

BEYOND THE SCHOOL: EMERGING ALTERNATIVES FOR LEARNING

SUMMARY OF PANEL PRESENTATIONS*

Ms. Burke recalled the work of Philip Coombs and others on education for rural development reviewed in the lead paper, pointing out that it highlighted a range of fundamental issues facing anyone working in this field. Coombs had popularized the terms "non-formal" and "informal education". His work had focussed primarily on non-formal education, which is defined as "any organized educational activities occurring outside the school system". She noted that Coombs himself had pointed out that informal education or learning which takes place through day-to-day experience, deserves closer attention. Related to this, Ms. Burke mentioned further that the possibilities offered by radio for out of school education had often not been fully utilized. In particular, she suggested that its use was valuable where programmes allowed for some form of a two-way communication as, for instance, on community-based radio learning groups.

Taking up the theme of community participation in local and national activities she suggested that participation could itself be educational, especially if it involved decision-making. This was certainly the view expressed in the report of a recent United Nations study "Popular Participation for Decision-Making in Development"*** which identifies basic essentials for participation as sincere commitment of leaders to the idea of popular participation and its implications; institutionalized structures for participation linked to a process of government decentralization; motivation of the population based, not in instant gains, but on medium and long-term incentives. Related to this Ms. Burke reported on an experience in Botswana where radio and village-based radio learning groups had been used to involve a large number of community representatives in discussions on the Government's National Development Plan.

On the case for strengthening out-of-school education Ms. Burke mentioned lack of resources to meet either present or future learning needs of young people on the basis of a structured school system: inadequacy of formal education to meet day-to-day learning needs of large numbers of young people; and irrelevance of many aspects of schooling for national development. She suggested that this lack of resources supported proposals for redistribution of educational resources to further develop out-of-school education. However, she noted that not all out-of-school education has been successful. The best examples were those where learning has been founded in the local environment, and designed to achieve self-sufficiency among learners.

Citing the Coombs studies again, Ms. Burke referred to the concept of "minimum essential learning needs", and suggested that the identification of these needs was a useful starting point for planning and reorienting education programmes.

* Members of the panel were Ms. Sue Burke, Messrs Felipe Bole, Turoa Royal, Geoff Bamford and Dr. Frank Mahoney

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As a practical example of the work done by one Government in this field Mr. Felipe Bole reported on an experience of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, in Fiji. Here 20 rural youth councils have been set up on an experimental basis covering about one third of Viti Levu, the main island of Fiji. The councils, with a membership of about 7000 youths, involve the youngsters in co-operative, self-help activities designed to make best use of land available to them in rural areas. The underlying principle is that rural transformation will begin only with changes in the rural people themselves - their attitudes towards change, their aspirations and above all, their perceptions of themselves and their own power, as individuals and as groups, to better their situation. To achieve this Mr. Bole suggested that the stimulus can initially come from trained outsiders, such as community workers. However, once the people are ready to move it is essential that outside help must only be in response to needs expressed by the community so that progress towards self-sufficiency is sustained.

Mr. Bole pointed out that the process of self-discovery, leading ultimately to self-help and self-management, is an educational one but added that, unlike most schooling or extension education, it would not alleviate young rural people from their environment. In the Fiji Rural Youth Programme, he said, a first step in this new approach to education has been the introduction of leadership training for youth council leaders, all of whom come from the immediate community. This covers: Youth clubs, identification of needs, setting club objectives and design of club programmes, motivating the young population, and how to initiate and evaluate local projects.

The Fijian experience has been that with limited funds and with the right motivation small agricultural projects for self-employment can be established. However, Mr. Bole felt that access to continued training opportunities for participants was important for the success of projects of this sort. He suggested that these might be provided through local resource and training centres where specific skills could be learnt. This is planned as the next step in the Fiji's Rural Youth Programme. Finally, Mr. Bole said that the Fiji experience in co-operative self-help, although relatively new, is a good example of how out-of-school education can contribute successfully and practically to both individual and community development.

Mr. Royal, building on the two preceding presentations, noted some of the factors which should be considered in planning out-of school education. He stressed that those he mentioned were neither exhaustive, nor in order of priority.

First, he pointed out that clear definition of objectives for out-of school education projects provided a sound basis for allocation of resources, involvement of other agencies and evaluation, since it gave a fundamental sense of direction to the work of the project.

He went on to consider the qualities of leadership needed in out-of-school education, noting that they were unlike those required of a teacher in a classroom situation. The leader should be an innovator, capable of establishing a fruitful and constructive relationship with the learners, without relying on compulsory attendance or examinations and other props which characterize school situations.

On the need for non-formal education where a school system already exists, Mr. Royal said that formal education could not meet all the educational needs of the people, since education is a continual process. In particular he cited the importance of non-formal education in providing second-chance

learning opportunities as an alternative delivery system for learning and in meeting the needs of school dropouts.

He suggested that the venue of out-of-school education could be an influential factor in its success, pointing out that despite a growing recognition that "on the spot" was the best place for realistic learning, it was often overlooked. As a rule of thumb he advised that the best place for out-of-school education was where the clients felt was best.

Finally he identified factors in the learning environment which he felt were important for success in out-of-school education. These included: involvement of as many senses as possible in the learning process; establishing a partnership relationship between facilitator and learners; use of all types of media; use of experiential learning processes; and choice of language meaningful to the participants.

Moving on from the factors affecting success in out-of-school education, Mr. Bamford outlined patterns and approaches in projects in this field. Most of these, he said, fall into the following categories:

- (a) Long-term training (2-3 years) which is mostly directed at school leavers in vocational training centres. This tends to be most useful in preparing for urban employment, and least successful for rural employment, since few trainees return to village life. It is a high-cost, low-output activities.
- (b) Short-term vocational/leadership training (2-10 weeks). This is useful for preparing leaders for village-level groups and programmes.
- (c) National Youth Service. This usually involves unemployed youth in activities of local and national importance while at the same time providing them with skill training. Additionally this aims at developing national consciousness among participants.
- (d) Apprenticeship schemes. These aim at providing skill training especially for urban employment. This approach, Mr. Bamford felt, cannot be readily used for training in agricultural and other rural activities.
- (e) Village/community level projects in the context of youth groups, women's clubs, co-operative societies, credit unions, farmers associations, church groups and government agencies. Through these, training may be provided in schools, community centres, church halls, factories or workshops and on-site, for instance, on the reef or in the fields. These, Mr. Bamford said, can meet a wide range of community needs from employment creation to leisure activities, and from community service to moral and religious education. He also pointed out that governments have a part to play in village-level projects, especially as supporting rather than controlling agencies. This might cover provision of facilities and personnel for training local leadership, provision of literature and mass media support, and provision of mobile training visits with supplementary learning materials and audio visual aids for use in village level training.
- (f) Finally, Mr. Bamford referred to the value of overseas work experience for those who require skill upgrading for both rural and urban activities. In particular, he noted that experience in neighbouring metropolitan countries is quite common and suggested that short-term experience directed towards specific skills was most

useful, with more long-term overseas work leading to disorientation of trainees away from their home environment.

Dr. Frank Mahoney referred specifically to out-of-school education, training activities under the South Pacific Commission (SPC), which he said, constituted about eighty percent of the Commission's work. In particular, he mentioned the Community Education Training Centre in Fiji where the SPC runs an annual ten-month course for about 40 women from Pacific Islands. The course is very practical and concentrates on nutrition and cooking, textiles and clothing and family management. Students use the training during their daily lives at the Centre. They also participate in field projects to develop community work skills.

Apart from this, the SPC runs a range of short-term training courses (3 weeks to 3 months) on youth leadership development, management of village-level youth programmes and rural vocational training. It also funds country-level training schemes, and is planning a mobile youth leadership training programme in the Region. Related to this, Dr. Mahoney said that the out-of-school education work of SPC included information exchange and a supplies service for key personnel.

On another level, Dr. Mahoney reported that the SPC runs technical training in fields ranging from pig production to educational broadcasting, and, when requested, responds to specific needs expressed by member governments. It also contributes to out-of-school education through its communications work which covers both printed and broadcast material.

In conclusion, Dr. Mahoney expressed the view that out-of-school education is preparation for self-reliance. He went on to say, "the aim of all our training activities is to enable people to set meaningful goals and objectives for themselves and then to identify and mobilize the resources required to implement these". This, he suggested, is the way to self-reliance and self-realization.

PLENARY DISCUSSION

Participants agreed that out-of-school education offers new, alternative and viable ways of meeting learning needs in the Region. At the same time, it was recognized that not only do programmes of this sort vary widely in their objectives but that educational patterns of out-of-school education differ considerably from country to country.

Among the objectives recognized in existing out-of-school education programmes, the preparation of young people for rural living and employment was considered most important. In addition, it was agreed that out-of-school education makes a useful contribution in programmes designed to: assist people in developing productive activities; provide skill training; encourage constructive use of leisure time; provide moral education; support and encourage community service activities; develop self-reliance; provide family planning education and education in personal relationships; provide school equivalency programmes and cater for the needs of women.

It was also agreed that out-of-school education, in a framework of rural development, has a particularly important part to play where:

- (a) rapid increase in population has resulted in increased numbers of young people in need of education and jobs;
- (b) young people have acquired unrealistic and urban oriented values through schooling and other modern influences;
- (c) high expenditure on formal school systems is at the expense of providing appropriate education to all who need it;
- (d) resistance to change or lack of personnel within the formal education system inhibits the implementation of new approaches to teaching and learning in schools;
- (e) existing education programmes are out of line with the needs of national development, especially making best use of land and sea resources.

Out-of-School Education and Rural Development

It was recognized that education on its own may not be enough to persuade young people to stay or return to settle in their villages. Other additional measures such as better social services and recreational facilities in villages, may be needed to make rural life more attractive. It was suggested that:

- (a) for those who have already left rural areas for town life, subsidized travel might be offered as an incentive to encourage them to return home. This, it was felt, might help young people in particular, who had not found urban life as conducive as expected;
- (b) rural youngsters might be exposed to town life through organized visits, before making a decision to uproot themselves and leave rural areas permanently. One programme was reported where this had resulted in a marked decline in the youngsters' desire to leave their villages;
- (c) subsidization of village level-activities, for instance, through provision of credit facilities for local development projects. Here the special needs of the young were emphasized since under most credit schemes, including those operating through Development Banks, young people are not eligible because their needs are said to be too small. It was noted that what young people require is access to small amounts of low interest capital over a short period to enable them to develop small-scale economic activities. In the examples, reported group borrowing and repayment was possible, and, in addition, recipients of loans were also given technical information and guidance on financial management.

Further, participants agreed that in general allocation of government expenditure should reflect the need to encourage people to remain in or return to rural areas, as is the case in Papua New Guinea, where a large proportion of the national budget is used for rural development.

Strengthening Out-of-School Education: Patterns and Approaches

In the context of rural development a number of patterns for strengthening the contribution of out-of-school education were identified. These were based both on existing experimental programmes and on new possibilities. They include the following:

(a) Self-sufficient rural youth groups: The experimental project in Fiji where the Ministry of Education has initiated people to be self-sufficient in agriculture or rural industry was cited as an example. In this project, the Fiji Rural Youth Councils draw on existing groups and leadership from the earliest planning stages in order that projects would be made relevant to the local environment. The established leaders are given further leadership training once a project has been agreed.

The Fiji experience provoked great interest since its approach was felt to be broadly applicable in many other Pacific Islands.

(b) Vocational training centres: In order to train school leavers for practical and productive work, the Government of Papua New Guinea has established a number of vocational training centres where young people attend live-in courses for 10 to 12 months to acquire basic skills in farming and fishing.

Although vocational training centres can usefully serve the needs of some young people for practical skill training, a number of problems were recognized: the expense of setting up a comprehensive network of such centres; the need for a large number of trained personnel to run such programmes; and the fact that what is learnt at such centres may further encourage students to move away from their villages to places where they can use the skills they learn.

(c) On-the-land training: Master Liv (liv = unemployed person scheme in the Solomon Islands) was cited as an example. In this scheme, the Government of the Solomon Islands is sponsoring an experiment in which groups of young people acquire skills in productive cultivation and marketing through "on-the-job" training at a central farm. Funds are raised from sales of produce grown on the farm, and participants receive pocket money while in training. Trainees are also expected to participate in community service projects.

(d) Occupational evening classes: It was noted that young people can receive skill training and participate in constructive leisure time activity through evening classes. In Niue, where costs are kept down by using existing buildings in out-of-school hours, young people can learn traditional craft work skills which they can use for wage earning, if necessary.

(e) School equivalency programmes: Where young people cannot enter the formal school system, it was recognized that an alternative provision can be made which enables them to take after-work classes. For example, in the Pastor Schools in Western Samoa, classes begin in the late afternoon. The classes are provided free to young people who have been unable to take up formal education; they cover mathematics, social studies, culture and Samoan language.

(f) Strengthening education through non-governmental groups: Since many non-governmental organizations, both secular and non-secular, run education programmes, their efforts can be consolidated and improved. The Ministry of Youth in Tonga and the National Conference on Community Development in the Solomon Islands have adopted this approach. In both cases the aim is to improve the capacity of non-governmental groups to cater for the employment and occupational needs of young people. Small grants and other sorts of support are

available to groups which adapt and develop activities to fit in with local development needs. In the New Hebrides, it is the job of community development officers to identify local problems and to co-ordinate, organize and support activities in response to these. It was agreed that if education is to be successfully strengthened through non-governmental groups, co-ordination is essential either through a government department or ministry for youth affairs, or through a national youth council or national conference.

(g) Planned parenthood education: It was recognized that both governmental and non-governmental groups can organize community education on family planning and responsible parenthood. For example, in the Solomon Islands, the Health Department involves doctors and nurses in village-based planned parenthood education. Some participants felt that this was an area that should be given more attention.

(h) Women's interests programmes: Particular attention was given to out-of-school education for women. This is well developed in some countries in the Region, though the focus varies from essentially home-oriented themes such as child care, home management and domestic agriculture to preparation for economic work through training in sewing, network and market gardening.

There was considerable interest in the possibilities offered through women's interest training centres where courses on a wide range of subjects, including carpentry and wood carving as well as agriculture and hygiene can be provided. It was suggested that radio-telephone could be used to extend the provision that mobile training programmes linked to training centres make to further women's interests programmes.

It was agreed that effort to involve the whole community in the training programmes of women's interests groups was an interesting innovation, especially where response to the needs of the whole community, not just the needs of women, is taken into consideration right from the start.

Planning Out-of-School Education

In considering the above approaches it was agreed that governments can usefully assert a certain amount of influence over developments in non-governmental and community-level organizations to ensure that the enormous fund of energy in the voluntary sector is channelled towards the achievement of national goals. A clear statement of objectives for out-of-school education was felt to be an essential starting point. It was suggested that governments can play a dual role, namely:

- (a) to support and encourage programme development at community level (through loans, subsidies, training programmes, secondment of staff, provision of supplementary material, access to radio, etc.);
- (b) to co-ordinate the out-of-school educational activities of women's groups, youth groups, churches and other community based organizations. In this connection, it was stressed that ideally, all educational delivery systems should co-exist and work in co-operation to overcome educational problems and respond to educational needs.

There were, however, seen to be some problems for governments if they were to pursue this dual role. For one thing, it was suggested that

in their efforts to support it, governments would have to take care not to control out-of-school education as this could result in loss of initiative as well as a reduction in the relevance of programmes to the community. It was felt that a system of accountability for government funds ought to be a sufficient means to control, while at the same time allowing considerable autonomy to community groups.

Other factors identified as important in planned attempts to these alternatives to schooling were:

- (a) plans should be prepared by people from within the country, who know the local situation and who can draw on other experiences as a basis for drawing up sound action plans relevant to local circumstances. In this regard, the proposed Mobile Youth Leadership Training Programme of the South Pacific Commission was considered to have a contribution to make;
- (b) methods of communication - use of language and style of presentation need to be carefully considered and planned to ensure suitability for particular audiences;
- (c) out-of-school/non-formal education is often a reorganization of time as well as of educational methods, approaches and leadership.

Participation in National Planning

Community participation in both educational and development planning was given special attention. It was here that out-of-school education was seen to have a part to play in preparing the public to consider and discuss goals and plans for national progress. It was suggested that all sorts of educational and communications techniques, ranging from radio and television broadcasts (including radio listening groups) to commercial style advertising campaigns can be used. Traditional structures at village level were also seen to offer possibilities for disseminating information and promoting discussion, for instance, by working through and with local leadership.

It was suggested that although full public participation in policy-making required a certain level of knowledge, at the same time participation also served as a means of education. It was suggested that a certain amount of "political moulding", to encourage public support of lines of action considered to be in the national interest or to develop a sense of national unity, might be justified. At the same time, the dangers of taking this to extremes was recognized especially among the young who could easily be manipulated. In particular, it was thought that the establishment of national youth movements for political ends could lead to a widespread and unfortunate collapse of most youth activities when there were government changes.

Again, the difficulties of relating education to development were stressed. This emphasis was necessary because education to encourage participation, as well as education to increase productivity, can result in widespread community resistance and disillusionment if the expected results are not forthcoming.