THE NATURE OF UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

Educational expansion and the schooling crisis

Since the Second World War the most remarkable development in international affairs has been the achievement of independence by so many formerly colonial territories. The coming of self-determination has led to drives to banish poverty, weakness and separation from the good things of life. "Development" has become a priority - a rising standard of living, industrial and urban growth, the rise of meritocracy; all form part of the expectations of people more able to determine their own future. The planning of development and change has become a major preoccupation of "new" governments.

This pressure to "develop" has become intensified as gaps between rich and poor countries have increased. Between 1974 and 1975 the average increase in per capita incomes in the rich countries at US $480 exceeded the average total income per head in the developing countries at US $416 (World Bank Atlas, London, 1978). Even amongst the poorer countries disparities have grown. The better off saw their average annual incomes grow at seven times the rate of some poorer countries between 1960 and 1975.

Such bald figures, even if accurately interpreted, are open to a variety of levels of acceptance. At the very least they serve to illustrate that pressure to

modernize and develop has become increasingly acute. Few governments have deliberately chosen the path of non-modernization.

Education, in the sense of formal schooling, has long been viewed as the "key that unlocks the door of modernization" (Harbison & Myers). The development plans of virtually all emergent countries lay great emphasis on the pre-eminent importance of education. The great international conferences of the 1960's in Karachi, Addis Ababa and Santiago gave impetus to and provided a rationale for the "rush to schooling". Targets were set; by 1980, it was recommended that, "primary education shall be universal, compulsory and free". The view that "education, under appropriate conditions is gainful economic investment and contributes to economic growth" (Addis Ababa Conference, 1962) having been generally accepted, it inevitably came about that formal schooling became accepted as the major tool or vehicle for modernization and development. Pressure for schooling did not arise from the economists alone. The political and social arguments in favour of mass provision were equally strong: Governments achieve their goals more rapidly with an educated populace; notions of national identity and integration may be reinforced through school systems; access to elite groups becomes possible for a wider section of the population; the teaching force may act as a bridge between "the people" and those in authority. Faced with problems of making the rural environment more attractive, governments have looked to schools as centres of community activity and to educated citizens as agents of change.

For these and other reasons, dramatic increases in school provision

characterize most of the new nations which have arisen over the last thirty years. Now is the time to ask if the promise inherent in wide-spread schooling has been fulfilled, if the hopes of the fifties and sixties have been justified. Commentators like Coombes, Abernethy and the World Bank are pessimistic. Schooling has been considered "a major instrument for the political, social, cultural and economic modernization of the developing world in the 1950's and 1960's" (World Bank, Education Sector Working Paper, 1974). Over those twenty years aggregate increases in enrolments were:

First level	211%	
Second level	465%	
Third level	511%	(World Bank, Education SWP 1974)

However, by the 1970's enrolments had stagnated. Education had contributed to development problems through escalating costs, mismatch of graduates to job-opportunities, political activism of the dissatisfied and other equally unlooked-for results. Schooling is no longer so readily seen as the panacea for development problems. Universal primary education, variously defined, may be interpreted as the major ingredient in the educational panacea about which so many second thoughts have been expressed. So questions must be raised - what is the current "state of play" with UPE and what lessons have been learned? The main task of this report summary is to pursue the following questions:

(a) What progress has been made towards UPE, particularly in Commonwealth countries?

(b) How do individual countries interpret UPE and what are the aims of their provision?

(c) What alternative and innovative strategies are being adopted in order to achieve the aims of UPE?

The examination of such questions may lead to a reconsideration of the "crisis" view of school provision. Phillips writes, "Those who believe today that education can change the course of civilization base their view less on the automatic gains from education than on the possibilities of fundamental change in education itself....." (Basic Education A World Challenge).

The shift in emphasis from a crisis to a challenge reflects more than the mere power of positive thinking. If a universalizing of opportunity for learning and self-improvement can be brought about by a sharing of successful strategies, developing variety in ways and means of achieving our objectives and adapting school systems to realistic targets,then the crisis may be translated into a challenge. The view which develops in this summary is that school systems are adaptable and therefore amenable to change and improvement. Further, governments have invested too much in their schools to abandon them or even partially dismantle them. What they are most likely to seek is help in deciding how to use the apparatus more effectively.

The nature of UPE - some distinctions to be made

Before examining progress towards UPE more closely it is necessary first to make some distinctions concerning the overall concept of universal primary education. The dangers of generalizing from preconceived notions of what may or may not constitute UPE are clear. It

may well be that no all-embracing definition exists or even needs to be sought. However, some separating out of the possible ingredients of universal provision may still be helpful.

(a) Universal

At its most simple this term may mean that all the target population actually attend school, as with primary age pupils in Barbados, Cyprus, Tonga and other Commonwealth countries. Again "universal" may merely mean that access is provided but the concept of compulsion remains open.

Further, countries may have legislation demanding universality and even compulsion dating from many years ago yet have no means of putting the legislation into practice. This is universality on paper but not in fact.

Frequently, universality is claimed because of high levels of enrolment - yet attendance may be at a very low level. "Universal" may therefore apply to very high levels of attendance in a compulsory or voluntary system; a right of access only; an unfulfilled but statutary aim; high enrolments with low attendance rates.

(b) Primary

Such terms as "basic education" and "first cycle" have been added to primary and elementary in describing the young child's first experience of organized, formal schooling. The "classical" model of a seven year cycle of primary education conducted in a special school building by

full-time teachers within a system of schooling is now open to considerable variation. The plans for a great spread of literacy and numeracy, life-skills and awareness expressed by the international conferences and aid agencies were largely envisaged in terms of formal school systems. One of the tasks of this study is to draw attention to innovations and developments which replace, supplement or complement the "formal schooling" view of what primary education is to be.

(c) Education

To say that "education equals schooling" may be a good rule of thumb when reading national development plans. However, the differences between the terms are well documented. In any discussion of UPE, it may well be a formal system of primary schooling, a cluster of non-formal programmes, a variety of multimedia approaches or adult literacy drives which are under discussion. Certainly one should be aware that primary education may no longer be taken exclusively to mean "instruction of young children in a formal school system".

Efforts towards UPE - variety in practice

It may not be possible to define UPE except in the most general terms - "that state of educational practive where, by conscious effort, communities attempt to make opportunities for learning and self-improvement available to all their peoples". As will become clear from later sections of this summary, provision for UPE may in practice include some of the following:

(a) A programme for implementation or a general, evolutionary development towards full attendance

Ghana and Nigeria represent countries where a programme for UPE with clearly defined starting and conclusion dates has been instituted. Countries like Botswana and Swaziland have a more general aim of school expansion until universality is achieved. Malaysia was already moving towards 100% attendance when full implementation began in 1962. A third pattern may involve integrating formal school expansion and development with adult leteracy, youth organizations and other less formal approaches.

(b) Compulsion or voluntary attendance

Compulsory school attendance has long been a feature of primary schooling in some Commonwealth countries. In others, compulsion has been avoided because schools could not cope with the large numbers involved and the problem of fee-paying is not easily solved. Compulsion is often a long-term aim as expressed in national development plans. Of the thirty-one Commonwealth countries surveyed, twelve demand compulsory attendance. The Seychelles which enjoys over 95% primary school attendance, still maintains a voluntary approach.

(c) Fee-paying or fee-free

This area is often difficult to separate from that of compulsion. Attendance cannot be compelled where fees are demanded. Again, even in apparently fee-free systems,

fees are disguised as text-book charges or building levies and so on. Freedom from fees at the early stages is a device used in countries like Kenya in order to encourage enrolment. In effect, true universalization must depend on freedom from fees.

(d) School-based instruction or centred on less formal methods

Provision need not be one or the other. Formal school resources may be used for teaching adults and school-leavers. "IMPACT" type projects may blur the sharp division between what is school and what is non-school. (Project IMPACT: an experiment in mass education, IDRC, Ottawa 1977). The nature of formal schools may also be changed as in Papua New Guinea's Community Schools and the recycling of schooling in Tanzania. Of the thirty-one Commonwealth countries surveyed, twenty-eight base their provision on formal primary school systems. A further seven supplement their provision for basic education with less formal methods.

(e) Age specific or open entry

Many countries specify quite clearly the duration, entry age and completion age of a basic cycle of schooling. Nigeria's UPE programme is a good example of this approach. As recently as June 1978. India has experienced controversy over proposals to change these specifications fairly radically (Times Educational Supplement, 30/6/78). An important aspect of the Project IMPACT innovations in the Philippines is the concept of entry and re-entry. More

countries seem to be experimenting with alternative interpretations of the "appropriate age".

(f) Government sponsored efforts and local community initiatives

The centralized model of universal provision entirely government financed and controlled is also a changing one. Local authority and community efforts may set up and finance much of what goes on in schools (see the School Improvement programmes of India and the 1976 Education Plan of Papua New Guinea which encourages parental contributions in cash and kind). One of the major problems encountered in Nigeria's programme of UPE has been that of over-centralized control. Commentators suggest that high levels of "grassroots" control are essential for true universalization. However, the Sierra Leone government has been discouraged from over-devolving control simply because the local administrative structure is not strong enought to cope with the added burdens of school administration.

(g) Unofficial schools and over-abundant child populations

A weakness of official figures for enrolments presented by many countries may well be caused by insufficient knowledge of how many children wish to attend. An extreme case is reported by Hawes and Bwanswa-Sekandi in "Teacher Education in New Countries", May 1969. In one district of Uganda more children were enrolled in unofficial schools than there were in the official ones. T.M. Bray reports in a "Savannah" article of June 1977 enrolments of

250% more children in Kano State, Nigeria than were anticipated. The need for reliable date when considering universalization is self-evident. Such phenomena as Koranic and church schools may be making such a significant contribution to primary schooling that far more children are in school than governments know about. The introduction of UPE schemes may also unleash a flood of applicants of unexpected proportions.

This brief discussion of some of the elements which may be involved in universal provision serves to underline the wide variety of circumstances which may fall under the blanket heading of UPE. A glance at three specific countries may further illustrate the ways in which UPE may be interpreted:

UPE in Nigeria

In January 1974 Nigeria's programme for UPE was announced. At the end of the 1975/76 school year massive preparations were made to admit the first UPE scholars for the commencement of the 1976/77 year. In Kano State alone, this meant an increase in schools from 678 to 2,724. Enrolments increased almost threefold. Kano State's dramatic expansion illustrates the general picture in Nigeria though the State's educational provision had long lagged behind the rest of the country. Nigeria's UPE scheme, financed by oil revenues, aimed

- to provide each child with his fundamental right to schooling,
- to provide a base for future prosperity based on an educated citizenry,
- to remove disparities in opportunity throughout the country.

- to increase national unity

By 1981 it is hoped that all six year olds will be enrolled, compulsion being introduced by 1979. The problems to be encountered in such a massive programme were predicted by Hawes and Williams in a series of 1974 "West Africa" magazine articles. Basing their estimates on Ghana's experience of UPE in the 1960's, Hawes and Williams predicted that far more children would be available than was supposed. As Bray's figures quoted above bear witness, the prediction was fulfilled.

Teacher supply was also identified as another problem. The 18 million children to be "on roll" by 1981 would need 600,000 teachers. In 1974, only 150,000 existed of whom half were unqualified. Hawes and Williams argue the necessity for accepting, at least temporarily, under-qualified teachers until the college can cope or alternative programmes of teacher education can be worked out.

Physical facilities, particularly new classrooms, present their own difficulties. On the one hand their high cost is a deterrent, but as Bray suggests, government spending on school buildings demonstrates how committed the authorities are to UPE.

The curriculum has obviously been the focus of much attention. Professor Fafunwa in a 1974 "New Nigerian" article pleads for a truly Nigerian curriculum. Hawes and Williams argue for a national core plus local variations. Unfortunately, Bray reports an "old-fashioned and unadventurous" curriculum. Modern mathematics has been abolished, partly because the poorly trained teachers could not cope with it. The curriculum

has not been blessed with much innovation, despite the pleas of authorities such as Fafunwa to avoid "the mixture as before".

As an exemplar of a specific programme for universalization, the Nigerian experience has much to teach us. Certainly much has been achieved though Nigerians are the first to admit that shortcomings remain.

UPE in India - the case for universal elementary education

As early as 1882 the first plans for universal primary education were put to the Indian Education Commission. By 1975 enrolments had reached 82.7% of the 6-11 years age group. India's vast size, population and variety of provision make it difficult to summarize the national picture accurately. The State of Tamil Nadu is selected as an example.

Tamil Nadu is well on the way to universalization with some 90% of the 6-11 year age group enrolled in primary schools. The constraints experienced by Tamil Nadu reflect those which are common to India. Economic pressures keep children at home for more productive work. Girls particularly suffer, as witness the low enrolment figures compared to those for boys. Where communities are mainly scheduled tribes or castes, literacy rates are low and enrolment rates are similarly low. Throughout the State the same relationship between literacy rates and enrolments is observed. Religious and cultural constrainst operate to hinder women's access to schooling. Geographical and population distribution patterns and factors lead to low enrolments in some areas of the State. Wastage and stagnation occur at high levels. Abrupt increases in enrolments have revealed real weaknesses in the holding power of schools. Echoes of the Nigerian problem of teacher quality are heard. Financial

and administrative machinery is also inadequate for true universalization. By 2001 it is estimated that numbers of school-age children will have almost doubled - 200 million children will be demanding their "inalienable right" to education.

Despite massive achievements, the formal system has failed to bring about true democratization of educational opportunity. Subramanian (Key Issues in Indian Education; A search for alternatives, Department of Education, University of York, 1977) is led to suggest that non-formal educational provision is "the only alternative available to us to solve the present impasse". Typically, non-formal education treats the casualties of the formal system, provides literacy skills for adults, arranges agricultural training for subsistence farmers and organizes health, welfare, family planning and craft education. Amongst Tamil Nadu's on-going schemes are:

(a) Remedial basic education;

(b) Orientation courses for social service and community development projects;

(c) Youth programmes including sports, Scouts and Guides;

(d) Agricultural, fishery and nutrition schemes;

(e) In-service industrial schemes;

(f) School-based vocational programmes;

(g) Cottage industries;

(h) Self-employment training.

The I.B.E. publication "Educational Innovation in India" outlines some of the significant areas of India's experimentation with non-formal methods. The "Gram Shikshan Mohim" or Village Education Movement arose from disappointment with the results of traditional adult literacy classes. Local committees were formed for self-help in literacy and a truly co-operative venture developed with a well-planned programme of instruction and recognition of neo-literates. A village "congratulatory function" would follow the graduation of the newly literate provided the practical, community improvement lessons integral with the programme had actually been carried out. Best results seem to have occurred with the 14-25 year age-group. In other age-groups high rates of reversion to illiteracy have occurred.

Though India relies fundamentally on her formal system as the major vehicle for universalization, such distinguished educators as J.P. Naik have long been recommending alternative structures and methods. The size and cost of the requisite formal system make non-formal provision a matter of urgency. At present, 60% of the Class 1 cohort does not complete Class 5. India is using the primary schools, community development programmes, broadcasting and multi-media approaches, literacy proframmes, farmers' and other clubs, incentives for children of the weaker sections of society, appointment of school mothers, provision of creches and pre-schools, education of parents to overcome prejudice against girls' schooling and other non-formal efforts to achieve universalization. In a questionnaire reply (see Section 2) it is stated that "non-formal education should be the major thrust". It might be added that, on such complementary programmes as those

outlined above, the survival of India's formal schools depends.

The Philippines and Indonesia; Experiments in Mass Primary Education

Looking beyond the Commonwealth, Project IMPACT in the Philippines and its parallal, Proyek Pamong in Indonesia, provide a third example of how UPE may be interpreted. Arising from a 1972 decision of the South East Asian Ministers of Education group, the Regional Centre for Educational Innovation and Technology (Innotech) was asked to devise "an effective and economical delivery system for mass primary education". The Nigerian model of UPE typifies attempts to provide access to schooling for all. India is particularly interesting for its experimentation with alternatives. Project IMPACT seeks to deliver the advantages of schooling in such a way that access is denied to nobody. Key concepts in the delivery system are the "module" of self-instructional material, the peer-grouping of pupils in mutually helpful classes, the innovative treatment of the teacher's role and the creation of Community Learning Centres. Sanger (Project IMPACT; IDRC, Ottawa, 1977) describes IMPACT as a "fragile experiment" into which more should not be read than into any other exploratory approach. The project rests on a seven-point programme -

(a) The school becomes a Community Learning Centre (CLC), dividing walls are removed and pupils move about freely to the modules or equipment they need;

(b) Students form groups at the same level or grade, helping each other with self-instructional modules;

(c) Lower grades have a 'programmed teacher', a student from the higher

grades to help them;

(d) Upper grades have a 'peer tutor', often a high school student on a one-day-a-month basis;

(e) Skilled members of the community come into the CLC or conduct classes in their own workshops;

(f) Home tutors - parents, siblings or neighbours help pupils work on modules at home;

(g) The classroom teacher becomes an "instructional supervisor" from whom most routine tasks are removed so that individual attention is increased. Aides help with test correction.

The Indonesian team has written, "Community participation is the heart of IMPACT'. This is a learning society we are bound to achieve". Nigeria, India and the Philippines/Indonesia experiment with IMPACT represent alternative ways of tackling the problem of mass schooling. Other countries such as Sri Lanka, Tanzania or Peru might have been offered as examples. The wide variations in what may go under the broad heading of universal primary education are illustrated.

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