



## Uganda Parliamentary Forum on Youth Affairs and the National Youth Council

Are advocating for a:

### National Youth Volunteering Programme

Our Aim is:

‘To establish a youth volunteering programme within Uganda that has genuine national coverage; is accessible and attractive to all the young Ugandans who wish to apply; and that a) allows those young people to make a positive contribution to their community and their country and b) enables them to gain practical skills and experience to become more employable’



*Participation in a programme opened doors for me, I am now an ICT officer*

*Fred Bbosa*

**Skills for Employability through Volunteering**

## **Why a National Youth Volunteering Programme?**

The high level of youth unemployment was one of the key issues in the Youth Manifesto, formulated for the 2011- 2016 election. This has also been one of the priorities of the NRM government since its election. Having become aware of such programmes in other Sub-Saharan African countries, Uganda's Youth MPs and the executive of NYC decided to investigate the possibility of setting up a National Youth Volunteering Programme (NYVP) as a means of addressing this problem. Such programmes are designed to assist young people to make the transition from education to the world of work; to progress from childhood to adulthood. However, an additional attraction is that they can also provide young people with an opportunity to contribute to their communities and their country and can channel the creativity and drive of youth towards national development. If such programmes are successful the pay-off for the young people is obvious: a greater chance of finding employment and increased self-belief derived from having made a contribution. However, the pay-off for the country can, if anything, be more significant with the potential of deploying the resource that is the country's young people into constructive activity.

## **What is a National Youth Volunteering Programme?**

It is the provision of fixed-term, work-like placements for young people that are well-structured to ensure both the young people, and their host employers, gain from the experience. For the youth this is about gaining employment experience, developing new skills and strengthening others, and building confidence and character; for the host employers it's about adding capacity, giving young people an opportunity and helping to build the next generation of the workforce.

Both here and abroad, there are examples of programmes that organise such placements and there are examples of organisations that provide them on their own initiative. Young Ugandans will also be aware that, if approached, some organisations will offer volunteering and/or internship opportunities and, although these are not always well-structured, they have been a key first step in many a successful career. The following are some of the key features of youth volunteering programmes:

- In most programmes the placements are fixed-term and full-time. Placement length can vary from 3 months to two years but 6 months to one year is the most common. This allows time for the young person to really gain from the experience;
- Most programmes have a central secretariat that does the recruitment, selection and posting of the young people, identifies the placement hosts and monitors progress;
- Programmes typically post individual young people to a host employer but there are examples of participants being deployed in groups to work on projects;
- The emphasis in most examples is on building generic and soft skills but some provide opportunities to apply learning from an academic course;
- Not all such programmes are called youth volunteering programmes. Other titles are internship/apprenticeship programmes, youth service programmes and national service schemes. Their common features are that they involve structured, fixed-term, work-like placements and aim to improve the employability of their participants;
- The titles are sometimes used interchangeably but the essential differences are:
  - Youth service/volunteering programmes place greater emphasis on the contribution the young person makes to the community than do internship/apprenticeship programmes;
  - National service schemes tend to be mandatory rather than voluntary;
  - The title 'youth service programme' is often used instead of 'volunteering programme' because there are so many different forms of volunteering many of which do not involve structured, fixed-term placements;
- As far as UPFYA and NYC are concerned all such programmes can, if well-planned and structured, have a positive impact



and be made accessible to all youth not just male, able-bodied youth.

A key message to young people in relation to such programmes is that being selected as a participant tends to be very competitive, those interested will need to demonstrate their worth. Furthermore, for such placements to be effective they involve hard work and those that get the most out of them are those that put the most in.

### ***What evidence is there that a youth volunteering programme can make a difference?***

The good news is that evidence from across Sub-Saharan Africa indicates that such programmes can have a very positive impact and an impact in terms of building citizenship in young people as well as helping to address youth unemployment.

Here in Uganda there are organisations, mainly NGOs and CSOs, that provide constructive placements to youth volunteers and from which the youth volunteers derive a benefit. However, whilst this constitutes a base on which to build e.g. organisations prepared to host placements, it cannot be said that there is an NYVP operating in Uganda and there is certainly no central recruiting point that simplifies the process for young people looking for opportunities.

In addition, there are some positive pilot initiatives underway, mainly in the internship field, which are indicating that the successful completion of a well-structured placement can assist in gaining employment. Lessons are being learned from such initiatives that can inform the development of an NYVP.

The evidence from other Sub-Saharan African Countries is more substantial. A recent study has investigated youth service programmes in fifteen countries. The study report, which was mainly into the contribution such programmes can make to addressing youth unemployment, draws out a number of positive practices of such programmes that can enhance their impact and the study constitutes an extremely useful resource towards developments here.

On a more cautionary note however the following points need to be borne in mind:

- Such programmes cannot solve the challenge of youth unemployment on their own but function best as one of a suite of measures;

- Although there are examples of youth service programmes that assist young people to become self-employed, the most common impact is to improve employability. If there is to be a major impact therefore measures to create more jobs need to be taken;
- Most examples target qualified youth: graduates and 6<sup>th</sup> form leavers rather than trying to be accessible to all;
- Because they need to be well-structured and well-managed to operate successfully, there is a cost to running such programmes and how that cost can be met is a key question to address in seeking to establish a programme in Uganda; and
- The scale of the problem here in Uganda will be a massive challenge to establishing a programme that can make a far-reaching contribution. The pilots referred to above have been successful but have only involved around 100 participants; there are tens of thousands that potentially could benefit from an NYVP.

### ***What about the employers' perspective?***

This is a critical question, without the active participation of employers there can be no NYVP. Participation from employers across all sectors would be ideal: public sector, NGOs and CSOs, and private sector, and would potentially make available a variety of placements that would meet different needs. Furthermore, active participation will be needed to create the well-structured placements that are required for a successful programme.

There have been studies that have reported that employers struggle to recruit young Ugandans who meet their needs with insufficient soft skills and bad attitudes being deficiencies often cited. In theory, a youth volunteering programme can address this issue by creating a pool of more employable young people. However, employers will need to be convinced that this is the case. Experience from recent pilot programmes is positive but there is work to be done to get this message across.

## **Recommendations and Next steps:**

*The key recommendation is to advocate for government to establish a National Youth Volunteering Programme based on evidence that such programmes can make a positive contribution. It is further recommended that implementation uses a phased approach that would start with a small voluntary programme but scale-up gradually and could, dependent on evaluation, culminate in a mandatory national service scheme. The recommendation is for a government-led but not necessarily a government run programme.*

*In order for this to happen, the necessary government policy will need to be formulated and adopted. It is recommended that this be a National Volunteering Policy which would apply to and regulate all volunteering. One reason for this would be to combat bad practice but*

*care will need to be taken not to place too many hurdles in the way of prospective placement hosts which could have the adverse effect of reducing opportunities.*

*It is also recommended that steps are taken to increase the number of high-quality internship programmes, building on current pilots, and that work be done with the private sector on how these can be supported. The Youth MPs are considering how government policy could stimulate such initiatives.*

*Interest in an NYVP is being shown by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development and there are also indications of donor interest, but these are yet to be harnessed into actual developments. Pursuing this in addition to further consultation to ensure that any planned programme meets the needs of young people, will be the priority for UPFYA and NYC.*

A more detailed Policy Paper on national youth volunteering and the steps to establish a programme in Uganda is available for download from the UPFYA website at: <http://www.upfya.org>.

If you would like to register your support for such a programme or make a comment you can do so either via the website or on email to: [upfya@parliament.go.ug](mailto:upfya@parliament.go.ug).

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