

Introduction

The first edition of this Directory was published in 1971 following a recommendation by the fifth Commonwealth Education Conference, meeting at Canberra, that the Commonwealth Secretariat should assemble and disseminate information about handicapped children in the Commonwealth. At the time of its publication, recipients were invited to submit corrections and additional information; where such information has been received it has been incorporated into this second edition, together with new material compiled from reports and publications which have come to hand.

In the two years since the appearance of the first edition there have been encouraging signs of increased awareness of the magnitude of the problem of handicapped children in developing countries and a gathering impetus to action. Commonwealth Ministers of Health, for example, meeting in Mauritius in November 1971, agreed that official policies should lay more stress on environmental and preventive medicine rather than the curative aspects of medicine; for this to be achieved, more resources would need to be directed towards public health activities. As the same time, the Ministers called for increased attention to problems relating to nutrition, from which so large a proportion of handicap stems directly and indirectly.

The Commonwealth Secretariat's study, "Special Education in the Developing Countries of the Commonwealth", published in 1972, reviewed the whole range of handicap and drew together for the first time information which made it possible to quantify the overall pattern. A realistic appraisal indicates that in the developing Commonwealth as a whole some fifty to sixty million children and young people could benefit from special educational provision for a greater or lesser period; five millions of them are handicapped to a degree which prevents them from benefiting from normal education. At present perhaps two per cent of them have access to special educational provision. Nor is the situation static. In the next ten years the number of handicapped children will rise by a third.

The longer the delay in incorporating provision for the handicapped into national education and employment programmes, the more intractable will the problem appear. The number of handicapped children surviving infancy in the developing countries is increasing. At the same time, school-age populations are expanding faster than national resources from which schools and teachers can be provided. In these circumstances it appears essential that the basic framework for a system of special education should be established, to be expanded as and when resources become available. For such a system to be effective it should be constructed within the context of overall planning for education, health, social welfare and employment programmes. Realistic policies could do much directly, by making provision for the handicapped, and indirectly, through the consequential effect of such programmes on public opinion and the stimulus to voluntary activity.

This volume attempts to collate information about official and non-official activities in special education and training and is provided as a handbook to assist all those active in this field by facilitating information exchange and co-operation. It is recognised that errors and omissions make this publication imperfect and it would be much appreciated if corrections and additions could be made known to the Secretariat. A third edition will be prepared in due course.