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ADDRESSING THE YOUTH BULGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA THROUGH NATIONAL COMPULSORY SERVICE PROGRAM

Olugbenga Ige

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Key Points

- Papua New Guinea (PNG) has “youth bulge” that constitutes serious challenges to its economic and social development.
- The National Compulsory Service Program (NCSP) is a veritable way to address the bulging pyramid in PNG.
- The Government of PNG (GoPNG), Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) can collaborate to establish and fund the NCSP.
- Establishment of PNG National Directorate of Employment (PNG-NDE) would be one of the most suitable models that creates employment for Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) graduates and grade 12 school leavers in PNG.

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ADDRESSING THE YOUTH BULGE IN PAPUA NEW GUINEA THROUGH NATIONAL COMPULSORY SERVICE PROGRAM

By Olugbenga Ige

Papua New Guinea (PNG) is experiencing a sudden increase in population that has created a 'youth bulge' (Lin, 2012). 'Youth bulge' can be described as a situation where a large share of the population comprises young adults and children (Lin, 2012). In the article published by 'Let's Talk Development' on World Bank Blogs, Lin (2012) describes 'youth bulge' as a popular occurrence in many developing countries, including PNG, and particularly in the least developed countries. The 'youth bulge' observed in many provinces arose because PNG has attained a stage of development that is characterised by success in the reduction of infant mortality that is supported by a high fertility rate from women. Jongore (2019) asserts that the bulging of the young arose because fewer infants die of hygiene factors or ill health from lack of proper nutrition caused by insufficient food. According to Jongore (2019), the bulging pyramid presents a population structure of citizens under the age of 15 to 25 years. The group presented by Jongore (2019) are secondary school leavers and university graduates who are unable to make a meaningful contribution in most developing countries and least developed countries through honest or legitimate paid work (i.e., employment). The 'youth bulge' in PNG requires a practical strategy to address the inability of secondary school leavers, college and Technical and Vocational Educational Training (TVET) Trainees, and university graduates to contribute in earnest ways to the economic development of PNG. In order to find a strategy that is appropriate to address the 'youth bulge' in PNG, creation of the PNG National Youth Service Corps (PNG-NYSC) is recommended.

National Youth Service in selected countries of the world

Some countries knowingly or unknowingly created the National Youth Service Scheme to address the youth bulge. I adopted the word 'knowingly' because the bulging pyramid had developed in countries such as Guatemala, Honduras, and South Africa before the national service scheme was set up. 'Unknowingly' seems suitable for the establishment of youth service in a country such as Nigeria because it was created in 1973 to reconstruct, reconcile, and rebuild Nigeria after the civil war. The 'youth bulge' that warranted

the proposed national youth service in PNG has not been featured and was not a social problem as in Nigeria when the national youth service was created.

The National Youth Service in Guatemala and Honduras

The National Youth Service Initiative in Guatemala and Honduras is a US\$2 million project funded by the United State Agency for International Development (USAID) from June 2022 to December 2023. According to USAID (2022), the country with the largest youth population in Latin America is Guatemala, with 61 percent of its population below the age of 30. Wyngaarden et al. (2022) reported that the 'youth bulge' has featured in Honduras because 50 percent of the country's 9.6 million citizens are below the age of 25. Guatemala and Honduras are two countries in the Central American Northern Triangle, plagued by many years of civil war and well known for violence, migration, and inequality (UNFPA, 2018).

The national youth service model in Guatemala and Honduras was selected and presented in this paper because subsistence farming remains the primary source of livelihood in those countries, which is similar to PNG. The economies of Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador (i.e., the Northern Triangle of Latin America) are like PNG's economy since coffee is their main cash crop. The National Youth Service Corps for Guatemala and Honduras were launched using the 'Gen Now: Youth Impact Leaders', a collaboration between USAID and Glasswing International. In Guatemala and Honduras, the national youth service is designed to (USAID, 2022):

- Improve opportunities for young people who are 15 to 29 years of age;
- Empower young people ages 15 to 29 to contribute to their community's development;
- Develop young people's leadership skills; and
- Foster greater resilience and hope for youth and their communities.

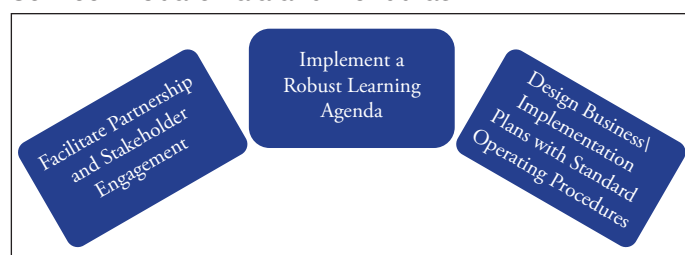
The benefits of the National Youth Service Corps in Guatemala and Honduras include the following:

- Provision of the skills required for future employment in local businesses;
- Generation of additional income into local economy through the provision of cash stipends for youth volunteers; and
- Empowering youths in the Northern Triangle of Latin America through community engagements.

Components of the National Youth Service Initiative in Guatemala and Honduras

The National Youth Service initiative in Guatemala and Honduras is built on three major elements presented in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. The three major components of National Youth Service in Guatemala and Honduras



Source: the author

The component on facilitation of partnership and stakeholders' engagement promotes the active involvement of multiple stakeholders such as youth, private sector, academia, think tanks, civil society organisations, local and national public administration institutions. These stakeholders are actively engaged in collecting lessons learned, best practices, and community service ideas, in addition to operational and financial conditions that would facilitate a sustainable model of national service that is youth-oriented (USAID, 2022). Implementing a robust learning agenda informs the designing of the National Youth Service's learning agenda model to generate evidence-based models on youth service models globally. The third element aims to develop a business model with standard operating procedures that would enable Guatemala and Honduras to launch a veritable National Youth Service Corps.

The three primary components of the National Youth Service in the Northern Triangle of Latin America are relevant and suitable for drafting the policy on National Youth Service Corps in PNG.

The National Youth Service in Nigeria

The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was established during the administration of Yakubu Gowon who was the military Head of State in 1973 by decree No. 24 promulgated on 22 May 1973. According to the NYSC Directorate Headquarters (2017), the scheme for youth service arose to encourage and develop common ties among the youths

in Nigeria. The development of children and Nigeria into a great and dynamic economy is part of the core mandate of NYSC in Nigeria (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1993). The NYSC has undergone different transformations from its establishment and training of the first set of graduates that were admitted into the scheme to date.

On 16 June 1993, the military government managed by General Ibrahim Babangida enacted the National Youth Service Corps Decree. The 1993's decree re-organised the NYSC programme by repealing NYSC Acts, providing the service corps objectives, and specifying satisfactory service conditions for corps members (Federal Government of Nigeria, 1993). The NYSC in Nigeria has three core primary mandates, like the youth service in Guatemala and Honduras, but different objectives to build the youth and nation. The drive to build awareness of a common identity among tertiary education graduates below the age of 30 from different ethnic groups seems to be the 'heartbeat' of the national youth service in Nigeria. On the other hand, the national youth service in Guatemala and Honduras is entrepreneurship-oriented and designed to address unemployment. Notwithstanding, these observed differences in models adopted for national youth service by Guatemala and Honduras, and Nigeria, the first official salary a university, polytechnic, or monotechnic graduate will earn to survive or start a business in Nigeria comes from the National Youth Service Scheme.

Strategies to establish and operate the National Youth Service Corps in PNG

The first step in establishing the PNG National Youth Service Corps (PNG-NYSC) is to commission experts and officers from government agencies whose works are related to social and economic aspects of development, relevant to youth participation in nation-building to prepare a policy and guidelines related document. Three primary experts that would be veritable guides to the management team of PNG-NYSC in the early years of its operation must be part of the policy and guidelines document drafting team.

- The funding of the PNG-NYSC scheme will be primarily from the GoPNG and secondarily from DFAT, and USAID. For instance, the USAID committed 2 million USD to fund the National Youth Service Initiative of Guatemala and Honduras.
- The recruitment of youths into the PNG-NYSC scheme will be in collaboration with the bachelor's degree – awarding registered institutes of higher education in PNG. Citizens of PNG that have completed their degrees abroad on the year the PNG-NYSC commenced will submit their documents to "The Board" for mobilisation.
- The PNG-NYSC shall be mandatory for youths who have completed at least a bachelor's degree and are

below the age of 38 years. The national youth service scheme shall run uninterrupted for 12 calendar months.

- The government shall build orientation camps in the Highlands, New Guinea Islands, Momase, and Southern regions. The youth corps mobilised for the scheme will undergo three-week mandatory military and entrepreneurial/vocational training in the GoPNG's designated orientation camps.

Posting of youth corps members

The posting of the youth corps shall follow this pattern or order:

- Graduates from the Highlands will be posted by the Board of NYSC to serve in New Guinea Islands (Bougainville, East New Britain, Manus, New Ireland, and West New Britain); Momase Region (East Sepik, Madang, Morobe and Sandaun (West Sepik); and Southern Region (Central, Gulf, Milne Bay, Oro (Northern), and Western (Fly River)).
- Youth corps from the New Guinea Islands Region will observe the mandatory one-year national service in Highlands Region (Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Jiwaka, Southern Highlands, and Western Highlands); Momase Region (East Sepik, Madang, Morobe and Sandaun (West Sepik); and Southern Region (Central, Gulf, Milne Bay, Oro (Northern), and Western (Fly River)).
- Youth corps that are natives of provinces in the Momase Region will serve at workplaces in Highlands Region (Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Jiwaka, Southern Highlands, and Western Highlands); New Guinea Islands (Bougainville, East New Britain, Manus, New Ireland, and West New Britain); and Southern Region (Central, Gulf, Milne Bay, Oro (Northern), and Western (Fly River)).
- The corps that are born in the Southern Region will serve at institutions located in Highlands Region (Chimbu, Eastern Highlands, Enga, Hela, Jiwaka, Southern Highlands, and Western Highlands); New Guinea Islands (Bougainville, East New Britain, Manus, New Ireland, and West New Britain); and Momase Region (East Sepik, Madang, Morobe and Sandaun (West Sepik)).

A graduate mobilised for the national youth service should be disallowed from observing the service in the region of his/her birth in PNG. For instance, a graduate born in Momase Region shall not be permitted or posted to serve in Momase Region.

Other matters relating to the PNG National Youth Service

- Interested employers in the PNG private sector shall apply to the PNG-NYSC Board to temporarily employ youth corps members in their offices for primary assignments.
- The PNG Defence Force shall appoint Camp Commandants and select officers to oversee the military aspects or drills of the three-week orientation camp in the four regions – Highlands, New Guinea Islands, Momase, and Southern.
- The Government, through PNG-NYSC Board, shall provide uniforms (i.e., national colours of PNG) and boots to all graduates mobilised for the national service.
- The government shall pay individual youth corps members a monthly living wage for the 12-month National Youth Service Scheme.
- The PNG-NYSC shall recruit and appoint Regional Coordinators (4) for each region and Provincial Coordinators (21) for each province excluding National Capital District, and support staff to manage the members of the National Youth Service Scheme.
- The GoPNG shall issue Honours certificates and offer employment to distinguished youth corps that make excellent contributions to community development during the one-year mandatory service.
- The PNG-NYSC shall organise a Passing Out Parade (POP) for all deserving youth corps, and issue to them a PNG-NYSC Discharge Certificate.
- The Youth Corps that deserted their places of primary assignment shall be sanctioned by the PNG-NYSC Board, have their national service extended by some months, conduct compulsory community service, and be placed on half salaries.

During the three-week orientation programme in the camps situated in Highlands, New Guinea Islands, Momase, and Southern Regions, these activities are recommended: registration of mobilised Youth Corp members, verification of educational qualifications, medical checkup, orientation of lectures, language classes, sporting activities, vocational training, cultural dance, PNG-NYSC campfire, parade rehearsals, leadership training, and community development service.

Concluding remarks

The initiative to have a youth service of an informal type is not new to PNG. In 1992, the League for National Advancement (LNA) featured one of the earliest initiatives of voluntary service for PNG youth. In the section on "*Olgeta*

pikinini mas go long skul” in the LNA’s manifesto, the party states that:

“LNA bai kirapim skul kedet, boi skaut na gel gaid. Dispela bilong givim gudpela trening na pasin igo long ol yangpela manmeri” meaning “LNA will start school cadet, Boys Scout, and Girls Guide This is to provide good training and conduct for young people”.

The PNG National Youth Service Scheme must be continuously evaluated and improved to enable it to contribute immensely to the development of communities in the country. The national service model presented in this paper is limited to tertiary education graduates because of the competency of manpower needed to drive PNG’s community development and economy. The team that prepares the policy document adopted by the government to establish the PNG-NYSC would have to actively train and retrain the PNG-NYSC coordinators and the military detachment to the regions’ orientation camps on facilitating activities at the orientation camps for some years. The capacity-building workshops will enable the PNG-NYSC employees to produce or train youth corps that will contribute to the development of all aspects of PNG’s economy.

This paper will assist researchers and the government team to create a sustainable National Youth Service Scheme for PNG. The model of the National Youth Service presented in this paper is custom-made to address the bulge of educated youth in PNG. Therefore, it is not recommended for adoption by policymakers and the government in solving the unemployment challenges confronting PNG citizens that have not completed a bachelor’s degree at the universities.

The model of the National Youth Service Scheme designed in this paper cannot accommodate TVET graduates and Grade 12 school leavers because such a scheme would create a debt burden for GoPNG. Thus, the appropriate scheme that would accommodate TVET graduates and Grade 12 school leavers would be the “Papua New Guinea National Directorate of Employment (PNG-NDE)”. The PNG-NDE would be a model of collaborative means of creating employment for schooled and non-schooled citizens to acquire vocational skills and training. The government, private sector, and entrepreneurs would collaborate through PNG-NDE to pay salaries to the trainees through the period of training. Citizens that have attended schools or are not opportune to attend schools would become self-reliant and job creators in the PNG-NDE scheme.

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About the Author

Dr Olugbenga Ige is a Senior Research Fellow and Program Leader of National Security and International Research Program at the PNG National Research Institute. His research interests include cybersecurity education, social sciences education, ICT in education, gender studies, society and culture, and community-based research.

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