WCOTP AND UPE IN AFRICA

LEAD PAPER BY MR O M SEHERI

One of the requisites for the successful implementation of universal primary education policies is the co-operation of a well-prepared and well-motivated teaching force. It goes without saying that the expansion of the primary school system, which the universalisation of primary education is all about, will make very heavy demands on the commitment and participation of teachers, far in excess of what they have been accustomed to.

In discussing the implications of UPE, one has heard repeated on many occasions the need for teachers to be prepared to teach longer hours and to larger classes in demonstration of their commitment and loyalty to their countries. One has also heard of the greater dynamism and originality which the teachers are going to be called upon to display. The net effect of all these sayings is that the teachers will be called upon to make greater sacrifices than ever before and that a better calibre of person will be expected in the teaching service before any of the demands made on the teaching force can be met satisfactorily.

Over and above the teacher being called upon to make a greater contribution to cope with a larger job, we are told that a professionally trained teacher will of necessity have to guide and pull along with him some less professionally prepared colleagues who will have to be introduced into the teaching profession in order to cope with the numbers of primary school pupils who will increase at a pace that will outpace the rate at which additional teachers are being trained in established institutions of teacher education.

There is no gainsaying the financial implications of UPE and the likely debilitating effects of the financial considerations on UPE. In view of this there is a tendency to think that one of the ways of coping with the problems is to aim at making savings on the larger cost items like teachers' salaries. Some people are likely to think of these savings in terms of persuading teachers to agree to take reductions in their emoluments as a sign of loyalty or commitment to the cause of UPE and to their nations.

The World Confederation of Organisations has over the years held as one of its priority objectives the professionalisation of the teaching service. This has not been governed by narrow trade unionist objectives aimed at maximum gain for the membership. On the contrary, the main rationale for the professionalisation of teaching has been to ensure that the beneficiaries of the teaching has been to ensure that the beneficiaries of the teaching service get maximum benefit out of the service and that the members of the profession in the end are able to enhance their status and to improve the acceptability of their profession. UPE would stand to lose, and to take down with it whatever has been achieved in education, if the unversalisation of education was ever to detract from the professionalisation of the teaching service.

No doubt the rapid expansion of the educational system, caused by the extension of the educational service, to the traditionally deprived members of the community, will demand a rapid increase in the manpower engaged in teaching.

As in other professions such paraprofessional manpower that may have to be engaged need not be used to depress the professionally acceptable standards of the teaching profession. Such depression can only do harm, not only to the teaching profession, but to the cause of education as a whole. On the other hand the members of the teaching profession will be quite prepared to help in the advancement of these "emergency teachers" to raise them to the acceptable professional standards for their own benefit and for the benefit of education as a whole.

The teaching profession, and WCOTP in particular, is the first to recognise its obligations arising from the adoption of the principles of the democratisation of education. The members of the profession are prepared, like all other nationals, to make a contribution to the development of education and the advancement of all members of the community. But the members of the profession are not prepared to accept that they alone should be called upon to make such a sacrifice. The teachers feel that their profession makes a significant contribution to national development, even if their contribution cannot normally be calculated in terms of Maluti and Lisente. They feel that their contribution entitles them to a fair retribution comparable to what is meted out to other colleagues in the public sector, the parastatals and in the private sector. Under no circumstances will teachers take any less treatment. This statement is by no means a threat. All it seeks to clarify is that, even where teachers may be forced to accept lower than fair remuneration, they will do so under protest and that, in the circumstances, they cannot be motivated to play the major role that UPE imposes upon them or to meet squarely the heavy demands that the democratisation of education makes upon them. Those who may be inclined to force teachers to make financial sacrifices in favour of UPE should be under no illusions that their action, and that alone, is the greatest disservice to the cause that they may be claiming to support.

Another alternative to forcing teachers to take lower financial returns for their contribution is to cause them to teach longer than normal hours. While this may look attractive because it reduces the size of manpower that may have to be engaged, it is bound to have the same effects as the lowering of teachers' salaries. A teacher can only be productive to the extent that he operates at optimal capacity. Just as under-utilisation of teachers is likely to be detrimental to the cause of education, the over-utilisation of teachers will certainly detract from their efficiency and their effectiveness. Such teachers can only provide a physical presence, but they will have very little impact and cannot be expected to meet the objectives that UPE is attempting to meet.

In conclusion, the WCOTP would like to appeal to those responsible for education in the various countries represented at this seminar to recognise the important role that teacher organisations can play in the planning of the provision of education, be it UPE or any other purpose that the educational plan in question is intended to serve. Not only will the teachers be affected by the implementation of these plans, but the teachers will be the chief operators, often left to their own devices, when such schemes have to be turned to reality. The goodwill of the teachers and their commitment to these plans is of paramount importance to the fulfilment of those objectives. There is no better way to ensure this goodwill and the commitment than to involve the teachers in the preparation of these plans and to get them to express their points of view as early as possible in the development of these plans. Teachers, as grass-roots operators in education, are likely to bring about realism in the consideration of plans for the implementation of UPE policies. It is hoped that where the consultation of teachers has not been done, it will not be considered too late to do so still and to give the teachers an

opportunity to express their genuine opinion on the plans and the future as they see it.

The World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession appreciates the opportunity that it has been given to observe and to make a contribution to deliberations at this important Commonwealth Seminar on Universal Training Education. WCOTP stands ready to continue to collaborate with the Commonwealth Secretariat and member states in the follow-up action arising out of the recommendations that will emerge from this seminar. It is our hope that our members in the various countries and members of the teaching profession in general will continue to be called upon to express their views on the plans that will emerge from this seminar and on other education plans that will be developed nationally, regionally and internationally.

LEAD PAPER BY MR RAYMOND J. SMYKE

Universal Primary Education planning is underway in several states. It has been the subject of discussion at the international level by three ministers of education conferences, Now, all eyes are on Nigeria where UPE is several years old. In view of all this, the Commonwealth Secretariat is performing a timely service by examining UPE from the practical side with those responsible for the day to day implementation of education - specifically the senior civil servants who finally have to make it work.

WCOTP has touched on this subject in several of its Delegate Assembly theme studies, including Equal Opportunity and more recently, Compulsory Education: Social Expectations at the Lagos Assembly in 1977. The latter resolutions are available from my colleague and friend O.M. Seheri, who has kindly consented to represent WCOTP at the Seminar.

In order to keep this paper brief, I would like to state its conclusion first. The solutions to UPE and other education problems must spring from African soil and be the result of serious co-operation within the total education community. The stakeholders in the total education community are (a) parents, (b) government, (c) the civil service, (d) the teachers, (e) universities and (increasingly) (f) students. This simply stated yet not functioning conclusion concerns above all (a), (b), (c) and (d).

A description of what happened to African education during the past two decades from a number of viewpoints will be useful.

Education Today

The education sector throughout English speaking AFrica is the largest employer of trained personnel. It is second to defense in the use of national and international resources. It touches more citizens than any other sector except perhaps farming. Its size generates differing expectations.

Parents view the process as a means of providing their children with a better life, regardless of their own social position. Children soon learn that school is a stepping stone to a job. Administrators and politicians see education as a vehicle to perpetuate a form of government. Churches look on it as a means for inculcating ethical and spiritual values. International agencies regard education as a source of manpower for development and modernisation. Teachers see it as a social good as well as means of employment. Indeed, it would be difficult to find an illiterate peasant without a view about the local school or its personnel.

This is true, of course, in every country of the world. However, in a developed society with universal education, near full employment and alternate means of self-advancement, the pressures on education are dissipated.

In other developing areas of the world such as Latin America, Asia, and the Arab world, the problems differ from those of Africa. For example, the strains of recent independence for the most part do not exist. The social function of education is buttressed by an age-old and well-defined cultural heritage, with colonialism a historical fact in the past. These regions are concerned with updating and adjusting a generally accepted system making it more responsive to locally defined needs, but within an accepted parameter. In this sense Africa is unique. A national or continental philosophy of education is still a matter of very active debate, carried on by Africans trained, for the most part, outside of Africa and reflecting what they were taught elsewhere. Those who have attended an African university are often lectured by expatriates or those trained abroad. This debate assumes that the colonial education structure must be changed even though no consensus exists as to how.

The two most immediate problems seem to be (a) the need for some clear national consensus or goal and (b) the financial burden that UPE imposes on the nation. The origins of the first problem can be traced by examining three separate institutions: the teaching profession, the development planning function, and the new civil servant international and African.

The Early Teaching Profession

The first teacher training institutions appeared in English-speaking West Africa and in South Africa in the late 19th century. They came later to East and Central Frica and to the French-speaking countries. Before this most teachers received informal instruction in the home of missionaries, who were initially responsible for education. Candidates were chosen for the promise they showed as leaders, for their intelligence, and the zeal with which they embraced the word of God. Since they were expected to serve as both catechists and teachers, the formation stressed moral training, preaching the gospel and proselyting. After the 1880s when government grants were made to voluntary agencies and examinations were prepared for teachers under a West Coast inspectorate, these teacher-catechists were found wanting in pedagogical skills. Many of them managed ultimately to meet professional standards, largely by self study in their own free time.

The teacher-catechists were a hardy lot who, after home formation, had to fend for themselves in rural areas under extremely adverse conditions with little or no salary. The inspiration that catechists received directly from outstanding European missionaries seemed to sustain them during the very difficult periods. As education expanded and formal training institutions were established, the education of teachers was separated from that of preachers, but the connection with churches remained.

The early mission control of education was conflict ridden. When government subsidy was made available, it was distributed to voluntary agencies to pay teacher salaries, sometimes based on examination results. In addition, the grants were intended to cover certain designated educational costs, but the agencies had great latitude in their application. Since the cost of furniture, fixtures, and transport for expatriate staff were relatively fixed items, the only area where economies could be made was African teacher salaries. This seemed reasonable enough from the European point of view but made little sense to an African teacher trying to support a family.

At the time, the teaching profession held little or no status for partially qualified primary school teachers. It was a dull, humdrum job that lacked security, status and opportunity for advancement. It is small wonder that the urgings of school proprietors fell on deaf ears. Since the majority of teachers were not articulate and educated only to primary level, the mission hold on them was immense. However, for secondary school teachers, those with degrees from Fourah Bay College and elsewhere, the grip of the mission was less firm and subject to negotiation. Inevitable tensions arose. Teachers who questioned "God's Policy" were labelled ingrates; some lost their jobs.

The Formation of Associations

A number of issues prompted teachers to form professional associations: inequality of mission teacher salaries compared to those of government teachers with the same qualifications; severe discipline invoked by expatriate employers on teachers; lack of opportunity for advancement, since top positions were always held by Europeans; the fading of the white man's charisma as it became clear that adoption of the foreigner's values did not in fact give entrance to the foreigner's world; the apparent double standard of Christianity which, upon close comparison of the Gospels with everyday life, suggested that Africans were second class citizens, even in the Kingdom of God. All this - couples with the multiplicity of Christian doctrines preached by the various denominations - provided grounds for legitimate doubt about the message brought by the white man. But it was perhaps the economic reality of earning less money that coalesced all of these tensions.

Most of the national teacher associations in English-speaking West Africa began in the 1920s, although Sierra Leone and South Africa trace their origin to before the turn of the century. In East Africa territorial associations were forming prior to World War II, while in Central Africa most emerged after the War. The circumstances of their beginnings are remarkably similar, although there was little inter-African contact among teachers at the time.

The Roots of Confusion

During the decade of the 1950s three crucial developments took place affecting African education. First, the timetable of independence accelerated beyond all expectation. Second, sharp differences of opinion developed on the rate

and type of educational expansion: local African groups were concerned more with education for all than with training an elite. Third, inter-governmental organisations like UNESCO were able to finance their own education programmes in Africa, challenging the basic concepts of colonial education. With the convergence of African independence, desire for mass education and for effective intergovernmental participation, there arose a termendous demand for popular education which the existing structures could not accommodate. The result was a mass intake of unqualified teachers and perhaps worse, unqualified trainers of teachers. This depressed the profession to such an extent that society in general - parents, the establishment, and teachers themselves - lost confidence in the ability of the profession to perform its normal social function. This low state of teachers was reflected in the classroom with the result that few students chose teaching as a career.

This was an Africa-wide situation which was further complicated toward the end of the decade when national independence - 17 new states in 1960 alone - created a demand for African leadership to staff the establishment, serve in the political sphere, and fill the many jobs being vacated by Europeans. This process of Africanisation had only one source of qualified personnel to draw upon: the upper echelons of the teaching profession, those few trained, dedicated teachers who were primarily responsible for the functioning of education in their countries. This draining away of experienced teachers took from the profession its only hope forinternal self-improvement. There was never any question of assessing manpower priorities; the national interest demanded Africanisation of all sectors of government and the teaching profession responded courageously.

In the decade of the 1960s the educational structure was vastly increased responding to pressures from parents, students and government for more education, in the hope that this would open up doors for better employment. This expansion was coincidental with the development of the relatively new phenomenon of national planning.

Both were going on side by side but with this important difference: teachers and administrators responsible for education were almost all indigenous Africans, while planning was in the hands of expatriate experts operating on the basis of non-African models. It was not until the early 1970s that it became apparent that planning in Africa, on the whole, was "falling short of expectations". By then, the rapid educational development of the previous decade was out of control. The result was a veritable inundation of under-qualified school leavers, largely from primary and middle sectors, who entered an economy with few emplcyment opportunities. School leavers from rural areas drifted to the large cities in the hope of finding work. This mass unemployment with attendant strains on the country's social services was an African-wide phenomenon.

While generous foreign assistance aided in the expansion of education, the heaviest resources were local in origin. This meant that by the end of the 1960s, many African governments were seeing education consume the largest part of the national budget. Still, the function of education was not serving the state. Why?

The Failure of Educational Planning

National planning or development planning and its sectoral components, which include education, was introduced into Africa about twenty years ago. It appeared as both a rational and simple solution to the ills of under-develop ment. As the years passed it became apparent that planning, on the whole,

was not working. Its severest critics said simply that "it was a total failure" while in polite international terminology it "was falling short of expectations". A 1969 Sussex University conference focused on the disillusionment with planning. Its two-volume report stated that "there are thousand and one reasons why planning has not been successful", including the weakness of statistics, isolation of planners from administrators, preoccupation with plan elegance rather than relevance, major planning decisions being made abroad, most plans being merely an appeal for aid framed by donor agencies, more electoral political than economic significance, sabotage by administrators, the assumption of questionable economic theories, and of course the straight forward political considerations which many economists were unable to comprehend. It is suggested that it may not have been the total fault of planners, but rather the formidable African variables they had to face and, as expatriates, their inability to cope.

Unfortunately, the greatest failure in the whole planning process was experienced in the education sector. The reasons are quite apparent. In technological planning for infrastructure or capital projects, there is really only a limited area for debate. Where to build a road and how to surface it, where to place a dam, where to dig a copper mine, how to expand a port facility - the decision usually results from a technical study carried out by competent people. It is discussed, altered, adopted and a contract let. The biggest problem is finding the money. But if it is prompted by the donor agencies of the UN, the whole package is assured - from the suggestion to the ribbon cutting. Not so with education. The variables mentioned by the Sussex study, the multiplicity of opinions, the absence of a clear national policy and the non-involvement of teachers, caused a tug-of-war between indigenous and foreign philosophies of education. The result was conflict at the decision-making stage which prevented progress and ultimately insured failure. Planning was not, of course, an end in itself. It was the basis for giving and administering foreign aid to help the development process, and thus it gave birth to the new international civil servant!

The New International Civil Servant

A by-product of the planning process was the short term expert sent by almost every United Nations agency, by governments carrying out bilateral assistance, as well as by voluntary groups, in a well-intentioned effort to aid Africa. These experts, who normally stayed less than two years, were drawn almost exclusively from the university communities of the developed world, to advise on every phase of education from pre-primary to adult. Eager to travel and pregnant with ideas, they were often culturally unsuited for the task they had to perform. Back-stopping this invasion of pedagogues were the first generation of international civil servants employed by the United Nations and its specialised agencies. The exception was the International Labour Organisation, which pre-existed the UN by a generation and had well-established professional ranks.

The new international civil servant, if he was an American, entered the field with experience from the Marshall Plan; if he was English or French he entered through the disbanding colonial service. Only the socialist countries were new to the arena, and they generally dispatched people from their political departments. Congealing this lot into a world-wide civil service was no easy task, but between 1950 and 1970, after two decades of experience, one could begin to identify a type of bureaucrat well-paid and entrenched, with sensitive political antennae, and a genuine desire to effect some change in the world. The brilliant ideas generated by these people

were often muted by political and budgetary considerations. Thus, what emerged as the aid package for developing countries, was often the result of tough headquarters infighting, with no genuine indigenous contribution.

Therefore when headquarters staff dispatched the university don to the field it was not to gather information, for the headquarters often knew much more about a country than did the local administrators. It was rather to implement a pre-designed, pre-conceived package deal with financing and staff included. If the local people did not have the immediate wisdom to see the value of this benefaction, they were soon convinced by a combination of pressure, pleading and resort to higher authority. In the final analysis anything that carried its own financing was accepted whether it fitted into a plan or not. The immutability of foreign aid and the failure of planning led to the gradual erection of an invisible wall between the local administrator destined to receive the advice and the expert dispensing it. Not surprisingly, the post-independence generation of younger Africans assigned to the civil service, to the education, political and military sectors feel, quite rightly, that they are competent in handling their own affairs with limited external guidance.

The New African Civil Servant

By the early 1970s there was little doubt that a new breed of national civil servant was gaining control of the whole African establishment. In the seventeen or more states run by the military, the absence of political parties ideally suited both the soldier and the administrator

Immediately after independence, when Africanisation was taking place, the positions vacated by Europeans were filled from the teaching profession, as noted earlier. With ample classroom experience, many of these men and women were older when they joined the civil service, and under the normally early African retirement age they did not serve many years. In the meantime a large number of students were filling the new African universities, while others were studying abroad both on government bursaries and as private students.

Hardened in the university ambiance at home and abroad, these men and women replaced the more mellow civil servant who was brought up under colonial-mission influence and filled in immediately after independence.

The new civil servant is on the whole intelligent, articulate, uninhibited by colonialism, and bursting with self confidence. He is better paid and furnished than his contemporaries and enjoys a superior status in society. With the vigor of youth, he moves to correct the apparent injustices of the world around him, among which is the over-abundance of foreign advisors vending immutable plans. Steeped in the vision of Africa's past glory - the Empires of Ghana, Manding, Songhay, Zimbabwe and others - the new civil servant reasons that his people have absorbed Islam and Christianity rebounded from slavery, dispensed with colonialism and now have only to sweat out international interference before they will be able to solve Africa's dilemma with traditional African genius.

The Teaching Profession in Africa Today

During the same twenty year period when planning was being developed, a remarkable growth among teacher associations was taking place. In addition, representatives of African teacher associations have been meeting annually

since 1959 with their colleagues in WCOTP throughout the world. This has provided the opportunity to view their own problems from a global perspective. It can be demonstrated that teachers wish to place at the disposal of their own governments their unique experience and potential stemming from their direct contact with the majority of their countrymen. Not to be underestimated is the growing influence of women teachers in Africa keen to encourage the participation of the teaching profession in development.

The willingness, indeed the desire, to do something substantive for their country has not been seriously considered by civil servants or the other stakeholders in education!

Teachers, as the largest literate and unified group in all African nations, come into daily contact with both children and adults in every corner of the country. They can reconcile the common man's fears and the nation's development objectives better than anyone in the society, while at the same time preserving the nation's cultural heritage. This seems reason enough to look upon the teaching profession as a partner in, rather than an obstacle to development. There is a growing awareness among African teacher leaders that the profession must work towards a solution to education problems including UPE. But first teachers and their unions must be viewed as part of the solution rather than part of the problem!

Conclusion

The educational sector has expanded to a maximum extent and is using an overwhelming part of the national budget. Governments have reached the limit of their resources for education, but the social pressures are such that expansion continues in the direction of Universal Primary Education. One of the alternatives is to make the education sector more efficient, more productive and more responsive to the country's national objectives.

This can only be done when teacher unions and the new African civil servant join forces as professional colleagues. The first step is serious, face-to-face dialogue between the full-time elected representatives of teachers and their brothers and sisters in the civil service, sitting down as equals. Given the desire to find common solutions they will certainly arrive. This, after all, is the African way.