INAUGURAL LECTURE

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Helping Malaysian Youth Move Forward: Unleashing The Prime Enablers

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Prof. Dr. Azimi Hamzah, 56, has dedicated 35 years of his life in pursuing Youth Development as a field of study and practice. He hails from Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, where he completed his initial education and where he took his first work assignment in the Department of Agriculture. Equipped with a Diploma in Agriculture from College of Agriculture Malaysia in 1969, taking advantage of his position as District Agricultural Assistant, he developed special programs to uplift the socio-economic status of the agricultural youth in several districts. Upon receiving his Masters Degree in Youth Development and Extension Education from Louisiana State, USA in 1973, together with a specific youth-interest team in Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), a networking system was initiated with agencies that have youth as their clients and positioned UPM as a leader-provider in continuing the professional education of youth workers and research in Youth Study.

On returning home with his Doctoral degree in Youth Development and Adult Education from North Carolina State University, USA in 1983, together with the youth-interest team, the Doctoral and Masters degrees in Youth Study were developed and concurrently the Youth Development Studies Unit was established under the auspices of the Center for Extension and Continuing Education at UPM. Subsequently, more systematic linkages were fostered between UPM and international agencies. Blessed by the leadership in Faculty of Educational Studies UPM, he developed a smart alliance of CYP, UPM, and the Youth and Sports Ministry to offer an international Diploma in Youth and Development Work in 1999. He was a member of the planning committee to establish the Institute for Community and Youth Studies which was endorsed by UPM's Senate in 2000.

Prof. Dr. Azimi Hamzah's contributions to the field of Youth Development are widely recognized. He is the only long serving advisor and resource person to the National Youth Consultative Council and the Ministry of Youth and Sports. He has served on the committees to formulate the National Youth Development Policy, the ASEAN Youth Policy, Youth Association Act, National Youth Development Plan, and National Islamic Consultative Body. He was given the honour to be the convenor of the Asia-Pacific Youth Research Council, based in Korea; as review committee member of Youth Programmes of the Commonwealth Secretariat, London; and member of the planning committee for developing the ASEAN Youth Leadership Program. He received a Medal from the Government of Vietnam in 1995, National Youth Award in 1999 and Johan Setia Mahkota (JSM) in 2003 in recognition of his contributions to youth development within Malaysia and abroad.

He does not limit his writings to journal articles and books but has directly influence the field of practice through modules and audio/video productions. He has supervised more than 60 Doctoral and Masters students, shared his ideas and findings in numerous forums at the national and international arenas, and has been a prolific provider of extension and outreach programs for the youth and youth leaders. Prof. Dr. Azimi Hamzah is persistently keeping abreast with the latest development related to his area of specialization.

HELPING MALAYSIAN YOUTH MOVE FORWARD: UNLEASHING THE PRIME ENABLERS

"Let them (guardians) stand in fear of Allah – who if they had to leave behind weak offspring..." (An Nisaa, 9)

■■■ ABSTRACT

Malaysian youth demonstrated a dramatic change in their lifestyles beginning in the late 80s when they became more tolerant towards internationalism through growing up with the communication liberalization. The scenarios of Malaysian youth in transition are not encouraging. As revealed from research findings there are shocking social trends developing among young people in key lifestyle areas and thinking patterns. The findings indicate that higher percentages of youth are engaging in risky behaviours as they leave adolescence and enter into early adulthood. As youth move from adolescence to adulthood, relevant enablers must promote a holistic approach to help youth take full advantage of the range of options at their disposal. The approaches must incorporate key universal competencies for youth to be successful as adults including health, social, cognitive/creative, vocational, citizenship, and spiritual competencies. The prime enablers were identified through research and juxtaposing theories and models of youth that are relevant to the local scene. The author shares his experience in unleashing the potentials of three prime enablers: youth workers, youth organizations, and youth R&D. The focus is on developing youth workers as effective enablers who are knowledgeable and professional to fully maximize the unique relationships they share with young people; on transforming youth associations into efficient vehicles for change that must be youth driven, efficient and complementing formal education to fulfil the needs of youth; and on youth R&D that should serve as a knowledge data bank to enable concerned adults to use as inputs in providing life direction to young people in transition.

■■■■ INTRODUCTION

Youth in general represent a unique sector of the population. They are not kids, nor are they adults. By and large, they are more idealistic, willing to give selfless service, sensitive to the needs of society, and open to new ideas and impulses than their elders. On the other hand, they are fragile, easily influenced by their surroundings, prone to fulfil their desires spontaneously, and can often be rebellious. In short, they are caught between two tendencies. For youth, this is the challenge of being in transition. Malaysian youth are not spared from these general attributes (Azimi, 2005).

Malaysia's population is young and growing fast. In the year 2000, according to the last Malaysian census, there were 10.1 million youth aged 15 to 40 years in Malaysia, an increase of 2.7 million since 1991. The proportion of youth in the population aged 15 to 24 years increased from 18.8 per cent to approximately 19.9 per cent from 1991 to 2000. The proportion of the 25 to 40 year age group grew slightly from 23.4 per cent to approximately 23.6 per cent of the total population in those years (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2003).

In 2000, 16.5 million people out of nearly 22 million were under 40. Those under 40 will represent two-thirds of the population in 2020, since the total population is projected to jump from 22 million in 2000 to 31 million in 2020, nearly a 50% increase. It is estimated that young Malaysians of 15-24 years will be 10 million strong at that time. The young population will also drive rapid household growth as total households are projected to increase from 4.7 million in 2000 to 6.2 million in 2010 and 6.9 million in 2015 (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2003).

The youth population is Malaysia's biggest asset. As such, the survival, development and continuity of the country rest with young Malaysians. The state of the country in the coming years directly correlates with the extent to which youth will be empowered in their coming of age. It is the focus of the subsequent discussion, therefore, to further understand the inputs to youth development, and specifically, to suggest strategies and approaches for unleashing the potentials of the prime enablers of youth in transition.

■■■■ YOUTH IN TRANSITION

Youth is a stage of human development that involves change and transition. It is known to be a period of exploratory self-analysis and self-evaluation ideally culminating in the establishment of a cohesive and integrative sense of self or identity (Erikson, 1968). The common perception is that youth is a phase that one must pass through from childhood and is thus seen solely as preparation for adulthood. Young people, however, are persons with specific qualities and characteristics who have a participatory and responsible role to play, tasks to perform, and skills to develop at their particular stage of life. The degree or

extent to which a young person experiences such responsible participation will determine and maximize his human development (Konopka, 1973).

Youth is a time of change and conflict; a time for moving forward into adulthood, and often that transition is a time of inner struggle. Sociologically, youth is the transition period from dependent to self-sufficient adulthood. Psychologically, it is a 'marginal situation' in which new adjustments have to be made, namely those that distinguish child behaviour from adult behaviour in a given society (Bee & Boyd, 2002; Muuss, 1962).

The period of youth is one that can involve high degrees of self-conflict. This conflict ultimately seeks stability in adulthood. The physiological changes that youth experience are related to emotional changes. Moving from dependence to interdependence creates a whole series of tensions and conflicts (Bee & Boyd, 2002). The impact of peers is magnified. The yearning to jump into the next stage of development co-exists with the desire to have things stay as they are. The feeling of omnipotence mixes with the feeling of helplessness and inadequacy. Being expected to act like an adult one minute and being treated like a child the next is experienced as confusing. Seeing parents as mere humans with frailties can be terrifying after having depended on them as all-wise in childhood (Konopka, 1973).

Young people want to become psychologically autonomous as they move into adulthood and thus try to affirm their *self* (Anatella, 2003). This is also known as the process of identity development. In their review of the development of identity, Poll and Smith (2003) examined four major developmental models: cognitive, psychodynamic, systems and narrative. From their review, all four theories support the following: (1) individuals seek a sense of self that is connected to and separate from others with whom they interact; (2) individuals seek a sense of continuity and constancy in how they view themselves; and (3) individuals seek to organize and understand themselves in relation to others and to their experiences (Poll and Smith, 2003). Furthermore, identity development proceeds from (1) a stage of being unaware of one's self as distinct yet connected to others; to (2) a stage of learning, crisis or conflict that challenges unawareness of the self; to (3) a stage of experiencing and creating the self in relation to the world and to others, and finally (4) to a stage of integrating experiences into a clear sense of self and others that provides meaning, coherence and continuity (Poll & Smith, 2003).

As human beings in search of *self* and thus in transition, youth are inherently at great risk and need adult guidance and support in navigating the waters of change and opportunity. They need to know how to discover themselves and how to know in what direction to take their lives. Their need for adult care is different, however, than as children (Azimi, Khaidzir, & Irwan, 1997). Youth need adults to help them understand and teach them the consequences of unhealthy and poor decision-making, so that they can learn for themselves, through application, how to make right choices.

Youth is also a period in life when significant biological and social changes occur. Youth may encounter difficulties in adjusting to new situations. In general, a majority of social

problems are related to behaviour, lifestyle or sexuality. Promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, running away from home, delinquency and substance abuse are problems that often occur among youth. Accordingly, youth is a period when individuals can be overly sensitive to the numerous impacts of rapid development, which can further add to uncertainties and ambivalence in their belief and value systems. This can lead to a discontinuity in practice of norms and traditions and lead to accelerated aspirations including 'materialistic syndrome', resulting in the pursuit of glamorous life styles (Azimi, 2005).

██████ SCENARIOS OF MALAYSIAN YOUTH IN TRANSITION

Malaysian youth demonstrated a dramatic change in their lifestyles and thinking patterns beginning in the late 80s. This generation is the first in Malaysia to grow up with computers, music downloads, instant messaging and cellular phones. The 'open sky' concept of information and media liberalization provides the means for young people to be more tolerant towards internationalism. Without adult guidance and insight, youth risk confusion in their identity resulting in being connected and yet disconnected.

In a study by the National Population and Family Development Board in 1994 on reproductive health among Malaysian youth, 2,366 adolescents aged 10 to 19 years from every state and all ethnic groups were surveyed over a two-year period. The findings included the following:

1. Over two-thirds of youth aged 13 to 19 years have had at least some exposure to materials such as magazines, films and videos containing explicit or implied sexual connotations.
2. Dating is an accepted norm among teenagers.
3. More urban than rural adolescents approve of cohabiting and of having sexual relationships, especially among older youth and those intending to subsequently marry.
4. Several adolescents interviewed knew or had known someone who had either been pregnant or had had an abortion. Many of the adolescents knew clinics that performed abortions as well as of the traditional means used to abort a foetus.

Census 2000 revealed that young adults are marrying at a later age. The proportion of never married (single) persons aged 20-34 years continued to increase between 1991 and 2000 from 43.2% to 48.1%. Among females 20-24 years of age, 68.5% were single in 2000 compared to only 60.2% in 1991. Similar patterns were also observed for females in the 25-34 age group, as well as among males. Young male adults are tending to marry at a later age, as indicated by data on mean age at first marriage, which showed an increase from 28.2 years in 1991 to 28.6 years in 2000, while for females the increase was from 24.7 years to 25.1 years over the same period (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2005).

Research on youth values and culture in Malaysia has also shown that cultural patterns and values among youth are changing. The common perception that Malaysian youth are more individualistic than ever before has been supported by research findings, which indicate that although collectivist values still predominate among youth, individualistic values are emerging (Ezhar & Azimi, 1997). Most believe this to be the result of a variety of factors, including the primary role of global culture that is inundating youth through a variety of forms of mass media. How else can one explain the emulation by young Malaysians of the appearances and behaviours of their western counterparts, despite never having come in to contact with them? Such direct evidence can only be attributed to the pervasive role of mass media in all its forms. Behaviour is a reflection of values, which implies that the rising involvement by youth in social problems can be due to a lack of positive values or the result of an increase in negative values.

Research conducted in Malaysia on values and culture (Family Development Foundation, 2002) has indicated that social problems are more common among teenagers with a high desire for external goods such as wealth, influence and respect. These teenagers were more involved in drinking, "bohsia", gambling, cohabitation, running away from home, loafing, illegal racing, truancy and gangsterism. On the other hand, teenagers who put priority on strong faith, wisdom, and good moral conduct were less involved in all the social problems mentioned above, and also less into drugs and pornographic videos.

In terms of the thinking patterns and lifestyles of youth, research has shown that they generally have a positive self-concept, which is relevant to the development process, including energy, desire for change, desire to learn and many others. They are sensitive to the needs of the society and are willing to provide the energy to meet them. By and large, they are responsive to national appeals for service. With these and other abilities, traits and energies, young people are an asset to any nation in its striving toward development (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003). However, some disturbing trends indicate the possibility that many Malaysian youth are at risk of discontinuity, which can lead to the trap of more serious social ills such as drug and alcohol addiction, HIV-AIDS, mental illness and others.

Research conducted to observe the differences in the thinking patterns and lifestyles of youth 15-19 and 20-25 revealed the following (see Table 1):
1. When asked who they go to for help, 43.1% of 15-19 year olds said peers as compared to 47.8% for 20-25 year olds; while 38.0% of 15-19 year olds said parents as compared to 35.0% for 20-25 year olds. Only 7.8% and 4.1% respectively said counsellors.
2. When asked about their eating habits, 33% of 15-19 year olds said they skipped breakfast as compared to 31% of 20-25 year olds.
3. When asked about clothing preferences, 16.1% of 15-19 year olds preferred traditional clothing as opposed to only 7.6% of 20-25 year olds. Conversely, 68% and 70.2% preferred trendy clothing styles, respectively.
4. In terms of information-seeking behaviour, 20.9% of 15-19 year olds used the Internet as compared to 26.1% of 20-25 year olds.
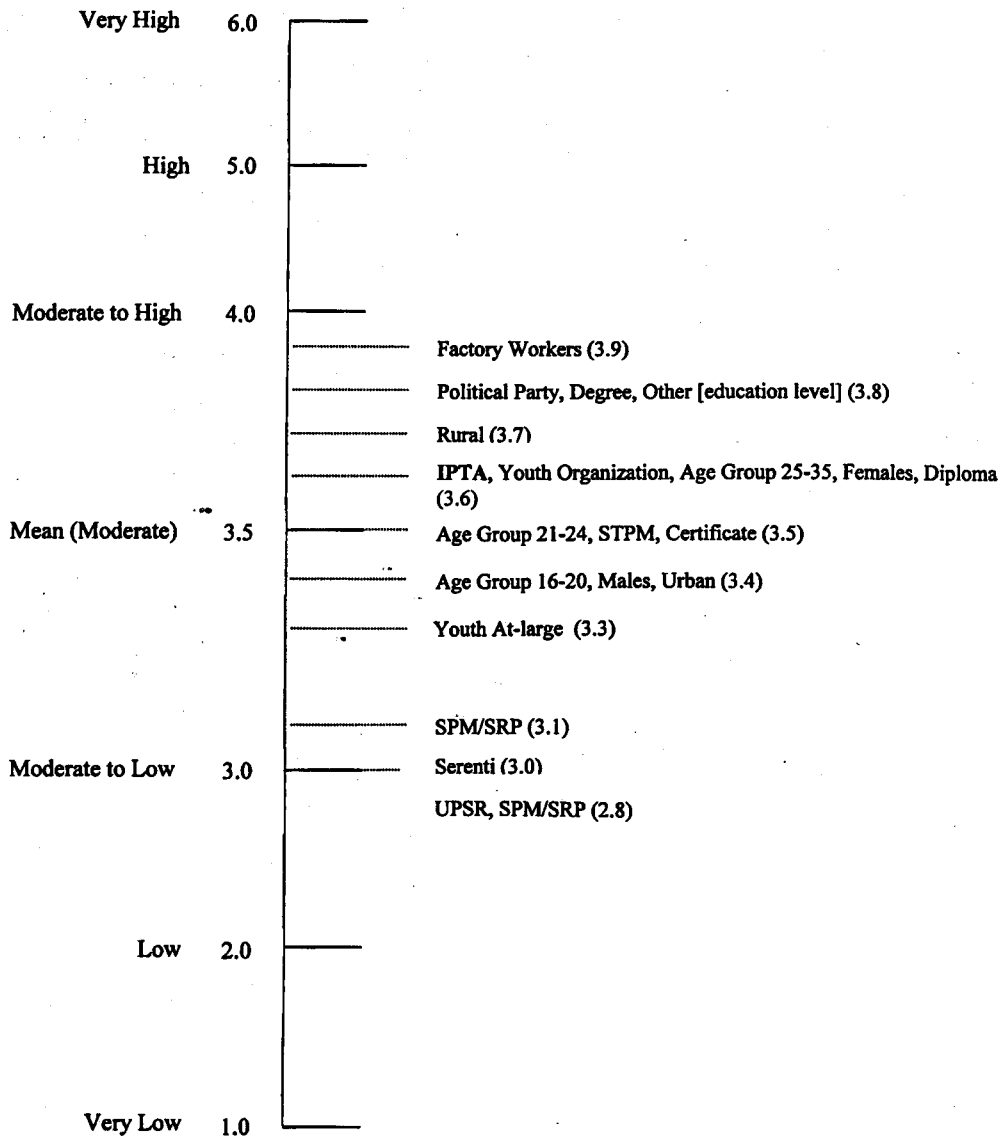
5. When asked whether they had had sexual intercourse, 5.1% of 15-19 year olds said they had as compared to 10% of 20-25 year olds.
6. In terms of entertainment preferences, 14.8% of 15-19 year olds said they frequented discos as compared to 32.4% of 20-25 year olds.
7. In terms of smoking, 31.7% of 15-19 year olds said they smoked as compared to 38.5% of 20-25 year olds.
8. When asked whether they drank alcohol, 13.6% of 15-19 year olds said they had as compared to 25.1% of 20-25 year olds.
9. In relation to gambling, 20.8% of 15-19 year olds said they gambled as compared to 29.2% of 20-25 year olds.
10. In terms of illegal drug use, 7.7% of 15-19 year olds said they took pills as compared to 12.9% of 20-25 year olds.
11. When asked as to whether religion was important in their lives, 25.2% of 15-19 year olds indicated that it was not important, as compared to 26.8% of 20-25 year olds.

Table 1: Lifestyles and Thinking Patterns of Youth

Lifestyle Items	15-19 year olds (%)	20-25 year olds (%)
Referral		
Peers	43.1	47.8
Parents	38.0	35.0
Counsellors	7.8	4.1
Skipped breakfast	33.0	31.0
Clothing preferences		
Traditional	16.1	7.6
Trendy	68.0	70.0
Surfing internet	20.9	26.1
Sexual intercourse	5.1	10.0
Frequented discos	14.8	32.4
Smoking	31.7	38.5
Alcohol	13.6	25.1
Gambling	20.8	29.2
Illegal drugs	7.7	12.9
Importance of religion	74.8	73.2

As indicated by the above scenarios, there are critical social trends developing among Malaysian youth in key lifestyle areas. The research findings indicate that higher percentages of youth are engaging in risky behaviours as they leave adolescence and enter into early adulthood (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003).

Malaysia is capitalizing on religion as the trust of a fully developed nation in 2020. If this is to happen, youth, especially those in tertiary institutions, should be supported in manifesting their beliefs into positive life actions. The findings of a UPM study on religiosity and personality indicated that youth in Malaysian universities, however, are not in the forefront in holistic religious practice. They ranked fourth after young factory workers, youth involved in political parties, and members of youth organizations (see Figure 1 for rankings).

Very High	6.0	
High	5.0	
Moderate to High	4.0	
		Factory Workers (3.9)
		Political Party, Degree, Other [education level] (3.8)
		Rural (3.7)
		IPTA, Youth Organization, Age Group 25-35, Females, Diploma (3.6)
Mean (Moderate)	3.5	Age Group 21-24, STPM, Certificate (3.5)
		Age Group 16-20, Males, Urban (3.4)
		Youth At-large (3.3)
		SPM/SRP (3.1)
Moderate to Low	3.0	Serenti (3.0)
		UPSR, SPM/SRP (2.8)
Low	2.0	
Very Low	1.0	

Figure 1: Muslim religiosity-personality scale findings across different groups of Malaysian Muslim Youth.

On closer scrutiny, when data from the religiosity-personality scale for youth in universities was analyzed by field of study, in general, it showed that youth in the universities scored low on the ritual dimension of the scale (see Figure 2). This is of concern because the same study also found that youth participating in at-risk activities positively correlated with their level of religious practice. Figure 2 also shows that youth pursuing IT, architecture, engineering, and medicine were found to have more difficulty in manifesting their religion into action than those in other fields of study (Azimi, Turiman, Sidik, Rumayah, Khairul Anwar, Hasnan, Azma, Krauss, & Jamiah, 2005). In the study, 'religious personality' was defined as a personality fully conscious of God and acting in accordance with the highest standards of character. As such, a religious personality is one always striving for perfection, always seeking self improvement, maintaining professional conduct, mindful of rules and guidelines, goal oriented, dedicated and trustworthy. This finding is truly an eye opener and further investigation is necessary to understand the life direction of university youth. Simultaneously, research is needed to explore why students pursuing science-related fields are less committed and capable in terms of ritual practice, human relations, and inculcating inner strength than their cohorts pursuing social sciences.
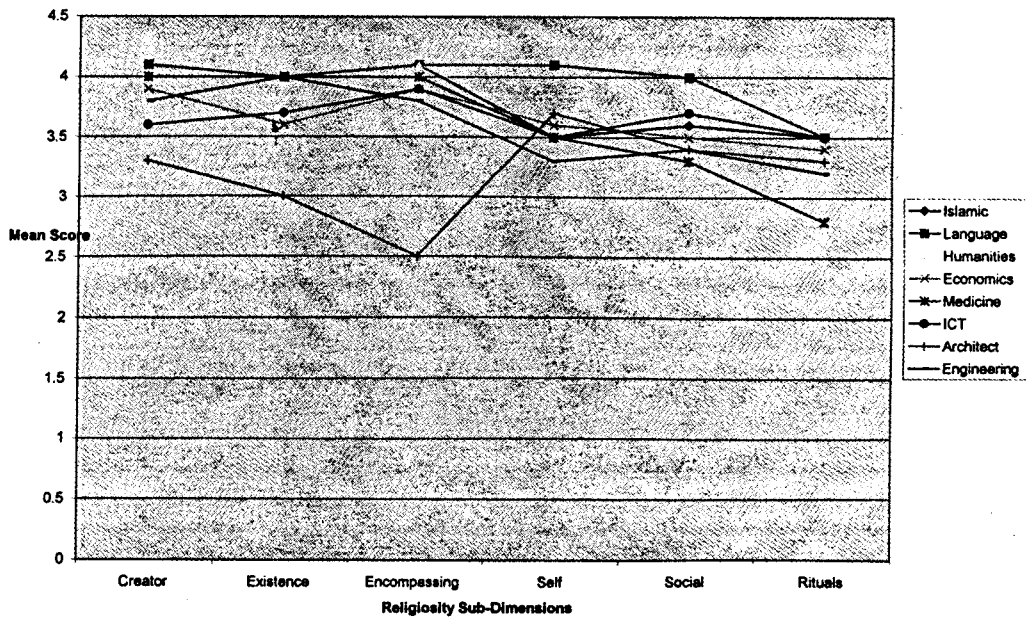

Figure 2: Religiosity sub-dimensions by field of study.

Another youth study currently being carried out whose findings can act as an early warning signal is UPM's study on ethnic relations/tolerance/sensitivity among Malaysian youth. As Malaysia is a country of rich multicultural heritage, the actions of the younger generation have to be in consonance with the forefathers' vision in ensuring solidarity through celebrating diversity (Azimi, Mansor, Zainal Abidin, Ezhar, Wong & Moltan, 2005). In

forging a better understanding of the climate of ethnic sensitivity, it was found that a majority of young people in tertiary institutions demonstrated low levels of tolerance in their daily dealings with those from other ethnic groups. Ethnic tolerance is an integral component to ensuring solidarity. Malaysia cannot afford another 13 May.

On further analysis, cutting across fields of study, of those indicating high practice of ethnic tolerance, the percentages of students pursuing ICT, Economics, and Engineering programs were found to be on the lower extreme (see Figure 3). There was somewhat of a similar pattern from both the religiosity and the ethnic studies where ICT and Engineering students scored the lowest of all the fields of study.

The findings thus pose important questions, such as: Are the concerned adults surrounding these students providing the wrong orientation in regard to ethnic tolerance? Is the curriculum leading to ICT and Engineering degrees void of these basic elements needed to produce tolerant and spiritually-grounded citizens for a fully developed Malaysia? There are probably several explanations contributing to the phenomena. Further study is thus unavoidable — as young Malaysians rely on positive professional help in order to realize the national hope of unity in diversity.
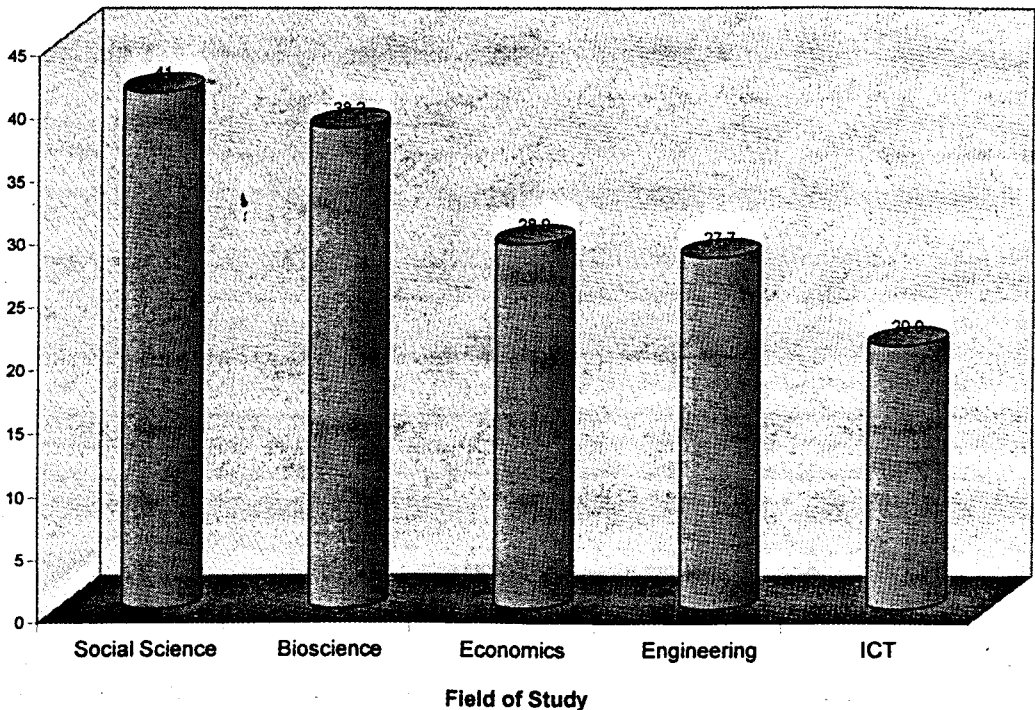
Figure 3: Practice of ethnic tolerance by field of study.

It is interesting to note that young Malaysians seem to know what they want in their lives. From a recent survey of 589 university students from both public and private universities regarding goals in life, respondents provided a list of ideals which ranked as follows: 1) To have a good job, 2) To be rich/millionaire, 3) To be successful in the world and hereafter, 4) To be happy/at peace, 5) To contribute to family, 6) To contribute to society, 7) To achieve ambitions and dreams, 8) To be a person with high morals, 9) To be successful in education, and 10) To be popular and respected. However, the scenarios of Malaysian youth in transition suggest that many of them fumble along the way.

'Youth are not without capabilities but are lacking in professional guidance'

██████ WHAT HELP DO YOUTH NEED TO MOVE FORWARD?

This question has been partially answered in the previous discussion. The following paragraphs attempt to give another perspective in search of the answer.

Early adulthood is the period when young people are expected to take on roles that are constructive to their own growth and that of society, such as engaging in higher studies, travelling the world, beginning their careers, getting married and establishing a family. However, intolerance and social ills among young adults can signify a major discontinuity in the lives of such people and result in major losses for the nation and society as a whole. There must be a consensus among stakeholders, therefore, as to what young people need to move forward in a healthy, self-fulfilling and contributory manner.

Davis (2003) sees successful life transitions as a true cause for celebration where the soul is maturing and the community is gaining new energy, creativity and potential. His observations were based on several episodes of 'rites of passage' in different societies. He goes further by saying that if the activities that give life direction seem empty, unsatisfying or hollow, transition brings disorientation, disenchantment, and distress. Youth difficulties with drugs, alcohol, or the law often stem from misguided attempts at a rite of passage.

Youth need a life direction, sanctioned by 'people in authority' to become full adults. However, with or without such a socialization process, youth will undertake the journey nevertheless. In the process many will fumble along the way, aborting the journey with their needs remaining unfulfilled. As such, when they leave the youthful age, many of them are adults in age but are still adolescence developmentally. They continue to struggle with their incomplete initiations into adulthood, which may lead to being actively counter productive.

The lessons learned from the rites of passage in different societies suggest five symbolic stages of successful transitions from dependence, to independence and inter-dependence (Davis, 2003):
    1.   Preparation – having the practical and spiritual tools, developing one's resources

including mindfulness skills and physical fitness as well as equipment
2. Severance – letting go of the old roles of adolescence
3. Threshold – crossing over into new spaces and new roles, learning to balance demand and comfort
4. Return – reincorporation with family and community with new contributions and forms of relationships, self actualization
5. Implementation – integrate all vision in daily living. Taking on personal or community projects and enlisting the support of peers and parents to become a 'person with a task'.

The qualities and attributes that are critical in coming of age may be developed through the heroic journey. The qualities and attributes include physical fitness, self-esteem, internal locust of control (a sense that one's behaviour influences outcomes), hardiness (appreciating challenge as opportunity), coherence (able to see that all aspects of the created world are meaningful and connected), mental health (mindfulness, involvement, engagement), trust in people and one's place, a sense of community and intimacy, new social roles as per demand, social supports and bonding, peak experiences (moment of joy, moment of sweetness), accepting that one's life is whole, enchanted and meaningful, a sense of coming home to contribute, to do good deeds, and to fulfil others' rights and not demanding your own.

The needs of Malaysian youth are unique to their time, place and circumstances. The ongoing forces of globalization and rapid technological advances will intensify the demand for a quality labour force that is knowledge-rich and has superior thinking skills. Malaysian youth must have the capability to optimize the use of new technologies and materials and to combine them effectively with creativity and innovation. Youth are action-oriented. In inculcating work ethics, for example, there is a need to spend sometime in a productive environment for the young people to 'get their hand dirty' in concrete activities and experiences, for positive attitude to be internalized (Rahim, Rusinah, Azizan, & Azimi, 2004). Towards this end, a labour force equipped with high academic and technical qualifications, multi-skilled in the use of ICT as well as imbued with positive values and work ethic must be developed.

With regard to appropriate youth programming to help Malaysian youth move forward, research has revealed the following programming-principles (Azimi, 2004a; Azimi, 2003)
1. Focus primarily on the interests of young people – be diverse, flexible, and adaptive
2. Collaborate and cooperate across sectors – identify programs already underway and identify present and future opportunities
3. Communicate and consult – listen and respond; share what works and what does not, and encourage youth to get involved
4. Promote partnership and networks – identify opportunities to strengthen existing partnerships and actively support such efforts across bodies

5. Participate meaningfully – ensure education is relevant by providing information, skills and support to make informed life decisions. This will help youth become active change agents (Azimi, 2003).

Research on youth programming needs has helped stakeholders in Malaysia know how 'effectiveness' translates programmatically. Youth programs need to be relevant to youth and flexible, they must not be isolated, they must be responsive to youth needs and concerns, they must facilitate partnership and networking while providing meaningful participation to endear their members to their causes and activities.

From the Malaysian context and the youth development literature (Pittman, 1991), the there are key universal competencies that the young people must have in order to be successful as adults. These competencies are:

1. Health competence – behaviours to ensure future health (exercise, diet, nutrition)
2. Social competence – intra-personal, interpersonal, coping, judgment skills
3. Cognitive/creative skills – creative expression, oral and written language skills, problem solving, analytical skill, interest in learning and achieving
4. Vocational competence – aware of vocational options, act on choices, choosing a career
5. Citizenship competence – appreciate nation's and community's values, desire to contribute
6. Spiritual competence – appreciate the unseen, appreciate the highest level of accountability and the ability to do check and balance of one's behaviour

For youth to be able to cope in a fast-changing environment, they need to be well-grounded in the above six competencies to ensure their successful transition to adulthood. If they fall short in any of the above areas, the risk of negative outcomes can become a reality. These six competency areas require a strong sense of self among the young person to know what is good for him or her and how to moderate one's life to optimize his or her chances for success. Youth development programming must aim to foster these competencies.

From the above competencies, four main areas of positive developmental outcomes for youth can be achieved:

1. Prevention outcomes – able to say no to negative temptations (i.e. problem behaviours)
2. Achievement outcomes – achieve endpoints of a successful transition to adulthood, such as completing school and having stable employment
3. Developmental outcomes – develop a positive sense of self, sense of connection and sense of commitment to others and develop the abilities and motivation to succeed in education and participate fully in family and community life
4. Metaphysical outcomes – develop integrity, and high level accountability, and capable of handling bereavement and other calamities with ease and hope

From the above outcomes framework, the four youth outcomes represent a general framework for a universal understanding of youth achievement. The four outcomes represent problem-free, accomplished, and socially, emotionally and spiritually competent youth. These youth outcomes are integral for the nation in achieving Vision 2020 and full development. If any of these outcomes is not achieved, our youth miss out in one way or another, as does the rest of society for young people are the pulse and barometer of society.

The job of enablers is to improve the pathways for young people to succeed, or risk their disconnectedness from themselves and society. There is thus a need to establish a common direction in developing transition opportunities for young people for improving social, educational and employment outcomes. As youth move from childhood to adulthood, relevant enablers must promote a holistic approach to help youth take full advantage of the range of options at their disposal in their upward movement toward independence. To help young Malaysians develop their capacities as creative, enterprising and fulfilled individuals, therefore, there is a critical need to invest in youth at least to the extent that we invest in other key sectors of the nation, for they are the greatest asset of the country that will determine the country's future (Azimi, 2004).

WHO ARE THE PRIME ENABLERS OF YOUTH IN TRANSITION?

Youth need all the help they can get in their process of transformation toward adulthood. However, due to their desire to be seen as capable and 'normal', they will usually not request openly for help to enable their smooth transition. Their 'enablers' – those that can help them to wade through the process of transition – may come from within the family system and later from the community, schools, peers, social institutions, media, and so forth. The spectrum of enablers for youth in transition is wide. Accordingly, we at Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM), as an excellence centre to promote Youth Development as a field of study, have tried to identify the prime enablers for facilitating the process of positive youth development and transition beyond the family system.

In 2001, a study was conducted following a nationwide program aimed at instilling social competence, citizen competence and community related competence in Malaysian youth (Azimi et al., 2001). The findings indicated mixed results for the program across all youth groups. Out of the 2,237 participants of the program contacted for follow-up, only 14.7 percent acknowledged that the program impacted them strongly on improving their social competence; 40.9 percent indicated improvements in their self-development and 46.8 percent indicated improvement in their citizenship skills.
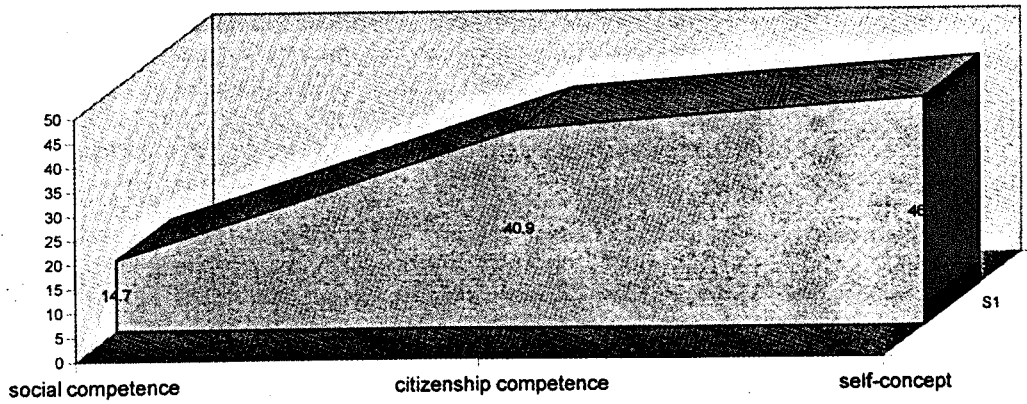
Figure 4: Impact of program.

Following the program, the facilitators were asked for possible reasons for the mixed results. The majority of facilitators agreed that the three main factors were poor commitment of youth workers, high staff-to-participant ratios and poor program scheduling (see Figure 5).
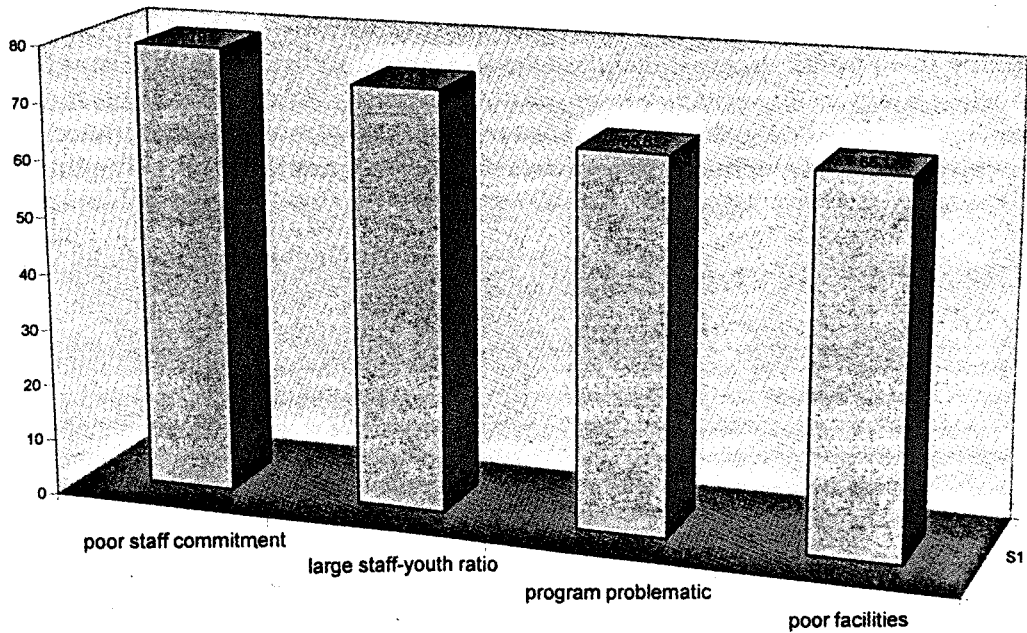

Figure 5: Reasons for low achievement of program.

As the providers of the program included youth officers, youth organizations, and selected consultants, the poor achievement can be associated to an overall lack of professionalism among the three groups of providers. These three groups must be targeted for potential improvements.

In order to contribute meaningfully within our capacity and available resources, UPM has arrived at the prime enablers through research and by juxtaposing the theories and models of youth development that are relevant to the situation in the country. Initially, theories and models were employed to reveal the roots of youth challenges and conflicts, followed by identifying principles and guidelines to work with young people. This was followed by identifying the most appropriate approaches for facilitating the transition process, leading to the arrival of the prime enablers. The steps are elaborated below under four subtopics.

The Roots of Challenge, Conflict, and Problems Faced by Youth

In the process of growing up, youth experience many forms of conflict and challenges that may result in varying degree of problems. A substantive explanation of what contributes to these outcomes may be understood through research on specific issues. However, the roots of these outcomes can be derived through the appreciation of three major sociological theories: functionalist theory, conflict theory and interactionist perspective. On closer scrutiny, these theories suggest that the roots of youth anxiety stem from nine sources, namely: conditions in society (e.g. poverty), lack of opportunities, personality (e.g. introvert), suppressed rights, being unaware or misinformed, being disempowered, lack of or no spiritual base, unfulfilled needs, and heredity (e.g. handicapped, see Figure 6).
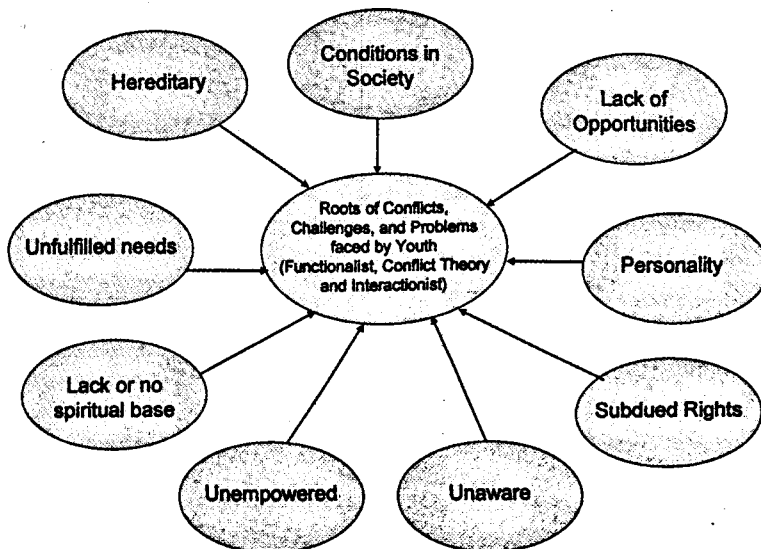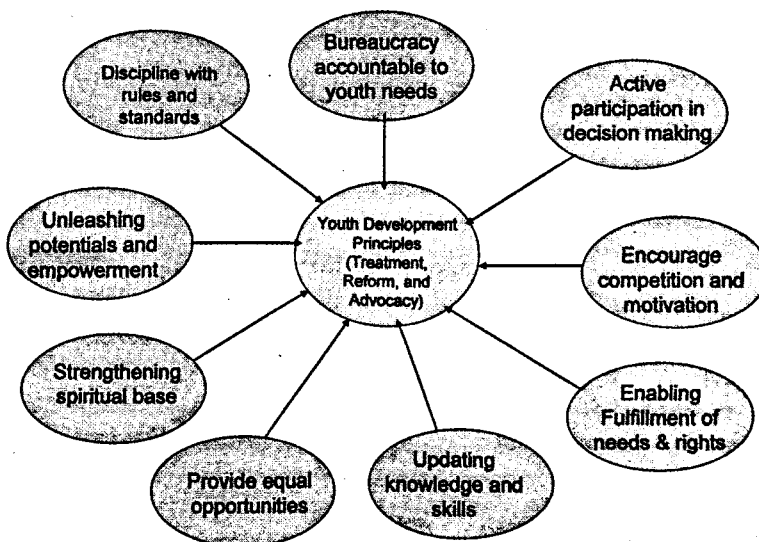

Figure 6: Roots of youth conflict, challenges and problems.

From functionalist theory, it is recognized that conflict emerges when young people are required to conform to the norms and values of the establishment even if it is not in accordance with one's beliefs. Conflict theory perspective stresses that conflicts and challenges stem from a lack of consensus on values and other aspects of life. As the other two theories are macro-level approaches, the interactionist perspective interprets conflicts and problems from the context of face-to-face interaction (Coleman, 1990). Thus, there are many sources of conflict, challenges, and problems as portrayed in Figure 6.

Principles of Helping Youth to Face Conflicts, Challenges, and Problems

The roots of youth anxieties form the basis of formulating the principles to help young people move forward. The development of the principles is guided by the models of programming in youth development, i.e. treatment, reform and advocacy models. Figure 5 reveals the nine principles that should be adhered to in the process of helping youth transition to adulthood successfully. These principles include: Bureaucracy should be accountable to youth needs; active participation in decision making should be practiced; young people should be exposed to healthy competition; the needs and rights of youth should be upheld; knowledge and skills should be continuously updated; equal opportunities must be given to youth regardless of creed or religion; spiritual beliefs and values should form the anchor in youth development; youth develop process should aim at unleashing youth potentials and empowerment; and their development should be guided by acceptable rules and regulations. The treatment model works on the principle that competition stimulates individuals to act, so they must work hard to fit into society. On the other hand, the reform model claims that it is the responsibility of the society to help those who cannot help themselves, while the advocacy model assumes that individuals know what they want to do but they do not have the skills or know-how, thus, they need to be helped (King, 2001). As no one single model is able to explain all human behaviours in total, all three models together provide the basis for the list of principles shown above in Figure 7.

Figure 7: Principles to help youth cope with conflict, challenges and problems.

Approaches of Enhancing Youth in Transition

The principles derived from the preceding discussions form the basis of the needed approaches to enhance the smooth transition from youth to adulthood. The approaches may also be viewed from the perspective of three models as summarized by Small and Memmo (2003), i.e. the prevention, resilience and positive youth development models. Thirteen approaches were formulated, which can be re-grouped into three suggesting a prime enabler for each group. Figure 8 depicts the construct and the different colours show the relevant groupings. The groupings and the related principles are as follows:
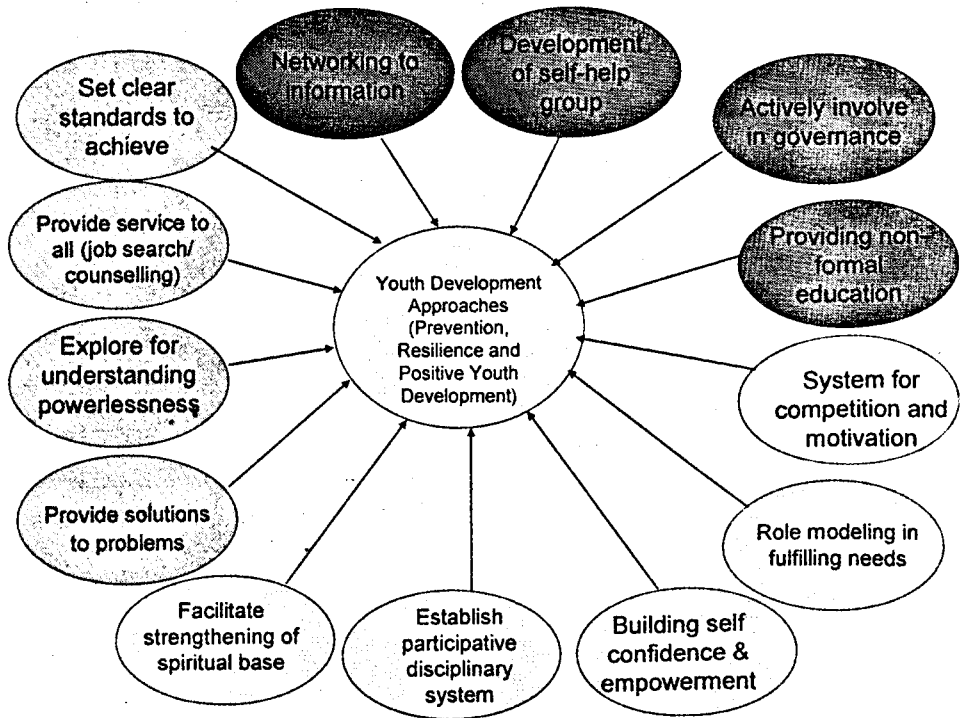

Figure 8: Approaches of enhancing youth development in transition.

1. Related to professional help from mentors
   a. Providing the role model for fulfilled youth needs
   b. Facilitating confidence building and empowerment
   c. Facilitating participatory development of an acceptable disciplinary system
   d. Facilitating the inculcation of spiritual beliefs and values
   e. Developing and implementing a healthy system of competition and motivation

2. Related to organization as provider of non-formal education to enhance youth transition
    a. Inculcating self-help group
    b. Inculcating leadership and governance
    c. Providing non-formal education for continuing development of knowledge and skills
    d. Providing the avenue for networking and linking to information

3. Related to continuous research and development in providing the needed data to guide policy and development of strategies
    a. Continuously determining relevance standard/goals to achieve
    b. To feed youth service providers with findings on the most effective and efficient services needed by young people on certain issues
    c. To explore what are holding youth back from unleashing their 'power'
    d. Providing the solutions/interventions/models to youth problems based on research

The Prime Enablers of Youth in Transition

Recapitulating on the continuity of presenting the roots, the principles, and the approaches of youth development that lead toward the prime enablers, we have mobilized our resources and expertise toward unleashing the potentials of youth workers, youth organizations, and youth research and development (R&D) (See Figure 9).
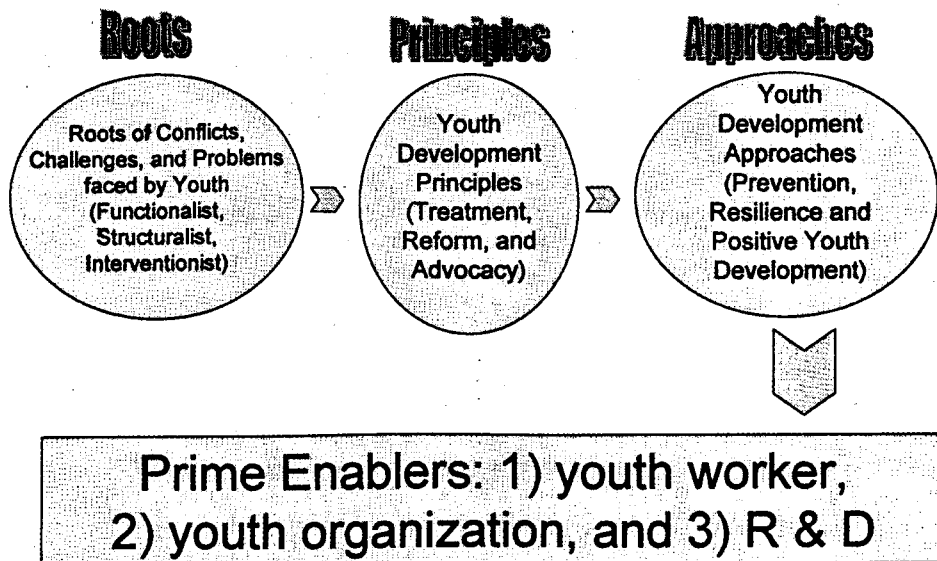
Figure 9: Interrelationship of elements in youth development.

Our efforts to unleash the potentials of the three prime enablers have come a long way. When we established the Youth Development Studies Unit (YDSU) in 1986, the objectives were directed toward helping the youth population through teaching, research, extension work, training and consultancy work. The specific objectives of the YDSU are:

1. To channel expertise in the area of youth development through teaching, research and extension services and consultancy
2. To establish effective networking and cooperation between UPM and other institutions, agencies and individuals related to youth development at the national, regional and international levels
3. To develop and test various approaches in operationalizing the National and Regional Youth Development Policies
4. To provide R & D feedback to policy planning bodies and program implementers related to youth development
5. To act as a clearing house to gather, store and disseminate information related to youth development

Subsequently, the Institute for Community and Youth Studies came into being in 2001, where we expanded the R&D components. UPM's contributions in helping the youth in transition cover varied group of enablers. However, the purpose of this presentation, the focus will be on the three prime enablers: youth workers, youth organizations, and youth research and development efforts (R&D).

■■■■ UNLEASHING THE PRIME ENABLER – YOUTH WORKERS

Youth workers are key players in the development of youth through the forming of 'developmental relationships' with young people. Developmental relationships are grounded in the belief that a youth worker exists in the life of a young person to meet the developmental needs of youth by providing supports and opportunities that youth do not otherwise have. Their help is based on developing reliable, trusting relationships, and expanding the scope of their efforts only when the relationship is strengthened (Morrow & Styles, 1995).

The discipline of youth work is developmentally oriented and operates by attempting to normalize rather than problemize the behaviour of its clientele. In practice, this means that youth workers actively seek to help young people build on their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses. Program planning for individuals and groups emphasizes skills and behaviours to be acquired rather than those to be eliminated. Active and increasingly responsible participation by the youth themselves in making and carrying out decisions concerning their own lives is central to youth work. Insofar as possible, youth work programs take place in the life space of the young people involved rather than on the worker's "turf" (Beker, 2001).

Youth workers, professionally, are a unique group in society, for the expertise of the youth worker is unique and not organically part of any other discipline; it is not social work, education, psychology, occupational therapy, or recreation, although it draws on all of these and others. Nor have any of the established professions shown itself as able and appropriate to encompass youth work. It is marginal even to the two most closely allied fields, education and social work (Beker, 2001).

The skills and knowledge required for youth work are broad. The first attempt to study the training needs of youth workers in Malaysia was conducted in 1972; long before the establishment of the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture (Azimi, 1974). The study revealed that all the youth workers then did not have the pre-training necessary to work with young people. The findings of the initial study showed that almost all of them required training in the following areas: adolescent psychology; educational psychology; career education; leadership training; youth motivation; communication; teaching method; group dynamics; and program planning.

In 1997, UPM conducted another study on the training needs of youth workers. The research indicated twelve areas of training need: human resource development; planning, implementation and evaluation; computer usage; teaching and learning; public speaking; problem solving; conducting research; management; financial management; conducting meetings; facilitating voluntary work; and understanding youth work (Azimi, Turiman, Ezhar & Siti Raba'ah, 1998). Formal and non-formal education for youth workers is an absolute necessity to ensure the right mix of 'hard' knowledge with knowledge of 'soft skills' as well. As an applied social science, youth work requires sincere training that must be ongoing to ensure that youth workers are current with developments in relevant knowledge and practices, including ongoing changes in youth culture.

In Malaysia, unlike in Europe, youth work is not yet a recognized profession. As such, youth workers tend to be undervalued, underpaid, and not adequately prepared for the all-important work they do with the nation's youth. However, great strides have been made over the past twenty years in formalizing the youth work field toward professionalization. Beginning as far back as the 1970s youth work was moving towards professionalization through informal in-service courses conducted at the then Universiti Pertanian Malaysia (Azimi, 1987). However, these courses were not accredited. In mid 90s the in-service training evolved over the years culminating in the creation of the Diploma in "Youth in Development Work" through innovative partnership involving the Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP), Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia (KBS), and Universiti Putra Malaysia. The new diploma program aimed to: 1) equip youth workers with the knowledge, attitude and competencies in working with young people in a variety of settings, in managing and supporting other paid and volunteer workers, and formulating policies in governmental and non-governmental agencies; and 2) prepare youth workers to empower young people to play an active and constructive role in the regeneration of their fellow youth to become effective partners in development. To reach the diploma

level, the participants of the program need to accrue 16 courses including Young People and Society, Principles and Practice of Youth in Development Work, Values in Youth in Development Work, Working with Young People in their Community, Management Skills, Project Planning, Policy Planning and Implementation, Conflict Resolutions, Strategies, and Skills, Promoting Enterprise and Economic Development, Youth and Health, Sustainable Development and Environmental Issues, and Youth Personality Development and Communication (Commonwealth Secretariat, 1997). The concerted role played by the three key partners in ensuring the sustainability of the articulation pathway of professionalizing youth workers in Malaysia is unprecedented (Azimi, 2004b). Table 4 summarizes the best practices of the strategic alliance.

Table 4: Concerted Roles of Commonwealth Youth Programme, Ministry of Youth and Sports Malaysia, and Universiti Putra Malaysia in Educational Program Delivery

Commonwealth Youth Programme (CYP)	Ministry of Youth and Sport Malaysia (KBS)	Universiti Putra Malaysia (UPM)
• Instrumental in developing innovative partnership to deliver the diploma • Coordinates regional and pan-commonwealth modules development • Coordinates regional and pan-commonwealth external quality assurance • Provide the lead for publishing journal and newsletter • Conducts tutors training and advance courses, regular meeting with partner institution, develops question bank and other related activities	• Instrumental in positioning the diploma program as the entry qualification for youth workers • Provides credited students placement locations for practicum and application • Provide study centres and related activities • Sponsors and allows flexi time for staff professional development through the program • Establishes networking with other youth related agencies for professionalizing youth workers	• Instrumental for the accreditation of the diploma program and the other youth studies programs together with the quality assurance system • Provides highly qualified to deliver the programs • Provides learning environment and resources for professional growth such as library, online learning and counselling • Committed to professionalizing youth workers through R & D and dissemination of good practices

In addition to the Diploma program being at par with other diploma programs internationally, it is recognized as the standard of pre-education before an individual is accepted as a bona fide youth worker in the youth development field. It is very encouraging to mention that on the 30th November 2000 the UPM Senate approved the offering of Masters and Ph. D degrees in Youth Studies, as an added dimension to the articulation pathway for youth workers in Malaysia.

The above discussion shows a missing link where UPM is yet to have a bachelor program in Youth Work. To this end, UPM did a market survey on employees and employers of selected government and non-government organizations that have youth as their clients.

Basically the study tried to gauge the percentage of employees who have pre-education in youth related fields, the subjects needed for them to be able to relate effectively with their clients, to what extend the employers feel about of the bachelor program as an entry qualification for their staff, and the period required by the employers to have all the staff obtain the degree. It was found that only 12.8 percents of the employees contacted have had some form of pre-education in youth work. The employees mentioned 10 areas that should be included in the upcoming bachelor program (Leadership, Managing Youth Organization, Psychology, Personality Development, Counselling, Program Development, Evaluation, Huaman Needs, Youth and Health, and Community Development). From the perspective of the employers, they unanimously agreed that such bachelor program is long overdue; and on the average they can afford to stagger sending their staff for the program within a period of 10 years. We are now working on the syllabus of the program to secure UPM Senate's approval for the 2nd. Semester 2005/05 offering.

To further the professionalization of youth workers in Malaysia, several important steps are required. A code of ethics for youth workers and set of standards for youth work as a field of practice are integral to raising the level and quality of youth work in the country. In Malaysia, a movement is afoot to develop them. In this respect UPM is again taking the lead through forming a Protem Committee to draft the constitution for the establishment of the National Association of Professional Youth Workers (NAPY). Among others, the draft of NAPY's purpose and goals as a non-governmental and non-profit organization includes:

1. to promote and develop professionalism in the field of Youth Development;
2. to formulate standards and a code of ethics in youth work in Malaysia with international parity;
3. to promote and oversee high standards of practice in youth work;
4. to spearhead professional training for youth workers;
5. to support and conduct R & D related to the field of Youth Development;
6. to publish journal and other relevant publications in the field of Youth Development;
7. to establish a one-stop information and dissemination centre;
8. to conduct human resource development programs at the national and international levels;
9. to establish linkages with other organizations having similar goals;
10. to be an integral component of policy development for youth development in Malaysia; and
11. to grant recognition and professional awards to individuals, GOs or NGOs that have contributed towards the advancement of youth development in Malaysia.

Unleashing the potential of youth work can be further championed through legislation that guides its development as a valuable and indispensable profession. UPM has proposed the need for an Act/guideline/policy for the past three years during the yearly meeting of the National Youth Consultative Council. The idea of having an Act remains in limbo.

This is probably due to timing and the fact that more research is needed to accurately present the state of affairs of youth work. Such an Act will emphasize the need for an articulation pathway or career path for youth workers, superannuation arrangements, conditions of service, the responsibilities of local governance, synchronization of programs/facilities with sufficient number of youth workers, ratio of youth workers to number of youth/youth organizations in a locality, the need for para-professionals in youth work, training for different categories of youth workers, and grant-writing.

'Youth work is the backbone of youth development; and the professional youth worker is the driving force of youth work'

UNLEASHING THE PRIME ENABLER 2 – YOUTH ASSOCIATIONS AS NON-FORMAL EDUCATION CENTRES FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT

The Malaysian government recognizes that youth need ongoing acquisition of different types and levels of knowledge, according to Malaysia's Youth Development Policy strategies of 1997. Knowledge is an essential element to the present and future success of young people, whether it is worldly in nature for meeting their economic, material and communal needs, or spiritual and religious in nature for meeting their moral, ethical and other-worldly obligations. The ability of Malaysian youth to be competitive and competent as future leaders on an increasingly competitive world stage is dependent on their acquisition of both levels and types of knowledge. Put simply, youth today must be better than ever before and fully capable in a variety of knowledge domains. Furthermore, youth having advanced levels of worldly skills without a strong moral, ethical and spiritual foundation will only add to the current problems of social ills and inequalities, and greatly detract from nation building goals.

Non-formal learning delivered through Malaysia's plethora of youth associations and organizations is a key ingredient for addressing the development needs of Malaysia's young people. Youth associations are an integral entity to the advancement of youth development as effective deliverers of non-formal education to young people.

Typically, in youth organizations or associations, individuals participate on a voluntary basis and as a result, the individual takes an active role in the learning process. Unlike informal education, where learning happens less consciously, the individual is usually aware of the fact that he/she is learning through non-formal education. However the educational atmosphere must be in place to enable the learning process to take place. The following questions may be considered as a check list to determine the capabilities of a youth associations to create the atmosphere for continuous learning. Does the youth organization function actively? Are the program/activities of the youth association targeted towards change in behaviours or merely to socialize/strengthening bonds among individuals? Does the organization believe in continuous upgrading of its resources (e.g.

expertise, financial, infrastructure, and equipments) as inputs to enhance the non-formal education programs? Does the organization having the support systems (e.g. leadership, governance, networking, and team work) needed to play the role as provider of non-formal education? The questions raised are based on the model shown in Figure 10.
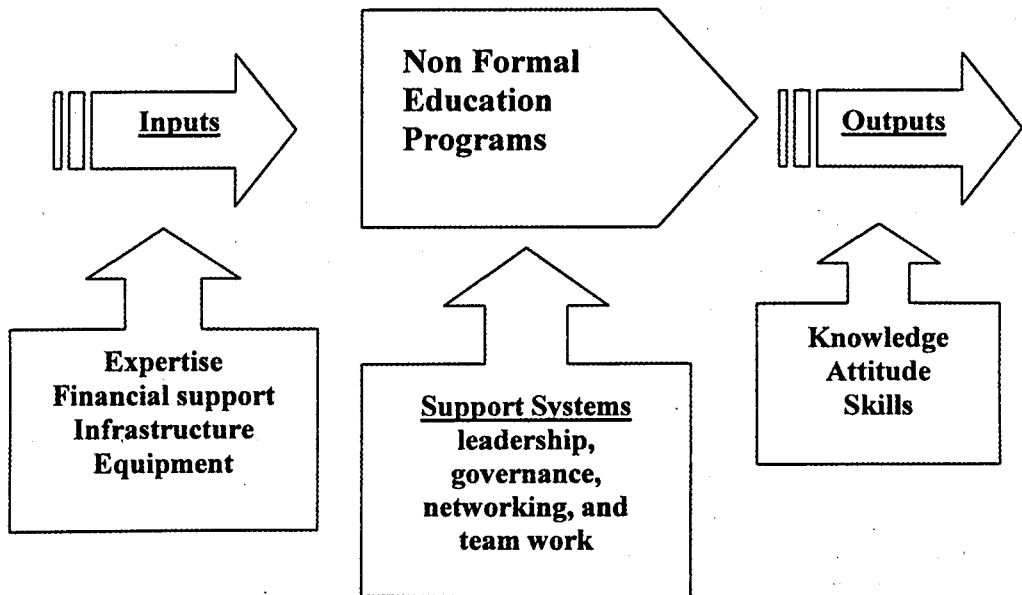
Figure 10: Interrelationship of components of non-formal education in Youth Organizations (adapted from Azimi et al., 2003).

In the years 1999 – 2000 three studies were carried out to reveal the status of youth organizations in Malaysia with regard to their philosophy, level of activity, potential, availability of resources, leadership capabilities, governance, networking, activities, and achievements (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003) These studies form the foundation for answering the questions posed above. Table 5 shows the level of activity of bureaus and members of youth organizations. The findings showed that in general almost all the bureaus in the youth associations were inactive and the situation was similar by location and by different groups of youth associations.

Table 5: Activity Level of Bureaus and Members in Youth Organizations' Programs

| Activity Level	Overall N=233%	Location		Types of Youth Association	
		Urban %	Rural %	General %	Others %
Bureaus					
Active	25	24	27	24	30
Inactive	75	76	73	76	70
Members					
High	8	11	5	7	12
Moderate	27	24	29	25	35
Low	65	65	66	68	54

General: focusing on socioeconomics development
Others: focusing on religion and uniformed groups

With reference to the model in Figure 10, the status of the inputs and support system for creating a learning climate in the Malaysian youth associations was found to be low. Figure 11 depicts the status of the inputs available in the youth associations.
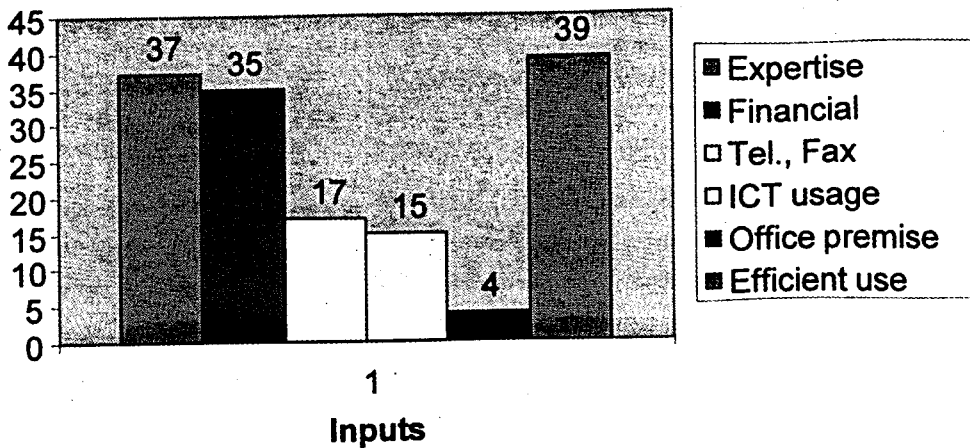
Figure 11: Availability of inputs in Youth Associations (in percentages).

The availability of inputs to enable non-formal education programs in the youth organizations is low. This probably explains why the orientation programs and the activities of the youth organizations were mainly relegated to social bonding. Azimi et al. (2003) showed that 65 percent of the youth associations' programs were social bonding related.
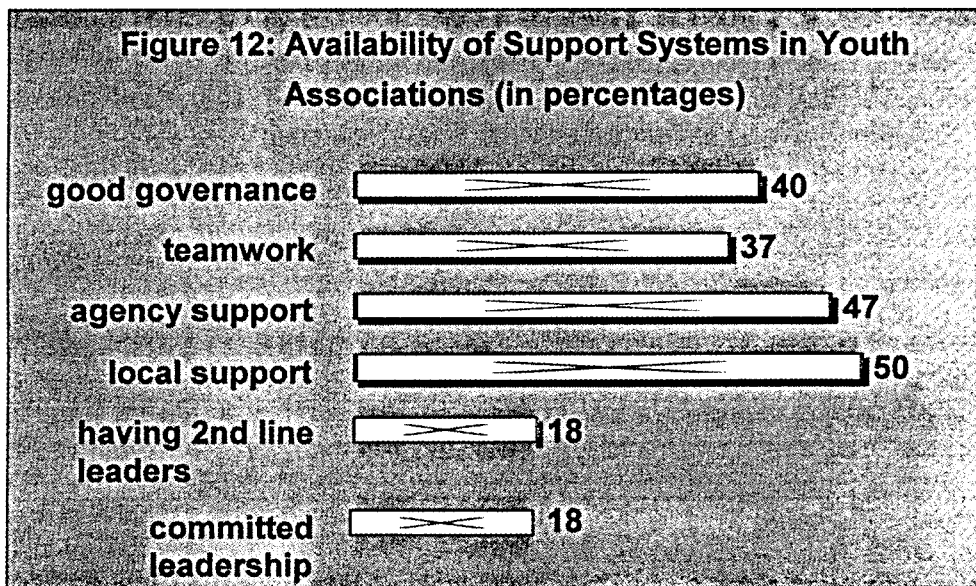
Figure 12: Availability of support system in Youth Associations (in percentages).

Figure 12 presents the status of the support systems for non-formal education programs in the youth organizations. The support systems to ensure continuity of non-formal education were found to be available but only to a limited number of youth associations. Incidentally, the study did not venture further to find out the extent of effectiveness of these systems in realizing the non-formal education programs.

The National Youth Consultative has endorsed the motion that the Malaysian youth associations are expected to play the provider role for non-formal education to help meet the needs of young people. The leadership of the youth associations accepted this challenge and they voiced their confidence in the potential of youth associations to be the major agent of change for youth development. When the leadership was asked about the role of youth associations as change agents, they came up with a long list of potential roles that included: leadership development, community development, centre for teaching and learning, resource centre, development of volunteers, development of leisure programs, and centre of excellence for youth development. Incidentally, almost all of what was mentioned was already referenced in the associations' constitutions (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 1997). In other words, the youth associations were destined to contribute as providers of non-formal education. However, due to several constraints, their aspirations remain more rhetoric than reality. According to research findings, the major cause of the organizations' inability to rise to what is expected of them is poor leadership both at the management and bureau levels (Azimi, Turiman, & Ezhar, 2003). Donnithorne (1993) points out that effective leadership is the heart of any successful organization.

When about two-thirds of the youth associations are not active, to unleash their potential as providers of non-formal education a well thought out strategy coupled with political will is required. It is obvious at this point that many of the youth associations may not be able to do it on their own. The main agencies best equipped and positioned for supporting them in what they do are the Ministry of Youth and Sports, Malaysian Youth Council, and the Department of Youth and Sports at all administrative levels. A capable body of selected youth associations should also be roped in as one of the major enablers, to help and advise their peers.

Youth associations in Malaysia are sleeping giants. Government must acknowledge and recognize the importance and key role of youth associations and organizations as non-formal educational institutions, and work to involve them at the decision-making levels in the area of non formal educational policy and programming. Furthermore, government should develop greater support measures for youth organizations including training and organizational development so that such organizations can expand their role in society (Azimi & Turiman, 1994). In 2003 UPM has tabled 10 strategies to unleash the potential of the sleeping giant to the National Consultative Council. The proposal included:

1. Establishing a model youth association at all administrative levels, as a centre of excellence in providing non-formal education for other local youth associations to learn and subsequently implement the provider role in their respective localities.
2. Educating local communities and institutions to take responsibility to contribute in one form or another to help the youth associations rise up as providers of non-formal education.
3. Building the human resource capacity of youth associations as providers of non-formal education
4. Helping the youth associations equip themselves with needed infrastructure and info-structure
5. Providing developmental training to sustain the capability of the youth associations as dynamic and proactive providers of non-formal education
6. Establishing a participative monitoring and evaluation system to further upgrade the professionalism of the youth organizations as providers of non-formal education
7. Above all, as the idea of transforming youth associations into providers of well-planned non-formal education is still new to the Malaysian scene, the first move to unleash the potential of youth associations is to organize 'road shows' at all levels of the organizational structure from the grass roots to the Ministry (see Figure 13). The support of leadership at various levels of the organizational structure on the systematic practice of non-formal education is critical for the endeavour to succeed. Thus, the road show is intended to promote change in the paradigm of learning to a participatory, learner-centred approach with an emphasis on real life situations, and the application of non-formal learning (e.g. work with unemployed young people, school drop-outs, low achievers at

school, delinquent youth, and youth at risk) as a long-term training course where young peoples' own projects constitute the core of a participatory learning process, promoting peer education and peer involvement, and to develop a curriculum for Malaysian youth leaders so as to enable them to implement the new venture. The endorsement by leadership at the various levels of the organizational structure for non-formal learning as an essential instrument in helping youth in transition is part and parcel of unleashing youth associations as one of the prime enablers.
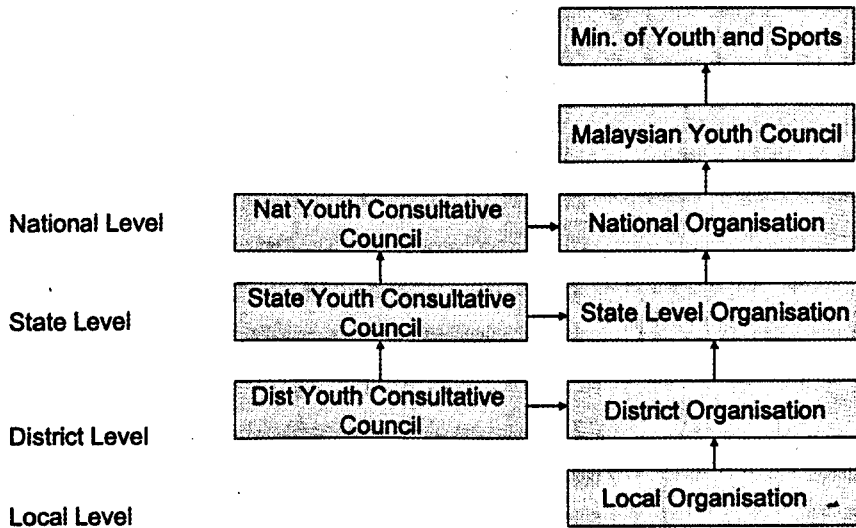

Figure 13: Structure of Youth Organization linkages.

Political will must be attached to the above strategies and approaches in ensuring continuity and resource allocation. To this end, UPM has been one of the key players in developing a youth association Act. The Act touches on the necessary elements to transform the youth associations into providers of high quality non-formal education. The proposed Act emphasizes on:

1. The responsibility of the government to unleash the potential of youth associations
2. The responsibility of the youth associations to pull themselves out of the dilemma
3. The responsibility of Youth Councils to facilitate the transformation

There are about 8,000 youth associations in Malaysia with a membership of about two million. *The stage has been set, but the actors are not performing and the audience is getting out of control.*

UNLEASHING THE PRIME ENABLER 3 – RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (R&D)

Youth research and development (R&D) must be given serious consideration and attention, as the youth population that exists today is highly diverse, above and beyond differences in race and culture. To address youth needs through programming aimed at ensuring their successful transition to adulthood, youth (R&D) must be capable of identifying the nuances between different populations of young people in the country. Responsible agencies should not gamble but rather capitalized on empirical research findings to provide life direction. Whenever a program or policy that concerns youth is implemented, R&D should be part of the consideration. The risks of implementing a policy or program that are not well coordinated and grounded in a sound research base are high. For example, recently, the Malaysian government embarked on a program called the National Training Service Program involving some 70,000 young people. This program aims to nurture the citizens of tomorrow in the spirit of cooperation, national unity and integration as well as healthy living. An allocation of more than RM300 million was provided for this one youth program alone (Mohamad, 2003). Whether the program is actually meeting its objectives is unclear, as there has been no evidence of a formal program evaluation to determine the effectiveness of the program. The fiscal costs of such a program are significant as the nation has made a huge financial investment in its young people.

Youth-related R&D is rarely afforded the attention it deserves. It should be an integral part of any youth development scheme as its goals cover the whole gamut of youth development. In general, there are several key objectives for engaging in youth research (University of Melbourne, 2005):

1. to identify local, national and international research issues relevant to young people;
2. to conduct appropriate, relevant and useful research that addresses these identified issues;
3. to promote research agendas and policies which contribute to an understanding of the full range of life patterns of young people, and which support young people's capacity to exercise increased control over their lives;
4. to promote and encourage awareness of youth issues amongst research students and within departments and research centres of Universities;
5. to facilitate communication between educators, researchers, policy makers and people working in the youth sector;
6. to facilitate national links and collaborative research on youth issues across different sectors, including education, health, youth work and juvenile justice; and
7. to strengthen international research links and scholarship in the area of youth policy.

The above mentioned goals of youth R&D accord with any sincere intention to help young people move forward. Several nations throughout the world – both developed and developing – have already come to this realization and have responded to it by creating youth research institutes to guide their policy and programming decisions.

In Malaysia, since its inception there have been attempts to have a sort of research unit at the Ministry level. For example, the present Nationhood Bureau actually started as a research unit in the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports in 1974 (Jabatan Perdana Menteri, 2000). Even the present Ministry of Youth and Sports has a long standing research unit which is dormant. One major reason why such a noble intention remains static or aborted is due to poor commitment in terms of expertise and budget. This is probably why almost all youth-related research in Malaysia has been conducted within the university system. However, the latter approach in conducting youth R&D is disjointed and without coordination (Azimi, 1999).

Youth R&D has yet to get the intention it deserves. In the IRPA manual published by MOESTI, the field of youth studies is yet to be accepted as a bona fide field of study. The field is not listed in FOR (Field of Study). Under the list of SEO (Socio-Economic Objectives), there is only mention of 'Youth Problems'. The field of Youth Studies is not even listed under the category of PR (Priority Research) and SR (Strategic Research). However, topics related to youth research are found in the Experimental Applied Research (EAR) section listed under the focus area of 'Social Transformation' and also the target area 'Youth and Nation Building'. The coming years can be bleak for youth R&D through IRPA when the emphasis will be R&D&C (Commercialization). There is a serious need for youth experts and youth researchers in Malaysia to come under one roof and jump start youth R&D toward becoming a major enabler of youth development.

Unofficially, UPM has been playing the role of youth R&D for the Ministry of Youth and Sports for more than 30 years. Our R&D contribution in lending a hand to the other enablers of youth in transition has a history that goes back to the early 70s when the study on the training needs of youth workers was carried out. UPM has been consistent in taking the lead in providing feedback to the Ministry, without fail, on the status of youth associations as agents of change since the early 80s. Concurrently, UPM's youth development research team has undertaken several projects to reveal the lifestyles and thinking patterns of contemporary Malaysian youth including studies related to understanding youth subculture, their religiosity status, their level of ethnic sensitivity, and benchmarking youth participation in nation building. Research has also been conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of selected nationwide youth development programs. Even though UPM has indulged in youth R&D for more than three decades, we feel the full scale impact will not be achieved until and unless R&D on youth is coordinated at the national level.

As resource advisors to the National Youth Consultative Council (NYCC), we have been vocal in urging the establishment of a Malaysian Youth Research and Development Institute (MYRDI) in almost all NYCC meetings. A breakthrough came when the Ministry of Youth

and Sports agreed to have a long-term national action plan for youth development and invited UPM to draft the MYRDI. This was a great opportunity to unleash the potential of youth R&D as enablers of youth development. We outlined three justifications for the establishment of the MYRDI (Azimi, Awang, & Aishah, 2004):

1. Youth are the country's biggest asset. Any attempts at preparing them to be partners in development should be pursued professionally with R&D as a base.
2. Youth do not exist in a vacuum. Their needs are affected by the changes in their local and global surroundings. In this context the approach, model, and indicators for meeting Malaysian youth needs must be constantly reviewed through a comprehensive R&D undertaking.
3. There exist pockets of institutions doing youth research independently in Malaysia. This scenario is against the principle of effective and efficient usage of expertise and resources.

MYRDI was proposed with the following objectives:

1. To bring youth experts and researchers under one roof;
2. To indulge in research that will contribute to policy development, program development, and long term planning for the development of Malaysian youth; and
3. To develop and further refine instruments, models, and indicators on youth development that will have implications on helping young Malaysians to be leaders within and outside the country.

MYRDI will be implemented in two phases:

Phase 1: Creation of a Decision Support System (DSS)

The first phase – data gathering – would be conducted toward the creation of a Decision Support System (DSS). The DSS initiative would act as a central component of MYRDI management and organizational development based on relevant and accurate youth-related data. Developing the DSS would involve the pooling of existing research from all youth-related fields such as education, health, recreation and sport, youth development and others. Such data would go toward the creation of a major youth research database that would eventually be made available for public access through the Internet and libraries. In addition, all MYRDI research findings and data would be included in the database. The database itself would be continuously updated and expanded for greater usability by stakeholders and the public.

Phase 2: Conducting Basic and Applied Research

Basic research includes evaluation of programs in Malaysia, developing key youth-related indicators; Malaysia-specific youth development and youth work competencies; and benchmarks for youth and youth-related institutions such as the family, schools, community and health systems. Such foundational research

efforts would be based on identified needs and gaps, as determined by data gathering efforts and expertise of MYRDI youth and youth-related professionals and affiliates. Basic research would form an important aspect of the DSS and would also inform applied research efforts in more specific, priority research areas. The findings and data resulting from the 'basic research' initiative would provide baseline information for policy makers at all levels in their formulation of youth policies.

Applied research comprises more specific youth-related research areas, particularly areas of concern to the nation. Some examples of applied research efforts are in the following areas: youth socialization and culture; ICT; inter-ethnic understanding and integration; youth empowerment; youth unemployment; youth entrepreneurship; strengthening of youth organizations; inculcation of spiritual values and ethics; youth health trends and issues; youth and the media; and others. Once the foundations from data gathering and basic research have been established, large-scale applied research efforts would be undertaken. It is in this area where the MYRDI aims to contribute most to the areas of policy development and technical assistance to government and organizations.

As mentioned earlier, although there are currently efforts within Malaysia to conduct research in some of the areas mentioned above, efforts are not centralized, organized, coordinated or systematic. They are conducted primarily by local universities and funded by research grants from MOESTI. Through the MYRDI, research at the university level would continue, but would be better coordinated. The MYRDI would help MOESTI and other funding bodies develop funding strategies based on the nation's research needs. It is suggested that MYRDI have the following organization:
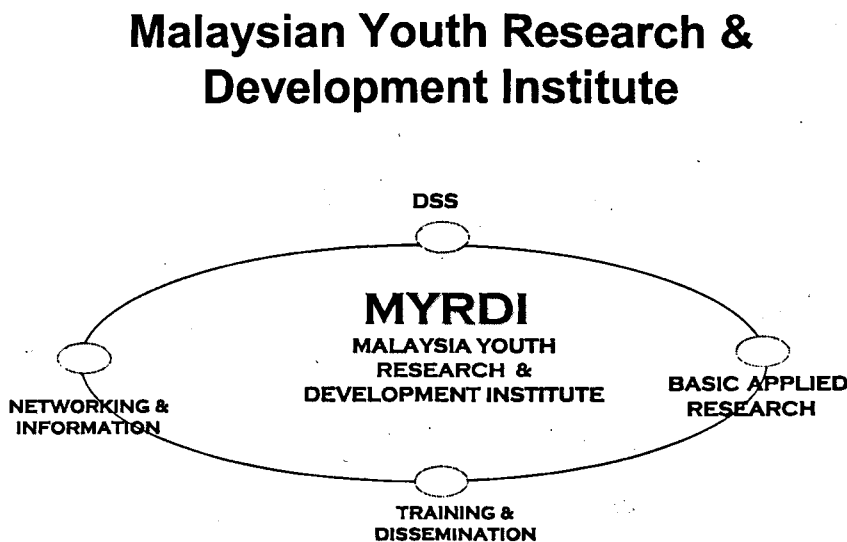
Malaysian Youth Research & Development Institute

Figure 14: Proposed program content of MYRDI.

Another key component of the applied research work would involve technical assistance and capacity building activities with youth organizations and training centres. Capacity building and technical assistance activities entail facilitating organizations to develop their core skills such as management, finance and fundraising, programs and evaluation, in order to build each group's effectiveness and sustainability (Dineen, 2002). To undertake such activities, a variety of trainings including hands-on intensive work with organizational leaders would be provided by MYRDI staff. These activities would rely on research findings and the development of organization-specific modules. At the beginning, to start the ball rolling, UPM proposed a working organizational structure:

Malaysian Youth Research & Development Institute
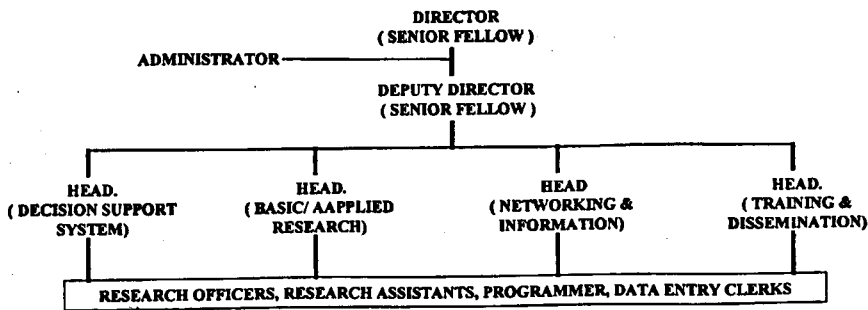
Figure 15: Proposed organizational structure of MYRDI.

The proposal has been accepted and was launched by the Prime Minister under the flagship National Action Plan for Youth Development in October 2004. Proper implementation of a high calibre R&D institution requires the following key components: leadership with authority and expertise, placement of MRYDI that can function with autonomy and effectively, some level of financial security/assurance, human resources with vast research experience, and the necessary infrastructure/infostructure.

Malaysia is at a crucial time in its history and is facing serious challenges among its younger populations. There is no reason that the well being of the nation's young people should not be given as high a priority as economics, education or national defence, as all of these sectors rely on competent and capable individuals tomorrow, which are our young people today. Traditionally, it has been said that the barometer of a people or nation's overall health and well-being can be detected based on the state of two groups – the elderly and the young. If these two are not well cared for then it can be safely said that the nation is not on the right course. With this in mind, a serious and dedicated youth research effort such as the MYRDI would act as an important step in the direction of ensuring the health and well being of Malaysia's young people.

▊▊▊▊ CONCLUSION

From a variety of research conducted on youth in Malaysia, there are indications that young people are developing toward being and becoming active and constructive members of modern Malaysia. However, coupled with the positive, there are also signs that too many young people are becoming counter productive. There are many research-related trends indicating that young people, though increasing their level of 'hard' knowledge in areas such as science and technology, are not finding the right balance between 'hard' and 'soft' forms of knowledge. For instance, in addition to increases in the prevalence of social ills, changes in basic values structures, perceptions and lifestyles are all indications that young people in Malaysia require more from adults to ensure their healthy development. As youth is a time of great inner change and conflict, Malaysia as a young nation is also developing and going through a period of major transition. For youth, the combination of personal change and transition in the external environment translates into a very precarious time littered with a variety of potential developmental traps.

As youth become citizens of their communities, the community must be able to accommodate young people with all their energy and desire for hands-on learning and new experiences. One viable option that this can be done in a positive and constructive way is to mobilize youth workers, youth associations and youth researchers as the main vehicles to advance knowledge and learning opportunities. Youth workers, to be effective in their tasks, must be capable, knowledgeable and professional to fully maximize the unique relationships that they share with young people as teachers, friends, parents and guides. Youth associations, as the organizational vehicle for youth mobilization, must be youth-led and youth-driven, highly efficient and organized, relevant to the needs of the community and nation, well connected and integrated with other organizations, knowledge and education-focused and attractive to young people's interests. Youth associations play the key role of filling the non-formal learning gap to complement the formal learning institutions such as schools, as well as the informal learning that takes place in the home, school and community. Finally, youth research and researchers play the critical role of assessment, evaluation and identifying relevant issues that need to be addressed to ensure the success of youth programming and policy-making. Youth researchers must also act as information and knowledge databanks, where youth organizations, leaders and policy makers can go for needed youth-related research and information as inputs to policy formation. Without serious youth R&D, youth programming becomes a gamble with little chance for success.

"...Surely Allah does not change the condition of a people until they change their own condition..." (Ar-Raad, 11)

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