
OFFICIAL ADDRESSES

1. Dr. K.T. Maphathe (Minister of Education, Sports and Culture)

It affords me great pleasure to welcome you all to Maseru which will, for the next ten days, become the venue for this important conference on Universal Primary Education (U.P.E.). Our Government appreciates that Lesotho was identified as the host country for the conference and we hope we shall be able to live up to the expectations of participating members of the Commonwealth.

Our stand on the issue of universal primary education was made as far back as 1971, in the "The Education Order 1971" (Order No.31 of 1971), which stated:

"As soon as circumstances permit -

(a) "every child shall be provided with opportunities and facilities to enable him to develop physically, mentally, morally, spiritually and socially in a healthy and normal manner, and in conditions of freedom and dignity;

(b) any child who is physically, mentally, or socially handicapped shall be given the special treatment, education and care required by his condition;

(c) the best interests of the child shall be the guiding principles of those responsible for the education and guidance; and

(d) it shall be the duty of the parent (as the case may be) of every child of school-going age to cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable to his age, ability and aptitude by regular attendance at school or otherwise and it shall be the duty of everyone concerned with the education of a child to ensure that he shall be protected from practices which may foster racial or any other form of discrimination. He shall be brought up in a spirit of understanding, tolerance, friendship amongst people, peace and universal brotherhood, and in full consciousness that his energy and talents shall be devoted to the service of God, and his country".

It is evident, therefore, that the Kingdom of Lesotho is committed to the achievement of universal basic education for each child in order that he fully achieves his potentialities, adapts into his society and becomes a useful citizen of his State. We have set this ideal as our ultimate goal. But we are aware that, due to economic realities and circumstances, the achievement of this objective cannot be realized next year or even in the next five to ten years. We have reasons for holding this point of view.

Firstly, Universal Basic Education is not achieved by universal entry into primary Class 1 or even universal enrolment of children of 6-12 years (or 6-15 or whatever age) but only when all children and adults have acquired the skills, knowledge and values necessary for full and healthy participation in society. This implies a greater supply of appropriate literature - reflecting

cultural realities and aspirations, for children and adults, as well as appropriate literature concerning the policies and technologies necessary for development. On the one hand it should be recognized that to have children complete primary school, is not necessarily a valid measure of accomplishment of our objective. The real measure of achievement is the learning by the child and his interest in wanting to continue learning, and this can only be expected to be achieved when there are adequate and appropriate facilities, materials and teachers. While Lesotho and any other countries on the African continent are seriously exploring ways of increasing the effectiveness and reducing the cost of these essential ingredients of UPE, there is no escaping the reality that they are expensive.

Secondly, experience has taught us that by stating a fixed short-term date for achieving such a major national goal, we would be setting ourselves unrealistic expectations, and if we failed to achieve the goal within the specified time limit we would be open to negative criticism from inside and outside and such criticism could harm our self-concept and pride and result in lower morale which would frustrate educational output. When we set ourselves fixed targets or goals, there must be greater probabilities of success than failure open to us. As it is, the economics of our situation warrants no such statement of fixed dates. We do not want to suggest that we do not accept accountability, but rather that UPE should remain a long-term goal until economic conditions have so improved that the probability of achieving the goal, is quite high. We also need research to enable us to make a considered decision.

In Lesotho, we are convinced that Basic Education should include the skills of fluent logical and concise speech, the ability to read, write, and make simple calculations; the ability to relate well with others, to use one's leisure time properly, to contribute towards one's personal and family's support and so on. These basic skills are already well-organized in the relevant school curricula. Primary schools are, therefore, under our present circumstances, the best organized institutions for the delivery of basic education to the largest numbers of children. Organized non-formal education agencies would be another group that would be used to complement and supplement primary education in order to ensure maximum achievement of basic education. Whilst primary education should make the acquisition of most of the skills of Basic Education available to all children as far as possible, we are aware that it is the contribution of other agencies in a child's environment (like the home, the playground, the church and others) that are essential in the development of skills, understanding and values. This realization obliges us to step up the non-formal education programmes offered by both Governmental and voluntary agencies. In the area of non-formal education such organized institutions include among others the Lesotho Distance Teaching Centre and the University's Institute of Extra-Mural Services.

While the Lesotho Government is convinced of the need to provide Basic Education to every child of school-going age (6-12 years), it is nonetheless aware of the constraints that make the achievement of the need impossible for sometime. However, a great deal is already being done to facilitate UPE. By taking over the payment of salaries of all teachers in primary schools in 1974, the Government relieved parents of the need to pay tuition fees and left them only with school maintenance fees and the buying of books for their children. This increased school enrolments a great deal. The Lesotho Government also wishes to ensure that every child who attends primary school should have all required books and instructional materials, but as long as the present difficult economic situation lasts, it will limit itself to a subsidised scheme whereby parents pay certain fixed amounts while Government itself pays the rest. Orphans and destitute and special-need children will be given

special consideration. Experience has taught us that when parents contribute directly in some way to their children's education, they become more concerned about the latter's educational progress. The plan to produce and supply instructional materials to all children, is currently being negotiated and will hopefully be implemented by 1983. We note that inability to purchase instructional materials (including books) has been a potent factor in school drop-out.

The Government is also thinking of strategies whereby local communities could be responsible for the maintenance of their primary schools. Such accountability would bear many useful results, for example, communal concern and involvement in the planning, implementation and evaluation of local educational projects.

In conclusion I must indicate, therefore, that whilst we in Lesotho are committed to making primary education available to every child of 6-12 years, we cannot see this goal becoming fully achievable so long as the economic situation is what it is. Government wants first to improve the lot of most if not all families, by provision of more and better employment opportunities for the largest number of adults possible. The fact that over 85% of our primary-age children are in school is due to a great extent, to the fact that parents see education as a lever facilitating employment and employability, and "force" their children to attend school.

Our Government will be waiting eagerly for the results of your deliberations. It hopes that the economic and socio-cultural realities of our nations are going to be kept constantly in perspective when discussions and recommendations are made. Let me also observe that the curriculum development process and the instructional materials resulting therefrom, are an area where Commonwealth countries, particularly in Africa, can share experience and materials.

2. Mr. Rex E.O. Akpofure (Director, Education Division, Commonwealth Secretariat)

It is my privilege and pleasant duty on this occasion of the opening of this Commonwealth Seminar on Universal Primary Education for the Africa Region, to bring you on behalf of the Commonwealth Secretary-General the greetings and good wishes of the Commonwealth Secretariat. I do so with a special sense of satisfaction: First because this is an educational occasion - a matter of urgent interest to all our member states. Secondly because the occasion enables me to fulfil a hope I have long nourished of visiting your country and getting to know at first hand something of its people and culture. Finally, I am glad to be here on a Commonwealth platform - testifying to the continued value of our Commonwealth of Nations as an action-oriented organisation - within its limited resources.

I am delighted too to highlight this seminar as one of our most purposeful examples of educational co-operation on the Commonwealth today. It is the second of such seminars; the first was held in Bangladesh last October for the Asia Region. The fundamental aim is to examine ways and means of exchanging commonwealth co-operation in achieving progress by member states towards U.P.E. in Africa.

Participation at this seminar has been pitched at a high level. Countries are being represented either by Directors of Education or Chief Education Officers - having to do with policy formulation. This clear testimony of the importance and urgency which our member countries attach to the subject. In addition, we have a representative of the Asia region, where the first seminar was held; as well as representatives of international organisations as observers: these are UNESCO and the World Confederation of Organisations of the Teaching Profession (WCOTP) - both old friends and campaigners in the field of education.

During the next 10 days, we shall be exchanging national and international experience, discussing our failures and successes within the commonwealth family and looking at possible solutions to the many problems of extending primary education to our education-hungry populations. In addition to the country reports which we shall be receiving and the lead papers by our consultants, we shall also be visiting a number of your educational institutions here, which have a direct relevance to the subject of primary education, whether in the formal system or in its non-formal dimensions. We thank the Government of Lesotho for these opportunities.

This seminar is an example of Commonwealth co-operation. It is testimony to the lively interest in and support for our Commonwealth of nations today. That Commonwealth draws its vitality and resources from the willing support and resources of its members, through projects such as this, through Ministerial Conferences which determine our areas of educational priority and co-operation and through your various contributions. It is therefore most appropriate that I should convey to the Government and people of Lesotho the appreciation of the Commonwealth Secretary-General on behalf of the Secretariat for the many facilities and resources which the Government of Lesotho has and will be making available for this seminar during the next few days; but even more important, for the warm welcome which we have been shown since our arrival.

Finally, I must thank our many distinguished guests this afternoon for their presence which is evidence of their support - not only our Commonwealth members but also our international friends and fellow toilers in education and other fields. The many departments of the Secretariat such as the CFTC, the Science, Health, Legal, Economic Affairs, Food Production and Rural Development - to mention only a few - all collaborate with corresponding bodies or departments of our international friends and we are pleased to see them represented here today.

It remains only for me to thank you all for your support and to express our pleasure at being here. We look forward to enjoying the cultural programmes which we understand have been provided for us during the next few days. We are confident that they will contribute in no small way to our mutual understanding of one another (and this is what the Commonwealth is all about) in our search for the development of a better world for mankind. Thank you for all your support.