



YOUTH ORGANISATIONS IN SRI LANKA:

Some dimensions and dynamics

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The Youth Organisations Survey is a product of the programme on Poverty and Youth (PAY), which seeks to improve understanding of the particular challenges faced by the poor youth in Sri Lanka.

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List of Acronyms

AD	Assistant Director
CBO	Community Based Organisations
CCF	Christian Children's Fund
DYO	District Youth Services Officer
FORUT	Campaign for Solidarity and Development
GoSL	Government of Sri Lanka
GTZ	German Technical Cooperation
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
JVP	Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna (People's Liberation Front)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NYSC	National Youth Services Council
NAITA	National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Education Fund
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
VTA	Vocational Training Authority
WFP	World Food Programme
YO	Youth Organisation
YSO	Youth Services Officer
ZOA	Dutch Refugee Care, Netherlands

Executive Summary

Background and Study Design

Understanding how young people assume responsibilities within their communities is one of the main aims of the Poverty and Youth (PAY) Programme of Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA). The intent of the study 'Youth Organisations in Sri Lanka: Some dimensions and dynamics' was the exploration of this issue. The two core factors which motivated this research are the frequency with which youth organisations were cited by youth respondents of PAY / CEPA fieldwork, and the fact that this movement has not been subject to comprehensive research despite its long standing existence.

The study which is qualitative in approach looks at the operational dynamics of Youth Organisations (YOs), in particular their driving forces and motivators, current and evolving objectives and activities, trends, leadership and membership, links with external organisations and future vision. It also looks at the government structures which support these organisations.

A snowball technique was used to identify YOs using contacts obtained during the course of a survey conducted by the PAY programme and other CEPA fieldwork. The sample was selected by applying certain criteria such the YO being operational for a period of at least one year. The study which was carried out island wide covered the nine provinces and included a total of 20 YOs. Interviews which were directed at three levels sought to elicit perceptions of government officers serving youth, community members and members of YOs. The respondents in the last category belonged to the 18-29 age cohort.

Youth

Although the main focus of the study was youth organisations, the study also addresses the challenges faced by youth as a population. Key issues that were highlighted included, the failure of tertiary and secondary education to provide skills and capacities required by the job market, marginalisation experienced in rural areas based on non-progressive local economies and deficits in infrastructure. Rural youth felt that that their social mobility was restricted by the limitations in access to employment and educational facilities. With regard to politics a majority of the youth were disillusioned with existent political systems which they saw as being partisan and ineffective.

Government Structures for Youth and the Youth Organisation Movement

The National Youth Services Council (NYSC), which was established in 1969 is the designated body for the management of youth affairs at meso and macro levels. The National Youth Club Federation, which is a registered NGO, was established as the implementing agency of the Youth Organisation Movement. This entity overlooks the functioning of YOs island wide.

Government Officers at three broad levels are responsible for overlooking YOs and other state implemented youth initiatives. Their duties include management and coordination, moderation and facilitation and supervision of day-to-day activities at the lowest level.

Among the challenges faced by these officers was the lack of funds and decrease in budgetary allocations, and the mismatch between youth needs and facilities provided through the state. Youth were perceived as a powerful and volatile human resource and working with this them was seen as challenging but rewarding.

Community members saw YOs as a catalyst, which brought youth together to serve the village, and accorded a high degree of recognition to the YOs. Many YOs were actively involved in organising and participating in village levels functions. Links with religious institutions such as churches and temples contributed to a community's validation of YOs.

Youth Organisations

The primary objective of establishing YOs is to provide an opportunity for youth to develop their talents and skills. At the inception, YOs were set up in accordance with the objectives conceptualised by the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs and the National Youth Services Council (NYSC). This has changed in that YOs have evolved and now focus on the needs of the membership and their larger community.

Representatives of the NYSC are instrumental in establishing YOs and are responsible for monitoring and supervision. On a village level the GN Officer, office bearers of village organisations, School Principals, teachers and religious leaders interact with the YOs on a more regular basis and assist in the implementation of activities.

Motivations for establishing YOs included requests by the relevant state officer, identification of a need (community or youth related) by the youth. The twin objectives of serving the village / community whilst proving a platform for them to share ideas and experiences and develop was cited by many.

Trends

The Youth Organisation Movement was very active and recognised at national level at the inception. This trend was gradually reversed with activities reaching a point of stagnation in the 1990s. The period 2000-2004 saw an upward trend in activities. During the JVP insurrection from 1987 – 1989 the YO movement ceased functioning in all provinces except the North and East. Likewise the conflict in the Northeast also saw the permanent closure of some YOs in the Provinces whilst others functioned sporadically. Decrease in state funding and sponsorship has spurred a majority of the YOs across the country to tap alternate sources for funding and build up strategic partnerships with I/NGOs.

Many YOs wanted to diversify their scope from sports and religious activities to more youth specific ones, especially in the provision of skills enhancement and support in income generation activities to its membership.

Leadership and membership

In terms of leadership all YOs visited, follow a democratic process of election of a committee who is responsible for managing the YO. As per the constitution of the Sri Lanka Youth Club Federation membership is open to those between the ages of 13-29. Guidance to the YOs is also provided through advisory panels. Gender parity has changed in that the sports orientation of YOs at the onset saw a higher number of males participating in various activities whilst diversification into other areas of activity has seen the attendance rates of females rising.

Personal growth and development were cited by many members as positive and beneficial outcomes of joining YOs. Experience gained in organising and managing various initiatives, interacting with the community and their peer group were some of the highlighted learning points.

YOs generally meet every month and in some instances once a fortnight. A larger percentage of their activities focused on community based religious activities and village development, such as construction of feeder roads, cleaning of waterways etc. Capacity building of the membership was done in the form of workshops and seminars which were organised in conjunction with external personnel.

The biggest challenge reported by members of the YOs was resource and funding constraints. Another gap that was identified was the lack of guidance and specialised expertise. Indirect factors such as high levels of poverty, and lack of connectivity in rural areas also impacted the functioning of YOs in rural areas.

Many reasons were given for the success and failure of YOs. The most essential factors influencing the success of YOs was a pro-active, dedicated and innovative membership, a committed leadership, guidance from the advisory panel and a supportive community.

Future vision

The establishment of Information / Resource Centres was an objective of many YOs in order to provide to its membership access to topical information and IT. The welfare of the membership was also another key area of concern with many YOs planning seminars on drug awareness, alcohol abuse etc. Community development, in terms of both physical development and improvement of the standard of living was a recurrent vision of many YOs.

Conclusion

This study sought to analyse the role of YOs in the socialisation process and public participation of young people in Sri Lanka. This was achieved by looking at variables such as such dynamics, trends, membership and activities and impacts of 20 selected YOs.

In terms of macro level objectives the one which has been fully realised is the establishment of a 'youth managed space'. The study found evidence that YOs play a key role in supporting, learning, experimentation and the acquisition of new skills such as leadership, personality development and group interaction. On a national level though, channels available to them are

limited. A few state agencies work with YOs but there is scope for utilisation of this resource group by other agencies.

YOs served a multiplicity of functions primarily as an informal education unit for the acquisition of life skills; through participation in YOs youth gain exposure and knowledge. They acquire a wide spectrum of skills and find an environment where they are able to realise and put into practice a number of their capacities. Overall there was a good level of recognition for the YO movement which could serve in a much bigger role if the necessary structures and support systems were put in place.

1. Introduction

The Poverty and Youth (PAY) Programme of the Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA) was designed with two general objectives: to raise awareness of the particular challenges faced by youth, particularly poor youth, in Sri Lanka, and to contribute to an enhanced understanding of young people's efforts to assume greater responsibilities for themselves, and within their communities. The present study falls within the second objective.

It has been recognised that youth clubs, groups and organisations can play a significant role in moulding the way in which young people begin to relate and navigate their incursion to the wider community and to the public sphere as a whole. These youth organisations, as an independent entity, have not been the subject of substantive research; this also influenced the conceptualisation of this study, which seeks to explore the role of these organisations in the social integration process of today's youth.

In terms of organisation, youth in Sri Lanka organise themselves both formally, and informally (as independent bodies without institutional affiliations), on both long-term and short-term bases in a variety of settings. For example, in a formal context, religious bodies/institutions, political parties, student unions and trade unions have their respective youth wings. Social service organisations, I/NGOs, CBOs and village level organisations also have youth groups. In an informal setting, youth create event-specific ad-hoc groups and come together to carry out various activities (mainly social and religious activities).

The focus of this study is youth organisations, which have been set up and operate under the state-run youth organisation movement. The exclusive focus on this entity allows for an in-depth analysis of these youth organisations and enables a comparison across different geographic regions and sectors. In addition, it permits an aggregation of issues and challenges faced by both the membership and government bodies serving this entity.

The intention of this study is to offer government entities, private and non-government organisations insight into how these organisations work, on the premise that a more thorough understanding of these mechanisms can contribute towards the formulation of better-informed policies and approaches for youth and related services. It is also intended to impel a strategic use of this widespread network for development.

This report comprises 6 sections; the first section delineates methodology. The second will look at general youth issues, government structures for youth organisations and briefly introduce the youth organisation movement. The third section elaborates on the role of provincial and district government bodies serving youth organisations and their perceptions. The fourth presents findings and analyses issues such as origins, driving forces and motivations, trends of leadership and membership, and the operations and activities of youth organisations. It also delves into the types of challenges and obstacles these organisations face and looks at their perspectives on the future. The penultimate section explores factors impacting the success and failure of youth organisations and concludes the analysis. The final section consists of case studies of YOs from the nine Provinces.

2. Methodology

2.1 Study Approach

The study uses a sample of 20 youth organisations, based throughout the island. It looks at the conceptualisation and operational dynamics of these youth organisations (YOs); driving forces and motivators; current objectives and activities; trends, leadership and membership; community interaction; links with external organisations and future vision. In addition it analyses the government structures which support these organisations.

The first step in the research required establishing a network of contacts with youth organisations throughout the country. A PAY team member, who is a past president of a youth organisation in Moneragala, facilitated the initial contacts. This entry point was followed by the use of a snowball sampling technique to identify other youth organisations. In parallel, written communications explaining the research and its objectives were sent out to youth organisations identified in the course of all PAY/CEPA fieldwork.

The research also generated information on 'youth' as a sub group. The fact that the field team and the respondents were peers may have been a possible motivating factor for the respondents to share issues faced by them as youth. These issues are presented in section 3 to set the context of youth organisations.

2.2 Identification and Selection of Sample

The next step in the research entailed choosing the youth organisations to be included in the study sample. The sample was selected using a representative technique to ensure that each of the nine provinces was covered. Although contacts and information were gathered from more than fifty YOs, a number of criteria were applied to select the YOs that would ultimately form the sample and following are the three mandatory criteria.

- The youth organisation should have been operational for a minimum of one year – this was identified as requisite to analyse trends and long-term impacts.
- The youth organisation should be managed and run by young people themselves – this was in keeping with the focus of the study which sought to understand the nexus between 'youth' and youth organisations.
- The youth organisation should be formally registered with the NYSC – this criterion was decided in order to enable a uniform comparison across the sample.

The sample sought to include a representation of geographical regions, backgrounds and ethnicities. The sample includes YOs from the urban, rural and estate sectors. The youth organisation movement was seen to be more active in rural areas and the sample is indicative of this phenomenon in that a majority of the YOs in the sample are those located in rural/peri urban areas.

2.3 Composition of the Sample

The field research component spanned September 2003 through March 2004. The data collection was carried out mainly through semi-structured questionnaires administered in Sinhala, Tamil and English with principle interviews being directed at three different levels:

- Interviews with government officials: In selected districts, interviews were carried out with officials such as Assistant Directors (ADs), District Youth Services Officers (DYOs), and Youth Services Officers (YSOs) of the respective regional National Youth Services Council (NYSC) offices.
- Member interviews: Individual interviews were held with the leaders of the youth organisations such as the President, Secretary and Treasurer. Other regular members were also interviewed. In addition, an attempt was made to ensure that both male and female members were included. Respondents belonged to the 18–29 age cohort with the median age being 25 years.
- Member interviews/focus group discussions: In a few instances, the youth organisations had arranged for the attendance of all members. In these cases, apart from individual interviews, focus group discussions were also conducted. This helped the study team to assess the general views of the YOs.
- Community member interviews: To obtain the community's perceptions on the organisations, interviews were also held with teachers, parents, *Grama niladharis* (GN),¹ and religious priests. In some instances the afore-mentioned also served on the advisory panel. These interviews were helpful in gaining an external view of the youth organisations.

The core questions addressed by the study are: How are youth organisations formed? Who is behind them? How do they function? What are the activities and initiatives they engage in? How do they work with the community? What are their leadership structures? What are the challenges and obstacles they face? and what are their future perspectives?

The team visited and conducted in-depth interviews with 20 youth organisations and allied key informants from all nine provinces, covering 14 districts.² In some districts, more than one YO was interviewed. The conceptual sample contained 22 YOs.³ Two organisations were removed from the sample. One was managed solely by adults and thus did not comply with the agreed upon criterion. The other was removed, as the information generated through the interviews was not substantial; the members were not interested in continuing the interviewing process when they realised that CEPA was not a funding agency.⁴

¹ *Grama niladhari* - Officer in charge of the lowest state administrative unit in Sri Lanka.

² The districts were: Mannar, Trincomalee, Jaffna, Moneragala, Nuwara Eliya, Ratnapura, Galle, Matara, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Gampaha, Kalutara, Kurunegala and Colombo.

³ Targeted sample was 20 YOs.

⁴ See Annex # 3 for coverage of interviews. Names of YOs, key informants and in some instances, locations have been left out in order to maintain anonymity

The field teams travelled to the sites where the youth organisations were located. The visits, on average, lasted 4 days. In three instances, familiarisation visits were conducted to identify youth organisations and set up the interviews, which were fixed for a later date. In all cases, the meetings with the youth organisations were prearranged and all efforts were made to accommodate a time convenient for the members. On some occasions repeat visits were required. In general, the study teams were met with a high level of receptivity.

2.4 Limitations of the Study

As explained in the communication sent out to the YOs, participation in the study was purely voluntarily. This resulted in certain Provinces being over-represented. Though a majority of the YOs had strong religious affiliations; the sample unfortunately did not include a Muslim youth organisation.

On some occasions, it was not possible to meet all of the key members of the organisations who were away due to other commitments such as employment, and educational activities. The possible imbalance this would have created was overcome to some degree by repeat visits.

Generally, NYSC district officers offered their full support and cooperation in the field. However, despite repeated attempts, it was not possible to have access to the central NYSC database of youth organisations, which could have offered a more comprehensive list from which to select the study sample.

3. Youth in Sri Lanka: Setting the Context

The classification of youth in Sri Lanka varies; factors impacting the various classifications include age, status of employment and marital status. Within the remit of this study the definition of youth are those between the ages of 18 – 29 as per the sample.

The information collected from the interviews with members of youth organisations and the observations of the study team produced a wealth of information not only on issues relating directly to the organisations themselves, but also on issues faced by youth in general. Following are some key points that surfaced recurrently

3.1 Urban-Rural Variations

In general, urban youth were found to be more outgoing and open to the prospect of exploring external alternatives for advancement. For example, in an attempt to overcome budgetary constraints and declining allocations from the NYSC, a YO in Negombo had directly approached the designated Member of Parliament (MP) with a request for funds. In comparison, the budgetary constraints of the NYSC have acutely affected activities of rural YOs. Although YOs in urban and semi-urban areas have better access to funding, perseverance and a high level of commitment has meant that rural YOs are more pro-active in engaging in self-financing through fund-raising activities. This can also be attributed to higher levels of commitment and participation by rural youth. Although they have limited access to external networks, in most instances rural YOs work enthusiastically, within their constraints, to develop their respective organisations. In general, awareness of avenues for development were higher among urban youth, not necessarily because of higher education levels, but because of a socialisation process that affords them better exposure. Cultural traits such as deference to adults, hesitancy in approaching those in high positions and a sense of inadequacy (dress, speech, knowledge) are more prevalent among rural youth.

On the other hand rural youth seem to benefit from their lived experiences, which are more practical and communal. These experiences helped both in their occupations and daily life. Living in a closed community also means that they usually enjoy a better support system in the form of extended families and community. In terms of political viewpoints, adherence to JVP⁵ tenets was found predominantly in rural youth. A number of them expressed that the JVP provided a channel to convey their grievances and seek solutions to the problems they face as youth.

Even in the less developed provinces, YOs were recognised and given more prominence within a village context. In rural areas, the levels of awareness among the community of the institutional workings of the YOs, its membership, partner organisations and general activities were generally high. In contrast, in urban settings, the community had little knowledge of the objectives and workings of YOs.

⁵ *'Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna'* (People's Liberation Front), a member of the governing UPFA. A rural Sinhalese youth-based movement. The Front which espouses an ideology combining leftist populism and Sinhala nationalism emerged with the organisation of an armed uprising in 1971 followed by relatively small-scale, yet more violent and intensive revolts in the late 1980s against what was seen as a 'capitalist' state.

While unemployment was cited as the ascendant problem faced by youth across the country, rural youth are more inclined to engage in some form of occupation because of the availability of land and access to natural resources. Urban youth, on the other hand, are dependent on salaried employment in the service sector. Urban youth also have better opportunities for self-employment owing to access to credit facilities and technical expertise. These facilities had not diversified to the rural sector, which had limited avenues of self-employment for rural youth.

Rural youth aspired to secure employment and a regular source of income. This, they saw as enabling them to '*stand on their feet*'. In addition to a job, urban youth desired social mobility and many saw '*going abroad*' as a means to this mobility. There was an interest in self-employment ventures in production and trade by both urban and rural youth, but the lack of support from financial institutions was cited as a key limitation.

Youth in the estate sector⁶ had to contend with similar exertions and in addition were also impacted by issues particular to the sector such as low-level penetration of services and limited integration. Youth in this segment explained this by citing the lack of youth specific initiatives for this sector. There were instances where NGOs had conducted training programmes (in welding, machinery maintenance) but once again the problem arose in implementation of skills gained. As residents in the estate line rooms they are subject to regulations which do not permit the operation of businesses / industries by the residents on the estates. Low levels of acceptance when looking for employment opportunities outside the sector resulted in their options being confined to menial labour. They also stated that the poor quality of education and economic constraints led to high drop out rates in school. This resulted in them being by passed in favour of those with higher levels of basic education and skills.

3.2 Education and Employment

Young people expressed frustration with an education system that, they consider, does not provide the skills required by the job market, particularly in the private sector. It was stated that though tertiary education had undergone certain reforms, those with Advanced Level or Ordinary Level qualifications were not proficient in basic requirements such as information technology, and were also not trained in skills such as communication methods and social interaction.⁷

An overwhelming majority of the young people interviewed who had the required qualifications argued that even though they possess the necessary qualifications, the non-availability of jobs means that they are not able to make practical use of the knowledge gained. Under-employment was highlighted in that the available jobs did not make optimal use of their capabilities.

The 'Colombo-centric' bias of various development interventions was cited by key informants and YO members. A micro-level focus was recommended; for example, the promotion and development of indigenous industries, which would utilise locally available resources and skills.

⁶ Tea plantation sector in the Central Province

⁷ Youth in the sample were between the ages of 18 and 29 and were not able to benefit from the education reforms (especially in the secondary sector), which were piloted in 1996 and implemented island wide in

3.3 Participation in Politics

Anti-systemic sentiments were frequently expressed during the course of the study. Youth appear to be de-motivated by what was perceived to be excessive partisan politics. This disillusionment could also be attributed to the failure of successive governments to address the needs of youth. Interventions that were put in place to address specific needs have not had the desired results and are accused of being politically biased. For example, the selection of *Samurdhi*⁸ animators for the programme was criticised by many youth on the grounds that appointments were politically driven. Securing employment, very specifically in the state sector, was very strongly linked to politics and party connections.

⁸ The state-sponsored social assistance scheme *Samurdhi* (prosperity), initiated in 1995, is the frontline national poverty alleviation programme.

4. Government Structures for Youth Organisations

4.1 The National Youth Services Council and Allied Institutions

The National Youth Services Council (NYSC) is a state organisation which comes under the purview of the Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs. Established in 1969 under an Act of Parliament, the Council came about with the realisation of a need for a designated body for the management of youth affairs at meso and micro levels. The NYSC is headed by a Director who is an appointee of the Ministry and is supported by five Assistant Directors.

4.2 The Youth Organisation Movement

The youth organisation movement was conceptualised in the early 80s under the aegis of the NYSC. The Sri Lanka Youth Club Federation, which is a registered NGO, was established as the implementing agency for the movement and is responsible for formulation of policy, planning and co-ordination of youth activities at national level. The Federation's stated objective is to empower youth as individuals and ensure their participation in the development process.

"Yawwana Samajaya" or *"Ellainyar Mandran"* (youth organisation) is a widely accepted youth based institution in Sri Lanka. As of December 2003 there were 6755⁹ functioning youth organisations registered with the NYSC. The aims of establishing youth organisations, as outlined in the 'constitution of youth organisations',¹⁰ are to:

1. Create a law abiding, patriotic and compassionate citizenship,
2. Provide state services to the village, at the state field-officer level, through linkages with youth organisations,
3. Provide an opportunity for youth to spend their leisure time in a productive and constructive manner and develop their talents,
4. Engage youth in the fields of arts, sports, and conservation,
5. Inculcate the spirit of volunteerism and motivate youth to participate in the national development process,
6. Provide opportunities for personality development and leadership skills.

The guidelines for establishing a YO are outlined in the constitution. The geographical area for the setting up of a YO could be, but is not limited, to a GN division, educational institution, professional institution, or estate division. YOs are encouraged to act independently, under the stewardship of the NYSC, and engage in activities such as the purchase of equipment, construction of youth centres, managing scholarships from external organisations, charging membership fees and engaging in community and youth development initiatives. It is compulsory that a member of the clergy, GN officer or school principal serve on the Advisory Board of the YO.

⁹ Communication with the NYSC, February 2005.

¹⁰ Constitution of Youth Organisations, Sri Lanka Youth Federation.

The membership in a YO, is governed by certain guidelines. Namely, adherence to the code of conduct for members, payment of membership fees, and age of membership to be no less than 13 and no more than 29 years of age. Registration of a YO with the NYSC also grants individual membership in the council to the member of the given organisation. Registration also makes a YO eligible for participation in various activities and programmes organised by the Council. For example, the NYSC has linked up with the University of Sri Jayawardanepura to conduct classes for the external degree (BA) programme. Members of registered YOs, who possess the necessary qualifications in regions where this programme is implemented, can avail themselves of this facility.

4.3 National Youth Services Co-operative Organisation (NYSCO)

The NYSCO is open to Sri Lankan youth between 18-25 years, who are members of the NYSC. Members in the NYSCO gain eligibility for regional and district level training programmes designed to identify and enhance entrepreneurship capacities and provide guidance for self-employment. The twin objectives of NYSCO are the provision of loans, and training for self-employment. Members are entitled to take out loans of up to Rs 30,000.

The Business Technology School (*Wayapara Thakshana Pasala*), an ancillary programme of NYSCO, complements the organisation's goal of promoting an entrepreneurial culture among youth.

4.4 Government Officers

Assistant Directors (AD), District Youth Services Officers (DYO) and Youth Services Officers (YSO) oversee the function and activities of the youth organisation movement, with the YSOs and some DYOs working with the organisations at grassroots level.

The primary tasks of the ADs are to coordinate activities and set out targets at provincial level to ensure implementation of the yearly work plan outlined by NYSC. The DYO is in charge of monitoring activities in the relevant divisions, supervising and advising YSOs, and drawing up project proposals for new activities. The YSOs help to establish new YOs and supervise their work. They are also involved in organising annual events such as sports festivals and Flag Day. YSOs serve on the advisory panel and are expected to attend monthly meetings.

The self-definition of their roles varied, and was influenced, by perception, job description, commitment and interaction with youth. Responses fell within the scope of three broad categories:

Those who worked with a vision and long-term objective:

[We work] towards improving the lives of youth in the district, identifying and enhancing their skills and abilities. (DYO)

Those who emphasised effective completion of tasks outlined in their job descriptions:

Monitoring of youth affairs, managerial tasks (pertaining to youth programmes and the district office), development of village youth, linking youth to relevant government programmes, providing guidance and counselling. (DYO)

And those who carried out their responsibilities on a purely functional basis:

*Visiting the YOs in the GN division⁵ allocated and facilitating meetings.
(YSO)*

Multitasking was common among DYOs and YSOs who served as implementers, facilitators, and counsellors. In certain instances, their responsibilities were need-based and depended on the YO they were working with. While acknowledging that it was their duty to motivate youth and create an environment that was conducive for the YOs to function, they felt that youth themselves needed to be more pro-active in their approach and outlook to make a positive and effective contribution in terms of activities, continuity, planning and vision.

They stated that their functions and involvement were also dependent on the activity at hand. For example, in setting up a YO they would serve as implementers, in linking up a YO with an external institution they would serve as mediators, while conducting programmes would put them in a more supervisory role. The current situation, with severe budget cuts to the NYSC, has called for YOs to be self-reliant and self-functioning with the role of the official being limited to an advisory capacity.

Apart from designated duties, officials also performed other tasks in their roles as public servants. They enjoyed an appreciable level of recognition by civil society, and were approached by members of the public on a variety of issues such as advice on government procedures and documentation, employment opportunities and even legal advice. In the Jaffna district an official commented that time spent on public service activities and NYSC-related duties was equal, as he helped with provision of health services, computer trainings and even served as a traffic controller in schools.

4.5 Challenges Faced by Government Officers Serving Youth Organisations

According to officers, the biggest challenge, in working effectively for and with youth organisations, is the lack of funds. A continued decrease in allocations from the national budget for the NYSC has severely constrained the progress of YOs island-wide. Many officers stated that the only regularised funding was for operational costs such as staff salaries. In the late 1970s (when the Council was launched) and in the early 80s, the NYSC had significant recognition as an active organisation and was the recipient of substantial funding. This trend changed over the years with 2002 being cited as the leanest period in terms of financial support. Many officials stated that they were now unable to provide YOs with financial support for the implementation of programmes.

“NYSC allocations have decreased over the years – this affects all levels of work. Rs. 4,500 is allocated for the annual sports festival; this event runs for 2-3 months and it costs Rs. 25,000/-. We have to cover the deficit with donations. During the past two years, even the Rs. 4500/- was not given. Despite financial constrictions, activities have continued with donations from the central government.” (Officer, Western Province)

Associated with the limited funds is the unmanageable volume of responsibilities allocated to

the Youth Services Officers. For example, a YSO in Moneragala stated that he had to supervise 32 YO's in 42 divisions. Some YO's are located in inaccessible areas with no motorable roads requiring him to often wade across streams.

In order to overcome the problem of financial constraints, the regional offices of the NYSC worked in conjunction with CBOs, I/NGOs and other state institutions such as the National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA). The drawback of this approach was that it compelled YO's to work in line with the focus areas of the organisation concerned.

Another challenge cited by some officers was the almost exclusive concentration on capacity building by many state and donor executed initiatives that target youth. Follow-up provision of opportunities and support for implementation of the skills gained was weak. Officers stated that an improvement in needs-sensitivity so that they may produce pertinent and required outcomes was a compulsory activity. The officers felt that these initiatives should be secondary and that more attention should be paid to recognising real life needs of the youth population, for example the restructuring and strengthening of the NYSCO that provides loans for income generation.

Another difficulty cited by officers was the outmoded state of institutions working for youth. Most of the current structures were put in place in the early 1970s. Since then, there has been no upgrading or transformation. Officers mentioned, for example, that in the districts of Polonnaruwa and Moneragala typing classes are still being offered when the current need is for skills in information technology.

There is a mismatch between the expectations of youth and the facilities and services provided by the NYSC. The officers felt that the NYSC and Sri Lanka Youth Club Federation should diversify its service provision and look into the current requirements of youth. A majority of the initiatives conducted focused on leadership training, personality development, seminars on drug abuse prevention and educational seminars for those facing public examinations at secondary-school level. A few initiatives provided training on sewing, carpentry etc.

The officers also elaborated the need to provide relevant job skills and training in accordance with the sectors/opportunities available to particular youth. Support for self-employment schemes and skills development in areas such as English language education and computers was mentioned.

We help youth to develop and improve within our current capacities but their wants lie in the direction of employment and loan schemes and we have no provision to explore these avenues. (Officer, Matara)

The youth hope that they can get jobs, but this is not the mandate of the NYSC. (Key informant, Nuwara Eliya)

The inherent difficulties of having to work with the Council, which according to many has become an archaic monolith with a limited and outdated comprehension of the ground situation was shared by both officers and youth. Furthermore, it was suggested that youth, as

a dynamic segment, needs institutions that evolve and take into consideration the changing social patterns, expansion in information delivery, youth aspirations and externalities such as the spread of globalisation and urbanisation. Furthermore, although the NYSC does enjoy a certain degree of autonomy in its governance as an independent authority, political interference in recruitments and postings were cited.

“Funds are limited and whatever is available is misused. When party X is in power they misuse half and when party Y comes into power they misuse the other half.” (YSO)

These biases did not trickle down to the level of YOs and hence had no impact on their functioning with the exception of the estate sector, where political and trade union forces influenced the workings of the YOs.

5. A Perspective on Youth from Government Officers and the Community

5.1 Perspectives of Government Officials

Government officials and communities considered working with youth a challenging but rewarding exercise. Overall, youth were perceived as a powerful and volatile human resource. Providing the right guidance was seen as vital in channelling their potential in the right direction.

A number of officers stated that economic difficulties constrained higher learning, compelling many youth to secure employment at the cost of developing their skills, interests and capacities.

Many youth come from impoverished families and they have to support their families from very early on, this means that they miss out on a vital learning period and cannot develop their talents. (Officer, Polonnaruwa)

Many of the youth face economic difficulties and cannot afford to go for additional training, but in today's context a school education does not suffice. (Key informant, Galle)

(Officer) informants felt that youth engagement in the development process, though an objective of the YO movement, was not at an optimal level. They felt that the potential and capabilities of this age cohort should be better utilised for the country's development. Also improved information delivery through the mass media has heightened expectations and aspirations of youth but means of reaching and achieving these objectives have not matched this pace.

Youth in urban areas were perceived to be more proactive and forward-thinking, having access to the resources necessary for development, while youth in rural areas were seen as dependent and resigned.¹¹ It was acknowledged that these attitudes had developed owing to a combination of village culture, limited exposure and constraints affecting rural areas such as lack of basic infrastructure, information communication technology, development projects and youth-focused interventions. Local economies that are agrarian-based with non-developed service sectors contribute to stagnation and do not allow for diversification in employment and income generation. On a positive note, youth in villages were seen as more 'cultured' (*'honda hadiyawak thiyanaawa'*) and community-spirited (*'gemi kama'*).

Many stated the need to educate adults and change persistent attitudes and stereotypes in relation to youth. They argued that it is common for society to view 'youthfulness' (*"tharunakama"*) with suspicion. The general belief is that a young person cannot be trusted to make his/her own decisions, to act responsibly, etc. Society views youth as being aimless and without direction. For example, youth hanging about and chatting in groups in bus stands and near culverts is a typical stereotype.

¹¹ Though this was the dominant opinion, the field research findings in itself disabled a generalisation.

In contrast to societal views, the officers saw youth as being progressive and forward thinking in their outlook, with many wishing to move out of traditional occupations and move into new areas of work. Diversification of the service sector through the setting up of industrial production units in rural areas was seen as essential for the provision of employment of youth in these areas.

Youth attitudes have improved over years....aspirations have also changed; those days their one aim was salaried job, now they want to venture into new fields. (Key informant, Kurunagala, peri urban area)

According to the officers interviewed the main problem faced by youth is unemployment. This is related to the lack of opportunities to pursue job related skills such as information technology, English and communication. It is further compounded by economic constraints which restrict access to available opportunities. The unavailability of job openings in the service and technical sectors was also mentioned recurrently.

Many youth are learning computer studies but they don't have the means (financial) of starting an enterprise utilising their skills. As there are no industries here, even salaried employment is hard to find. (Member of YO, Medawachchiya, Anuradhapura)

Although the provision of free education up to tertiary level is universal, the quality of education provided is not equitable. Lack of support facilities such as career guidance and an inadequate inflow of information and current knowledge to both students and educators are constraints experienced by the education sector.

The difficulty in accessing services such as transport, technology, marketing facilities, electricity, telecommunications and banking was highlighted repeatedly. In addition, credit services and resources vital to the development of the informal sector, in which a majority of youth were employed, are unavailable to this sector.

Youth organisations were seen as platforms for the exchange of information and experiences. Through them, youth have the opportunity of expanding their knowledge base and interacting with others in their peer groups (To serve their community and share and discuss ideas).

The youth organisation is different and superior to other village level organisations. The leadership is not autocratic and participation provides opportunity for many. Youth learn to recognise their talents and develop. They learn how to interact with society. (Key informant, Polonnaruwa)

Youth organisations were perceived as a forum for youth to develop their personalities, learn skills such as leadership and explore avenues for career guidance and development. It was highlighted that structures of YOs are non-hierarchical and allow for the equal participation of members.

A considerable number of officials commented on the wide age range of membership in YOs (13–29). This posed a problem as the needs of those between 15-19 focus on educational activity while those in the range of 20–29 looked for assistance in skills development and opportunities/training in income generating activities.

5.2 Community Members' Perceptions of Youth Organisations

In general, it was found that members of the community recognised the YOs as an important element of village society. Youth were seen as a conduit to improve and develop the village.

Youth organisations are very important to a village. Youth are the future leaders ... they have the ability to work towards their betterment, they are very active ... (Community member, Northern Province)

Youth organisations were also seen as a catalyst which brought youth together to serve the village. In many instances YOs had been instrumental in organising village level functions such as *shramadhana*¹², *sil*¹³ programmes and new year festivals. Their support and participation in community events was recognised and appreciated. The community expressed the view that YOs served a utilitarian purpose while providing a learning process for its membership.

Many stated that the YO was recognised because it was initiated and monitored by a state body. The involvement of government officials served to authenticate the YO and its activities. More importantly, links with a religious institutions such as a church and temple contributed to a community's validation of a YO. This link was inevitable since almost 90% of the YOs visited during the course of the study did not have a meeting place. Hence, it was common to use the temple, church or *kovil* (temple) hall, or schoolhall for this purpose. This sharing of communal space strengthened links with the village. Religious leaders serving as advisors were endorsed by the community, as was the role of the NYSC.

A limitation of the information presented above is that it over-represents members of the community with positive views on YOs. Those with differing opinions or marginal involvement with YOs were not willing to be interviewed. The government officials interviewed stated that some members of the community had reservations in sending their children to the YOs owing to the co-ed nature of the organisations and perceptions such as "*groups of youth getting together does not augur any good.*"

¹² *Shrama* = labour, *dana* = alms, free contribution of labour for a common cause.

¹³ *Sil* = religious observance involving adherence to 8-10 codes of discipline in Buddhism

6. Background and Analysis of Youth Organisations

This section focuses on youth organisations in relation to conceptualisation; driving forces and influences; current activities; trends, leadership and membership; links with external organisations and future vision.

At a government level, the primary objectives of establishing YOs are to provide state services to the village through the link provided by this entity. In addition, youth organisations serve as a medium to engage youth in the fields of arts, sports and conservation, and to provide an opportunity for youth to develop their talents and skills.

At the inception of the youth organisation movement, YOs were set up in accordance with the macro-level objectives conceptualised by the Ministry¹⁴ and the NYSC. The main focus was on sports and the Arts. For example, the Belwood Youth Village in Kandy was set up to provide training (free of charge) in dance, music, drama and media studies to members of YOs. The annual youth sports festival bringing together members of the YOs island-wide is an established event and many youth have gone on to participate at both national and international level. YOs serve as a meeting point for youth whilst enabling state-level policies, projects and agencies (e.g: NAITA, VTA¹⁵), which target youth to use this network.

There is noticeable variance in objectives from the point of setting up YOs to its day to day operational stage. In most instances YOs were set up on the combined initiative of the relevant state official/s and the members at the time. While the establishment of a YO is in keeping with macro level objectives of bringing youth together to harness their skills and engage them in development, these objectives are refined with time and are adjusted to suit the needs of the given membership and its community. Current evolutions have seen the inclusion of the objectives that specifically look at the capacity building and skills development of the membership in relation to access to information and technology, awareness creation and dissemination with regard to education / employment opportunities.

The status and recognition accorded to the youth organisation movement has receded over the years. This recession was attributed to the gradual decline in macro / state level involvement and lessening of funds. At its inception the movement was considered a pioneer venture and enjoyed the attention and benefits from a high level of state support which changed over time. From a bottom up opinion the apathy of the relevant governing bodies had resulted in the movement's functionality being dependent on the YOs. A decrease in the number of regional /national activities for the movement has seen a shift in responsibility for continuance of movement from the Federation / regional offices to the district personnel and organisations. According to the respondents the involvement of the NYSC and more importantly the Federation which is responsible for the functioning of the movement has taken a perfunctory role. Many stated that a greater degree of involvement by the NYSC and allied institutions in energising the movement and the associated YOs was vital for the further development and sustenance of this entity.

¹⁴ Ministry of Sports and Youth Affairs

¹⁵ VTA – Vocational Training Authority

6.1 Conceptualisation

Conceptualisation at macro level by the Sri Lanka Youth Club Federation/NYSC is in accordance with the mandate outlined by this entity, and is subject to regulations found in the constitution in terms of governance, membership, election of office bearers etc. They function within the broad focus of the youth organisation movement but they are autonomous in their decision-making with regard to activities and organisational partners.

At a micro-level, the activities and thrust of each individual organisation is thus decided upon by its membership, taking into consideration the available facilities and resources, their needs and practical limitations. In general, YOs fell into four broad focus areas:

1. sports
2. community development and religious activities,
3. education and
4. vocational training.

A weakness identified in conceptualisation was the mismatch between policy and actual need. Whilst youth felt that the youth organisation movement was a commendable initiative, they felt that it had not evolved and failed to recognise the pivotal problems faced by youth today. Just as much as avenues for leadership training, personality development etc are provided, youth felt that trainings should focus on more immediate needs of the target population such as computer skills and vocational training.

6.2 Driving Forces

Government representatives, religious leaders and ex-members are the three most influential external forces driving the creation and continuation of a youth organisation.

Representatives of the NYSC, especially DYOs and YSOs, are instrumental in establishing YOs and assisting them with the documentation required for registration. A representative of the NYSC generally serves on the advisory panel and looks into the monitoring and supervision of activities, especially those endorsed by the state. At a village level, the GN officer, office-bearers of village organisations and the principal and teachers interact with the YOs on a more regular basis and assist in the implementation of activities.

There was no YO in the village prior to this. When the current membership (in their mid-twenties) were teenagers they worked together in youth groups. Owing to the success of their work and the pioneering efforts of the grama niladhari, eight to nine youth got together and formed the YO. (obtained registration from the NYSC etc). (FGD, YO, Polonnaruwa)

Religious leaders are also an influential force in the establishment and guidance of YOs. Many members stated that they were linked to the YO through the “*daham pasala*” (Buddhist Sunday school).

Finally, it is common for ex-members to serve in a consultative capacity, providing input from past experience and helping to plan and steer the YO’s activities.

6.3 Motivations for Establishing Youth Organisations

The study set out to capture motives that compel a group of young people to organise themselves in a formalised group. What benefit or purpose are they after?

Variation was observed regarding the main reasons for setting up a YO. Since a designated number of YOs have to be established for each GN division, in most instances the motivation had come from a 'request' by a YSO. In other cases it was through the stimulus of I/NGOs which guarantee financial support and expertise to implement projects. For example, a Dutch-collaborated project in Negombo set up a YO to implement a rainwater harvesting initiative and another Norwegian INGO with countrywide operations partnered a YO in Anuradhapura to construct a roadway.

In other instances, however, setting up a YO was not advocated by outside elements but was the result of the identification of a need (community or youth-related) by the village youth.

We came together as a group to collect funds for the temple hall. We collected over Rs.100,000. Since this was successful we were motivated to organise ourselves formally. (Member of YO, Anuradhapura)

For a group of youth in the Northern Province, province adversely affected by the separatist conflict, the incentive to form a YO was the result of previously joining forces as a volunteer group, when they were displaced and resided together in a refugee camp. After resettling in a village, their past experience and the realisation of their potential led them to organise themselves formally and establish a YO.

6.4 Trends in Youth Organisations

It is generally agreed that the years after the youth organisation movement was established it was very active and enjoyed a fairly high level of recognition at a national level. This trend has gradually reversed with activities becoming low-key and even stagnant in the 1990s. The year 2000, however, saw a resurgence of the movement and an upward trend was noted from 2000-2004.

During the JVP insurrection between 1987 and 1989 the YO movement ceased to function as a result of impositions on civilians, such as the ban on public meetings. Due to the suspicion with which gatherings of youth groups were looked upon during the era, many YOs throughout the country, and especially those located in areas of intense JVP-led activity, were disbanded and remained dysfunctional. In that period, the duties of NYSC officials focused on rehabilitation of 'insurgent' youth and the NYSC offices were used as counselling centres. There was also a general apprehension that youth would turn subversive if their needs were not met. Many key informants mentioned that the JVP insurgency had proved the 'mettle' of the country's youth population.

With the commencement of the conflict in the North-East in 1983, many YOs in these provinces were abandoned as populations dispersed and were displaced. Whilst those in areas that were under direct attack shut down, some organisations in areas not directly under attack functioned sporadically. As a state-run movement, even though YOs were viewed with

circumspection by the LTTE, and in some instances (even today) are closely monitored, they were nevertheless allowed to function. The respite from fighting after the signing of the MoU¹⁶ saw the reactivation and establishment of many YOs in these regions.

With the possibility of conscription by LTTE forces, the period between 1983 - 2001 also saw an exodus of youth between the ages of 16-30 out of the country. This has had both positive and negative impacts on YOs today. On the one hand, remittances from past members who migrated contributed immensely to the development of the YOs, especially in the last five years. Some of the YOs in these provinces are the best-equipped in the country in terms of finances for programmes, equipment such as VCD players and regular sources of funding. On the other hand, continued out-migration has hampered the continuous functioning of the organisations.

On many occasions, YOs cease to function owing to a lack of sufficient members, lack of external support or other commitments that hinder youth from being actively involved. For example, there are 114 YOs in the Jaffna district¹⁷ of which only 20 could be considered active. In the Nuwara Eliya district,¹⁸ 350 YOs have been established of which only 150 are active. In some instances YOs undergo restructuring and are restarted by a different group of youth.

Religious beliefs and faiths of the village communities had an impact on the YOs especially when the YO had strong affiliations to religious institutions such as a temple, or church. The membership in some YOs (such as in areas of the Eastern province) was multi-ethnic and multi-religious but a majority of YOs are mono-ethnic and mono-religious. This can be attributed to the spatial distribution of YOs as they are established based on a village area (such as the GN division).

In addition to out migration, income generation activity and education, marriage was seen as a contributory factor for members moving out of the YO. Many continued to participate in activities of the respective organisation but did not consider themselves as 'members' of the organisation. A combination of societal views, which conferred the status of adulthood on, married persons and an increase in personal responsibilities after marriage was cited by respondents as reasons for this shift. This trend varied in the Northern Province where married and widowed members continued their commitments with the organisation even after marriage.

6.5 Links with Other Organisations

A majority of YOs across the country tap alternate sources for funding and sponsorship in the absence of support from state authorities. In addition, in a number of instances INGOs such as FORUT, and agencies such as the UNDP partner YOs. They usually provide financial assistance for specific projects and appoint YOs as implementing partners to carry out various initiatives. For example, WFP and ZOA, had funded road construction projects of two of the YOs interviewed. A YO in Jaffna was negotiating with UNHCR and the UNDP to

¹⁶ MoU = Ceasefire agreement signed between the GoSL and the LTTE in 2002.

¹⁷ as of March 2004.

¹⁸ as of September 2003.

obtain assistance for projects. In this context, INGOs and other donor agencies show a noted preference for YOs registered with the NYSC owing to the backing and monitoring of these organisations by a state institution, and the assurance this brings for continued support for the implementation of the project.

6.6 Long-Term Vision

When YO members were asked about the long-term objectives of their organisation, the majority indicated that projection and planning was generally done for one calendar year, and in detail, on a quarterly basis. The general trend was for annual events to be planned in conjunction with the advisory panel and mostly involved the youth leadership committees. Coordinators in charge of various sub-divisions, i.e. sports, cultural activities, training etc conceptualise projects for each activity area and present them for discussion with the rest of the YO membership. Members' involvement usually comes in at the implementation stage. In most of the YOs interviewed the YSOs met with the YO at least once a month, during which they assisted in planning and fine-tuning of activities.

In general, it was found that the link between the achievement of long-term objectives and activities planned by the YOs was weak. In commenting on the long-term objectives, the members stated that mostly they try to fulfil the organisational mission, serve the membership and their communities in the short-term, and concentrate on completion of activities at hand.

The main factor constraining long-term planning is the uncertainty of funds. Many YOs now allocate a good portion of time for locating and contacting sources of funding. However, limited fund allocations did not always deter the planning of projects; some of the activities and programmes implemented were not wholly contingent on the availability of funds as YOs combined available funds and other resources and also planned for fund-raising activities.

YOs also found it difficult to sustain long-term plans owing to frequent changes in membership. With the exception of a few core members, most YOs stated that there are constant shifts in membership owing to other obligations such as out-migration in search of employment, and marriage.

A common objective that influenced the vision of many YOs were two key needs of the membership, ie the provision of skills enhancement and support in income-generation activities. As a result, many YOs wanted to diversify their scope from sports and religious activities to more employment-oriented activities.

6.7 Politics and Youth Organisations

At a national level the constant changes in government have affected the continuity of government youth programmes. In addition the repeated restructuring of the NYSC and the changes of its managerial level have impacted youth organisations. An example cited was the Youth Corps programme which commenced operations in 2003. Many stated that this initiative sapped financial and other resources, thus impeding the continuance of other in-process youth focused interventions such as those implemented by the NYSC.

At grassroots level, the study found that YOs have not been overly subject to politicisation. It was refreshing to note that even if members had personal political affiliations, these, apparently did not impact their functions within the YOs.

An exception to this, however, was found in the estate sector where the impact of political and trade union action was strongly felt.

The estate management propagates the isolation of the estate community because they want them to remain within the confines of the estate. (Official who served in the Central Province)

Activities of the YO in this area were affected by politicians who wanted to ensure a continued dependence of the estate population on their respective political parties. Hence the operation of independent organisations was not encouraged. The force of political influences was also felt in allocation and division of resources, and the YOs in the estate sector argued that they felt openly marginalised.

6.8 Leadership and Structure

It was found that all youth organisations studied had a fair degree of uniformity in the leadership selection process, with the exception of a YO in Trincomalee which now functioned as an NGO. Elections are held once every calendar year and term of office is for one year from the time of appointment. Apart from the members of the YOs, the advisory panel and a YSO from the NYSC regional office participate in the general meetings. The advisory panel and YSO are involved in the election process by providing nominations but do not participate in voting.

Although membership in YOs was open to those between 13-29, positions of leadership were generally held by those above 20 years. The mean age of leaders ranged from 18 to 29 years. The most common characteristics identified as being desirable for YO leaders included talent, creativity, commitment, dedication, and innovation and the ability to be a role model to other members. Although education was not universally mentioned as an indispensable criterion, it was acknowledged that a higher level of education contributed to better leadership.

In addition, the number of years of experience in working with the YO, and familiarity and awareness of challenges at both organisational and community level were seen by other YO members as key attributes of good leadership.

The highest level of leadership in YOs was the president, who was elected annually. Other positions include vice president, secretary and treasurer. Office bearers such as secretaries and treasurers are also elected during the annual election. In the event that an office bearer is not present, the second in command steps in.

Many YOs appointed sub-committees for various areas of activity while the main committee was in charge of the overall functions of the YO. Sub-committees vary from one YO to the other but the most common are for education, sports, culture, and disciplinary issues. Management of each of the sub-committees is the responsibility of a designated coordinator.

Guidance is also provided to YOs through advisory panels. The objective of these panels, which comprise the GN officer, religious leaders, school Principals, teachers and past members of YOs, is to guide the YOs. Involvement of the advisory panel in activities varies across YOs, but in general there was a considerable level of involvement. The advisory panels provide input to planning, monitoring and specialised expertise. In some instances, they also motivated the YOs, taking a personal interest in its members and activities.

A majority of youth organisations are set up based on GN divisions and membership is open to residents of the particular division. In some instances, this rule is relaxed to allow members from neighbouring villages to join.

Members are mainly village youth. There is no distinction; any youth from the village can join the YO. There are a few members from other villages, they are given membership if they show interest and support. (Member of YO, Galle)

6.9 Gender and Participation in Youth Organisations

Traditionally, YOs have higher male participation as activities revolve around sports such as cricket, football, volleyball and *elle* (a sport similar to baseball). This trend has been changing gradually as the mandate of YOs has broadened to include cultural activities, vocational training and community work. The youth organisations in the study sample showed minimal gender disparity in terms of registered membership.

It was interesting to note that female participation in monthly meetings was higher, while male participation was higher in implementation activities. Involvement in employment and income generation by males hindered a more regular participation in YOs. In terms of leadership, it was observed that although it is common to find women in mid-level positions, such as secretaries and treasurers, in the leadership structure the highest level of the hierarchy is still dominated by men.

When comparing urban and rural YOs, differences in participation among females and males were observed. (Both youth members and NYSC officials mentioned that parents in metropolitan cities such as Colombo do not like their daughters joining YOs, as it is more common for urban YOs to be focused on sports activities rather than community work and sports was considered a male-dominated arena.) Likewise, in urban areas, both male and female youth have other means of entertainment apart from participation in YOs, whereas in many rural locales YOs are most often the only source of entertainment and interaction with other youth.

In rural villages, female and male participation is generally equal. A handful of YOs in interior areas did exhibit less participation from women. One common reason put forward is that owing to cultural reasons, elders in the village do not consent to females becoming members of YOs. Nonetheless, a majority of parents expressed their approval of youth organisations, citing them as a place where youth can develop their capacities and talents and explore possible avenues for further development, especially in the light of non-availability of other such channels.

6.10 Operations and Activities

On average, a YO conducts meetings once every month. During these monthly meetings a member from the advisory panel such as the religious priest, GN officer or the YSO also attends.

Factors impacting attendance include the seasonality of agriculture and fisheries and public examinations (this was particular to YOs in which a majority of members belonged to a younger age group). As mentioned earlier, the country's situation such as the insurgencies and the ethnic war, have also affected the functioning of YOs.

Substantial decisions are made at the monthly meetings which all members attend. Generally, only in cases of emergency will the committee members take decisions without the consent of the rest of the membership. Individual decision-making is not encouraged as it creates problems between members. Some YOs did acknowledge that the President's say carried more weight in important decisions.

Although sports continues to be one of the main areas of focus of YOs in both urban and rural areas, many have diversified to include other activities in their agendas. In the Jaffna district a YO was running a computer centre for the students in the village. In addition, some YOs provide scholarships to students at both secondary and tertiary level.

We provide scholarships for the poor children and these students can attend the tuition class organised by the YO free of charge. (Member of YO, Moneragala)

Most of the YOs engage in *shramadhana* work in temples, hospitals, schools etc. In the South, West, and Central provinces the members said that some YOs actively participate in religious activities. Especially on *Poya*¹⁹ days and *Vesak*²⁰ holidays, members of the YOs arrange religious ceremonies such as *sil*, *dhansal*²¹ and *dharmadeshana*²². In rural villages, it is very common for the YO to be involved in the coordination of the annual *avurudhu*²³ festival. Some YOs organise cultural shows in order to raise funds to implement a project or activity.

Youth Flag Day which commemorates National Youth Day is an event marked by all YOs and organised by the NYSC. During this event YOs get involved in fund-raising activities.

Individual members elaborated on some of the activities their organisations frequently engaged in. For example, in Ratnapura, a YO maintains a medicinal plant nursery. The produce is sold to a collection centre and the profits gained are used for the youth organisation fund. In the Trincomalee district the YO interviewed²⁴ has a branch in Muttur and is working with women, the poor, war affected persons and children. The majority of their projects concentrate on providing psychosocial assistance, revolving loans and education.

¹⁹ Poya – Buddhist day of religious observances based on the lunar calendar; falls on the full moon day.

²⁰ Vesak – The concurrent celebration of three events in the Buddha's life; his birth, enlightenment and death.

²¹ Dhansala – distribution of food at religious events for the acquisition of merit.

²² Dharmadeshana - Preaching of the Buddha Dhamma (Buddha's teachings).

²³ Sinhala and Tamil New Year marked by the transition of the sun, celebrated in April

²⁴ The YO has now been established as an NGO.

Some YOs engage in activities which are beyond their area of focus. For example, when Ratnapura was affected by floods in 2003, a YO in Moneragala arranged an entertainment show for the public as a fund-raiser in order to help those who were affected. They also collected clothes and dry rations. The members of this YO considered the help extended to the flood victims as one of the most successful activities of their YO.

Workshops and trainings were held at YO, district and regional level. These short-term trainings sought to impart guidance on leadership, communication, personality development etc and provided the opportunity for members to interact with members of other organisations in other parts of the country. It is considered a fruitful avenue to exchange ideas and information.

One exchange programme arranged by the North and South chapters of the NYSC organised for youth from the Southern province to visit the North;

Many youth from the South came to our village and spent two days here; it was a very refreshing experience, we exchanged views on many things and even clarified certain misconceptions. These youth had been under the assumption that all the youth in the North are members of the LTTE! (Member of YO, Jaffna)

Two other initiatives which stood out were:

A YO in Polonnaruwa organised a cricket match and a day of entertainment between armed personnel stationed in the village and the YO.

Most of the soldiers are in our age group, they risk life and limb to protect our village so we organised this day as a show of appreciation. Our interaction with them has improved after this. (Member of YO, Polonnaruwa)

A YO in Anuradhapura organised a revolving library scheme. Books were borrowed in bulk once a month from the library of an INGO and the YO circulated them among members for a fee of Rs1 per week. Many student members availed themselves of the facility and cited it as a very beneficial initiative.

6.11 Overview of Personal Reasons for Joining Youth Organisations

The Study questionnaire inquired on personal reasons and motivations for joining and participating in a YO. Many youth members mentioned that YOs were the place where they could develop their leadership qualities, and gain more knowledge. Some also revealed that they saw it as medium through which they could help their community.

I was quite a reserved person those days (prior to joining) and tended to follow someone instead of taking an initiative. After joining the YO I feel I have developed my personal capacities tremendously. (Member of YO, Kurunegala)

Personal growth and development were cited by many members as positive and beneficial outcomes of joining YOs. Many of the interviewed members recounted how they had overcome inhibitions and insecurities after joining YOs and participating in their activities. The opportunity of participating in activities organised by the YOs such as workshops have allowed them to improve their communication skills and expanded their knowledge base. Also the experience gained in orchestrating and managing various initiatives and interacting with the community peer group were some of the highlighted learning points.

I linked up with FORUT through the YO and their training courses. I gained a lot of exposure and knowledge by interacting with other organisations and people. I even obtained a loan from the Bank of Ceylon to start a home based business. (Member of YO, Anuradhapura)

YOs were also considered to be an entry point to society in that it was a place for the membership to learn and hone skills that would be of use to them in the future. In addition to providing them with a space to interact with their peers, participation in YOs exposed them to a variety of life situations and the opportunity to learn and share with both and peers and superiors. Some respondents also stated that involving themselves in activities of the YO was a productive use of their time as opposed to 'staying around at home' and 'loitering about'.

Community members also remarked that young people who are members of YOs have a better social standing and recognition which even carries weight when applying for a job.

7. Challenges, Obstacles and Strategies for Youth Organisations

7.1 Challenges and Obstacles

Interviewed members indicated that youth organisations face four main challenges: limited funds; constant changes in the membership base; lack of proper guidance and specialised expertise; and financial constraints.

A lack of readily available funds was seen by members as the biggest challenge to the future and sustainability of YOs. It was recounted that YOs were keen on planning and organising a variety of activities but were impeded by budgetary deficits, which in the recent past had become even more acute due to the NYSC's cutbacks. It was argued that the wane in state support for the YO movement had to be addressed at a macro level.

The membership base of YOs is often subject to regular change as members get job opportunities and move away from the villages. Other responsibilities might also hinder their full commitment to the YO and eventually, many youth drop out of the organisation. When a critical mass of members withdraws, it can lead to the eventual demise of the YO. The intermittent attendance of the membership was also cited as a problem common to many YOs.

While YO members acknowledged that the existing knowledge and skills base of the members was shared among them, they commented on the absence of an inflow of expert/technical knowledge. Many youth felt that a long-term linkage of the YOs with agencies or experts would be beneficial to complement the access they already had to workshops and seminars. One suggestion was for guest lectures and presentations.

Financial constraints, and limited access and connectivity to the centres of development also impacted the functioning of the YOs. Many YOs attempted to address the problems faced by its membership by, for example, providing training in skills development and arranging for loan schemes to provide capital for members to start up enterprises. This was identified as another key area which required institutional support.

A minority expressed that (CBOs) felt threatened and would, on occasion, encumber the work of the YO. However, this was the exception. Most YOs said that they worked in conjunction with CBOs in their communities.

7.2 Why some youth organisations succeed, and some fail

Members were clear on the crucial elements that are necessary for the long term success of a YO, these included,

7.2.1 A proactive, dedicated and innovative membership

It was generally acknowledged that levels of activity peaked and dipped depending on the motivation of the existing membership. YOs which were active during a given period also experienced periods of slackened activity if the core group of active members left the YO. An

interesting case-in-point was a YO in the Galle district where past members had a considerable influence on the YOs in their capacity as advisors, which aided the continuity of activities.

YOs find it difficult to subsist for extended periods of time without the support of the core membership. For example a YO in the North-Central Province was deactivated owing to the lethargy and lack of motivation of members and leaders. While the initiative of a single member had led to the YO's involvement in a road construction project, the general functioning of the YO was erratic. In other words, even if one leader or a handful of members are committed, it is necessary to have a core group that will follow through with activities and continue injecting life to the YO.

Personality traits of the membership such as perseverance and commitment worked to strengthen the YOs whilst attitudes such as disunity, hopelessness and apathy had negative impacts on the YOs concerned. An example is a YO in the Western Province which had received a financial grant and training facilities from an INGO to implement a community-based project under the monitoring and supervision of the Social Services Officer of the INGO. After the INGO supported project phased out, the initiative was abandoned by the YO owing to the apathy of the members and a general lack of commitment.

7.2.2 A supportive community

Recognition, acceptance and involvement by the community and community institutions (such as village societies, temple/church/*kovil*) as well as a positive relationship with those in positions of authority (such as the GN officer, *Samurdhi* animator, School Principal, and teachers) was found to be essential in buttressing the activities and functioning of YOs. Encouragement and support from the afore-mentioned in planning, identifying objectives and carrying out projects, impacted the success of YOs. In many instances, village leaders served in an advisory capacity as stipulated by the constitution governing youth organisations. YOs also established strategic partnerships with village organisations to conduct *shramadhana*, building construction and maintenance of common properties. Villagers also provided financial and material assistance to projects initiated by YOs such as road construction, leadership seminars, trainings etc.

Lack of support from community members, and influences from outside forces such as political parties, had a particularly negative influence on YOs, even contributing to the demise of some YOs in the estate sector.

7.2.3 Assistance and funding from external organisations

YOs that were solely dependent on the NYSC had to function within the confines of the NYSC structure and were acutely impacted by the constraints experienced by the Council in recent years. The recent reduction of budget by the NYSC to YOs has particularly hard-hit those YOs that had limited social networks and had not found alternative sources of funding. Those situated in remote areas felt that a lack of connectivity in terms of infrastructure and technology kept them in the margins of development. In terms of resources, YOs situated in the townships had better access to resources, other than those available through the NYSC, than those in rural areas.

7.3 Future Perspectives

Although YOs have many ideas for action the study found that these ideas are most often not accomplished because of limited resources. Some YOs look to other avenues for financial support. In the Kurunegala district, the National Youth Services Office has started the '*Sahasra*' (Millennium) Information Centre in Galgamuwa to serve youth in the district. This centre has computer facilities, Internet access, educational publications and information on various educational and national training courses. YOs indicated a high level of interest in establishing information centres. Many youth also reported interest in pursuing IT education and look to obtain access to this through YOs. There were also instances where the NYSC regional offices had been instrumental in setting up computer classes for YO members.

The welfare of the membership was also a key area of concern for many YOs. Seminars on drug awareness, alcohol abuse and good social habits were evidence of this. One YO in the Galle district also engaged in rehabilitation activities. Many saw YOs as a learning point for youth on how to be good citizens. An example was a YO in Galle which rehabilitated five drug addicts who are now considered 'responsible citizens of the community' with two of them serving as teachers.

Community development, in terms of both physical infrastructure development and improvement of the standard of living, was a recurrent vision of many YOs. The support, and in some instances participation, of the community was cited as being vital to the success and continuity of the activities and existence of the YOs.

A refining of the service orientation was highlighted by many respondents with many of the YOs looking to support its membership in specific areas. Whilst the general objectives of serving the larger community was still a core objective, many commented on the need for YOs (which are in some instances the only available avenue for its membership) to facilitate opportunities for its members to access information and services such as job banks, training programmes and funding for small scale entrepreneurs.

8. Summary of Recommendations

A number of recommendations were highlighted by the NYSC officials to improve the support-mechanisms for youth and youth organisations emerged out of the study:

1. The need to revisit existent structures and the need for a comprehensive National Policy on Youth²⁵ was cited as essential for the management of youth affairs in the country. It is important for the NYSC to reorganise. Upgrading institutional capacities and service-orientation, and the refining its focus in terms of planning and programmes were suggested in order to provide a better and efficient service to the target population. The need for decision-making to be based on information generated at grassroots level was also considered to be potentially helpful in identifying the current needs and service areas of the youth population.
2. The forging of links with external partners and YOs was currently in process but was not widespread throughout the country. The creation of such partnerships was seen as providing the much-needed financial assistance and technical expertise, which could not be provided owing to limited financial capacities of the NYSC. Strong linkages with religious institutions such as churches, temples and *kovils*, and strong support systems in the form of advisory panels, and the backing of village communities was recognised as being necessary for the functioning and sustainability of YOs.
3. A more dynamic approach in conducting programmes was also suggested. Whilst helping to maximise the use of the island wide youth organisation network, which is currently under-utilised, this would also aid the expansion and outreach of national level interventions.
4. Better avenues need to be devised for young people to showcase their talents. It was stated that identifying talents was futile if it was not complemented with means to use and develop them further.
5. YOs were considered an effective tool for information delivery such as the transfer of technical know-how, and public service awareness programmes, e.g. on drug abuse, alcoholism, and dissemination of information on state policies and schemes. The respondents felt that YOs were the best placed organisations to work with both institutions and communities. However, these strengths were not fully utilised.
6. The establishment of vocational training centres and setting up of technical training institutes, particularly in interior areas, was recommended. For example, in the Southern province, the Technical Colleges are located in the main towns of Galle and Matara. Youth in interior areas have access only to courses in carpentry and masonry.

²⁵ The policy remains in a draft stage

7. Acceleration of the country's development process was considered possible with better engagement of its youth population. Involvement of youth in the development schemes fulfilled an objective of the YO movement and provided them with training and an income even if it was for a short period. The Gal Oya and Mahaweli schemes²⁶, which engaged youth in manual labour and compensated them, were cited as an example by one respondent.
8. The need for the evolution of YOs in addressing youth issues and providing a space for expression for this very distinct population was stated by both the officers serving youth, and youth themselves.

²⁶ Large-scale anchor projects in the dry zone which were based on irrigated agriculture.

9. Conclusion

This study was conceptualised with the intent of analysing the role that youth organisations play in the socialisation process and public participation of young people in Sri Lanka. In order to shed light on this, the objectives, dynamics, evolution, trends and impact of a selected number of youth organisations were explored in detail.

The government's youth organisation movement was conceptualised with the recognition of the need for a youth-managed space at community level through which youth could gain access to multiple services, and could find a voice in local and national decision-making. In addition, it sought to promote social cohesion and to play an active role in the country's development.

The study on '*Youth Organisations in Sri Lanka: Some dimensions and dynamics*' found evidence that YOs play a key role in supporting, learning, experimentation and the acquisition of new skills such as leadership, personality development and group interaction. Members learn to identify needs – be it individual or community based – and explore avenues to fulfil these needs. By working as a team, they are better able to access resources, and, on occasion, get opportunities to work with people and organisations outside their immediate spheres of interaction. They are also able to make representations on behalf of themselves and their community through the YOs.

At a national level though, the channels available to them are limited. A few state agencies work with YOs but there is scope for utilisation of this resource group by other agencies. Youth-focused initiatives could expand their outreach to include YOs and aim to serve youth by supporting and working through the YOs.

The partnering of YOs by I/NGOs is an emerging trend. The experiences found in this study could be used as learning points for NGOs and INGOs wishing to explore these partnerships. A good validation for selecting YOs as implementing partners is that membership is representative of all village / community level sub groups such as livelihoods, religions, gender, social hierarchy etc. Structures within YOs are generally fluid and allow for the involvement and implementation of various activities. Many YOs cited close collaboration, monitoring and evaluation, involvement and training of the organisation in related methodologies as being crucial to a successful partnership. Such alliances were seen as being mutually beneficial in that they provided the YO with opportunities for institutional and capacity development on the one hand and a successful intervention for the donor / agency.

YOs have acted as a catalyst in bringing together various groups of youth but these groups are homogeneous to a large extent. Activities that interlink YOs such as the exchange programme organised by the North and South chapters of the NYSC encourage diversity and promote understanding across cultural, ethnic and religious identities.

Although one of the intents of establishing YOs is to engage youth in the country's development process, the realisation of this objective was not evident. YOs did not have opportunities of participating in macro-level development schemes although they were very active at micro- and sometimes meso-levels.

It was interesting to note that decision-making and implementation within YOs followed relatively open and democratic processes. This has contributed, in many cases, to encourage the active participation of the membership. In terms of gender, although males make-up the majority of the leadership, around 80% of the YOs mentioned better and consistent participation by females in attending monthly meetings and ensuring continuity of activities.

The current areas of activity where YOs are more actively involved are community-based, such as the organisation of religious activities and ceremonies. Youth-related initiatives, such as training focused in the majority of the cases on leadership and personality development. The need for education in areas such as vocational training and support for income generation activities was highlighted repeatedly. I/NGOs that had used YOs as implementing partners had found this to be a mutually beneficial and sustaining exercise. Links such as this could help to strengthen YOs and expand their outreach.

YOs served a multiplicity of functions, primarily as an informal education unit for the acquisition of life skills. Through participation in YOs, youth gain exposure and knowledge. They also acquire organisational skills and find an environment where they are able to realise and put into practice a number of their capacities. As cited by the respondents, by being involved in a YO, they have opportunities to interact with a variety of actors ranging from politicians, government officials, and I/NGO personnel. Additionally, they build up institutional links with village level organisations, CBOs and I/NGOs. Membership in a YO also helped youth to gain recognition and acceptance by society, especially in the light of stereotypes of youth being labelled '*rasthiyadu*', '*thada sooru*' (good for nothing/time waster).

The success and failure of the YOs were dependent in most part on the dedication, motivation and drive of the members themselves, though the support and guidance of the NYSC and allied officers, the advisory panels and the community were also identified as decisive factors. The progress and continuity of the YOs was seen as being closely linked to the interest levels of the members. Overall, there was a good level of recognition for the YO movement which could play a much bigger role with the necessary upgrading and establishment of support systems.

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Annex 1: Case Studies of Selected Youth Organisations*

Case Study 1

This youth organisation was established in 2001 and is located in Seeduwa, Gampaha district, Western Province. Its total membership is 15 and the median age of membership is 21 years. The structure is composed of the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and coordinators for activity areas. The advisory panel includes the parish priest and the GN officer. A collaboration between a state body and a donor-funded project motivated them to set up the YO.

Their activities are currently concentrated on a community water supply project. They have also organised an awareness campaign to commemorate drug prevention day, sports competitions, church feasts, and *avurudhu* festivals. In terms of community assistance they regularly assist members and non-members with funeral arrangements, help with house repairs and food provision for those affected by floods and heavy rains, and clean rainwater tanks through *shramadana*.

The membership of this club is particularly talented in the spheres of sports and drama. They were placed first in a Sirasa TV street drama competition and members generally obtain a place at the district level sports events.

The YO funded the trainers and material to set up courses on bridal dressing, fabric painting and saree embroidery. The courses carry only a nominal registration fee of Rs. 90/- and are limited to YO members. Some members characterised the YO as a “second school.”

In the recent past the membership has been reduced to the committee and a few others. According to members the main reason for the decline in membership has been infighting and disagreements. The attendance of the YSO, who can mediate in these disputes, is also erratic. Other village-level organisations have also posed problems, as they did not like the youth organisation being active.

The disunity of the village community was mentioned as an obstacle for them to work more actively at village level.

Among the future plans of the youth organisation is to conduct language classes in English, Japanese and Tamil. They have also been allocated land to build a hall for the organisation but they claim they have been unable to start construction owing to the lack of a deed because the Minister has not forwarded the necessary notification to the Divisional Secretariat.

* Names and addresses of YOs have been left out. The 9 case studies have been purposively selected from the 9 Provinces

Case Study 2

This youth organisation was established in June 1996 and is located in Arunapura, Polonnaruwa district, North Central Province. Its total membership is 56 and the median age of membership is 25 years. The structure is composed of the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer and coordinators for various sub-divisions. The advisory panel includes the Priest of the village temple, *Samurdhi* Animator, GN officer, and the YSO.

There was no YO in the village prior to this. When the current membership (in their mid-twenties) was teenagers, they worked together in youth groups. Owing to the success of their work and the pioneering efforts of the Grama Niladhari, eight to nine youth got together and formed the YO by obtaining registration from the NYSC.

Currently the YO is constructing a meeting hall for the organisation. They have organised and conducted reproductive health awareness workshops, educational seminars, seminars for O/Level and A/Level students and a leadership camp for 150 YO members in the Polonnaruwa district. They participated in the NYSC festival for the fifth consecutive year. In terms of community assistance they offer support for funerals, *pirith* ceremonies, reconstruction of houses and clearing waterways which supply water to the paddy fields.

There is a very high level of recognition for the YO within the village community. Parents of the members are very supportive, financially and otherwise (as none of the YO members are working they are dependent on their parents). The YO obtained first place at a drama competition for a play scripted by members of the organisation.

We have gained recognition for our activities. It has helped us to develop our talents – we put up a pandol for Vesak. (Member of YO)

We have learnt and developed skills, i.e. how to speak [in public]. We have learnt to be social conciousness. Our personal development runs parallel to our engagement in activities of the YO. (Member of YO)

In the immediate future the YO expressed that they have plans to assist members in setting up self employment ventures, such as the rearing of ornamental fish, and mushroom production. Later they also want to set up a revolving fund for income generation activities. (There is expertise and enthusiasm, but no resources). They also wish to conduct awareness programmes on drug abuse and to set up a rice production unit (this would enable the farmers in the village to get a better price rather than selling the paddy to middlemen).

Case Study 3

This youth organisation was founded in 1994 by a young person who then went on to become the President. It is located in Karapitiya, Galle district, Southern Province. Its total membership is 50 and the median age of membership is 24 years. The structure is composed of the president, vice-president, secretary, assistant secretary, treasurer and coordinators in charge of sports, education, cultural activities and organisations. The advisory panel includes the temple priest and two past presidents.

The original founder was motivated to set it up because of his engagement with community work. He felt this would be a good way to motivate and involve youth in the area in such work. He continues to give a lot of support to the YO along with officers from the NYSC. Following from this, the mandate of the YO is the general development of the village.

Key activities have included an annual blood donation campaign on Independence Day, (for which they obtained sponsorship from a private company), organising the *Avurudhu* festivals, *bodhi poojas*, *shramadhana* and *Vesak* festivals.

In addition the YO constructed a road linking a village road to the main road. They have also started a revolving loan scheme to help poor community members by assisting them in animal husbandry and small enterprises. They discuss the problems with the potential beneficiaries and provide assistance accordingly.

The temple plays the role of facilitator in the activities of the YO. The YO gained a lot of recognition and status because of its connections with the temple.

The YO also maintains links with other YOs in Piliduwa, Mirissa and Welipatha and organises sports competitions jointly.

According to their members the YO has achieved its objective - youth work in co-operation to serve the village. Many villagers approach the YO to help them fulfil village level needs. They receive a lot of support and recognition from the village community.

In the future the YO plans to involve youth in sports. This they feel will prevent young people them from idling or getting involved with drugs and alcohol. They would also like to address the problem of a lack of toilets in the village, but they are constrained by the lack of funds.

Case Study 4

This youth organisation was founded in 1998. It is located in Bibile, Moneragala district, Uva Province. The total membership is 25 and the median age is 21 years. The structure is composed of the president, vice-president, secretary, and treasurer. The advisory panel includes the temple priest, the GN officer and the YSO.

The YO came into being with the support of the YSO through a tuition class begun for O/L students.

The main areas of focus are sports and community development. They have organised drug awareness campaigns and conducted *shramadhana* and *dhansal*. They also assist with functions in the temple, help with the maintenance of the temple grounds, and support poorer members of the village with free labour for house improvements.

There is a good level of acceptance for the YO in the community, but there are those who challenge them on the basis of their age. Although the original objective of setting up the YO was to provide educational assistance to O/L students, orientation has now shifted to sports activities and community support.

A decrease in membership and level of activities of the YO has been identified owing to many of the members migrating to towns in search of employment that is unavailable in their own community.

In the future the YO hopes to increase membership, raise funds and also to organise computer training workshops for YO members.

Case Study 5

This youth organisation was founded in 1994. It is located in Innuvil East, Jaffna district, Northern Province. The total membership is 80 and the median age is 22 years. The structure is composed of the president, secretary and treasurer. The advisory panel includes the village headman, the GN officer and past members.

At the onset there were only 10 members, but now the YO has expanded and claims a contingent of 80 young people. The main objective of the YO is to develop education in the village. The YO took the initiative to develop educational facilities and access to knowledge in the village.

The leadership is selected annually through an election. Members are the key people in decision-making. The members are allowed to voice their suggestions and opinions. Membership is open to youth within the village, including those who are married. There is equal participation by males and females.

Their main activity has been conducting a computer class for the children in the village in collaboration with a local NGO. They have also obtained funds from the local CBO and individual donors to provide annual scholarships to students who gain entrance to university.

They have worked closely with the NYSC and local NGOs. Their main problem is funds; they are unable to implement as many projects as they would like to because of financial limitations.

In the future they want to improve facilities for information technology in the village.

Case Study 6

This YO was established in 1999. It is located in the Trincomalee town, Trincomalee district, Eastern Province. The total membership is 16. The structure is composed of the president and a committee. They do not have an advisory panel.

The YO has now evolved into an NGO and is registered with the Muttur Divisional Secretariat. Prior to its inception members participated in various trainings which were conducted by the Young Men's Hindu Association (YMHA). This gave some of the initial members the idea of starting their own YO. They were supported by external resource persons. This organisation differs from others in that they do not adhere to a rigorous structure of leadership, and equal participation in decision-making by all members is encouraged. The president is elected once in three months to avoid giving authority to one person for a long time. There is a gender balance in the membership.

The main focus of this YO turned NGO is to introduce various forms of community based participation. Their main target groups are women, poor people, war-affected people, displaced people and children. Other activities include road development, psychosocial projects, children's clubs, and home-based education. They work in collaboration with GTZ, CARE, CCF, UNICEF and local NGOs.

The YO works very closely with the beneficiaries. They placed special emphasis on being transparent in carrying out their work.

In the future, they hope to become a resource centre with the aim of assisting other youth. They are currently reorganising themselves with the intent of expanding their outreach.

Case Study 7

This YO was established in 1995. It is located in Balangoda, Ratnapura district, Sebaragamuwa Province. The total membership is 25 and the median age is 17 years. The structure is composed of the president, secretary, treasurer and coordinators of sub-committees. The advisory panel includes the GN officer and the Temple priest.

The founding members attended a leadership camp arranged by another YO, at which point they realized the importance of such an organisation. The YO was very active in 2000. The YSO and the present president have played a key role in improving the YO. The main objective in setting up the YO was to promote a better interaction between youth in the village. Now, the focus also includes community-based activities.

All the activities implemented by the YO target the entire village, but also focus on children in particular. Some of the community activities include regular clean-ups, construction of roads, and planting of trees on the tank bunds. In addition they work closely with another YO and conducted a joint initiative on sanitation and water. In the recent past they have been in charge of operating a library for the village with the support of the village temple.

This YO receives considerable support and recognition from the village. Members indicated that the YO is strong and that they work as a team.

In the future the YO hopes to start a career guidance/counselling programme for young people in the village and address the serious problem of drug addiction in youth through psychosocial programmes.

Case Study 8

This YO was established in 2003. It is located in Meddalanda Watta, Kurunegala district, North Western Province. The total membership is 30 and the median age is 21 years. The structure is composed of the president, vice-president, secretary, treasurer as well as coordinators of sub-committees on discipline, organising, education and sports. The advisory panel includes past members. Meetings are attended by the YSO who provides input.

The present president was the key person who reactivated this YO which functioned erratically prior to 2003. The members launched the YO with the intention of helping the village. Membership is open to residents in the GN division.

Around 30 members participate at the monthly meetings of the YO. The Sanasa Bank has provided them with a space for meetings. Female participation is higher as most of the males are busy with employment.

Their main activities have been: *shramadana* to clean the cemetery, provision of lunch to an elders' home on a regular basis and fund raising for the rehabilitation of five wells.

The YO and their work is recognised by the villagers. The elders expressed that the YO is an asset for village. Political influence poses a challenge and has proved to be a barrier to their work.

Finding employment is a key challenge to youth in the village and the YO intends starting a self-employment scheme in the village. They also want to start a computer-training centre.

Case Study 9

This youth organisation was founded in 1998. It is located in Agarapathana, Nuwara Eliya district, Central Province. The total membership is 30 and the median age is 25 years. The structure is composed of the president, secretary and treasurer. The advisory panel includes estate leaders and past members.

Membership is open to those between 20 to 30 years of age who belong to the specified Estate Division. Generally, meetings are held at the *kovil*. Decision-making is basically in the hands of the leadership.

Currently they are providing a revolving scheme which provides loans at a 5% interest. They have also conducted various *shramadana* activities on a regular basis (in general it is the community that benefits more than the members).

The YO has requested assistance from the PALM Foundation as it is faced with the problem of insufficient funding to implement projects. Projects are also impeded by estate bureaucracy as the YO has to obtain permission from the estate leaders and the management.

The estate school does not have proper classrooms and the YO is exploring the possibility of building a few classrooms for the school. They also intend launching a library service for school children.

Annex 2: Interview Discussion Outlines

Members of Youth Organisations

1. Background

- When was your organisation formed?
- Could you give some background on how and why this youth organisation was founded?
- Who were the most important people in bringing your organisation to life?

2. Membership and Leadership

- Who were the original leaders? Who are the leaders today? Are they the same?
- How does the organisation choose its leadership? Who is involved in selecting this leadership?
- Are the leaders young people or adults?
- What are the ages of the leaders?
- What is the structure of the youth organisation?
- Who are the members of your youth organisation? Can any body join? Is there any selection criteria (such as age, place of residence, gender)
- Are both young men and women involved? What is the percentage of men and women approximately that are active members of your youth organisation?
- Why did you decide to become a member?

3. How Does the Organisation Operate?

- How often are meetings held? Formal / informal
- How many members usually attend the meetings?
- Where do you normally meet?
- Apart from the members who else participate in the meeting (NYSC officer)
- How do you arrive at decisions? Who is involved in decision-making?

4. Objectives

- What was the original purpose of forming this youth organisation? Do you think this is still the objective of the organisation?
- Do you think the organisation is fulfilling its objectives? (Please explain)
- For you, what is the purpose of this youth organisation?

5. Activities

- What type of activities does this youth organisation carry out?
- Is the organisation involved in helping the community or other young people in any way? If yes explain in detail the types of activities.
- Has the youth organisation helped any group or individual to move out of poverty if so how?
- What are the most valuable things according to you (personal perspective) that the organisation does?
- Has the organisation faced any particular obstacles or challenges in their work? Explain.
- What are the positive aspects of being a young person today? How do you overcome problems?

6. Links with government, other institutions and the community

- Has this youth organisation worked jointly with other youth organisations? Which ones? What did you do?
- Has this youth organisation implemented projects for NGOs? If yes, explain.
- Does this organisation have contacts with the district NYSC office or the government?
- Does the larger community recognise the work your organisation does? How?

7. Future Perspective

- How do you see the organisation developing in the future?
- What activities and areas would you want the organisation to get involved in the future?
- According to you, what is the role of youth organisations in the development of youth?
- How has this youth organisation influenced your life?

Key informants

1. Background

- Designation of interviewee
- What is your main function as per your designation?
- What is the government's/Ministry's/NYSC's mandate on youth organisations?
- What are the broad aims and objectives in establishing youth organisations?

2. Involvement with youth organisations

- Which organisations/areas come under your purview?
- What is your role – i.e. – implementer/ facilitator/ guidance counsellor etc (please elaborate)
- How do you work with youth organisations - arrange for the provision of monetary support, assist in an advisory capacity, other ?
- What is the role and function of the youth organisations that you oversee? What is your assessment of them (in terms of achieving objectives etc)?
- Gender representation in youth organisations – is it equal, if not what causes imbalances?
- What are the particular challenges faced by youth organisations, how do they overcome these problems?

3. Perceptions

- What are your perceptions of youth (in general) in relation to their aspirations, opportunities, education, employment etc? What do you consider to be pressing issues for this segment of the population?
- How do you think youth differ in terms of the urban/rural (estate), sectoral divide?
- How do you see youth organisations in terms of providing a forum for youth, building their capacities etc?
- Comments / recommendations?

Community Members

- When was the Youth Organisation founded and how?
- Is it an active youth organisation? yes or no please explain?
- What type of activities are they mostly involved in?
- Are your children involved or members of this youth organisation?
- Do you think this youth organisation (or youth organisations in general) are necessary for a village? Why?
- Do you think that youth organisations are helping the community? Yes or no and why?
- Do they have any influence in the community?
- Do they have any political affiliations?
- How would you rate female participation in a youth organisations?
- Does this youth organisation work in partnership with other NGOs?
- What are your suggestions for further improvement of this youth organisation?
- What do you think of today's youth (in your area) in terms of developments and challenges?

Annex 3: Interviews Conducted

Province	Youth Organisations	Key Informants	Community Members	Youth Organisation Members
North	4	7	5	13
East	1	2	1	4
Central	1	3	1	3
North Central	5	6	3	11
North Western	1	3	2	5
Western	2	5	1	6
Uva	3	3	1	6
Sabaragamuwa	2	3	1	2
Southern	1	4	8	4
Total	20	36	23	54