 year age group made up 28.4% while the 13 to 24 year age group made up 28.8%. Of the new drug users traced in 1999, 97.6% were male, 70.6% were Malay, and 93.7% were people aged below 40 years (ESCAP 2002:44-45).

These youth leaders cited three main sources of problems. First, young people with problems tend to lack knowledge. They did not complete their education, and thus have limited job opportunities. Second, they have not cultivated a love for knowledge or reading, so

they have limited information on current events as well as the training opportunities provided by many public or private organisations. Finally, those who are well-off become too materialistic and are not able to contribute constructively toward the development of the nation.

These youth leaders would like to see more young people participating in productive activities, regardless of who the organisers might be. They are concerned that young people might tend to shy away from activities organised by different government agencies. Second, they would like to see youth stay away from unhealthy lifestyles such as promiscuous activities, late-night outings, and drug usage. Instead, they would like to see youth building themselves up physically and mentally. Third, these youth leaders would like to see the digital divide between those living in the urban and rural areas addressed by the government. The disadvantages faced by rural youth will increase if the digital divide, as well as the problem of rural-urban migration, is not solved. In another study (completed in June 2000) by the National Information Technology Council (NITC) found that the digital divide provides a valid cause for concern. Findings of the study reveal that 46% of secondary schools in Malaysia do not have access to computer facilities. 66% of secondary schools do not have access to the internet (Tyndall 2002:191). Finally, youth leaders argue that the various programs initiated by government are not reaching the intended target group.

Voices from the grassroots echo the problems listed by the United Nations Youth Agenda (<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unyin/agenda.htm>). Some of the problems are as follows:

- Limited resources available for funding youth programmes and activities.
- Economic and social conditions
- Gender discrimination
- Insecure livelihoods
- High levels of youth unemployment
- Armed conflict and confrontation
- Ethnic prejudice
- Social ills and exclusion
- Rejection of the values of adult society
- Homelessness
- Continuing deterioration of the global environment
- Increasing incidence of disease, and substance abuse

- Hunger and malnutrition; and
- Inadequate opportunity for education and training.

While the government has created a large number of programmes, those programmes may not be fulfilling the needs of young people. It is important to acknowledge grassroots aspirations expressed by the youth leaders.

## **6. The Role of ICT in the Lives of Malaysian Youth**

The internet has become a main source of information and exchange for young people within Malaysia as well as internationally. Cyber cafes, well-equipped with personal computers, have sprung up in most urban areas, especially in the Klang Valley and close to colleges. They provide a cheap means of surfing the net for students and others who cannot afford a computer.

State-of-the-art telecommunications and information technology facilities in Malaysia have provided easy access to the internet. Malaysia's telecommunications system received a boost in 1996 with the launching of the country's own satellites, Malaysia East Asia Satellite (MEASAT) and 2. The satellites provide a high capacity, broadband, digital infrastructure to support mass information technology and multimedia operations. For example, the Eighth Malaysia Plan (2001-2005) notes that more than half (53.6%) of internet subscribers are concentrated in the Klang Valley, followed by 9% in Johor and 7% in Penang. KL has the highest penetration rate with 104 subscribers per 1,000 of the population, followed by Selangor and Penang with 85 and 52 respectively (Loo 2003:190). At present, there is no national youth development strategy to tap the potential of the young technopreneurs/professional (20-30 years) for nation-building. Therefore, this research project was initiated to explore the usage of ICT among urban youth.

**Table 6.1 Age of respondents**

<b>Age</b>	<b>%</b>
18-25	58.5
26-35	33.3
36-45	7.3
46 above	0.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that all respondents are in the productive age group. They are also those who will suffer from unemployment if there is an economic downturn. This is the target group that comprises the main bulk of Malaysia's human resources. The 18-25 age cohort is the group which is known to be ICT savvy.

The sample indicated that they use the computer to engage in word processing, surf the internet for information, and to e-mail their colleagues. A smaller number of respondents use it for chatting and programming. A much smaller number also shop via the virtual media. Table 6.2 indicates the percentage of users in each category related to their usage of the computer.

**Table 6.2 Reasons related to usage of computer (%)**

<b>Activities</b>	<b>%</b>
Word Processing	35.0
Graphic drawing	0.8
Surfing the Internet	39.0
Shopping	1.6
Chatting	3.3
E-mail	10.6
Programming	9.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 6.3 shows the amount of time young people spend in front of the computer. In this purposive sample, it is apparent that respondents tend to fall into two categories: those who use computers for two to five hours and those who use them for more than ten hours. As these are students and young professionals, their usage of computers related to activities such as surfing the internet and word

processing. A study by Musa and Narimah (1999) also noted that the most common activities of Malaysian students in using the internet were chatting, e-mailing and playing games.

**Table 6.3 Usage hours on computer per week**

Hours per week	%
< 2 hours	13.8
2-5 hours	35.0
5-10 hours	18.7
> 10 hours	32.5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The medium represents a channel for information output as well as input. Tables 6.4 and 6.5 are results from a cross-tabulation between two variables.

**Table 6.4 Reason for computer usage and age group**

		Age				Total
		18-25	26-35	36-45	>46	
<b>Reasons for Computer Usage</b>	Programming	6.9%	17.1%			9.8%
	E-mail	12.5%	4.9%	22.2%		10.6%
	Chatting/Telephone	2.8%	4.9%			3.3%
	Shopping	1.4%	2.4%			1.6%
	<b>Surfing Internet for information</b>	<b>44.4%</b>	<b>34.1%</b>	<b>22.2%</b>		<b>39.0%</b>
	Graphic work		2.4%			.8%
	Word processing	31.9%	34.1%	55.6%		35.0%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

In Table 6.4, it is interesting to note that in the two most frequently cited activities there is an inverse relationship with age. Those in the younger age group tend to surf the internet much longer than the older age cohort. They look for various kinds of information. Some may want to increase their knowledge in a field of interest. Some may be trying to purchase something that can be bought cheaper in a foreign land. Credit cards have facilitated online shopping.

Those between 36-45 years old tend to spend their time word-processing. This group of young professionals is engrossed in trying

to advance their careers. An in-depth discussion with several of the respondents revealed that there is a need to complete job assignment in a multiple-task situation. The usage of the computer for word-processing was indispensable to the respondents who work.

Results of cross-tabulation between education level and computer usage time by youth reveals an expected trend (Table 5). With increased levels of education, computer usage also increases.

**Table 6.5 Computer time usage and education**

		Education Level				Total
		SPM	STPM	Diploma	University	
Computer Usage Time per Week	> 10 hours	24.1%	4.8%	30.0%	49.1%	32.5%
	5<10 hours	24.1%	19.0%	20.0%	15.1%	18.7%
	2<5 hours	34.5%	47.6%	40.0%	28.3%	35.0%
	< 2 hours	17.2%	28.6%	10.0%	7.5%	13.8%
<b>Total</b>		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Note: SPM stands for Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia. This is a national exam equivalent to O Level. STPM stands for Sijil Tinggi Pelajaran Malaysia, another national examination equivalent to A Level.

Young people become more computer-dependent in completing their activities. An in-depth interview with a teacher revealed that computers have allowed her to have flexibility in her work schedule. Computer technology gives a flexibility which allows her to work from home without being counted as absent from the office. This young professional can manage her career and her home with the assistance of technology. Developments in telecommunications such as the SMS (Short Message System) have allowed parents to keep in touch with their teenagers on a more frequent basis. These gadgets can be regarded as a blessing in disguise despite the possible high cost of maintenance such as telephone bills, prepaid cards, prepaid internet cards, and other telecommunication services.

The third part of the questionnaire assesses the thoughts of youth on a number of issues such as the rural-urban divide, political leanings as well as the influence of the internet. It is important to discover the thoughts of young people on this issue because youth are considered

future leaders of the nation.

**Table 6.6 Do you agree that the gap between the rich and the poor has widened because of internet?**

	%
Strongly Disagree	8.1
Disagree	37.4
Neutral	35.0
Agree	14.6
Strongly Agree	4.9
Total	100.0

Tables 6.6-6.10 are results based on Likert scale answers. In Table 6, 19.5% indicate that they agree with the statement that the internet has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. There is also a large group of respondents who are uncertain. One can interpret this finding by saying that young people in urban Kuala Lumpur may not have enough knowledge of their rural counterparts' lifestyle. In general, Malaysian youth who were born after 1970s grew up in the period when the country enjoyed tremendous economic growth and political stability.

Results from Tables 6.7 and 6.8 indicate that young people believe information obtained by using the internet is helpful to them. The range of information covers sports, news, education, entertainment and religion. While some respondents feel that the information can be against their culture, beliefs and religion, others feel that such information will not have a negative impact on them. In fact, the diversity of information obtained from the internet can help decision-making. A total of 57.7% of the respondents believe that information from the internet helps them to make decisions. However, upon further probing with some of the respondents, major decisions such as preferred educational institutions are still made after consultation with people.

**Table 6.7 Do you agree that most information from the internet is against our culture, beliefs and religion?**

	%
Strongly Disagree	1.6
Disagree	47.2
Neutral	25.2
Agree	21.1
Strongly Agree	4.9
Total	100.0



**Table 6.8 Do you agree that information from internet can assist you in making decisions?**

	%
Strongly Disagree	3.3
Disagree	13.8
Neutral	25.2
Agree	51.2
Strongly Agree	6.5
Total	100.0

Finally, respondents believe that the time and money spent on using the internet are not wasted. There are many service providers such as Maxis, Celcom, Digi, and Telnnet that offer attractive telecommunication packages to lure young customers. The variation of prepaid internet packages has allowed parents to manage the ballooning costs of phone bills when the internet was accessed through the fixed line.

**Table 6.9 Do you agree that internet usage is a waste of time and money?**

	%
Strongly Disagree	19.5
Disagree	56.1
Neutral	9.8
Agree	8.9
Strongly Agree	5.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>100.0</b>

The purposive findings from this survey augers well for the aspiration of the National Information Technology Council (NITC) to develop the National Youth and Information Communication Technology for Development (YnICT4D) Policy. The fact that young people spend a substantial amount of their time on the computer, and the fact that they tend to be technologically savvy are reassuring for policy makers who believe that the demands of the new global economy require a large workforce of knowledge workers. In Malaysia, the main problems are categorised under: economic, education, social and political (InfoSoc Malaysia 2003).

## 7. Conclusion

In a period when the Southeast Asia region is experiencing growth but is yet underdeveloped, technological advancement occurs alongside an increased digital divide. Authoritarian regimes as well as democratic governments exist. Cultural diversity is nurtured while religious intolerance is increased. It is against this background that young people have to chart new courses in order to make their mark. Malaysia's rapid economic growth over the past several decades has resulted in improved living conditions for its citizens, including the young. Overall, the incidence of poverty has reduced, basic social services have expanded, educational attainment has risen, and basic health indicators have improved. In Malaysia, young people have the opportunities to reach their full potential. There is a multitude of programmes available through the government and private sectors. However, the effectiveness of the programmes is questionable. Despite these programmes, young people in Malaysia are still facing myriad problems. The problems can be categorised as economic, political, social and education. Youth leaders at the grassroots suggest that the programmes are not reaching the target audience.

It is also clear the ICT is becoming an increasingly important aspect of work and play for young people yet there are no government programmes targeting this area or aiming to alleviate the growing digital divide between rural and urban youth. The gap between the information haves and have-nots will only increase and create inequality of different types if not bridged. A lot more has to be done if the benefits of the digital age are to be enjoyed by both rural and urban youth. One way of doing it is by improving internet access to schools at the secondary level. Another way is to expand ICT-based pilot projects to as many parts of the country as possible, especially in rural areas.

The National Youth Development policy of 1997 has established a framework to strengthen planning, implementation and evaluation of youth development programs in the country. The development process of this policy was comprehensive involving all of the major national youth development organizations that in turn engaged youth groups throughout the country. The monitoring of policy implementation should be equally participatory with youth involved in the process.

Generally, the government takes an interest in youth and their concerns. Nonetheless, there is a lack of knowledge about government programmes targeted specifically at youth, with the exception of *Rakan Muda*. This lack of knowledge could be a reflection of a need to increase dissemination of information about youth development initiatives among youth.

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# 4

## YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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# **I. Youth Voices: 'I do not want anything from anybody, I will re-build my family'**

*Maunaguru Sidharthan*

## **1. Introduction**

According to many writers on Sri Lanka, young people have mainly been thought of in that country as a problem (Fernando 2002, Lakshman 2002, Hettige 2002). They have been seen as an anti-establishment and violent group of people. Scholars (Hettige 1996, 1998, 2002, Fernando 2002, Thangarajah 2002) argue that Sri Lankan youth have been neglected and alienated from the socio-political and economic mainstream of Sri Lankan society. This led to youth unrest in the south in 1971 and 1987 and in the north and east from the 1970s onwards. Young Sri Lankan Tamils have become particularly vulnerable during the ethnic conflict. Some of them have been subjected to discrimination and have been, arrested and tortured by the security forces. Displacements, delays at army check-points and routine round-ups in the villages have made going to school and to work difficult. Young Tamils have also been harassed by the LTTE and endured forced recruitment<sup>1</sup>. Ill-treatment of young people by the government and by the armed movements has resulted in their marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream socio-economic activities. Government policies like the Sinhala Only Act in 1956 and the educational quota system of the 1970s have had a negative effect on young Tamils and some have argued that these discriminatory policies have caused young Tamils to take up arms against the government (Thangarajah 2002, Mayer 2002).

In the south, young Sinhalese were also marginalised and excluded from mainstream socio-economic activities and took to armed revolt. As my research was confined to the eastern part of Sri Lanka, particularly Batticaloa, and was limited to a short period, I will not look in this paper at the problems of young Sinhalese.

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1 LTTE also crushed other Tamil military movements that were also fighting against state oppression. The LTTE eliminated Tamil young people who participated in other Tamil military movements. Therefore, in the case of Tamil youth, they are not only hunted by the State but also by the LTTE.

The Youth Commission Report<sup>2</sup> of 1990 argued that the mismatch between education and employment was one of the main causes of youth unemployment and poverty and contributed to youth unrest. A youth is defined by the Commission as a person aged between 15 to 29 years and unmarried<sup>3</sup>.

Gunawardena (2002) and Hettige (2000) write that in Sri Lanka, education is strongly considered as an equaliser which helped upward social mobility for many decades. Post-colonial governments were able to absorb newly-educated young people into public sector jobs. Today, apart from the armed forces, there is less scope for recruiting young people into the government sector. Young people still show a marked preference for public sector employment and they to wait a long time to get public sector jobs rather than looking for other work. Some writers believe that there is a greater possibility of rural youth experiencing poverty during this waiting period (Fernando 2002, Gunawardena 2002, Lakshman 2002).

The conflict in the north and east has had a profound impact on the opportunities available to young people. Young men in the conflict areas are consistently a target for suspicion because of their gender and age. They are seen as possible collaborators of the militant groups (Mayer 2000). Young people have been considered a problem and not as a national development resource (Mayer 2000 and 2002). Their voices and experiences have never been heeded. In this paper I record their experiences and try to understand the effect of the war on their lives.

Pamela Reynolds published an article in *Ethnos* called, 'Not Known Because Not Looked for: Ethnographers: Listening to the Young in South Africa', She traces the nature and implications of accounts of childhood in the early ethnographies and compares them with her own attempts to look at young people differently. She asks how well we have understood their voices and experiences and how much we have to learn. According to her argument, the early ethnographies failed to capture the voices of young people and failed to recognise their individuality. The voices of the young are not heard. Classical

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<sup>2</sup> This report was produced in 1990 by a team of scholars from different discipline (sociology, law, economics, political science, policy makers, ) and was submitted to the president of Sri Lanka.

<sup>3</sup> This definition is used both in the youth commission report and the national youth survey of 2001. Government of Sri Lanka, Report of the presidential commission on Youth, paper No1 1990



ethnographic works did not recognise the individuality of young people as active participants in their own development. The subject of such ethnographic inquiry was a unitary, whole, notional individual. The assumption was that socialisation was about adult guidance of children in accord with maturational processes of development, and that the young contribute little to political and economic life. We now debate the dissonance between the individual/subject and society. We now look behind the ideals/norms /conventions for the multi-faceted nature of the individual. Reynolds claims that there is little recognition of the notion of the subject who takes up a variety of subject positions within a range of discourses and social practices. Finally, she claims that in recent debates on children, the anthropological discipline has shifted its notion of socialisation. It now recognises “children’s involvement as active participants in a process that contains conflict and contradictions; and on the understanding that the young can and do choose political and philosophical positions” (Reynolds 1995 and 2000).

## **2. Research Area**

I did my research in Batticaloa, which has been designated a conflict zone by the Sri Lankan government. Prolonged violence has displaced people within the region and moved them out of the region. The war has caused most northern and eastern villages to become solely Tamil. Batticaloa is one of the few places where the community is still somewhat heterogeneous

Batticaloa district is in the central part of the eastern province. The total land area of the district is approximately 2632.7 sq. km including inland water bodies in an extent of 168.3 sq. km. Batticaloa lagoon, which forms the water body, extends 73.6 km up to Verugal in the North and 32.6 km up to Thuraineelavanai in the south from Batticaloa town. The lagoon divides the district into two areas; the eastern seaboard, which is mainly a residential area, and the western area where the bulk of the paddy lands are located. Until the peace process started in 2002, the western area was called an un-cleared area, which was controlled by the LTTE, and the eastern seaboard, mainly controlled by government forces is called a cleared area. There are restrictions on movement of people from areas controlled by the LTTE and those controlled by the government, and vice versa.

Agriculture and fishing are the main economic activities of the district. 31% work in agriculture while 18% of the population are fishermen. Major agricultural activities take place in the western part of Batticaloa whereas in the eastern part the main work is fishing. (*The Land of the Singing Fish* 1993)

The population of Batticaloa district in 1991 was 433,776 and it increased to 517,878 in 2001. Out of the total population, 74.3% are Tamils, 25% are Muslims, 0.15% are Sinhalese and 0.5% are Burghers. 76% of the district population live in rural areas and 30% in urban and suburban areas. Furthermore, there are 221,559 people under 18 years of age and 123,274 people fall within the age group of 15 to 29 (*The Land of the Singing Fish* 1993).

In Batticaloa<sup>4</sup>, there are 16,188 (26.8%) government employees and 2775 (4.6%) people are employed in the private sector. 23,194 (38.4%) people are involved in the agricultural sector and 18,240 (30.2%) people are fisher folk. There are 51,244 *Samurdhi*<sup>5</sup> beneficiaries. The majority depend on agriculture, mainly on paddy cultivation which is mono-seasonal. In this district, most of the areas are rural and a high percentage of the population depends on agriculture. However, in Batticaloa district 10,691 acres of paddy lands are abandoned because of security reasons. Hence, many farmers are *Samurdhi* recipients.

There has been an unusual increase in fishing from 1987 - 2001. The total number of fishermen has increased from 39,365 in 1987 to 227,785 in 1998, an increase of almost 400% (*The Land of the Singing Fish* 1993). These figures clearly indicate an unusual dependence of the population on the fishing industry. This is because of the restriction of access to agriculture and agriculture-related jobs like milling, land-preparation, and harvesting work.

People have had to abandon cultivated lands either because of displacement or because the army occupied these lands for their own purposes. For example, in the Vellavali region of Batticaloa there is a clay factory, which gave jobs to more than 1000 people but is now used as an army camp. The war has reduced the farmers' market facilities. People cannot take their goods to other parts of Sri Lanka because of the war. Restrictions on moving pesticides into uncleared

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<sup>4</sup> The Statistical Handbook of Batticaloa District, 2001.

<sup>5</sup> *Samurdhi* is a programme launched by the government to support people below the poverty line. It provides the poor with a small monthly allowance.

areas made the situation even worse. Government agricultural departments curtailed their activities. In the Batticaloa region there are no government rice mills and the rice mills in LTTE-controlled area were destroyed. Farmers have to take their goods to rice mills in army-controlled areas.

During the war (after 1985), restrictions on fishing and movements of goods to the LTTE controlled areas dramatically affected the economy of Batticaloa. Mass displacement in 1990, temporary displacements throughout 1990 to 2001 and ethnic riots between Muslims and Tamils adversely affected economic conditions. The ethnic riots created tension and hostility between Muslims and Tamils and disturbed the socio-economic life pattern of the region. For instance, the LTTE did not allow Muslims to cultivate their paddy lands in LTTE-controlled areas until peace time.

I started my ethnographic research by trying to understand how the term 'youth' has been defined by ordinary young people in that region and how Tamil cultural norms and values fail to acknowledge young people as active participants in the shaping of the culture. To what extent has Tamil culture marginalised young people? How has the disruption brought by war affected young people? How do they find their spaces? How do they deal with the responsibility of looking after their families? How do they deal with social exclusion? What coping strategies do they adopt to face such situations? This study is an attempt to record the experiences of young people, listen to their voices and to recognise their agency. This paper aims to understand young people from their own perspectives and experiences

### **3. Research Process**

The fieldwork in Batticaloa district started on 10<sup>th</sup> April 2003 and was completed 10<sup>th</sup> May 2003. The selected villages represented both LTTE-controlled areas and government-controlled areas, even though these boundaries are very fluid and often overlap with each other. A large number of displacements have taken place in the selected villages. The main work in the district was in agriculture and fisheries, which are also the main economic activities of the region. Research was done in the LTTE-controlled villages of Unichai, Kokaticholi, Ambalthurai, Velavali, Puthukutiirupu, Vakari, Sinapulmali, Pathali, Kangrankuda, Kopavalli, and government forces-controlled areas of Kaluvankani, Mandur Kalaru Mukathuvaram and Tharathivu.

My research sample consisted of 30 young people suffering from poverty. I have used three interviewing methods: unstructured interview, semi-structured interview and life-history. I have also used another interview guideline to conduct interviews with a few key informants at the regional level.

I developed formats and interview guidelines in February and March 2003. In March and April, together with a co-researcher, I visited Batticaloa and met my key informants. They were university lecturers, government officers, Young Men's Catholic Association, Young Men's Hindu Association, Young Women's Catholic Association, Non Governmental Organisation officers and youth club leaders. We conducted 30 interviews with young people. Interviews were mostly either semi structured and unstructured. We had one focus group discussion. Information about the life-history of the young people was collected. These interviews are based on qualitative methods. Later, I analysed the narrative and life-histories of those I interviewed. These narratives of youth may stand for their experiences of everyday life. I believe these narratives can help us revise preconceptions about what young Tamil people are like.

#### **4. Research Samples**

When I selected the sample, I defined youth as those aged 15-29 years who are married or unmarried<sup>6</sup>. I put the sample of 30 into three different groups according to age. The first group consists of those between the ages of 15 and 19, the second group consists of those between the ages of 20 and 24 and the third group consists of those aged between 25 and 29. In order to maintain gender-parity I decided that, of the 30 interviewees, 15 should be men and 15 should be women. Furthermore, each age group consisted of ten youths and they were divided equally as five males and five females as table 4.1 shows. I decided to include educated, uneducated, employed, unemployed, married and unmarried youths. This is indicated in Table 4.2.

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<sup>6</sup> This is the definition used by the policy makers and government in Sri Lanka. Even though it is not possible to define youth by age, my idea here is to follow the mainstream notion of youth and work 'against the grain'. I have also included married people in the category of youth, which is different from the official definition. I will argue later why I included married people and why the age category does not work in the Sri Lankan context.

**Table 4.1 Research sample by age and gender**

<b>Batticaloa (total sample)</b>	<b>Age :15-19 years</b>	<b>Age:20-24 years</b>	<b>Age:25-29 years</b>
30	10	10	10
15(males) 15(females)	05(m) 05(f)	05(m) 05(f)	05(m) 05(f)

As Table 4.2 indicates, the number of interviewees varies from one category to another:

**Table 4.2 Research sample by marital status, education and employment**

<b>District</b>	<b>Married</b>	<b>Un-married</b>	<b>Educated (up to Ordinary/ Level)</b>	<b>Not educated</b>	<b>Emp-loyed*</b>	<b>Unem-ployed</b>
Batticaloa	09	21	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	15	15

\* Temporary, multiple jobs, and permanent

## **5. Youth and Marginalisation - A Conceptual Framework**

I will use vulnerability and social exclusion as the main concepts to analyse young people in Batticaloa. Both Sinhalese and Tamil youth in Sri Lanka suffer restricted opportunities for higher education, pervasive conditions of unemployment and underemployment, particularly in rural areas, and lack of a social support system. This makes adjustment to the job market, family life or society at large difficult and often painful. (Silva 2001, Mayer 2000, 2002, 2003, Lakshman 2002)

I adopted the National Youth Survey<sup>7</sup> definition of youth with one modification. The survey defines youth as persons between 15 and 29 years who are unmarried. The survey argued that marriage gave certain responsibilities to young people that paved the way for them

<sup>7</sup> The National Youth Survey took place in the year 2000. It covered 2563 youths. Youth Survey (2000) Sri Lanka Youth survey, Centre for Anthropological and Sociological Studies, University of Colombo and South Asia Institute, Colombo Office

to be recognised as adults and socially-responsible decision-makers (Mayer and Salih 2003).

For my purpose, a definition of youth which takes account of marital status does not fit since most men and women do not marry at the same age. Marriage does not give equal responsibility, social identity or privileges to men and women. Emmanuel argues that there is much evidence that even if marriage guaranteed young men's entry into social decision-making processes, one cannot assume that women get the same privilege after marriage as men. She argues that when young women get married, they face added obstacles to social participation, such as having to bear and rear children or trying to manage dual roles. It could be argued that some women withdraw from public life after marriage rather than increase their participation. The other important factor is that unmarried women often face different kinds of social realities and discriminations than unmarried men (Emmanuel 2003).

Many interviewees said that marriage at an early age (between 18 and 22) is common in Tamil society as it protects young people from the army or the LTTE. Unmarried young people are constantly harassed by the army and have become prime targets for recruitment into Tamil armed movements.

I have defined youth as persons between 15 and 29 years irrespective of their marital status. There is a need to differentiate between adolescence and youth. Adolescence is a psychological concept referring to the 'storm and stress' or turbulence associated with the change of status that occurs at the time of attainment of puberty (Hall 1974). "Youth is a product of the extension of adolescence due to the processes of economic and social changes in modern societies" (Keniston, as quoted in Hettige 1996). Agreeing with that, I will argue that youth is a social process rather than a psychological concept.

The disturbing psycho-political circumstances under which young people come of age may determine many of the anti-establishment views and attitudes expressed by them on various issues of politics and society. It can be argued that what is relevant in contributing to anti-establishment views and attitudes is a sense of deprivation, i.e. deprivation relative to one's expectations. Hettige (1996) argues that there have been many social and political changes in the country under globalisation that have influenced not only the thinking and

expectations of higher living standards of people, but also politics, governance, democracy and human rights. In my opinion, what young people experience when they enter society is a mismatch between their expectations and aspirations and the day-to-day reality. This frustrates them because they are excluded from mainstream politics, development programmes and policies.

I will examine how the normative structures of a culture marginalise young people. The concept of 'culture' has received considerable attention in anthropology. The representation of culture in ethnographies as autonomous, integrated and bounded wholes has been called into question. In these depictions differences between cultures are celebrated while, at the same time, differences within a culture are homogenised. The space of culture wherein the inconsistencies occur, where meanings are contested or alternative ones articulated are in turn marginalised. These spaces are the social sites of difference according to such factors as gender, race, ethnicity and age. The social spaces of difference are important because these sites are constituted by the people and activity of people whose voices continue to be silenced. These voices belong to those, including women, children and youth<sup>8</sup>, who occupy subordinate positions. Culture, portrayed in terms of a unified system of meaning, privileges the voice of the powerful. In turn, cultural meaning that may be held by groups opposing the dominant interpretations continues to be excluded in order to uphold this representation of culture (Caputo 1995).

In this paper, I argue that by heeding the voices of marginalised people such as young people we begin to understand the complexity of young people as active agents engaged in the production and management of meaning in their own social lives. Virginia Caputo (1995) argues that the concept of culture is viewed in relation to the age/time-based culture that encompasses the lives of children and young people. Children/young people are actively engaged in the production of meaning in their lives and should not be treated as passive in the production of culture, but rather as active in that process. She analyses categories of childhood and children, and sees how they have been constituted and maintained. She argues that we have to reinsert the notion of agency into child/youth life. Another

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<sup>8</sup> I prefer to use the term youth/children rather than define it as a single category of youth or children as I still find it difficult to differentiate between these two categories. Therefore, throughout my article I will use both terms as inseparable.

important point she makes is about the temporal dimension in the construction of the category 'child'. She argues that in socialisation models, which depict children in the process of becoming fully adult, the 'present' of childhood is dismissed. The category 'child' is thus robbed of its immediate status and constructed as something of the past or as configured in a future adult life. She claims that in order to understand children as active agents of culture, their presence and action in the immediate world must be acknowledged.

Caputo's argument can also be applied to youth. Allison James (2000) argues that one should not see cultures of youth and children as subcultures seemingly fixed in their opposition to the adult world, or in jeering mockery of it, but as responses to the denial of access and of participation in the central institutions of society. West (2000) identifies two major strands in the scholarship on youth and war. The first is the western psychological approach that asserts that exposure to violence leads to young people's loss of innocence; proponents of this approach argue that such young people go on to perpetuate violence throughout their lives, whether as victims of violence or its perpetrators. The second approach centres on cultural agency and understands young people as being able to adapt effectively to violent situations in culturally specific ways (Peters and Richards 1998, West 2000)<sup>9</sup>.

Reynolds in her article, 'The Ground of all Making', argues that, "children can fall into cracks between convention and new permutations as the difference between social and biological parenting is renegotiated. There are profound implications for a child in the public recognition of kinship links. These include the right of access to parental care, rights to ritual attention, and right to incorporation within communities bounded by acknowledgment and kin links (2000: 143). However, she goes on to say, "ideals about kinship are still reinforced by state policies and practices among kin. The nature of kinship is flexible, modifiable, but the forces of convention are strong. Communities may fail to be cognisant of the extent to which ideas or norms are out of kilter with experience" (144). She argues that we have to see children as active agents negotiating within kin relationships. Her quotation from Moore is apt for our purposes: "shifting the ground of meaning, reading against the grain, is often something done through practice, that is through the day to day activities that take place within symbolically structured space' (Moore 1994:83 in Reynolds 2000: 143).

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<sup>9</sup> Even though Richards (1996) in his book neither problematises the notion of youth nor defines youth clearly.



She says that "we [social scientists] too often obscure children's lives by moulding our observations and designing our policies in accord with ideologies (particularly theological or political) or the experiences of people within certain strata of society" (2000: 144). The key point is that to say, we see childhood and so interpret others' experiences as children, differently depending on our own experience. Therefore she suggests that "... in order to begin to describe the experiences of children in South Africa, we must return to the reality of practices rather than depend upon the analysis of customs (or norms)" (2000: 147). This can also be applied to society in Sri Lanka. This paper will show how the concept of youth is constructed by the adult world within the Sri Lankan context. Recent changes that took place in the youth world as a result of prolonged ethnic conflict have not been incorporated in policy-making. Conventional notions of young people (for instance that they are passive when it come to effecting changes or shaping the culture) still govern the policies of the Sri Lankan government and NGOs.

Reynolds in another article, 'Youth and the Politics of Culture in South Africa', argues that the long-term oppression of people in South Africa and the fragmentation of communities and families, meant that adults who ought to have been best able to shape discourses were variously silenced, and, to some extent, young people took on the role. "It is their stand against symbolic domination and, in the process, the forging of their identities... which lead to negotiation of identity within family and community" (1995:222). In the article entitled 'The Ground of all Making' she argues that children take an active role in determining their own paths in life. "A central concept in the work of the sociologist Anthony Giddens is that every person is a 'competent human agent'. This, he says, is because "human actors routinely and chronically constitute and reconstitute their qualities as agents in recurrent process of social interaction" (Giddens 1989: 283). And so do Children" (2000:157). Though he speaks of the western world this is true for young people in Sri Lanka too.

Reynolds shows in her article how the children she studied have mastered self-governing and take responsibility for their families. They do not want their families to suffer because of their political participation. Reynolds shows how they hold and cultivate such responsibilities. In this paper I use Reynolds' notion of responsibility. It is received wisdom that young people are irresponsible and incapable of taking on the responsibilities of family life. I will show how these assumptions have been dramatically challenged in Sri Lanka.

These are the concepts that shape the conceptual framework of this research. I will portray young people as active participants in making their own culture, capable of taking on responsibilities and building up their own networks. I challenge the general perceptions within Sri Lankan Tamil culture of youth and young people's behaviour. I differ from Reynolds in that I take ordinary young people, who neither participate in any political movement nor take political action against the government. The young people in my sample are ordinary Tamil youth caught up in the war between the LTTE and the government, whereas Reynolds dealt with young people who were involved in the political movement in Africa. I try to record these ordinary young people's lives and show how they are creating their own cultures, structures and networks and how they deal with everyday life. In thinking about ordinary young people, we have to rethink the cultural norms and values which constrain them. In my view, these ordinary young people have cultivated a culture and taken on certain responsibilities, which have not been investigated in social research up to now. Is it prolonged war, or prolonged poverty that leads young people to take on responsibility for their own lives. Have these voices always been there although we are only hearing them now.

Policy-makers in Sri Lanka who work on youth issues have access to resources such as money and time to define the category of children and youth. They argue that access to resources will enable youth to have greater control over their choice of clothes, mobility, and over their life more generally. This kind of broad generalisation will however lead us to total blindness towards discursive practices and the way in which power operates over them. How do young people in a war zone, or in periods of prolonged violence, negotiate in everyday life, and take responsibility for their families; how do they become active members and agents, creating space to survive? If we insist on looking at youth through adult eyes we will fail to acknowledge the agency of youth and will negate the new subject positions that have been negotiated by them during a time of poverty and war.

Young people, particularly those in the rural sector, are trapped in a vicious cycle of poverty, with inadequate access to education and training, lack of funds or capital for self-initiatives, and lack of political influence to benefit from limited developmental efforts. Young people in the rural sector have been marginalised or socially excluded.

The ethnic conflict has caused further marginalisation of Tamil youth. For the purposes of this study marginalisation is taken to

mean spatial, socio-cultural, political and economic marginalisation. Socio-political exclusion refers to a process whereby certain sections of the population are systematically excluded from the benefits of government policies and programmes (Silva 2001). Sri Lanka has had apparent success with equity-orientated welfare policies, which have resulted in the development of a countrywide network of educational, and health facilities and a basic infrastructure catering to all communities. However, organisational discrimination against minorities has gradually become established in some government policies and programmes.

The bias of the state against the Tamil minority became more systematic following independence. Each of the two leading political parties mainly represents Sinhala interests and these parties alternate as the party of government. The system of patronage that pertains will systematically disadvantage minorities as long as they are not linked to the ruling political parties (Silva 2001). The militant Tamil separatist movements perceive the Sri Lankan state as being actively involved in discrimination against Tamils in important areas such as education, government jobs, distribution of land in new settlement schemes, and in development programmes in general.

People living in war-torn areas encounter the adverse effects of the war through displacement, disruption of economic activities, breakdown of the state-run delivery mechanism, limited freedom of movement, injury and death of family members. There are some benefits from the relatively well-funded relief and rehabilitation programmes but these programmes do not target young people in the Northern and Eastern provinces. They mostly target families who are displaced and focus on the household level. Tamil youth have been excluded from government and NGO development and rehabilitation programmes that provide loans or building materials.

Upper class Tamils migrate to Colombo or other countries. Young Tamils in the north and east mostly belong to the lower class and they are more vulnerable to the armed conflict. The conflict keeps them constantly on the move. The LTTE is always looking for young people for forced recruitment. The army and police always suspect young Tamil people of being LTTE members. This makes it difficult to empower Tamil youth through social mobilisation and leadership. Displacement means that people are forcibly moved out of their homes and mostly live in camps or with their relatives or friends. In the north and east since 1987, people have been displaced several times.

They have moved from one place to another, as the previous place to which they were displaced becomes unstable. I call this continuous displacement. Displacement also made people move out of their homes and make temporary shelter/semi temporary shelter in the new locations. Tamil displacement has a unique character. One has to understand the Tamil experience of this kind of displacement.

In the next section, I will discuss how young Tamils create their own spaces, networking and engaging with structures by bringing their voices to the forefront, not just as passive learners but as active participants. What I am proposing here is that active participation of young people opens up new spaces for them. What I mean by 'new spaces' is working against the normative ideas of youth among the Tamil community and how already-available spaces have been strengthened and increased by the war.

## **6. Experiences of Youth**

Adults in the Tamil community see young men as 'boys' who do not have responsibilities or decision-making capabilities and are carefree. There is a saying among Tamils that young people's cultivation will not bring any returns (*srupillai Vellami vedu vanthu serathu*). Informants said that because such received ideas persist in Tamil society, they feel that their voices have never been heard by adults. The following story of Ruban shows that he is taking very seriously his responsibility for looking after his family. Society's labelling of him as irresponsible places constraints upon him. It undermines his confidence in his capacity to support his family of eight. He is the fourth child of the family and his elder brother is 30 years old. His father is a fisherman but he is unable to go fishing at night because of the restrictions imposed by the government. He does not earn enough to support the family. Though Ruban's brother had a chance to go to university, lack of funds prevented him. He also became a fisherman.

*"I missed the university by one mark. Even when I was going to school, I used to go with my elder brother for fishing in the nights because that gave me some income to look after my studies. Yes, I worked and studied. I got admission to technical college in Jaffna but because of the difficulties in travelling, I did not have enough money to travel to Jaffna and study. Therefore, I gave up those studies. In this world*

*if you need to study you need money. I wanted to look after my family; I want to take care of my sisters. I have to help my elder brother. So, I also decided to take up fishing with him. But I also thought fishing itself will not bring enough income. So, in the night I go for fishing, in the morning I work in a shop writing bills."*

The house they owned has been taken over by the army and they have to live in a rented house. Ruban said that he does not agree with the saying that young people's cultivation never brings income to the family. His friend, who is 17 years old, looks after his family and does three jobs. He said:

*"Even in our family, my elder brother sacrifices his life to bring up the family. My father drinks all the time. I also work hard and earn money. We are slowly saving our money for our sisters. How can society say that? Whenever we say something against elderly people, they do not listen and they treat us as boys. When they act like that, it affects our psychology and our morality. **Some times I fear that I cannot do certain things because I am a young boy.** (Ruban, Keraan, age 20/translated/emphasis is writer's)."*

Ruban's case has showed how he is placed between the normative discourse and the reality. Even though his day-to-day activities show that he is actively participating in making money for his family and carrying the family burden on his shoulders, he still feels uncomfortable in making certain decisions because of received wisdom about youth.

The majority of my interviewees denied the fact that youth are irresponsible and disagreed with the saying *Srupillai Vellami Vedu Vanthu Serathu*. They said that young people in Sri Lanka are taking leading roles, especially in the Tamil community, as they are the ones who are fighting for the rights of the Tamil people. Even at the household level, they are the prime breadwinners. They feel that they have been marginalised because they are considered too young to handle certain situations such as investing in production, and making decisions about marriage.

My research shows that young people have developed skills in order to be able to do several jobs. They are fishermen as well as casual labourers and are skilled in carpentry and farming. Most

of the interviewed youth who belonged to the educated category thought that they do part-time work such as casual labour or fishing because it helps them to look after their family and meet education-related expenses. They challenge the traditional notion that young people are irresponsible and unable to make decisions. We need to acknowledge young people's experience. We need to rethink the definition of youth. Should a person be removed from the category of youth upon marriage because marriage brings responsibilities? In Ruban's case, even before his marriage he has taken up a number of responsibilities.

When I asked the interviewees how they define youth, they linked the notion of responsibility with the definition of youth. Most of the interviewees agreed people between the ages of 16 and 30 can be defined as youth. They linked the definition of youth with marriage and responsibility. Some argued that when a person gets married, then he/she becomes more responsible towards his/her family and they no longer fall within the category of youth. Most of those interviewed said young people always have many responsibilities even before marriage. Whether one falls into the category of youth cannot depend on marital status. Some interviewees strongly argued that once a person gets married he/she should be removed from the youth category. Rajan thinks a person cannot be categorised as a youth if he is married. He said that young people are dependent on parents and that one cannot categorise a married man/woman between the ages of 15 to 30 as a youth.

*"Once a man is married we can not call him ellam podiyan (young boy) anymore. A male has to look after his family. Therefore, we can not call him a boy (youth) any more. Even if they are married at the age of 20, then they are not youth (Rajan, 24 years, Kokaticholai/translation)."*

He thinks that once a person, even a young person, gets married he/she takes on responsibility for looking after the family. Therefore, if the person is married he/she no longer falls within the category of youth. But others argued strongly against this on the basis of their own experience because before they got married they had many family responsibilities.

*"Youth are the people who fall within the age between 15 and 30 but I am not sure about the age, but they are called elantharical or ellam podiyan/ ellam peta (young boys/ young*

*girls). At this age only one [boys] has a lot of burdens and responsibilities. A boy needs to think how he can fix the marriage of his sister, and look after the family. In most of the families' the father drinks, so the he does not bring any income to the family. Therefore, the responsibility of looking after the family falls on the young boy or sometimes on the young girl. Therefore, they (boys) have to go and work outside and some times they have to give up their studies. Sometimes you see that they work at night or in the evening and study in the morning."*

Rani said that even if they are married they are young, if they fall with the age of 16 to 30. Even before they get married, they are people with responsibilities for looking after the family.

*"Look at my anna (elder brother), he is the one who is supporting my family and he is 27. Do you think that he does not have responsibilities? He is not married (Rani, 22 years old, Kaluvankani/ translated)."*

She strongly disagreed with the idea of using marriage as a criterion for deciding whether a person falls within the category of youth or not. Most of the young people feel that they have taken a share of family responsibilities from an early age. Some feel that marriage disqualifies a person from being categorised as a youth. My interviews showed that, in a constantly changing world, many have taken on responsibilities at an early age long before marriage. We need to rethink how we define youth.

## **7.1 Displacement, war and youth**

Interviewees said that the reason for unemployment and lack of education in Batticaloa was long-term displacement. Most of those interviewed belong to families whose livelihood came from fishing or farming, two sectors that have been adversely affected by the ethnic conflict. As a result, poverty, including among young people, has increased in these sectors. In Batticaloa, one could observe continuous displacement since 1990.

*"We started running from 1990 when our village was destroyed, from that day onwards we moved to Aethiyamala, Kolithimadu, Sipi Madu, Anayan Thidal, Unnichai,*

*KaradiyanAru, Kopavalli, last 10 years we have been on the run. Every place we go, we build a small hut and stay. We lost our properties, lands, cows and chickens. We lost our father, and elder sister's husband due to this ethnic conflict. We have not recovered from that even during this peace process. We are not sure whether to go back to our original village because we are not sure that these talks will end in permanent peace. Because of displacement and constant move, all my siblings have given up their studies. How can they concentrate on studies? On top of it, first we need money to live. We cannot support any family members to study. This is the fate of our young generation" (Eankal Ellam Pottiyankanlenda Thalavithi Ethu).*

*"I have taken up multiple jobs and my younger brother and sister go to work. Now we have to build a house and live peacefully. That is our aim. I have a sick mother. She is sick since we lost our father. In addition, I have to look after my grandmother and grandfather. We will work hard and look after our parents. Who can look after them if we do not look after them?" (Murukan, 25 years, Thathativuv/ translated).*

Ramani, who is 19 years old and from Kiran, said her family has been displaced since 1995 and moved from Eravur to Kokadichoalii in 1990. Then they moved to Verukal and stayed there for two years which was very difficult. They did not even have proper clothes or food. Therefore, in 1997 they moved to Kiran, where they stayed in a refugee camp for four years. She went to school but she missed three years. She was reluctant to go to school because the other pupils were younger than her. As she did not have proper uniforms or slippers, she always avoided other students. Students from the refugee camps are seen as poor and less intelligent by the other students who keep away from them. As a result, she dropped out of school.

Tamils have been displaced for more than two decades, and, in most cases, young people are subject to continuous displacement.



This has made life very difficult in this region<sup>10</sup>. The two cases quoted above show how continuous displacement has affected young people seeking education. The fact that they could not pursue education also has had psychological consequences on them. In the east, many young people have dropped out of school and this has made them more vulnerable in the job-market. They have been forced to take up any kind of work that is available. Even during the peace process, long-term effects of displacement persist. Young people cannot compete in the job market because of their missed schooling. This was shown by Murukan, 24 year old man from Verukal, who wants to create a new space for himself within the limits placed on him by war and displacement. He wants to take up the role of looking after his family. In my field work I often came across stories like Murukan's.

Families have lost properties and relatives because of the war and people have had to take up family responsibilities when they are young. Merri's life-history shows the adverse effect of displacement. She said that poverty means not getting three meals a day and being without proper housing and water. She said poverty means always being in debt. Merri said:

*"For example take us. We have to settle a loan of 200,000. I could not follow my education. I wanted to be a teacher from my childhood. You know when I was small everybody said that one day I will be a good teacher. That was my dream. But when I was 15 I was forced to leave my school. Because of this war, we were displaced several times and moved from one place to another. We were displaced three times. We lost all our properties. It is difficult to get new school admission. Because every time we move out I have to find a new school. Also, my father had to abandon farming. We have not still gone back to our villages. It has become a jungle. So my father started to do wage labour. So he could not support me to go to school. Consequently, I dropped out*

<sup>10</sup> I visited the so-called 'uncleared areas/ LTTE controlled areas', and I observed that roads were badly damaged, irrigation systems were not properly maintained. Lack of teachers and maintenance of schools, added to the adverse conditions created by war and displacement. I travelled with my friend on a motor bike on the muddy roads. Sometimes it took us more than three hours to travel 15 K.M. we had to get down at several places and push the bike because the road was too muddy. Sometimes dams and streets were flooded. As we could not see the roads, we had to step carefully, not knowing where the edges of the road were and where the dam starts.

*of school. I feel that we are in real poverty because I could not finish my education and fulfil my dreams. Now I do not think about my studies, I have to look after my family, I have two younger brothers and two sisters, I have to send my younger brothers to school, and I will not let them suffer from hunger. I will send them to school, a good school. I will look after my sisters. These are my prime aims now. I will build up my family, yes I will!" (Merri, 21years, translated).*

She said that she lost her hopes and her education because of war and poverty. Nevertheless, she is fighting back to rebuild and support her family. Restrictions on movement of people from the LTTE-controlled areas to army-controlled areas have prevented people from travelling to find work. This situation has had two effects. One is that they have become poorer and the other is that they have started to seek other jobs such as fishing.

According to Rajan, he faces many problems such as unemployment and the burden of family. He has to earn and save money to give dowries to his two younger sisters. He said:

*"I do not know which one to give up, whether to study or to go to work and look after the family. Most of the time, I feel frustrated and depressed. During the ethnic conflict, I faced problems such as harassment by Tamil militant groups and by the security forces. Many times I escaped from crossfire. Once, the military arrested me and kept me for a few months. I even cannot bring my friends to my home because I feel shy to show my poor status to them. My other friends drink to escape from these situations. That is also reduced because LTTE has passed a law saying that it is illegal to drink kasippu. So now, the people do not drink too much because kasippu is not available. Youth also drink and get addicted. Youth here face many psychological problems because of fear about their future. Even I do not know what my future is. It is true that the peace process has given us some advantages but we have suffered so much and have lost 10 years in our life, who is going to fix that?" (Rajan, 27 years, Kopavalii / translated).*

Rajan has taken up many household responsibilities but structural constraints make his future uncertain. My interviewees have taken on heavy responsibilities looking after their families, forgoing their

desires, developing multiple job-skills and planning the future. Socio-cultural and political structures restrict or fail to recognise the agency of youth, making young people uncertain about their future and undermining their confidence in their ability to meet these responsibilities.

In Batticaloa, most of the interviewees said that war and displacement had made them poor. Youth is the most vulnerable group during this armed conflict, as they are the prime targets of the state security forces and the LTTE, which causes them to be excluded from mainstream socio-economic opportunities. Their movements were restricted during the war. They were on the move to escape from the army and the LTTE, which led them to drop out from schools at an early age, get married early, and not travel far to look for work. Job opportunities were reduced due to the armed conflict. For instance, in Vellavelli in the Batticaloa region, a rice mill, which provided around 1000 jobs, was demolished during the armed conflict, and a clay factory in Mandur is now occupied by the army.

Young people have been separated from their families by displacement or by the loss of their parents during war. Young people have been severely affected by lack of jobs, career guidance, and a supporting mechanism to help them continue their education, as well as the heavy burden of family responsibilities thrust upon them at an early age. The interviewees demonstrated how they have navigated their way through the socio-cultural and structural constraints set against them.

## **7.2 Education, employment and youth**

Education has been disrupted by the war and displacement. Young people missed their O/L and A/L exams and skipped classes and schools became targets for forced recruitment by the LTTE. Yet a large number of school-dropouts can be seen in these areas.

Youth poverty is higher among graduates than among less qualified young people. This is because educated youth want white-collar jobs for which they have to wait for a long time. Less qualified youth are willing to take up any kind of job. Graduates have done wage labour or any other kind of part-time work before graduation, but they choose unemployment while they wait for white-collar jobs. They explain this as follows:

*"How can we go for such work? You know what the society will say if we do such work? Other youth will laugh at me and question the purpose of my studies. So, even if we like to go for these kinds of jobs we are compelled to either stay at home or find white-collar jobs." (Translated by ethnographer 04/2003/ group interview)*

Graduates are restricted in the kind of work they will do by social perceptions and values. Social status limits their chance of getting work. The waiting period for graduates seeking white-collar jobs keeps increasing. They are frustrated and depressed since they cannot earn and support their family and even in their late twenties they still have to depend on their parents. An interviewee who graduated in 1999 and has been searching for a job for the past three years said:

*"I feel ashamed of myself, I am poor, and my father who is 64 years old still goes to work and supports our family. Nowadays, I do not feel like eating at home and whenever I eat very little (Nan Konchanthan Sapetenan). So, at least it will lessen my burden on the family. I feel frustrated, and angry. I sometimes think if I had gone to some other job instead of going to university, now I would earn and be in a better position." (Rajan, age 31, /Unichai / translated)*

Such situations increase frustration among unemployed graduates. They withdraw from society and family and their marriages are postponed.

Social expectations restrict a graduate's chances of choosing different kinds of work. If he stays at home he has to face his father's criticisms. One interviewee said he is a graduate but had failed to find a job.

*"Society looks at me as I'm an alien. I tried to take up some wage labour but there, those workers laugh at me so I stopped going there. My father drinks a lot and laughs at me. He says I am eating with his money (Tahndasoru), I do not have work (Velaai Vetii Eillatahven), that I'm lazy (Sompary). Nowadays, I rarely eat at home, I cannot bear this. I dreamt about going to jobs and buying things for my parents. That is only a dream. I drink these days, that is only the time I feel free and relaxed" (Nemaln, 27years,/ translated).*

The next story is of a young female graduate who cried when relating her experience of day-to-day life. She had just graduated from university and had applied for several jobs but her lack of proficiency in English has posed a problem.

*"Well, what is the point? I have good grades and a first class but that does not matter to them. I have to work somewhere to get experience. How can I get a job if they ask for experience? Why are they not giving me a chance to prove myself to them? I even tried to obtain a loan from the bank to start self-employment; the bank said that I do not have any properties or guarantors to support me and refused to provide me the loan. Because I am young, they see that I do not have the potential to do well in business. Because we are youth in society, we are seen as 'boys' and 'girls'. If nobody helps me, how can I come out of my difficulties?" (Lasumi, 26 Puthukuttiyerupu).*

These stories show the socio-cultural and political constraints that these young women and men face in everyday life. That does not mean that they are passive subjects of these structural and cultural conditions. Although these case studies have shown how socio-cultural and political structures limit their decision-making choices or constrain them in their choice of job, those interviewed demonstrated how they coped with such situations. They are active participants in the creation of their own space. They try to find their own coping mechanisms to deal with day-to-day constraints. Scholars, policy-makers and researchers need to identify these mechanisms and recognise the agency of youth.

### **7.2.1 Hope of education**

Some school-age children have lost their trust in the Sri Lankan education system. When I asked some of my informants why they have stopped going to school, they answered that even if they go to university there is no guarantee of employment. They leave school at an early age, or have no desire to go to university. Most interviewees told me that they are losing hope of higher education or even schooling. That does not mean that they do not want to study further, but the education system does not guarantee them better jobs if they finish higher education. They have to decide whether to study or to start working at an early age. One cannot isolate one

factor that brings about this situation. Many factors are interwoven in a complex manner. It is not the shortcomings of the education system alone that creates this quandary for young people. War, displacement, socio-cultural and structural systems are also contributory factors. How does the agency of youth function under these overarching conditions. What are the alternative spaces created or invented by young people? Varathan faced a number of constraints but decided to overcome them. He has three sisters and one elder brother. He lost his father and one sister during the conflict in 1990. They were displaced in 1990 and 1995. In the second displacement, they lost all their properties. He said:

*"I could not go to school. I also decided not to go to school. It is useless. Look, I know a number of my brothers' friends who have finished their degree at the Batticaloa University, but if I start to work now I will have more money. Money is the main block for me to continue my education and family burden is increasing day by day. I like to receive vocational training but I cannot. If I do not go to work, there is no food at home (Nan Velaku Varati Vetila Sapatu Ella). I told you also how many times we were displaced. Today, in the morning I gave home Rs.50/=, now I do not have a cent with me. Tell me how can I dream about studying computer now? And who will guarantee me that even if I study computer, there will be a better job for me? It is wise for me to start doing some jobs now itself and within another five years, I will be able to acquire a good job. (I asked him how and he replied) with those five years of experience, you can definitely get a good or a better job." (Varathan, 18 years/ Vakara / translated )*

He is, at the moment, working as an assistant to a building contractor. He said that if he continued to work with contractor, one day he will have his own business.

### **7.3 How do youth negotiate? (work and study)**

Young people who have experienced displacement, war, cultural restrictions and poverty, develop various coping mechanisms to safeguard themselves. Some do several jobs. They engage in farming, wage labour, fishing, and casual work for the government. Even if they are employed in the government sector, they might still take other jobs. In many cases young people are the ones who look after their families, since the father does not bring in enough money or

spends it all on alcohol. The responsibility of looking after the family falls to the older children.

Another interviewee, who is 21, said that jobs available for young people at present are fishing, toddy-tapping, wage-labour (*Kuli work*) in the farms or paddy-fields, in vegetable gardening. He said that there also jobs like teaching, driving, masonry and welding work for young people.

*"Nowadays you have to be flexible enough to do more than one job per day or per week. If you have capital, you can do animal husbandry, or poultry or even paddy cultivation but the problem here is there are no proper market facilities, they will not get good prices for their products. You know we have been in this village for the last ten years, we do not go out of this place for anything because of fear. Therefore, they (intermediary) come and buy our products from us. Even now during the peace process we do not know to whom we should sell our things, middle-men control everything here. So, that is why I decided to engage in different kinds of work so that I can earn more. I go to paddy field for wage labour; in the nights I go to lagoon to catch prawns. If I do not get work at the paddy field, I go for kuli work anywhere in the morning. I also cultivated a small vegetable garden behind our house." (Nelam, 21/ Vakarai/translated by ethnographer)*

Combining work and study is very common among young people in the east. In Tamil culture, a norm strongly observed is that a student should concentrate on study and should not do paid work. However, with the increase of poverty, war and violence in Sri Lanka, families are unable to support their children's education. One could argue that new spaces have been opened up for Tamil youth in the Eastern province. One could argue that, even though contributing to family income, working while studying is not a new trend, and is not limited to areas affected by war; my opinion is that prolonged war has increased such spaces for young people. Most of the interviewees from the Eastern University said that during lecture times, when they have no lectures or after lecture hours they go to work. These trends are no doubt connected with the war and related problems.

## 7.4 Gender and marginalisation

It has been seen that females are exposed to poverty more than male youth, because of the socio-cultural constraints imposed on them. Females are not allowed to travel long distances for work and they are expected to return home before 5.00 p.m. Parents want them to get married as early as possible. They are labelled as 'bad women' if they socialise with males or go out to public places. Under such circumstances, females become more vulnerable, poor and dependent.

Raji (18 years/Valachani), lives with her elder sister and her mother in the Valachani district, which is controlled by the security forces during the day time and by the LTTE in the night. Between 1990 and 2001, they have been displaced twice. The security forces murdered her father and the family could not even receive his body. Her mother makes and sells clothes and her sister is a nursery teacher who earns Rs.1100/= per month. She said that since there are no males in her family, they do not have any security. The villagers always see them as a bad family whenever a male visits them, as if they are running a brothel. She went on to say that because they lost their father when they were small, her elder sister had to marry when she was 16 years old so that there would be a man in the family. Three years ago they separated. She said that females are more subject to poverty than males because males can do any 'ugly thing' and get away with it (*setha kandal mithipankal thaniyai kandal kalluvuvanga*). If a female makes one mistake she will be labelled as a bad woman. Even when they go out for work to distant places and make money, the society says that she is a prostitute (*attakari, vasi*). Therefore, she has restricted her movements, which leads to a lower income and they can only take two meals a day. She said that society has restricted her behavioural patterns. If one gets dressed nicely, one is seen as a prostitute; if a female rides a bicycle the men pass comments such as "is that a woman or a man?". She is prevented from doing certain jobs like carpentry and car repairs because she is a woman. In our society, women have to depend on men so they become poorer than men. Even households headed by women are greatly affected. During the war, the security forces always hunt for women. She said:

*"Last time one of our relatives was taken by the security forces and abused, and thereafter my mother did not let me go out of the house for several months. In addition, the*



*security forces captured women and shaved their heads. These reasons also lead some young women to join the LTTE. Also, if you see our village, most of the males drink and they do not bring much income home, most of the families survive because females go to work. They run the family and they are the ones who save something."*

She said that she could not get married because her family could not afford to give a dowry and that dowries are one of the main problems that young women face in marriage.

*"What is to be done, this is our fate! [She added that, but she is willing to look after her family.] It is our fate but that does not mean we should just sit here and blame the fate. We should do something...recently I have started to go out to find jobs. I found one... I will continue to work. I do not care what people say. I have to feed my family. It does not matter what others say. It is my responsibility now. I have to take things into my hands" (translated by ethnographer).*

The above story shows how young women are marginalised in society and are more subject to poverty than their male counterparts. Social and cultural constraints limit their space. Freedom of movement has been restricted by society. Work opportunities are limited and, once again, women have been forced to take up what ever conventional jobs are available. Because of the conflict, young women become more vulnerable to government forces. They have been forced to stay at home. These factors made Raji drop out of school at an early age. Raji's sister married at a young age to escape social harassment and to bring the male into the family so that society would not see them as a bad family. Young Tamils do not have a say in their own marriages (Davith 1980). They are excluded from decision-making about buying and selling properties and even getting jobs. Raji said that when she goes to distant places for work, society says that she is a prostitute (*attakari, vasi*). She has restricted her movements, which leads to a lower income and they can only take two meals a day. Society restricts her to certain jobs. She said "in our society women have to depend on males so they become poorer than males". Schrader-Cox (1992:172) argues that "as long as women feel unsafe in their homes and on their streets they cannot fully participate in... evolving economies". Researchers have discussed how fear of assault can restrict women's freedom of movement in rural and urban communities in Spanish-speaking Latin America

(Bourque and Warren 1981, Schrader-Cox 1992 Matthew Guttman 1996). In Raji's case, her movement is restricted because of the fear of being labelled a prostitute.

It is mainly women who run the households and bring in the money and save money. According to the young women interviewees, most of the men are addicted to alcohol and do not bring in much money. Married women save money for the future. Whenever they cook rice, most women take a handful of rice and keep it in a pot for future use. This is called *Oru Kai Piti* (one hand of rice). Interviewees, both female and male, accept that women face different problems from males such as sexual harassment, restrictions of movement, and restrictions in employment while they also face the problem of dowry.

The socio-cultural fabric of Tamil society has changed as a result of the conflict. Women participate in the household decision-making process because the males have gone abroad or died in the war. In Batticaloa, there are many widows. Households headed by single women have become common among Tamils, an uncommon feature 15 years ago (De Alwis 1993; Maunaguru 1995). Have these changes affected the perception of women in Tamil society? The evidence from this research is that views have not changed. Widows are still labelled as prostitutes, especially in Batticaloa during the peace process; there are a number of instances where women were asked to wear conventional clothing<sup>11</sup>. Young women are socially marginalised and they face greater vulnerability. Young women face different constraints from young men. Raji is determined to find a job and look after the family. She ignores the conventions, norms and customs which usually restrict women, and finds spaces for herself and for her family. She does not sit at home passively allowing mainstream culture to dictate to her while she blames her fate. She is determined to create new norms, take up new responsibilities and be an active member of making her own culture. Raji said that society has restricted her behaviour patterns. My observations in the field demonstrate that women have taken an active part in decision-making, challenging existing normative discourse and cultivating women's agency. Scholars such as Rajasingham (2001) and Maunaguru (1995) have emphasised that we have to recognise the agency of young women in time of war.

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<sup>11</sup> See Maunaguru's (1995) article on how clothing was one of the issues, constructing the figure of women by Tamil nationalistic discourse.

## 8. Summary of Ethnographic Research and the Agency of Youth

In Batticaloa, the young people I interviewed said that their youth made them more prone to violence than other age groups. Conflicts between militant Tamil groups, and the conflict between those groups and the army, cause young Tamils to be targeted. Young people have been kidnapped even during the peace process and all sides murder and torture. Forced recruitment by Tamil militant groups makes young people more vulnerable to violence. Violence towards women is higher than that towards young men because women are subject to sexual harassment and domestic violence. Most of the interviewees believed there was a strong link between poverty and violence. They said that young people joined Tamil militant groups or the army mainly because of poverty.

Young people are marginalised by society. Young people are stigmatised as irresponsible, emotional, dependent, and inexperienced. Youth needs, desires and ideas are not considered. Young women are more marginalised than young men. This is in spite of the fact, as this research shows, that young people are responsible, mature and are family breadwinners, sacrificing their own needs to look after the interests of the family and taking part in decision-making within the household.

Generally, youth are active in making decisions about siblings' marriages and buying and selling properties. Young women have the upper-hand in decision-making about health matters in the family. Young people are very much involved in decision-making but received wisdom in Tamil culture is that they are incapable of making stable concrete decisions, and are too emotional to be involved in the decision-making process. Long-term ethnic war has changed social patterns in the Tamil community. Social reality and the constructed values of Tamil culture contradict each other when it comes to youth. The change in young people has to be taken into consideration by the development agencies and state policy-makers when they plan their development programmes.

Factors such as the loss of fathers in the war, heavy drinking by fathers, and loss of property, create situations where young people have to work to support their families. Conventional notions that young people are irresponsible, that they have to be socialised before

adults can give them responsibilities, that their work will not yield any benefits for the household, are being challenged by the new situation in everyday life. Because of the war young people have lost their ambitions and opportunities for education and employment. Even if one acknowledges young people as agents of their own culture, it is a fact that the war machine crushes their desires and needs and pushes them to work within a limited framework. Within this given space they try to build up their own lives and the lives of their families.

When asked what he wanted from the government, NGOs or other institutions to overcome these problems, one of the interviewees said he wanted many things from NGOs. He was silent for a while and then said:

*"you asked what I want, I want peace, I want government to relax/remove restrictions on movement (fishing, transporting goods from government controlled areas to LTTE control areas) and I want the LTTE to stop recruiting young people, if that happens I do not want anything from any body, you bet in a few years, I will work hard, I will earn a lot, I will rebuild our house, rebuild our lives may be if god blesses us, I will be in a position to help others"* (Balan, age 25/ Keran)

This research has shown that we have failed to acknowledge the changes that war and displacement have brought. We need to recognise how young people actively shape their culture and create new spaces against the conservative cultural discourse. We repeatedly try to work with the socio-cultural notions of youth that prevail in the Tamil society. We look at youth experiences through adult eyes. Therefore, policy makers, NGOs, the state and researchers have not understood the number of changes that take place in the life of the youth. We need to register the experiences of young people and enter into their world. We need to recognise their agency. We need to stabilise and strengthen what they have already started to negotiate in everyday life. We have to think about the norms and values associated with youth in cultural settings and how we can start to work with these enriched youth experiences.

## 9. Conclusion

Society has seen youth as a problem. Young people have been marginalised by society. The years of youth are inherently vulnerable even in stable countries. Young people have become a target group, especially in Sri Lanka where ethnic conflict is at its worst. Conflict broadens and deepens the impact of existing threats to youth. Ethnic conflict brings new threats to young people, such as voluntary and enforced military recruitment, exposure to landmines, displacement, lack of employment, restrictions on movements, trauma inflicted by all parties, gender-based violence and exploitation.

This study shows that young people become more vulnerable in such circumstances and the cultural values that exclude youth from society persist. Their desires and needs are not properly heard and fulfilled. Young women's independence is even more restricted. Their job-seeking options have been curtailed by cultural values. Young people are, in general, seen as irresponsible, highly emotional, and less committed people and are not invited to participate in the decision-making process at the household, community or national levels.

The ethnic war has changed the behavioural patterns and attitudes of young people. They have taken on the role of looking after the family, doing several jobs to fight poverty; participating in the decision-making process at household and community levels and even in national politics. They have given up their ambitions for higher education to look after the family or to fight poverty. They have changed from dependents to breadwinners following the loss of relatives and property because of the war and displacement.

Even though the social-cultural system of Tamil society has changed because of the prolonged ethnic conflict, certain constructed cultural values have not changed in the minds of the people. Young people are still marginalised and lack the supporting mechanisms needed to strengthen and support the changes. The social structure does not help young people who are fighting alone against poverty. Development projects, education reforms and job-creation should be geared to respond to these changes and should include young people in the design process. As social reality has diverged from cultural notions, these differences have to be studied and new projects should take social reality into consideration.

Young people are at a crossroads between structural constraints brought by war and displacement, cultural restrictions of conventional norms and customs and new opportunities brought by their active

participation in bringing meaning to their lives. One should recognise the notion of agency in the life of young people. They are creating their own spaces between these two sets of forces, taking on responsible roles looking after their families and dreaming of a better life in the future. Policy makers and NGOs have to rethink the definition of youth because one of the criteria for defining youth is based on lack of responsibility and this is invalid. This study shows that defining young people by age is problematic. Classing unmarried young people as youths creates problems because of the issue of women. We have to redefine the notion of youth in the Sri Lankan context and we have to listen to the voices of young people.

### **Annex 1: Population by age group**

<b>DS Division</b>	<b>Total Pop</b>	<b>Age 0-04</b>	<b>Age 05-14</b>	<b>Age 15-29</b>	<b>Age 30-49</b>	<b>Age 50-59</b>	<b>Age 60 +</b>
Manmunai North	78509	7061	13092	19047	20982	11587	6740
Kathankudy	36368	3779	6683	8257	10388	4875	2386
Manmunai Pathu	26627	2180	5284	7649	6572	2582	2360
Manmunai South & Eruvil Pathu	54566	6412	11306	12900	12731	6785	4432
Porathivu Pathu	44911	4239	10371	8101	11177	8257	2766
Manmunai South-West	23946	2808	5194	6218	5928	2495	1306
Manmunai West	27452	3188	6181	7953	6721	1693	1716
Eravur Town	32201	3728	6719	7910	7666	4760	1418
Eravur Pathu	66631	9138	14617	16566	14247	7633	4430
Koralai pathu	56723	8087	11775	12995	14368	6465	3033
Koralai pathu West	49271	5878	9823	9896	14923	5592	3159
Koralipathu North	20670	2019	4103	5782	4960	2154	1652
District Total	517878	58517	105148	123274	130663	64878	35398

Source: D.S.S. Batticaloa District 2001

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Koralai pathu West

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Koralai pathu North

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## **II. From Marginalisation to Participation: Supporting youth volunteering for development and social cohesion**

*Arthur Gillette*

### **1. Introduction**

Decades of civil strife left the Cambodian countryside littered with unexploded anti-personnel mines. As a result, the country has an uncommonly large number of amputees and citizens who are otherwise disabled. At the end of the 1990s a United Nations Volunteer Programme project aimed to assist with the development of the National Centre for Disabled People. A key figure in this project was Carmen Reyes Zubiaga, a UN volunteer from the Philippines with two years of service at the centre to her credit.

On the face of it, the centre looks like a café where tourists can drop in for a good meal and buy handicrafts; it generally overflows with customers. In fact, however, all the staff are people with disabilities. In addition to offering on-site training and employment, the centre provides support for the start-up of small businesses run by people with disabilities.

Indeed, the project's philosophy stemmed from the overall goal of empowerment. It "is a model for change in the sense that all of the disabled people here work to be competitive in their fields. Employees here may be disabled, but they have to act as though they are not. It is difficult, particularly at the start, but it is very important that they learn to help themselves first."

This is how she assesses the centre's progress and her part in it. "I am happy to see that the people of the centre feel that this is their work, their property. If I have instilled this commitment and self-confidence, then I have done my job". Of the centre's members, she says: "They are proud to be part of a growing organisation. In spite of their disabilities, they are motivated to learn and improve their skills. They are serving as inspiration to other disabled people."

Carmen herself uses a wheelchair; she decided to launch a similar project on her home island when she returned to the Philippines on completion of her UN volunteer assignment.

If there was one person who one might not have expected – in many contexts - to participate in a lead role, Carmen is it. She is subject to a kind of triple jeopardy: marginalised by her physical disability AND by being female and young. As this example surprisingly suggests, people usually considered to require help are becoming... helpers! Let me focus on the youth aspect: although progress has been made (lowering the voting age from 21 to 18 in some countries), there are still numerous obstacles hindering young people's full participation which make special supportive measures justified.

Carmen's example – as poignant as it is improbable – prompts me to explore participation through volunteering by different categories of people who are at least partly marginalised or excluded by their youth and/or other factors.

This journey – sometimes stark, sometimes hopeful - should suggest some action-orientated conclusions on questions about how the participation of young people can be supported, in Asia as elsewhere.

My central hypothesis is this:

1. Young people still tend generally to be viewed and treated as consumers rather than producers of development, that is: vulnerable and dependent beneficiaries rather than dynamic and imaginative actors. But
2. There is much evidence that we can turn that view on its head and, by spreading and enhancing the participation of young people, making them full members of a partnership for progress. If your ship springs a leak, you don't push the cabin boy aside – you invite him to join you at the pumps! And despite necessarily ambitious Millennium Goals, I think I see a world with massive and dangerous leaks in the economic, social and political spheres.

## 2. Background to Youth Empowerment: An Emerging Priority

Throughout history, virtually all societies have made provision for selfless contributions by individuals and groups to their local communities' economic prosperity and social health, thereby achieving, among other aims, the mobilisation, participation and socialisation of the younger generation. Although still surviving in various, particularly rural, parts of the world, such institutions are often in danger of disappearing, although they - paradoxically - can offer a tradition-rooted springboard for re-invigorating volunteering. This is underscored by the 2001 International Year of Volunteers National Committee in Nepal (Silwal).

With the breakdown of rural solidarity during the industrial revolution and the concomitant re-stratification of societies with monetary income as a defining factor, youth voluntary service as we generally know it today emerged: unremunerated and idealistically-motivated work by the more privileged young members of the mainstream in aid of the less privileged strata. This is what could be termed, with no negative connotation, philanthropic volunteering.

In Asia, one may point in this regard to the work in the People's Republic of China of young - often student - volunteers over the last half century. One project organised in the early 1990s by the Communist Youth League was the reconstruction - with volunteer participation - of rural homes destroyed by severe floods in Manchuria. Another function was to mobilise students at the beginning and end of summer holidays to inform and assist passengers at major train stations. These and other experiences led to the creation of the China Youth Volunteers Association in 1994-95 which has mobilised since its inception some 70 million secondary-school-leavers aged up to 25 years. Peer pressure and other incentives/requirements facilitate such massive mobilisation (Stroud and Omeltchenko 2003).

In the Philippines a recently-created and mandatory National Service Training Programme enables female, as well as male university students, to undertake individual or civic service instead of military training. In worldwide terms, a UNESCO world study on volunteering by young people discovered that 55% of the projects randomly surveyed explicitly involved "actions in favour of marginalised groups." Other projects pursued activities probably at least partially

designed to combat one form or another of social exclusion: literacy/education/training (63%), and actions in favour of youth (56%). (UNESCO)

A growing recent trend has, however, been the increasingly clear priority given to involving the 'helped' in helping themselves – and others - as a right. Edmundo Werna (1999) points out (Werna) that "participatory work is at the heart of a process of construction of social cohesion/capital." Today, this trend seems to be blooming in many parts of the world.

Among the goals of the Bangladesh Rural Improvement Foundation are to:

- Mobilise disadvantaged people to play a role in socio-economic development by providing access to credit for income-generating activities;
- Promote skills, professionalism and technical knowledge of the beneficiaries;
- Build awareness of the law..., provide legal-aid services and promote the exercise of democratic rights among deprived and exploited sections of society;
- Promote women's empowerment, gender-equality, and the prevention of child abuse and torture of women... (BRIF 2000)

Virtually unknown half a century ago, empowerment has become a key concept (although admittedly sometimes an unrealised slogan) in many youth volunteer programmes intended to combat social exclusion. Although not exhaustive, the following examples are suggestive of what the complete reality may actually be regarding volunteering by young people, and particularly marginalised youth.

Ernesto Rodriguez points to a curious situation found in Latin America (his statement is surely valid for other regions as well – including Asia): "although currently unfolding forms of development require optimal recourse to advantages concentrated in the younger generation (better predisposition to change, better preparation to forge ahead with new technologies, less links with pre-existing structures, etc.) we find the paradox of the wide diffusion of an image that stigmatises a generation as 'problem youth'." (Rodriguez 2000)

A case moving beyond that paradox is found in Israel, where about 10% of Israel's population of six million is aged 65 and above.

Among these senior citizens only about 8% or 9% own a personal computer, whereas access to new information technologies in general, and the internet in particular, would enable them to find information and further their education, not to forget interactive communication and at least virtual conviviality. It is no wonder, then, that initiation to practical informatics is in demand from the clients of the Virtual College for Third Agers, an initiative of the Israeli Ministry of Education's College Department. Where could volunteer teachers be found? The organisers were not long in finding an (obvious?) answer "In the new Hi-Tech world, where children speak the new language of the Internet as their mother tongue, it would be most fitting to put their mastery to good use and train them to teach this new language to senior citizens." (Aphek 2000)

During 1999, an experiment was carried out at the Alon Elementary School under which ten youngsters aged 11 to 14 tutored ten seniors. Following pre-service training, the course lasted five weeks, with learners and teachers meeting for three hours each Friday, enjoying a break that offered both groups an "opportunity to eat, drink and socialize". The results? "There is much talk about the shallowness, the zapping way our youngsters behave... Give them a meaningful, real-life task to do, and we'll see how responsible and deep they are" Said one organizer: (Ibid.)

### **3. Economic Exclusion**

Unemployment and underemployment clearly link up with other symptoms of exclusion, such as poverty and hunger. But the extent and worsening of economic exclusion worldwide is sometimes not fully realised. According to ATD Fourth World: "One hundred million more people live in poverty today than a decade ago. Half of humanity - 3 billion of a total 6 billion - live on an income of less than two U.S. dollars a day, and 1.3 billion live on less than one dollar a day..." (ATD) It should also be remembered that economic exclusion is not limited to the Third World: "Of the European Union's 400 million inhabitants, 60 million live under the poverty line (which is put at 50% below a country's average income)... "(ibid)

Already after The Crash of 1929, a number of mainly-governmental schemes began to offer young job-seekers the opportunity to perform socially useful tasks in about 30 countries, including Japan

and Australia. National service schemes for unemployed young people again flourished in Third World countries as diverse as Burma, Jamaica, Mali and Tunisia as part of the decolonisation process during the 1950s and 1960s, often with a strong training/education component.

Launched in 1964, the Kenya National Youth Service enlisted voluntarily about one twentieth of each year's unemployed school-leavers in building roads, dams, irrigation ditches and in National Park development. Although some of these schemes involved an element of compulsion and/or military functions, most seemed accepted, even appreciated, by the participants concerned, and the population at large. It may, then, be asked why very few survived beyond the 1970s (Gillette 1968).

The answer has obvious implications for volunteering by the economically marginalised/ excluded youth of today and in the future. It may well be at least partly economic. An International Labour Organisation study of the Kenya National Youth Service (Costa) showed that the per-participant market value of its outputs was much greater than its costs: US\$809.19: US\$675.36. This programme was definitely profitable in terms of internal analysis: value of output surpassed costs. But the costs seem to have been prohibitive in terms of the share of national budget reasonably available.

Would alternative means of achieving the same aims have been possible - and less expensive? Although useful and productive, such heavy-structure Third World schemes, which for example had recourse to mechanical earth-moving equipment, appeared too expensive in absolute terms. Compulsion and indoctrination have also sometimes been problems. These conclusions should, however, spur rather than deter the search for ways and means to offer the jobless large-scale democratic opportunities to volunteer.

#### **4. Ethnic/Racial Exclusion**

Migrant communities in industrialised countries appear increasingly to be organising volunteer-manned mutual self-help schemes, and many young people are among those volunteering. They are somewhat similar to traditional community action prevalent in pre-industrial societies and are rather different from most other



programmes through which the excluded are enabled to serve as volunteers. The latter tend mainly to emerge thanks to initiatives and support from within the mainstream society. These result, then, from outreach to the excluded. Here, however, we have action that originates from within the excluded community itself. And this appears to happen whatever assistance is (or isn't) available from host-country governments and NGOs.

The realisation seems to be spreading that, as the Turkish ECHO-Austria association puts it: "it is up to us to see that being able to draw on two cultures is enriching." (Echo-Austria) For the Agabey-Agbla Model Project (Agabey-Agbla) in Germany, where there are two million people of Turkish origin, "Our motto is 'taking one's future into one's own hands'." Mirror volunteering is at the heart of the Agabey-Agbla (Big Brother-Big Sister) project. This venture grew from the European Association of Turkish Academics, an NGO bringing together Turkish-origin academics, students and entrepreneurs, mainly of the second generation. The A-A project began in Germany in 1991. It has now spread to Austria, Belgium, Denmark and Switzerland, and definitely follows a 'mirror' approach. Since European teachers "can be very prejudiced because they don't know much about Turkish culture," (Ibid.) the idea is to mobilise Turkish-origin students as mentors and role-models for two or three Turkish-origin school pupils each. With these youngsters they spend some two hours weekly, focusing on subjects indicated by the regular teacher. In a way, this is an example of the less under-privileged among the under-privileged helping the more under-privileged.

Funding for such schemes has sometimes been obtained from host-country sources. But this is far from always the case. ECHO-Austria reports (Echo-Austria) that "We need to have a flexible approach to overcoming problems, including bureaucratic and political obstacles," and stresses the desirability of "un-bureaucratic financial support for projects /involving/ those affected by social exclusion."

## **5. Gender-Related Exclusion and Marginalisation**

Gender-related exclusion and marginalisation is another obstacle to social cohesion being undermined by volunteering. Long gone are the days when female participants in international voluntary work camps were expected to do the shopping, cooking and cleaning-up, leaving

the 'real' work to the boys. A male participant in a 1960 East-West camp that built a secondary school in a Ukrainian kolkhoz reminisces: "The star worker in our team of about 80 from some 20 countries was a petite ballerina from Leningrad. She was all muscle and no-nonsense!" (Conversation)

A major trend today seems to be that volunteering by the gender-marginalised be gender-linked. Thus, the Pakistani Society for Disabled Women's mainly female 105 members focus on educational, protective, fund-raising and productive activities benefiting other women (SDW). In addition to gender-specific 'mirror volunteering', and as the example of the ballerina quoted above suggests, gender-penalised young people have increasingly been volunteering for work of broader social value.

## **6. Exclusion from Communications Technologies**

Today, the major form of exclusion from communication technologies may increasingly be expressed as 'electronic isolation'. The relevant literature stresses the gap in access between industrialised and developing countries, which Cees Hamelink says "is widening and ... hinders the integration of all countries into the Global Information Society... Today some 15% of the world population enjoy some 71% of the world's main telephone lines. Low-income countries (where 55% of the world population lives) have less than 5% of the world share of telephone lines... More than 50% of the world's people have never even used a telephone!" (Hamelink 1998)

"Less than 4% of internet users are in the Third World. In India for 100 people there is only 0.2% of personal computers; this compares with ... 15 PCs in Japan, and... 21 PCs for 100 people in the United States." (Ibid.) Within, as well as between, countries there are also often glaring disparities. In most developing countries a person who belongs to the rural majority lacks the necessary resources or access to enable him/her to use the internet. Despite a 'natural' attraction to and ability with, say, the internet, it seems fair to assume that an underprivileged rural young person in the poorest Third World countries may have even less access to such technology than his/her elders living in cities.

Inhibited access to communication technologies does not *ipso facto* prevent volunteering. In depressed neighbourhoods around Metro

Manila, Philippines, the Youth for Sustainable Development Assembly (YSDA) has engendered 20 groups of 20 volunteers each. There, the internet and even telephones are not exactly household items, nor even very readily available in public places. Yet, YSDA classed 'lack of communication...isolation' tenth out of ten as a cause of exclusion, and lack of access to services or information as fifth (poverty was first).

YSDA follows an empowerment approach, i.e. to generate development from within. Their "voluntary services are meant to make participating youth groups from poverty-stricken communities both beneficiaries and partners where our conservation projects are conducted...". The over-riding goal is to help participants "regain their dignity" (Ibid).

Concerning this last point, YSDA stresses the importance for the excluded – and the young more generally – of "having a voice and being represented." (Ibid) It also points to a drawback, in volunteering, when there is not a move beyond service and subsequent economic projects "to building a political activity to ensure that ... gains are preserved."

"Having a voice" implies that voices can be heard. YSDA's Secretary General says that going online can lead to "an influx of too much information - destructive ... cultural influences included." He feels that other forms of communication, particularly locally-run media, are more likely to favour empowerment. "What have proven to be effective so far in the Philippines are community radios. These are small-scale, low-capital, cooperative alternative radio systems which the community can initiate and manage. Empowerment has to start here. It must be bottom-up." (Cabonegro)

## **7. Main Issue Clusters: Obstacles to Voluntary Youth Participation and Possible Ways Forward**

Drawing on recent and current evidence, this paper has attempted to suggest, among other things, how great the potential of volunteering by marginalised and excluded youth is. It has, in particular, sought to help discover and understand the potentials for volunteering among people affected by one or more kinds of social exclusion.

Here, let's examine some main issues - obstacles and possible ways forward - that appear to require attention from different institutional actors, and groups thereof. The aim is that these potentials be more fully realised, as concerns service by both the more privileged and the less privileged. Some of these issue-clusters concern volunteering at large as a powerful means of youth participation; most pertain more specifically to volunteering for - and particularly by - the more marginalised.

### **a) *Information and awareness issues***

We may be living in the information millennium, but insufficient information about volunteering and social cohesion seems evident at two levels: among the public at large including certain categories of individuals, and among actually or potentially concerned organisations.

Youth participation through volunteering appears to be well-known and positively valued in some societies: a recent UK study revealed that 85% of 15- to 24-year-old Britons are willing to "give at least one day of their time a year to help a good cause..." (CSV) Nevertheless, many adults still doubt the ability of youngsters to contribute productively to different development activities. In an African country I visited recently, the slogan on volunteers' tee-shirts simply pleaded "Trust Me."

Intensive public information efforts have been a regular feature of the annual UN International Day of Volunteers (5 December). They are also a hands-on centrepiece of the Global Youth Service Days, celebrated since 2000. These events see coalitions of youth organisations in some 30 countries undertake a variety of concrete attention-attracting activities including home building in Costa Rica, road-sign-painting in Guyana and playground-construction for deprived neighbourhoods in the USA (Global).

In addition to across-the-board information aimed at society in general, specially targeted programmes of communication are designed for different categories of potential young volunteers. They should, however, be particularly sensitive to the ways both more and less marginalised young people do (and do not) communicate. For example, Francesca Becchetti suggests (Becchetti) that "decentralised

contacts" are needed when approaching young people in difficult situations: one "needs a lot of skill, communication and dialogue to get through to this public." How, for example, does one penetrate informal word-of-mouth communication networks between young people?

The world at large is obviously not waiting with bated breath for news, ideas and proposals concerning volunteering as a means of youth participation. This is quite understandable given the array and intensity of problems facing us. Disquietingly, however, there seems to be a lack of awareness of the above-mentioned potentials among bodies directly concerned. A worrisome indicator here is a remark recently made by the then Chief of the UN Youth Unit to the effect that "youth service has somehow been lost in the United Nations shuffle... "(Angel) A second is the fact that although, in preparation for 2001 International Year of Volunteers, the UNESCO Executive Board placed on the Agenda of its 160th session (late 2000) the item "Review of Existing Youth Voluntary Service Programmes and Proposals for an Innovative UNESCO Approach", when that point came up in the Board's relevant commission only one Member State and one NGO observer took the floor.

### **b) *Participation issues***

An important question here is: How voluntary should participation be? An overtly obligatory and militarily organised service scheme, such as Nazi Germany's 1930s Arbeitsdienst, can obviously not be considered voluntary. Even where participants can choose to opt in or opt out, there are grey areas, possible causes for concern. The temptation to foist a kind of volunteering on certain kinds of excluded young people, e.g. the long-term unemployed, may be strong in certain contexts. Another case in point is the civilian service option offered as an alternative to bearing arms in certain countries where national (usually military) service is mandatory - although probably few conscientious objectors having served usefully would complain.

Indeed, rather than drawing too sharp a distinction between 'unavoidable obligation' and 'pure volunteering,' it is probably useful to assess different schemes along a continuum with varying mixes of free will, on the one hand, and incentives and social pressure, on the other. In Nigeria, for example, university graduates must do a stint of National Service before being permitted to work in that country. In a real sense, this is obligatory service. On the other hand, the

service period is one way of partly repaying the cost of their tertiary education - and enriching earlier classroom education with practical learning. And, it can be added that nobody obliges them to attend university (Eberly).

On the question of incentives, a long-smouldering, and sometimes flaring, debate in certain settings turns around the amount of material support and other incentives that should be offered to attract volunteers. A young prison inmate recording books for blind people may not expect - or want - even minimal material compensation for this effort. But 'good marks' on his/her record, improving parole possibilities, may sometimes be an ulterior motive. This does not necessarily diminish a selfless motivation of desiring to make amends for a misdeed committed and/or help those in need. On the other hand, a disabled short-, medium-, or long-term young volunteer working far away from his/her home can rightfully expect that at least lodging and insurance will be covered as well, in certain instances, as pocket money or even (a contribution to) travel costs.

### **c) *Nature of tasks***

To offer maximum impact to both society and participants, how can the nature of work undertaken by volunteers be truly meaningful? 'Made jobs' to pass time, and e.g. artificially absorb unemployment, should be avoided whatever the (survival) material benefits for the participants may be.

Further, continuing an already long and complex discussion between trade unions and voluntary service bodies, India's International Foundation for Human Development asks how one can ensure that low-cost or cost-free volunteering does not steal jobs from regular workers. (IFHD) If a teacher in Delhi volunteers on-line to translate a Northern-hemisphere NGO's brochure into Hindi, is it not possible that his/her service is taking bread from the mouth of a jobless local professional?

### **d) *Economic issues***

So long as youth participation through volunteering remains a fairly marginal activity, the economic value of its inputs and products may also be considered to be of relatively minor importance. Now, however, there is the prospect of its assuming a more widespread and

central role in society. Serious economic analysis is needed to inform the decisions of those who assess and allocate the use of budgetary and other resources. The central issues here are the benefits and costs of volunteering, and the relationship between them.

## **8. Benefits of Volunteering**

The benefits to society of most volunteer projects seem clear: socially useful manual and/or non-manual tasks carried out less expensively than by usual means, with the added value of an unusual enthusiasm and abnegation born of a willingly-made sacrifice of hours, days, weeks, and year(s). In this sense, youth volunteering may be viewed and affirmed as, by and large, a real mosaic stone in the construction of social cohesion/capital.

With few exceptions, however, and whatever their successes and intrinsic value, the experiences reported on in this study are relatively modest, even symbolic. This is so in terms both of society's needs-to-be-met and of the potential pool of volunteers to meet those needs. The possible/probable benefits to participants, and particularly volunteers who are excluded for one or more reasons, also seem to have been demonstrated in the foregoing. First is the improvement in self-image, self-esteem and self-confidence. There was, for example, one volunteer's realisation that "even I" have "a gift to offer."

Formal and informal learning of new and often employable skills - carpentry, languages, computer use, and inter-cultural initiation: the list is as long and broad as the variety of tasks carried out - is a second benefit. Positive transformation of previously stereotyped mainstream views of youth - particularly the more marginalised - is a third.

When appropriate balances are struck in programmes and projects between benefits to society and benefits to volunteers, volunteering for and by excluded young people - and youth in general - can be a powerful tool for building social cohesion. But what are those appropriate balances? The answer is at least partly dictated by its costs.

## 9. Costs

Volunteering is probably never cost-free, if only because it involves opportunity costs. The young prisoners who record books for the blind do not *per se* incur a budget item beyond infrastructure and supervision. These would in any event have to be furnished were paid readers to be used. Yet the time that the prisoners spend volunteering could have been used for other (e.g. self-educational) purposes which, in the abstract, might be considered of greater value to them and, ultimately, to their society. Then, too, even where cost: benefit ratios of volunteering by youth are irrefutably positive, investment in them may be prohibitive, taking into account the resources reasonably available.

Thirdly, and although hard, significant, comprehensive and internationally comparable data do not seem to be available, it seems safe to say that volunteering by the marginalised and young people more generally is not necessarily more expensive than that effected by others. Nevertheless, there are reasons why in some cases there may be higher expenditure per successful volunteer. One is the special organisational arrangements required for certain categories of the excluded and younger youths. Another is the very fragility of at least some candidates who drop out once money has been spent on them.

## 10. Cost: Benefit Comparison

Should this supplementary cost discourage policy-makers interested in promoting volunteering? At least part of the answer may be found in a brief return to the question of benefits. We have seen above that the benefits to the excluded – including the younger among them – who volunteer to be exceptionally varied and great. It may, then, be postulated that higher input is justified by higher output.

In Washington State, USA, the monetary value of work carried out by 18-24-year-old female, low-income, minority-race unemployed volunteers was found to be more than twice the size of the grant that funded the operation. In addition, while 70% of participants had been unemployed before their year of service, the jobless rate fell to 18% afterwards (Eberly 2000).



Here, one finds three major groups of issues to address as concerns in volunteering as a means of youth participation. Two are internal: special provisions and pace; another is external: partnerships and cooperation. Volunteering and particularly by young people – particularly the more marginalised – may require special provisions. Leadership of several projects contacted during the study by Roker et al. (Roker 1998) “believed that a real commitment to involving young disabled people meant ‘putting ourselves out’, and addressing issues of staffing, resources, time, stereotypes, etc.”

## **11. Special Provisions May Be Required During Three Phases**

In the pre-service phase, both before and after selection/recruitment, extra care may need to be exercised to ensure that all parties concerned - sponsoring and host structures, volunteers, their families, etc. - are fully and correctly informed about all aspects of the project to be undertaken. This information includes, as necessary, volunteers’ special requirements. Due attention should be given, however, to avoiding the propagation of stereotypes.

During the period of service, particular logistical arrangements may need to be made, e.g. for youngsters not having attained the age of legal majority. As well as technical backstopping, particular moral support is needed in many contexts; provision for ‘buddy’ relationships and periodic inter-volunteer encounters can be helpful in this regard. Concerning governance, it is important to be aware of the need to strike a balance between top-down and bottom-up decision-making, and to ensure institutional sensitivity to initiatives, ideas and criticisms (not to forget unexpected behaviour) emanating from volunteers. These may hitherto have lacked self-confidence or experience in personal and group self-management.

Special post-service attention to volunteers’ aspirations and needs may also be required. This can range from offering information to volunteers’ family and entourage, not to forget potential employers, about the sometimes radical changes in personality and skills that may have occurred during service. Also needed may be assistance in hunting for jobs or further training/education, and support for additional volunteering.

Large-scale participation of young people, particularly the more marginalised youth, through volunteering is a desirable and ambitious long-term goal. Yet, as the Chinese proverb has it, "The longest journey begins with a single step." The Russian Peace on the Planet Foundation states that a "primary factor for success in projects mobilising volunteers from marginalised categories is work on realization of a small but concrete task, which is useful to a group of ... people" (PPF).

## **12. Partnerships and Cooperation**

A major trend revealed in research undertaken to prepare this document is the near-universal existence, in and accompanying programmes and projects reported on, of horizontal inter-structural cooperation and partnerships of an almost bewildering variety. The Filipino Youth for Sustainable Development Assembly (YSDA) affirms that "local multi-sectoral support within the community is a major factor for success."

In Nepal among "factors responsible for success of ... social cohesion initiatives, is, networking, which supported people and organisations to be empowered from each other's lessons and learn from each other's experiences." Drawing further on Nepalese experience, Bhuvan Silwal, of the National Committee for the International Year of Volunteers advises that external agents "should be sensitive to the local volunteering traditions" and even proposes "a code of conduct for donors" and other non-local bodies.

A variety of governmental, intergovernmental, non-governmental and philanthropic agencies not directly responsible for project organisation is or could be involved in volunteering for social cohesion. Understandably, such agencies have criteria and guidelines governing their contribution to and involvement in other structures' programmes and projects. One recurrent complaint revealed by a UN Volunteer Programme survey on social cohesion was that the 'rules of the road' are so complicated that they can make for inextricable 'traffic jams' in terms of cooperation.

The Israeli experience reported on by Edna Aphek leads her (Aphek) to suggest greater links between volunteering and schools with the specific aim of "value and character and ... greater involvement in the community." For his part, Ernesto Rodriguez (Rodriguez)

proposes the inclusion of “voluntary work as part of the curriculum in educational systems.” This has been done in settings as different as Cuba, Denmark, Tanzania and the USA.

The private sector of the economy is, for a variety of reasons, becoming more involved in social action. The UK Minister for Corporate Responsibility has pointed out that “businesses can benefit from behaving responsibly towards employees, communities and the environment.” (Guardian 2000) While concrete expressions of private sector responsibility are becoming increasingly widespread in industrialised countries, how can similar actions be spread to favour youth participation in general – and in particular through volunteering – in the developing world?

### **13. Evaluation**

Formative and summarised evaluation can provide vital information and at the same time the following points (a) programme improvement, (b) informing decisions of policy-makers and resource-providers who can assist such programmes, and (c) feeding the sort of public information activities referred to at the beginning of this chapter. Given the specificities of volunteering by the young – and particularly more marginalised youth -, it is particularly important that evaluation be participatory.

Edna Aphek (Aphek 2000, emphasis in original) reports on the Israeli project under which children tutored seniors in computer skills: “Though we were very careful as far as documenting the project is concerned, we failed to ask the children - our ‘young teachers’ - to ... give us feedback in writing in the last session. They did give us feedback in our oral discussion, but one can’t rely on one’s fickle memory.” Roker et al. (Roker 1998) stress the importance of “consulting with and including ... young/ disabled volunteers/ at all stages...”

## 14. Conclusion

In summary, let me pose some crucial questions about what hinders and what supports volunteering as a form of participation by youth – including excluded/marginalised youth - in the different contexts:

### 1) *Perceptions:*

- To what extent do adults harbour paternalistic opinions about the younger generation? Are those perceptions evolving? How and why?
- Do young people – particularly the more marginalised among them – tend to accept paternalistic opinions about them? How much do they aspire to more empowered and participatory behaviour? How do they express that aspiration?

### 2) *Types of empowering participation through volunteering:*

- What conclusions would you draw from any experience you have had with volunteers as young as 11?
- What do you feel are innovative good practices linking youth volunteering with income-generating activities?
- If inter-ethnic or inter-racial tensions or conflicts are a problem in your setting, how do you see youth volunteering coming to grips with them successfully?
- Is it at all realistic to hope that, through volunteering, young people can massively help society (including themselves) gain access to Information and Communication Technologies? Could not such massive access destroy valued cultural traditions?

### 3) *Obstacles to and ways forward for supporting youth volunteering and youth participation more generally:*

- What are proven successful means of getting 'the message' across to the public at large, potentially concerned institutions and to the younger generation?
- How voluntary can and should participatory service be?
- What is your typology of the most appropriate tasks for

volunteering by young people experiencing respectively mild or serious marginalisation?

- Can you quote examples of good cost-benefit ratios in youth volunteering schemes? Bad cost-benefit ratios?
- What kinds of special provisions need to be made for young volunteers, particularly those experiencing a degree of marginalisation?
- Is there an ideal pace for the launching and development of youth volunteer schemes?
- What are good practices of youth volunteer schemes in terms of approaching and engaging a variety of potential partner structures, e.g. other similar schemes, governmental/intergovernmental/philanthropic agencies, the school system...?
- Is evaluation of youth volunteer schemes taken seriously enough? Or too seriously? (Remember the Malaysian proverb: "When you buy a monkey, make sure you don't pay more for the leash than the animal!")

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- (i) This document is largely based on research carried out on “volunteering and social cohesion” for the U.N. Volunteers Programme in preparation for 2001 International Year of Volunteers. A short summary of results of that research has been published as a chapter entitled “Taking People Out of Boxes and Categories: Voluntary Service and Social Cohesion” in the first number of the yearbook Service Enquiry, Global Service Institute, St. Louis, Missouri, Washington, D.C., Johannesburg 2003. Readers are strongly encouraged to visit the relevant Website: [www.service-enquiry.org.za](http://www.service-enquiry.org.za)



### **III. Youth and Learning in Post-Conflict Situations: "In our mind, in our blood, we still have this feeling of war"**

*Stephanie Schell-Faucon*

#### **1. Introduction**

To explore the role of youth in sustainable and peaceful development in post-conflict situations requires a close look at the following questions: What do we understand by youth in conflict-prone or post-war and transitional societies? What does learning mean in such an environment? What kind of learning is needed for youth and how do these definitions and concepts impact on educational approaches?

Following an inductive approach, we will start off with a case-study of the Wilderness Trail and Therapy Project (WTTP) implemented with and by militarised and criminalised youth in South Africa in the late 1990s. This example provides many insights into the difficulties youth, their communities as well as those who offer space for learning and education may encounter, as they strive towards a social re-integration of young people into their communities. To fully comprehend these challenges, the specific conflict context, and the active involvement of the youth during the violence as well as their fragile position in the aftermath need to be – at least briefly – considered (1.1) before the project itself and the experiences of the involved youth are discussed (1.2).

The lessons one can learn from the case-study presented here will help us to draw a number of conclusions for the conceptualisation of youth and learning in societies scarred by a culture of conflict and violence. There will be a discussion of why the category 'youth' has to be questioned (2.1) and why re-integration approaches need to embrace a holistic concept of learning and re-learning (2.2).

## **2. Social Integration of Militarised Youth – a Case Study from South Africa<sup>1</sup>**

### **2.1 Political violence and youth involvement in South Africa**

#### ***Escalation of inter and intra community violence***

In South Africa, over decades, state repression and opposition to apartheid have resulted in high levels of militarisation.<sup>2</sup> Between 1990 and 1994, during the transition period of the negotiated settlement, the nature of political violence changed. Whereas previously the focus was direct conflict with white security forces, this shift exhibited a higher rate of intra and inter-community conflicts, the so-called black-on-black violence. With the deproscribing of political organisations, the contest over political power increased and claimed more lives and a wider range of victims than before. In particular, the rivalry between the African National Congress (ANC) and the Zulu Inkhata Freedom Party (IFP) alignments, fuelled by the security forces, precipitated this rapidly escalating conflict. Communities split into different camps, and families were torn apart.

A crucial component of the conflict escalation in many townships was the emphasis on ethnic and political boundaries through territorial control of particular areas. This polarisation led to the politicisation of ethnic origin. Ideological, ethnic and territorial fortresses were created: e.g. non-Zulus (or Zulus who refused IFP membership) were driven out of migrant worker hostels, while people of Zulu origin or IFP affiliation (or those who were simply suspected of either of these) were forced to leave their houses in territory claimed by the ANC. Many townships became war zones, with forced colonisation of different kinds and no-go areas between the different territories. In the Katorus region, south of Johannesburg alone, where the WTTP started its work later on, around 1,200 people died between July 1993 and April 1994. At this time it became almost impossible for residents not to take sides. The divides became deeply implanted in people's

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<sup>1</sup> The case-study is presented rather briefly for the purpose of the particular questions raised above. A detailed analysis of the project and its impacts based on interviews with all stakeholders is provided in Schell-Faucon 2004 (125-246) and 2001.

<sup>2</sup> However, the struggle against the Apartheid state and its main agents was not only a militarised one, it also included many forms of opposition and non-violent resistance on individual and communal levels.

minds and had a direct impact on the lives of the young people (Cf. TRC 1998/3, 670ff; Van der Merwe 2001, 192f; IBI 1994).

### **Involvement of Youth in Political and Criminal Violence**

Since the 1980s, township youth had been among the most active participants in the revolutionary struggle. They identified themselves as key agents of social and political change. In the 1990s a number of young people mainly of the age between 12 - 25 years became involved in informal military structures affiliated either to ANC or to IFP. These groups often provided young people with a sense of belonging in times when families and communities were breaking up. As they responded to the communities' need to protect life, limb and home, the status of youth was one that of 'defenders of their community' (cf. Marks 1995:5).<sup>3</sup> This was acknowledged by the neighbourhood supplying money for protection.

The distinction, however, between criminal and political motivation for violence became increasingly blurred. In search of guns or money to purchase weapons, a lot of young people were drawn into robbery, violent attacks and murder. Political violence depended on the support of criminals who had access to weapons, and numerous criminal activities shrouded in quasi-political motivation. In the context of their militant units, drugs and alcohol often bolstered them against danger and fear. Growing addiction in order to suppress painful experiences and memories was reported by a large number of youth:

*"I had to smoke dagga and I had to smoke pills because you wouldn't go there sober-minded to fight or you wouldn't get a rest there to sleep. I mean you sleep here, nearly outside that door there's a corpse and it's burned in ashes and there are dogs eating it, it has been there for two weeks. You saw the person when they hold him, you saw the person when they start torturing him up until he's dead, up until he was burned – that person is still there. So there was no way that you will be sober and pass by." (Mandla 28.06.2000)<sup>4</sup>*

<sup>3</sup> Since negotiations for a peaceful settlement of the conflict were on-going, it became difficult for youth to identify themselves as freedom fighters. The internecine and political violence in the townships however gave them still a heroic role to play (cf. Dissel 1997, Marks/ McKenzie 1995).

<sup>4</sup> The names of the interviewees have been changed to keep the youth anonymous (for more details on the sample and their background cf. Schell-Faucon 2004, 129f/ 182ff).

## ***The "Struggling" youth after the elections of 1994***

With Nelson Mandela and the ANC winning the elections, the political motivation for the struggle was removed, but enmities, as well as economic and material interests rooted in the social conflict, remained largely intact. Many of the militarised youth, highly trained in the use of weapons and lacking an immediate income, became even more involved in criminal activities. Their leadership role vanished and communities started to reject and marginalise them. Thus, the heroes and protectors of yesterday became the social outcasts of today (cf. Dissel 1997:407-409; Marks/McKenzie 1995:1).

The psychological, emotional and social effects of people's experiences during the violence are multifaceted and immeasurable. They manifest on an individual level, within families and throughout communities. It is estimated that 60 to 80% of the population of the Katorus region suffered from some kind of post-traumatic stress symptoms (Seiler 1997: 114). Everybody had to deal with different kinds of scars from lasting physical injuries to the loss of family members and friends, some of whom have not been heard from since. The symptoms differ, but many young people said that they suffered from nightmares and flashbacks. The sudden change of status hit them in a harsh way and often resulted in an exacerbation of the trauma experienced during the violence. For a lot of young people who had found a frame of reference and the acceptance they desired in street gangs and formal or informal political and militant structures, it was very difficult to find a new place and sense of belonging in their community:

*"94 to '96, by then the violence was over - I can say over in the way that we didn't stay up in the night on guard... but now in our mind, in our blood, we still have this feeling of war." (Mapetla 29.06.2000)*

Most of the youth were, however, unwilling to attend any of the formal counselling sessions that were available, conceiving therapy as something that is designed for 'mad people' only. In addition, the situation of the youth in the aftermath is also characterised by educational and socio-economic disadvantages. The formal school education of young people had been severely disrupted. With the end of the violence many were too old to be reintegrated in the regular school system. The creation of special school projects isolated and labelled them as social outcasts and also failed in the aim of bringing

former enemies together. In cases where a return to school was possible, the attendance of militarised youth created unease for the youth, the teachers as well as other students:

*"I was always quiet and just watching things but I wanted no one to mess up. ...that's the way I was - get angry very quickly and I quickly give a smack. But then I think that people could even see that too and that some of the teachers at school were very, very nervous. I could say not really respecting me but scared of me, ja, the way I appeared."*  
(Mapetla 28.06.2000)

In 1994 a Community Constable Project had hoped to restore peace in the townships by integrating former members of the militarised youth into the South African Police Services. Lacking a long-term integration plan and neglecting the trauma of the ex-combatants, this strategy turned out to be a failure. It resulted in a high rate of suicides amongst the community constables, as well as provocative behaviour and criminal activities which in turn led to rejection of the project by the community. So, finally, neither the educational nor the socio-economic needs and expectations of the youth were met. And as government pensions for people who participated in the liberation struggle were not given to anyone under the age of 35, the youth's disappointment was considerable. They perceived themselves as being let down by their leaders:

*"Today, there are people who are members of Parliament (of) whom I know their bad stuff, bringing a lot, thousands of guns to our people. Today they are big there, there's a gap now, this big gap. You can't even shake hands with them, we are just nothing."* (Thembisile 26.06.2000)

In a similar way many respondents articulated the feeling of having been 'trapped' by politics. It is not surprising that they talk about their involvement as perpetrators but also perceive themselves as victims, both during and after the violence.

When the Truth and Reconciliation Commission started its investigations of gross human rights violations in the Katorus region in 1996, the area was still deeply marked by the less violent, but ongoing conflict. The no-go zones prevailed as much as the negative perception between the opposing groups. Many people were not ready to disclose their recent experiences. Some said that they were

concerned about the legal consequences, but even more afraid of revenge.

Against this background, it is not surprising that attempts to work with the militarised and criminalised youth of Katorus proved to be extremely difficult. Various phenomena and effects during the violence and others in the aftermath - many of which tie back to this earlier period - need to be taken into consideration in order to address the complex situation of youth:

- diverse experiences of violence (as observer, victims and perpetrator)
- complex perpetrator-victim-dynamic and fear to reveal their role in killings
- physical injuries
- fragmented families (with members being torn apart or killed)
- different post-traumatic stress symptoms (including flashbacks, sleeplessness, nightmares, fear and aggressive behaviour)
- addiction to alcohol and drugs (often used to suppress flashbacks etc.)
- involvement in crime after the violence (partly due to unemployment)
- disapproval of therapeutic intervention
- suspicion of authority figures (partly due to disappointment in their leaders)
- lack of formal education and unemployment
- lack of social acceptance and loss of a sense of belonging

## **2.2 Experiences of the wilderness trail and therapy project**

### ***Brief outline of the project***

The Wilderness Trail and Therapy Project (WTP) of the National Peace Accord Trust (NPAT), a South African non-governmental organization founded in 1992, started in the Katorus region in late 1996. The work of the NPAT is grounded on the belief that besides the vital development of socio-economic infrastructure, a parallel effort, focusing on human development, is necessary to address the psycho-social effects of violence (Seiler 1997). As such, the transformation of trauma is a first and crucial step to a peaceful society. But since, in the case of the former militarised youth,

conventional, mostly western ways of dealing with trauma appeared to be unsuccessful, new approaches needed to be found. A robust seven-day Transformation Trail in the Mountains of KwaZulu-Natal, based on the concept of transforming trauma through the power of nature was developed. In order to build a 'culture of peace' within the community, the trail brought together former enemies involved in the violence.

The hike was designed with the understanding that the physical obstacles, challenges, achievements and their parallel psychological equivalents are part of the same process. While challenges appear to be insurmountable or dangerous, they are selected and presented in a way that they are high in perceived risk and low in actual risk. The ultimate aim was to give participants - through the facilitation of new connections between them and their environment, others, and self - the feeling of personal empowerment and a sense that others can be trusted. It was assumed that an atmosphere of growing mutual trust also allows participants a gradual reframing of their conflictive relationships and lets them share their past experiences. Most trails included a visit to sacred San caves serving the common ancestors of the youth for healing rituals. The rock art associated with this healing ritual still remains on the cave walls and addresses issues of social harmony, well-being and the healing of individuals by means of the communal trance dance. The painting of a beast chasing a man and vice versa was used as a metaphor to explain the effects of trauma and strategies for facing and integrating it.

Crucial for the project's access to militarised and criminalised youth was the involvement of a former youth commander as project coordinator and the training and integration of participants from both factions as trail assistants. The project became over time more and more independent of the NPAT and the rather young white psychologists and facilitators who had initiated it together with the ex-commander.

After returning from the Transformation Trail, a post-trail support programme in the township facilitated their re-integration in the community. While it was vital for the individual to get access to formal education, vocational training or skills to set up a self-made business, it was also recognised by the project that the newly-established group of youth across the ethno-political divide needed a safe space for meetings. Informal counselling opportunities developed when some of the former trail members founded a 'Mountain Club'. This

informal structure first served an ongoing therapeutic function, allowing youth to meet and discuss their experiences, to continue building relationships, and to become involved in cultural and sporting activities. Some of these activities included the larger community and gave the youth the possibility to constructively re-connect and engage with their families and other community members.

### ***Sketching some of the impacts and challenges of the project***

The following section refers exclusively to discussions and interviews held with participants and trail assistants who were formerly involved in political and criminal violence. Most respondents are male. They represent different ethno-political groups.<sup>5</sup>

It can be stated at the outset that the opportunity to leave the township and to hike seven days in the wilderness was - without exception - enjoyed as an outstanding and meaningful event. While many respondents had problems in indicating the year when they left school and joined other community projects, most of them knew the exact date of their trail. The main criticism of the project revolves around the post-trail support.

### ***Transformative power and new connections***

Participants described the project and especially the trail as a turning-point in their life, some claimed to have found an end to their nightmares, while others simply emphasised that it helped them to find there is something they have to further work on. On the whole, the interviewees shared a fundamental belief in the positive energy and transformative power of the process. This confidence often found expression in efforts to convince friends to also participate.

When asked about the most significant experience of the project, all responses centred on the establishment of new connections with the environment, other and self. Often, the participants put the emphasis on one or two kinds of relationships that shifted or changed during the trail. This is also the case in the interview fragment quoted below. Throughout the interview, this participant stressed "socialising with people" as a major aspect. At the same

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<sup>5</sup> Only selected relevant results are presented. For the complete study and more details on the impacts, the sample and research methodology cf. Schell-Faucon 2004/ 2001.



time, his response shows how the connection with others (sharing, recognising the other as somebody, as an-other self) is linked to the experience of nature (listening, speaking to nature, feeling spring water, facing the dangerous tunnel) and how both impacted on the self (you've been qualified, you are somebody, be proud of yourself) and vice versa. This speaks for a complex interdependence of the new connections that contribute as a whole to the individual's process of transformation and healing. The participant seems to perceive this interconnection of internal and external events (you can hear that, it's inside, naturally), but these feelings are difficult to express. He refers to his experience in terms of an initiation process. Other interviewees talked in a similar way about "a changed life", being a "different person" and having "new friends".

*"The most important thing was socialising with people, getting to know people. I was a hermit. I used to lock myself [in]. I did not want to socialise with anyone. I was thinking I was the best. Other people were just like shit. But going there [means] meeting other people, discussing with them, making some new ideas ... - it is a good place, no air pollution - speaking to nature, just sitting there, looking at the mountains, birds, you know? ... You're feeling like a new person, you feel like you've been qualified. Now we are starting a new life. You are a renewed person, like a new somebody."*

*[Interviewer]: And it has to do with nature and the experience of nature?*

*"Ja, ... not meeting people of the location, not meeting all those things, it's just staying there, just the atmosphere, you can hear that ... it's inside, naturally, it heals—even with that water, spring water, the one that they are selling. Just getting into that water, you feel like a new person. There is this place that they call a tunnel. From this side, you cannot see the other side; you have to cross it. When you come that side, you are proud of yourself—you are proud to see 'I have done it' ... When time goes by, you feel like: this is somebody and I am somebody, this guy is nice, we are just fighting for shit ... we can share a lot of experiences. He used to be my enemy, but now he's not my enemy anymore. We can do many things together, now we are clicking together."*  
(Mokethsi 02.07.05)

## ***Gaining self-confidence and developing coping strategies***

Listening to the participants it becomes evident that everybody was confronted with fears at some point. The anxieties experienced during as well as after the trail vary a lot but occupy an extensive space in all interviews. They hint at the importance of opening up, admitting fear and taking risks. Having successfully overcome these moments of stress, often going along with physical challenges, the participants claim to have felt a new sense of strength, courage and self-esteem. In many cases these experiences led to more generalised lessons about how to deal with difficulties and solve problems in life. One of the females described it as follows:

*"Even when I felt that it's difficult, I told [myself]: 'let me try myself and see if I can cope with something in life.' ... And the time I was there at the top, when I was looking down [seeing], that I came from so far away, it was amazing, as if I'm dreaming. Then I started to see ... I'm not that person I was thinking I was. Now I trust myself that I can do something that is difficult....*

*There's a lesson that they used to teach us there, about a beast ['inner beast' used as metaphor for their trauma chasing them]... They told us that this is about our life: you must not run away from your problems, you must face your problems until you go together with your problems [integrating problems] because in life there still are problems, you cannot live without problems .... So always when I come across a problem, I sit down and think. I try to tell myself, I must not fear but face these things and fight for it, then I'm going to do it, I'm coping and I'm okay." (Mudiwa 02.07.2000)*

Lessons learned concern also the respect for the natural environment and the group's well being. It left a lasting impression that it is important to protect nature and that the group has to learn to adapt the rhythm of the hike to the physical and psychological capacities of the weakest member. One interviewee summarised: "The way you walk is the way you're going to face life." Altogether, the interviews showed that the development of these different kind of coping strategies during the trail were highly relevant for a successful re-integration in the community.

### ***Trust building and transcendence of stereotypes***

Many young people spoke about the cautious but steady process of coming closer and getting in touch with other participants. Their initial anxieties indicate the atmosphere of extreme distrust and suspiciousness characterising daily life in the Katorus region. The young people felt that a first step towards the other was often triggered spontaneously by sharing cigarettes or lending the other a hand in difficult hiking situations etc... Many said that confidence in the group increased when they realised that other participants also had to struggle with problems and that they were able to support each other. They report of a holding environment that allowed them to build trust and increasingly empowered the group to tackle problems faced by its members. It is striking that the interviewees attributed only little attention to the work or presence of the facilitators on the trail. It seems as if the facilitators' aim to foster self-help strategies that allow the group to assume responsibility for their members proved to be quite successful. Many participants had the feeling that the group was able to help them to cope with their anxieties, flashbacks and other difficulties.

The above demonstrates that the trust-building process relies on the discovery of common issues that demand a de-construction of the stereotyped image of the 'other'. In most cases, the opening up and sharing of traumatic experiences during the violence, facilitated the revelation that their situation and feelings were quite similar: "The same thing we were doing in the location, they were doing in the hostel". The project seemed to allow them to transcend stereotypes held of the other militant youth faction. However, the discussions also showed that general prejudice projections and mistrust among different ethnic groups, for example on the life style of the Zulu etc. tended to persist.

### ***Correlation of individual and collective healing***

Many participants illustrated with their personal stories how the trail experience and the acquired skills and attitudes had a ripple effect on their families and even seemed to influence the community life. Two kinds of impacts can be distinguished that contributed to the community's well-being:

**Sharing the experience with one's community:** New connections with the 'self' often enabled the participants to change their attitudes and relationships within the community. The positive energy the participants felt after the trail also had an influence on their family life. Some restored contact again, while others became the breadwinner of the family etc. At the same time, parts of the community apparently felt relieved when they realised the impact the trail seemed to have:

*"When I came back, I just spread the message to all the others, the parents and their children that there is this wilderness therapy, going there will help you to be healed as you are stressed or traumatised, it will help you to be connected with yourself. ... and it made a change because in my section they know that I was involved in these depending things." (Mxolisi 03.07.2000)*

Another ripple effect of this enthusiastic attitude seemed to be an increasing acceptance of trauma and counselling work in the community and among former militarised youth.

**Meeting across physical boundaries:** In 1996, the legacies of the apartheid system and intra-community violence were still visible in Katorus. The no-go zones still existed and contact between the opposing groups was avoided. Today the main no-go area seems to be a normal street again. Against this backdrop, it is not astonishing that a great number of participants emphasised how the encounter with the 'other' during the trail in the long run had a positive impact on the community:

*"The other people who haven't been on this thing start wondering, what's happening with these guys, they are still our enemies but you go there, you hang around with them." (Mapetla 29.06.2000)*

Without this group context and the opportunity to leave the township in order to practice new ways of dealing with one another in a safe space, such a change in the behaviour of the participants would probably have been difficult to achieve. But this step represented a process of again consciously facing danger and taking a risk:

*"Now on my return from the mountains, I was like a bad person to the hostel dwellers because I was accommodating people from the location [ANC affiliated] ... Now it was*

*as if now I'm an informer, I'm selling them out."* (Thandi 01.07.2000)

It can be concluded that the daily life and contact of the opposing groups changed over the years. It also can be assumed that the project (or more precisely its participants), along with many other projects and people, contributed to this transformation, which can be interpreted as a form of community healing. This should not be taken to overlook the fact that many remarks also indicate persisting tensions. Burned buildings remind the township residents of the violence, and the world of the hostel residents is still perceived as less approachable, causing unease among the township population.

### ***Post-trail depression***

Most of the responses to the question about what should be changed or improved in similar programmes concentrated on post-trail support. The responses show that the return is an extremely volatile moment. Re-entry depression or 'return bewilderment' is common after such an intensive experience of oneness with nature and the group. Asked about the difficulties encountered when they came back from the trail, interviewees often voiced feelings of being bored, experiencing initial problems in readjusting to the life in the township or wishing to return to the mountains. The obvious desire to go back into the mountains is difficult to interpret. Different kinds of longings and hopes could play a role. At times, it could be seen as an escape from reality. This could be an indicator of the understandable fear of not being able to cope, but it could also be a sign of avoidance, an attitude not leading ultimately to transformation. The desire to return could also mean that participants discovered the spirituality or the transformative power of wilderness and have the feeling another trail offers the opportunity to work on different issues.

In the end however, the value of this once-off intervention lies in the return and the coming back. Wilderness therapy can most probably not be successful in the longrun without addressing re-entry depression and accommodating participants accordingly. Establishing a post-trail support programme is crucial. Here, the project had to go through a learning process. After the first trails, the former commander and project coordinator realised that rather than counselling, what was required was a space for participants to meet:

*"They used to come always to my place ... More and more trails were coming to my place. Then I thought of opening up this Mountain Club so that they can come and meet each other ... and then it grew on its own, no longer coming to me, coming there and then they feel fine ... because they feel they're bonded now, there is a kind of mutual identity, they have got somewhere a place where they belong."  
(Madhlophe 07.07.2000)*

This opportunity to meet and talk regularly at the Katlehong Resource Centre, and the common activities former participants initiated for themselves, were seen as an important support structure. For some of them, the Centre became a constant 'landing-place'; others benefited from this environment only for a transitional period. Altogether, the participants emphasised that the return also demanded ongoing personal efforts and commitment to change from every individual.

### ***(Equal) access to job opportunities***

The question of employment and daily survival was of central concern to many participants. It is therefore not surprising that respondents' employment situation seemed to influence their attitudes towards the project. The interviews proved that the situation of jobless participants is marked by a greater fragility (mentally, physically and economically). Their expectations of the NPAT are correspondingly higher and possible disappointments risked having a negative impact on the individual's healing process.

Only carefully and in informal conversations, several participants (of both factions) said that they perceived the opportunities provided to them as being ethno-politically imbalanced. They felt that there was less integration of IFP affiliated youth into the post-trail programme and the internships as well as trail assistant jobs offered by the NPAT. It was felt that some mistrust remained. Another participant explained the discrepancy in terms of the lack of English hindering hostel dwellers from participating in post-trail offers. Additional support would have been necessary:

*Most of them were very scared to come up and volunteer to take part because they thought that they're going to talk English and they felt that because they were not really educated they can't be part of it. ... if the NPAT could have*

*organised some black tutors or black facilitators who can facilitate those kinds of programmes that might have been much better (Thobela 01.07.2000).*

It needs to be mentioned, though, that the above perceptions of reinforcing the former divide through imbalanced access or distribution are also nurtured by the overall reality in the region. Over the years, more programmes were offered to ANC affiliated factions. Many reasons seem to be involved: IFP and ANC controlled different levels of funding and did not seem to provide the same kind of support to their 'old' factions. Additionally there was a higher flux among the IFP affiliated population and access to their migrant hostels was more difficult.

### **3. Lessons for the Conceptualisation of 'Youth' and 'Learning'**

It is a crucial caveat about the above project that it does not provide a general recipe. The NPAT project manager who later on worked with the concept in other regions as well emphasised this himself:

*"The project looks the way it does and developed the way it did because of the particular community, because of particular conditions found and all the different circumstances - it has changed along the way." (Gavin Robertson 19.07.2000)*

The most important conclusion to draw from the case-study is probably the recommendation to understand the implementation process of similar programmes as a permanent learning process that constantly needs to re-assess its understanding of youth and their particular learning desire and requirements.

The situation of the youth presented in the case study also allows us to draw a few general lessons to be considered for the creation of an adequate learning environment for youth in post-conflict situations.

#### **3.1 The category 'Youth' in post-conflict situations**

In conflict-prone societies, youth cannot be defined in terms of rigid age categories. In the above case some of the youth got involved in violence at the age of 12 years. We know from other civil war contexts that they can be even much younger, which makes us in

fact refer to the category of children and child soldiers. At the same time, others were almost in their thirties; a few had already started families and were responsible for their children when their violent behaviour became suddenly inappropriate and unacceptable to their communities. Here it seems problematic to speak of youth as well. It is hence important to recognise that eight year-old child soldiers are in some ways adults. At least they have been treated as such for a while. On the other hand, thirty-five year old former combatants, who have sacrificed their youth and school education for their cause, would still want to somehow benefit from offers made particularly to youth of their society. They may fast become a lost generation of the country if they are denied access to learning and employment opportunities.

Subsequently, the concept of youth as a transitional stage between childhood and adulthood must be re-appraised according to its specific context. This process of re-defining youth however offers itself a lot of fresh conflict potential. As we have seen in the above case most of the young people involved in violence were in extremely volatile situations and definitions affected them not only economically but also mentally. It can be very painful and have a stigmatising and counter-productive effect to be appraised as militarised and criminalised youth while the thirty-five year old comrade falls under the category of a freedom fighter or war veteran and receives a regular pension for his involvement.

Thus, one of the most crucial questions to be asked is: Are definitions of youth, especially in terms of age categories really necessary? Who do or shall they serve exactly and for what purpose?

### **3.2 Re-integration approaches and the concept of 'Learning'**

As the case-study indicates, addressing social and emotional scars means more than integrating criminalised and militarised youth in police or defence structures or providing access to formal education, vocational skills and job opportunities. Various project experiences in the mid-nineties in South Africa suggest that comprehensive approaches including opportunities for learning as well as healing are required (cf. for example Kayser 2000, Colvin 2001). Thus, it is suggested that it is necessary to consider and further discuss the following crucial questions and lessons when conceptualising learning processes for youth in post-conflict situations:



## ***Understanding of learning and the notion of de-learning and re-learning***

The way we understand and frame 'learning' is particularly important in volatile post-conflict situations. It definitely has to go beyond a classroom context and the usual school curricula or syllabus. While there might have been an interruption of formal education processes, informal learning and socialisation always continue to take place and shape our values and behaviour. Civil war and ethno-political conflict situations especially are often very complex: as we could see above, victims can also become perpetrators and vice versa. Moral standards of society have often been severely distorted. The daily life and socialisation in a war context often has taught young people values, behavioural and psychological patterns that made sense during a time of conflict and struggle for survival but are not appropriate anymore in a post-conflict situation or transitional society striving for democracy. Defence mechanisms were shaped by an extreme culture of violence. Fresh learning or re-learning of forgotten and formerly less useful patterns is necessary to adjust and integrate into the new context. Deconstruction or de-learning of defence mechanisms is however not enough. There needs to be safe space for youth to develop and test the new psychological and behavioural strategies that may serve as satisfying and viable substitutes. The case-study above suggests that it might be helpful to take the learners out of their usual environment for a while but in the end the sustainable acquirement of new coping strategies can only be consolidated by testing and experiencing its usefulness in the daily context. It could be dangerous and even counter productive to start with these processes in an on-going conflict situation where the young people might not be able to make use of these strategies or may even take inappropriate risks for their life.

## ***Specific or integrated approach for militarised and criminalised youth?***

The above case-study proposes a tailor-made approach for the specific needs and context of militarised and criminalised youth. According to the youth and even the affected community, this form of specifically targeting those already stigmatised has been successful. Such targeted approaches are often adopted because of the difficulties in finding access to groups with particular resistance to conventional healing and learning approaches. It seems often impossible to

integrate them into a larger youth group of the community. This should however not lead to the conclusion that this is the only or best approach. In Mozambique for example many projects preferred not to isolate child soldiers from their peers. They tried to create from the beginning an environment that facilitates the integration of all youth into the new situation. The results of the above case-study confirmed furthermore that the specific approach may also lead to jealousy and the community could question why one concentrates so much on the culprits and 'violent voices' while the community as a whole is deprived and in desperate need of support to overcome their past experiences as well as their present grievances.

### ***Peer approach***

While the approach might be specific or integrated, in any case a peer approach seems to be of advantage when working with young people. The key feature of peer education is that the educators are similar in age and sometimes also in origin and gender – as in the case-study. While peer-group influence is often portrayed negatively (drug abuse etc.), it is also known that peers can play a positive role in promoting values and dismantling prejudices within their group without losing credibility. One consistent observation in all interviews of the above case-study is that the WTPP was only feasible and successful because of the eagerness, persuasiveness and personal investment of the Project Coordinator. Having been a youth commander himself who was drawn into criminal activities and suffering from addiction in the aftermath, he was able to connect to his peers on both sides. For his community and all the respondents, he represented the first and most convincing proof that the project can work.

The integration of former participants as interns and trail assistants further reinforced this peer approach with all its advantages. Coming or going through a situation, understanding a situation very closely and directly, and then being able to facilitate for others in a similar situation is very powerful. It empowers former participants, acknowledges their capacities to care for their community and thus enriches the project's work and credibility. At the same time it boosts the community's resourcefulness and initiative.

Thus, projects like the above seem to demand a dedicated and trustworthy person (or group of persons) that is able to mobilise the envisaged target group. This person or group might best come from

within the target group. The success of the integration and learning concept can be further enhanced if the ownership of the project can be extended to a larger group of peers and the broader community. The only problematic part to keep in mind is the generally limited employment and internship offers in a project context. In a situation where all involved in a project are in need of a job, feelings of jealousy and rivalry are predictable. The responses proved that one needs to be very careful, lucid and inclusive concerning these decisions, since the fresh and still fragile sense of community is at risk as soon as the impression arises that the distribution between the former opposing groups is not balanced.

### ***Holistic learning approaches***

The above project has also been successful because of its holistic and comprehensive approach. The work with the youth was holistic in several manners:

First of all, the trail and some of the post trail activities addressed the human being as a whole, his mind, soul and body. While we theoretically know - at least since Pestalozzi's work in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century - of the significance of learning with and through "hand, heart and head", the importance of the body and corporal exercise and expression still tends to be omitted in learning processes.

Holistic was also the project's approach to healing. The project dissociated itself from conventional western therapeutic frameworks, grounded in individualistic concepts of health and illness. These individualistic notions often struggle to adequately address broader community and environmental healing. They neglect the strong interdependency of individual and community healing. Especially in the African and Asian contexts it is very difficult to distinguish between the individual growth which is almost a product of community development and growth and group healing which is part of the individual healing and the individual healing being part of the group healing.

Finally the approach was also comprehensive with its attempt to re-integrate the young people in their community by offering them skills in order to find a job. Without socio-economic integration a sustainable healing process and re-integration into the community will be very difficult to achieve. At the same time it became evident that post-trail support seems to require a broad range of types of assistance

and there are limits to the services that one NGO can supply on its own. In order to respond to the participants' expectations in an appropriate manner it is therefore very important to take the time at the beginning of the intervention to evaluate the specific needs. First, this helps to avoid disappointment, and second, it also gives the project the time to look for possible partners. The work of the NPAT has illustrated that networking with other initiatives is crucial. However, it also became evident that it will always remain a big challenge to find the right balance between offering sufficient post-trail care and providing enough space and flexibility to encourage and support self-help-initiatives.

### ***Attractive, innovative and safe space for the encounter***

According to John Paul Lederach (1997:35), reconciliation as a concept and praxis has "to seek innovative ways to create a time and a place ... to address, integrate and embrace the painful past and the necessary shared future as a means of dealing with the present." The WTPP represents one possible form of providing such a safe and highly attractive space that allows the participants to express and share their memories of pain, loss and trauma, without getting locked into a vicious cycle of mutual exclusiveness. In bringing together former enemies and exposing them to new group experiences and nature challenges, the project enhances the feeling of interdependence. This creates a foundation for realising that people on both sides of the conflict share similar feelings and aspirations concerning the past as well as the future. This point of encounter of common concerns and experiences may represent "the necessary ingredient for reframing the present." (Lederach 1997:27)

However, looking at the complexity of South African society, it needs to be emphasised that the encounter initiated through the Wilderness Project concentrates only on one particular conflict constellation, the division of the black community affiliated to different parties. Economic, social and psychological legacies of the apartheid system continue to entrench multiple other modes of segregation between South Africans. The transcendence of stereotypes held about the 'other' does not necessarily prove to be transferable to other factions. In the long run, even more inclusive approaches are needed and the question how the broader context of the conflict could be considered must be addressed.

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