

Editorial Introduction

Rationale and format

This volume is one of the bi-products of the Pan-Commonwealth Experts Meeting on Educational Development: the Small States of the Commonwealth, organised by the Commonwealth Secretariat and held in Mauritius from 19-27 November 1985. The official report of that meeting was published in November 1986 and is listed in the select bibliography (Appendix B), but the many individual papers and seminar contributions that helped to make that meeting so productive could obviously not be included in a summary report designed to synthesise the main outcomes of the discussion. It has been our pleasure and privilege to respond to the invitation of the Commonwealth Secretariat to compile a collection of essays on a selection of the themes arising from that formative conference.

The *modus operandi* has been to invite potential contributors, mostly from among the participants of the Mauritius meeting but sometimes from colleagues who were unable to attend, to give their individual views on specified topics thus enabling them to include information or ideas not present in their contribution in Mauritius or arising from the discussion there. These contributions have been edited and in some cases combined to give a structure that gives the volume a meaningful sequence and format. In some cases considerable modification has taken place, in others less so, but in any case the identity of the original contributor is given in the introduction to each chapter. We are sorry that in the event it has not been possible

to include all invited contributions as constraints on the scale and balance of the volume have had to be observed: we are most grateful to all those who responded to our call.

Two main objectives have informed this exercise: firstly, to provide an opportunity for professional educators in or from small member states of the Commonwealth to contribute to the literature that is developing on education in small countries; secondly, by operating in this way to produce a volume that is both informative and readable for those at work where collections of work on small states may not be readily available. We hope that we have struck a reasonable balance in trying to meet our two objectives. A brief bibliography is included as Appendix B in the hope that at least some of the titles may be accessible or attainable by readers in small countries. This is not a volume which gives chapter and verse in the form of footnotes and references. Nonetheless, the majority of contributions are based upon documentary research as well as personal experience and we are most grateful for that. For obvious reasons then, we have not included any discussion on the definition of 'smallness'. We therefore suffice with the provision of Appendix A which simply comprises a list of member states and territories within the Commonwealth with individual populations of less than two million; an arbitrary figure but one which is often used as a bench mark for small country work.

This volume does not enter the academic debate on smallness. Nevertheless it is necessary to include in this introduction some broad comments on the variable context of small states so as to provide a degree of geographical and socio-economic perspective for the educational essays that follow.

Whatever the threshold of scale used in a definition of smallness, be it spatial, demographic or economic, the most obvious characteristic of the small states of the Commonwealth is that of variety. This must be taken into account when generalising about the characteristics of education, and the problems and challenges which it faces. Appendix A not only illustrates the vast range in territorial, demographic and economic scale that exists within small states but also the

geographical variety as between island, archipelago, littoral and landlocked countries. There are too, many cultural differences. It is appropriate then to preface a volume on education in small states with brief consideration of socio-economic contexts.

Socio-economic context

Problems of development and overconcentration

While there is no necessary association between size, however it is defined, and income per head or rate of growth of an economy, very few small states have achieved high levels of industrialisation. Further, out of the countries which have been classified by the United Nations as 'hard core', least-developed countries, nearly all of them are small. This suggests the propensity of small states to be poor, or at least to be faced with major economic difficulties in efforts to achieve development, because of factors which are usually related to their size. Their limited population base usually means that they have a very restricted internal market for products and as a result they do not enjoy the advantages of economies of scale which are important for successful industrialisation and economic diversification. In short, the economies of most small countries are overconcentrated.

Open economies and overdependence

Another feature of small nation states is the high degree of 'openness' of their economies, a factor which has encouraged outward economic integration, often at the expense of efforts to grapple with internal economic problems. This fact is partly revealed by the high ratio of imports to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which is about five times higher than the average for all exporting countries. This is directly related to the heavy concentration on a limited range of products and markets, which in turn contributes to economic, political and cultural vulnerability.

Some small countries have sought to overcome this constraint by the establishment of economic free-trade zones which allow

foreign firms to capitalise on relatively cheap labour in assembling or finishing products locally for specific markets abroad. For example, companies manufacturing television sets in the USA have been assembling these in smaller islands like St Kitts and Nevis and then shipping the assembled sets back to mainland USA without having to pay import duties for bringing in the parts to be assembled. However, this development strategy has so far not proved very successful, often benefiting only a very small section of the population. This is partly due to the relatively high cost of developing the necessary local infrastructure, such as roads, and extending their highly subsidised transportation services to these free zone areas.

High public expenditure

Basic services such as education, police and health have to be provided for the entire population. In small states the size of the public service expressed as a percentage of the total population tends to be disproportionately large. Further, the small number of clients for whom such services have to be provided makes it difficult for the administration of small states to enjoy economies of scale. Both the provision and the administration of public services tend to be more costly proportionately than in larger nation states.

Distance costs

The remoteness of areas with small clusters of population from the capital city can also add considerably to the difficulties of developing all areas of a country. The costs of transportation especially in archipelagic nations can be extremely high in meeting the needs of communities scattered across many islands. The per capita costs of providing services such as education tend to be higher than in larger and more densely populated countries. In addition, because of the economic, cultural and sometimes environmental differences that exist in some small nation states with widely scattered populations, the relevance of a centrally planned educational programme, and particularly a national curriculum, may be reduced and the problem

and cost of administration and supervision of educational services increased.

The dominance of public employment

Another feature of some small scale economies is the fact that the main generator of wage earning jobs tends to be the government. Public sector activities in general are usually large in comparison with those carried out by the private sector with all the inflexibility which this can bring about. This can affect adversely the pace with which new projects are developed and implemented. Further, much of the public sector spending tends to benefit the capital cities at the expense of the rural areas. Salaried and wage earning employees are concentrated in the capital with government workers predominant. Thus the multiplier effect of much government expenditure tends to be concentrated around the urban centres, widening the gap between the urban and rural areas. This can leave the rural economy in a further state of decay by contributing to the 'brain drain' from the rural to the urban areas; a phenomenon not peculiar to small countries.

Problems of finance

Small nation states tend to experience major difficulties in raising commercial loans. Even multilateral financial institutions such as the World Bank do not readily respond to their need for capital, partly due to the cost of vetting and approving small loans applications and then servicing them. In addition, these states tend to have difficulties in attracting foreign investors, usually because of the limited size of the home market. Therefore the major role in economic development is played by domestic entrepreneurs and by government.

Aid dependency

Because of the difficulty of securing access to international capital markets, small nation states have to depend heavily on aid, and on a per capita basis tend to receive more of it than do countries with a larger population. But while this has its advantages there are certain

potential disadvantages in such a situation. For example, donors might, and often do, impose their own criteria for granting aid. This process can determine the development priorities of small nation states irrespective of local priorities. In the field of education, lending agencies tend to dispense aid according to their perceptions of how education can help in the development process and not necessarily on the views of the countries requesting the aid. This in turn helps to increase their vulnerability to the open and hidden agendas of metropolitan countries.

Patronage and nepotism

Finally because of size, isolation and other factors the relationships among various sub-groups in the population of a small nation state tend to be characterised by strong personal ties and this can prove a challenging problem to educational administrators, especially when there are also racial or ethnic differences in the population. The high level of public visibility engendered by smallness brings instances of maladministration and partiality very much to the fore.

Some implications for human resource development

Disparities in the distribution of benefits as between capitals and free trade zones and the other areas of small countries have tended to increase. The flow of 'educated' manpower from the peripheral areas to the core around the primate city or town has grown. Furthermore, the kind of 'screwdriver' industries which outside entrepreneurs have spawned do not usually demand individuals with much technical skill, certainly not with higher levels of education. This disparity has another dimension regionally. Attempts to establish regional trading blocks have often tended to favour the larger, often at the expense of the smaller members states; the core/periphery problem appearing at the regional level.

Additional or alternative attempts to diversify small state economies have also occurred through the production of a wider range of agricultural commodities and the encouragement of tourism, but

despite such efforts the economies of the small states remain fragile. Further, because of the limited size of the economy, one or two transnational corporations operating in a small country can almost entirely dominate domestic production for export thereby increasing economic, political and cultural vulnerability through increased dependence. So increased integration into a world market from a position of profound weakness, and further dependence on world trade, plus their lack of influence over the markets in which their products are sold, tends to reinforce the dominance/dependency relationship between small nation states and metropolitan centres, whether through neo-colonial ties or the emergence of new industrial powers such as Japan.

The limited size of both population and economy are likely to have effects on the demand for education. Because of the tendency towards product specialisation, the range and level of skills required by local industries is often very restricted. Therefore any major attempt to diversify the educational services by increasing the range of skills offered can only effectively take place if there is an increased demand for trained manpower, which is often dependent on further economic diversification. However, as already noted, a limited population base imposes serious constraints on diversification.

Because of the limited labour market in small states for highly educated and trained manpower, there is often a lack of clear career opportunities, especially for individuals who are well qualified and competent. Therefore an individual's chances of moving up the occupational ladder in such circumstances can often prove frustrating, especially when a few, relatively young people fill the only jobs to which he/she could aspire. Partly for these reasons, when students from small nation states go abroad for further education they are often disinclined to return home, especially if they have pursued specialist studies in areas for which the local demand for their skills is limited. Even so, because of the small manpower resource base of microstates there is often a lack of spare capacity, in terms of qualified personnel available locally, which would allow these countries to send staff abroad for further training without adversely affecting the operation

of their existing organisations. So when new projects are initiated there is often a shortage of persons with the required skills to carry them out, especially in areas in which persons with specialist training are required. And if there is not likely to be any further demand for these specialised skills after a project is completed, then there is little sense in training local staff for jobs which disappear on completion of a particular project. This can result in a lack of local expertise to work on new development projects which can add substantially to their cost, through the employment of expatriates.

Provision of educational services

Given the broadly similar constraints facing small Commonwealth states in economic terms, those providing services - including educators - need to recognise the following points:

- 1 Certain non-manipulable variables are part of the very nature of small states and while they impose constraints in terms of the way in which educational services are provided they should be looked at more as challenges, with educational planners and administrators trying to come up with more non-traditional and innovative approaches.
- 2 Certain manipulable variables, though they would affect the nature and quality of the educational services needed, can only be 'manipulated' through adequate and appropriate economic and political strategies. Such responsibilities do not usually fall on the educators, who can often only work on their outcomes since the way these variables are dealt with would affect the nature of the educational programmes which they would have to provide.
- 3 Certain manipulable variables in education might help to reduce the constraints which size often imposes on the provision of educational services by traditional methods. It is to this which the

attention of the educators has to be directed in their efforts to produce appropriate educational policies and programmes.

Different degrees of educational provision

In trying to identify the manipulable variables there is a need to distinguish between those small nation states in which

- the provision of universal primary education is still not a reality
- primary education is universally provided, albeit in need of qualitative improvement; secondary education facilities are limited and no tertiary education is available locally
- both primary and secondary education are well provided and some tertiary education facilities are available locally, possibly even at university level.

Staff development and policy-making

The educational problems, needs and priorities in each of the above situations for small states must be different. That is why policy development must be locally generated, and the temptation to replicate educational models from larger developed countries should be resisted. A danger into which it is comparatively easy for a small country to be drawn is that of embarking upon overambitious programmes of educational development, especially in view of implications for recurrent expenditure. The greater the involvement of local expertise at an early stage in the development of policy the more likely that realistic routes of educational reform are followed. However, this does depend upon a cadre of skilled and experienced professionals being available locally. Due to the long standing tradition of 'education for migration' in many small states, it is the absence of such a cadre that tends to overburden local officials and limit the separation between policy development and policy implementation.

It is our conviction, therefore, that there is a need for the infusion of flexibility into the strategies identified and developed by education officials in small Commonwealth states. One way to lay the foundations

for the staff development inherent in this objective would be to ensure equality of treatment for all public officials. It would seem that lack of comparability in this respect normally works to the disadvantage of those in the education service. A greater proportion of an inevitably small pool of talent needs to be gathered into this area.

We see this volume as a small contribution to the process of staff development in the education services of small Commonwealth states in that it provides an opportunity for those confronting educational problems in similar contexts to make connections through authorship and readership. We hope it will foster discussion and highlight the need for continued sharing of knowledge and ideas as between those concerned locally, regionally or internationally with educational development in the small states of the Commonwealth. For while appropriate policy in such states will almost certainly be locally generated, that policy will be all the more appropriate for being informed by the experiences and ideas of others charged with making policy in similar circumstances of constraints of scale.

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