

**ACTS**

**ASSOCIATION OF CATHOLIC  
TERTIARY STUDENTS**

**NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE  
PROGRAMME**

**IMCS SOUTH AFRICA**

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International Movement of Catholic Students

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

As part of the National youth structures in South Africa we have been called upon to take a stance regarding the National Youth Service programme as proposed by the National Youth Commission (NYC).

The organisation is founded on the principle that our Faith should manifest itself into action, and as Catholic students we realise the need to contribute towards processes aimed at re-building our country. We are conscious of the fact that these processes would, more often involve and demand vigilant action from the youth as this remains one of the most important age groups in South Africa today.

Accordingly, this submission presents our position as an organisation on the service programme as deliberate upon in our 1998 Leadership Conference. ACTS supports the intended programme as it is reflected below, however, there are issues, which we feel the Commission needs to seriously look into as the process is in motion.

## **2. ACCEPTANCE OF NATIONAL YOUTH SERVICE PROGRAMME**

### **2.1 Creating a Culture of Development**

The history of our country inform us that the youth of South Africa has remained the most affected group to apartheid. This history therefore puts pressure on us to ensure that development of the youth takes place. ACTS acknowledges the fact that the programme has the potential of bringing about an impact on development of the Youth in this in the sense that we will be directly involved in re-erecting this nation. This development is also tied with the whole question of creating a culture of responsibility, which because of our history, seems to be lacking.

### **2.2 Developing a culture of ploughing back into community**

The programme is also supported because it appears to be “two-way stream” that is, both the community as well as the participants in our case young people who have just graduated stand to benefit from the service.

Firstly, it is believed that as graduates we owe something to our communities, that there exists a duty on our part to utilise the skills that we have gained from the various Institutions of Higher Learning. Through this, we would be contributing to the attempts aimed at enhancing the value system in our country.

Furthermore, tertiary students stand a chance of gaining relevant work experience from the programme as it would be a hands-on approach where theory is encompassed with practical experience which often appears to be a hindrance when young people are looking for employment. In a way the initiative could assist in fighting the “experience factor” which is always mentioned by the employment sector.

Also there is the question of one identifying with the current socio-economic trends in the country. Partaking in such a programme would assist the participants to develop some level of awareness among themselves about the issues that are of concern in our societies. Hence, as an organisation we believe that the service would lay the foundation for the re-creating the culture of a responsible young people.

### **2.3 Redressing areas of marginalisation**

An inescapable truth about South Africa is that the country still has communities which are less advantaged than others where real development, which ought to be people centred remains a necessary condition for the country's economic growth. As a means of contributing our efforts in re-dressing the situation the programme would have to be deliberately based towards specific areas in our country for instance, rural areas as well as townships.

## **3. ISSUES TO BE CONSIDERED**

### **3.1 Relevant Field of Study**

The organization is of the view that the success of the programme rests, *inter alia*, on its being based or specifically focussed on each and every participant's own field of study. This view is based on our belief in a holistic approach to development, which wants to ensure that at the end of the day everyone involved in the programme would have something to gain out of it.

### **3.2 Loans Repayment**

The Commission needs to take into cognisance the fact that there are students who are financing their studies through loans from the government for instance. TEFSA as well as loans from private institutions for instance, banks. The main bone of contention here is that the Commission would have to accommodate the needs of needs of these students before it even considers to put the service into practice bearing in mind that where loans are involved, whether from the government or from the private sector there is the whole issue of interest accruing.

### **3.3 An Integrated Approach**

Furthermore, the commission would have to consider whether in the early or in advance stages of the programme, making the service part and parcel of each and every student's Degree or Diploma. This would mean that the service would be integrated into ones academic period and therefore students would not have to be involved in the service after they have finished their studies rather the service would be a component of their studies.

### **3.4 Incentive during the Service**

The issue of incentives remains as another bone of contention in that, in as much as the organisation is aware that it is not necessary to demand a salary out of the service because we would be building our own communities, there remains as an issue whether the participants would get some form of a living allowance to cover the

necessary and basic cost of living for the duration of the service.

This is also tied with the view that a stable work location or environment has to be in place. That is, the organisation is convinced that for the participants to feel that they are part of what they are involved in, it is important to consider the notion that one would have to be located in one particular area for the duration of their service to the community.

### **3.5 Option of Military Service**

We noted as an organisation that military service used to be a compulsory programme in South Africa under the apartheid regime and that it was more of a tool used to further divide the people of South Africa (the youth in particular) as it was discriminatory. Now that era of statutory segregation is behind us, there are fresh opportunities to initiate the programmes that would serve to bring the people together under new patriotism. It is within this context that the Commission would have to look into the possibility of making military service as one of the Youth Service Programme.

#### 4. **OTHER POINTS TO PONDER**

- ◆ There are other points that the organisation would want to see the Commission dealing with and these include:
- ◆ Where would we place those students who drop-out of their institutions considering that they would not be regarded as graduates; the Commission would have to find a way of dealing with this issue since it is one of the main problems currently facing students in institutions of Higher Learning.
- ◆ The issues of foreign students, especially those from Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) some of whom are entitled to scholarships in the country and who stand a chance of getting employment inside the country.
- ◆ The issue of married couples as well as students who get pregnant during their studies. What is at stake here is how do we propose to deal with such students who already have other commitments that are over and above the normal family support that students offer once they get employment.

