

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND COMMENTS

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The remit for this monograph was to develop Part A of the 8CEC paper presented by the Commonwealth Secretariat under the title of **Education in the Island Developing and Other Specially Disadvantaged States**, (1) without departing significantly from the structure of the original paper. The survey on which that paper was based was returned by less than half the countries to which it was sent, and in fact only 11 small Commonwealth countries both returned survey information and prepared a country paper for 8CEC. Consequently these 11, with the addition of Belize, have been used as a sample for the bulk of this essay which, like its precursor, necessarily attempts to confront the issue of scale. Questions of isolation and dependence were also introduced to the original discussion and therefore have been developed here. Some extension has been possible through the utilisation of other documentation on these issues, and a list of these sources comprises the bibliography. It is hoped that the way in which the extension has been effected will provide a certain amount of basic information to readers not familiar with the nations involved. This basic information, summarised and synthesised, comprises a substantial appendix (Appendix B) to this monograph and is presented in relation to the six headings used in the Commonwealth Secretariat's survey questionnaire (Appendix A) namely institutions, finance, employment, curriculum, expertise, and technology.
- 1.2 Since 8CEC a number of meetings have taken place on small country issues and two in particular relating to education*. Information from papers submitted on these occasions has proved useful in the preparation of this paper.
- 1.3 The first observation to be made is that the concepts of scale, isolation and dependence are relative and composite. At the level of generalisation of the original 8CEC paper they have little meaning. The degree of disaggregation permitted by the increased scale of this monograph merely illustrates the fact that very much more research, conducted on a more sophisticated data base, is needed in order to identify elements and combinations of each of the three concepts that could be of practical value to educational planners and administrators in the countries concerned.

2. The concept of smallness

- 2.1 Indeed, the concept of smallness itself seems not to have engaged those concerned with educational provision, despite the problems attending it. As a past Vice-Chancellor of the University of Guyana has observed in respect of the educational policies of small Caribbean states:

* Commonwealth Secretariat: Commonwealth Regional Meeting on Innovation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training in Island Developing and other Specially Disadvantaged States, Nassau, The Bahamas, 26-30 April, 1982.

The Commonwealth Foundation: Seminar on the Development of Appropriate Skills and Qualifications Required to Serve the Community in Small Island States, Barbados, 2-7 May 1982.

"... they present few features that particularly distinguish them from the educational policies of much larger countries. This is somewhat surprising in a sense, in view of the recognition by policy makers in other contexts of the special problems and needs of the small LDCs, and only serves to illustrate the serious lack of integration of educational policies in their overall development policies. It is hardly surprising that the problems which beset much larger countries such as over-qualification for jobs and the brain drain, assume such greater proportions in these island states".(2)

- 2.2 Bennell and Oxenham take these points a stage further by making a general recommendation:

"The small society then should be prepared to foster few specialists and large numbers of polyvalent handymen. Since the SIS (Small Island States) are by definition small and since their export/haemorrhage of skills suggest that indeed they cannot support certain specialists (at least in the style the specialists feel they deserve), it can be reasonably expected that they would have turned their minds to encouraging substitutability and polyvalence. This does not appear to be the case. Manpower planning adheres to the specialisation of the larger societies and seems unwilling to accept the implications of smallness. In this it is urged and abetted by the professions". (3)

3. National co-operation and co-ordination

- 3.1 In the Country Papers of the small Commonwealth nations presented to international conferences one often finds reference to an obvious concomitant of smallness, and that is the potential of inter-ministerial and inter-institutional co-operation and co-ordination. More often than not the comment is in respect of the lack of such linkage, and it is quite clear that not only do several ministries have some sort of role in educational provision but also that in theory small countries often provide an ideal context for co-operation of this type. However, there are some prominent examples of initiatives in this area. Take for example the way in which the two major new institutions in the area of technical and vocational education in Barbados - the Samuel Jackman Prescod Polytechnic and the Barbados Community College - are both departments of the Ministry of Education. Also in Barbados, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security has since 1979 been responsible for a Skills Training Programme. This is run under the overall auspices of the National Training Board on which is represented not only this particular Ministry, but also the Ministry of Education, employers, employees and trades unions. As a recent Barbados country paper has observed:

"The courses are decentralised and community-based requiring light equipment and reaching young people in or near where they live. Such training is

offered mainly in existing accommodation in local communities". (4)

4. Reform

- 4.1 The intention of the Barbados programme to reach young people in their home areas touches on a crucial aspect of this whole problem, namely youth unemployment. As it happens, the percentage of those of working age who are unemployed in Barbados is, at about six per cent, relatively low. In many small countries it is very much higher and is linked with another phenomenon, migration to urban areas, sometimes associated with the increased incidence of delinquency and crime. It is indeed paradoxical that in these small countries high levels of youth unemployment exist in association with a shortage of labour in selected occupations, normally skilled. Most countries in our survey make mention of this issue, and a number of them have taken initiatives. Some of these are within the formal system of education, others are non-formal schemes.
- 4.2 Within the formal education system, a considerable effort seems to have been made. In Guyana, for example, a nationwide system of Community High Schools has been established, each one attempting to provide an experience relevant to the employment structure in its locality. The Adult Education Association of Guyana works with the schools on developing suitable skills - a good example of cross-sectoral co-ordination. St. Vincent, and the Grenadines, in keeping with many small Caribbean states, considered its Junior Secondary School Programme to be associated with the acquisition of relevant skills, but as in neighbouring St. Lucia, such schools have in practice become appropriated by the general educational tradition based on book learning and non-manual occupational aspirations. This is because parity of esteem is not afforded to parallel strands of a selective system, and one of the outcomes of national smallness is that the matter of selection becomes more acute in quantitative terms and more obvious in personal terms.
- 4.3 Nonetheless, some small countries have attempted a more thorough-going revision at the junior secondary level. For example, Dominica which has experimented with the village polytechnic model, sees this level as the focus of a community education initiative supporting objectives of self-employment and self-reliance. Multiple use is made of the physical facilities and the activities cut across the formal, non-formal divide. For such a model to succeed, the new sector must be nationwide in access in order to overcome the selection issue. It is also clear that all age groups need to be involved and that an adult education thrust is at least as important if not more so than school based innovation.
- 4.4 One of the most interesting small country innovations in respect of youth is that of the Seychelles National Youth Service. Indeed, the radical nature of this scheme was and is assisted by the smallness of the country. Even here, the major stumbling block is the need for a parallel transformation of the examination system without which the issue of correspondence between the means of the education system and the values underlying it cannot be resolved. Strongly expressed ideology, together with the boarding element with limited parental access have led to predictable unease and opposition in this case. Nonetheless, the experiment is clearly deserving of serious attention on educational grounds. A genuine attempt has been made to reform the curriculum in accordance with perceived local needs, with a relatively

small core of academic subjects and sport, and a rotating block system of vocational groupings such as agriculture, health and culture. A further development has been to institute the crop production and agricultural block as a village co-operative activity. Whether this can be developed throughout a difficult geographical context is questionable, but the possibilities, indeed imperatives of closer school-community integration in a very small country are at least being radically examined here and should be of interest to comparable states whether they are political bedfellows or not. Of course, this experiment would need to be extended to link with all communities in the country to be effective.

5. Attitudinal change

- 5.1 Clearly something more than a reform of schooling as such is required, in fact nothing less than a profound attitudinal change in respect of both education and the economy. With certain well known exceptions such as the Cayman Islands and Nauru, there has to be a coming to terms with the fact that agriculture and rural life form the basis of foreseeable fortunes. Throughout the small country sector of the Commonwealth as indeed with their large counterparts in the developing world, the style of colonial education and the temporary opportunities created by colonial society for clerical employment were a major force engendering disaffection with agricultural work, and rural living in general. Consequently, as the St. Lucia Country Paper to a Commonwealth Caribbean regional meeting puts it:

"... an eradication of the view that some traditional forms or levels of work are undignified". (5)

- 5.2 The Kiribati Country Paper at the same meeting takes a similar view in declaring that rural development is synonymous with national development. Here a labour rotation programme has been introduced for unskilled and semi-skilled workers as an attempt to cope with unemployment both in rural and urban areas. In addition, a focus on village-level technology is in hand. Such initiatives are part of the Government's response to the need for attitudinal changes outlined in the Country Paper:

"Introduction of new technology and skills training at village level is not to be seen as an easy task. Many cultural factors tend to work against the concept of change. Sharing or exchange of skills at village level is alien to Kiribati culture. These facts are mentioned to illustrate that the rate at which change takes place is an indeterminate variable, very much dependent on individual attitudes". (6)

- 5.3 Kiribati has the extra problems of island scatter and a relatively poor national resource base, but is nonetheless grasping the nettle of local rural economic improvement.
- 5.4 While most of the small Commonwealth countries in the Pacific do have a tradition of small family communities, the Caribbean experience of having been established from the outset as plantation estate economies based on slave labour presents an extra dimension of challenge to the requirement of

an attitudinal change in favour of the rural sector. Nonetheless, in the context of rising population totals, constraints on emigration and a small finite land area, options are beginning to sharpen, and a refocussing on agriculture is inevitable. Both Montserrat and Dominica are seeking to enhance the export agriculture sector, the former in terms of regenerating the Sea-Island cotton industry and the latter with respect to bananas. In both cases the aim is to modernise the technique of production and increase the output. The educational implications of this type of agricultural initiative are obviously different from, though not necessarily at odds with, the smallholding and semi-subsistence element of the rural economy. There are other initiatives in this area too, for example the Agro-based School Co-operative Project in Saint Lucia, which:

"... arose out of a general need to relate the educational provision for final year students in the primary and junior secondary schools more closely with the world of work, thereby enhancing their employment prospects". (7)

- 5.5 Whilst remaining mindful of the over-riding importance of improving the primary sectors of small country economies, a task requiring profound educational reform and support, the other sectors of these economies must also be recognised. Bennell and Oxenham categorise these as being productive activities generating wage and salaried employment, public sector employment, and the urban informal sector. The last named is, they suggest, particularly significant and they claim could have some effect on vocational training policies in small island states (SIS):

"The primary mode of skill acquisition in the informal section is 'learning by doing' on the job and the success of this informal training process has helped to counteract to some extent the tendency towards excessive formalisation and institutionalisation in the provision of training facilities by SIS governments". (8)

- 5.6 Given the proportionally high incidence of urbanisation in what are in many cases rapidly becoming 'City States', any desired attitudinal shift must not be simplistically rural. Non-primary sectors in small insular countries may be extremely volatile and geographically clustered, but this demands flexibility in education not just at the vocational level of employment opportunity, but also at an earlier stage of focus in the primary curriculum. Localisation, with the environment, physical and human, as a resource for learning would help, but this requires a different type of teacher education and training to provide the necessary skills of personal research and materials production. A re-orientation of teacher education and training, initial and in-service, could provide the sharp end of curriculum change.

6. Indigenous resources and structural change

- 6.1 It is clear that in a world of individual political units with their errant systems of education, small states have a particular need to generate much more and accurate information on their own resources. Given increasing populations and less opportunity for emigration, the pressure on these basic resources will increase most urgently in the smaller nations. So curriculum

renewal based on the local circumstances of economy, society and culture is urgently in need of indigenous information. It is not only the expertise to gather and integrate this information that is needed, but also the technical skills and facilities to reproduce and disseminate it. To this end the integration of teacher training institutions with technical colleges and other post-compulsory elements into a tertiary college at the apex of the educational pyramid of small country systems is a promising trend.

- 6.2 The College of the Bahamas has given a lead in this direction and the Morne Complex of tertiary institutions in St. Lucia has great potential for further integration and localisation.
- 6.3 It is important that localisation and small scale operation should be viewed as positive trends open to what the Swedes have termed 'rolling reform'. To be constrained by a new orthodoxy could be just as damaging as failing to challenge the inherited colonial model of schooling. The cult of appropriate technology is a case in point, which as a recent country paper contribution from Guyana points out is in need of re-orientation and integration with education and training:

"Under existing circumstances only a few kinds of items of appropriate technology are manufactured and sold in kits and these are relatively few in number and expensive. The vast majority are either designed and built by farmers and other rural folk or designed by persons in university departments of technology and similar institutions, to be built, used and maintained by farmers and members of rural communities. It appears that as a generality, attention is given to getting the thing to work and little or none to explaining the underlying scientific principles. This omission is lamentable particularly with respect to young persons who otherwise get no science education, and amongst whom are included the potential innovators of these generations." (9)

- 6.4 Unlike in their larger and more diversified counterparts, for most small countries it is the case that the best available technical expertise is in the education system itself, but is not locally orientated. Rather it is striving towards the preparation of students and pupils for metropolitan examinations and qualifications. It is a direct consequence of the lower status of technical education in the legacy of the colonial model that while schooling is becoming subject to local and regional validation, craft skills are still in a state of dependency. In fact in many small countries the technical college, however modest, could cope with many of the skills problems of local communities and individual families. It could become the core rather than the periphery of the educational scene, with a corresponding increase in popular esteem, which links back to the issue raised earlier of the need for profound attitudinal change.
- 6.5 In the same way that inter-ministerial co-operation is particularly important in small countries, so also is that between technical education and economic activity in the 'real world'. Certain institutional obstacles need to be overcome, for as Franklin rightly points out:

"There is an urgent need to examine the remuneration levels and career opportunities for technical and vocational education and training staff to ensure that the movement of key personnel between training institutions and industry is a two-way process which will bring the greatest benefit to national development strategies." (10)

- 6.6 This is of course a need in large countries too but smallness engenders wider disparities and differentials as well as inviting co-operation by virtue of geographical proximity - archipelago nations apart. There is no doubt that one very clear outcome of the survey (from which this monograph derives), identifies the technical sector as at the same time the weakest and the most needed dimension of small country educational provision.

7. Regional co-operation

- 7.1 Widening the scale, and recognising the geographical and historical clustering of many of the small states in question, both the survey and the Country Papers express a recognition of the vital role of regional co-operation. While an increased localisation of curriculum is required, there is the juxtaposition of local and international frames of reference to be coped with. The resolution of these competing claims is a task for which the university, whether national or regional, should be concerned to equip itself. Given the inertia effect on the school system arising from the demands of traditional modes of selection and preparation for university entry, there needs to be a reappraisal of the role of a university in this context along the lines of Michael's proposals referred to above (Chapter 4). The detailed role, structure and operation of a university serving small countries should be more in the line of a high expertise supporting service rather than a repository of disinterested scholarship. Changes of approach at this level need not prevent the genuine maintenance of standards for which universities are most properly responsible.
- 7.2 In particular the regional network of a university could greatly assist the sort of local research mentioned above as being necessary to generate a locally oriented and resource based curriculum at the school level. It can be especially effective in the field of adult education. The department of extra-mural studies should be elevated to a position of prime significance. This would require a major shift in attitudes and resources within the institution itself. Regional governments are the paymasters and as such should be able to exert pressure for innovation and development.
- 7.3 Regional co-operation is not confined to the university, but is also a ministerial responsibility. The post-independence picture of increasing disparities between small countries is evident from the survey above and would certainly increase if the regional university split up into a number of separate institutions. This has long threatened the Commonwealth Caribbean and could arise in the South Pacific also.

8. Comparative studies

- 8.1 This previous point leads directly to the potential interest of a series of comparative studies of educational patterns and problems. This relates to the elementary fact that one of the obvious problems arising from a combination of smallness of scale, isolation and dependence is that of obtaining information on educational and other developments elsewhere.
- 8.2 It would, for example, be of some potential interest and value to compare and attempt to evaluate the response to the problems posed for education by island scatter in say, The Bahamas, Tonga and the Seychelles, or by land based insulation in Guyana, Botswana, Belize and Brunei. Another dimension of comparison that might be informative would be to consider the educational problems and responses in small island communities of the British Isles such as selected Hebridean Islands or the Isle of Man, in relation to small Commonwealth countries. A third possibility for comparative study would be to consider educational patterns in small highly developed countries outside the Commonwealth for example Iceland or Luxembourg, or selected components of France d'Outre Mer such as Martinique, Reunion or New Caledonia. Supportive international agencies or consortia such as the Association of Caribbean Universities (UNICA) and the South Pacific Commission (SPC) already exist as potential facilitators of cross-national small country comparative study.
- 8.3 Not surprisingly in the circumstances, the limitations of the 8CEC exercise and of any study developed from it are such as to uncover rather more problems than solutions. The essential disparity of the sample set of 12 small nations analysed above shows that the chances of formulating a magic equation for the resolution of problems of smallness, isolation and dependence are exceedingly remote. However, it has been shown that a number of recognisable types of small country do exist within the Commonwealth and elsewhere, and it is at this level of comparability (e.g. Fiji/Trinidad/Mauritius or Kiribati/Turks and Caicos/Seychelles) that cross-national study could be mutually beneficial.
- 8.4 The study above also indicates that the relativity of the concepts of scale, isolation and dependence per se, as well as various relationships between them, provide for a balance to be achieved through a degree of correspondence between the differential properties of each. Some small countries in our sample, such as Malta and Barbados are fortunate in having this sort of correspondence enhanced by the legacy of their history and geography. Despite the considerable skill and enterprise evident in the development of the educational systems of such examples, it would be a serious error for other currently less fortunate small countries to regard them as models to be followed as far as education is concerned. Each small Commonwealth country has its own individual permutation and combination of the various indices of scale, isolation and dependence, and a particular pattern of educational imbalance which results. Some of the policies and initiatives taken by individual countries in response to their particular situation have been mentioned in this paper. The identification of existing ideas and sources from which further information about them may be obtained should be of practical assistance to others and this monograph has made a start in the direction of a discussion of issues of mutual concern for small Commonwealth countries. It is itself intended primarily as an educational exercise leading to more detailed researches and comparisons of direct practical potential.

9. Conclusion

- 9.1 Education in its widest sense, including a general awareness of the issues discussed in this monograph, has an important part to play in identifying crucial policy options available to those responsible for educational provision in small countries. Even when this point is reached, the resolution of the problem will still be subject to the political considerations of the day. For example, Bennell and Oxenham state that:

"While its objectives are remarkably similar to those declared by many other SIS States, it is apparent that the zeal with which the Grenadian Government proposes to implement them is not shared by the majority of SIS States in the Commonwealth - with the possible exception of the Seychelles. The point is, of course, that education reform and appropriate manpower strategies have to do with life chances and income. They are intensely political. It is the constraints imposed by the political process itself that are usually underestimated in the discussions on this subject."
(11)

- 9.2 Given that we are only just beginning to enquire seriously into the comparative educational problems of small countries, those who will make the significant political decisions are most likely still in the schools of the countries concerned. Such is the political contribution of education to inertia; but it is hoped that this monograph will make a small contribution to the eventual localisation of educational styles in small Commonwealth countries. It is a matter of some urgency to many such countries that educational provision should be designed which is more conducive to achieving and maintaining human and physical ecological stability within their borders. Given that some small Commonwealth countries are not so small, perhaps the sort of research, comparisons and co-operation suggested above should begin with the category facing the most difficult problems, namely the poorer archipelago nations. Their own regional links would inevitably lead to comparisons at that level and the crucial role of the regional university in particular.

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