

UNITED NATIONS RESEARCH INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Discussion Paper N° 3

PROMOTING YOUTH EMPLOYMENT:
POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

by

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N°3

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May 1988

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ISSN 1012-6511

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PREFACE

This paper deals primarily with programmes for expansion of youth employment opportunities, paying special attention to generation of self-employment through youth enterprises. Since these programmes cannot be considered in isolation of the nature of youth unemployment and of the overall policies for employment creation, the initial sections of the paper focus on the emergence, dimensions and characteristics of youth unemployment, and elements of employment-oriented strategies. This is followed by a discussion of various types of youth employment programmes. Three kinds of wage employment programmes are considered: job creation in the state sector, wage employment in private enterprises and training and apprenticeship schemes. The rest of the paper is concerned with self-employment promotion programmes, a distinction being made between conventional schemes and participatory initiatives. On the basis of the preceding discussion, some suggestions are put forward for promoting self-employment through youth enterprises. The paper covers both more and less developed countries with emphasis, however, on the Commonwealth developing countries.

In developing countries, the youth unemployment rate tends to be two to three times the overall rate and higher for teenagers, females, urban areas and for those with more schooling. Effective solutions to youth unemployment can only be provided by a comprehensive employment-oriented strategy. This will require both a faster expansion of the economy and a more labour-intensive growth path. The various youth employment programmes have at best made limited contributions to employment generation. Typically they tend to be high cost, reach a relatively small number of people and require continuing government assistance. There are, however, schemes which have been more successful in promoting employment opportunities in an efficient manner. In this regard, the experience of some participatory initiatives at grass-roots levels appears to be particularly promising.

In promoting self-employment through youth enterprises, it is important that the organization charged with this responsibility should have the necessary autonomy to ensure flexibility, speed in decision-making, experimentation and innovation. It should also operate in a

participatory style interacting continuously with youth organizations and others with relevant experience and knowledge. It is also necessary to take an integrated view of the various ingredients required for successful enterprises. These include not only technical skills, credit arrangements, marketing techniques, choice of activities but also such complex factors as stimulation of entrepreneurship, appropriate forms of business organization and institutional support for youth enterprises.

May 1988

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Introduction 1/

Youth unemployment has come increasingly to be recognized as one of the more serious social problems confronting both developing and industrialized countries. The discussion of an item devoted to youth at the International Labour Conference in 1986, the publication of a report on youth unemployment by a Commonwealth Expert Group and its discussion by the Commonwealth heads of government as well as a number of studies by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and other regional and national authorities attest to the growing concern with this problem.^{2/} While youth unemployment is part of the wider problem of growing unemployment in most countries, it also has some specific features and characteristics which justify its separate treatment.

There are many reasons why governments and societies feel increasingly concerned about this problem. At the human level, failure to secure satisfactory employment upon completion of schooling and training can cause intense frustration, despair and alienation. It may contribute to the emergence of problems of mental and physical health. It may also be associated with such social ills as drunkenness, drug-taking, violence, robbery and prostitution. From a material point of view, youth unemployment represents a tragic waste of skills and talents, resulting in lower production, increase in dependency burden on the rest of the society and, in the longer run, a gradual deterioration in the quality of national human resources. All these factors may contribute to increasing polarization, sharpening social conflicts and growing political instability. The potential consequences of high levels of youth unemployment at personal, social and national levels are thus serious enough to warrant sustained efforts to find solutions to these problems.

The main purpose of this paper is to discuss programmes for expansion of youth employment opportunities, paying special attention to generation of self-employment through youth enterprises. But youth unemployment cannot be seen in isolation from the overall unemployment problem. Thus, in order to provide the broader context to the consideration of the problems of youth employment, the paper reviews

briefly the emergence of youth employment and its dimensions and characteristics in relation to overall unemployment. It then considers some key elements of an employment-oriented strategy. This is followed by a discussion of various types of youth employment programmes. Three kinds of wage employment programmes are considered: job creation in the state sector, wage employment in private enterprises and training and apprenticeship schemes. The rest of the paper is concerned with self-employment promotion programmes — a distinction being made between conventional schemes and participatory initiatives. On the basis of the preceding discussion, some suggestions are put forward for promoting self-employment through youth enterprises.

The paper covers both industrialized and developing countries in the Commonwealth, but the bulk of the discussion relates to the situation in poorer countries. Illustrations are occasionally drawn from the experiences of non-Commonwealth countries.

A. Emergence of youth unemployment

As stated earlier, youth unemployment cannot be understood in isolation of the overall unemployment situation. In the majority of industrialized and developing countries, there has been a severe worsening of the unemployment situation since the late 1970s. To give a few examples, in the United Kingdom the unemployment rate has risen from 6.8 per cent in 1980 to 11.9 per cent in 1985, but has fallen somewhat over the past year. In Australia and Canada the rates have risen from 5.9 to 7.9 per cent, and 7.5 to 10.5 per cent over the same period, while in New Zealand it rose from 2.9 to 4.0 per cent. ^{3/} For developing countries, the figures on open unemployment give a misleading picture of the size of the employment problem as they do not cover under-

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