

11. Sale of Goods & Services

Another way to generate extra resources is through sale of goods and services. These can be:

- * on an *ad hoc* basis, i.e. the school sells the products as and when they are produced, or
- * on a contract basis, in which the school undertakes in advance to supply a certain amount of produce at an agreed price.

(a) Scope

The types of projects on which a school may embark are almost unlimited. The following are a few examples. Schools may:

- sell crops and animals as soon as they are matured;
- run their own trade stores;
- service and repair vehicles;
- make furniture for sale;
- go to people's homes and farms to mend fences, etc.;
- make clothes for sale;
- cook food for large meetings, weddings, etc.;
- undertake typing and word-processing assignments; and
- run small printing services.

Many schools have achieved considerable revenue through these methods. Commercial activities have the added benefit of giving students experience of the 'real world'.

(b) Problems

At the same time, however, certain problems must be noted:

- i) *Disruption of the School Day*: The school authorities have to make it clear that products are only for sale during certain times. People must be discouraged, for example, from bringing vehicles

School Economic Activities: Two Successful Examples

1. *Dominica*
Since 1983, the Dominica Community College has engaged in many outside activities:

- for the Ministry of Education it has wired schools, plumbed buildings, and produced and repaired furniture;*
- for the Ministry of Health it has altered and furnished a Health Centre Resource Room; and*
- for other purchasers it has produced carnival costumes and uniforms.*

To date, over EC\$40,000 has been earned. Half of that has been used for wages, allowances, tools, etc., and the remainder has been put in a fixed deposit bank account.

2. *Jamaica*
The Elim Agricultural School sells produce to the public, to the school canteen and to staff. Pigs are reared by the animal husbandry students, and the ham processed by the Home Economics Department has proved particularly popular. The school now has a monthly turnover of J\$32,000 to subsidise its work.

for repair at all times of the day. And the school trade store can only be open after school hours, even if that means that the best times for trading are lost.

Similarly, when customers stress that a job is urgent, the school is tempted to sacrifice other learning (such as English lessons) for the sake of the commercial goal. Alternative benefits must be carefully weighed.

ii) *Disruption of the Curriculum:* Goods and services will only be marketable if the quality is reasonable. But the danger of this is excessive specialisation — that the school *only* produces iron gates or wooden tables, for example, because the students have

a lot of practice in making these things. This restricts the range of the students' learning.

In addition, contract work can force staff to change the sequence of a curriculum. For instance, from a pedagogic point of view they may wish to teach woodwork joints in a certain sequence; but the existence of a contract may force them to change the sequence.

- iii) *Embezzlement of Funds*: The existence of commercial transactions increases the risk of staff and students misusing the funds. It is essential for school authorities to insist on proper accounting.
- iv) *Poor Marketing Strategies*: Most teachers have been recruited because they are trained teachers — not because of their commercial skills. It should not be assumed that school staff know how to judge market fluctuations or what price to put on school goods. Many schools have experienced problems either of vegetables rotting because they have no market or of them having to be sold to staff at unrealistically low prices.
- v) *Resentment from others in the Community*: Schools with commercial enterprises are almost certainly competing with the community's own artisans and businessmen. This may cause considerable tension in the community. Parents may argue that the job of the school is to teach — not to put local entrepreneurs out of business.
- vi) *Disruption from Vacations*: School vacations may cause serious problems for school businesses: (a) the closure of trade stores etc. means a loss of regular customers, (b) jobs that are half finished at the end of term may remain uncompleted until the new term begins, (c) vegetables may miss the planting or harvesting seasons, and (d) animals may fail to receive proper care.

None of these problems are insuperable, and the positive aspects of commercial operation are again worth emphasising. However, the difficulties require careful attention. It cannot simply be assumed that a school with a practical curriculum is automatically capable of successful business.