

PROPOSED DISCUSSION
CONCEPT ON
COMPULSORY NATIONAL SERVICE IN UGANDA

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PART I

1.0 INTRODUCTION

This proposal is for compulsory national service subject to discussion and acceptance by Government.

1.1 Background

Compulsory service programmes have been used worldwide as a way to deploy and retain a professional workforce in different sectors within countries. Other names for these programmes include "obligatory", "mandatory", "required" and "requisite. All these different programme names refer to a country's law or policy that governs the mandatory deployment and retention of a worker in a certain line of profession for a certain period of time. From available literature, these programmes are all governed by some type of regulation, ranging from a parliamentary law to a policy within the relevant Ministry. Some of the compliance-enforcement measures include withholding full registration until obligations are completed, withholding degree and salary, or imposing large fines. As governments consider the shortfalls in service delivery, growing insecurity and a worrying rate of decline in nationalim and patriotism, they are using compulsory service requirements as a way to deploy and retain workforce.

The belief in service is already embedded in Ugandan but it isn't mobilized. There is evidence that shows a striking imbalance between the desire to serve and the opportunities to do so. National service would therefore fill this gap.

A compulsory national service program has been included as a component of the National Development Plan II. The program aims are highlighted as ensuring that all students that complete advanced secondary education (senior six), undergo nine months of military training and another twelve months of practical training in various disciplines. This proposal however intends to include all the youth between the ages of 16-25 years to cater for even those who dropped out of school before advanced secondary school.

1.2 What does National Service entail?

Eberly Donald J. (1993), a widely recognized, prolific scholar on community building, economic development, and civil society described national service as a multitude of things. Eberly reflected:

*“A sociologist views national service as a rite of passage from adolescence to adulthood. A patriot sees it as a training ground for building good citizens and national unity. An antipoverty worker considers national service primarily as a service delivery program to the poor and needy. A manpower expert looks at national service as a way to facilitate the transition of young people from school to work. An inner-city resident hopes national service will reduce the incidence of neighbourhood crime, poverty, drug abuse and unemployment. An educator believes national service will provide the experiential education needed to counter balance the years of largely passive education received by students in the classroom. An employer welcomes national service as an initiative that will yield good work habits, thereby reducing the risk of hiring young employees. A conservationist views national service as a source of labor that can restore the forests and wilderness areas to their condition of a century ago.”*¹ As Eberly’s lengthy description implies, national service can be almost anything undertaken to better a country and its people.

1.3 Historical perspective on National Service in Uganda

National service programs have been a feature of post-independence Uganda and have majorly focused on civic responsibilities. In many cases, these programs have had a strong political purpose such as promotion of patriotism and national reconciliation. The concept of national service in Uganda has its origins in the Common Man’s Charter of 1970. The Charter contained proposals for a national service whose objectives included among others, the need to mobilize all able bodied persons to develop a real sense of individual and collective responsibility to society; provide expanded opportunities and develop the potential of those with little or no education; provision of facilities for people from various

backgrounds to participate in national and community projects; to promote new patterns of rural life that are compatible with modern requirements and standards.

It was envisaged that national service would specifically produce economic returns hence create wealth for the country, improve the standard of living in rural areas and make them more attractive; eradicate factional feelings and loyalties and consolidate national unity; promote African Revolution, Culture and Aspirations; acquisition of skills and new attitudes by those who participate. The 1971 coup ended this dream and the idea was shelved.

When the National Resistance Movement took over government in 1986, a voluntary political education and military science course commonly termed as “Chaka-mchaka” was introduced. The course particularly targeted civil servants and graduating students; these were trained in areas of political education and military science. Many cadres graduated from this program and there is need to bring it back better packed and move involving not only for pre-university students but all young Ugandans

The Constitutional Review Commission found that there was overwhelming support for the inclusion of duties of every citizen in the new Constitution. The Commission made recommendations on the patriotic duties that should apply so that every citizen is duty bound- these included among others, *“To defend the nation at all times and to undertake military or national service in accordance with the laws.”*

The Commission further established that many people suggested a requirement for mandatory national service and military training for able-bodied citizens over eighteen years of age. Such service was viewed as important for national defense as a duty for every citizen, maintenance of peace and security; a way of demystifying the gun; national building; an important safeguard for the Constitution and a means for developing loyalty and commitment to the nation.

It was argued that such training would involve not only military training but also training in other areas such as human rights, constitutionalism and other skills

Article 17 (2) of the 1995 Constitution of Uganda (as amended) provides that it is the duty of all able-bodied citizens to undergo military training for the defence of this Constitution and the protection of the territorial integrity of Uganda whenever called upon to do so; and the State shall ensure that facilities are available for such training.

This proposal therefore will bring into effect the proposal of military service as well as other related services that are proposed herein (National Service).

2.0 PROPOSED NATIONAL SERVICE FRAMEWORK

2.1 Objectives of Compulsory National Service

To train the next generation to work together as leaders

To renew and strengthen the capacity of the tradition of rising to meet the challenges an unpredictable world places in its path.

- To inculcate a culture of national service by supporting youth to participate constructively in nation-building; and promote social cohesion;
- Create understanding among young people of their role in promotion of civic awareness, patriotism and nationalism;
- Develop the skills, knowledge and ability of young people to enable them to make the transition to adulthood; providing young people with a sense of purpose and direction;
- Improve youth employability through; opportunities for work experience, skills development and support to gain access to economic and further learning opportunities;
- Harness the nation's untapped human resource and provide a vehicle for enhancing the delivery of the country's development objectives especially to disadvantaged and underserved communities.
- prepare young people to contribute towards the development of the country

2.2 Components of the National Service Program

Target group

The program will target youth aged 16-25 years at the time of deployment, who have attained basic literacy levels. This should include youth that have completed ordinary and advanced secondary education as well as those that have dropped out of school before ordinary secondary education. In addition, the program should seek to promote affirmative action to redress imbalances and

promote equal opportunities for all by specifically targeting persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities etc. to enhance their participation in the national service program.

Fields of deployment

Health, Agriculture, Education and Training, Local Governments, Military and other security agencies, Rural and Community Development including surveying, physical planning , civil engineering and rural industries, Service sector, youth programs and any other field that may be prescribed.

Placement criteria

- a. The posting/placement consideration of service personnel is determined by an interplay of a number of factors including the following:
 - i. National programs
 - ii. Policy priorities
 - iii. Courses pursued
 - iv. Choice of region
 - v. Requests from user agencies
 - vi. Human resource demand and supply
 - vii. Extreme health conditions
 - viii. Social integration
 - ix. Regional balance
 - x. Personnel re-orientation etc.

- b. At the request of a Service Person, his/her original place of posting may be changed on health grounds. Written petitions may be accompanied by the relevant medical documents.

Training camps/centres

- It is proposed that training centres for specialized/ unique skills e.g. military skills are established at regional level i.e. Acholi, Lango,

Busoga, Bukedi, Ankole, Bugisu, Teso, Bunyoro, Kigezi, Buganda, West Nile, Karamoja, Toro/Bukonzo & Kampala Metropolitan Area (KMA). Every region shall have 5 training centres/camps strategically located in key towns based on the population size, to ensure accessibility by trainees from various constituencies within the region. Training centres for general skills such as community development, agricultural training should be established at sub-county level to ensure that more trainees are targeted.

- These camps should be equipped with the necessary amenities i.e. shelter, food, water and sanitation, places of worship
- Each Centre will be constructed in a gender sensitive manner to accommodate women and men
- All participants at these training centres shall participate in courses on national consciousness, agriculture and animal husbandry irrespective of their professions or occupations
- Training sessions and classes will be conducted in English and appropriate indigenous languages as well as Swahili.
- At the end of the course, students who excel in specific subjects should be facilitated to undertake further training in those specific areas.

Personnel i.e. staffing, remuneration

- The training centres will have qualified lecturers and staff to facilitate the training exercise; as well as other personnel to engage in the day to day running of the centres;
- The instructors will be drawn from various disciplines such as political science, health, agriculture, law, business, environmental management, engineering, education etc.
- Remuneration of personnel will be based on existing Public Service structure

- *Leave:* Personnel shall be entitled to a one month terminal leave in any normal service year.

Duration

The National service training in skills development other than military shall be for a period of one year. The trainees will be required to also attend at least a one month military skills training.

Organization

A stand-alone Ministry of National Service should be established to provide policy, strategic direction and monitor implementation of the national service program. Departments should be established charged with recruitment of trainees and trainers/facilitators; development of courses; overseeing the general allocation of resources and assets; monitor the progress of the program; liaise with other stakeholders like Ministry of Internal Affairs (i.e. NIRA, Uganda Police and Directorate of Immigration, Ministry of Education, Health and Agriculture among others.

Management structures should also be created at the regional, district and sub-country levels to oversee the delivery of the National service program.

Registration

- It is proposed that registration of recruits into the program be done at the sub-county level. Data from the National Identification and Registration Authority should be used to determine the anticipated number of trainees.
- Each recruit should present a national Identity card and birth certificate at registration.
- Calls for registration should be made through advertisement; posting notices at sub-county offices for a specified period.

- The Ministry of National Service should maintain a register of all persons that undertake the training and should be accessible to the public, these should be kept at the regional coordination offices and district and sub-county offices

Exemptions

It is proposed that the following categories of persons be exempt from the National service program:

- Expectant and nursing mothers;
- Persons incapacitated on medical grounds that should be proved by a duly certified medical practitioner;
- People enrolled in the armed forces

Certification

It is further proposed that at the conclusion of the national service course, certificates will be issued to participants.

Trainees that perform exceptionally should be escalated to professional institutions for further training in order to enhance their skills in the area in which they excelled. For instance, those that exhibit excellent military skills may, with their consent, be integrated in the national army.

3.0 IMPLEMENTATION

A detailed inquest ought to be undertaken to come up with a comprehensive report to guide initiation of a national service program in Uganda. For this purposes, the report should be informed by findings from the following:-

- Views on this issue should be obtained through a nationwide consultation with various stakeholders including national and local leadership, institutions of higher learning and civil society.
- A critical examination of other countries' experience on national service programs (including study visits) i.e. structures of implementation; legal and policy frameworks. Visits to a few purposively selected countries such as Norway, Ghana, South Korea and Nigeria where compulsory national service has been successfully implemented with evident benefits to these countries should be undertaken to draw lessons which can be integrated into the proposed implementation system for national service in Uganda.
- There is a need to carry out feasibility studies to look at the practicability of the program in terms of resources (human, financial, infrastructures etc.
- Pilot training centres need to be established to test the program and later spread it out.
- Proposals for a policy and legal framework to guide the commencement and implementation of the national service program should be considered.
- If all these have been resolved them a policy document leading legislation be effected and a Compulsory National Service Law enacted by Parliament.

4.0 EXPECTED ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Making civic participation a rite of passage for young Ugandans could mend an increasingly morally degenerating society

The proposal envisions a network that by 2030 would allow one million Ugandans between 16 and 25 to serve the country each year through the programs. Unlike a wartime draft, this program would rely on a cultural norm that service is expected. The national service program will seek to achieve the following:

4.1 Promote unity among the citizens of the nation

Since almost all the citizens of the country will have to serve in the national service program at a certain point in their lives, there will have a sense of unity among the people. This will also make the citizens have a sense of patriotism and nationalism which are important values.

4.2 Foster equality

The National Service program will foster equality because all those required and eligible to enlist will be mandated to do so, regardless of social status or profession.

4.3 Build Character

The national service program will build the character of young people by focusing on the social, psychological, economic, cultural as well as political aspects of their development.

4.4 Employment/exit opportunities

It is envisaged that the national service will provide and, or improve youth employability through opportunities for work experience, skills development and support to gain access to economic and further learning opportunities at the end of participating in a national service program.

4.5 National Service

The program will empower the youth participation and promotion of development of positive attributes that will benefit the community by imparting principles of nationalism and self-determination. It will also provide the young participants with an opportunity for experiential learning or on-the-job experience linked to the structured learning and individual development element.

4.6 Nation-building and Patriotism

The program will inculcate in the youth, an understanding of their role in the promotion of civic awareness and nation building. The service will therefore promote the values of good citizenship and patriotism that help young people develop a positive identity and connectedness.

4.7 Developing a common identity

Where there is a strong need to develop a national identity or a need to overcome a difficult past, countries have found that the National Youth Service can become a vehicle for consciousness transformation. Typical examples in this category are: China (Youth Service in China); Canada

4.8 Preparedness

This training is envisioned to up skill young people to prepare them for the employment world. It is hoped it will help young people to develop positive attitudes in life and their willingness to try new ideas, maintain high standards in any task they will be engaged in.

PART II

COUNTRY EXAMPLES

GHANA

Ghana National Service Scheme (GNNS) was established in 1969 by virtue of Article 179 of Ghana's 1969 Republican Constitution. According to a GNSS Country report of 1993, the scheme was later reconstituted under the National Redemption Council Degree (NRCD) 208, 1973.

The National Service Scheme Act 426 of 1990 provides that the scheme is committed to deploying young graduates and diplomats of tertiary institutions on national service countrywide to supplement manpower shortfalls and to provide re-orientation and entrepreneurial skills for post-national service employment, through community development programmes. In addition, the scheme has a component for military training or orientation for selected national service personnel that aims at ensuring that trainees attain high levels of physical fitness, mental alertness, patriotism, discipline, confidence, development and empathy for rural community improvement programmes. The Act provides that national service should be undertaken under a two year period of which six months should be devoted to compulsory military training.

GAMBIA

The national service program in Gambia is the National Youth Service Scheme. The program runs for a period of two years and is voluntary in nature. It is guided by the National Youth Service Scheme Act of 1999. The law outlines four principles to guide the scheme in achieving its aims-“ 1) inculcating discipline in Gambian youth by instilling a tradition of industry at work, patriotic and loyal service to the Gambia, (2) boosting morale of youth by giving them opportunities to learn about high ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement, (3) developing positive attitudes in youth through shared experience and suitable training thereby making them more responsible to

national interest, and (4) providing youth with marketable skills so they may secure employment in informal and formal sectors.”

The scheme has a six weeks paramilitary training component that precedes the 22 months skills training and community service component.

NORWAY

Conscription in Norway means the manner in which citizens of Norway are required to serve the military. As of March 2016, Norway currently employs a weak form of mandatory military service for men and women. In practice recruits are not forced to serve, but if the armed forces see an unmotivated person fit for military service, they can force them to serve. About 60,000 Norwegians are available for conscription every year, but only 8,000 to 10,000 are conscripted. In earlier times, up until at least the early 2000s, all men aged 19–44 were subject to mandatory service, with good reasons required to avoid becoming drafted. Since 1985, women have been able to enlist for voluntary service as regular recruits. On 14 June 2013, the Norwegian Parliament voted to extend conscription to women, making Norway the first NATO member and first European country to make national service compulsory for both sexes.