

LEAD PAPER BY MR R L SMITH

The Case for UPE

There is a danger in generalizing from the "more developed" countries to those characterized as "less developed". Certainly there are many instances of models from Western Europe inappropriately applied to the developing world. However, a glance at some "now-rich" countries and the path they pursued towards mass education, is extremely interesting. To take Japan and the USSR as examples, it can be seen that both these countries achieved 90% to 95% primary enrolment before developing secondary and tertiary schooling. Japan had reached UPE by 1912, Soviet Russia by 1930. Japan achieved universal junior secondary education by 1930, Soviet Russia by 1950.

A similar pattern of the development of the base of the educational pyramid first and only later development of the apex can be observed in more "open" and spontaneous systems such as France, Germany, USA and Britain.

In the less developed regions of the modern world a completely opposite pattern has been followed. In Asia, Latin America and Africa, growth at the apex has been much more rapid than at the base of the educational pyramid - both in terms of rates of growth of student numbers, and in rates of financial expenditure. It may well be argued that all countries do not have to follow the same developmental paths. Further, many of our countries have had to transform their economies more or less overnight, despite a lack of higher and middle-level manpower.

What have been the results of the "apex-first" developments? Graduate unemployment is an increasingly apparent phenomenon in many countries. (In Africa, 10 or 15 years ago, we were worried about the primary school leaver problem; now the unemployed or under-employed graduate is beginning to concern us.) In Latin America and Asia we must ask if it will ever be possible to employ all the graduates we are producing. Has not the apex been over-expanded if we have so many unemployed and under-employed graduates of high schools, technical schools, polytechnics and universities?

Questions are also being asked about the rates of return to tertiary education. Economists like Blaug* present strong evidence to support the view that primary schooling "pays off" to society much more than does higher education. One third of the countries of the world were surveyed, including 25 in the less developed regions and this conclusion was true for all of them. Graduates from higher education can expect to earn much more than primary school leavers, especially when their earnings are measured over a life-time.

*See "Third World Quarterly, I 1979"

However, higher education probably costs around 30 times as much as primary schooling. (In one African country the comparative figures are as follows - for every £1 spent on primary, £10 is spent on university education. Another way of expressing this is that one university student keeps 99 children out of primary school).

The economic disadvantages of "apex-oriented" education systems are not the only ones. The social arguments in favour of the "base" are very powerful. Governments buttressed by the targets of Addis Ababa, Santiago de Chile and Karachi, have promoted UPE as an "inalienable" right of their children. For Africa, 1980 was the date set for achieving UPE. By 1970, it was envisaged that 70% primary enrolment would be achieved (and 15% secondary). Certainly, the primary enrolment targets have generally not been met despite strenuous and often remarkable efforts. On the other hand, secondary enrolment targets have generally been met and exceeded. A look at Education budgets in many of our countries reveals where all the true priorities lie. One country, whilst naming UPE as a "top" priority, reveals that its spending on secondary education is almost double that on primary schooling though there are seven times as many children in the primary sector as in the secondary. So much for the "inalienable right".

Similarly, the notion of equity in schooling is fashionable. The truth is that our over emphasis on the apex has created the inequalities we seek to destroy. Our elites are still with us. The challenge to a "new" nation to build up its identity and create a spirit of nationhood is an obvious one. Universalizing primary schooling is an equally obvious way of creating an "enlightened and participant citizenry" who can contribute to nation-building. Yet in too many countries this chance of expressing national identity is denied many children. Naturally the arguments concerning population growth, escalating costs and the making of very difficult choices present themselves. Perhaps the case made out is more one against higher education than one in favour of universal primary schooling. Yet it is important at the outset of this seminar to rehearse and emphasize the crucial importance of making opportunities for learning and self-improvement available to all our peoples, not just to a privileged minority.

Again, it is not simply a matter of declaring that UPE is alive and well and even flourishing in many parts of the world. Our rates of progress have been slow because of a number of inter-related factors. Population growth has been, and continues to be spectacular. Many countries can expect a growth rate of at least 3% per annum by 1985. By that date almost half our populations will be under 15 years of age. Further, the bulk of this expanding population will probably continue to live in rural areas. The majority of the youngsters of this generation and the next will need to find their self-fulfilment in village communities. Above all, the dominating brake on universalization has proved to be the cost constraint, linked inevitably with the economic capacity of our countries.

But before proceeding to the second part of this paper, a more detailed examination of the findings of the Commonwealth survey, it is worth pausing to measure recent general achievements. By 1970, roughly half the targets set for that interim date had been met. If the trends since 1970 should continue then perhaps 60% of the ultimate primary enrolment target will be met by this, the "Addis Ababa" year. We must also recognize the very severe problems of wastage which have accompanied these not inconsiderable achievements. On the more positive side, many countries have achieved remarkable annual growth rates in enrolments.

What the Commonwealth Survey Reveals

(a) Aims of the Survey: In accordance with a recommendation of the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, held in Accra, the Commonwealth undertook a survey of Commonwealth countries in order to assess their progress towards Universal Primary Education, to discover the means and methods Commonwealth countries were using, to evaluate the major constraints in achieving universalization and to shed light on any innovative practices which might speed and facilitate UPE.

(b) Methods of the Survey: In May 1978, a questionnaire was despatched to some 33 Commonwealth countries. This instrument was prepared in consultation with staff of the University of London Institute of Education. Pressure of time prevented field-testing of the questionnaire and, in the event, some items had limited relevance to some countries. However, most items appeared sufficiently clear for respondents to offer useful answers.

(c) Responses to the Survey: Of the 33 countries surveyed, 15 eventually responded. (Of the 14 countries in the Africa region 7 responded.) Though this response rate appears disappointing, recognition must be made of the extreme pressure under which many Ministries of Education have to work. However, the research is quite severely limited if recourse has to be made to already published reports and obsolescing development plans. The validity of findings may be so impaired as to make coherent policies for aid and development more difficult.

(d) Key Issues Arising from the Survey: The most strict definition of true UPE would be universal attendance - all the children of a given age-group actually attend school. Of the surveyed countries in the African region, Kenya, Mauritius and Seychelles might lay claim to this with Lesotho and Tanzania rapidly approaching the target.

Universal Capacity is a less strict definition of UPE - there are enough places but, for one reason or another, not all children attend. Perhaps a significant repeater population absorbs too much of the capacity.

Universal Accessibility is another definition - enough places exist but the distribution of schools is unequal. Thus urban areas may enjoy 100% attendance whilst isolated areas or those with difficult terrain do not have sufficient schools. In some countries, low enrolment of girls illustrates another aspect of the access problem.

The question of what is meant by UPE is illuminated by a discussion of how the term is used in practice. In some countries, UPE has meant the institution of a specific programme. Nigeria, Ghana and Tanzania offer good examples of this approach. In other countries, universalization is to be achieved by a more evolutionary trend. A target date may be declared and gradual expansion follows until universalization is reached. Swaziland exemplifies this approach.

Another major aspect of UPE is the element of compulsion. Allied to this is the matter of fees. Most countries recognize the difficulty of compulsion where fees are also demanded. None of the African countries surveyed practise compulsion and fee-paying. Ghana, Nigeria and Tanzania practise compulsory, free primary schooling. All the other countries have voluntary systems though The Gambia, Malawi, Sierra Leone, Swaziland and Uganda require fees. Some countries offer free tuition but text books or uniforms must be purchased by parents or pupils.

Financing: UPE is another area of great interest. Central governments may have their efforts supplemented by voluntary agencies (such as missionary societies) or by local community contributions. Sierra Leone exemplifies this pattern, as does Swaziland. Tanzania's self-reliance philosophy has resulted in considerable local community involvement in paying for UPE.

(e) Current Practices and Progress: The survey reveals that at least seven of the fourteen Africa Region countries have achieved sufficiently high levels of enrolment to claim UPE. Ghana, Kenya, Lesotho, Mauritius, Seychelles, Tanzania and Zambia all have enrolment ratios of 85% or more. The financial effort required to reach the last 15% or 10% may be disproportionate to the rewards. For those countries with the biggest backlogs, crippling financial burdens may result from attempts to universalize using traditional, school-based methods. The teacher supply situation exacerbates the financial problem. Expanding the teaching force and retraining under-qualified staff in order to provide schooling for all may prove the largest, single element in vastly increased educational spending. Strengthened inspection and supervisory services, as in Botswana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone; curriculum renewal, as in Swaziland and The Gambia; development of in-service teacher education as in Tanzania and Zambia - all these are aspects of the continued push towards universalization. All governments have to make choices in planning educational development. What is of note in surveying progress in the Commonwealth countries of Africa is that the majority of countries rank UPE high amongst the competing demands on their limited resources.

(f) Constraints in Universalizing Primary Education: A remarkably uniform picture is presented by all the countries responding to questionnaire items concerning constraints in and brakes upon progress towards UPE. All countries comment first on the high cost inherent in universalizing primary schooling. Countries are already spending 20% to 25% of their recurrent budgets on formal schooling (Nigeria 24.2%, Unesco Yearbook, 1977). Additional allocations of resources are unlikely to be forthcoming. It is obvious that unless objectives are scaled down or rephased, or less costly types of education are developed, then the cost constraint will continue to hold back universalization. Locally raised contributions to the costs of schooling are an increasingly attractive answer to the financial problems of UPE.

Problems of teacher supply, qualifications and retention figure prominently in questionnaire responses. These questions are obviously linked to costs. Countries like Botswana, Ghana, Lesotho, Sierra Leone and Swaziland face problems in these areas.

Poor physical facilities present a further constraint.

Wastage in all its guises - repetition, drop-out and school-leaver unemployment - acts as a considerable challenge to countries attempting universalization. These problems are not merely the offspring of UPE - they have been with us for many years. Universalization will exacerbate wastage in many countries, particularly where provision for secondary education cannot keep pace with UPE.

The quality of schooling is mentioned as a cause for concern in such countries as Lesotho, Nigeria and Seychelles though it is true to say that few countries are entirely satisfied with the qualitative aspects of their provision.

Problems of irrelevant curricula are also mentioned in the survey as constraints on UPE. The entry to school of much larger numbers of children, representing perhaps for the first time the complete range of ability, may render a bookish and inappropriate curriculum quite meaningless to pupils.

Additional constraints keeping children out of school may include problems of:

transport and communication

scattered or nomadic populations

over-centralization of control and weak administration

poor school and population mapping

social and religious barriers

low rate of adult literacy affecting parental enthusiasm for schooling

(g) Innovations and Alternatives in UPE: As has been stated, UPE in the area surveyed has generally been based on the formal school system. Innovations may be conceived of as developments outside the formal school - alternative approaches. What innovations and alternatives are open to us?

Raising Finance: The use of local contributions in cash, kind or labour needs further exploration. Which countries have relevant experience of developing community involvement which they can share with us? Are governments making special incentive-grants to backward areas? Tanzania probably has much to teach us in terms of self-help schemes.

Cutting costs: Can unit costs be cut by improving teacher/pupil ratios? Such measures as double-shift systems, use of teacher-aides and national service programmes may contribute to the teacher supply without excessive increases in costs. Alternate day attendance or shortening the school day may contribute significantly to more economical use of teachers. Teacher costs represent 70% to 90% of the education budget. If teachers in Africa could handle 65 children a day instead of 35, the saving in costs would finance UPE in 19 more countries tomorrow.

Redistribution of funds: If £1 could be taken from every £5 spent on higher education and applied to primary schooling, then enough cash would be available for UPE at the 90% level everywhere in Africa tomorrow. If money cannot be raised or diverted from elsewhere then savings in teacher-costs are the only real lever available to raise enrolments. Countries like Tanzania, Sierra Leone and The Gambia which have, or are planning, multi-pronged approaches to universalization stand the best chance of achieving UPE within a reasonable budget. The "Community Education Centres" of Tanzania attempt to bridge a number of gaps such as those between school and community, and between formal and non-formal. The Bunumbu project in Sierra Leone represents an alternative approach to the teacher's role in the community. Educational Broadcasting is being used in some countries to help underqualified teachers. Swaziland's Teacher Innovation and Distribution Centres will help to infuse new curriculum developments and provide in-service facilities for teachers at the local level.

It may be that no revolutionary or startling innovations and alternatives are in fact available for replication. Rather, the secret of successful universalization may lie in the application of a number of familiar and complementary techniques. Many countries wishing to universalize may first have to enter the area of attitude change to convince parents, pupils and teachers that the formal school model with which they are familiar may have to change radically if everyone is to get access to schooling. Educational authorities such as Beeby and H M Phillips, whilst recognizing the faults and shortcomings of school systems, declare that schools remain the most viable means of achieving UPE.

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