
20 THE NATIONAL INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND THEIR USES

A J Seymour

In Guyana we lack the tradition of handling, disseminating and using information especially information relating to Science and Technology, yet there are elaborate systems of information generated within the country and necessary for the national life. These are the information systems relating to the major industries - sugar, bauxite, rice, agriculture and timber. For the successful operation of these industries, the management structures have amassed for their own use and decision-making central reservoirs of data and statistics which are being constantly up-graded, styled and analysed against a changing global market situation.

Apart from these there are other growing centres of industrial development - e.g. the textile industry. Guyana has made a name for herself with her shirt-jacks. Because of a keen rivalry between shirt manufacturers, there has emerged over the past ten years an inexpensive but attractive series of designs modelled upon the Latin American Guaya Gera which are distinctively Guyanese. There will be the completion of the textile mills, one from China one from India, which will make use of the cotton plantations being created, and a whole new system of technology will be based upon this aspect of our national policy of cloths ourselves.

The point being made is that for Guyana to become part of the modern world and to improve the quality of her life, she will have to create a national awareness of these growing points of technological and scientific information. Guyanese must become familiar with these tools of decision-making at all levels. The senior pupil of a secondary school must have a familiarity with this type of information - there must be no mystery about it as at present. Take an example, we should be able to appreciate the transition of a textile from a shirt cloth to a jacket cloth by the denier involved, the amount of weight of the texture and the number of strands used. We need to bring Guyana out of the fore-industrial era into the modern world of Science and Technology.

Because Guyana has chosen the road of Socialism, the country will not be an area showing the free-play of the forces of supply and demand on the classical capitalist model and therefore it will be for the State Corporations to supply all the information necessary.

There is an allied point. Guyana has a policy by which she believes ultimately in an emergent Anglo-Caribbean Federation and there has to be an accommodation between Guyana

as a self-sufficient entity and as a part of a larger political association. But whether on the smaller or larger grouping, we must envisage a self sufficiency in the field of Science and Technology and we will have to plan accordingly.

There are dangers to be guarded against - first that the sense of national and cultural identity is not undermined by the action of external transnational organisations and corporations while the technology is being transferred from outside or that mass media do not frustrate national policies and create alienation and exploitation, since there is a strong link between independence and cultural identity.

The importance of inculcating a general scientific outlook in the national education system is very marked and may I give at this point one example of system of statistics that we need to introduce in Guyana and in the Caribbean. Cultural development is becoming a focal end-product of many developing countries since it is universally recognised that all our communal activity is designed ultimately to improve the quality of life for the individual. Already in Europe, Asia and Africa, governments have agreed to introduce instruments of analyses to measure cultural statistics and to see how objectives are being realised and the methods that are most satisfactory. In October of this year, an inter-governmental conference is planned for Latin America and the Caribbean and in the near future, for the governments of the Arab world. The governments of the Caribbean will be invited to establish inter-locking systems of cultural indicators in common with those already in use elsewhere.

I will merely list some of the areas of our use of leisure time which will demonstrate the need for this means of measurement. Other areas are more difficult to measure.

For example, the questions asked will include: In every 1,000 people in the population, how many possess radio receiving sets? How many transistor radios are sold every year? What is the annual sale of gramophone records - how are these broken down into pops, classical? How many newspapers are sold per 1,000 people in the city and rural areas - in the morning and in the afternoon? How many people go to the cinema per year, what movies are the most popular? In the field of dramatic presentations, how many plays are put on in any year? How many people pay to see these plays? What is the rate at which people read books borrowed from the National Library? How many books are sold in Georgetown over a year and of what type? What is the total of book production in Guyana and how do these break down to literary text books, party promotional literature? How many children visited the National Museum? What is the number of adults to do so? How many art exhibitions were staged in Georgetown and what was the attendance? How many paintings and other works of arts were sold? When the Calypsonian Sparrow came to Guyana how many people heard him perform and at what forces? What is the number of concert recitals presented last year?

It is fairly easy to get the answers to these question once we set them out. In the teaching of the arts it is more difficult to evaluate the degree of stimulation and promotion of creativity. In a series of lectures to teachers on creativity and the products of the creative process, it may be impossible to say what happens and to measure.

Guyana possesses a National Trust for the preservation of its Cultural Heritage. It is difficult to assess the work being done to arrest the deterioration of Fort Island. Finally, what is the impact upon the people of Georgetown by the erection of the 1763 Monument; how have the minds and attitudes of viewers been shaped away from a two-centred appreciation of aesthetic values towards an appreciation of the Afro centred values embodied in the Monument.

I must stop here before I bore you utterly, but I hope you will appreciate the depth and the range of these aspects of our national cultural identity and the complexity of the system that will be eventually elaborated to measure this aspect of our national life. It will mean a re-orientation of approaches by the national agencies for development; and will involve: financing, widespread training of census takers, the enhancement of the cultural content in education, the training and involvement of artists and administrations, a series of research studies, a massive campaign for popular awareness and participation.

We must move from the needs to the functions and then proceed to the structure within the framework of a national information policy. After I had drafted my presentation, I saw in today's newspaper three articles which have a bearing on our subject. One was an appeal by Sir Lionel Luckhoo, for a vibrant Research section at the University to test out the old wives' remedies that enrich our folk lore. The second was an examination by Hamaludin of the approaches by the Guyana Manufacturers Association for government assistance and support through foreign exchange permits. In this we learn of the formulation of a policy on Science and Technology by the Guyana Government and the third is a back page article on the possible boosts in tool making, the Manufacturers can make upon the Guyana economy. These three prices may add up to the fact that the Guyana public is not getting the service it deserves from its press, but certainly underlines the fact that public awareness is abysmally small of the part that Science and Technology can play in our national life.

We need to have this type of information mediated to our school children in the classroom situation so that they may become familiar with these concepts.