
SUMMARY OF DISCUSSIONS

PROGRESS TOWARDS UPE IN AFRICA

Plenary Session

Following the lead paper introduced by Mr R L Smith, three crucial questions were raised:

1. Is UPE still a valid objective?
2. Are schools to remain the main vehicle for UPE?
3. Can UPE be provided on the cheap?

Before dealing with these questions, however, the point was made that most countries are planning UPE as an expansion of the formal system with its classrooms, teachers, equipment, curriculum, examinations and certificates when, perhaps, countries should really be looking for alternatives to the formal system.

It was felt that UPE is still a valid objective since the United Nations had declared that everyone should have the right to primary education. Access to education is the basic problem though this is intimately tied to the economic problem of trying to implement UPE without unduly straining national resources. Another problem is how to incorporate the African cultural heritage into the school system. Problems like these make agreement difficult on whether conventional schools and curricula are the best way of implementing UPE, but in spite of present disagreement, the African community would like to see children equipped with the necessary skills to deal with the life they have to face in the future.

Three further specific points were made:

1. A sense of nationality and pride in that nationality are a component of the educational process since national values and heritage must be passed on to succeeding generations.
2. Education is a human right, therefore developing countries should strive towards it.
3. Education offers the only path towards effective, integrated rural development and re-construction. Therefore, all citizens must be made aware of the developments and new ideas that can improve their life.

It was agreed that every child is entitled to education, the form and content of which will depend on the resources available in his country. Naturally, these resources will differ from country to country.

It was pointed out that even the retarded or handicapped child (such as the blind, and the crippled) can contribute to the betterment of society given appropriate educational opportunity. On that basis, UPE is an acceptable

objective. However, appropriate skills should be incorporated so that mass unemployment is avoided.

It was commented that parents in some areas have indicated that children should be taught through the national language in order to make them fully proficient in it, since language embodies their cultural heritage.

In order to gain an historical perspective, it was suggested that delegates should look at the recommendations made at the 1961 Addis Ababa Conference, where the following decisions were made:

- Universal, free and compulsory primary education should be provided for all.
- 30 per cent of those completing primary school should go on to secondary school.
- 3 per cent of those completing secondary education should proceed to tertiary institutions.

The 1968 Nairobi Conference felt that the 1961 objectives were naive and prompted by nationalist zeal. Nevertheless, it concluded that UPE was still valid.

In 1974, UNESCO and UNICEF felt concerned about the plight of nursing mothers and the underprivileged. This resulted in the signing of an agreement which sponsored a seminar on Basic Education in Nairobi (1974) at which 17 countries from the Africa region were represented. This Conference agreed that schools are fundamental to UPE activity. The Lagos Conference of Ministers in 1976 agreed with this conclusion. However, other modalities have to be included since schools are not the only means for achieving UPE objectives.

The Accra Commonwealth Conference of 1977 was asked to find out what progress had been made towards the implementation of UPE objectives. This resulted in the recent Commonwealth Survey.

The key question in UPE is how it should be made available to all. But this immediately raises issues of the modes of provision and the content of the curriculum and has led some people to conclude that the only educational provision that every person must receive is a survival package to help them cope successfully with their environment.

The seminar observed that the school system alone cannot meet the expected objectives of wholesale democratization of the educational process. The word "cheap" has connotations of low quality. Perhaps an improved (and more expensive) communication and administration system may yield better returns.

In response to a remark that some Ministries provided educational facilities without much expense to them, it was pointed out that some of the instructional methods that called for ingenuity and imagination especially in challenging situations also required more money and more sophisticated organisational strategies.

The seminar scrutinised the paradox that "apex-development" breeds a vicious circle in society; yet, "base-development" produces unemployment that culminates in frustration and unrest. An attempt to break this would be to develop educational programmes that provide training in appropriate skills

for making pupils useful citizens in society.

It was generally acknowledged that a re-distribution of funds is a very difficult problem because other sectors of public life demand adequate attention as well. However, the setting of target dates can be useful since they galvanize each country to make meaningful progress.

Perhaps there is a lesson for countries to learn before planning UPE from the fact that community schools prove better able to respond to pupils' real needs. Children taught in them are also more easily absorbed into society. Therefore, governments need to make a reappraisal of their formal system of schooling.

The cost of UPE can be reduced significantly by making greater use of community resources and of regional co-operation.

Group Sessions

Mr R L Smith, as consultant, prepared the following questions as a guide to the discussion groups:

1. Is there a role for non-formal education in our efforts towards universalisation?
2. What methods are available for cutting the costs of teachers?
3. What are the curriculum implications of universalisation?
4. What strategies are available for ensuring quality in UPE?

GROUP 'A' REPORT (Chaired by Mr P V Sephuma)

The group considered each of the questions and reached the conclusions noted below.

1. The role of non-formal education in our efforts towards universalisation.

At the beginning of the discussion a definition of non-formal education was formulated as "any form of organised education out of school".

Members were unanimous that non-formal education should play a complementary role in efforts towards universalisation as it can cater for those groups not accommodated in the formal system e.g.

- those who have not had schooling
- drop-outs
- school leavers who turn illiterate after some time.

As regards universalisation, it was felt that integrating the formal and non-formal systems is the most realistic approach as the non-formal system constitutes education for life.

It is essential to develop a common yet flexible curriculum which includes:

- (a) A core content consisting of the 3R's.

- (b) A survival content - nutrition, health etc.
- (c) Vocationalisation - training in basic skills.
- (d) Attitudes and values.

2. What methods are available for reducing overall costs of education with regard to teacher costs?

Those suggested by the group included:

- (a) Master teaching where one qualified teacher is assisted by two or three lesser qualified teachers. The salary of these assistants is lower than that of the master teacher.
- (b) Use of community volunteers such as retired teachers, nurses, parents etc.
- (c) Provision of adequate supplies of teaching materials to make the teacher more effective.
- (d) Shift system.

3. What are the curriculum implications of universalisation?

There is need for a relevant curriculum and flexible methods of instruction.

4. What strategies are available to ensure quality in UPE?

The following strategies were suggested?

- (a) For quality to be maintained in UPE, the set objectives must be met.
- (b) Proper advisory and supervisory assistance for teachers can improve quality.
- (c) Schools should be supplied with teaching equipment to help make teaching effective.
- (d) In-service teaching should be provided for all teachers already in the field.

GROUP 'B' REPORT (Chaired by Mr B Kang'ombe)

It was suggested that the group should first list the different forms of non-formal education without putting too much emphasis on exact definition since different countries used different terms for non-formal education (e.g. adult education, continuing education, non-formal education for children etc.). The following forms of non-formal education relevant to UPE were mentioned:

- Non-formal adult education.
- Mass media education.
- Programmes by Youth Services, (Youth Clubs, Village Craft Training Centres, Young Pioneers).

- Correspondence education.
- Night schools.
- Women's organisations/clubs/unions programmes.
- Functional literacy programmes run by external voluntary organisations.
- Non-formal pre-school programmes.
- Cultural organisation programmes.
- Periodical campaigns.
- Community schools.

After this, Mr Smith's questions were discussed in sequence.

1. Is there a role for non-formal education in our efforts towards universalisation?

The discussion focused on stating the specific role of non-formal education with respect to the curriculum content and types of skills which can be taught. It was suggested that:

- (a) Non-formal education must be complementary to formal education in terms of the curriculum content as well as in terms of the population coverage. It should provide the teaching skills, attitudes, specific functional knowledge to the whole community. It should offer general education to those outside the formal primary education system and should help to promote and integrate cultural education and socialization into the formal education system, thus checking against cultural alienation which may result from experiences in a foreign system of formal education.
- (b) Non-formal education programmes are delivered through a wide range of organisations. Therefore when well co-ordinated, these programmes help to maximise the use of human resources towards education.

In summary therefore, the group felt strongly that non-formal education still has a vital role in helping towards the implementation of UPE.

2. What methods are available for cutting the costs of teachers?

The question was taken to mean cutting down on the overall government education bill and not on the individual teacher's salary because, as public servants, their salaries have to be considered together with those of the rest of the public servants in other sectors.

The following measures were suggested for cutting down on the education bill (the measures are limited and we would have to be cautious of their implications on the quality of education):

- (a) The shift system maximises the effective use of trained teachers.
- (b) Increasing the student teacher ratio may be achieved by relieving the head master of some of his administrative duties, thus allowing him teaching, and classroom supervision time.
- (c) The use of para professional monitors, and uncertificated but well-experienced community personnel.

(d) Encouraging community self-help schemes to provide housing for public workers including teachers.

(e) The use of specialists other than teachers (e.g. agricultural field workers, nurses, etc.) to help in the teaching of their specialist subjects (mobilisation of local resources).

(f) The reduction of teacher training expenses by such measures as: having some non-residential training colleges, running distance teacher training programmes, running in-service teacher trainer training programmes, allowing for functional internship elements in the teacher training programmes, regulating the length of pre-service teacher training.

(g) All schools and colleges should do productive work to contribute to their running costs.

(h) Using teachers to handle both formal and non-formal delivery systems of education.

In summary, it was felt that the government education budget could be reduced through

(a) effective and maximum use of resources,

(b) encouraging active community participation and contribution in terms of provision of materials as well as construction,

(c) using various methods of teacher training to cater for the use of para-professionals who could be trained and maintained at inexpensive rates and would also allow for an increased pupil-teacher ratio.

3. What are the curriculum implications of universalisation?

Both primary and teacher training curricula have to be locally relevant broad and diversified in content, allowing for the wide range of interests and abilities of the children. Such curricula cannot be definitive but depend on the innovative ability of the teacher or the trainer respectively.

4. What strategies are available for ensuring quality in UPE?

During the initial transition, quality, defined in terms of UPE objectives, is bound to drop temporarily. But to ensure only a minimal drop for a relatively short time, there has to be a range of continuing activities namely - continuous training, curriculum relevance, improved effective educational management, and continuous educational evaluation.

Examination systems have to be periodically reviewed to ensure relevance to the objectives of UPE.