

UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION AND THE FUTURE

Plenary Session

The topic was dealt with as a symposium with contributions from Mr Smith and Mr Lijembe, consultants to the seminar, and Mr Akpofure, Director of the seminar. Mr Smith drew attention to statistical trends in Africa that were of relevance to UPE and drew from these trends conclusions, some of which he confessed might be contentious. He went on to predict what the position of UPE might be by 1985. Mr Lijembe made his response to this introduction, while Mr Akpofure presented the international dimensions of UPE and how international bodies could assist progress.

The summary which follows does not attempt to identify the contributors further, but rather to provide a view of how UPE will develop over the next five years.

If total enrolment trends continue, the predicted enrolments in Africa by 1985 are likely to be 82%, but this conceals a range which will extend from 100% in some countries to as low as 36% in some Sahelian territories.

The following matters will become of increasing importance in the future. Noted with each, are areas of action that may be necessary:

1. POPULATION SIZE AND GROWTH

Attention to population problems will become necessary. In less developed regions there is a high percentage of children below the age of 15 (40%-45%) which indicates an unfavourable dependency ratio.

In administration and control there is a tendency to employ young people who lack experience and the proportion of these younger people increases every year.

A high rate of population increase is a factor that could prevent the realisation of UPE. Coupled with this is the problem of changing attitudes to schooling. Therefore, there is a need for:

- Population statistics to be more complete.
- Population distribution to be tackled by collectivisation of villages or other means.
- Political will and popular socialisation to encourage parents and pupils to enter freely and willingly into learning as against using indoctrination as a tool.

The question of population growth rate in Africa requires immediate attention. To this end a co-ordinated effort of national social service sectors would be the best way to tackle some sensitive areas such as population management and culture.

2. VARIATIONS IN QUALITY OF EDUCATION

In some situations, quality of education may have to be given lower priority than expansion and may necessitate a redefinition of quality in terms of places provided rather than academic standards.

Curriculum change may have to be more radical than present trends in order to meet the needs of the increasing number of children from fixed or even decreasing resources.

3. EMPLOYMENT OF SCHOOL LEAVERS

The problem of the employment of school leavers is not essentially different from that of finding employment for any young person. The crucial difference is that those who have been to school have greater expectations than the others. There is also the problem of the unemployed school leaver who is in fact an unemployed child. Children in the primary school have expectations that schooling will lead to employment or further opportunities for schooling.

4. EDUCATIONAL REGRESSION

Where only a limited amount of education can be provided, there is always the danger of regression. Sending children to school means helping children to attain literacy. Literacy reinforcement can be effected through such media as the radio, the TV and newspapers. People cannot depend on these alone however as this would subject them to indoctrination. They should have access to all the world's literature and thinking. The aim should be to keep literates literate.

Literacy can sometimes be maintained through a nation-wide library service. Books that are more relevant to the people's way of life are preferable. Another aspect is the creation of a healthy political and social climate since these are necessary for encouraging writers and publishers.

5. SCHOOLING

There is likely to be an increasing range of school types. The traditional form of schooling will be one among others. In this respect, the following points may be noted:

(a) There is no alternative to alternatives meaning that all sectors of education need to be decentralised in order to allow curriculum and schooling to respond to variations in local needs and circumstances. However, such decentralisation requires co-ordination.

(b) There is need to face up to having auxiliaries and aides in the classroom.

(c) There is also need for a curriculum that encompasses local variety; that is, one which allows more local initiative.

(d) There should be more induction and in-service courses for teachers, and so there will be need for much bigger and more effective supervisory services.

(e) If teachers are to be retained there should be incentives such as promotion, special allowances, and provision for a change to urban teaching after working for 5 years in rural areas.

(f) Above all, there should be a move away from the idea of access to schooling and a move towards the delivery approach. It is no longer enough to build a school and leave the responsibility with parents for ensuring children's attendance. The idea of schooling must be "sold" by creating incentives such as school feeding, transport, itinerant teachers etc.

6. POLITICAL WILL

Education cannot entirely claim to influence political leadership but can sometimes help bring about desired change.

7. CURRICULUM

To meet the highly dynamic needs of society, curriculum design should respond to socio-economic objectives. These may be arrived at by such policies as pursuing a particular ideology, offering proper incentives, and introducing a language policy in schools.

8. LANGUAGE POLICY

Language in most parts of Africa is a sensitive area that sometimes forms a barrier to cultural enrichment. Experience in other parts of the world has shown that cultural diversity can enhance the development of a rich heritage. UPE/UBE should adopt a language policy that delivers education to the people in the most effective manner.

9. VOCATIONALISATION OF EDUCATION

If governments were to learn better from past experiences in planning there might be fewer of the problems associated with education. For instance, most African countries have in the past prepared people to take up jobs that would never absorb all of them. It should therefore be a pre-requisite in the future that education responds to the tempo of economic development for the given time and circumstances so that benefits are enjoyed by all.

10. NON-FORMAL EDUCATION

Past experience has shown that sometimes education received at school is not life-oriented. To augment the efforts of formal education, UPE should aim at intensified non-formal activities that would render life meaningful to all sectors of the population.

11. NATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF UPE

Traditional perspectives must be retained in UPE. Education must be looked upon as a socio-economic process. Its efforts, aimed at national development need to be enhanced by inter-ministerial co-ordination, which implies a need for a realistic method of encouraging co-operation.

12. INTERNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF UPE

Foreign aid agencies are primarily concerned that projects which they support should have vocational or development components. Therefore, countries making applications for assistance should ensure that this aspect is emphasised in the project description. They should also make sure that all aspects of the project are presented as part of a coherent whole and as part of their own national development plan. Governments need to be mindful of the length of time that may be taken for an application for foreign aid to result in the receipt of that aid. Good presentation and a knowledge of the specific terms of reference that control an aid agency's work can facilitate the process.

Group Sessions

The following questions were distributed to each group as a suggested guide to discussion:

1. How realistic is it to seek for control of population growth? Which agencies should co-operate to achieve this end?
2. Is it realistic to talk about re-defining "quality"?
3. What are the implications of a move to "UBE"? What should such a programme look like in terms of length of cycle, aims and outcomes?
4. How do we envisage teacher education developing and changing - are the initial training, induction and in-service patterns a useful model?
5. Are incentives a realistic strategy? What alternatives present themselves?
6. Is it useful to talk about "delivery" rather than "access"?
7. What plans might be made for co-ordinating education with social, economic and rural development agencies?
8. If schooling remains divorced from "real life" what means are open for solving the problem?
9. Is decentralisation of planning, finance, control, supervision or curriculum development realistic?
10. How can non-formal or distance teaching methods in schooling and in teacher education be implemented?

GROUP 'A' REPORT (Chaired by Miss J.S. Attah)

The group applied itself to questions related but somewhat different from those suggested. These were as follows:

1. Where do we go when UPE has been achieved?

In discussing this topic the group had to assume that UPE can be achieved.

Two areas were then examined:

- (a) Universal secondary education.

(b) The danger of reversion to illiteracy for pupils who leave school with only basic education.

The group felt that the aims and objectives of primary education had to be clearly defined and the curriculum restructured periodically so that primary leavers can function successfully in their environment whether it be rural or urban. The group advocated the integration of the school with the community through programmes such as community schools, in order to minimise the migration of primary school leavers from rural to urban centres.

In order to make rural life more attractive the government should provide social amenities such as water, electricity and good roads. An efficient village library service would help both the young and the old not to revert to illiteracy.

There is therefore an indication that emphasis is shifting from UPE to Universal Basic Education where basic education is seen as a period of mastering skills rather than a length of time spent in school.

It was felt that the objectives of Basic Education should be to develop attitudes and values, numeracy, literacy and functional skills (such as health and nutrition, science, environmental studies and practical skills such as agriculture, carpentry etc.)

In addition, it was suggested that a careful study should be made of the implications Basic Education might have on lengthening the first cycle of education, the curriculum, teacher training and the role of inspectors.

Finally, the group agreed that Basic Education should be seen as part of the total education system, which in turn should be part of the National Plan. The structure should be such that it will take care of those who would proceed to the second and third levels of education as well as those for whom BE is terminal.

2. How realistic is it to seek for control over population growth? Which agencies should co-operate to achieve this end?

African countries have different political, religious or cultural views on the question of population control. For some countries, control does not necessarily mean the reduction of population but adequate provision for their people. It was generally felt that states should plan for population growth rather than its control.

In countries that exercise population control (that is the control of the size of the family) population education forms part of primary and adult curriculum. To this end, the ministries of health and social welfare should be involved.

Some states have experienced difficulties in planning because of migration of people from rural to urban areas and from one rural area to another. Also there is the external factor of movement due to political upheavals beyond the control of the state.

The improvement of rural facilities referred to earlier and the re-settling of migrant population should go a long way to solving the population problem. Finally, the group identified some agencies whose co-operation should be enlisted in the efforts to achieve population control, namely churches, voluntary organisations, communities and government ministries such as Education, Agriculture, Health etc.

3. What plans might be made for co-ordinating education with social, economic and rural development agencies?

Members stressed the importance of having co-ordination among all the development agencies such as Education, Agriculture, Health etc. It was also felt that more use could be made of these agencies in educational programmes and therefore there should be consultations and seminars involving all the agencies of development.

As there is a possibility that over-specialisation could be a hindrance to the achievement of integration, it was recommended that consideration should be given to a single institution in which people working in the community such as teachers, agricultural extension workers and health inspectors would be trained. For the degree of co-operation needed to achieve such results, it was recognised that there must be co-ordination at the highest level.

4. How can we use non-formal or distance teaching methods in schooling and in teacher education?

The general feeling of the group was that distance education has vast and untapped possibilities for pre-service, in-service and upgrading programmes for teacher education. This is because, apart from being an inexpensive and effective method of training, it can reach a large number of teachers without removing them from their schools and environment.

It was also identified that distance education can be used for adult functional programmes, out of school second level programmes and for vocational training by correspondence. However, the problem of the maintenance of equipment for distance education was noted.

5. Is it useful to talk about "delivery" rather than "access"?

Members felt that the two terms were interrelated and that removal of barriers for "access" to education would enhance its "delivery".

GROUP 'B' REPORT (Chaired by Mr I.J. Omondi)

The group discussed the set questions briefly.

1. How realistic is it to seek for control of population growth? Which agencies should co-operate to achieve this end?

The group expressed the view that a number of ministries and departments should be involved in the control of population growth. Those suggested included Statistics, Health, Education and Community Development. In addition, voluntary agencies such as women's organisations and adult education programmes should also be involved.

It was suggested that the ideas of planned parenthood (which is necessary for maintenance of the quality of family) should be taught to families. It was emphasised that this should not be left to voluntary agencies but that government should also take a leading role to ensure wide population coverage and also to help integrate the idea into the total plan of national development. It was also suggested that the implications of population trends and parenthood should be taught to children through their parents to ensure success and to make the idea sound less foreign.

2. Is it realistic to talk about redefining "quality"?

Quality is seen as a dynamic term relative to specifically defined objectives of UPE and UBE.

3. What are the implications of a move to "UBE"? What should such a programme look like in terms of length of cycle, aims and outcome?

Primary education will have to be more vocationalised. There will have to be a free flow of clientele between PE and BE and therefore both systems will have to accommodate a varied clientele. The length of BE will have to vary with the particular skill to be taught as well as with the client's previous educational exposure. Both the PE and BE curricula will have to offer a core of locally functional skills without necessarily isolating communities.

4. How do we envisage teacher education developing and changing? Are the patterns of initial training, induction, and in-service training a useful model?

The models of initial training, induction and in-service training are seen to be vital for professional up-to-dateness and effectiveness.

5. Are incentives a realistic strategy? What alternatives present themselves?

Hardship allowances should be seen as temporary measures as, ultimately, the said areas will have to be developed appropriately. And such development will have to be the responsibility not only of education but of government and the community in general. Other types of incentives are necessary for professional development and stability (not stagnation).

6. Is it useful to talk about "delivery" rather than "access"?

Both systems are important. They are supplementary and complementary as well as situational. (e.g. education for epidemic diseases may have to be delivered). It was however felt that generally, the "quality" and level of accountability of BE should be enough to "sell" the system without having to impose it on many communities.

7. What plans might be made for co-ordinating education with social, economic and rural development agencies?

There should be:

- (a) Interministerial consultations leading to interministerially planned and financed projects for effective deployment of manpower.
- (b) Efforts should be made for a fairer, more flexible and more efficient sharing of government and foreign resources.

8. If schooling remains divorced from "real life" what means are open for solving the problem?

Primary education should be more pre-vocationalised. It should offer career information and education. There should be a greater emphasis on the development of strong effective self-reliant attitudes.

9. Is decentralisation of finance, control, supervision or the curriculum realistic?

Financial policy must be centralised but the distribution and use of the funds may be partially decentralised. Financial control for capital developments is best centralised but funds for recurrent expenditure can well be decentralised while allowing for some degree of flexible central monitoring.

10. How can we use non-formal or distance teaching methods in schooling and in teacher education?

There have to be national guidelines for core subjects with room for adoption of certain aspects to meet local needs and demands.