

Foreword

“To a large extent the pace of any society’s development depends on the availability of an appropriate supply of skilled and educated manpower for harnessing and exploiting its resource endowments”.

These words form the opening sentence of the lead paper by Dr. Adebayo Adedeji, presented at the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference in Accra. Our theme was “The Economics of Education”, and the aim was to consider how to get the best value for the money that member states are spending on education. The sums involved are considerable. Few Commonwealth countries spend less than one-seventh of their total public expenditure on education: some are spending as much as one-third. This in itself is a great achievement, underlining as it does the confidence of Governments in education as an instrument of progress. But while the need for massive expenditure on education persists, it is clear that very few Ministries of Education will be able to increase their budgets significantly in the immediate future, and some may even have to reduce them. It is also clear that public expectations of education are not being realized in practice. Again and again we were reminded of the fundamental “mismatch” that exists between the skills provided by the schools and the available jobs on the market, and of the way that such schooling as exists in rural areas is often far removed from the realities of rural development.

These were some of the back-drops to the Accra Conference. They had already served to foster experiment within countries, and the sharing of experiences among them; processes of innovation and consultation which the Commonwealth Secretariat has been privileged to assist in a variety of ways. Between the Sixth and Seventh Commonwealth Education Conferences, the Secretariat held two linked specialist conferences — on learning materials and on educational broadcasting — that concentrated on the means by which modern media could make more education available to more people in a more effective way. It organized regional workshops and seminars on low-cost science equipment, book development, educational supervision, and technical education and industry. The Secretariat also maintained a vigorous publishing programme and, as a new development, began the organization of regional training courses in two important aspects of education. The first of these — for educational administrators in Africa — was drawing to its close in Nairobi while the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference met in Accra. The next, on book development for the Caribbean, will follow shortly in Guyana. These and many other co-operative educational activities have been made possible by the resources provided through the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (C.F.T.C.). In addition, the Education and Training Programme of the C.F.T.C. has been enabled to multiply the number of students it supported by over three times in the period between the Sixth and Seventh Commonwealth Education Conferences, and to increase its projects to over 500 a year.

One of the significant results of the Accra Conference was the approval given to an increased emphasis on programmes of education designed to create an understanding and appreciation of the Commonwealth and of the activities being undertaken within its framework. Our interest in these matters was undoubtedly heightened by the cordiality of the deliberations which are so characteristic of Commonwealth Education Conferences, and further reinforced by the fact that the first commemoration of the newly designated Commonwealth Day was held while the Accra Conference was in progress. This happy circumstance enabled us to enjoy an exhibition of Commonwealth children's art mounted in the Kwame Nkrumah Conference Centre to mark the event, and to join in some of the other Ghanaian special activities. I am sure all who were present will long remember the occasion and give encouragement to schools to celebrate successive Commonwealth Days in ways which serve to increase Commonwealth understanding.

While Commonwealth Days will undoubtedly help to foster a sense of belonging, the Conference recognized the need for a much wider appreciation of the Commonwealth, the principles it stands for and its programmes based on them, and recommended that this be brought to the attention of the Heads of Governments who were scheduled to meet in June this year. It is gratifying to be able to report that the Heads of Government at their London Meeting endorsed the need expressed by the Conference for greater efforts to increase information, understanding and appreciation of the activities being undertaken within the Commonwealth framework, stressing at the same time the role of school and adult education programmes designed to reach the general public.

It is my hope that this Report will be carefully studied by all concerned — Governments, educational institutions and organizations, educationists, and the community at large. Each should find somewhere in the report pointers to contributions towards this collective responsibility of educating our peoples for a better and more meaningful living.

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