IMPLEMENTING UNIVERSAL PRIMARY EDUCATION

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The United Nations Universal Declaration on Human Rights of December, 1948 states in article 26 that "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free at least in the elementary and fundamental stages ..."

This article makes it obligatory for each Member State of the United Nations Organization to develop an organizational structure in which equal opportunity in education is guaranteed and through which ideally, education at its various levels and in its various forms, is brought to the entire population. When this objective is achieved in a given State, that State will have in effect achieved "the major components in a new deal in education namely democratization and universalization" of its system. However, despite the presence of this article, and in spite of the increased efforts that have been made by the Governments of particularly developing countries over the last three or so decades, the achievement of this objective has remained slow, prompting the authors of the World Bank's Education Sector Policy of 1979, to record that "..... if the trends observed during the 1960-75 period persist, then in Africa alone, 28 out of 46 countries would not be able to reach the primary enrolment ratio of 80% by 1985," and yet "just to maintain the current levels of primary schooling, in the face of pressing population growth, primary enrolment ratio in these countries must increase by about 30% between 1975 and 1985".

Concern for the achievement of this objective was the subject of much discussion at the conference of African Ministers of Education held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in May 1961.

The Honourable Ministers had before them facts and depressing statistics about the level of education in their respective countries and from this information they noted among other things, that Sub-Saharan Africa was "the only region in the World in which the school system only covered a minority of the school age children and that this minority averaged only about 40% of the region's children of school age". In these circumstances the Ministers worked out long and short-term targets for a programme of educational development in Africa, recommending among other things, that for long-term plan 1961-80, "primary education shall be universal, compulsory and free" and that targets for the short-term plan 1961-66 "shall be an annual increase at the primary level of an additional 5% of the beginning school age which will increase enrolment from the present 40% to 51%". In tabular form these targets look like this:

	1960-61	1965-66	1970-71	1980-81
Primary level	40%	51%	71%	100%

While the purpose of this Seminar is to examine in part, the progress so far made by African Member States of the Commonwealth towards the achievement of these targets by 1980, figures collected by UNESCO and published in

Action - Training for Development some ten years after the Addis Ababa conference indicated that the gross enrolment ratio for the Sub-Saharan region of Africa in the primary school level of education was only 49% instead of the anticipated 71% in 1970. This indicates further that even though the annual budgets of the countries in this region showed considerable increases in the percentages of funds devoted to education since the sixties, thereby illustrating that governments' efforts to achieve their targets by 1980 were tremendous, progress towards the achievement of universal primary education remained a far cry as early as 1970.

The reasons for this are many and varied. As indicated in the quotation from the Uganda's Third Five-Year Development Plan 1971/72 - 1975/76, both the economic and demographic factors combined to frustrate efforts for the achievement of universal primary education by 1980:

> "18.7 Government attaches the utmost importance to achieving a rapid growth in primary education. In the Second Five-Year Development Plan, it was indicated that universal primary education would be achieved during the 1970s. This is now considered to be totally unfeasible, both because of the failure to achieve a rapid growth in enrolments over the last five years and because the 1969 Census revealed that the size of the population and its growth are much greater than was assumed in the Second Five-Year Development Plan. The achievement of universal primary education lies many years ahead, and it would be dangerous to under-estimate the size of task which the nation faces in this regard. Much depends upon the success in reducing the rate of population growth. If the planned growth of intakes for Plan III can be achieved and continued into the future, and if the measures to reduce the rate of population growth are successful, universal primary education will be achieved by the early years of the next century. If no measures to reduce the rate of population growth are taken, and the population growth rate continues its present gradual acceleration; universal primary education will not become a reality until decades after the end of the present century, unless a disproportionately large amount of the country's resources are devoted to the expansion of primary education".

Uganda, of course, faced a further period of political turmoil when, during the dictatorship period of the seventies most of those political and educational leaders who would have been involved in the policy decision-making, planning and eventual impelentation of measures towards the achievement of universal primary education 'disappeared' from the country, some of them for good, and schools were closed for most of the time.

The process of linear expansion of educational opportunities until universality is achieved at the "basic education" level may however be the result of officially proclaimed government policy to the effect that every school age child should go to school. The Nigerian Government for example, in its national policy of education states unequivocally that universal primary education is needed not only for the purpose of accelerating the pace of national development, but also because it is necessary and desirable for efficient leadership and effective followership. The main issues underlying Government policies for the expansion of educational opportunities are related to timing and readiness. How desirable is it to expand schools and other "non-formal education" activities for universal primary education in response to official directives, some of them based on popular demands, when this expansion must be balanced against financial constraints which limit quantitative expansion and deeply affect quality control during the expansion process? Ideally, educational planners, policy-makers and administrators should aim for a phased planning strategy which provides for a balance between quantitative expansion and the maintenance of quality, and takes account of

the national social and political pressures and economic needs, and whose timing avoides the agony of unpreparedness. For once universal primary education has been achieved, it becomes increasingly difficult to control demand. Each successive educational level begins to feel the pressure from below; that is, those with primary education want secondary education and those with secondary education want higher education. Thus each generation starts from a new platform of higher expectations.

In the case of South Korea, such Government policies were provided for in the national constitution. As far back as 1950 the South Korean authorities instituted compulsory primary education partly for the purpose of "democratizising the nation and providing equal educational opportunities", but mainly in fulfilment of the national constitution from which the educational law of 1949 was drawn up. This law provides in part that

- "Every person is entitled to receive a six-year primary education.

- Central and local governments share the responsibilities to establish and operate the necessary primary and civic schools, as well as to provide an education plan for those who have not had the benefits of primary education and are too old to enter primary schools.

- School boards and districts in every city and country shall establish and administer the compulsory primary education. However, all the salaries of the teachers and other expenses of the schools shall be provided by the National Treasury of the Central Government.

- The age for compulsory education shall be from age 6 to age 12.

- When children are unable to attend school for economic reasons, the local education autonomy body can subsidize educational expenses."

By the end of the current Five-Year Development Plan 1977/81, South Korea, with a high literacy level of 90%, will have attained an impressive 98% of school age population, about 6 million children, attending elementary school. But this attainment was not without problems. In addition to the problems caused by the Korean war of the early fifties, South Korea faced four other main problems. One of these problems related to oversized classes and schools. Legally, there should be only 60 pupils in a class and only 36 classes in an elementary school. But because of shortages of classrooms and schools, as late as four years ago, 35% of the available classrooms had more than 60 pupils each, thereby necessitating double shifts in large cities and great overcrowding in rural areas.

The second problem was a blessing in disguise and related to teacher supply and demand. The country was fortunate in this regard because the 16 teachers' colleges preparing primary school teachers produced an oversupply of the teachers, so that by 1977, the Government was forced to decrease the enrolment numbers of these colleges and to convert six of them into in-service training centres for primary school teachers. As late as last year the South Korean Government was still faced with the problem of finding teaching appointments for some 7,000 graduates from these colleges.

The third problem was financial. It was unthinkable for the Government to collect money from parents of primary schools in a system of compulsory primary education guaranteed by the constitution. It is planned that by 1981, this tax should be reduced drastically and thereafter replaced by grants from the national treasury.

Two other circumstances created an unfavourable financial situation since the seventies - first, government support through domestic taxes was not regularly sustained, and secondly, funds were being diverted to middle schools in preparation for the extension of compulsory education to the middle schools in the early eighties. However, the Government plan is gradually to raise the percentage of domestic taxes, and in addition to establish a new education tax by 1981 in order to strengthen finances for compulsory primary education.

Also, in the process of expanding basic educational opportunities, it is necessary to remove barriers which cause inequality of participation from the point of entry into the school system through each level of that system until the school leaving stage is successfully reached. One of these barriers is the removal of payment of tuition fees and other statutory levies. This is what Kenya did at the beginning of 1974, when the President decreed that no tuition fees were payable by children in Standards I to IV throughout the Republic, but these children were required to pay an annual nominal equipment levy to their District Education Boards. When schools opened in January of that year, total enrolment in these classes rose by one million children above the estimated figure of about 400,000, thereby increasing the number of children in primary schools from the projected 1.8 million to nearly 2.8 million, there was public disquiet about this equipment levy which eventually had to be removed by another Presidential directive last year.

Non-payment of fees and other levies has now been extended to Standard V, VI and VII classes in order to fulfil the commitment made by the ruling party, the Kenya African National Union (KANU) in 1963, that the Government will in due course provide seven years of free primary education to all Kenyan children. But when it was first issued in 1974, the decree raised three immediate problems. First, the treasury had to provide no less than an additional twenty-three million Kenya pounds in order to implement the measure. Secondly, the Teachers Service Commission had to employ no fewer than forty thousand untrained secondary school leavers in order to teach the increased pupil enrolments in the primary schools. Thirdly, in the face of the severe shortage of classrooms, furniture and other teaching materials and equipment, primary school headmasters had to contend with makeshift teaching arrangements so as to contain the many children who turned up especially for Standard I. Before this decree was made in 1974, the Kenya Government had in 1971 removed payment of tuition fees for all primary school classes in the ten arid and semi-arid districts of the Republic in an effort to encourage the nomadic parents of these areas to send their children to schools which, in most cases, were boarding. What Kenya requires now is a law initially providing for compulsory seven years of free primary education and eventually extending this provision to nine years.

The second barrier which should be removed lies in the area of selection. The Tanzanian Second Five-Year Development Plan 1970-74 provided "for the end of selection barriers at Standard IV in 1974" and the expansion facilities in order that, by the end of the Plan period, "all public primary schools might be in a position to offer seven years of education". This provision was to be "the first stage in a programme of expansion of primary schools leading to universal primary education in or about 1989". In other words, the plan was for Tanzania to move from 45% of the age group entering Standard I as at 1969/70 to 95% 20 years laters. It also meant that Tanzania was aiming at a large intake of school age children in a growing population with a large retention in the primary schools which, in effect, called for a greatly expanded number of primary school teachers.

The third barrier which should be removed is wastefulness in the education system. In this respect, it is important to improve not only access to

basic education, but also to improve the efficiency and relevance of the education system, especially at the basic education level. Detecting causes of wastefulness in terms of high rates of drop-out and repetition is a matter of continuous evaluation of the education system through not only the normal planning and programming strategies, but also through frequent and systematic education sector reviews such as those which were conducted in Ethiopia in 1972, Sierra Leone in 1973, El Salvador in 1974, Kenya in 1976 and Zambia in 1978. The El Salvador review pointed out very serious weaknesses with regard to the methods of determining academic performances, and revealed that hitherto, the system was extremely wasteful in terms of very high drop-out and repeater rates amongst primary school children and very high per student cost due to incomplete primary school development programmes especially in the rural areas. The review recommended measures to be taken by the Government of El Salvador in order to maximize academic performance, minimize drop-out and repetition rates, and reduce per student costs.

At the time of the Sierra Leone Education Review in 1973 only about 45% of the country's school age children were benefiting from the education system, and less than 50% of those who started school stayed on and completed the primary school course. The review therefore, called for a broad education base "embracing those education experiences which contribute to each individual's personal development and to intelligent citizenship, and which are also foundational to the learning of vocationally useful skills". Thus, at the end of this "basic course", pupils should have "become literate in one or more languages, acquired computational and mathematical skills, moral understanding and rational or scientific outlook to social and natural events as well as to other understandings and attitudes."

The fourth barrier to be removed is related to the needs of such special areas as girls' education, handicapped children, children in arid and semi-arid zones, deprived and rural areas and in urban societies. In the case of girls' education the aim is to narrow and eventually close the gap between the enrolments of boys and girls of the same age group. For example, "in both North Africa and Middle South Asia, female enrolment ration for age-group 6-11 was about 45% compared to 70% for boys. In 1976, of the six-year old children entering the first grade, the percentage of females was 15% in Afghanistan, 24% in Nepal, 30% in Chad and 33% in Pakistan. In Brazil in 1971, country-wide urban enrolment ratios averaged 92% as against 52% for rural population, and in this same year, Indonesia had a national gross enrolment ratio of 80% in the primary years ..... with a gap of about 15% between rural and urban children".

Further, in the process of expanding, and in this case extending, basic educational opportunities, it is becoming fashionable to restructure the sequence of the basic education system. This measure is being adopted in Thailand from her current 4-3-3-2 pattern, that is, four years of lower elementary, three years of upper elementary, three years of lower secondary and two years of upper secondary, to the 6-3-3 sequence, that is, six years of elementary, three years of junior secondary and three years of upper secondary. The new Nigerian 6-3-3-4 sequence implies that the first cycle of basic education would be at the end of junior secondary school and not at the end of primary school. It also means that at the end of the first six years of school, all primary school pupils would be expected to move on to the three year junior secondary school. The extension of the present seven years of primary education to nine years, free of charge in the first seven years of the primary schools, is currently under discussion in Kenya. When this goal is achieved, the new pattern of 7-2-4-3 instead of the current 7-4-2-3 may have to be adopted, and as in the case of Nigeria, it will mean that all primary school pupils in Kenya will move to Standard VIII and IX

after completing their seven year course.

Formal schools will probably continue to have a comparative advantage over other modes of education in the 6-16 age group while non-formal education will be called upon to provide a "second chance" for the adults and school leavers who fall by the wayside. Because of this and in terms of the magnitude of the problem, African Governments are now placing considerable weight on non-formal education programmes. Four studies have contributed to this emphasis on the role of out-of-school education programmes in universalizing basic education. On the one hand, the rapidly rising costs of the quantitative expansion of the formal schools combined with growing unemployment of school leavers at various levels has caused many observers such as Philip H. Coombs in The World Educational Crisis to question the cost-effectiveness of formal schools. On the other hand, issues of social and political equity have caused such other critics as Everrett Raimer in School is Dead to attach schools as elitist institutions which serve the urban minorities at the expense of the rural masses. Thirdly, this dissillusionment with formal schooling has caused representatives of many of the major donor agencies to undertake extensive review of the role of education in development and to meet at Bellagio in Italy in 1974 to deliberate on these and their own studies. The report and findings of the Bellagio Conference are published for the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations in Education and Development Reconsidered - a document which gives a broad-based review of the educational dimensions of development. Lastly, the Report of the Faure Commission, Learning to Be: The World of Education Today and Tomorrow, sponsored by UNESCO and published in 1973, added to the disillusionment with formal schooling and the relationship between it and development in broad terms. The Faure report has been described by Williams J. Platt, the former Director of Planning and Financing of Education at UNESCO, as a "turning point in educational planning" for the way the report shifted attention from the fixed "targets" of the sixties to the "vectors" which require continuous minor adjustments in the course of time. Platt's summary of the vectors and their implications for planning apply equally to the Bellagio Conference papers and to much of Philip Coombs' work on non-formal education in New Paths to Learning for Rural Children and Youths, but are irrelevant to this paper.

However, given the intense social and political demands for formal schooling, the challenges for non-formal education are to assist the unschooled, the partially-schooled and the school-leavers at every level to lead more productive lives, both in economic terms, and in the sense of self-fulfilment. Since the unschooled and partially-schooled constitute the vast majority of the population in African and other developing countries, it is important to consider some of the responses to these challenges.

By far the most comprehensive non-formal education programme is found in Tanzania, where the policies outlined in the Arusha Declaration and in Education for Self-Reliance reflect a deep commitment to a more relevant, lifelong education for the entire population. Another equally radical experiment was in Somalia where the secondary schools were closed for a year in 1973/74 while their students went out to teach literacy in rural areas. Somalia educators expected this programme to have a profound effect on the schools, the "elites" and on the rural largely nomadic population. A third radical experiment was recommended by Ethiopia's Education Sector Review of 1972 which called for a dramatic reorientation of formal schools towards rural development and the establishment of a network of non-formal education programmes planned at the district level. Intensified use is being made of such other out-of-school schemes as the Malawi's Young Pioneers, Koran Schools in Mauritania, Upper Volta's Rural Training Centres, Zambia's National Youth Service, Botswana's Brigades and Kenya's Craft Training Centres, formerly

called Village Polytechnics. Boards of Adult Education, Centres of Continuing Education and Institutes of Adult Studies where they exist, have a key role to play in the planning and organisation of adult literacy programmes. As these programmes normally have larger numbers of students in their classes than the formal school, the use of mass media, particularly the radio and television. is of special importance.

Also, a number of experimental projects in non-formal education are being undertaken in various developing countries. In addition to the IMPACT project in the Philippines and to the Proyek Pamong scheme in Indonesia, Egypt is experimenting with a One-Classroom School project as a means of eliminating illiteracy in the country. Like South Korea, Egypt has claimed universal primary education for a long time, but unlike South Korea, some 59% of the population over 8 years of age cannot read or write, and yet the country's constitution stipulates that it is the obligation of the Government to provide each child a minimum of six years of primary education. Subsequently, the education law states that primary education is compulsory and free for every child reaching the age of 6 and and that it should continue until the age of 12-14.

Despite this legal provision, the implementation of universal primary education in Egypt has progressed slowly - the number of pupils enrolled in primary schools has only been raised from 1.3 million in 1952 to 4.2 million in 1977, and as indicated above, the literacy rate has not been reduced significantly between 1952 and 1977.

The One-Classroom School scheme was therefore initiated a few years ago by the National Council of Education, Scientific Research and Technology in an effort to find a radical solution to the problem of illiteracy. The Central Ministry of Education accepted the Council's recommendation for the establishment of this scheme and prepared a five year plan by which 1,000 such schools evenly distributed amongst the 24 Governorates, were to be set up every year, each school holding not more than 40 students.

The programme provides educational opportunities for children between 6-14 years of age who for various reasons, missed the years of regular primary schooling or dropped out of primary schools or have relapsed into illiteracy after finishing primary school years. These individuals may include children who are still of compulsory school age or adults. The aims of the One Classroom School do not coincide with those of the regular primary schools, they complement. The educational opportunities offered in the One-Classroom School are so designed as to

- "To develop the learner's skills in the Arabic language in reading, writing, comprehension, and expression to such a level that the learner will not relapse into illiteracy.

- To develop the learner's skills in arithmetic to enable him to deal successfully with others in his community.

- To help the learner to adjust socially and to understand his environment, including the explanation of natural phenomena, the causes of disease, and the falsity of superstitions.

- To prepare learners for admission to vocational training centres, if they wish to enter".

The Central Ministry of Education provides teachers' guides and other teaching materials, funds and financial guidelines. Governors provide furniture, equipment, teachers and their salaries. Retired teachers, educated

women in the community and recent graduates from universities who are conscripted for a year's public service in the literacy campaign, are among the persons used as teachers in the One-Classroom School project.

Based on the results of achievement tests, the learners in the One-Classroom School are divided into three groups according to their levels of achievement. The duration of the school is ten months working for five days a week and three hours a day, and operating in the morning or afternoon or evening. At the end of the year the teacher decides on the promotion of students from one group to another according to the results of continuous evaluation. Students who achieve comparable levels to any group in the primary school are promoted, if they desire, and move to the primary school provided their age falls within the age group of the particular grade. At the end of his or studies any student in the One-Classroom School may apply to sit for the Primary School Certificate public examination.

There are currently over 2,000 project schools holding some 26,000 students, of whom 80% have had no opportunity to go to the regular primary school, 15% have dropped out of the primary school and 5% have relapsed into illiteracy. Thus, while contributing to the elimination of illiteracy the One-Classroom School provides opportunities for basic education to children in remote and deprived areas of Egypt.

This paper has attempted to point to a variety of obstacles which have to be overcome before the task of providing universal and free education to all primary school age children can be achieved. These obstacles range from those that can be overcome by the education system itself, to those whose solutions lie outside education. For example, with careful planning and programming in circumstances of political goodwill, the education system can overcome problems related to shortages of qualified teachers and teaching materials and equipment, depending on the adequacy of funds provided by the national treasury. Similarly, educational planners and administrators can take measures to improve the internal efficiency of the system. One such measure is to ensure that the flow of students through the system is accomplished with minimum of waste. The second measure they can take is to set up standards for class sizes in order to alleviate overcrowding in classrooms. Other significant inputs they can effect in the system in order to improve the quality of teaching and learning include teacher qualifications, teaching techniques, improved curriculum and inspection services, instructional materials and years of schooling. For the purpose of improving the curriculum, National Curriculum Development Centres, National Councils of Science and Technology and National Subject Associations have been established in almost all the African Commonwealth countries.

Overcoming such other obstacles as the unwillingness of some parents to send their children to school; malnutrition, poor health and housing facilities, and insufficient physical facilities, requires the concerted efforts of all the sectors of nationhood. Deciding, for example, that universal primary education should be free and compulsory from a given year, means that the whole nation, and not just some part of it, should by that year, be mobilized to appreciate the financial and legal consequences of this measure.