

Commonwealth co-operation

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THE COMMONWEALTH TODAY

The Commonwealth is a free association of states, one of the world's strongest voluntary international organizations. In December 1979 it has 42 members ranging in size of population from several hundred million to a few thousand. They include some of the world's richest nations and many of the poorest.

The Commonwealth contains people of many faiths, races, languages and cultures linked through shared traditions and the belief that their interests are served by partnership. Among member countries, English is the common language, and ideals about human rights, law, education and government are shared. These beliefs are enshrined in the Declaration of Commonwealth Principles (a copy of which may be obtained from the Commonwealth Secretariat).

All Commonwealth nations believe in and work for the success of the United Nations. The overwhelming majority of them belong to other regional or world-wide international associations, economic or political. Commonwealth membership is not an alternative, but a complement, to other forms of international co-operation.

The summit of Commonwealth relationships is the meeting of Heads of Government, held every two years. Other Ministerial meetings are held at regular intervals in such areas as finance, law, health, and education. The purpose of these meetings is to help formulate policies and to advance the interests of the nations of the world at large. The central body for co-operation between Commonwealth Governments is the Secretariat, established in 1965.

Governmental co-operation in the Commonwealth is crucial, but by no means everything. There is also a massive network of relationships between organizations and individuals in Commonwealth countries, more intimate and friendly than in any other international group of such diversity. The Commonwealth, world-wide, is a framework for friendship, frank speaking, and mutual understanding.

Julius Nyerere summed up the essence of the Commonwealth and the value of the co-operation which it can generate when he said, "The Commonwealth is people meeting together, consulting, learning from each other, trying to persuade each other and sometimes co-operating with each other, regardless of economics or geography or ideology or religion or race. It is this which makes the Commonwealth valuable".

COMMONWEALTH CO-OPERATION

1. The Commonwealth Secretariat

The Commonwealth, through its Secretariat, is active in a variety of fields. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) is the

largest and best known. It is a voluntary pledging fund and is administered in three main divisions:

- (a) General Technical Assistance
- (b) Education and Training
- (c) Export Market Development

Co-operation throughout the Commonwealth also takes place through the Commonwealth Science Programme, the Youth Programme, the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Programme (CSFP) and the Southern Africa Programme for Zimbabwe and Namibia. Functional Divisions in the Commonwealth Secretariat such as Rural Development and Food Production, Health, Economics, Law and Education are also deeply involved in co-operative activities.

2. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation

- (a) The General Technical Assistance Division of CFTC has been active in each of the regions of the Commonwealth in a variety of specialist fields through the recruitment and support of experts and advisers requested by member governments. Through this programme, for example, Keith Warren whom we met at the Village Educational Resource Centre at Savar, was employed to gather information on work being done in Commonwealth member countries on the production of low cost science teaching materials. His findings were later published as a book. Similarly, experts have been recruited for specific projects in a wide range of educational and technical fields.
- (b) The Education and Training Programme of CFTC is responsible for funding many of the seminars, workshops and conferences that are organised by the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat. It is also the channel for assisting countries who have personnel in key posts for which further training or experience is necessary. In this way teachers have been enabled to attend training courses which provided them with such basic skills as to enable them to take responsibility for schools broadcasting, establish audio visual aid centres or set up production centres for instructional materials. Study visits have been arranged for persons newly appointed to posts of responsibility to enable them to see successful programme in other developing countries where conditions are similar to those in their own country.

It was this programme that funded the visit in 1976 of a group of Commonwealth educators and broadcasters to visit India and study the working of its ambitious Satellite Instructional Television Experiment (SITE).

3. The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan

The Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Plan has benefited all Commonwealth Teachers. Through it, graduates are nominated by their country for places at a wide range of Commonwealth universities to undertake post-graduate studies. At present, more than 1,000 places are provided each year, but Ministers for Education have called for more so as to increase the number to 1,500 awards throughout member countries.

4. The work of the Education Division

The work of the Education Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat is determined largely by the recommendations made by Commonwealth Ministers of Education at their triennial meetings, the last of which was held in Accra, Ghana, in 1977. With its small staff of seven professional officers working under a Director and Assistant Director, the Education Division is currently engaged in programmes covering the fields of teacher education, educational media, universal primary education, science and mathematics education, technical education, non-formal education, curriculum, examinations, higher education, educational administration and book development. In addition to this, the Education Division is engaged in a programme of teaching about the Commonwealth through its varied activities and through the materials it produces and distributes to Ministers of Education regularly and especially for Commonwealth Day now held on the second Monday of March each year.

This present seminar marks a new thrust by the Education Division into the important matter of access to education. UPE is seen as highly desirable, but difficult to achieve for countries with low school attendance percentages, and so the issue of access to education is being pursued both through the formal system of schools and through alternative means which may more rightly belong to the field of non formal education. This approach is to be backed up by a Commonwealth wide study on the development, production and distribution of low cost teaching materials.

In recent years, the Education Division has organized a number of regional conferences, seminars and workshops in Asia and the Pacific such as:

- Pan-Commonwealth specialist Conference on Materials for learning and Teaching (Wellington, 1975)
- Pan-Commonwealth specialist Conference on Educational Broadcasting (Sydney 1975)
- Regional workshop on Educational Administration and Supervision (Kuala Lumpur, 1975)
- Regional workshop on Technical Education (Hong Kong, 1976)
- Regional workshop on Community Education (Cook Islands, 1976)
- Regional workshop on Low Cost Science Teaching Equipment (Papua New Guinea, 1978)
- Regional training course on Educational Administration and Supervision (Fiji, 1978)
- Regional workshop on In-service Teacher Education (Colombo, 1978)
- Pan-Commonwealth specialist Conference on Non Formal Education (New Delhi, 1979).

THE FUTURE

The next Commonwealth Education Conference will be held in Sri Lanka in 1980 and Ministers for Education will be determining the educational

priorities which will form the basis of the work programme of the Education Division. It is likely that recommendations will be made to enter, among others, the fields of non-formal education and special education.

The future of Commonwealth co-operation depends on this form of dialogue and consultation which has been a feature of our interaction so far. Increasingly the Commonwealth is exploring avenues of greater collaboration with other international organizations such as the SPC, SEAMEO, OAU, ECA, IBE, UNESCO, UNICEF, WCOTP and L'Agence de Co-operation Culturelle et Technique for the benefit of the people throughout the regions of the Commonwealth. Given the background of common institutions even where local adaptations and other changes have taken place, the informal nature of Commonwealth consultation and co-operation, with its unique flexibility in accommodating new ideas, has continued to hold out the hope to its members of growing co-operation, not merely in our own field of education but also in health, finance and economic affairs, agriculture and science policy and in administrative matters. In this way, though its resources are limited, its contribution to the international order is increasingly recognized in the counsels of the nations.