

Educational priorities in Africa

When over half the nation is illiterate and the people clamour for education; when public expenditure on education is mounting, but the number of children who are denied the right to education is increasing; when classroom techniques are autocratic and teachers are in short supply and inadequately trained; when government and private firms demand trained recruits, but unemployment is widespread and is increasing; when a country is poor, what policies should the national officials responsible for the planning of educational development pursue?

Although these problems do not occur to the same extent in every country, it would be true to say that to a greater or lesser degree, all countries of the world are faced with the problem of the population explosion, and of the scientific and technical revolution, both of which have resulted in more people to be taught and more information to be learned, which have in turn caused an unprecedented and almost insatiable social demand for more and better education.

However, despite public zeal and heavy investment in formal education, the gap between supply and demand for education in the various countries is wide and increasing, as is the gulf

between the rich and the poorer countries of the world. About half of the world's population can neither write nor read, while only half of the children of primary school age receive more than a few years of schooling in most developing countries. Combined with this is the widening cleavage between country and town, and the inability of the economies of the developing countries to absorb readily the products of the schools. These, and similar problems, baffle policy makers and educational planners everywhere.

How can the limited resources available for education be used to tackle these massive problems, and make a difference?

The report of the International Commission on the Development of Education (1972) is a wide-angle lens covering a vast array of educational problems and zooming in on a number of the major issues related to educational development.

Although the treatment is 'global', almost every crucial and critical issue related to education is raised and brought into proper focus. There is no doubt that this study should be a source of inspiration and a guide to policy makers, educationists, educational administrators, planners and personnel concerned with the organization and implementation of educational development, throughout the world, because of the way it raises the right questions and discusses the possible means at our disposal

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to answer them. The report should also be of immense value to teacher educators as a source-book for courses on foundation studies and current issues in education.

It is not possible to comment on the many issues that are encompassed by the report. Attention will be focused in this short paper on a few main recommendations which seem to the writer to be of most significance to the educational problem of developing countries.

Futility of schooling

The importance of formal education through the traditional school system is almost everywhere taken for granted. Governments devote large proportions of the annual budgets to formal education, and parents in developing countries build *Harambee* or self-help schools and spend large proportions of their meagre incomes to pay school fees for the education of their children. Children walk long distances from their homes to school, and memorize voluminous chalk-board notes and the contents of partially understood foreign textbooks, in order to try to go over the hurdles of examinations which are often set externally. There seems to be an unquestioning faith in the power of school education, which is seen by the pupils and their parents and teachers alike as the chief and almost the only means of advancement on the social and economic ladder.

The report is unequivocal about the futility of the current practice of concentrating public attention and spending on the conventional school and other formal institutions reserved for children and adolescents. As the report rightly points out, 'so great is the demand for education today, and so great will it be in years to come, that present institutionalized systems are, and will be, incapable of absorbing it'.

levels, and between formal and non-formal education should be abolished; recurrent education should be gradually introduced and made available in the first place to certain categories of the active population.

The old notion which equates education with school and limits the time for learning to the traditional school age is challenged.

First, the formal schooling system is proving to be prohibitively expensive. Even if the traditional primary school system could be extended to cover all the children in the relevant age group, in the short run this would do little to combat the problem of mass illiteracy throughout the world and, in the long run, would take too long and would be very costly. The conventional school is open for a limited number of hours during the day, and for only nine months during the year. The school plant is thus under-utilized and teachers in many ways underemployed. Secondly, the children upon whom the school has traditionally focused its attention take time to become adult men and women who can affect production and development. For example, primary school children can only learn *about* the importance of a balanced diet, mosquito and malaria control, family planning, soil conservation, etc. They are not in a position to apply this knowledge directly to present-day problems in their homes and thus to affect the pace of development *today*. Society cannot wait until the children who are being educated today at such great cost and sacrifice are grown, in order to get the economic and social development it urgently needs *now*, nor can it afford to keep half of its children in cold storage because they cannot enter the school system. Moreover, because of the knowledge explosion the schools can no longer be expected to equip the individual with an adequate educational experience and intellectual capital to last him a lifetime. By the time the children who are in primary schools of today become adult producers several years later, much of

4 *Artificial or outmoded barriers between different educational disciplines, courses and*

what they learned at school will be obsolete.

These considerations should lead us to the following conclusions.

1. The enormous and growing commitment and the central position accorded to the school as the chief vehicle of conveying education to the world's population must be re-appraised.

2. The internal structure and organization of formal education must also be critically re-examined. For example, it is inevitable that all pupils spend the same number of years and the same number of hours a day sitting before a teacher to 'cover' the primary school curriculum? Can we not seek ways of increasing the quantity and quality of educational facilities within the limits of the present resources so as to enable us to lessen, if not to close, the gap between the 'schooled' and 'unschooled' sectors of our population?

3. A much larger share of public educational spending must be directed towards adult and continuing non-formal education than has been traditionally the case.

12 *Educational strategies in the coming decade should have rapid development of adult education, in school and out of school, as one of their priority objectives.*

4. The school must be more integrated with the community than is the case at present. It must become a social and cultural centre where, not only the children, but also their parents come to receive continuing education. Emphasis of the curricula must shift from the transmission of information aimed at the production of finished 'educated' élites to the creation of an 'educable learning' society. The report rightly calls for more immediate, more practical, more massive and also more lively non-traditional educational patterns.

5. It follows that formal education and adult education, which have traditionally been seen as competing and unrelated items and have been planned and financed under different ministries, must be seen as complementing each other, and

as part of the same process. Educational planning must embrace not only the formal aspects of education but also the non-formal aspects such as adult mass literacy, health and agricultural education.

Lifelong education

The central theme of the report is based on the concept of lifelong or continual education for everyone. Lifelong education, says the report, is the keystone of a learning society. Lifelong education means that there must be opportunities for every individual to learn for the rest of his life. It implies that education must pay less attention in the future to the transmission of information than to the development of the individual's capacity to continue learning by himself, and to the development of his reasoning faculties, critical judgement and proficiency in problem-solving. It means providing opportunities at every stage for adults and out-of-school youth to become 'learning stations' and to continue to be learners for the rest of their lives, and thus to close the gap between the 'schooled' and 'unschooled' sections of the population.

Lifelong education inevitably implies that the present cleavage between the content of education and the living experience of the learners, between the system of values of the school and the goals set up by society, between ancient time-honoured curricula and the modernity of science must be narrowed if not entirely closed. Education ceases to be merely a preparation for life and a process of selecting and training the social élites. It becomes life itself, every human being becoming, as it were, 'a learning station'. From this point of view, the report is appropriately entitled *Learning to be*.

The idea of continual or recurring education for everyone has far-reaching implications for educational planners in developing countries. It would mean opening several alternative gates into and through institutions of formal learning

and abandoning or at least modifying drastically the current cut-throat competitive examinations which pervade the education systems of most countries. This would make it possible for adults and out-of-school youth who missed the bus to enter, at various levels, and continue in the system for the rest of their lives.

Lifelong education may at first appear to be a Utopian ideal which cannot be within the reach of developing countries for a long time to come. Given the present constraints of limited financial resources, many countries have, in their plans, adopted the manpower requirements strategy, aimed at pushing through the educational pipeline only those men and women who are required and are likely to be absorbed by the economy at various levels. This has meant in some countries making educational provision for only 50 per cent of the children in the primary school age group, and for only 3-4 per cent of the children in the secondary school age group, thus denying educational opportunity to one out of every two individuals.

It is clear that the world cannot afford to continue much longer with this magnitude of wastage of human resources. One question we have not asked seriously in the past, and which we must ask now is: assuming that it is imperative to spread education to all the population, how can the present resources be used to accomplish this task? In other words, how can the resources be disbursed to transform the present meritocratic systems of education into lifelong learning for the majority if not for everyone?

The report rightly points out that there are many modern means and discoveries which science has placed at our disposal, but which we do not at the moment use sufficiently to improve and spread education. Planning strategies in the developing countries should look more into the application of mass media and modern technology to the problems of spreading and improving education. They should be prepared, in this respect, to make a great leap into the future. The Director-General

of Unesco has called for 'a more systematic utilization of the means which technology has placed at our disposal'. There is no field in which this is more essential today than that of education, particularly in the developing countries. As Frederick Harbison has said, the newly developing countries must pioneer in the new methods of teaching—perhaps in utilizing modern inventions such as television, teaching machines, and other technological devices which are not yet widely employed even in most advanced countries. In fact, the need for new technologies of pedagogy is probably greater in newly developing countries than in those more fully developed education systems. 'Consequently, the African countries should give serious thought to the establishment of centres for research in educational technology.'

Television and/or radio which are now used mostly for entertainment and political indoctrination in most developing countries, could in the long run prove to be the cheapest if not the only practical means of combating mass-illiteracy effectively, and of bringing education to all the children and adults who want to learn and who are at the present denied admission to the schoolhouse.

13 *In all areas where there is widespread illiteracy, programmes organized for the adult population must include a strong literacy campaign. Action must be taken in two ways: it must aim firstly at functional literacy among strongly motivated sections of the working population and secondly at mass literacy when conditions are appropriate and, above all, when social development conditions—political, economic and cultural—are suitable for active large-scale participation by the people.*

An evaluation of the experience of American Samoa, and that of the Ivory Coast, where educational television is being used in primary schools, may help to reveal the tremendous potentialities of modern instructional media in the developing countries.

A more systematic and regular use of self-instructional correspondence materials through newspapers seems to have great potentialities which are worth examining in developing countries.

Educational technology, however, should not be taken as a panacea for all educational ills of the present time. It is not merely the application of sophisticated hardware and gadgetry to conventional systems of education and thus broadcasting traditional styles and techniques. We are warned that educational technology can be of value only if it is totally integrated in the system and if it leads us to rethink and renovate it.

While the need for total reform is accepted, not everyone will go all the way with the report when it suggests that it is impossible really to derive advantage from educational technology without overhauling the entire educational edifice. Must we wait until we have dismantled and reconstructed the entire educational structure before we can take advantage of the offerings of educational technology? A technology of education can, and is being developed with the aim not only of making education more widely available, but also of improving the quality of education which is already being offered. Experience has shown that widespread use of closed-circuit television in certain British universities is having a great impact on university teaching by way of improving even the traditional lecture techniques. From this standpoint the section of the report 'Intermediate technologies' (Chapter 5), about the use of simplified technologies, adapted to each country's particular needs and possibilities, is especially relevant to African and other developing countries.

The content of teaching

In the foregoing section, we have been concerned mostly with the problem of the accel-

eration of educational expansion to cover not only school-age children but also the adult sector of the population. Another area in which education in developing countries is beset with problems is in the field of curriculum development and reconstruction. We have already referred to the problem of unemployed school-leavers who cannot be absorbed in the economies of these countries. Existing school curricula inherited from the former colonial régimes are by and large irrelevant and inappropriate to the needs of economic and social development.

The point is made, for example, that the curricula and teaching methods are often theoretical and academic, and do not include agriculture and technical education and manual arts, which these countries need for their development.

The report makes numerous references to the gap between the content of education and the living experience of the pupils. The schools, among other things, 'inculcate values into schoolchildren which estrange them from their surroundings, feeding intellectual and material ambitions which are becoming harder and harder to realize in a rural setting. Schools thereby push young people out toward the towns, having failed to instil in them the kind of values which should make people attached to their everyday surroundings'.

It is accepted, as the report recommends, that the development of authentically national educational systems which enable individuals to achieve an increasingly harmonious and positive integration at all levels into their environment is essential. It is certain, however, that the education system alone cannot accomplish this task merely by manipulating the school curricula to include rural subjects. The problems of the rural-urban exodus are not entirely, nor principally educational. They have their roots in economic considerations, namely, in the wide disparity in economic opportunities between the rural and the urban sectors of the economy. No matter how much agricultural or rurally-

oriented education they may have had, school leavers will not achieve a harmonious integration with a one-acre-one-goat-one-hoe subsistence economy.

Although there are some educational considerations bearing on this problem, the real solution to it seems to be in the field of rural development and transformation. It is village and small-town development, extension of health, education services, water supply, construction of access roads, organization of marketing facilities, and the like which will induce school leavers and those who have never been to school alike, to remain or go *forward* into rural areas.

This is not, however, to detract from the importance of curriculum reform related to the rural environment but rather to suggest that the school curriculum should not be looked at in isolation from other aspects of life in the community.

Much research is essential to develop curricula that will create in the children and adults alike a rational and experimental outlook towards their social and physical environment and foster attitudes which are favourable to development; this must be done in conjunction with other aspects of physical and economic planning in each country.

Child growth and development

The reconstruction of curricula, teaching methodology, examination instruments, and many other facets of educational change and renewal recommended in the report, all require that we have systematic knowledge about the children and adults for whom they are intended.

5 *The development of education for pre-school-age children must become one of the major objectives for educational strategies in the 1970s.*

Today, most of educational thinking and methodology in African countries, for example, is

still based on knowledge and research related to children of other cultures. Let me suggest that there is a crying need for programmes of research in child growth and development in our countries to provide a framework of knowledge on which to build curricula that are meaningful for the physical and social needs and of the cultural milieu of the learners. This is an area in which great technical assistance is essential and urgent.

Reforming teacher education

There is no area in which there is more urgent need for reform than that of the professional preparation of teachers. Implementation of the recommendations of the report demands a new type of teacher who is basically an educator. One cannot agree more with the report when it suggests that 'one of the essential tasks for the educators at present is to change the mentalities and qualifications inherent in all professions'; this is especially true of the teaching profession.

Although the last decade has been a period of considerable activity in the field of curriculum development and reconstruction in most countries of the world, almost all of the efforts in this area have been directed primarily to the improvement of curricula for primary and secondary schools. As far as African countries are concerned, little if any attention has been given to the improvement and modernization of the professional education of teachers.

Of all the aspects of the curriculum for teacher education there is not one in which there is more urgent need for reform than that which relates to the social role of the teacher. With the diminishing gap between formal and informal education, school and out-of-school, child and adult education, it is essential that the teacher should cease to be merely a classroom operator but should be a community leader. Teachers, more than any other group of professional workers, need to have a deep conception of the nature of

society and of their own role in influencing the shaping of social goals. They need to know much more than merely those things which immediately impinge on the academic welfare of their pupils. They need to have an adequate grasp of the main social, political and economic problems of their countries, and the role which education can play in alleviating, if not solving, these problems. It is equally important for teacher training institutions to demonstrate through their own teaching and involvement in community affairs the principles and methods which they advocate, instead of, as they do at present, merely teaching *about* how to teach.

In many developing countries, however, teacher education institutions stand in very poor and inferior relations compared to other institutions concerned with academic education, from the standpoint of libraries, staffing, laboratories and other teaching materials. There is need, therefore, not only to reform the professional component of teacher education, but also to accord a higher status to teacher education institutions.

Increasing aid to education

If the fundamental reforms in education proposed by the group were to be implemented, much greater educational aid to developing countries would be essential. Development is an international problem, and while self-reliance is a useful concept, no country today, let alone a developing country, can solve all its problems when left to itself. The gap between the poor and the more affluent nations of the world could never be bridged if only country-by-country approaches were to be relied upon. The continued flow of capital, technical skills and ideas between nations is a *sine qua non* for development.

As Philip Coombs had said in *The World Educational Crisis*, 'educational assistance programmes, whatever future labels they may wear, must become an accepted fact of life for at least the balance of this century. And they must acquire much higher dimensions—of size, quality, creativity and sophistication—than anything seen to date'.