

“DEVELOPING YOUTH RESOURCES THROUGH THE NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE”

The Namibian Experience

Melaka International Youth Dialogue, Malaysia. Presented by: Hon. Pohamba Shifeta, Deputy Minister, Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture

1. Background:

In 1995, the then Ministry of Youth and Sport approached the Namibian Cabinet for approval to establish a National Youth Service Scheme which would serve as an integrated training and employment creation programme, which Cabinet approved right away.

Piloting: In September 1999, under the auspices of the then Ministry of Youth and Sport the first group of fifty (50) recruits joined the Service as a pilot programme to serve as an integrated training and employment creation scheme for unemployed youth and school drop-outs aged between 16 and 30 years. Since its inception, the Service recruited youth from all over Namibia on annual basis.

Recruits go through three phases of the training programme, which are as follows:

Phase I: four months training on civil defence and emergency management training programme with the Ministry of Defence, Namibian Police and the Municipality. The training involves basic military training; fire fighting, crowd control, distribution of drought relief food and assisting the Government Emergency Management Unit in times of drought and floods.

Phase II: This phase involves recruits in one-year voluntary community service. Recruits are dispatched to remote rural areas of Namibia, where they participate in Government rural projects and education awareness programmes on HIV/AIDS, polio, malaria, tuberculosis, and other related infectious diseases.

Phase III: This is the exit phase of the programme, where recruits make informed decisions to go for further education and skills training at various Government and private institutions of higher learning such as the Universities, Polytechnics and Vocational Training Centres, etc.

The youth exit the program after graduating from skills training programs.

It was not until July 2005 that the National Youth Service Act was promulgated by an act of Parliament, hence the Service became a legal entity. In terms of the Act, the President of the Republic of Namibia is the head of the Service and to that extend, the President may give written directives to the Service concerning the performance of its functions or exercise of its powers, either generally or in relation to a particular matter, and the Service must give effect to those directives so issued. Thus, the President delegated the power of implementation of the Act to the Minister of Youth, National Service, Sport and Culture.

2. Operational Objectives:

- To provide an experimental learning environment to the youth of Namibia, so as to enhance their self esteem, self confidence, self discipline, sense of responsibility, ability to identify, analyze and help solve problems, and their commitment to the country's development;
- To involve unemployed youth and school drop-outs in social and economic development through voluntary community service;
- To increase national pride;
- To act as a youth exchange program par excellence, where understanding among the youth and the populace in general is enhanced from the different parts of the country.
- To provide an opportunity to the youth to participate in rural development programmes on voluntary basis;
- To provide the youth with opportunities for further studies and skills training so as to enhance their opportunities of employment;
- To encourage patriotism, a sense of nationhood and commitment to Namibia's development.

3. Functions of the Service:

- To recruit on a voluntary basis youth to benefit from the Service's programme, projects and activities;
- To provide further education, skills training and personal development programmes and activities for the recruits;
- To initiate, plan, organize, fund, manage, administer and control programmes, projects and activities for recruits development;
- To employ recruits in tasks of national importance and otherwise in the service of the nation; and
- To inculcate youth volunteerism and civic responsibilities among the youth.

In order to achieve the objectives set out above and to perform its functions, the Service may –

- buy, hire or otherwise acquire, sell, let or otherwise dispose of or deal with any movable or immovable property or any right in or over movable or immovable property with the prior concurrence of the Minister responsible for finance;
- enter into commercial arrangements with any person, including a body corporate or incorporate and in particular may enter into joint venture, establish its own corporate bodies in which it will be the sole or majority shareholder, purchase shares or other interests in existing corporate bodies;
- with the concurrence of the Minister responsible for finance, invest money or any other asset not immediately required for its affairs with any institution or organization;
- enter into any contract with any person to give effect to any provision of the Act, including any contract for entering into joint ventures with any person; or
- with the concurrence of the Minister responsible for finance, accept donations made to it by any person or body.

4. Management and Administration of the Service:

There is established a Board, which is responsible for the overall management and control of the affairs of the Service, and the Board has authority, in the name of the Service, to perform the functions and to exercise the powers conferred on the Service by the Act. The Board consists of nine (9) members appointed by the President of the Republic of Namibia, of whom five (5) are women. Board members appointed have the necessary skills, training and experience relevant to the functions of the Service. The President designated one of the members to be the chairperson of the Board, and the members of the Board, at their first meeting elect one of their number as vice-chairperson of the Board.

4.1 Tenure of service of members:

A member of the Board holds office for a period of three years and is eligible for re-appointment at the end of that term of office.

4.2 Conditions of service of Board members:

A member of the Board who is not in full-time employment of the State is entitled to receive remuneration, allowances and other benefits determined by the President in consultation with the Minister responsible for finance, and is appointed on terms and conditions determined by the President.

4.3 Commissioner of the Service:

The President must, pursuant to Article 32, section 3 and subsection (i) of the Namibian Constitution and in consultation with the Board, by proclamation in the Gazette appoint an individual to be the Commissioner of the National Youth Service. He or she is the chief executive officer of the Service and subject to the control and directions of the Board, responsible for the efficient management and administration of the Service. The Commissioner is an ex-officio member of the Board with no voting right.

4.4 Recruitment to the Service:

- A person is eligible for recruitment into the Service if he or she is a youth and a citizen of Namibia;
- Recruitment to the Service must not be done on a discriminatory basis, but the Board may determine different criteria for admission to the various areas of activity undertaken by the Service;
- When recruiting persons to the Service, the Board must ensure that there is equitable representation of persons from all the regions of Namibia;
- Notwithstanding anything to the contrary in any law, recruits of the Service are not employees of the Service and, subject to any provision to the contrary in this Act, the Labour Act, 2004 (Act No. 15 of 2004), or any law governing relations between employers and employees, does not apply to them.

4.5 Service graduates get certain preferences:

When awarding any scholarship, grant or any other educational benefit or facility which is offered by the State or any statutory body, and/or recruiting persons into the Namibian Defence Force, Namibian Police, Municipality Police, Namibian Prison Service or any other Government or statutory body, the person making the award or recruiting the persons must take into account and give weight to the fact that a person has successfully completed his or her programme with the Service, and that such graduate is suitably qualified for that award.

5. National Youth Service Fund:

There is, as contemplated in Article 125(3) of the Namibian Constitution, established a special fund known as the National Youth Service Fund. For the purposes of the State Finance Act, 1991 (Act No. 31 of 1991), the Commissioner is the accounting officer of the Fund responsible for all money received and payments made by the State, and all assets and the discharging of all liabilities of the Service.

5.1 The Fund consists of -

- money appropriated by Parliament for the purposes of the Service;
- money generated through the performance of the functions of the Service, including the sale of products made or produced through programmes or projects undertaken by the Service or the provision of services by the Service;
- interest or funds received from investments made by the Service;
- donations or contributions received by the Service with prior approval of the Minister responsible for finance; and
- money lawfully received from any other source.

5.2 Utilization of the Fund and accountability:

Property and money allocated to, or standing to the credit of, the Fund may only be utilized by the Service for the purposes approved in terms of the Act for –

- financing the various programmes, projects and other activities of the Service;
- financing the activities of the Board;
- the administration of the Fund

5.3 Exemption from taxation:

Despite anything to the contrary in any law –

- the income of the Service is exempted from income tax;
- no transfer duty, stamp duty or any other fee payable to the Registrar of Deeds in connection with the transfer of movable or immovable property is payable in respect of the acquisition and transfer of immovable property by the Service; and
- no stamp duty is payable in respect of any document if the stamp duty is, according to law, payable by the Service and no stamp duty is payable in respect of the registration or transfer of securities issued by the Service.

6. Programmes, Projects and Activities of the Service:

The Service acquired a huge complex in the north-eastern region of Namibia, previously used as a mining site by a multinational company, TCL. At independence, the property with its entire infrastructure was donated to the Government, and in turn transferred to the National Youth Service as its administration and operational head quarter. There are currently more than 500 young men and women of the Service who are involved in various programmes, projects and activities undertaken by the Service.

Amongst the major projects so far implemented by the Service are –

- Agricultural projects: irrigated crop production, rain fed crop like maize, pumpkin, watermelons, potatoes, sorghum, tomatoes, etc.
- Animal husbandry: dairy and beef cattle; dairy and meat goats and sheep;
- Forestry and poultry projects: these are added projects to boost the income of the Service and also to train recruits in various income generating activities. The poultry project is both for layers and broilers;
- Aquaculture is also one of the latest fish farming project undertaken by the Service in conjunction with the Ministry of Fisheries and Marine Resources as a way of improving the dietary content of our people and as a source of income for rural unemployed youth;
- Vocational Training: the Service is busy renovating the Centre with a view to open one of the country's biggest vocational training centre for the recruits. Courses to be offered varies from the traditional trades such as building and construction, welding and fabrication, carpentry and joinery; plumbing and pipefitting, hospitality and tourism; boilermaker; electrical and mechanical engineering; and so forth;
- Information and Communication Technology is to be launched at the Centre as part of the Namibian Government regional computer literacy programme. In addition to the computer literacy programme, the Service is to launch courses in International Computer Driver's Licence (ICDL), A+ (computer technicians) and Java.
- The Service has also acquired properties in the country in terms of farmland for large scale livestock farming and seasonal crop cultivation in selected regions.

7. Conclusion:

At independence, it was obvious to first Namibian Government that the Namibian youth were not afforded an opportunity to obtain quality education necessary to prepare them for the labour market. Consequently, the majority of our youth are unemployed because of the past political discrepancies that denied them appropriate qualifications or skills needed by the market. Hence, the People's Government at independence was faced with the challenges of initiating deliberate measures aimed at rectifying the situation. Therefore, the Government, through the then Ministry of Youth and Sport adopted a National Youth Policy in 1993, which gave birth to National Youth Council as we know it today. The Policy provides an operational framework with a set of guidelines, from which action programmes and services have been developed to facilitate meaningful involvement of youth and to respond to their various needs and aspirations. The National Youth Service, as a statutory body, is a direct product of the National Youth Policy, and a tool for youth empowerment and poverty eradication. The long term strategy is to expand the Service programmes, projects and activities to all the regions so as to address the problem of rural youth unemployment in particular, and youth unemployment in general and to eradicate poverty.

I thank you all for your attention.