

INTRODUCTION

The birth of the non-formal idea coincides with a fundamental review both of development strategies and of the educational policies which support them. Throughout the developing world, but also to a lesser extent in the developed countries, the 1970s have been characterized by a search for educational alternatives. For many educators the search has meant improving formal school systems—more relevant curricula, better pedagogy and more flexible use of teachers or physical resources: such improvements have made and will continue to make an important contribution. However, for an increasing number of development planners and of educators, educational alternatives now include a wide range of planned *out of school* educational programmes, often for adults, but also for the school-age left-outs and drop-outs of formal schools. It is this great variety of out-of-school alternatives which has come to be known as ‘non-formal’ education.

In many ways, ‘non-formal’ is a new label for long established activities. What is new is the realization that educational programmes formerly seen as rather separate—like agricultural extension or literacy campaigns or health education—must now be seen more holistically as the educative component of national development plans; only then will they make the maximum contribution of which they are capable. It was therefore timely that the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference, held in Ghana in 1977, should recommend that a Commonwealth Specialist Conference on non-formal education should be held. In the event a conference on ‘Non-Formal Education for Development’ took place in New Delhi, India early in 1979 and a separate report of its deliberations has already been issued by the Commonwealth Secretariat under the title *Mobilizing Human Resources*.

One important effect of calling such a conference was to bring together an unusual range of talent and experience from all the major sectors of non-formal education. Not only that, but the Commonwealth itself, with its enormous variety of member countries, is uniquely able to provide examples of the whole range of world development strategies and of educational policies. The collective wisdom and experience of the delegates and resource persons at the conference have provided the essential raw material for this book. The

2 INTRODUCTION

conference papers and the conference discussions taken together give a more complete and more up-to-date picture of non-formal education than is currently available elsewhere.

What has been attempted here is a distillation of this collective wisdom and experience into a readable narrative. Some of the conference papers are quoted in full: others are used as the basis for a discussion of the major current themes of non-formal education for development. Without the papers and the hard thinking that went into them, no book would have been possible. Without the Conference, their interpretation might well have been different. With the help of both, it is hoped that this book will provide both stimulation and guidance to non-formal educators in the important tasks which lie ahead.

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