



## 3

### *A Global Perspective*

| BY SUSAN STROUD

As novel as it may seem to us, America's decade-old experiment in national service is hardly unique. Indeed, national service programs have grown tremendously across the world during the past two decades. Although they take many forms and serve many different purposes, these programs often share features shaped by the common histories, politics, and cultures of particular regions. Their growing popularity could signal the birth of a new social institution that someday might become as much a part of life as going to school and working for a living.<sup>1</sup>

#### BACKGROUND

The Global Service Institute defines service as “an organized period of substantial engagement and contribution to the local, national, or world community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal monetary contribution to the participant.”<sup>2</sup> Most national service programs meet this definition. Generally speaking, they offer young men and women structured opportunities to participate in civic life in ways that are intended to benefit themselves and their communities.<sup>3</sup> Some

national programs (e.g., Australia, China, Japan, United Kingdom, United States) send service workers to other parts of the world; others bring people from different countries together to promote international understanding and regional identity (e.g., European Volunteer Service, Canada World Youth); and still others engage older people in structured volunteer service (e.g., United Kingdom, United States).<sup>4</sup>

In the most common national service model, young people in their late teens and twenties spend a year working full time to meet local communities' needs. But within that broad model, details vary considerably from country to country. The government might control programs centrally, and its military might be involved in civilian service programs (Kenya), or the central government might determine criteria and funding and deliver services through nongovernmental organizations, also known as NGOs (United States). Programs also differ in terms of mandatory versus voluntary participation, length of service, and levels of compensation and benefits provided to participants. Participation might be limited to targeted groups (university graduates in Nigeria and China) or open to all young people (Italy and the United States).

Program goals also vary widely and typically address pressing national needs. Nigeria, for instance, created its national service program after gaining its independence, with two principal goals in mind—forging national cohesion and identity among multiple tribal groups, and harnessing university graduates' skills to contribute to national development. North American and Western European programs, meanwhile, tend to focus on strengthening participants' values and civic behaviors. In South Africa and Namibia, where youth joblessness hovers near 60 percent, it is impossible to separate national service from employment.

## REGIONAL SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES

While countries' national service programs vary considerably in form and focus, they are often similar at the regional level.

## AFRICA

Many African countries, for example, established national service programs during the era of colonial independence in the 1960s and '70s. Several still exist, as in Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Senegal, Zambia, and Zimbabwe, although most have been modified, refocused on different priority issues, or corrupted and turned into militias. Others have been discontinued, as in Botswana and Tanzania. Namibia launched its national service program in 1999, and South Africa adopted its National Youth Service Programme in 2004.<sup>5</sup>

Most African programs were designed to mobilize young people for national development. Poverty, disease, and armed conflict across the continent are disrupting social and family structures, displacing millions from their homes, and undermining the values of democracy, social equality, and economic opportunity. Structured service programs can provide positive alternatives to membership in militias or street gangs and play an important role in nation-building.

### Nigeria

*The Nigerian National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) was inaugurated soon after the end of the civil war in 1970 to promote development and reconciliation. NYSC is a one-year compulsory program for all Nigerian university and polytechnic graduates, except those who have served in the armed forces or intelligence services. It aims to foster national unity, encourage labor mobility, and boost rural development. The program has become Nigeria's main source of teachers and doctors in rural hospitals.*

*NYSC has also contributed to nation-building and intergroup understanding. Corps members must work away from their home areas and with other tribal groups.*

*The Nigerian government provides most of the funding; matching funds are required from state and local authorities. Annual participation rates have varied, depending on the numbers of university grad-*

*uates and the availability of funds. Approximately 710,000 young Nigerians served in the program between 1973 and 1999.<sup>6</sup>*

A central theme of African service programs is giving young people opportunities to become involved in nation-building. By investing their time, skills, and passion, volunteers play an important role in nurturing their communities' well-being. Service programs provide disenfranchised youth an opportunity to make a significant contribution and transform not only their own sense of efficacy, but the communities' opinions about young people. The programs also address needs that cannot otherwise be met, due to a lack of human and material resources.

## LATIN AMERICA

In Latin America, the concept of *solidaridad* is the driving force behind national service, service-learning, and volunteer programs. As explained by one of the region's leading practitioners, Maria Nieves Tapia, executive director of Centro Latinoamericano de Aprendizaje y Servicio Solidario (CLAYSS), *solidaridad* means "working together for the common cause, helping others in an organized and effective way, standing as a group or as a nation to defend one's rights, face natural disasters, or economic crisis, and to do it hand in hand. *Solidaridad* is one of the values South Americans cherish most, and it is the common flag of all the new and old volunteer organizations in our emerging civic societies."<sup>7</sup>

Many Latin American national service programs began in the 1990s, including Adopta un Hermano and Servicio Pais in Chile, Programa Jovem Cidadão: Serviço Civil Voluntário in Brazil, and Uruguay Solidario in Uruguay. Government played an active role in the development of several nations' programs. In other cases, NGOs took the lead and may or may not have received government funding. Innovations in Civic Participation has published preliminary results from its review of Latin American and Caribbean nations' policies on service.<sup>8</sup> Although the policy environment for youth service in coun-

tries in the region is mixed, several recent developments in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, and elsewhere provide evidence of positive interest in youth service among policymakers.

## Chile

*Servicio Pais is one of five programs of Fundación para la Superación de la Pobreza committed to overcoming poverty in Chile. Founded in 1995, Servicio Pais enlists recent university graduates to work with municipalities and social organizations throughout Chile, but particularly in geographically isolated areas. Servicio Pais initially sought to distribute young professionals more equitably throughout the country. Today, young professionals in the program engage community members and organizations in local problem-solving and provide technical assistance. Now, 264 professionals are serving for 13 months in 114 rural communities around the country.<sup>9</sup>*

Service learning has expanded rapidly in schools in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay during the past five years. This pedagogical approach to youth service has two main thrusts: teaching subjects through hands-on, experiential learning and applying the lessons learned in socially responsible ways in the community; and teaching civic education as a discrete subject, including active engagement in the communities. In Argentina, fourth-graders improve their writing skills and learn important civic participation skills by sending letters to newspapers about the need for recreational facilities in their communities.

Service learning is also common in Latin American universities. In Mexico, all university students must spend several hundred hours in community service projects aimed at poverty alleviation as part of the final third of their undergraduate studies.<sup>10</sup> For example, undergraduate economics students practice their skills by working with microenterprises to provide technical assistance to entrepreneurs who lack institutional supports. *Universidad Solidario* (UniSol) in Brazil mobilizes university faculty and students to work with municipalities in impoverished regions. In 2002, some 16,000 students from 191



universities participated in the program in almost 1,000 poor Brazilian communities.<sup>11</sup> Similar programs exist in Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, and other countries in the region. Most have the stated goal of developing lifelong habits of civic engagement, including participation in national and community service programs.

As the gap between rich and poor has widened in Latin America, civic organizations have taken the lead in fighting poverty and political corruption. Schools and colleges have been under pressure to do more in this regard but are already overwhelmed. Service learning offers them a way to attend to social needs, enhance educational quality, and reinforce *solidaridad*.

## EUROPE

The end of the Cold War has significantly influenced national service policy in Europe. Many Western European nations maintained large conscript defense forces during the postwar era and are now moving to smaller all-volunteer forces. As military conscription ended, nations began debating whether to create either mandatory or voluntary civilian national service programs as a means of fulfilling the social contract between the state and the individual. The Italian (2001) and French (2000) governments, for instance, created both voluntary armies and voluntary national service programs open to men and women. Both countries' laws include provisions for volunteering overseas.

Germany is a notable exception, in that it maintains military conscription as well as the *Zivildienst*, which assigns large numbers of conscientious objectors to social service work each year. Social welfare groups that benefit from the employment of conscientious objectors are some of the strongest advocates of conscription; roughly 100,000 conscripts work for low wages in German mental hospitals and other welfare organizations every year.

Several voluntary national and community service programs, including the *Freiwilliges Soziales Jahr* and the *Freiwilliges Ökologisches Jahr*, began in Germany in the 1980s. They support young women

and men in yearlong environmental and social service placements. All told, Germany has space for approximately 23,000 such volunteers, and demand for those positions is growing.<sup>13</sup>

## Italy

*Italy's National Civic Service was designed to address social exclusion and enhance constitutional principles of social solidarity; to develop civic, social, cultural, and professional values among young people; to provide civil defense in emergencies; to preserve the environment; to provide social assistance; and to promote Italy's cultural and educational sectors. Young men and women between the ages of 18 and 28 serve for 12 months. During its pilot phase from 1998 to 2004 the program enrolled both volunteers and military conscientious objectors—15,000 volunteers and 85,000 conscientious objectors in 2003. It is unclear how the end of military conscription in January 2005 will affect enrollment, but funds are available to support about 60,000 volunteers per year.*<sup>14</sup>

The end of the Cold War has affected Russia and Eastern Europe quite differently. Governments in former communist states have taken virtually no action to create civilian national service programs. Efforts there to engage young people in service are mainly led by international donors, including the Open Society Institute, the Ford Foundation, Levi Strauss & Co., and others. This is especially true in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland, and, to a limited extent, in the Balkans. These privately funded Eastern European programs are often designed to engage young people in civic activities that strengthen democracy and civil society. During the communist era, young Eastern Europeans were expected to participate in politically related voluntary service. Given this legacy of coercion, skepticism about national and community service remains strong. However, the growing number of civil society organizations in the region may help to change the prospect for national service in the future.<sup>15</sup>

In 2000, the European Union Youth Programme created the European Voluntary Service (EVS), a unique development in national service programs. EVS allows young people in member

states between the ages of 18 and 25 to volunteer for three to 12 months in an NGO in another member state. One of the program's chief purposes is to create a pan-European identity. As the European Union expands, EVS will be a vehicle for exposing young people to realities in new member states. According to John Stringham, former director of the Association of Voluntary Service Organizations in Brussels and author of a recent research paper on EVS, "The program is an attractive option for many young people because it combines individual development (language, international, and professional experience) with the feeling of 'making a difference.'" Demand for placements each year exceeds the number of available positions (3,500 in 2002).<sup>17</sup>

As Cold War legacies fade, and as civil society institutions grow in the East, national service programs can help create a common European outlook. EVS represents an attempt to build a common European identity and enable Eastern and Western Europeans to learn from one another.

## ASIA

Asia, where national service programs vary more than in other regions, has seen a number of recent developments.

China has encouraged youth service in urban areas since the 1980s, in conjunction with its economic and social reforms. As in Russia, the communist tradition in China links youth participation to political parties. Participation is voluntary today, although this was not always the case. Before the social, political, and economic reforms of the past 15 years, young people were expected to answer calls for service to respond to national disasters or political events. In 1994, the Communist Youth League established the China Young Volunteers Association (CYVA) to design and implement youth service programs. Between 1994 and 1999, approximately 70 million young people participated voluntarily in programs organized by the CYVA. These programs helped the elderly and disabled, responded to emergencies and disasters, and provided

services to rural areas through the Poverty Alleviation Relay Project.<sup>18</sup> In 2003, the Chinese government launched Go West, a new national service program that sends university graduates to serve in underdeveloped western regions of the country for one or two years. In 2004, some 20,000 university graduates participated in the program.<sup>19</sup>

The Indian National Service Scheme was created in 1969. Based on Gandhian principles of nonviolence and self-reliance, it seeks to develop civic responsibility in young people and contribute to national development. The program is based at universities and schools and involves nearly 1 million students. India's smaller National Service Volunteer Scheme enrolls several thousand university graduates each year in a full-time program that matches their academic qualifications to areas in need.<sup>20</sup>

Malaysia created a new national service program in 2004 and enrolled 85,000 eighteen-year-olds in its first group. Participants are selected randomly for a mandatory three-month term of service. The program is run under the direction of the military.

## Pakistan

*The Pakistan National Youth Service was launched in 2003 for 100 young men and women between the ages of 15 and 29 who serve their communities for one year. In 2004, an additional 1,000 new volunteers were enrolled. The program recognizes young people as major partners in development and nation-building and aims to foster participation and leadership, increase the participation of young women in development efforts, and improve education and health. The new participants will be engaged in childhood literacy efforts for children 5 to 9 years old in Punjab province through a partnership of the district government of Kasur and UNICEF. The PNYS is considered an experiment at this point, but has the potential to be the basis for a large-scale nationwide program.*<sup>22</sup>

Unlike European, Latin American, and African programs, Asian programs have no dominant theme. The communist tradition in

China continues to maintain strong links between service programs and political parties. India's program is based largely in schools and universities and stems from Gandhian principles. In Malaysia, the program is run by the military. Throughout the region, however, national service addresses important social, political, and economic needs.

### **ARE THERE LESSONS FOR THE UNITED STATES FROM INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE?**

Should the political will exist in the United States in the future for the significant expansion of youth service to engage the majority of young people for an intensive period of a year or more, aspects of several programs in other countries might be adapted to American realities. The German requirement that all young men serve either in the military or in a civilian capacity (and making the choice non-punitive and bureaucratically easy) could be adapted to the United States if the expectation were also extended to women. The Democratic Leadership Council in the late 1980s supported the idea that young people bound for college should spend a year prior to entering higher education in national service—a model now in place in Botswana. The Nigerian national service program that requires all university graduates to spend a year in service, or the Mexican model that requires all undergraduates to serve in poverty alleviation activities before graduating, could be adapted in the United States with the proper financial incentives to fill the need for scarce skills in a variety of areas. In effect, this is a variation on the U.S. National Public Health Service Corps, which pays for medical education for a limited number of students in return for a commitment to serve several years in poor communities. The AmeriCorps program has been studied by several other countries as a replicable model, but serious consideration of national youth service models in other countries would be a profitable exercise for policymakers and advocates hoping to expand youth service opportunities in the United States.

### **CONCLUSION**

Although national service programs vary considerably in form and function, they all give young people a chance to address important priorities in their communities. Policymakers and institutions are increasingly turning to the concept to engage young people in meaningful civic activity. If recent trends continue, this form of engagement may eventually become a common experience and expectation for the majority of young people worldwide.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Sherraden, Michael, *Youth Service as Strong Policy*, paper prepared for The Ford Foundation Worldwide Workshop on Youth Involvement as a Strategy for Social, Economic, and Democratic Development, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> [www.gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/gsi](http://www.gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/gsi).

<sup>3</sup> The United Nations defines youth as 15 to 24, although different countries may define youth to reflect the realities of that country. In South Africa, for instance, youth is defined as 14 to 35, in order to accommodate the needs of a generation that was negatively affected by the policies of the former apartheid government; South African National Youth Commission Act, 1996.

<sup>4</sup> A typology and brief description of service types is available at the Global Service Institute web site: [www.gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/gsi](http://www.gwbweb.wustl.edu/csd/gsi).

<sup>5</sup> South Africa National Youth Commission, [www.nyc.gov.za](http://www.nyc.gov.za).

<sup>6</sup> Ford Foundation report, *op. cit.*

<sup>7</sup> Tapia, Maria Nieves, 'Servicio' and 'Solidaridad' in South American Spanish, Service Enquiry, 2003, Global Service Institute, [www.service-enquiry.org.za](http://www.service-enquiry.org.za).

<sup>8</sup> Metz, Edward et al., *An Exploration of National Youth Service Policy in 17 Countries in Latin America and the Caribbean*, Innovations in Civic Participation, 2004. Future studies are planned on youth service policies in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

<sup>9</sup> [www.serviciopais.cl](http://www.serviciopais.cl).

<sup>10</sup> Ford Foundation report, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> [www.unisol.org.br](http://www.unisol.org.br).

<sup>12</sup> For Italy, see Act No. 64/2001, "Establishment of National Civic Service," March 6, 2001. For France, see article L.111-2 of the national service code; measures relating to national service reform, N.2000-242.

<sup>13</sup> *Youth Civic Service in Europe*, Association of Voluntary Service Organizations, draft report, Global Service Institute, 2004, p. 106.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 100.

<sup>15</sup> Stroud and Omeltchenko, *The Post-Cold War Environment for National Service Policy: Developments in Germany, Italy, Russia and China*, Service Enquiry, 2003, [www.service-enquiry.org.za](http://www.service-enquiry.org.za).

<sup>16</sup> *Youth Civic Service in Europe, op. cit.*, p. 213.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> Ding, Yuanzhu, paper on China for Ford Foundation report, *op. cit.*

<sup>19</sup> *People's Daily Online*, June 18, 2004

<sup>20</sup> *Service News Worldwide*, Issue 9, ICP, 2004, [www.icip.org](http://www.icip.org).

<sup>21</sup> *Service News Worldwide*, Issue 14, ICP, 2004, [www.icip.org](http://www.icip.org).

<sup>22</sup> *Service News Worldwide*, Issue 14, ICP, 2004, [www.icip.org](http://www.icip.org); information from Ali Khan, country coordinator, Pakistan National Youth Service.