9 Educational Provision and Operation

Regional dimensions in the South Pacific

'Ana Taufe'ulungaki

In this chapter 'Ana Taufe'ulungaki focuses on the eleven South Pacific states that are both members of the Commonwealth and small. These states share certain common links and characteristics, but it is important to recognise too the many profound differences, and the diversity found within and between countries: differences which are reflected in their education systems and differences which derive from a uniqueness in respect of geography, linguistic heritage, language policies, forms of government, economic status, and varied colonial histories and education legacies. The question then that has to be answered is why, given the distinctiveness and the heterogeneity that characterise the area, the concept of regional solutions to educational problems should have persisted? Consideration is given to the thinking that has promoted and sustained regional educational activities, to examples of regional educational activity and to the effects of regionalism on educational provision and operation in the small member states of the South Pacific.

The case for regional educational activities

The reasoning behind most regional educational projects has been well documented and cogently argued by many of the papers

presented at the Pan-Commonwealth Experts Meeting on Educational Development in the Small States of the Commonwealth held in Mauritius in November 1985, and elsewhere. Some of those arguments are reiterated here.

Cost-effectiveness

The business of providing the educational needs of an individual from kindergarten to tertiary level and of creating and maintaining infrastructures for the provision of this service is a costly exercise. Not even the most affluent societies in the developed world can fulfil to the letter the often cited educational goal to enable the child to achieve his/her fullest mental, physical and emotional potential - even if they do succeed in defining precisely what this entails.

The small land areas and populations of the small states of the South Pacific, their lack of natural resources, trained manpower and capital, their scattered islands, their isolation from the major trade routes and centres of the world, their late entry into the technologically and scientifically advanced western world are only a few of the factors that have affected their capability to provide and operate educational institutions for all the current and expected educational needs of their peoples. Clearly, they cannot afford to provide for all educational needs but they can select and implement the least costly alternative that is most likely to yield the greatest benefit to society. Whether this alternative also benefits the individual is a secondary and often ignored consideration. It is not too difficult, in view of the constraints, to understand the expediency of such an approach to educational development. However, despite these severe limitations, educational achievements in the region are relatively high in comparison with more affluent developing countries: near or universal literacy in Polynesia and Micronesia; universal primary education, except in the Solomons (60 per cent) and Vanautu (90 per cent); a 1:30 teacher-pupil ratio at primary level and 1:29 at the secondary level; relatively high literacy in English (55 per cent of people over 20 in Tonga). But contrasts in educational development are quite marked between countries in the region: in the Solomons the

number attending secondary schools is only 13 per cent of its primary enrolment as compared to Fiji's 40 per cent, Samoa's 60 per cent and Tonga's 103 per cent. Yet the Solomons is the only country with its own Form 5 examination and its investment in tertiary education is probably the highest in the region. While adult literacy is 100 per cent in most Polynesian groups, it is still very low in the Solomons (13 per cent) and in Vanuatu. Whereas Tonga began secondary education in 1866, the first in the region to do so, the Vanuatu secondary school system was only developed in the 1960s.

Investment in education in all these countries is already very high, accounting, for example, in Kiribati and Vanuatu for over 13 per cent of their total GNP. Figures for current expenditure show that over 80 per cent is on the maintenance of existing systems, with salaries taking over 70 per cent. Very little is spent on resources and training. In most countries universal primary education and much of the secondary education provision has only been made possible with non-government funding. If this source of funding is stopped, governments would be forced either to curtail even further existing educational opportunities or to spend more on education. These countries, with the possible exception of Fiji, basically have subsistence economies, which are heavily dependent on one or two primary products such as copra, sugar or bananas, rendering them extremely vulnerable and dependent on overseas markets over which they have no control.

When current expenditures on education are considered together with the current state of the economies, the inescapable conclusion is that each country is already providing maximum input into education and, in most cases, their economies cannot allow for further educational expansion either laterally or vertically. Added to which most countries are already heavily reliant on multilateral and bilateral assistance in the provision and maintenance of existing systems and educational needs are just one among the multiplicity of priorities in each of these countries, all of which must somehow be met. It has to be acknowledged that regional co-operation in educational provision and operation seems to be the only rational solution in improving educational opportunities.

Virtues of co-operation

The colonial history of the Pacific amply demonstrates the fact that small countries are particularly vulnerable to interference from world powers, whether they like them or not. The countries of the region in world terms are insignificant but they do command vast strategic areas of the Pacific Ocean. Tiny Kiribati with its 822.72 sq km of land area claims 5 million sq km of the Pacific Ocean. Thus even if they choose to opt out of the world stage and pursue their destinies in their own way, it is very unlikely that they will be allowed to do so. But powerless though they may be individually, together as a unit they become at once a potentially significant political and economic entity. This is, for example, the main impetus behind the establishment of the South Pacific Forum but the concept is not limited to political and economic areas but is extended to include most regional activities, including education. While international recognition and credibility might be impossible to obtain for individual education systems and national qualifications, it may be easier to obtain for regional institutions and qualifications.

But beyond these pragmatic considerations, there are other arguments in support of regional co-operation based on more idealistic thinking. In the world of today, increasingly torn apart as it is by extreme sectarian and partisan loyalties, there is every reason to foster and maintain the co-operative traditions intrinsic to the social, cultural, political and economic organisations of the people of the region, where life in a village means the mutual sharing of both the obligations and the privileges of community life. In Polynesia, where political and social structures, based on pyramidal kinship ties, which defined both political and social roles according to blood relationships, were most highly developed, the application of the reciprocal formula of obligations and privileges was total. This formula can be extended from the village unit to the national level and from the national level to the regional level. This spirit of co-operation is best manifested today in what has been labelled 'the Pacific Way', which is essentially a communal and consensual approach to any activity, whether it is at the village, national or regional level. Such an

approach achieved through friendly and peaceful negotiation, is an inherently worthwhile educational goal, and is worth maintaining and developing wherever possible, whether it is in the conduct of the affairs of the South Pacific Forum or in education.

Relevancy

The education systems of all the countries in the region have been borrowed and adapted from the education systems of their colonial masters, and before independence, it was not only the systems that they borrowed but almost everything connected with them: the style of administration used, the curricula they implemented, the qualifications they offered, the training of their personnel, the resources they used, and in most cases the very aims and purposes of their education systems. There was very little, if any, questioning of whether the education systems were benefiting the societies and the individuals they purported to serve. With independence, the question of relevancy, already raised by other newly independent countries elsewhere, suddenly became a major issue. Countries began to look critically at their own educational operations and provisions and found them, not surprisingly, inappropriate and irrelevant to the needs of their people and societies. But recognition and admittance of the shortcomings were far easier to accomplish than the provision of alternatives. To revolutionise an entire education system from its structure, to its administration, to its curricula, to its training, to its goals, requires capital and professional expertise, neither of which was available in any appreciable quantity or number in any of the small countries of the region. To continue to maintain colonial practices was emotionally abhorrent but any major revolutionary change was equally unaffordable.

A regionally developed answer was, however, both acceptable and possible. It would minimise individual government input and maximise the output of scarce trained personnel. Since it would be developed by or in collaboration with regional personnel, it would take into account the constraints as well as the strengths of the region, with the consequence that it was likely to be far more appropriate to

the needs of individual member countries and would certainly be preferable to the alternative of continuing dependence.

Some regional educational activities

Two general points about co-operative regional educational activities must be mentioned. The first is that they are not new, although they may have existed only at the sub-regional level and were mostly of an informal nature. One of the earliest was in the 1830s when the first literacy materials in the Samoan and Fijian languages were printed in Vava'u, Tonga by the Wesleyan press. Later examples are the Fiji School of Medicine which has continued to train doctors for most of the region, and the continuing practice of accommodating secondary and post-secondary students from other countries of the region, such as Kiribati and Vanuatu secondary school students in Samoa, Tonga and Fiji, and regional students in the Honiara Technical Institute (Solomons).

The second is that several educational activities are best dealt with at the national level. These include primary schooling, most aspects of secondary schooling, adult and continuing non-formal education, task-specific training for government employment, middle and lower level technical training. However, educational activities which entail heavy capital investment and high recurrent expenses, plus the participation of highly trained staff are obviously areas in which countries can pool their resources to their mutual benefit. This is notably the case at the tertiary level and for middle and high level technical training. Some programmes of this nature are described briefly in the following sections.

The Tate Oral English Programme

The Tate programme was developed for Pacific countries in the 1960s under the sponsorship of the South Pacific Commission and was intended for use at the primary level. At the completion of the programme, the pupil should have acquired sufficient competence in English to switch to an English-medium education. The course was

designed specifically to meet the needs of Pacific students in English and it therefore employed vocabulary items likely to be used in the region. These were introduced within familiar Pacific linguistic contexts. Since the competence of primary school teachers in English was in some doubt, the programme was made 'teacher-proof'. Both the teacher's and the pupils' activities were written in detailed individual lessons. The oral course was accompanied by a supplementary reading programme. Within the framework of the programme, countries were encouraged to adapt them to their own needs: to introduce them at whatever level, to whatever age group, for a short or long time span, although the recommended time was six years, so long as the order of the books and the lessons was maintained.

If the success of the programme was judged solely on adoption, then the Tate programme can be said to have been highly successful since it was widely adopted and slavishly followed by teachers in the region. However, today the Tate course is either abandoned in its entirety or drastically modified, and many countries are now developing their own English programmes or turning to other non-regional English programmes. The question of whether the Tate programme made any significant contribution to English acquisition in the Pacific is largely immaterial. The importance of the Tate programme lies in the fact that it was the first attempt at a regional level to develop curriculum materials that were relevant and appropriate to the region. For that reason alone it was an important contribution to the improvement of the educative process in the region.

The University of the South Pacific

The University of the South Pacific, the only tertiary institution of its type in the region (excluding for the purposes of this discussion the University of Papua New Guinea), was established in the late 1960s and under its founding constitution it is answerable to all eleven governments of its member countries. This is not an enviable position for a university to be in, but it clearly demonstrates the fact that it is

a regional university. Its initial establishment and continuing capital development have been possible only with very generous assistance by New Zealand, Australia, the United Kingdom, and to a lesser degree, Canada and the United States. Basically, the university has a teaching role, although it offers a limited number of post-graduate research programmes, depending on the research and supervisory staff available. It offers first degree programmes in the sciences, the arts, and in business studies and administration. A major component of its initial programme was the training of secondary school teachers on four year degree programmes and three year diploma programmes. In the degree programme, academic work and professional training are combined. The student graduates with a degree plus a graduate certificate of teaching. The three-year diploma programme prepares teachers for teaching in the first four years (Forms 1-4) of secondary schooling.

Besides its teaching role, the university conducts research and provides consultancy services. With the creation of the Institutes (e.g. the Institute of Education) within the University's three major Schools, the University has been able to increase its responses to requests for in-country training and consultancy assistance from member governments. The University's extension centres, which are found in most member countries, are visible proof of the University's presence in the region. In addition to offering the usual combination of degree and diploma courses, the centres usually provide extra educational services which are in demand but not available within the host country, such as teaching English to handicraft vendors. The extension courses are a combination of centre-based tutorial services plus satellite sessions with main campus staff. Through the satellite service, centres are linked together across the Pacific and to other centres of learning around the world.

The development of the university over its fifteen years or so of existence is a reflection of the changing needs and priorities of member countries. Initially it had to offer preliminary courses, the equivalents of Forms 5 and 6, in order to cater for students from some countries whose secondary school development had not then achieved

high enough levels to qualify for degree courses. It is still offering foundation courses, the equivalent of Form 7, since most member countries have no Form 7 courses. Recently it has had to discontinue offering the full-time residential education diploma mainly because the main client, Fiji, has ceased sending students.

At the same time, in response to demands from the region, it has developed programmes to meet the specialist needs of growing professional groups, such as the law diploma and a diploma and certificate in the teaching of English as a second language. But despite the evidence of a university responding and adapting to changing educational needs and priorities, hampered as it is by financial constraints and the burden of having to meet the demands of not one but eleven governments, many member countries are increasingly turning away from services already provided by the university to establish their own, with, for example, not only Fiji, but Tonga, Samoa, and the Solomons, already developing or planning to develop their own diploma in education. Samoa has gone one step further and established its own university, although so far it has simply borrowed the University of the South Pacific's course work. Some member countries have also resumed the practice of sending many of their government-funded scholars to metropolitan institutions, although the same courses are available at the University of the South Pacific.

The UNDP/Unesco Secondary School Curriculum Project

This project, funded by UNDP, administered by Unesco and based at the University of the South Pacific, was intended to develop a common basic four year secondary school programme (Forms 1-4) for member countries in the whole curriculum. It was to meet the needs of school leavers for whom a four year course or local leaving certificate would be terminal but which would also form the basis on which courses to Forms 5 and 6 would be built.

Curriculum writers were recruited from practising teachers in the region, who worked under the supervision of, and in collaboration with, the consultants appointed to the project. This was the first and last attempt at regional co-operation in curriculum development.

From the participating governments' point of view, the project was the first meaningful attempt to offer an education at the secondary level that was commensurate with the contexts of the Pacific. For the first time, Pacific teachers and educational administrators were actively involved in the process of curriculum development. However, despite the genuine enthusiasm the project generated in the region, it was terminated before it had achieved many of its goals, although the region as well as individual governments had requested its continuation. What the region was left with were some personnel who had been exposed to the process of curriculum development and some partially completed curriculum materials. Only Science, Maths and Social Science had completed Forms 1-4 materials, but the Social Science Forms 3 and 4 materials had been rejected by the region for overt and inappropriate political content.

The main achievements of the project were: it began the process of providing a more meaningful and realistic secondary education in the region; it began the process of teacher participation in curriculum development; it encouraged the creation of curriculum and planning units within ministries of education in member countries. However, its greatest achievement was that it made countries conscious for the first time of the potential abilities of their own personnel to plan, develop, implement and evaluate their own educational programmes according to their own particular goals and priorities, and this only came about because the project was terminated and member countries were forced to rely more on their own resources.

The South Pacific Board for Educational Assessment

The Board is based at the University of the South Pacific and is funded mainly by New Zealand and Australia, with smaller contributions from member countries. Its main functions are to give assistance to countries of the region in improving their own national examinations and to develop examinations to replace the New Zealand School Certificate and University Entrance examinations. Most countries of the region, apart from the Solomons, Vanuatu and Nauru, present

candidates for the New Zealand Forms 5 and 6 examinations. The establishment of the Board is an attempt to develop examinations that would be the logical culmination of the new curricula that have been developed by member countries to meet their particular national needs.

So far the Board provides training in-country, at the sub-regional and regional levels, and consultancy services. It is early days yet to assess the impact of the Board or to predict its future development, but it is unlikely, in view of educational developments in the region, that regional examinations would be developed to replace the New Zealand examinations. What is more likely to happen is the continuing development of national examinations which would be moderated and co-ordinated through the Board.

Effects of regionalism on provision and operation

Countries of the region, in consenting to participate in joint regional education projects, seek to achieve a number of educational development goals:

1 To obtain educational services which, individually, they can neither afford nor possess the expertise to operate;
2 To provide their own personnel with relevant and wider experience and training, and to hasten the process of high level professional training;
3 To obtain educational programmes, services, and practices that reflect their values and aspirations and which are appropriate to Pacific contexts;
4 To lessen educational dependency and increase self-reliance in both educational practices and provision.

All four of the educational projects described previously contributed in some measure to the fulfilment of each of the goals. Each provided a new and much needed vocational service; each provided a combination of training packages at the regional, sub-regional and national levels; each was an attempt to match educational provision

to specific regional needs; each represented a step away from dependency and a step forward towards educational self-reliance. The two curriculum projects, even though their official existence was of relatively short duration, left impacts still measurable today. The Assessment Board is providing valuable professional training and advice in a much needed area.

Obviously, out of the four, the greatest contributions have been made by the university. In its fifteen or so years of existence, the number of graduates in member countries have multiplied enormously to the extent that Fiji is now in the equivocal position of possessing too many graduates. In every country, the university's graduates are not only occupying positions of responsibility, many of them heads of government departments determining policies, but are contributing much needed professional skills in many areas vital to national development. They bring to their tasks training which has been specifically oriented towards those conditions. At the same time, through the university's in-service training programmes many more professionals are upgraded and kept up-to-date in their skills and knowledge and given fresh motivation. By participating in these regional and sub-regional training programmes professionals from member countries have the opportunity to learn from each other's experiences and perspectives and thus bring to their own situations and tasks new perceptions and skills. Through the extension services, middle and lower level personnel are provided with the opportunities to improve their professional qualifications. In 1984, some 35 per cent of the entire teaching force of Tonga (1,599 teachers at both primary and secondary schools) were reportedly enrolled for degree or diploma programmes with their extension centre, a figure which brought consternation to the government, since part of its contribution to the university was based on student participation.

When the four educational projects are reviewed in terms of their ability to meet expectations of member countries, it would be fair to conclude that they were and are largely successful. However, it is also clear from the review that member countries are slowly but inexorably moving towards separate and individual educational

development, a trend which has been acknowledged already by other reports. If regional educational projects have been demonstrated to fulfil expectations, and if the reasons for regional co-operation have not ceased to exist, why have member countries turned away from joint regional education projects?

The answers are complex and are at best speculative but they seem to stem largely from the very motives that initially prompted regional participation.

The relevancy issue rides again

One of the most persuasive arguments for joint regional education projects was the issue of providing relevant and realistic education. Hitherto, member countries had either borrowed or merely accepted whatever educational provision their colonial masters chose to give them. With independence came the first opportunity to determine educational policies and practices. There was of course no question of getting rid of western education, even had they wanted to, or of devising plausible alternatives, but they could begin the process of providing a more meaningful education in small ways at little cost to themselves and hence the Tate Education Programme and the UNDP/Unesco Project. But as history has shown, the projects were only partly successful. In some ways, the failure of the projects was partially attributable to their own flaws, either in their conceptual frameworks or in their implementation strategies. For example, neither took fully into account the sheer physical distances between countries or within countries, or the enormous variability in educational goals, structures, organisations and the resources available to education within each country. The sharing of common educational terms and practices only compounded the issue by presenting an illusory facade of sameness. For example, the term *Form 1* may be used throughout but it might refer to different levels and different age groups, and the standards would certainly vary from one country to another. But perhaps the most important factor was that most countries were not satisfied that the aims, content and methods of the two curriculum projects met their specific and individual needs.

The projects, in sincerely attempting to conform to a regional context had to concentrate on the so-called regional features and develop their materials accordingly. But there are eleven countries in the region, each one unique and distinct from the other. Not one represents a 'regional' country, and the projects, in endeavouring to cater to the needs of a mythical and abstract entity, ended up with educational programmes that did not match the concrete requirements of any member country. Countries, of course, acknowledged that the projects provided training and curricula that were certainly closer to their needs than previous programmes of non-regional origin, but the fact still remained that the two projects did not match individual needs .

The projects made the assumptions that by providing a common core, member countries could then provide supplementary materials that would reflect their own individual needs. However, a common core by its very nature assumes common goals, common priorities, common structures and methods of operation, which is far from the reality of the region. Education systems are political tools and subject to the control of governments which allocate their goals and resources. Therefore, however much the fact might be deplored, their policies, contents and methodologies are to a very large extent a reflection of the policies and practices of their governments.

Individual education systems in response to governmental directives have to find their own common core, fashioned from the diverse needs and aspirations of their own people and society, and only when this is achieved can they turn from this independent but necessary task to consider the wider experiences that are afforded through associations with other systems. As pre-independent educational systems were very much the creatures of their colonial masters so are post-independent education systems the embodiments of their present governments' needs and hopes. No regional curriculum project can meet with integrity, individually and collectively, those needs and hopes.

Relevancy is the reason most likely to prevent the development of regional examinations to replace the New Zealand examinations.

Most countries have now established their own curriculum development units which are developing their own curriculum materials. The next logical step is the establishment of national examinations based on those curricula, which some countries have already done or are in the process of doing; they are in essence evaluations of the educational provision and operation within each country.

Educational independence

The creation of joint regional education projects was in some measure a declaration of the need to assert regional independence and represented in an overt way the further distancing of the region from their colonial masters. With independence, the educational focus shifted away from the metropolitan centres to the region itself. Thus participation in regional activities was not only expected to bring tangible benefits but it was important too as another symbolic indication of independence. It represented a necessary transitional phase in the quest for individual self-reliance and the creation of unique national identities. No country had the resources, both human and material, to indulge in quixotic gestures immediately after independence. However, the fact that countries of the region are not separately pursuing their own educational destinies is a measure of the success of regional co-operation. Through their participation in regional projects, regional personnel have been training in greater numbers than hitherto, with the consequence that localisation of professional and top level positions in government and in the private sector is nearing a hundred per cent in many countries. For the first time, their own nationals are in positions to formulate and implement their own policies. It is not entirely coincidental that the moves towards separate educational development only occurred after increased localisation of staff. If greater self-reliance was one of the goals of regional co-operation, the step now taken by member countries can only be interpreted as a successful achievement of that aim.

While countries admit their debt to regional projects, they argue, however, that regional solutions are just as much of an imposition and encroachment on their individual freedom as the

previous colonial educational practices were. They admit that all regional projects were initiated by non-regional personnel and organisations, with good intentions no doubt and undoubted benefits, but they were and are, impositions. They further add that regional activities do not always guarantee a better understanding of the problems of individual member countries and neither does the sharing of regional personnel. Nor does it lessen the time needed for orientation. An expert from one regional country on assignment to another, despite his/her Pacific background, is just as much in need of full briefing as a non-regional person, perhaps even more so as he is probably suffering from many more erroneous preconceptions.

The increase in the number of trained and skilled professionals has enabled member countries to mount in-country training in areas of need, in which previously they had had to rely on regional or sub-regional provision, such as secondary teacher training and middle level technical training. But this has not been the only factor. Member countries have felt that their needs were either not being met, or were taking too long. For example, when member countries were forced by the collapse of the UNDP/Unesco Project to develop their own curricula, they found that there were mis-matches between the rationale, contents, and methodology of their curricula. In addition, the training received by their teachers from regional projects tended to favour the host countries, so that some training was accelerated in some member countries but barely made progress in others.

With countries increasingly undertaking their own training at the middle and lower levels, they are beginning to consider the specialist and post-graduate training needs of their top professions, and with this group, member countries perceive another weakness in regional educational provision. They believe they are too narrowly focused on regional issues, with the result that their top professionals are exposed only to a regional context and other regional personnel, whereas what they need are exposures to and experiences in world contexts and affairs. They argue that their countries depend on world markets, and therefore their leaders need as much experience in

world affairs as they do in regional matters, probably more so, in view of their importance to their economies. Thus the quest for self-reliance has progressed from regional co-operation to individual development to metropolitan experience.

What then of regionalism?

If the trend towards separate educational development persists, what is the future of the region? Again, the answers are not clear, but perhaps the situation will be better understood in a discussion of the two issues that have been left unresolved by the discussion so far: one is whether the countries can afford such developments and two is whether the 'Pacific Way' is worth preserving.

Is separate educational development viable?

The answer is both 'no' and 'yes'. It is an unequivocal 'no' in economic terms, if member countries are thinking of providing every educational need from kindergarten to tertiary level. The desire to mould their education system in their own unique national images or to use it in achieving this is understandable but it does not change the reality of the economic situation or the fact that regional education projects as well as many of the national educational programmes were and still are heavily subsidised by multilateral and bilateral agencies. Countries must address themselves to resolving the issue of relevancy versus the need for regional and world experiences. Countries argue that in-country educational provision should serve the needs of the majority who are expected to live and work within those societies and therefore education systems should not be geared, as they were in the past, to the needs of the tiny minority needing regional or world exposure, an argument which applies to both national and regional provision. This argument, as applied to the national level, is somewhat spurious in the light of the fact that a very high percentage of regional people (allegedly 40 per cent of Tonga's population) migrate to metropolitan centres. What percentage of the curricula should be context-based and at what level is a question that

each country must resolve in terms of its own priorities and goals. It is a question that each country must decide for itself.

The answer is also 'no' if by educational provision member countries think in terms of high profile, prestigious infrastructures which require expensive capital investments and high maintenance costs, or of complex, specialised training needing special facilities and highly trained professional staff that are both costly to mount and to sustain. The former should have no place either at the national or regional level. The latter type of training, if vitally necessary to national and regional development, can either be sought through regional co-operation or it may be found existing already in metropolitan countries. Either solution will be less costly than a national attempt. However, regional solutions do not always prove to be the most efficient and economic use of resources. The efficiency and success of regional projects depend on the kind of educational service to be provided, the level at which it is aimed and implemented and the number participating at the national level.

Projects which require a minimal physical base, such as one central location, with minimal staff and minimal target population, and whose contents are largely abstract and theoretical, are likely to be cost-effective and successfully implemented at the regional level. Tertiary education and most high level professional training fall into this category. However, programmes which require duplication of facilities and personnel at the national levels, involve the participation of whole national systems, and require heavy national inputs in terms of time, resources and personnel, such as curriculum development projects for primary and secondary schools, are unlikely to be successful or efficiently administered. Such educational programmes can be provided at lower unit costs and operated more efficiently and successfully at the national level. Thus the answer can be 'yes' if member countries adopt policies of selected vocational provision and the least costly methods of operation, and do not succumb to pressure from either the regional or the world community to conform to the accepted norms by which achievements or otherwise of educational systems and countries are normally judged, such as their ability to

provide free and compulsory education to a certain age group for a number of specified years, or the percentage of degree holders in the total population. They must also resist the temptation to accelerate the pace of development when neither the urgency of the need nor the resources available can justify the haste or the expense. Particularly, they must not expect or solicit continuing assistance in the form of funds, materials or personnel from either the region or the world community for in-country educational provision. Apart from the doubtful moral and ethical nature of such requests, external assistance, however benevolent its aims, is never unconditional and will always exert some influence on policies, contents and implementation strategies. Educational provision developed to meet both nationalistic and instrumental purposes must be entirely supported from within the system if it is to achieve its goals with any meaningful integrity. This is the price countries must be prepared to pay to retain and maintain their own evolving and still fragile and vulnerable national identities.

Within the resources available to countries, they can maximise their effects by improving the efficiency of their operational methods and by optimising the use of all resources both human and material, and by judicious and flexible redeployment of resources to areas of need most likely to yield the greatest returns to individuals and to society. For example, the total trained manpower in the country is a very valuable asset whose effectiveness and efficiency is often dissipated and wastefully squandered by compartmentalisation into rigid and narrow fields of endeavour. When the same force is considered as a single entity and mobilised to perform a multiplicity of tasks, its impact is made in geometric progression. The capital assets of a country could be utilised in a similar fashion. Tonga's newly created Community Development and Training Centre is based on such a concept, consisting of a skeletal staff whose main function is facilitating training, with a minimal physical infrastructure. Its teaching staff are whoever in the community possess the requisite skills and knowledge and its classrooms are wherever the training need is. Countries are of course aware that their own personnel are likely to

be lacking in experience, are burdened with too many diverse responsibilities, and are working under severe material constraints but these are not insurmountable obstacles to providing a meaningful and worthwhile educational service that also meets the present and future needs of their people. Countries have gained confidence and experience in participating in regional activities, and they do have today a pool of trained and capable professionals. These facts should be acknowledged and member countries be allowed to determine their own needs, seek their own answers and decide for themselves the issue of how many of these needs they can afford to provide in-country and for how many they should seek co-operative solutions. They are more likely to accomplish these tasks with sagacity and imagination, if they are neither inundated with forecasts of doom nor harassed with inducements of well-meaning but fatal assistance.

Is the 'Pacific Way' only a myth?

If member countries are so anxious to pursue their own educational answers, it might appear that co-operation and consensus are not after all the 'Pacific Way'. Perhaps this is so if the matter were only considered superficially. Despite the obvious desire of member countries to provide as much as possible of their societies educational needs, there is no evidence to suggest that they are attempting to pursue in-country educational provision to the exclusion of sub-regional, regional or metropolitan co-operation. Member countries of the region today have continued to make use of each other's educational facilities at all levels, both informally and formally, and no member country has shut its doors against training requests from other members, whether secondary school places or practical attachments to some government departments, even though their own needs in those areas might not have been fully met. Australia, New Zealand and Papua New Guinea have given important similar assistance, although they are strictly not of the region. In fact, the establishment of so many new educational institutions within the region itself has provided member countries without such institutions with a much wider choice and a much higher likelihood of

finding an institution that can meet their particular needs. Such evidence suggests that member countries have already adopted policies of selected educational provision and given notice thereby that they accept that certain educational developments, such as tertiary education, at least at this stage of their development, are either not suitable, are too costly, are best provided at the regional level or already exist in some metropolitan or developing country. They would have already ascertained that such provisions would neither compromise their desire for meaningful education within their contexts, nor reduce their chances of successful formulation and implementation. Thus regional educational activities would be seen as developing from individual national need assessments of member countries taken within the constraints of their own national goals, priorities, and available resources. Such regional programmes are much more likely to be successful and enduring since the participation of member countries would have arisen from genuine national priorities. The end results might not be too far removed from some of the regional programmes described previously. The main difference is that the move towards regional co-operation would have come from individual decisions by member countries, coerced and compelled by nothing other than their own national interests. Under these circumstances, it is only to be expected that each member country would have a vested interest in ensuring their success.

It is easy to deplore the pure pragmatism exhibited by such attitudes to regional educational co-operation but it is readily understandable in terms of national survival. If it ever comes to a question of regional versus national survival, there is really no doubt as to what the choice of member countries would be. The demise of the former is likely to bring deep regrets but to insist on its survival against the best interests of individual member states would be tantamount to mass national suicide.

However, successful co-operation at whatever level is based on mutual respect for each other's contribution regardless of size, manner or value. It is only when people are strong in themselves, certain of their identities and confident of who they are and where

they are going, that they can bring to any co-operative task or association, as individuals and as groups, a meaningful and valued contribution. Member countries, although willing, were induced to participate in regional educational projects immediately after or even before independence, when many of them had neither the time nor the skills to create homogeneity out of the disparate elements of their societies. It is only now that some member countries have begun to succeed in those tasks. The fact that they are committed to those tasks and seemingly at the expense of regionalism is an indication that the 'Pacific Way' can be perceived in many ways and the fact that sub-regional and regional co-operation is occurring at different levels, undeterred by nationalistic rhetoric and gestures, are testimonies to its being alive and thriving. Endeavours at creating and fostering national identities, and the struggles towards stable and self-sufficient political and economic systems, of which the educational systems are instruments, are integral processes of national development. The existence of the educational region has meaning only within this context, as a contributing instrument towards the achievements of individual national goals.