4. The Role of Non-Formal Education: *Manzoor Ahmed*

Introduction

Without going into the question of definitions and concepts of education - formal, non-formal and informal, I would like to stress that the demarcation lines are by no means clear and rigid; there are large grey areas between programmes characterised as formal and those described as non-formal, and between non-formal programmes and informal learning. It is of no consequence how a programme is characterised as long as it serves its purpose. In fact in real life, in many instances, educational solutions that fall into the grey zone between formal and non-formal, combining elements of both, are likely to be the most pragmatic solutions.

It is, of course, appropriate and necessary (for analytical purposes rather than for neat administrative classification) to distinguish between non-formal and formal approaches to learning and to examine the operationally significant features of non-formal education.

It is important, for example, to note that the significance of the concept of non-formal education and its practical application lies not in labelling certain programmes as non-formal but in creating the awareness that education is not to be equated with schooling, that a very large amount of systematic and vital learning goes on outside the school system, and that the planning, resource allocation and strategy building for national education must take into account the totality of organised education including components other than the formal institutions.

It is also necessary to remember that non-formal eduation does not constitute a system in the sense that formal education does, and it cannot be viewed as a parallel or alternative to the formal system or as a counter-system. In specific instances, of course, a non-formal effort may serve the same or a comparable educational purpose as a formal programme.

In respect to the human resources of a country and the role of non-formal education, an essential point is that the problems relating to human resources are only partially educational. The development design, priorities and objectives, the economic dynamism of the country or a region, and the values and norms of society, are crucial factors that affect the process of mobilising human resources and set the parameters within which the educational variables function. Educational measures alone cannot solve the problems of unemployment or of poor income and productivity of workers. We return to this question later.

Keeping in view the above premises, we now proceed to examine some critical concerns in human resource development; consider the possible application of non-formal education approaches in efforts to solve the human resource problems; and, in conclusion, discuss the conditions for effective use of the non-formal education approaches.

Some Issues in Human Resource Development

The main human resource concern is that all working-age citizens should possess such skills and knowledge as they can apply to productive pursuits in order to ensure a reasonable standard of living for themselves and their families and to contribute to the general welfare of society.

Obviously this concern cannot be allayed for a country when a large proportion of its children for one reason or another cannot enjoy the benefit of primary education, when the absolute number of illiterate people is growing, when large numbers with various levels of educational achievement are unproductively idle, and when the majority of the population is trapped in a vicious cycle of underemployment, low productivity and low income. Unfortunately, this is too familiar a picture.

The Demographic Factor

In any prognosis of educational progress in the developing Commonwealth countries, the demographic factor looms as a dark cloud. Projections prepared by UNESCO statistical office on the assumption that present educational growth trends will hold, show that in the three developing regions of the world school enrolment must increase between 1975 and 2000 by 418 million students compared to actual increase of 252 million achieved with enormous efforts during the previous 25 years from 1950 to 1975. Even this level of increase will leave in Africa 28 per cent, in South Asia 27 per cent, and in Latin America 8 per cent of primary-age (6-11 years) children out of school in the year 2000. As for the age-group 12-17 years, the out of school proportion in the year 2000 will be 51 per cent in Africa, 61 per cent in South Asia and 29 per cent in Latin America.[1]

The main constraint to expansion of educational opportunities is, of course, financial. Between 1960 and 1974 the share of GNP going to public education expenditure increased globally for the developing countries from 2.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent. Data for more recent years are not available for many countries. But already by 1974, many countries seemed to have been approaching the ceiling of the share of national wealth devoted to education.[2] The conclusion is inescapable: in the years ahead it will become increasingly difficult for developing countries to continue to increase the share of GNP and of the total public budget devoted to education.

A pertinent point regarding educational costs is that economies of scale do not seem to apply. Over the years the global trend is for expenditure per student to increase just as the total enrolment has increased. Moreover, as larger proportions of secondary-level children are enrolled, the cost per student will also rise. It has been found that in Africa second-level education is six times as costly per student as primary level, two-and-a-half times as costly in Asia, and double the cost of primary level in Latin America.[3]

The quantitative dimensions of the problem of education are certainly different for different Commonwealth countries. The above global picture is indicative of the nature of the problem that affects all developing countries in varying degrees - some are affected much more seriously than others. However, the problem of quantitative expansion is not the only - or even the main - headache for most countries.

From the human resource point of view, the critical question is what happens after, or as a result of, an individual participating in an educational programme.

What Happens after Primary School?

A number of African Commonwealth countries, such as Botswana, Kenya and Zambia, have reached over 80 per cent participation rate at the primary level and a high rate of completion of primary schooling. Tanzania, by sheer determined effort, is also approaching universal primary education. These countries are now faced with the two-fold question: "How many of those who complete the primary level should go to secondary schools?" and "What should the rest do?"

In Tanzania, by deliberate government decision, the access to second-level education has been kept at a level commensurate with employment opportunities, and at present less than 5 per cent of primary-school completers enter secondary schools. In Kenya, where also there is an official policy to restrain secondary enrolment but where the private sector in education has a somewhat freer hand, about one-quarter of primary-school completers go to secondary institutions. As for the rest, the expectation is that they should enter the world of work by taking up their family's traditional occupations in farming, pastoral activities, various rural trades and services, or begin a phase of institutionalised or informal preparation and apprenticeship for various artisan skills and trades.

The arrangement, we all know, leaves much to be desired. Whatever method is used to decide who should be chosen for the secondary school, the decision is viewed as unjust by those who are left out. The frustration and unhappiness of students and parents, the constant pressure for the expansion of secondary-level facilities, and the length parents are willing to go (including financial sacrifices and illegal methods) are ample testimony to the fact that rigidly restrictive policies satisfy few. The high level of unemployment among the youths and young adults, and the large numbers that flock to urban areas, show that the primary school leavers (and drop-outs) are not satisfied with their assigned lot. At any rate, the implicit assumption that sufficient economic opportunities exist to offer a reasonably satisfying livelihood to young people with a minimum level of education and with or without some additional occupational preparation, is plainly invalid in most situations in the poorer countries or poorer regions of countries.

This unhappy state of affairs raises many questions. How can the privilege of post-primary education be granted more equitably - or at least how can the perception of injustice and the consequent resentment be minimised? Are there reasonably effective ways of handling the transition between the completion of primary education, or a certain level of secondary education, and entry to the world of work? To what extent can the learning experience at the primary and secondary levels be restructured to facilitate transition to the productive economic role? And are there alternatives to the restriction of educational opportunities on the basis of presumed demands of the job market? Answers to these questions have ramifications beyond education. But it will be argued later that the principles and methodologies of non-formal education must figure prominently in approaches to the resolution of these questions.

Mobilising People's Productive Potential

The greatest human resource challenge, particularly in countries with agrarian economies and high population density, is the unleashing of the creative energy of the people, raising their consciousness about the potential of their collective efforts and helping them organise for self-help and self-reliance. One element of this process is the growth of community organisations which can manage essential social services and run co-operatives and other collective production enterprises. Another is the formation of cadres of community workers who can serve as the bridge between the extension and service agents of the government and the community. A third is the development of the capability and motivation of the masses for active participation in decisions that are expected to transform their life. The process of mobilising the productive potential of the masses is to a large extent an educational process - creating a critical awareness among the masses about their situation and the potential for change, bringing new knowledge and information to the people, training vast numbers of rural cadres, reorienting and changing the attitudes of bureaucrats and government decision makers and even technical experts, helping people learn about forming and running local co-operatives, and so on. This certainly is not just a Ministry of Education task but a national challenge. However, an Education Ministry, if it so chooses, can play in partnership with other agencies, a central role in this endeavour.

In the context of community-based provisions for basic services and popular participation in the development process, the question of literacy assumes a special significance. Literacy, by opening the door to the world of printed words, can become an invaluable instrument for consciousness-raising and popular participation in the development process, when the contents and methods are chosen appropriately. The problem of illiteracy in the developing world remains serious. Although some slow progress has been made in reducing the proportion of illiterates, their absolute numbers keep rising. Some 1000 million people in the world today are estimated to be illiterate. A literacy campaign need not be, and generally should not be, the precondition for community-based basic services and a larger community role in development efforts. But where a large proportion of the adults in a community are illiterate, serious and sustained popular participation in local development is unimaginable without literacy and other adult education components. Therefore, developing viable approaches to the removal of illiteracy in conjunction with the provision for basic services and other community-based development activities is an important issue in human resource development with a very distinct bearing on non-formal education possibilities.

Schools as Community Learning Centres

The question "How can the primary school be restructured so that school leavers can adjust reasonably well to life outside?" has already been raised. Another important question is how the primary school can make a contribution to the community's self-help and development efforts.

Tanzania has made a determined and successful attempt to universalise primary education and at the same time has tied restricted secondary school access to the employment prospects for secondary graduates. Tanzania's answer to the two questions raised in the previous paragraph is the community school.[4] The community school, originating from

experiments begun in Kwamsisi in 1971, embodies the principles of education for self-reliance propounded by Julius Nyerere. It is a centre of many communal activities. Every school includes an important element of productive work and self-reliance activities in its curriculum; manual work is a core subject for all pupils; and each school must contribute significantly to its own upkeep. Village development projects including the provision of basic services are adopted as "centres of interest" in the school curriculum; and parents as well as children benefit from the educational services of the school. The management of the school and the development of its productive activities are in the hands of a village education committee.

The propagation and growth of the idea and practice of the community school is the responsibility of a group of change-agents known as MTUU (Mpango wa Tanzania/UNICEF/UNESCO) which includes a team of Tanzanian teachers, curriculum specialists and inspectors who are stationed in teachers' colleges throughout the country. Their job is to help village schools develop curricular materials, test teaching methods and materials, assist in the training of teachers, and advise on various problems faced by individual schools. The community school programme has spread by now to 35 experimental schools and is to be extended throughout the nation by 1982.

Whether and to what degree the community schools answer the questions posed above will depend on the extent Tanzania is successful in its programme of building Ujamaa villages aimed at transforming the life of the rural people. The greater the stride made in rural development, the greater will be the prospects that the students of community schools will find the opportunities for a satisfying life in their villages.

"Second Chance" for Youth

We have noted that large numbers of young people in the developing countries of the Commonwealth never enter primary schools or drop out from them without acquiring a useful level of literacy and numeracy. Even when a full coverage of all primary-school children is reached, which is far from being a reality for the majority of the less developed countries, a large number of children will not complete the cycle nor will they achieve a functional proficiency in literacy and numeracy. At the secondary level, few if any of the less developed Commonwealth countries have over a quarter of the age-group in school. Should all these disadvantaged children have an educational opportunity to attain a minimum level of functional skills, and should some of them who choose to do so continue beyond that minimum? Cutting off educational opportunities for the majority of the children and youth, except probably in the form of sporadic adult literacy courses, is certainly a denial of the development of the human resources up to their full potential.

At the primary level, it is possible to organise abridged and part-time programmes for the adolescents and youth, and it has been found that they can cover the whole primary cycle in a relatively short period because of their greater maturity. The costs for such programmes can be quite low because they can be implemented through existing facilities and teaching personnel.

The principle of universal opportunity for education at the primary level is not disputed in any country. But at the secondary level, how

wide the access should be is a policy issue. Some countries follow a rigidly restrictive policy, and almost all developing countries in the Commonwealth attempt to regulate the expansion of secondary education. The reluctance to expand secondary education hinges partly on its cost and partly on the expectations it arouses regarding occupations and earning that cannot be fulfilled. These objections can be met if the costs of secondary education can be lowered and the occupational categories can be delinked from formal education qualifications.

It is also possible to utilise secondary facilities and personnel for part-time and evening programmes for those who do not enter the regular full-time programme, for those who drop out, and for those who look for a second chance later in life. The range of possibilities for low-cost alternatives is wide and may include the use of distance learning methods and a combination of productive work with academic learning.

The ultimate solutions of the problem of occupational expectations created by secondary education are, first, effective rural development that opens up economic opportunities in rural areas, and second, measures to reduce the gap between white collar urban jobs and manual occupations. While these solutions can produce results in the long run, there is evidence that where a relatively non-restrictive policy in secondary education has been permitted, as in South Asia, the currency of the secondary diploma has gradually become "devalued" and these diploma holders have begun to accept jobs other than white collar ones.

In most developing countries, an institutional solution has been sought in the form of vocational and technical training schools for some of the young primary school leavers who do not find a place in the regular secondary school. By definition, these vocational and technical training facilities are more expensive than academic schools and cannot be opened to a large proportion of the young people. Moreover, in most situations, in the context of agriculture-based low-income economies, the formal and institutional approach to middle-level skill development does not appear to work very well. What Philip Foster called the "vocational education fallacy" some 20 years ago in the case of Ghana to describe the inefficiency, inappropriateness and false expectations of formal vocational training whether in agriculture or in industry, is still applicable for this type of programme. The lessons have remained unlearned by national educational establishments as well as by external donors.

Some programmes that go by the label of non-formal education do not necessarily offer the right solutions. Pertinent examples are the youth service projects in Kenya and Jamaica which combine camp life, military discipline and practical training for selected youths. While the results in employable skill development seem to be good for these projects, the intensive resources they require put them beyond the reach of all but a very small proportion of the out-of-school youth.

The question of a viable approach for skill development is taken up later. To sum up the arguments presented above, it may be said that countries following restrictive policies in second-level education should rethink whether the goals of democratising education, fair play for the youth of the nation, and optimal development of the human resources, do not demand that second-level education is more widely open. Various non-formal approaches, some mentioned above and others to be mentioned later, can be used to initiate affordable education

programmes at the post-primary stage. While the alternative of a freer access to secondary education is not a painless process, the costs in terms of perceived social inequity, frustration of young people, and the waste of human potential of a rigidly restrictive policy are surely higher.

Combining Learning and Production

Three major educational problems brought out in our discussion so far are: (a) how to organise effective skill development programmes so that the needs of economic development are satisfied and the young people find employment; (b) how to make the general primary and secondary education more relevant and meaningful for life rather than just a preparation for the next stage of formal education; and (c) how to handle the problem of rising costs that continue to plague all efforts aimed at the quantitative and qualitative improvement of education.

Certainly no one line of action or approach can be expected to solve these problems. However, one promising strategy that should figure prominently in any serious approach to their solution is the possibility of combining productive and income-producing work with learning activities.

Primary and secondary schools can have production and service units attached to them; their nature depending on the environment and market demand. Schools in rural areas can concentrate on agriculture, manufacturing and the services needed in rural communities; whereas in towns the emphasis will be on repair, construction, craft work and the services in demand there. Primary-level children will not be expected to do a man's work, but they can contribute their labour according to their physical capacity as they normally do in their own homes. Parents, community members and teachers can be involved in the economic enterprises of the school according to the school's needs and be paid for their services.

Sporadic examples of the school as an economic entity are found in many countries - mostly managed by private and missionary organisations. Cuba has gone further than most countries in introducing large-scale commercial farming in their secondary-level "schools in the countryside", where each day students alternate between work and study shifts.

In spite of a general problem of youth unemployment and that of the quality of skills acquired by workers, almost all middle-level skill training - an area in which there often are specific shortages - can be carried out more effectively and at lower costs through guided on-the-job practice than through institutional courses. There is also a greater assurance that the skills learned will be used, and that the training will lead to employment.

All economic enterprises - especially the larger ones and co-operative and collective projects - can play an educational role in both skill training and general education for workers and their families. It is a matter of self-interest for economic establishments to do so, and also a social obligation since these establishments make use of the physical, human, and institutional resources of the community.

As a general rule, educational services designed to reach the most underprivileged and poorest groups have a better chance of success

when they are combined with production and income generation. Economic poverty and the poverty of the institutional setting, which often go together, prevent these groups from benefiting from conventional educational activities. This constraint is likely to be better overcome when ways of raising the income of the participants and their families can be blended with the educational efforts.

Again sporadic examples can be found in developing countries of efforts to use productive activities as a vehicle for learning. One such case that has generated many useful lessons is the Brigades in Botswana. They enable young out-of-school people to engage collectively in specific types of paying activities (construction, manufacturing, service, etc.) which are so organised that the young people while working systematically learn certain skills and get a general education - at no cost to the public or themselves.

The idea suggested here must be clearly distinguished from various attempts to introduce vocational and practical arts in schools - invariably raising the costs of schooling and achieving little by way of teaching employable skills.

Mass Media - the Unexploited Resources

Mass media facilities are widely available in most countries for public information and entertainment. Only in a very few developing countries, however, is the potential for systematic educational use of the communication media fully exploited. The most under-utilised media are printing and radio, both of which can be low-cost, reach large audiences, and be adapted for specific groups. A combination of print-media and the radio can be used for following-up literacy courses, training and orientating community-level workers of all kinds, up-grading teachers and administrators, informing farmers of new farming practices, and giving a chance to motivated youths and adults to complete the primary or secondary programme they may have missed. The possibilities are as wide as the imagination and ingenuity of the planners and implementers of the mass media-based education programme.

Two related factors appear to have undermined the wide use and effectiveness of the media for education. First is the resistance of the educational establishment to entertain the idea of other pedagogical approaches than the face-to-face classroom technique. It is difficult for the education profession to accept that the primary and secondary teachers can be trained by radio and correspondence lessons complemented by on-the-job apprenticeship rather than by a full-time teachers' college course. Yet in Tanzania it has been found that a multi-media approach is the only way to meet the large teacher demand created by the universalisation of primary schools, and the result appears to be better than the traditional method.

The second category of problems with the educational use of mass media has to do with the logistics of the programmes themselves. Far too often insufficient attention is given to organising the recipients of the media messages into homogeneous interest groups with common motivation and concerns. Nor is sufficient attention given to adapting and relating the messages to the specific situations and needs of groups, or reinforcing the messages through a combination of media such as printed materials, radio, and face-to-face group contacts.

We cannot discuss here the technicalities of launching an effective media programme. Experience in many countries demonstrates both the problems and the potentialities. Some years ago an imaginative district agriculture officer in a South Indian district is said to have worked a "miracle" in the agricultural production of the district by maintaining a weekly radio contact with all his extension agents to which the farmers' groups also tuned in. It is possible that this experience has been replicated in other districts. The rural radio forum of the All India Radio continues to render a valuable service in many parts of the country. Another significant experience is that of the Distance Learning Centre of Lesotho. The Centre uses printed materials, correspondence and radio for a variety of purposes including up-grading teachers, complementing and enriching instruction in schools, and reaching a variety of rural audiences.

Educational Components of Basic Services

The educational elements of the process of self-reliant socio-economic development have been mentioned earlier. More specifically, in relation to the provisions for basic services for health, water supply, sanitation and shelter as well as for food production and nutrition, we can speak of several categories of education needs:

(a) Disseminating knowledge and skills necessary for the general population for making good use of services and opportunities available.

(b) Educating the population to organise themselves for community control and the management of rural services.

(c) Training the community-level auxiliaries; and training and orienting planners, managers and specialists at different levels for rural services.

The educational components of basic services - which by definition have to follow non-formal approaches - often are not viewed as integral parts of the total system of organising and providing services. For some services, such as agricultural development, the educational needs have received more attention than for others. There are both positive and negative lessons from the agricultural extension experience that can be applied in the other types of educational activities in the context of basic services. A few of the important lessons that have general validity are:

(a) The clienteles of the educational activities linked to basic services need to be organised into homogeneous interest groups on the basis of their economic or "class" standing, especially if the disadvantaged segments are to be served.

(b) The front-line workers in the programme must be the selected and trained members of the groups or communities that are to be served rather than outsiders.

(c) Ways must be found to continually replenish and refresh the knowledge and information of the front-line workers and the back-up personnel with appropriate, timely, and locally adapted learning materials.

(d) Most important, the educational activities must be synchronised and meshed with the necessary plans, provisions and action for effecting the social transformation - be it raising grain production or improving sanitary conditions, or a series of such transformations.

Another issue that will assume a larger significance if the educational components of basic services are taken seriously is the co-ordination of educational activities within various development services especially at the local and community level so that the intended beneficiaries are not confused by a multiplicity of overlapping and conflicting channels and messages. Mechanisms have to be found for co-ordination at the local level, possibly through the local administration, and collaboration at higher levels.

Literacy programmes can play a critical role in the context of provisions for basic services and income-raising activities rather than as campaigns divorced from concrete action for development. The content, methodology and organisation of literacy programmes should logically bear the imprint of the arrangements, objectives, and distribution of clientele for the basic services and economic projects of which the literacy effort should be a part. The legacy of disappointment and frustration that we are left with today from many well-intentioned literacy projects warns us that these efforts can succeed only when linked with concrete plans to improve the social and economic situation of the participants.

The Need for Co-ordination

Besides agricultural extension, other scattered educational efforts related to basic services and rural development programmes can be found in all Commonwealth developing countries. Only rarely however; is a comprehensive and co-ordinated approach taken with regard to the various categories of educational needs referred to at the beginning of this section for improving and expanding basic services. One project for training and the development of training materials and methods for rural development workers of various types that has received international attention, is the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development at Comilla. The Academy over the last two decades has done commendable work in training thousands of workers of all levels. Even this project can benefit from closer collaboration with the various development agencies in the country in regard to the approach to training and utilisation of the rural cadres of the different agencies.

At the other end of the spectrum is the massive National Adult Education Programme of India, the goal of which is to carry out adult education activities including literacy projects in support of the overall efforts to improve the quality of life of the masses. The programme is in its early stages and any judgement about how it is functioning would be premature. The first reports indicate, as might be expected, that the picture is uneven regarding getting the effort underway and sustaining the enthusiasm of the learners. However, very encouraging progress has been made in many places. In general it appears that a great deal of exploration and hard work will be needed to find and apply the modality of organically merging educational activities with local development projects and provisions for basic services.

Conditions for Effective use of Non-Formal Education

The Development Context

To the extent they have to function in the context of an established formal educational system, non-formal education approaches cannot be effective unless a nation is committed to the principles and objectives of an egalitarian society and its development programmes and priorities are based on this commitment. The problem of the wastage of human resources in the form of unemployed educated youth and the masses in low-productivity and low-income occupations is symptomatic of a more serious disease - a dual society comprising a small modern-sector island in a sea of the traditional undeveloped economic structure with most of the development resources and efforts going to the former. Only by eliminating the enclaves of a modern sector and embarking on a development design that improves productivity, employment and the basic public services all over the country can the root of this problem be attacked.

In the educational sphere, steps have to be taken to eliminate the duality between the full-time formal institutional education and non-formal education. If "second chance" programmes, the training of personnel, and skill development programmes through non-formal approaches are to succeed, they have to be accorded full "parity of esteem" with corresponding formal education programmes. Moreover, bridges have to be built between the two. All possibilities of combining formal and non-formal approaches, when this is desirable to achieve the educational goal or reach the clientele, must be fully utilised. Non-formal programmes cannot gain acceptance if they are seen as "poor cousins" of formal schools.

The Organisational and Administrative Framework

Because the spectrum of non-formal educational activities is so wide and the purposes and clienteles it may serve are so diverse, non-formal education cannot be the exclusive preserve of the Ministry of Education, although it must have the responsibility for expanding the opportunities for primary and secondary education and general adult education through a combined formal and non-formal strategy. The Education Ministry may also be the focal point, the principal advocate and the initiator of policy review and formulation in relation to the nation-wide efforts for human resource development. However, many other government, community and voluntary agencies and organisations must be actively involved in what may be called a nation-wide learning system.

Responsibility for educational programmes for youth and adults linked to basic services and economic development projects must belong mainly to the respective ministries or to a strong rural development co-ordination body. In actual implementation of the programmes, a rejuvenated local government structure should play an important role along with national voluntary organisations active in rural development as well as local community organisations and voluntary groups.

Education and training of field personnel and auxiliary workers from the communities for the rural services such as agricultural extension, health care, family planning, co-operatives. etc., has to be in the hands of the agencies responsible for the respective services if they are to operate successfully.

For technical-vocational skill development, if the principle of combining learning and production is accepted as the main strategy, the Ministries of Labour, Industry, Commerce and Agriculture as well as public corporations, associations of industries and trades and individual enterprises should share the burden. The Ministry of Education can be a partner in the process to the extent it is willing to abandon the emphasis on formal training institutions and turn them into multipurpose, flexible technical service centres for economic projects.

Obviously a special Ministry of Non-Formal Education or a Board or Commission as the executing agency will not serve the purpose. The need is for a body or a focal point for human resource concerns so that problems and needs are kept in national focus, appropriate national policies are developed, and the diverse efforts and activities of the many agencies involved serve the common goal. Such a body may be located in the national planning organisation or the office of the head of government. This body can also sponsor the analyses and reviews necessary for policy formulation on subjects such as manpower requirements, the structure and policies in regard to remuneration and rewards in different occupations, the use of resources and cost-effectiveness in various educational programmes, the links and articulation between formal and non-formal programmes, ways of encouraging and using voluntary organisations, and so on.

Decentralisation of Authority and Popular Participation

It is unthinkable that economic projects in schools, or skill development programmes combining learning and production, or the adult education activities for local groups as a part of local development projects, can be run by central ministries and their agents waiting for orders from the capital.

Effective local government bodies and strong participatory institutions at the local level have to serve as the vehicles for integrated locally-managed development services. The national planning body, the national-level decision-making authorities and the sectoral agencies would in this case lay down national policies and priorities, set overall guidelines, determine aggregate resource allocation, and play a facilitating and supportive role as providers of technical and financial assistance to the local bodies but would abdicate the role of being the director and controller of programmes which are intended to serve local communities.

The local government organisations, which exist in one form or another in all countries can be built up as the area-wide organisational structure for the optimal exploitation of the total land and human resources of an area, and local participatory institutions can play their part within this structure. In the context of such an institutional setting, relevant educational components of rural services can be planned and managed to a large extent at the local level and to a lesser extent by the national and regional level government agencies who would increasingly assume a facilitative role.

It is essential to mention that far-reaching changes are needed in the style of development planning and the structure of public administration, because education cannot be an "island" of decentralisation and community participation without changes in other spheres.

The Political Framework

The educational process functions within a given socio-economic structure. The goals set for the educational efforts and the results achieved are defined and limited by the socio-economic framework of a nation. The lessons of contemporary and past experiences around the world are that appropriate educational measures support and accelerate socio-economic change but the initiation and guidance of structural change in society is essentially a political process. The overall national development objectives and priorities, and the institutional and logistical measures adopted in support of these objectives and priorities, define the tasks for all educational efforts and set the limits to what education will achieve by way of social transformation. Non-formal education only opens up a wider range of educational options by bringing the non-school vehicles of education within the orbit of organised and planned nation-wide learning efforts. Political determination, backed by the commitment of the highest level of national leadership and concrete measures reflected in resource allocation as well as development priorities and policies, must be present if the goal of reorienting the educational system for optimal mobilisation of human resources is to be realised.

It is not, however, being suggested that all the conditions for success must be met before non-formal education programmes are launched and other measures for the development and use of human resources are taken. The millennium is not around the corner and if we have to wait for the ideal environment there will never be a chance to begin anything. Progress towards the creation of a favourable environment for the success of non-formal education can be made simultaneously with the introduction, experimentation and development of the education programmes themselves - provided the goodwill and determination exist. At the same time, it is necessary to be fully conscious of the factors that can help or hinder the progress of programmes and to make realistic assessment of what is possible in given circumstances.

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