
31 CARIBBEAN WORKSHOP ON SCIENCE COMMUNICATION

Tuesday, 19th April, 1977

CLOSING SESSION

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Cde. Chairman, distinguished guests, your Excellencies and Comrades; I am very much impressed with the papers which emerged from this workshop. The contents of these documents amply illustrate the dedication with which participants approached the various topics assigned them. I am sure, you have all enjoyed your deliberations even though exacting and I am certain our foreign guests will return to their homes with happy impressions of what is known in these parts as "Guyanese hospitality".

As you may observe, I have made no scientific statement, but it does not seem as if I can avoid doing so for too long. If per chance I do, please feel free to apply the necessary scientific elimination process. It is well known that technological progress is the key to prosperity and scientific research lies at its roots. We need research to prevent spoilage of our crops after reaping, to devise new methods of reaping and cultivation, where necessary, as well as to ensure that these crops are not destroyed by pests during growth. In short we must by communicating relevant scientific knowledge and technological information enable the farmer to produce without fear of loss, by pests and spoilage after reaping. We should, with the aid of scientific expertise devise the best means to preserve our locally grown crops and fruits in order to give the farmer the incentive to produce. In this way science can help to stimulate economic growth and improve the lot of our society. The challenge is great and the way you accept it will determine the extent of our future prosperity.

I would like to refer to certain features of the ninth biennial meeting of the Commonwealth Science Council which was held last year in Sri Lanka. The Council recognised that there was considerable responsibility on research scientists to make the right choice of projects and unless forethought was given, considerable expenditure could be wasted. The Council, therefore, advised that research leaders should be involved in the decision making at the national level.

Much interest was evinced at this Conference on the utilisation of natural products and follow-up action was suggested.

It was stated that for centuries a variety of plants have been used in folk medicines throughout the world and in recent years, many have found their way into scientific medical practice. One example of this is the Rauwolfia, which was used for centuries in India and is now proved to have medicinal value. Another such tree is the Neem tree which we have in Guyana. This tree has been found to have commercial, exploitable properties. We are also carrying out experiments on some of our trees and I feel exchange of information of this kind can be of tremendous benefit among Commonwealth countries.

In order to achieve scientific and technological progress, the structure which a country sets up is of great importance. The Government of Guyana saw the wisdom of this and enacted the National Science Research Council Act No. 26 of 1974. This legislation, established the National Science Research Council, which has wide functions in scientific research. In order to give practical effect to the use of science and technology, Government obtained the services of Dr. Ponnamperna, an expert from the Commonwealth Secretariat. He compiled a report entitled "the organisation of technological research and development." In this report he referred to the need for supporting Scientific and Technical Services and Research and Development to support various operative sectors of the economy.

Overall manpower development, he said, is an important aspect of national economic planning and development and scientific and technological manpower is one of its critical components. These are to a greater extent absent in Guyana and the task that lies ahead is to fulfil this need. The responsibility of the National Science Research Council to suggest ways and means to overcome this shortage is a great one. However, with cooperation and interchange of ideas among Commonwealth Countries this task could be made easier.

We have great hopes in the functioning of the Institute of Applied Science and Technology and look forward to it as the chief centre for promoting and conducting research. It will be the working laboratory of the National Science Research Council where scientific knowledge would be transformed into reality. We all look forward with great anxiety to the completion of this building.

In the process of advancing science and technology in different fields, information and communication play an essential part. Not only must this information be properly classified and categorised but it must also be made easily available to potential users. The theme of this workshop is on communication and from what I have read in the submissions, this is no easy matter. It depends so much on the vagaries of human behaviour that the communicator must have a multi-disciplinary knowledge to approach it with success. The papers presented have shown the pitfalls and ways of avoiding them and I am certain if our communicators follow the guidelines set out, a great deal could be achieved.

But while communication of scientists information to the user is important another form of communication in my view should not be overlooked and that is the communication process of science education in schools from the lowest level onwards. This would have tremendous benefit and may in time provide an adequate amount of science teachers which is now very much needed. There is only 10% science graduates of the graduating students from the University of Guyana each year. Stimulation of the interest of children in science education from an early age would allow us to discover many a genius and may increase the necessary manpower resource so essential for higher scientific and technological education.

Information centres are very important in providing the necessary data which is required for research and development. Such information may not be easily accessible but is scattered in different departments and industrial enterprises. This, I would imagine is a great handicap to scientific research. Here again there are two schools of thought - some favour a coordinated central information centre while others prefer separate specialised sources of information. This is a matter for the specialists. I understand that UNESCO has also established information systems which could be useful to a developing country. Government has established a National Data Management Authority which is at present studying the computer needs of Governments Departments and the Public Sector. The time may very well come when we will have a great deal of our data both administrative and operational, computerised. We shall soon study a report on the setting up of a Documentation Centre in Guyana.

Conclusion

I am hopeful that with the establishment of our Institute of Applied Science and Technology, we shall proceed from documentation to implementation. Science plays a great part in our lives and there are few activities which do not require a scientific approach. No country can afford to lag behind in pursuit of scientific knowledge and technology and to rely on external assistance without at the same time developing its own indigenous base, may be detrimental.

The paradox of our age is that men seek peace while preparing for war and make full use of the scientific and technological knowledge at their disposal to achieve the latter. In the developing world there is a great need for scientific knowledge to aid development rather than to pursue the exploits of war. The exchange of ideas and sharing of technological information in seminars and workshops can go a far way. It is how we pursue the various decisions taken at these meetings which can be of advantage to our people. I look forward to see the Commonwealth Science Council grow into a dynamic scientific source of information which with proper communication may be able to meet some of our scientific needs.

I thank you all for participating in this workshop and it has indeed been a great pleasure for me to join you at this closing session. I may have the privilege of seeing some of you again when the Commonwealth Science Council meets in Guyana next year under the Chairmanship of the Secretary General NSRC, Dr. Pat Munroe, that is, provided as a non-scientist I am invited. Thank you.