

## FORWARD

During the 1950s more than 170 million people in the world migrated from rural areas into towns, attracted by the prospect of better living and regular employment. Many were disappointed but few returned to their own communities. Nevertheless, more than two thousand million people, two thirds of the world's population, still live today in rural areas, and, despite the migrations, their numbers are increasing. It was in recognition of their needs, and the inadequacy of the provision made for them at present, that the Commonwealth Conference on Education in Rural Areas brought together delegates from 23 member countries with rural populations totalling more than 700 millions.

Traditional educational processes have become increasingly irrelevant in the face of rapid technological development and evolutionary changes in family and community values. This situation has not arisen from an unawareness of the desired ends of education. Nearly fifty years ago the aims of education for developing countries were stated with clarity and enlightenment: "Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples, conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life; adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of natural growth and evolution." The underlying problem was also identified: "The real difficulty lies in imparting any kind of education which has not a disintegrating and unsettling effect upon the people of the country." (1)

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(1) Education Policy in British Tropical Africa,  
Cmd. 2374, H.M.S.O., 1925.

Yet, in 1970, there is little evidence that the solution has been found. Governments today find themselves, reluctantly but unavoidably, devoting up to one third of their annual revenues to the provision of a form of education which they recognise as potentially dangerous, creating a rapidly increasing number of unemployable school leavers for whom schooling has opened a window on the world while leaving the door shut. All too often the reward for a Government's investment in education is a youth problem, young people alienated from their traditional culture, unable to find a foothold in the modern sector of the economy, and unwilling to reconcile themselves to the tedious poverty of rural life. Few of them are as articulate as Cameron Duodu's "Gab boys":

"We respected nothing and nobody, and in turn, no one respected us or cared two hoots about us. We had all 'finished' school and yet we had no work . . . If we had no work, we thought, it was not because we were bad but because there were no jobs. Tell us to go back and work on our parents' farm - to 'go back to the land', as the politicians' cliché ran - and we would say: 'Look here, sir, if we wanted to be peasant farmers, we would not have wasted a full ten years at school learning to read and write . . . If we are to be farmers at all, we don't simply want to weed a piece of land and plant yam or plantain or cocoyam or cassava or vegetables on it in the topsy-turvy way we've seen our fathers do for years, but which barely gives them enough food to live on, let alone bring them money. No, sir.' Ask us: 'But do you know any better way of farming than your fathers?' Our answer would still be a big 'No' . . . Our teachers had no specialised training in agriculture. How could they teach us agriculture? They just gave us a plot to plant things on. And the things grew, thanks to the good soil. Any ass can do that."(2)

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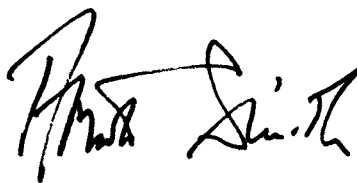
(2) Cameron Duodo: The Gab Boys, Deutsch, London 1968.

The townward drift cannot be reversed, but life in the rural communities can be made more rewarding, materially and intellectually, for those who stay. Young people need to be persuaded that the prize for educational success in their village school is not necessarily the award of a passport to the town. Healthy rural communities are the foundation of a country's wealth and well-being. Educational and development programmes, therefore, should equip young people for modern living and at the same time provide the stimulus and the means to develop in the rural areas progressive communities attractive to the young people, and providing all their inhabitants the opportunity to achieve a reasonable standard of living in return for their labour.

The process of education can no longer be conceived in terms of a single period during childhood in preparation for a lifetime of work. Continuing provision is needed for all members of the community so that change and development may be encouraged with the minimum of disruption to the essential fabric of society. Co-ordinated and comprehensive educational systems for the rural areas should provide for the young people, in school and out of school, and for their elders, enabling villagers to compete on equal terms with their urban counterparts. Only thus will rural people achieve that standard of life and status which they merit as the originators of their country's wealth.

Rethinking and educational reconstruction are urgently required, for unless adequate provision can be made on a large enough scale within a limited time, the outlook is bleak.

The Commonwealth Conference saw the key to this great problem in terms of involvement. If comprehensive public participation can be stimulated by imaginative leadership, then action will be possible on a scale large enough to meet the mounting challenge of social disruption and disappointed hopes. While the size of the problem should not be underestimated, there are solid grounds for optimism that, given inspiration and unstinted support by their leaders, the rural populations of the developing Commonwealth can play a major role in creating their own future prosperity.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. M. S. S. S.', written in a cursive style.