

COMMONWEALTH REGIONAL CO-OPERATION

Plenary Session

Following the presentation of papers on this theme by the Director of the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat and the observers invited to the workshop, general discussion on issues raised in the papers was invited.

Regarding the question how the Commonwealth could help member states out of administrative and financial problems, it was suggested that nothing could be done unless the initiative came from member states to get assistance. Information about the availability of assistance can always be obtained from Commonwealth publications or by application to the Secretariat.

It was felt that a sense of co-operation and totality of the Commonwealth with common concern towards UPE would be achieved if meetings such as the current workshop could bring together people from as many regions as possible. The value of co-operation with other organisations in matters of common interest such as WCOTP, UNESCO and regional bodies was also acknowledged as was the practice of inviting representatives of other Commonwealth regions.

If a shortage of funds prevented individual member states from following up strong recommendations, application through Ministries of Education for assistance from CFTC could be made.

In answering the question how the Commonwealth could assist in training programmes, it was mentioned that every proposal was treated according to its merit. The Commonwealth intervention, for example, might take the form of the supply of expertise or material support. Local transport and other services would be a responsibility of the local government.

Because of lack of facilities in African countries, it was felt that co-ordination and co-operation among regional organisations are essential. But there is also an important role for international bodies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat, UNESCO and WCOTP where their interests coincide. In trying to achieve this co-operation it is necessary that the national and international input should be specified. For example, UNESCO could come to the rescue in particular projects by supplying lecturers or other experts from universities, provided the course content was well defined and outlined, the duration of the course was clearly stated, the profile of the participants was described and an accurate estimate of costs in terms of a particular currency was supplied.

Member states could benefit greatly by appointing in each Ministry of Education a Commonwealth desk officer to co-ordinate all communication between his Ministry and the Secretariat. Fortunately an increasing number of countries have done this with the result that Commonwealth documents are more effectively used and Secretariat response to requests is more efficient. UNESCO has provided a centre in Dakar for training document officers, but there are few countries that have as yet taken advantage of this opportunity.

Because of slow and weak communication links in Africa, letters do not always reach their destination as soon as expected. For example, correspondence which is sent through Ministries of Foreign Affairs do not always reach the Ministry of Education in time for appropriate action to be taken. It was suggested that, as a corrective measure, letters might be sent through Diplomatic Missions and Embassies as already happens with the German Embassy in Bonn. Local universities could also disseminate information through radio broadcasts.

Co-operation between Commonwealth and UNESCO offices could be strengthened for the implementation of projects of common interest. Elements of protocol within a broad umbrella of communication channels could be arranged to facilitate contact. Co-operation with bodies such as WCOTP and regional organisations could be more informal.

Regarding projects, it was suggested that member states could visit one another to learn more about them. There are already arrangements made by the Commonwealth Secretariat for university lecturers to visit other places. Such an arrangement could be made for other educationists as well.