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## INTRODUCTION

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Since the Oxford Education Conference 21 years ago, there have been six Ministerial Conferences where schemes of Commonwealth co-operation in education have been reviewed and areas of priority action identified. The Specialist Conference held in between the Ministerial Conferences, is one such form of co-operation. The main objective of the Specialist Conference is to enable experts to examine subjects of immediate concern to member states for the purpose of clarifying concepts and identifying programme possibilities for action. The Delhi Conference on Non-Formal Education for Development was the eighth of these Specialist Conferences.

Given the fact that in most Commonwealth countries the desirable limits of public expenditure on formal education have already been reached and, in many countries, exceeded, and given the high proportion of unemployment and the constraints on access to education for the majority of the population of member states, the search for other avenues of manpower development merely recognizes the logic of reality; but it is also much more than that. In equally realistic recognition of the close integration between the needs of development and education, it was inevitable that a conference such as this, having interpreted development in terms of improving living standards, should devote itself to consideration of "education for the improvement of the overall standard of living of the most needy section of society - the deprived and the poor", the majority of whom live in the rural areas of Commonwealth countries. For two weeks, delegates consisting of academics and administrators in education, agriculture and rural development, health, and economic planning discussed the formulation and implementation of a variety of national programmes in non-formal education in all regions of the Commonwealth. This report and the conference recommendations reflect something of the enthusiasm and the urgency which marked the deliberations of the conference.

The proceedings of the conference were assisted by a large volume of lead papers as well as country reports as may be seen from the documentation list. Some twenty-three specialists, some of whom had written the papers for the conference, participated in the discussions in the different committees and contributed signally to the quality of the interchange that took place. In response to the general acclaim of the overall value of these papers, not merely to those who attended but indeed to a wider audience, they are being edited for publication as a separate document which, it is hoped, will be a useful source of information on non-formal education in the Commonwealth.

By focusing attention on a strategy for integrating education more closely with development, the conference itself showed a new awareness of the many implications of both formal and non-formal education for national development. Many delegates came to the conference to learn more about the subject and sharpen their ideas and concepts in the field of non-formal education. It would be fair to claim that everyone went away enriched by the experience of the discussions and the projects visited and certainly clearer in understanding of non-formal education. While it is still premature to assess its full impact, the commitment and urgency which were demonstrated throughout the duration of the conference and the range of recommendations for action, are certainly a valid index of its success in re-awakening national and

international awareness of the vast potential for overall development which non-formal education constitutes.

Many agencies contributed to the realization of the valuable interaction which this conference represented - the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation which financed the major costs of the conference, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Bernard Van Leer Foundation and the International Planned Parenthood Federation, which provided funds for the participation of a number of delegates and observers. To them all, and especially to the Government of India whose contribution as host enabled the conference to take place, we owe a debt of gratitude for their support. We trust that they will find in these pages satisfaction that their support was not in vain.

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