

INTRODUCTION

Twenty-seven of the 47¹ member countries of the Commonwealth have a population of less than 2,000,000 people. Of this group 18 countries have fewer than 500,000 people and seven of them have less than 100,000. Ten of the 27 countries lie within the Caribbean region and another eight are in the South Pacific.

Recognition of the distinctive problems which confront the smaller nations of the Commonwealth has resulted in initiation by the Commonwealth Secretariat of a number of programmes and projects for what is termed collectively the Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States of the Commonwealth. Support for special measures of Commonwealth assistance was re-affirmed most recently at the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting held in Melbourne, Australia in October 1981. Heads of Government acknowledged the existence of distinctive economic and trading difficulties related, in part, to limited human and natural resource endowments, coupled with specific transport and energy problems, and requested the Commonwealth Secretariat to strengthen Commonwealth assistance to the countries in question.

In the 1981-82 financial year the Secretariat's Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) spent 36 per cent of its total programme expenditure on these smaller members of the Commonwealth, especially in support of scholarships and the provision of experts and consultants. In addition, educational development, export marketing, industrial development, the training of public administrators and the role of women in development have received attention from specialist divisions and units within the Secretariat. A few studies have been undertaken of the distinctive economic problems of small states, and of the implications of smallness and remoteness for health services.

WORK OF THE EDUCATION PROGRAMME OF THE COMMONWEALTH SECRETARIAT

Much of the work of the Education Programme of the Human Resource Development Group (the Education Division prior to January 1983) has been based on the provision of courses, seminars and meetings at a regional level. Therefore, support for the educational development of the Commonwealth Caribbean and of the Commonwealth Pacific has been of major concern in areas such as technical education, teacher education, book development, educational administration and the teaching of science and mathematics. Current initiatives include the proposed establishment of a Commonwealth Regional Training Programme for Educational Administration in the Caribbean following the recommendations of a regional meeting held in Jamaica in July 1982.

However, in addition to initiatives in established sectors of education, the 1979 meeting of Senior Education Officials recommended that the Education Division should undertake a survey of the educational problems of Island

¹ In September 1983 St Christopher-Nevis became the forty-eighth member country of the Commonwealth.

Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States of the Commonwealth in preparation for the Eighth Commonwealth Education Conference (8CEC). Based upon information received from member states a discussion paper entitled "Education in the Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States" (reference 8CEC/WP/2) was presented at the 8CEC held in Sri Lanka in August 1980. The Conference recommended that the paper should be supplemented and then revised. The revision, which is to be published shortly, pays particular attention to the problems of developing effective educational systems in the light of an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages imposed or brought about by scale, isolation and dependence in the smaller countries of the Commonwealth.

BACKGROUND TO THE MEETING

Another major recommendation of 8CEC was that "... the Secretariat develop its informational base and that of the island developing and other disadvantaged states over the next three years through initiatives that will provide opportunities for the small states of the Commonwealth to meet together to examine the diversity and commonality of educational need" (8CEC Report, para 160). Coupled with this recommendation was the statement in paragraph 161 of the 8CEC Report that "... meetings should be held to examine the problems of effecting and supporting appropriate innovation in the field of technical and vocational education and training, recognising that this will have different connotations in different countries "(para 161).

Technical and vocational education and training has been a major component of the work programme of the Education Division for nearly 15 years. During this period particular stress has been placed on the liaison between industry and technical education, the development of technical teacher training, the development of examinations in technical subjects, the provision of industrial experience, and the establishment and furtherance of regional co-operation among technical institutions.

These needs present a distinctive spectrum of difficulties in the Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States of the Commonwealth. The industrial base is likely to be small and narrow, and during the current recession stagnant, thereby providing limited employment opportunities. The formal educational base is also likely to be limited. Although most countries have their own small technical college, few offer technical teacher training or have their own examinations system or develop most of their own teaching materials. For these requirements there is dependence on countries overseas, often at relatively high economic and social cost.

Recognising the growing demand for effective and efficient technical and vocational education and training, yet aware of the special economic and educational limitations posed within the Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States of the Commonwealth, a meeting was organised by the Education Division of the Secretariat with funds from its Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) from 26-30 April 1982 in Nassau, The Bahamas. It sought to examine appropriate ways and means by which technical and vocational education and training could benefit from greater innovative and cost conscious use of indigenous resources, both human and capital, in countries of the Commonwealth Caribbean.

OBJECTIVES OF THE MEETING

The meeting had three broad objectives:

1. To examine the current contribution to development of technical and vocational education and training within the Caribbean and other regions of the Commonwealth.
2. To examine innovation in the practice and management of technical and vocational education appropriate to the development needs of Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States.
3. To improve and develop regional and pan-Commonwealth co-operation to assist innovation in such states in technical and vocational education and training.

In pursuing these objectives the meeting identified projects and proposals, innovative in character, and with particular emphasis on the use of indigenous resources, which respect national ambitions, reflect actual needs - such as food production, job creation and community development - and relate to the range of agencies and possible mechanisms which can provide relevant education and training for adults as well as young people. In addition to the established forms of technician and craft training the meeting sought to recognise the present and potentially greater contribution of family and other small scale employers, and that of churches, voluntary organisations and local groups. The meeting was also concerned with the management and co-ordination of technical and vocational education and training.

The meeting stressed that the appropriate scope for technical and vocational education and training is not confined to any specific number of examinable training courses in formal education institutions. In this respect the meeting sought to examine the attitudes of those concerned with technical and vocational education and training through recognising that it has a broad developmental role to play. In this context technical and vocational education and training can take many forms, from the informal transmission of skills and knowledge from one individual to another through to highly organised and examinable national training courses. As the needs are numerous and varied, the responses must be flexible and not constrained by inherited models.

The scope and sequence of the meeting is reflected in the seven main chapters of this report. These are:

1. The Contribution of Technical and Vocational Education and Training to Development.
2. The Methodology of the Meeting.
3. Current Provision and Potential of Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Development.
4. The Management of Technical and Vocational Education and Training for Development.
5. Case Studies from the Commonwealth Caribbean and the Commonwealth Pacific.
6. Innovative Projects for Development.

7. Improving the Effectiveness of Technical and Vocational Education and Training through Regional and International Co-operation.

At the conclusion of the meeting the participants discussed and agreed upon a series of specific recommendations addressed to governments and to the Commonwealth Secretariat and other international agencies. The complete list of recommendations appears on page 6.

METHODOLOGY ADOPTED AT THE MEETING

The meeting had a practical orientation. For most of the week participants gathered in small workshop groups to isolate precise national development needs, examine existing training responses to those needs and identify the potential within national education and training systems which could improve training responses. This process is explored more fully in Chapter 2 of this report.

From an examination of these three stages, groups and individuals, although limited by time, proposed in outline specific training projects to match known economic and social development needs. The proposed projects were taken back in outline to the governments of the countries represented at the meeting for consideration and, where appropriate, subsequent implementation.

This workshop process was recognised by the participants as a valuable opportunity for the sharing of experience, needs, problems and innovations. Of particular interest and widely welcomed by the Caribbean participants was the infusion of ideas and information from Mauritius, Kiribati and Fiji, countries thousands of miles from the Caribbean but which offer examples of training programmes which can be applied in the Commonwealth Caribbean. The continuation of this sharing of experience can continue with the assistance of the Commonwealth Secretariat and through regional educational networks such as Unesco's recently established Caribbean Network of Educational Innovation for Development (CARNEID). The deliberate networking of educational information is especially important for small island countries which may suffer from professional isolation.

PARTICIPANTS AT THE MEETING

The importance attached to the meeting can be gauged by the response to the Commonwealth Secretariat's invitation. Fourteen of the 18 Commonwealth Caribbean countries, including associated states and dependent territories invited to attend accepted, as did three non-Caribbean countries - Fiji, Kiribati and Mauritius. Three of the Caribbean countries paid for a second participant to attend. Invitations to send an observer to the meeting were accepted by the Caribbean Community Secretariat (CARICOM), the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the University of the West Indies (UWI) and the Association of Canadian Community Colleges (ACCC). The full list of participants is contained in Appendix A of this report.

THE GOVERNMENT OF THE BAHAMAS

The Ministry of Education and Culture played a vital role in ensuring that arrangements for the meeting were of a high standard. The Honourable Darrell E Rolle M.P., Minister of Education and Culture, formally opened the

meeting, and provided a valuable Bahamian insight into the problems with which participants would be grappling. The meeting was very ably chaired by Miss Marjorie Davis, Director of Education. Secretarial and administrative support was of the highest order. A warm welcome and memorable hospitality was extended to all participants, thereby providing the ideal context for the deliberations of the meeting.