



**An Exploration of National Youth Service Policy
in 17 Countries in
Latin America and the Caribbean**

**Findings from the
*Global Youth Service Policy Scan***

Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP), Global Service Institute (GSI)
Washington, DC
Edward Metz, Ph.D.
Susan Stroud
Brett Alessi

Argentinean Center for International Cooperation and Development (CACID)
Dacil Acevedo Riquelme
Gustavo Smith

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Abstract

This exploratory study examines the emerging field of national youth service policy (NYSP) in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). The main premise behind policies that support community service is that when given an opportunity for meaningful involvement in society through service, youth take advantage. Well-designed service policies support programs that provide youth a forum for engaging in meaningful, pro-social activities, and in turn provide opportunities for the acquisition of skills and experience in collective action for community improvement. This study defines the core elements and characteristics of national policies that involve young people in community service and volunteerism. Next, the study examines the responses of experts in LAC regarding NYSP and movements toward NYSP in 17 countries. Results report that 8 of 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have a NYSP, and these policies come in many forms, configurations, and models. Results further demonstrate that movements often exist in LAC even when countries have no such NYSP. Facilitators and obstacles of these policies and movements are discussed and the paper concludes by discussing emerging themes.

I. Introduction

Despite progress in recent years, the practice of engaging young people in pro-social activities is still not fully realized in most countries. In Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), where youth comprise one-fifth of the regions population, large segments of 15 to 25 years olds have limited access to employment, higher education, and formal job training (World Bank, 2004). Even more severe, many youth in LAC live in poverty, are subject to drug abuse, violence, and crime, and have few options for improving their position in society. The causes for the problems that confront youth are complex and the solutions are far from simple.

One emerging movement that holds promise for positive change is youth participation in community service and volunteerism. Community service and volunteerism are mechanisms through which young people acquire practical skills and prepare for active citizenship by making a contribution to the betterment and maintenance of society. Recipients can benefit from energetic and creative actions, and the organizations often benefit from services that may not have been done otherwise. On a societal level, youth community service is theorized as an emerging social institution and as a strategy for social, economic, and democratic development (Sherraden, 2002).

The main premise behind policies that support community service is that when given an opportunity for meaningful involvement in society through service, youth take advantage. It is argued that well-designed service policies are the most effective strategy for implementing and supporting programs that provide youth a forum for engaging in meaningful, pro-social activities, and in turn provide opportunities for the acquisition of skills and experience in collective action for community improvement. Further, it is argued that national policies and programs can reach remote parts of countries and provide opportunities to those who may not normal opportunities to participate in service activities (Angel, 2003).

In their strongest and most comprehensive form, youth service policies can:

- Provide a framework for the creation and implementation of effective youth service programs;
- Define the purpose and role of the young people's involvement in community service;
- Forge relationships and create partnerships among organizations in civil society and private sector interested in and dedicated to positive youth development through service;
- Be designed to reach segments of the society most in need through national, inclusive youth service initiatives;
- Provide financial resources to youth service programs;
- Provide incentives to youth servers to participate;
- Provide a legal framework to safeguard servers and the organizations;
- Provide training to support organizations in reaching their objectives; and

- Benefit society through programs that support social, economic, and democratic development.

National youth service policy is an emerging social field, yet research has not identified the major configurations that exist, nor has research examined the factors that promote or hinder its creation and implementation. The purpose of this report is to describe findings from 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean through the *Global Youth Service Policy Scan*. Findings from this study uncover the factors that relate to the development, creation, implementation, and sustainability of national youth service policy. Findings also contribute to a global understanding of national youth service policy and are useful to policy makers, practitioners, and those interested in the field. Lastly, findings provide the basis for further in-depth research on the impact of such policies on young people's positive development and more broadly on society in general.

Findings in this report detail Responses from 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama, Peru, Venezuela, Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Uruguay. In these countries, Respondents with experience and knowledge of youth, service and volunteerism, and policy completed questionnaires. All but two of the questionnaires used in this study were completed in Spanish, and translated into English.

This report provides these Respondents insights on National Youth Service Policy (NYSP) and movements toward NYSP by:

- Describing the countries that have a NYSP and the countries that do not have a NYSP;
- Describing the configuration of the NYSP in countries where one is present, and describe emerging themes in these countries.
- Describing the movement to create a NYSP where there is none, and describing emerging themes in these countries.

II. Methodology

Overview of the Global Youth Service Policy Scan In Latin America and the Caribbean

The Global Youth Service Policy Scan is an ongoing exploratory study that assessed the status and configuration of policies that involve young people in community service and volunteerism in each country in Latin America and the Caribbean. The study (which is presently ongoing in other regions of the world) seeks to develop a knowledge base by providing descriptive information, and explores the context within which NYSP can emerge and thrive. The research is necessary because there is relatively little well documented information available about NYSP, especially in developing countries. Please visit www.icicp.org for more information on this research.

Study Scope

The Authors set the study scope prior to the beginning of the study. The scope of the present study included countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. With such a broad scope, the research employed an exploratory and open-ended methodological approach. Contrary to the use of forced-choice items, this approach allowed respondents freedom and flexibility in answering questions. Further, the current approach permitted for uncovering emerging themes not theorized prior to the start of the study. Questions were designed in order to mirror the different stages of a NYSP, from inception to full operation, including the development of, the creation of, the implementation of, and finally the sustainability. While the study was seeking factual information regarding the nature and configuration of NYSP, the research was also seeking perceptions, viewpoints and/or beliefs, based on the respondents' expert knowledge and experience in the field.

Questionnaires

Two questionnaires were utilized in this research. Questionnaire A was emailed to respondents in countries with a NYSP and Questionnaire B was emailed to respondents in countries without a NYSP (or in the process of developing one). In cases where the status of a NYSP could not be determined, Respondents were emailed both questionnaires and were asked to choose one of the questionnaires.

Criteria for selecting respondents to the questionnaires

- *The Authors were seeking 3 or 4 respondents per country in order to triangulate the data sources:* The Researchers were seeking Respondents who had substantive experience with youth policy, youth, service and/or volunteerism, or policies in a country were the targeted respondents. The researchers sought 3 or 4 Respondents from each country. The goal was not to have a large sample of respondents from each country (e.g. not just anyone who knows a little about the topic), but to have multiple responses in order to “*triangulate the data sources*” (e.g. validate the accuracy of the content relating to youth service policy).
- *The Authors were seeking Respondents in each country with different perspectives:* The researchers seek Respondents from multiple and distinct domains to ensure a representative assessment of NYSP, and to showcase differing viewpoints where appropriate. For example, the researchers sought

responses from individuals in the institution that created the policy (e.g. government official), the institution that implemented the policy (e.g. youth minister, a non-profit or NGO administrator). Respondents from other domains included individuals deeply involved with youth, service, or policy, (e.g. education or research backgrounds, etc.). In a country where a NYSP did not exist, the researchers sought individuals who have a commitment to youth, service, volunteerism, and/or policies that promote youth development in general.

Definitions

Because there is no agreed upon definition, a goal of this study was to utilize questionnaire responses to identify the core elements of a NYSP. Toward this end, the working definition of NYSP in this research is more broadly than narrowly defined. The broad definition allowed for inclusive depictions of the various forms and configurations of that may exist around the world. It was expected that the respondents would provide important context in defining what “policy” means in their respective country. In this regard, it was not specifically stated that a NYSP had to be created or implemented by a governmental body. The researchers left open the possibility that policy could be created and implemented in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and through other institutions. The researchers were seeking to identify the core elements of NYSP and to identify the characteristics that often accompany such policies.¹

The following are definitions for the components of the term NYSP:

Youth: The United Nations General Assembly defines “youth” as those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years inclusive. However, we understand this definition of youth may differ from country to country. Thus, this definition includes persons younger than 15, and older than 24 (but not older than 30).

Service: Service is defined as a period of intensive and substantial engagement and contribution to the local or national community, recognized and valued by society, with minimal or no monetary compensation to the participant (Global Service Institute, 2002). In this research, service is defined broadly to include many forms (e.g. community service, civic service, volunteer service, service learning, service that is required by a school, etc).

Policy: Policy is defined as an approved and documented legislation, law, regulation, or strategy.

Broadly speaking, a NYSP is created by an organization or agency (normally in the government) for the purpose of involving young people (generally age 15-24) in community service, volunteerism, or service-learning. NYSP’s are implemented, or put into action, through community service programs. The exact nature, forms, and purpose

¹ This report does not assess local, transnational, international, or regional youth service policies. While these are important and emerging frameworks for youth volunteerism, they are beyond the scope of the present study.

of the service vary greatly from policy to policy and country to country. Innovations in Civic Participation (ICP) defines the term Youth Service Policy (YSP) on the basis of core elements and main characteristics. Core elements include absolutes, or necessary components of YSP. Main characteristics include elements that are often present or accompany YSP.

Core Elements: a NYSP:

- Is created by an approved legislation, strategy, law, regulation, etc;
- Is implemented (put into action), through new or already existing community service programs;
- Provides opportunities for young people to become involved in some form of service on a regular basis, whether community service, service-learning, voluntary service, social service (e.g serving to alleviate poverty), civic service (e.g. serving as a responsibility of citizenship), alternative to military service (e.g. conscientious objector service), etc.;
- Defines the purpose of young people's service; and
- Is intended to be national in scope (e.g. provide opportunities for participation throughout a country).

Main Characteristics: A NYSP:

- Is created by a governmental body, although in some cases may be created by a non-governmental or religious organization (NGOs);
- Is created within a general youth policy or as its own separate legislation or strategy;
- Is implemented in collaboration with or by NGOs;
- Is established with sufficient structure and framework to sustain service programs;
- Engages a general (e.g. all youth 18-25) or specific youth population (e.g. high school students, university students, 18-year olds);
- Includes other components, such as:
 - A legal framework protecting youth servers from abuses;
 - A legal framework for organizations that implements youth service programs;
 - Training for youth servers and program administrators;
 - Incentives for youth to serve and for organizations that provide opportunities for youth to serve;
 - Restrictions for youth servers and organizations;
 - Guidelines that forge partnerships between organizations to improve opportunities for youth to get involved in service, etc.

Stages of a Youth Service Policy as defined by this research

The following are definitions for the various stages of a NYSP:

Movement to develop: Is defined as the period of time when there is a valid attempt to create a NYSP.

Creation: Is defined as the period of time when a policy is officially approved, regulated, written in law, and documented by either a governmental body or non-governmental organization.

Implementation: Is defined as the period after the approved and documented creation of the NYSP. More specifically, implementation is the period when the policy is formally enacted or brought to life (e.g. programs being formed and youth actually becoming involved in service under the auspice of the youth service policy).

Sustainability: Is defined as the capability of the policy to continue over time despite factors that may hinder the effectiveness of the youth service program(s) (e.g. changes in governmental/political climate, financial or organizational troubles, failures of programs, loss of interest, etc).

Data collection

Data collection for this study commenced in February 2004 in the Latin America and the Caribbean region, and ended in August 2004. The participants' names and the specific names of the institutions, government offices, universities, and agencies are withheld to protect confidentiality. Respondents' professional background are listed to describe the particular sector in which the respondent is an expert, and to provide important context to the study.

III. Findings

In February through September, 2004, the Authors sent 232 emails requesting participation from individuals in 22 countries who had been pre-selected as experts in youth, service, and policy in their respective countries. 51 (22%) questionnaires were returned with usual information from Respondents in 17 countries.

47 out of the 51 (92%) of the respondent's questionnaires in 17 of the 17 (100%) countries were utilized in this report. Questionnaires were excluded either because 1) the information could not be validated or 2) respondent's answers lacked clarity or did not refer to specifically to policies that involve youth in community service. Responses came from the following countries:

- Argentina: 9 Respondents
 - 7 Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but described the movement toward a NYSP in Argentina. Six of the seven questionnaires were utilized in this report. The information in the questionnaire that was excluded was not relevant to this report. One of the six respondents was a Provincial Government Official, three were NGO members, and two considered themselves consultants.
 - 2 Respondents indicated that there were local (city-wide) youth service policies in Argentina. These responses were outside of the scope of this report and were excluded.
- Bolivia: 4 Respondents
 - 1 Respondents indicated that there was a NYSP in Bolivia, in which the government formed a network of organizations for the purpose of creating substantial opportunities for youth to participate in community service programs to promote youth development on the basis of collective needs and interests of youth. The other 3 Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but described the movement towards a NYSP in Bolivia.
- Brazil: 2 Respondents
 - 1 Respondent, the director of an NGO, indicated that there is a NYSP in Brazil while the other respondent, an NGO member, indicated that there was none. The latter questionnaire was verified through outside sources and was utilized for this report. The former Respondents' questionnaire was excluded from this report because the responses could not be verified.
- Chile: 2 Respondents
 - Both Respondents indicated that there was no NYSP in Chile, and described the movement to create a NYSP in Chile.
- Colombia: 3 Respondents
 - Respondent 1 discussed a YSP that was implemented on a local level and was not included in this report. Respondent discussed a NYSP in Colombia, and Respondent 3 discussed the movement toward a NYSP.
- Costa Rica: 1 Respondent:
 - The respondent is a Youth Council member and indicated that the NYSP is embedded within a general youth law.

- Dominican Republic: 3 respondents
 - All the Respondents indicated that there is a NYSP in the Dominican Republic, two of the Respondents indicated that there are two such policies.
- Ecuador: 2 Respondents
 - The Respondents, from the National Youth Forum, indicated that there is no NYSP and discussed that there is no movement toward a NYSP in Ecuador.
- El Salvador: 2 Respondents:
 - The Respondents, from the Youth Office in one of the agencies in the government, indicated that there was no NYSP in El Salvador and discussed the movement.
- Honduras: 2 Respondents
 - 1 Respondent indicated that there is a NYSP, the other Respondent discussed a movement toward another NYSP in Honduras.
- Mexico: 1 Respondent:
 - The Respondent indicated that there is a NYSP in Mexico.
- Nicaragua: 2 Respondents:
 - 1 Respondent indicated that there is a NYSP, the other discussed a movement toward another NYSP in Nicaragua.
- Panama: 5 Respondents
 - All 5 Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but discussed the movement toward a NYSP in Panama.
- Paraguay: 3 Respondents
 - The Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but discussed the movement to toward a NYSP in Paraguay.
- Peru: 4 Respondents:
 - All 4 Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but discussed the movement toward a NYSP in Peru.
- Uruguay: 4 Respondents
 - All 4 Respondents indicated that there is no NYSP, but discussed the movement toward a NYSP in Uruguay.
- Venezuela: 2 Respondents:
 - Both respondents are NGO members, and both indicated that there is a NYSP in Venezuela.

Of the 47 responses used in this report, 37 (78%) of the responses came from individuals who work in private organizations in civil society (e.g. NGO members). Fewer responses (n=10, 22%) came from individuals in public institutions (e.g. government agencies). At the start of the study, the goal of the Authors was to receive 3 or 4 questionnaires from each country to ensure differing perspectives from members in different professional sectors. For example, it would be likely that a public policy maker may have a different perspective than an individual who works in a program that implements the policy. In this regard, findings from Argentina, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Bolivia represent this

perspective. Findings from the other countries are biased toward the perspectives of individuals in the private sector.

III. Analysis

➤ Countries with a National Youth Service Policy

Configurations of National Youth Service Policy

There is no formula or agreed upon definition for what the concept, structure, content, or configuration for the term youth policy (Angel, 2003), or NYSP. Rather, NYSP can take on many forms, configurations, and models. For example, a NYSP can be included within the framework of a general youth policy, or can be created as its own distinct body. A NYSP can be created and implemented on different levels (e.g. nationally or more locally). A NYSP can target an inclusive group (e.g. a comprehensive policy which targets all young people age 15-25) or a specific group (e.g. a segmented youth service policy that targets all high school students). These are only some of the key elements that can be used to define the specific configuration of a NYSP. A main purpose of this study is to identify the core elements that comprise the models of NYSP that exist.

Data in this study provided examples of NYSP where it has been created and implemented, and differing configurations across countries. Findings revealed that 8 of the 17 countries in this report currently have a NYSP that implemented a program to specifically involve young people in community service and volunteerism. Of the countries with NYSP, the Dominican Republic has two distinctive policies. As well, among the five countries with a NYSP, there were four different configurations that emerged.

- **“National Segmented Education Youth Service Policy”**
Dominican Republic, Venezuela, Honduras, Mexico, Costa Rica*, Colombia*
7 out of 17 countries have policies created by the government in the education department or ministry. These policies are implemented in public and private secondary schools and universities throughout the country. The policies call for mandatory required service for high school or university students to perform a specific number of hours of service. The general purpose of these policies is to develop an awareness of youth to the needs of the community and involve them in solutions for community needs. The policies are considered segmented because they only involve specific segments of the population in service (e.g. only high school students, only university students, etc.). This is the most prevalent form of NYSP found in the study. (*Note that the data from Colombia was not fully described by Respondents in this study.)
- **“National Comprehensive General Youth Service Policy”**
Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, and Nicaragua

The NYSP in these countries were created within the legal framework of the country's "General Youth Policy" with a provision that calls for the inclusion of youth community service activities. The policy establishes a framework that lays out the right and responsibilities for youth servers and the structure of support for service programs. The policies were designed to be implemented on a national basis and to be inclusive to youth of all ages in all parts of both countries. Several of the Respondents indicated that the service components of the youth policy have yet to be fully (and successfully) implemented.

- **"National Capacity Building Youth Service Policy"**

- Bolivia**

- This policy in Bolivia provides a framework that promotes the development and coordination of volunteer programs through which youth participate. The policy supports programs to promote youth development on the basis of collective needs and interests of youth. The goal of the policy is to fortify youth organizations and help youth serve and learn about management and knowledge of the economic and human resources for efficient results. This is the only NYSP that does not directly focus on involving youth in service, but instead focuses on NGO's role in involving young people.

- **National Segmented Alternative to Military Youth Service Policy**

- Brazil**

- The Civilian Volunteer Service is a National Level policy because it is implemented in all areas and it is segmented because its population is limited to 18 to 21 year olds only as an alternative to 1-year military commitment. Programs are implemented by civil society organizations with a proven track record, relevant experience and credibility. In 1996, this policy was legislated by the Federal Government and created as part of the National Program on Human Rights. The objectives of the policy according to the Respondent are to offer an alternative to youth who would have a 1-year military commitment, to become better citizens for the protection of human rights in Brazil.

Common Themes, Factors that Influenced Creation and Sustainability, and Common Features and Characteristics

Many common themes emerge when assessing the countries in LAC with a NYSP. One clear theme is that each NYSP has specific characteristics, including objectives, legal regulations, incentives, target populations, training and support and motivations for performing service. The objectives of the NYSP in this study are all similar, primarily focusing on the development of the server in relation to citizenship and becoming more aware of the needs in the community. For example, citizenship and civic enrichment is an objective in Costa Rica, both policies in the Dominican Republic, Brazil, in Venezuela, in Mexico, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The one notable difference is the Bolivian NYSP, which seeks to fortify programs in order to provide opportunities for youth service.

Legal frameworks are present in several of the NYSP in this study and protect youth volunteers' rights as an individual. Other legal frameworks state the involvement of the young person in relation to the service they perform. In Venezuela, for example, the legal framework clearly states that the student server must be involved in a voluntary activity that benefits the facility or the community. Each of the NYSP also had awareness campaigns so that young people know about service opportunities and so that organizations know to provide opportunities. Certain NYSP ensure that servers and those implementing the programs under the policies receive training and support. For example, Brazil's NYSP ensure that program provide citizenship classes, citizenship observation (field research and community work); reading and composition; business management; market preparation; and computer training all to ensure a successful experience.

There are also several common themes when assessing the factors that facilitated and hinder the creation and sustainability of the NYSP. In each case, a facilitator of the creation of a NYSP was the government's interest and commitment. In the Dominican Republic, for example, the Respondent indicated that the government recognized the large and growing youth population and devised policies, such as the NYSP's discussed, to address this growing need. In Brazil, the government was committed to human rights and saw NYSP as one mechanism to achieve this among its youth. In Costa Rica, the NYSP has remained through changes in government and from its creation since 1966. Youth are another reason for the successful creation and sustainability of NYSP. In Costa Rica, the Respondent indicated that youth groups and organizations were the driving force behind the creation of the policy.

Respondents indicated many common obstacles to the sustainability of NYSP as well. The successful implementation of the NYSP is one of the main obstacles of certain types of policies. For example, according to the Respondents in each country, the General Youth Service Policies in Costa Rica and the Dominican Republic were not implemented fully and that these policies require additional financial resources and organization to be implemented effectively in the future. Respondents in both the Dominican Republic and Venezuela indicated that requirements could be improved with training, or the implementation of innovative strategies, such as service learning. The Respondent in the Dominican Republic noted that the Education Policy receives a lack of priority and funding because its implementation is decentralized and the progress not well tracked. Both Respondents noted that the effectiveness of the Education Policy is also lessened by the little training that is provided to staff on how "best practices" to engage students in service. For example, despite there being innovative practices in service learning, the Respondents indicated that little if no emphasis is given to service-learning methodology, and what practices are most effective.

The Respondents note that one of the weaknesses of the policy is the require nature of the service. For example, under the policy all teachers/schools must report that *all* students complete the requirement, which according to the Respondents inevitably results in either misrepresentation of the actual work done, or having students do less meaningful volunteer work around the school grounds to complete the needed hours.

In Venezuela, the lack of clear objectives hinders the success of the youth requirement policy. A Respondent noted that a weak spot as far as what national is concerned is that they do not have clear and agreed common objectives and strategies. No consideration of the philosophy and principles in social participation. It is mostly seen as activism and the consequence of important achievements, but not sustained in the qualification for participation as transversal axis of a life time, that supports social transformation and fortifies democracy. The government can be another obstacle to the success of a NYSP. In Bolivia, the Respondent indicated that mismanagement, changes in government regimes, and government personal were all challenges to the NYSP. Similarly, financial resources are cited in almost every case as a main challenge to sustainability. In Venezuela, for example, financial resources are always needed for workshops, for improving training, and improving technology related to youth service.

➤ **Countries without a National Youth Service Policy**

Movements toward development and creation

Respondents in 6 of the 17 countries indicated that a NYSP in their country. Many are at differing stages in the NYSP process. For example:

- **Ecuador:** Both Respondents stated that there is no goal or movement for a NYSP in Ecuador. The Respondents stated that youth and youth issues have not been the focus of policy makers in Ecuador, and that a NYSP movement is premature. The Respondents noted that there are isolated local community service movements led by the local governments which are more commitment to youth issues and programs, and local organizations to set up volunteer opportunities for youth. The Respondents believe that a NYSP policy will eventually be created as local government catch on. Although, the Respondents indicated that there currently exists an intention to promote voluntary service as an alternative to military service. This initiative is inserted in the Law of Youth and is approved as the right of “conscience objection”. The Law is not yet regulated.
- **El Salvador:** The Respondents indicated that NYSP is a goal in El Salvador, as there is interest in several public and private organizations including efforts made by the UN Program for Development (UNDP). A National Voluntary Service Center was created (but not confirmed) in 2001 for the International Year of Volunteer and provides support to the movement, as do other NGOs. The Respondents state that the 2002 Voluntary Service Law in waiting has not moved forward because a lack of support in the Legislative Assembly. The Respondents state that a NYSP will probably be created because of the great need in the country, yet disorganization prevents youths’ efforts from being harnessed.
- **Panama:** 4 of the 5 Respondents indicated that the creation of a NYSP is a goal in Panama. One NGO Respondent indicated that there is a good policy environment in

Panama in 2004 because of the electoral period and YVS being a platform item of some candidates. Another respondent feels NYSP is a goal because of the benefits of YVS to youth. At the same time, the National Youth Council member, while noting the importance and value and isolated actions of YVS, states that NYSP is not a goal of the members of State. Institutions from many sectors support the service movement, including religious, youth, government, and non-governmental organizations. There has been progress toward the creation of a NYSP. One Respondent noted that there is currently a service requirement in the education office. Other respondents noted more limited Progress, and provided an example of a Project of law that was presented in 2000 that was not approved and since then no progress has been made.

- **Peru:** The expert Respondents has mixed views on whether or not a NYSP is a goal in Peru. The two NGO members stated that NYSP is and is not a goal in Peru, as the government does not emphasize the movement while NGOs and religious organizations do. CENAVOL (National Volunteering Center) is one movement for all Peruvians regardless of age was created in 2001 for the IYV. The National Youth Commission member states that *NYSP is a goal because the National Youth Council (CONAJU) has proposed to involve youth volunteers in civil society organizations, and has hosted workshops and produced materials to further the National Youth Voluntary Service Program.* According to the National Youth Commission Respondent, the government wants YVSP in NGO and sees itself as an organizer, instructor, and promoter of the practice. Each Respondent noted advances in the YVSP movement. The NGO members noted increased capacity building, or people and groups coordinating rather than competing. The National Youth Commission member noted *increased awareness YVS* on the subject of voluntary service in organizations and in society in general. The Respondents also noted some challenges
- **Uruguay:** One NGO Member stated that several organizations (mainly government) are working to create a YVSP. International Year of Volunteers played a role in starting the movement. On the state level related initiatives exist, but mostly isolated and without continuity and consistency. Both NGO Respondents indicated that religious organizations were at the forefront of the movement toward YVSP in Uruguay. The movement is advancing because volunteerism is a more commonly understood terms. Events such as AIV (International Year of Volunteers) increased awareness and mass opinion. The committee has done well organizing the actions of different government organizations and NGOs. As well, a Project of Law is in consideration of the National Parliament and its approval would allow to advance even more in this issue.
- **Argentina:** Among the expert Respondents, there were varying opinions of whether a National Youth Service Policy (NYSP) is a goal in Argentina, and whether there is a movement toward the creation of a NYSP. The Provincial Government Official was most exact in stating that no clear government legislation currently exists and therefore NYSP is not a goal. Two Respondents viewed the 2004 approval in the

government of the Law of Social Volunteering as a rationale that a similar youth related policy is likely a goal and within reach. Conversely, one Respondent viewed the creation of this Law as a reason why such a Law is not necessary specifically for youth. Another Respondent indicated that in order for a NYSP to be a goal in Argentina, there would need to be a change in the “social fabric” or paradigm of how Argentinean policy makers approach youth issues. In this regard, the Respondent stated that more programs should provide opportunities for youth to make positive contributions in society, rather than solely focusing all efforts on the deficits of young people (e.g. prevention programs). The majority of Respondents indicated that there is currently a movement toward a NYSP in Argentina, and that this movement is led by youth servers themselves, and by an increasing number of private and public organizations aware and interested in youth volunteer service (YVS).

- **Paraguay:** Two of the three Respondents indicated that there is currently no National Youth Service Policy in Paraguay. Both Respondents indicated that there are non-governmental non-profit organizations which are working toward a NYSP. For example, both Respondents noted that CONAVO, National Voluntary Service Council, is currently working on a project of Law toward the creation of a NYSP. Both Respondents indicated that young people are also interested in opportunities to participate in service. However, both Respondents also indicated that there is a lack of interest and movement among the government to advance an legislation on the topic of YVS. While there have been isolated movements to advance NYSP, there are also obstacles. Respondent 2 noted that in 2001 the Vice Ministry of Youth participated in a Regional Ministry of Youth conference and committed to promote the “Global Voluntary Service Day”. However, this was not promoted because of the lack of interest of those who followed. Both Respondents indicated that there was a lack of networking and capacity building among organizations interested in promoting youth service, and a lack of awareness on the topic. Another issue is whether youth volunteers are utilized fairly and properly by those in charge. For example, youth volunteer should not be used to provide services without recognition and for the advantage of others.

Clearly, certain countries are at differing stages in the YSP process. For example, Columbia and Peru have legislation that was passed but the policy was not implemented in the form of youth service programs. The Argentinean government recently passed a law which legislated volunteerism called the Social Service Law. While young people can participate through the law, the law does not focus on youth nor does it provide opportunities specifically for youth. Countries also are at varying levels regarding whether YSP is a goal of the government or whether there is even a movement toward YSP creation. For example, respondents in Argentina were split as to whether YSP was a goal and to whether there was a movement, whereas respondents in Panama were more optimistic about the movement leading to the creation and implementation of a NYSP.

More information on each country with a NYSP can be found in the Appendices.

Factors that Influence and Hinder the Movement Toward NYSP Common Features and Characteristics

There are many common themes in the countries without a NYSP. Among them are the forces that are driving the NYSP movements. These include factors such as NGOs and religious organizations leading the movement toward NYSP by creating space for youth involvement through youth service programs, awareness campaigns, and efforts to affect policy makers. In Argentina and Peru, NGOs are at the center of capacity building, bringing people together rather than for competing interests. Involvement in NGOs provided opportunities for members to feel like they can make a difference in the movement. Those who are dedicated to service can more easily identify with the needs of their communities and their own ability to change it. NGOs are becoming aware of the benefits of YS and taking action. In Panama, youth service and volunteerism are on the agenda for the current presidential candidates, thanks to mobilization of organized youth groups who have shown the value of service.

One of the most commonly cited themes for why a NYSP has not been created is the dispersion and fragmentation among the key players. In this light, Respondents in Argentina, Ecuador, Panama, Uruguay, Paraguay, and El Salvador all noted that many agencies are pushing toward a YSP, but not in unity. There is a lack of common articulation and goals. To improve this situation, many respondents noted the need for networks and capacity building among the multi-stakeholders. Several respondents noted that there would need to be a broad base of involvement and support for the creation of a NYSP. The Government would need to be involved in defining and legitimizing policies and NGOs would need to be given the space to implement programs to make this happen.

Another common theme among Respondents in countries without a NYSP is the need for public awareness and research. Results need to be seen and publicized in some programs and evaluations. Respondents indicated that policy makers should learn, compare, and systemize the current programs that exist on an isolated manner so that they can learn from all that is going on and not start from zero. Respondents noted that the public needs to become more aware as well to put pressure on policy makers. Public pressure may be one of the most powerful forces. Similarly, there are a lack of financial resources in the institutions that run programs and provide opportunities for service. There is a lack of funds to generate projects with voluntary youth participation.

There was agreement among most Respondents in many of the countries that a NYSP would be created in the future. Respondents in Peru indicated that they believe a NYSP will be created with CONAJU (national youth council) playing central role. In Paraguay, the CONOVA (National Council of Volunteers) has a similar role. In Panama, all five expert Respondents state that they believe a NYSP will someday be created in Panama, primarily because there is strong interest in YVS and the benefits to all involved (server, recipient, organizations, and society) are becoming better well-known. Respondents agreed that a NYSP will someday be created in Argentina. The Provincial Government

member and the Youth Program Consultant stated that there is a great need for such a policy to be created to improve solidarity among citizens after the 2001 crisis.

V. Conclusion

Several preliminary themes emerge from the first wave of data collection in the Worldwide Youth Service Policy Scan. In countries with a youth service policy, findings revealed that organizations from distinct sectors (e.g. public-government and private-NGOs) often worked together to create and implement service programs. Findings also shed light on the configurations of youth service policy and the many factors that can facilitate YSP creation, implementation, and sustainability. Factors that facilitated the creation of youth service policy included organizations supporting YS programs, policy makers focusing on youth development, government commitment, awareness campaigns, youth involvement in the process and events such as Global Youth Service Day (GYSD). While there were different configurations of NYSP that emerged in this study, each retained the core elements and provided opportunities for youth get involved and make positive contributions to society. In countries with one NYSP, there are still other movements in action for the creation of a different form of policy, or a more improved policy. For example, in Honduras and Nicaragua Respondents who discussed the movement to create another policy made light of the current NYSP in their country.

In countries where respondents' indicated that there is no YSP, it appears the process toward policy development and creation is slowly emerging in the LAC region. The process appears fragmented and disjointed in some countries. Yet, progress is being made because of dedicated institutions and individuals who have a special interest in moving YSP forward. Preliminary findings highlight the need for greater awareness and consciousness of the benefits of youth service and volunteerism. Some respondents indicated that research needs to identify the best practices for creating and implementing successful youth service policies and programs. There was great disparity in the stages these countries were at in relation to NYSP. Some countries already have Projects of Law accepted but not implemented while other countries are stressing greater awareness of youth issues.

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

In the Latin American region, research is beginning to emerge that demonstrates that national youth service policy and programs play a crucial role in the fight against poverty and in the promotion of full citizenship and social inclusion. On an individual level, service opportunities have contributed to capacity building processes by helping participants develop marketable skills, providing access to workplace networks, and boosting confidence and self-esteem. On a local, national, and international level, investments in service have human, social, and economic benefits and can play an important role youths' development and in improving society in general.