Policy Scan

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE POLICY IN 19 COUNTRIES IN LATIN AMERICAN & THE CARIBBEAN

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POLICY SCAN:
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Abstract

THIS PAPER presents findings from an exploratory study of government policies that involve youth in community service in 19 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. The research, which was performed in 2004, provides descriptive information and explores the context within which national youth service policies can emerge and thrive. While it is assumed that well-designed national youth service policies provide a framework for engaging youth in pro-social activities that benefit themselves and their communities, relatively little research is available on the subject. Findings indicate that 13 of 19 countries in the study have a national youth service policy, and that the policies vary in forms and configuration. Facilitators and obstacles of these policies are discussed. The paper concludes by providing recommendations to policy makers.

Introduction

A PRINCIPAL challenge for policy makers addressing youth issues is to design legislation that supports the widespread implementation of sustainable evidence-based programs in order to reduce problem behaviors and build on youths' assets (Catalano, Berglund, & Ryan, 1998). Such policies not only deliver services to young people, but also provide opportunities for young people to become agents in their own development. In the last two decades, youth-focused governmental initiatives have emerged around the world in the form of national youth policies (Angel 2003). These policies, which are often implemented in coordination with non-governmental youth organizations, define the roles and responsibilities of youth to society and society to youth. These policies address youths' needs through the creation of structures that protect youth and encourage youths' involvement as participatory and active citizens (Angel 2003).

In the Latin America and Caribbean region, where 40 percent of the population is under 30 years of age (Inter-American Development Bank, 2005), national and local policy makers are under increasing pressure to educate youth as responsible citizens who are capable of overcoming harsh systemic plights such as poverty, drug abuse and violence, and HIV/AIDS. One movement that holds promise for positive youth development is participation in community service. Encompassing a continuum of activities (Tang, McBride, & Sherraden, 2003), service provides opportunities for productive participation while also challenging portrayals of youth as 'victims of poverty' or 'problems' in society. Through exposure to and in working to remedy community needs, youth servers develop practical skills and a sense of civic identity in which they envision the kinds of people they want to become and the kind of society they want to create (Youniss & Yates, 1997). Further, because service forges collaboration between individuals, community organizations, and governments, some scholars theorize that youth service is an emerging social institution and should be viewed as an important national strategy for social, economic, and democratic development (Sherraden, 2001).

The premise behind national governmental policies that promote community service participation is that when provided an opportunity for meaningful involvement in society through service, youth take advantage. Research indicates that many Latin American and Caribbean youth are active community service participants. Common forms of youth service in the region include building sustainable housing, raising awareness to HIV/AIDS, improving literacy rates through tutoring programs, protecting national parks, cleaning up urban slums, and assisting with home-based care for seniors (Johnson, Benitez, McBride, & Olate, 2004).

While it is assumed that well-designed policies are an effective strategy for designing and implementing youth service programs, research has yet to identify the major forms and features of policies that exist. The present exploratory research study, conducted in 2004, surveyed experts in the Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) to provide an inventory of national youth service policy (NYSP) in 19 countries in the region. The paper first describes the features of national youth service policies in the LAC region. Following, the paper describes respondents' perspectives on factors that facilitated policy creation and obstacles that hinder policy effectiveness. The paper concludes by providing respondents' recommendations for improving policies in the region. Findings from this study uncover the factors that relate to the development and sustainability of NYSP, and provide a foundation for future in-depth research on the impact of such policies on communities, young people, and on society at large.

Methodology

KEY TERMS are defined as follows. Youth refer to persons between the ages of 15 and 30, although respondents in certain countries noted slight variations from this age-range. Service refers to a period of intensive and substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal or no monetary compensation to the participant (Sherradan, 2001). In the present study, the term service is used interchangeably with several forms of community service, including service-learning (e.g. service linked to an academic curriculum), volunteerism (e.g. service freely given), social-service (e.g. service to address a community need such as poverty), civic-service (e.g. service as a responsibility of citizenship), conscientious objector service (e.g. community service as an alternative to military service), among others. Policy is defined as a government-based legislation, law, regulation, decree, or strategy that has been approved and implemented, or put into action. Policies are legislated by government bodies or ministries within the government, such as a ministry of education or a youth office. In the case of a NYSP, the service activity is explicitly defined in the text of the policy document, and the policy is implemented in the form of a program.

Two questionnaires were utilized in this research, one for respondents to describe a NYSP where it exists, and one for respondents to describe any movements towards a policy in countries where there is no NYSP. The questionnaires consisted primarily of open-ended qualitative questions focusing on features of NYSP and on factors that facilitated or hindered the policy. The authors coded responses into categories to identify main themes. Because no standardized procedures were utilized to collect the data (e.g. a specified number of respondents per country), percentages of coded responses were not utilized. As such, the purpose of the coded responses was to uncover themes in describing the field of

COUNTRY	Total # of Respondents	NGO	Government	Other**
Anguilla	1	0	1	0
Argentina*	6	4	2	0
Barbados*	1	0	1	0
Bolivia*	4	3	1	0
Brazil*	2	2	0	0
Chile*	3	1	0	2
Columbia*	2	2	0	0
Costa Rica*	1	0	1	0
Dominican Republic*	2	2	0	0
Ecuador	2	2	0	0
El Salvador	2	0	2	0
Honduras*	2	2	0	0
Mexico*	1	0	0	1
Nicaragua*	1	0	1	0
Panama*	5	2	2	1
Paraguay	3	2	1	0
Peru	4	3	1	0
Uruguay	4	3	1	0
Venezuela*	2	2	0	0
TOTALS	48	30	14	4

Table 1. Number of questionnaire respondents per country and number of responses by professional position.

Notes:
Denotes a country in which a respondent indicated that there is a NYSP

**"Other" refers to consultants, psychologists, or reporters.

NYSP in LAC and to inform future research on the topic.

The authors requested participation from individuals with substantive knowledge of government instituted youth policies and community service. The goal was not to have a representative sample of respondents from each country, but instead was to gather multiple responses so as to verify the accuracy of the responses. The authors sought respondents from multiple and distinct domains to showcase differing viewpoints, such as individuals in the institution that may have created the policy (e.g. government official), the institution that may have implemented the policy (e.g. a non-profit or non-governmental organization administrator), and individuals who may have evaluated the policy (e.g. researchers). While the study was seeking factual information regarding the nature and configurations of NYSP, respondents were asked about personal viewpoints and beliefs based on their knowledge and experience in the field.

From February through September, 2004, the authors emailed 232 requests to individuals in 23 countries. Fifty-five (24% total) questionnaires were returned from individuals in 19 countries. Forty-eight out of the fifty-five questionnaires (87% of those returned) were utilized in this report. Questionnaires were excluded in cases where the information could not be validated or the respondent's answers lacked clarity. Table 1 lists the number of responses per country and the respondent's professional background. Thirty responses (63%) that were utilized for the study came from individuals who work in private organizations in civil society (e.g. NGOs). Fourteen responses (30%) came from individuals who work in a government position. Four responses (7%) were from individuals with other professional backgrounds, including a psychologist, consultant, reporter, and writer. While it was a goal to receive three or four questionnaires from each country to ensure differing perspectives from members in different professional sectors, only the responses in Argentina, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Bolivia, represent multiple perspectives. Findings from the other countries are biased toward the perspectives of individuals in the private sector. Despite requests for participation, there were no responses from individuals in Belize, Guatemala, Jamaica, and Surinam. Participant and institutional names are withheld to protect confidentiality.

Findings

FOLLOWING THE criteria noted above, the authors determined that 13 of the 19 countries in the present study have a NYSP. These countries include Argentina, Barbados, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Nicaragua, and Venezuela. Three countries have two separate NYSP, including the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua. In several countries with a NYSP, including Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Panama, and Nicaragua, respondents described separate movements toward another NSYP. Respondents in six countries, including Anguilla, Ecuador, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay, indicated that there was no NYSP and discussed movements toward a NYSP[1]. Table 2 describes the name, legislation, and purpose of each NYSP listed by respondents. The following section highlights features of NYSP, and describes themes that emerged from the research.

Table 2. A summary of National Youth Service Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Country	Name, Year, & Description of Legislation	Purpose & Main Characteristics
Argentina	Presidential Award "Escuelas Solidarias" 2000: Presidential Decree 377, which is regulated each year by the Ministry of Education.	To reward and further support primary and secondary school-based programs that show promise for effective practices in implementing service learning programs.
Barbados	"Barbados Youth Service" 1995: Legislated by the Youth Affairs Division	To create and finance a national service program that annually supports 250 16-26 year olds. Youth voluntarily participate in the year-long program, but receive a small stipend & complete job training modules, service, & often become employed by the organizations through which they serve.
Bolivia	Youth organization fortification program 1996: Supreme Decree 25287 of Law 1674 of Descentralization, in the Department of Social Development and the Generational Gender and Family Unit of the Social Management Service.	To design and finance programs that promote participation among all youth, and to strengthen organizations' capacity to create youth programs through the "Departmental Network of Youth Organizations"
Brazil	Civilian Volunteer Service Policy (Serviço Civil Voluntário). 1996: Federal Government and created as part of the National Program on Human Rights, implemented in every state in Brazil in 2001	To provide youth aged 18-21 the opportunity to perform community service as an alternative for military service, as well as to enhance the citizenship skills of youth as a strategy to protect human rights in Brazil.
Chile	Fortalicemientos de Alianzas entre Sociedad Civil y Estado" 2000: By the Chilean Government.	To provide opportunities for youth ages 15 to 24 (and seniors age 60 to 90) to perform civic service through public and private organizations locally or nationally, with the goal of increasing the participants' level of civic engagement.
Colombia	The General Law of Education Year Unknown: Law 115 Article 97	Requires 10th and 11th grade high school students to participate in service-learning to improve their communities as a provision for graduation.

Country	Name, Year, & Description of Legislation	Purpose & Main Characteristics
Costa Rica	Student Community Service (Servicio Comunal Estudianti) 1997: Ministry of Public Education	Requires students to perform community service as a pre-requisite for graduation.
Dominican Republic	General Youth Law 2000: Law 49 through the State's Youth Office embeds community service activities in the general youth policy.	To provide opportunities for 15 to 35 year olds to become involved in pro-social activities through service.
Dominican Republic	Students' Social Service Requirement 1988: Ministry of Education Ordinance 4-89.	Requires high school students to complete 60-hours of service as a provision for graduation.
Honduras	The "Law that Organizes the National Universities of Honduras 1980s: Ministry of Education, Education Office in State Affairs by the Law that organizes the National Universities of Honduras	Requires high school and college students to perform community service as a provision for graduation in order to build solidarity among youth and increase collaboration in community development.
Mexico	Servicio Social 1945: Constitution of Mexico. Presently 70 universities have their own legislation regarding Social Service.	Requires university students who have completed 70% of their course work to perform 480 hours of community service as a prerequisite for graduation.
Nicaragua	National Policy for the Complete Development of Youth 2001: Government of the Republic of Nicaragua	Includes a framework for institutions to provide opportunities for youth to perform service within the general youth policy in Nicaragua.
Nicaragua	No name provided Year Unknown: Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports	Requires high school students to perform service through the ecological brigade
Panama	Students Social Service 1995: Law 34 of the Ministry of Education and Resolution 1003 in 1998	To supplement students' education with service experiences, the policy requires public and private high school students to perform eighty hours of service.
Venezuela	Service Requirement Law 1980: Article 27 of the Regulation of the Law of Education	To supplement the curriculum by involving students in civil society and by exposing them to societal ills, the policy requires public and private high school students to perform community service as a provision for graduation.

Features of National Youth Service Policy

STUDY RESPONDENTS were prompted to describe each NYSP in detail, including the part of government within which the policy was created, the design and implementation of the policy, and the general characteristics of the policy. This section synthesizes the main features of NYSP as described by questionnaire respondents.

Similar configurations: Although no two NYSP are identical, several policies share similar configurations. Eight countries in the present study, including the Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Honduras, Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Nicaragua and Panama, have a national education-based policy that requires students to perform a specified number of service hours as a prerequisite for graduation[2]. Three countries, including Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua[3], embed service as a component within a general youth policy to promote and support service programs. One country, Bolivia, has a policy that increases coordination

> *Each NYSP defines a target population, either focusing on inclusiveness by providing opportunities for all youth or by targeting a specific population of youth servers.*

among organizations to promote service program development. Two countries, Barbados and Chile, have a policy that designs and supports national youth service programs. One country, Brazil, has a policy that provides community service as an alternative to military service. And, one country, Argentina, has a policy that provides financial awards for effective service-learning programs.

Legislated by a government body: Each NYSP was legislated by the national government, often through an education department (e.g. required service policies) or youth ministry (e.g. youth policies that embed service). NYSP were created either as their own legislation or as a component of another legislation.

Legal characteristics: Each NYSP includes legal regulations that establish the rights and responsibilities for youth servers and the organizations through which youth serve. For example, the general youth policy in the Dominican Republic contains articles that outline the rights and roles of young people, and guidelines for Municipal, Regional and National Youth Councils to develop plans to promote youth participation in communities through service. In Mexico, the universities that have service requirements create their own legal framework for social service. In Panama, student service is defined through articles in the policy that identify specific priorities, such as service to rural communities or to urban marginal communities, among others.

> *The general youth policy in the Dominican Republic contains guidelines for Municipal, Regional and National Youth Councils to promote youth participation in communities through service.*

Defines the target population: Each NYSP defines a target population, either focusing on inclusiveness by providing opportunities for all youth (regardless of age, background, economic background) or by targeting a specific population of youth servers (e.g. students, unemployed youth). For example, the youth policies that embed service tend to be inclusive to all young people, whereas the required service policies target only high school or university students.

Defines the policy objectives: Each NYSP defines the objectives for program participants and for the service recipient. For example, the broad purpose of required service policies is to enhance student learning and civic engagement while addressing community needs, whereas the youth policies that embed service were formed to provide a mechanism for fulfilling youths' participation in pro-social activities. Other policies, such as the one in Barbados, were created to provide youth job-training and employment opportunities, and to enhance citizenship. In Brazil, the policy provides youth an opportunity to

perform community service as an alternative to military service. In Bolivia, the policy seeks to strengthen organizations capacity to create programs that provide opportunities for youth to serve. Each NYSP also defines objectives for addressing community needs, such as poverty, the environment, as a response to natural disasters, and for increasing democratic practice among the organizations that implement programs.

Funding: The presence or absence of funding is another feature of each NYSP. In Mexico, Bolivia, Barbados, and Costa Rica, the government provides annual funding for program implementation for basic costs including salaries, training, or supplies. In Barbados, private sector non-governmental organizations and international agencies provide additional support for specific activities and programs. In several countries with a education-based service requirement policy, funding is scarce. For example, in Honduras and Venezuela, where there is no annual governmental budget, students often do their own fundraising to finance service activities. Likewise, in the Dominican Republic, the education-based service requirement receives no government support, and furthermore, the service component of the general youth policy does not receive any special funds beyond the normal funding of the youth policy.

Local implementation: The implementation of each NYSP occurs locally in conjunction with schools and non-governmental organizations who often set the guidelines and deliver service programs. For example, policies that require service are nationally approved but implemented by public and private high schools or universities. Other polices are implemented through newly created or already existing programs. The policies in Barbados and Chile, for example, are orchestrated through a central office but delivered by local community organizations.

> *Mexican university students must complete 480 hours of service in a six-month period.*

Duration: Several NYSP provide guidelines for the duration of the service, which varies from policy to policy. In the Dominican Republic, secondary high school students are required to perform 60 hours of service per year. In Honduras, the policy calls for 100 hours of service per year. In Mexico, university students must complete 480 hours of service in a six-month period. In Venezuela, students are generally required to complete 40 to 60 hours of service in a 3-month period. In Barbados and Brazil, the term for service is generally one-year. In Bolivia, youth decide on the duration of the service in coordination with the organizations through which they serve.

Forms of service: The forms of the service through which youth participate vary from policy to policy. Among the countries with a education-based policy that requires service, such as in Venezuela, a legal framework clearly states that the student server must be involved in a voluntary activity that benefits the facility or the community. In Mexico, students are required to perform social service for a community need, such as poverty. In Nicaragua, students must perform service related to ecological purposes, whereas students in Honduras, Panama, and the Dominican Republic can perform any type of service to complete the requirement. There are few restrictions on the forms of service through the other NYSP configurations, provided the service addresses a community need.

Professional development and support: Some NYSP incorporate trainings, professional development, and support to those implementing the service programs, and to the servers themselves. For example, in Mexico professors receive training to implement programs. Some policies provide support to servers. In Mexico and Chile, servers sometimes receive monetary support or stipends to cover living expenses. In Bolivia, under the Youth Fortification Program, organizations receive training on different strategies for coordinating efforts related to promoting youth service. In the Dominican Republic, teachers do not receive any formal support under the requirement policy, and their involvement in delivering the program is considered a part of the normal workload.

Incentives: Incentives are another common feature built into NYSP. In countries with service require-ment policy, the incentive is for students to achieve a specified number of hours to graduate. In Vene-zuela, some students receive recognition awards for exemplary service work. In Argentina, Presidential Awards provide government recognition and financial resources to schools that implement high quality service-learning programs. In Barbados, servers receive a small stipend and often find employment through the organization in which they served. In Costa Rica, servers receive basic provisions, and exemplary service performances are eli-gible for a Youth Award. In Chile, youth servers often receive sym-bolic awards and distinctions.

> *Argentina's Presidential Awards provide government recognition and financial resources to schools that implement high quality service-learning programs.*

Awareness campaigns: Many NYSP incorporate awareness cam-paigns to inform youth of service opportunities and to facilitate organi-zations in coordinating activities. In Barbados, a central placement office promotes opportunities and advertises positions that need staffing, and radio and television adver-tisements are utilized to recruit servers and publicize success stories from the program. In Bolivia, the Youth Fortification Program uses a database to contact organizations regarding youth service opportuni-ties. In Costa Rica, service programs are publicized through radio announcements, newspapers, and email. The youth policy in the Dominican Republic promotes service opportunities through the internet. In Mexico, program administrators are building an information database system to identify and promote social service opportunities at the national level.

Perspectives on NYSP

IN EACH COUNTRY with a NYSP, questionnaire respondents provided their perspectives on policy effectiveness, facilitating and hindering factors to policy creation, and recommendations for improving the policy in the future.

Effectiveness: Despite there being no empirical research on the impact of any of the NYSP on youth servers or on society itself, respondents provided anecdotal perspectives as to whether each policy has achieved the objectives as set forth at the time of legislation. In the countries with a education-based service requirement policy, many respondents discussed that these policies have been and will continue to be effective because such policies involve thousands and thousands of students in service each year. However, many respondents, such as those in the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Honduras, and Mexico, noted that the quality of the service under these requirement policies depends entirely on the school that implements the policy and on the individual students who serve, as programs vary from school to school and students perform the different types of service with varying degrees of motivation. In countries with a general youth policy that embeds service, including Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, and Nicaragua, the respondents indicated that despite great potential for providing opportunities for youth to participate, the implementation of these policies has been slowed by financial limitations and a lack of coordination among the key players. In Barbados, the respondent noted that the Barbados Youth Service program has mostly achieved it goals of involving youth in service to gain employment skills. However, the respondent also noted that the program under the policy has been stunted because it reaches a limited number of youth each year. Similarly, in Chile the respondent noted that the policy has been successful, but could be expanded to include more youth throughout the country. In Brazil, the respondent noted that the Civilian Volunteer Service has been effective at providing opportunities to youth from less advantaged backgrounds to serve, but has been hindered by recent budget cuts.

Facilitators of NYSP creation: Respondents described many factors that facilitated policy creation. The bulk of these responses focused on the positive role of government officials, non-governmental representatives, and youth servers in driving the movement prior to policy creation. For example, respondents discussed that in recent years youth ministers and youth councils have been instituted (Angel, 2003). According to the respondents in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic, an outcome of the increased youth focus on youth was the creation of general youth policies to address the total development of youth (Angel, 2003). In these cases, youth service programs were included within these policies as an action plan to fulfill the goal of providing a pro-social activity through which youth could be involved. Other respondents in countries with an education-based service requirement policy, noted that policy creation was often driven by a particular governmental official's beliefs that service can be an effective applied learning strategy to supplement the academic curriculum, and can be a way for students to repay society for their public education.

Respondents often listed non-governmental civic organizations, such as the Red Cross and Boy Scouts, and religious organizations, such as youth groups in the Catholic Church, as crucial in leading the NYSP movement. Such organizations have historically provided an avenue for youth to serve, as noted by respondents in Mexico, Panama, Argentina, and Costa Rica. More recently, these organizations promoted interest in and understanding of youth service through workshops and conferences. These organizations have been catalysts for broader campaigns and events such as Global Youth Service Day (GYSD) and the International Year of the Volunteer (IYV).

As well, many respondents noted young people themselves as a force behind NYSP policy creation. Youths' involvement in service in LAC, which has been well documented in recent years (Nieves Tapia, 2004), put service on the agenda of policy makers by giving credence to the notion that a youth would take advantage if given structured opportunities for service.

Obstacles that hinder NYSP implementation: Respondents described many obstacles that hinder the full implementation of NYSP. In Costa Rica, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic, Barbados, and Nicaragua, respondents discussed that the lack of financial resources has curtailed program infrastructural necessities, such as trainings and professional development for administrators and servers themselves, supplies for performing service, facilities where service takes place, and travel between service sites and youths' homes. Respondents described a lack of coordination between policy makers on the national level and the individuals who implement programs locally. For example, in the Dominican Republic, the respondent indicated that the service component of the youth policy remains incomplete due to a lack organization in the government and differences of opinion regarding how to implement key policy components locally. Similarly, in Barbados, the respondent noted political wrangling between the two government parties has interfered with local delivery of the Barbados Youth Service program.

> *A lack of financial resources can curtail program infrastructural necessities, such as trainings and professional development for administrators, supplies for performing service, facilities where service takes place, and travel to service sites.*

Although thousands and thousands of students serve through these policies, respondents noted obstacles that hinder national education-based service requirement policies. In the Dominican Republic, Mexico, and Honduras, for example, respondents described the inherent nature of required service as an obstacle that prevents successful program implementation. Despite all students serving under requirement policies, some students resent these mandates because of the belief that service should be performed voluntarily, or autonomously. Furthermore, respondents noted that required service activities are often misrepresented because schools must report that all students completed the needed hours. In such cases, respondents noted that some students inevitably engage in service types that are less meaningful (e.g. collecting garbage or painting walls), solely to complete the needed hours.

Recommendations and Conclusion

WHILE THERE is considerable momentum around youth service, more can be done to promote NYSP creation, implementation, and sustainability. Respondents were asked to provide recommendations to advance and improve policies that involve youth in service. Several themes resonated among the respondents' recommendations for improving NYSP. One theme was for policy makers to improve the design of implementation strategies to ensure the sustainability of programs over time. Recommendations toward this end included increased capacity building and collaboration between public and private entities, from the policy draft stage to delivering the programs under the policy. For example, the respondents in several countries noted that local organizations could have been more intricately involved in the design of the programs under the policy. These forms responses emphasized the need for a unified participative approach with a common vision with the greatest number actors. Similarly, many respondents noted a need for a more inclusive approach to delivering NYSP to provide opportunities for all youth regardless of educational or socioeconomic status.

> *In the Dominican Republic and Honduras teachers often receive little or no training on effective methods for engaging students in innovative practices such as service-learning.*

Respondents in all countries noted the need for increased public and private financing for infrastructural program needs, including professional development, supplies and facilities, staffing, and coordination among those creating and those implementing the policy. For example, in the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, the respondents suggested the general youth policies that embed service need a national network or database through which would activities could be coordinated locally and in conjunction with the national regulations. In the Dominican Republic and Honduras when discussing the required service policy, respondents noted that teachers often receive little or no training on effective methods for engaging students in innovative practices such as service-learning. Similarly, respondents in Venezuela and Mexico discussed the need for workshops at the national and local level, and improved technology to enhance collaboration. The respondent in Honduras also recommended that those who deliver the education-based service requirement should more fully articulate the policy's purpose to students to ensure that students have a more complete understanding of the policy – that is, as a responsibility of active citizenship.

Respondents in each country recommended an increase in the quantity and quality of research on NYSP. Such research is necessary in order for policy creators and program implementers to demonstrate to private and public funders how policy is necessary to supports programs that benefit society and youth participants alike. The respondents discussed a need for research to assess policy implementation and also to determine the impact of the policies. Respondents noted that such research is a challenge, however, because of the implementation of disparate programs across a country. For example, in the Dominican Republic and other countries with a service requirement policy, while local school administrators must adhere to the guideline for students to serve a particular number of hours of service, schools are free to design their programs as they choose otherwise. Such leeway in implementation poses great difficulty for researchers interested in determining the overall effect of a policy. In this regard, features analyses are a potential first step in assessing the landscape of disparate programs implemented under the same policy.

Respondents discussed the need for impact analyses to determine the effectiveness of policies and programs relating to youth outcomes (e.g. employment, civic engagement, etc.), and community level outcomes (e.g. needs such as the environment, emergency response, poverty, etc.). For example, although all students perform service through school-based requirements, research has not demonstrated the efficacy of such policies across programs. In this case, respondents noted that there is a need for common set of metrics and benchmarks that can be used in evaluations, and for research designs that can measure programs across disparate sections of a country with different levels of delivery. Research is also needed to design policies to address specific needs of communities. In Mexico, for example, the

respondent emphasized the need for increased linkages between the requirement policy and local communities, so that the service requirement can better address the needs of in marginalized areas.

Research is also needed to identify the economic costs of implementation (e.g. the amount of funding needed to sustain programs), and how such costs influence the creation and sustainability of NYSP. Finally, respondents noted that research is needed on the role of cultural, political, social, and demographic factors in determining the impact of NYSP (not touched upon in this paper), each of which is fundamental to understanding how policies and community service have different meanings across countries, as the role of service and its status cannot be the same in every country as the status of democracy vary greatly across countries (Johnson et al. 2004).

The past two decades have witnessed an increase in literature devoted to youth service programs, much of which focuses on curriculum and programmatic features that enhance the effectiveness of youth service programs (Center for Social Development, 2004; Metz & Youniss, 2005; Youniss & Yates, 1997). This paper describes the status and configurations of national policies that support youth service involvement in Latin America and the Caribbean. The research, performed in 2004, revealed that 13 of the 19 countries in the study have a governmental policy that involves youth, indicating a strong state and societal interest for engaging youth in pro-social activities that address pressing community priorities. The research also revealed that in several countries with a national youth service policy, there are movements underway toward the creation of another, separate policy.

Findings from this study illustrate that the national youth service policy landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean is diverse, as policies are implemented and operated distinctively nationally across and locally within countries. At the same time, national youth service policies share common features in that they are created by government agencies and are implemented and sustained with collaboration of local non-governmental youth-serving organizations. This research demonstrates that such policies create a framework for national or local programs, define the target population, and define the objectives of the service. Ultimately, national youth service policies are created to provide opportunities for young people to become involved in and to make a contribution to society as active and responsible citizens.

> *The national youth service policy landscape in Latin America and the Caribbean is diverse, as policies are implemented and operated distinctively nationally across and locally within countries.*

Due to the non-representative sample of respondents and the exploratory nature of this research, the authors recognize that this study may have omitted existing national youth service policies. Further, this paper does not address findings in relation to the cultural, political, and social context of the particular countries in Latin America and the Caribbean in study. At the same time, by uncovering some of the configurations of national youth service policy and addressing specific factors that hinder and facilitate such policies, this assessment provides a stepping-stone for further research and inquiry.

Lasting change best occurs when all stakeholders (e.g. communities, mass media, civil society, public sector, private sector, etc.) view youth not as 'clients' or a set of deficits that need to be addressed, but as essential agents in addressing important community needs. Around the world, young people are mobilizing for civil rights, organizing for environmental justice, advocating for school reform, serving on agency boards, raising consciousness through the arts, responding to natural disasters, and providing neighborhood-based services. These efforts challenge portrayals of youth as problems in society, as well as the typical focus of professionals on youth needs and deficiencies. National youth service policies, in their best form, provide an important framework for young people to become viable and active contributors to the maintenance and betterment of society.

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Endnotes & References

[1] Respondents' described movements toward NYSP as such: In Anguilla, a respondent who is a former member of the national youth council indicated that in the near future there will likely be a provision for service to be included in the country's general youth policy. In Argentina, there were varying opinions on whether a NYSP would be created. A government official stated that no clear legislation currently exists. However, other respondents in the private sector stated that the increasing number of youth servers and the increasing number of private and public organizations that promote service enhance the likelihood that a NYSP will someday be created. In Bolivia, the respondents stated another NSYP will likely be created through the efforts of youth-serving organizations such as the Bolivian Red Cross. In Ecuador, both respondents stated that it is unlikely that a NYSP would be created in the near future, as youth issues have not been the focus of policy makers. In El Salvador, the respondents stated that service may soon be included as a component of the general youth policy. In Panama, all five of the respondents stated that a NYSP will be created as there is strong interest and support for youth volunteerism, and the benefits of youth service (for the server, recipient, organizations, and society) are becoming more well-known. In Paraguay, respondents provided a similar assessment by stating that the National Council of Volunteers (CONOVA) will continue advocating for the creation of such a policy. And, in Peru, the respondents shared the belief that a NYSP would one day be a reality, with the national youth council (CONAJU) playing a central role. Respondents in several countries described stalled attempts to legislate a NYSP. In Columbia and Peru, national youth service policies have been approved in the past, however service programs have yet to be implemented under these laws. In Ecuador, a draft law to provide service as an alternative to military service was not approved by the government. In El Salvador, a 2002 proposal for a voluntary service law was presented to the Legislative Assembly but not approved. Respondents in several countries described recently approved national service policies. The governments in Argentina and Peru recently passed "laws of volunteerism" for all citizens to engage in service activities. While young people can participate, these laws do not focus specifically on youth nor do they provide opportunities specifically for youth, and are therefore outside of the scope of this inquiry. The respondent in Nicaragua also indicated that policy makers are presently working to approve the "Law of Voluntary Service." This law would provide opportunities for all citizens, including youth, to perform service.

[2] Little information was provided on the requirement policies in Colombia, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua.

[3] The respondents in Anguilla and El Salvador indicated that draft provisions exist for the inclusion of service activities within these country's general youth policies.

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