

Chapter 2: The Gambia

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Population (1989): 822,000

Population Growth Rate (1980-88): 3.3% per annum

Land Area: 11,300 square kilometres

Capital: Banjul

GNP per Capita (1988): US\$220

Year of Independence: 1965

Primary School Gross Enrolment Rate (1990): 59.0%

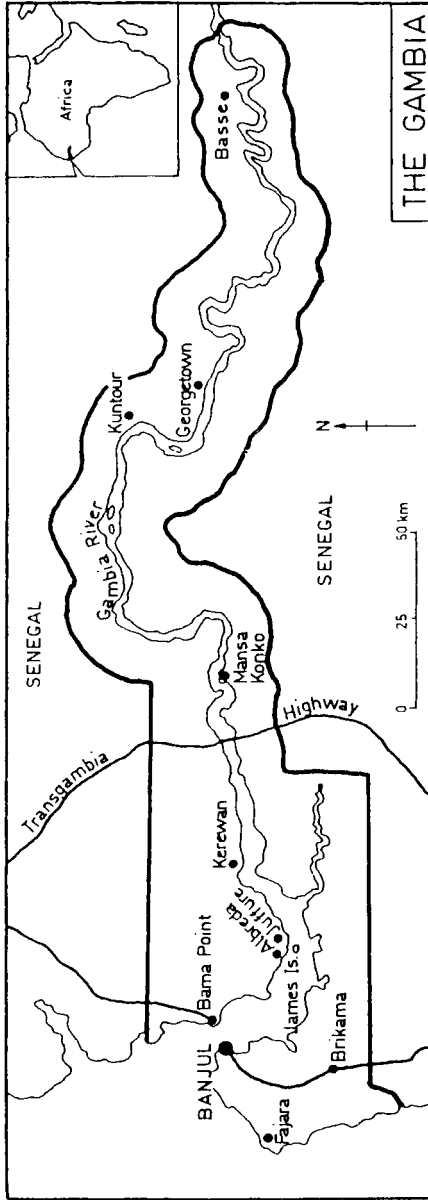
Human Development Index (1987): 0.094

The Republic of The Gambia is a narrow territory stretching nearly 500 kilometres along the River Gambia from the west coast of Africa. The country has a short coastline on the Atlantic Ocean, but is otherwise surrounded by Senegal. English is the official language, and the principal vernaculars are Mandinka, Fula and Wolof. About 85 per cent of the inhabitants are Muslim, while most of the remainder are Christian.

The Gambia was formerly a British dependency. It became a separate colony in 1888, having previously been part of Sierra Leone. Full internal self-government was achieved in 1963, and Independence was gained in 1965. A constitutional change in 1970 made The Gambia a republic under the presidential leadership of Sir Dawda Jawara.

In 1980 the government was obliged to ask neighbouring Senegal to dispatch troops to help The Gambia maintain internal security under the terms of a mutual defence pact. A more serious threat was posed by an attempted coup d'état in 1981. Senegalese troops again entered the capital and quickly crushed the rebellion. Shortly afterwards, plans were announced for the merger of The Gambia and Senegal in a confederation to be called Senegambia. However as the 1980s progressed initial proposals were greatly modified, and in 1989 the idea was abandoned.

The economy depends mainly on agriculture, and about 70 per cent



of the population lives in rural areas. Groundnuts are the principal agricultural export. In recent years tourism has become increasingly important, and now contributes approximately 10 per cent to GDP.

1. The System of Education

Primary education in The Gambia is free but not compulsory. Children are expected to enter school at the age of seven, and to take the Common Entrance Examination at the end of Grade 6. Candidates who are successful may proceed either to a four-year course in a secondary technical school or to a five-year high school course which leads to the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O Level examination, with a possibility of a further two years to GCE A Level.

Recent decades have brought rapid expansion of the education sector. In the period 1976-86, primary school enrolments increased 174 per cent from 25,000 to 67,000. High school enrolments rose 123 per cent, from 2,200 in 1976 to 4,900 in 1988; and secondary technical school enrolments grew by 134 per cent, from 4,600 in 1976 to 10,900 in 1988. However, population expansion has reduced the growth of enrolment rates. The 1990 primary school gross enrolment rate was just 59 per cent, and the net enrolment rate was just 50 per cent. Moreover, only 35 per cent of primary school leavers were able to continue their formal education in secondary schools.

In 1988 the government published a new initiative entitled *Education Policy 1988-2003*. The document called for structural reform to create a 6+3+3+2 system. According to the plan, the six years of primary schooling will be followed by a three-year middle school programme. The resulting nine-year basic education cycle should eventually be available to all Gambian children and will prepare school-leavers both for self-sufficiency and, for those with suitable ability, for further academic schooling. The system will also expand to meet the demands of a growing population. The government aims by 2003 to increase the primary school enrolment rate to 75 per cent and the primary to secondary transition rate to 60 per cent.

The new system will also have to make provision for the 40 per cent of Gambian children who currently have no access to primary school, and for the estimated 75 per cent of the population over the age of 15 who are functionally illiterate. The response to this situation has been the development of non-formal education focused on functional literacy.

2. The Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture

Despite the four functions named in the title, this ministry has only two main component parts. One is Education, and the other is Youth, Sports & Culture. Education is the larger and more prominent of the two, and indeed the Ministry is commonly referred to as the Ministry of Education rather than by its longer title. This chapter focuses primarily on what used to be called the Department of Education.

In 1988, the government undertook a major review of structure and operation of the ministry. The work was assisted by two consultants recruited through the UK Overseas Development Administration. The consultants' principal tasks were to:

- i) examine the structure of the Department of Education in relation to the ministry as a whole;
- ii) make recommendations on ways to integrate the functions of the Department of Education into the Ministry of Education in order to create a single administrative and managerial unit; and
- iii) examine the support units, and made recommendations for their future operations within a restructured ministry.

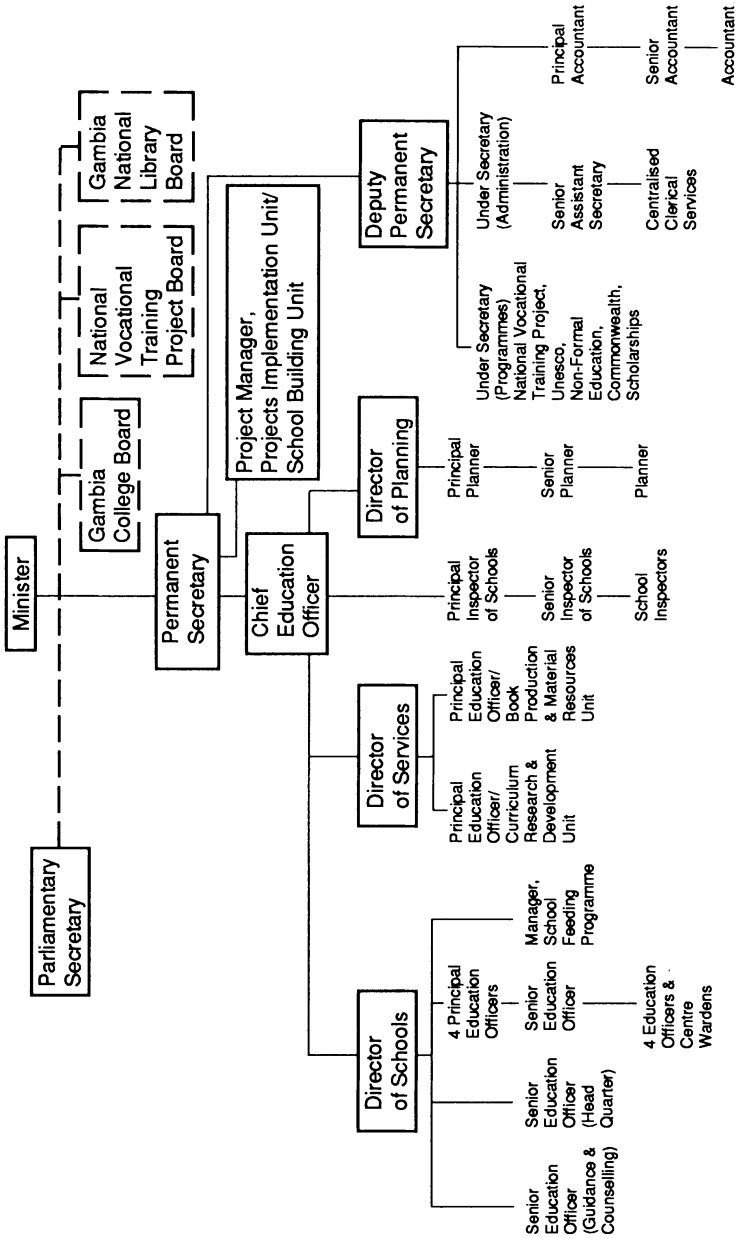
The consultants' report (Garvey & Wood 1988) contains many valuable insights and observations, some of which are outlined in this chapter. The report contributed to the decision to remove the separation between the Department and the Ministry of Education.

Figure 2.1 shows the organisation chart for administration of the education function. The Permanent Secretary (PS) is the administrative head, chief adviser to the Minister and chief accounting officer for the entire Ministry. Below the Permanent Secretary is the Chief Education Officer (CEO), who is the Ministry's chief professional adviser on all educational matters. He exercises direct professional control over the Divisions of Schools, Services, and Planning, and is required to ensure their effective coordination. The CEO also provides professional advice to the Ministry on technical education, vocational training and non-formal education.

The three Divisions have a measure of autonomy in day-to-day management and planning. The same is true of the three major statutory bodies - the Gambia College Board, the National Library Board and the proposed National Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (NCTEVT), which will be the successor to the board for the National Vocational Training Project (NVTP).

A separate wing of the Department is headed by the Deputy Per-

Figure 2.1: The Education Sector of the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture, The Gambia



manent Secretary (DPS). He has two Under Secretaries responsible respectively for programmes and for administration. He is also responsible for the accounts section. The DPS is a generalist administrative officer who, like the Permanent Secretary, can be moved from one ministry to another. The present DPS came from the Ministry of Tourism. He handles such general administrative matters as finance, transport and office services.

The Projects Implementation Unit is responsible for implementation of donor-assisted projects. Because of the sensitive nature of such projects, with donors often having direct access to the Minister, the Permanent Secretary prefers PIU problems to be referred to him personally. The School Building Unit used to be a separate entity but has now been integrated with the Projects Implementation Unit.

A senior management team operates under the chairmanship of the Permanent Secretary. It comprises the CEO, the DPS, the Directors of the Divisions of Schools, Services, and Planning, the Principal of Gambia College, and the Director of Technical Education & Vocational Training. The team should meet at least once a month to review and monitor implementation of plans, draw up programmes of action, and advise the minister generally on trends within the sector.

3. Centralisation and Decentralisation

As the education sector expanded, the government decided as part of the ten-year Education Policy (1976-86) to decentralise educational administration. In 1976, four regions were established, namely:

	Region	Headquarters
Region 1	Banjul and Kombo St. Mary	Kanifing
Region 2	Western	Brikama
Region 3	Lower River	Kerewan
Region 4	Macarthy Island Division & Upper River Division	Basse

Regional education officers are responsible for the implementation of education policy and for the management of schools within their regions. The four regional centres are focal points of the school sub-systems. Their staff combine administrative and professional roles in a manner which reflects the components and functions of the Ministry itself.

Each regional education office has three professional education

officers, who act as local representatives of the Ministry. The Principal Education Officer (PEO) is the local representative of the Permanent Secretary, and is accountable immediately to the Director of Schools. He is the senior educationist in the region, responsible to the Permanent Secretary through the Director of Schools for implementation of the national policy and for maintenance of good practice in schools.

The Principal Education Officer is assisted by a Senior Education Officer (SEO) and an Education Officer (EO). Collectively the team is responsible for:

- recruitment and posting of unqualified teachers,
- deployment of qualified teachers,
- monitoring of school standards,
- distribution to the schools of resources, supplies and materials from the Central Stores,
- inspection of schools (in conjunction with the inspectorate),
- appraisal of teachers,
- checking school records (pupil admission, attendance, etc.), and
- approving payments of transport allowances for teachers.

The staff are appointed by the Public Service Commission, and are posted to the regions by the Permanent Secretary. However, the regional staff are directly responsible to the Director of Schools.

Although there are four regional education offices, many educational services are managed centrally from the Ministry of Education headquarters in Banjul. Major decisions, e.g. on recruitment, discipline and transfer of teachers, are taken at the central level. Because the regional education offices are under-resourced, the capacity has not been developed to make an objective assessment of professional activities to facilitate the task of making important decisions. The *Education Policy 1988-2000* recognises the need to strengthen the four regional education offices. During the plan period, increased responsibilities will be placed on the regional offices in financial management, in the monitoring and administration of schools, in the development of professional services for teachers, and in direct involvement in the regional development of education.

4. Specialist Units within the Ministry of Education

(a) *The Planning Unit* is responsible for gathering data from the schools through the regional education offices. The unit also advises the senior management on the interpretation of such information, and analyses the

statistical consequences of policy options which may be under consideration. The unit comprises a Principal Education Planner, a Senior Planner, and a Planner/Statistician. The officer responsible for building projects is also attached to this unit, and reports to the Permanent Secretary through the Principal Education Planner. The unit is currently computerising all its statistical data and carrying out analyses of the annual statistics and the school mapping survey. A clerical officer and a typist have been added to the staff to assist in data processing and reporting.

(b) *The Curriculum Research & Development Unit (CRDU)* is in the Division of Services. It was established in 1976 with assistance from Unesco, and has been chiefly responsible for the development of curricula and syllabuses for the primary and secondary schools. Since its inception the unit has produced a new curriculum for primary grades 1 to 6, and has prepared teachers' manuals and pupils' workbooks for the subjects taught in that curriculum.

(c) *The Book Production & Materials Resources Unit (BPMRU)* has developed over the years into an effective printing and publishing establishment with sections for editing, graphics, audio-visual work and printing. The unit forms another wing in the Division of Services, and works closely with the Curriculum Research & Development Unit. The BPMRU does not have the capacity to publish all text books and other needs, and the system still relies heavily on overseas publishers. Nevertheless plans are in hand to develop the national capacity in text book printing. Despite its small size, the education sector has over the years developed a structure which is responding to the requirements of an expanding education system.

(d) *The Inspectorate* also works closely with the curriculum unit. A Principal Inspector, a Senior Inspector and 11 Assistant Inspectors cover both primary and secondary technical schools. However, high schools are not inspected at all.

On the administrative side, difficulties arise from the fact that all inspectors are based in Banjul. The Garvey & Wood report (1988, p.10) recommended that they be posted out to the Regional Education Offices to work under the control of the Regional Education Officer and in close collaboration with the Wardens of the Teachers' Centres. The principal role of Assistant Inspectors in the situation where many primary teachers are unqualified should be to advise and assist the schools on a week-by-week basis. This cannot be done effectively if their contact with schools depends on periodic visits from Banjul.

In small education systems, inspection of primary and middle schools presents less of a problem than inspection of secondary schools. The chief difficulty in secondary schools is the need to secure inspectors who are specialists in the full range of subjects. The recommendation of the Garvey & Wood report (1988, p.10), which may also have some relevance to other small states, was (i) that the Senior Inspector carry out the regulatory inspection of high schools each year, and (ii) that the Senior Inspector appoint a panel of advisory subject specialists from serving teachers either in the Gambia College or the high schools themselves. These specialists would visit and advise subject departments on professional practice, and would advise the Senior Inspector on performance and standards. Such inspections could be conducted as panel inspections every few years, or could be carried out at the specific request of the Senior Inspector or the inspected department on an occasional basis.

(e) Accounts. The centralised accounting system requires the preparation of monthly salary vouchers to be handled by the Accountant General's Department of the Ministry of Finance & Trade. Nevertheless the basic information on teachers' salaries and allowances is provided by the Accounts Section of the Ministry of Education. Salary print-outs are sent to this unit by the Treasury for verification before salaries are released. Plans are in hand to establish a management information system in the Division of Planning, to ensure an effective computerised record of all education personnel.

(f) The Non-Formal Education Services Unit does not at present have a substantive Director but is managed by an Under Secretary who also has responsibility for the National Commission of Unesco and who administers on behalf of the Permanent Secretary the areas of Youth, Sports and Culture.

Non-formal literacy teaching in The Gambia is largely a voluntary activity, and as such sits uneasily with management of the large salaried formal school structure. Thus while the present arrangement whereby the unit is directed under the 'administrative' rather than the 'education services' section of the Ministry seems slightly anomalous, there is no good reason to change it given the unit's present level of activity.

5. Work not Undertaken

The Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture does not undertake all the tasks which would be undertaken by such a ministry in a larger

country. The lack of inspection of high schools has already been mentioned, as has payment of salaries which is the responsibility of the Treasury Department in the Ministry of Finance & Trade. A further function is personnel recruitment and promotion, which is the responsibility of the Personnel Management Office of the Office of the President.

The Gambia also lacks expertise in assessment of examination candidates. This limitation applies not only to O and A Levels but also to professional and technical subjects such as accounting. The problem is partly solved by membership of the West African Examinations Council (WAEC), which sets regional examinations. Membership of WAEC also includes Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia and Sierra Leone. These countries are much larger than The Gambia, and their manpower resources in assessment and related matters are much better developed. Pupils in The Gambia also sit examinations set by such bodies as the City & Guilds of London.

6. Personnel

(a) Expertise

The public service in general has found it difficult to recruit qualified nationals for senior positions. One factor contributing to this problem is persistent emigration to international organisations, universities and companies. To redress this situation, the government has conducted periodic salary reviews and has increased financial rewards.

In order to bridge gaps, the government has also had to recruit expatriates in certain jobs. This itself has created certain difficulties. The expatriates who come to The Gambia usually stay only for a short period; and some expatriates interpret reality according to their own norms and attitude systems, which might differ from those of The Gambia. Many expatriates have had experience in the larger African countries, and some find difficulties adjusting to the special circumstances of The Gambia with its small population and land area.

Some aspects of recruitment display internal biases. The Gambian population is composed of different ethnic groups, and has suffered from a lack of cohesion. This phenomenon, commonly known as tribalism, affects the selection of manpower for certain government positions. There has recently been a tendency for senior officials in certain institutions to recruit staff from their own tribes. Apart from the obvious social and political consequences, this fragments a labour market which is already small.

To deal with this problem, the government has introduced a new scheme of service which indicates the required qualifications and experience within the hierarchical structure of government. The scheme also stipulates the total number of years of service required by employees before they can be promoted to certain ranks.

(b) Job Definition and Appraisal

Job definition and appraisal are quite new practices in the Ministry of Education. They were first introduced in 1987, and have two dimensions. One covers all ministries and special departments, and the other is specific to the Department of Education.

Although the scheme of service in the Department of Education has many positive aspects, it has two major deficiencies. First, unlike the scheme of service for the administrative cadre, it does not define positions by level of responsibility. The scheme should distinguish between the levels of management and the powers of decision-making proper to the various grades of officers in the service. Second, the scheme includes duties and functions which apparently were those carried out at a specific point in time by individual officers. Schemes of service ought not to be too specific about duties which can be altered by management decisions, but should still reflect the ability of the Permanent Secretary or his senior representatives to adapt the functions of middle-level officers to needs arising.

As in other small Ministries, officers generally know their colleagues very well. On the positive side, close interpersonal relationships permit effective teamwork. Monitoring within groups can also ensure that all members carry out their tasks on time. However, the strength of personal bonds can have negative effects. Individuals and groups can hide inadequacies and absences from work, and evaluation of individuals may be subjective. Also, sub-groups may fight each other instead of utilising their time and energies for more productive work.

(c) Promotion Prospects and Procedures

Promotion prospects have in the past been quite dynamic. A couple of individuals have taken jobs elsewhere, which opened up posts for other professionals in the Ministry. This had a positive effect on motivation. Since general mobility has been so high, the question of whether generalists have better promotion prospects than specialists has not really arisen.

The promotion procedure is now based on the scheme of service recently introduced by the government. This important document spells out the total amount of time required to work within a unit before an individual is due for promotion. A senior planner, for example, is expected to work for three years before becoming a principal planner.

To some extent the generalist civil servants have an advantage in their promotion prospects to the top of the system, for they can easily move from one ministry to another and thereby move into vacancies. However, the Deputy Permanent Secretary hold the same rank as the Chief Education Officer, and theory the two officers should hold equal chances of moving to the Permanent Secretary's position should it become vacant.

7. International Aid

A great percentage of the aid that the ministry receives comes in the form of food. For example Norway, Denmark, Finland and the USA have donated rice, cooking oil, canned beef and sardines for the school feeding programme. However, a negative aspect of the food aid is the dependency syndrome which it creates in the minds of the recipients and which sometimes has a negative impact on motivation.

As noted above, because of the important and sensitive nature of donor-assisted projects, the Ministry has formed a specific Projects Implementation Unit and has made it directly accountable to the Permanent Secretary. This arrangement is logical, and is on balance desirable. However, in this structure it is more difficult to arrange coordination with the rest of the system, for the line of authority does not come under the Chief Education Officer. As in some other countries, there is also a danger that the unit which deals directly with the donors is better resourced than other parts of the system. If not handled carefully, this can lead to imbalances and petty jealousies.

Requests for information from external bodies normally take a lot of the time of professional staff. This negatively affects the timely execution of their normal duties. However it is very difficult to quantify the amount of time taken in dealing with such requests.

8. Rationalisation in Use of Resources

(a) Personnel

Table 2.1 shows the number of establishment posts in the main sections

of the Ministry. Some of these posts are not used with maximum efficiency, and various rationalisation measures have been proposed. For example the Accounts establishment includes 15 Accounts Clerks and four Supplies Officers. Much of their work involves the preparation of payrolls and the physical payment of teachers' salaries. It is probable that a computerised accounts system will eventually lead to a reduction in the size of the Accounts Department.

Table 2.1: Establishment Posts in the Principal Parts of the Ministry, 1989-90

Unit/Section	No. of Posts
Office of the Minister	31
Curriculum Research & Development Unit	33
Regional Offices (Admin. & Advisory)	33
Accounts Section	30
Planning Unit	4
Book Production & Materials Resources Unit	25
School Inspectorate Unit	12

It is also desirable to explain the large number of posts in the Office of the Minister. These include all administrative staff in the Ministry, right down to the clerks, typists and messengers.

One measure proposed by the Garvey & Wood report (1988, pp.16-19) focused on what at that time was called the Curriculum Development Centre. The Centre had 35 posts, and although at the time of the report only 18 were filled the consultants recommended a further reduction. Their views could have implications for ministries of education in other countries as well as in The Gambia, so are worth noting in some detail.

The basic philosophy on which the Garvey & Wood recommendation was based was that curriculum development should involve the whole education sector, from the senior management whose policies and aspirations are served by it to the teachers whose activities constitute the actual curriculum. They suggested that certain aspects of the curriculum development process should be undertaken by specialists such as those employed in the curriculum development units, but that others could and should be undertaken by teachers.

In fact teachers have long been involved in curriculum development in The Gambia. The proposal from Garvey & Wood was that such involvement should be strengthened to make better use of the abilities,

interests and training of personnel who worked in the Gambian education system but who were not necessarily employed by the Curriculum Development Centre. Curriculum development specialists, they suggested, should be used as managers rather than writers of curriculum plans and materials. This would promote both efficiency and flexibility. As noted in the report (p.18):

It is hugely wasteful of trained manpower to maintain a body of specialists just in case any one specialism needs a new curriculum. Curriculum planning needs itself to be planned on a project basis. Curriculum specialists can manage projects and within them work with subject specialists from the teaching field.

This statement was also based on recognition that production of good materials requires writing skills which should not be expected to exist only in a curriculum development unit. Such skills cannot easily be taught in curriculum training programmes, and are highly dependent on innate ability, careful editorial guidance, and motivation. It seems unreasonable to expect all curriculum specialists to be gifted writers; and it might therefore be wiser for the staff in curriculum development unit to be given primarily a management function, responsible mainly for promotion and guidance.

The specific recommendation for the Gambian system was that curriculum development be considered a function of the whole education sector under the management control of the Permanent Secretary and the Senior Management Team. In this case, all that would be needed for a curriculum development unit would be a Director and six other specialists, two of whom would have particular ability in research. Such a system would be less wasteful of scarce manpower, cheaper, more flexible, and perhaps capable of delivering better products.

The Garvey & Wood report also commented on aspects of book production. In particular the report suggested (1988, p.16) that the decision to print pupils' workbooks as part of the curriculum was now generally agreed to have been a serious professional error. Because the workbooks have to be filled in by pupils, they can only be used once. This requires constant reprinting, which wastes financial, human and other resources.

(b) Information Flows

As in all public institutions in The Gambia, in the Ministry of Education

informal channels of communication are widely used. However, such channels are not systematic, and are sometimes misleading. This results in communication and information networks which are broken, and decision-makers therefore have to work with fragmentary information which may or may not solve the problem at hand.

Sometimes, both decision-makers and implementers assume that information has flowed easily when in fact it has been incomplete or misleading. For example in certain schools failures in the Common Entrance Examination were attributed to the lack of text books, but after the provision of such materials problems still persisted. It was later suggested that shortcomings among the teachers were a more serious cause of failure. Improvements in information collection and dissemination are essential for improved efficiency and rational use of resources.

9. Conclusions

The education system in the Gambia has grown dramatically in the last two decades. This has had major implications for the structure of administration. Primary school enrolments increased by 174 per cent between 1976 and 1986, and secondary enrolments by 123 per cent between 1976 and 1988. At the same time, the population has also grown dramatically. Whereas in 1973 the population was estimated at just 493,000, by 1989 it was estimated at 822,000. Geographically, the country is long and narrow. The combination of population increase and geographic dispersion has required a process of decentralisation to four regional education offices.

In 1986 the government commissioned the firm of Peat, Marwick & Mitchell to review the overall organisation, staffing and efficiency of the Gambian Civil Service. The firm did comment on the Ministry of Education, Youth, Sports & Culture, including a brief account of its needs in a document entitled 'Overview of the Ministries'. Because this was not a detailed review, however, the government commissioned a more thorough examination of the Ministry. The work was undertaken in 1988 with assistance from the UK Overseas Development Administration.

One of the overall recommendations of the consultants undertaking this work (Garvey & Wood 1988, p.3) was that the distinction between the Ministry and the Department of Education should be abolished. When the Ministry of Education was created at the time of self-government and Independence, it apparently absorbed the existing Department of Education, leaving intact its organisation and responsi-

bilities and the powers of its head, the Director of Education. At that time a reordering of such powers would have been necessary since the Director, who had represented Education to the Governor and had been solely in charge of the sector, had henceforth to report to a Minister (who represented Education to the Cabinet) through an administrative Permanent Secretary.

As the consultants pointed out, in all Ministries of Education the work of the general administrative cadre and of the technical officers must proceed together. Although there are many ways to ensure their integrated functioning under general supervision of a Permanent Secretary, it appeared that in The Gambia this mode of functional integration had not been satisfactorily developed. While serious in all contexts, this failing is perhaps particularly serious in a small ministry and in a country faced by manpower constraints. The consultants made various recommendations to improve the situation, some of which have been noted here.

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