

Part III:

Generating Extra Resources

10. Students' Fees

One common way to meet the high costs of practical subjects is to charge fees. These can be:

- specific ones for individual subjects (e.g. \$10 per term for woodwork, but \$12 per term for automechanics);
- specific for particular levels (e.g. \$11 per term for all students in Form 3 but \$13 for all students in Form 4);
- flat rate ones for all students in any particular school; or
- flat rate ones for all students in the system.

Some fees are quite low, and just attempt a small reduction in the total financial burden; others are quite high, and are nearer the real cost of education. And some private schools actually seek to make a profit on fees.

(a) Advantages

The main advantages of fee-charging systems are that:

- i) The people who will benefit from the service are the ones who pay the fees. This contrasts with general government taxes, which people have to pay whether they benefit from specific government services or not.
- ii) They encourage students and their families to be more cost-conscious, less wasteful of the opportunities to learn and of the

materials provided.

- iii) They encourage students and their families to make more careful choices about the subjects they study, and to avoid waste of time and resources learning skills that they are unlikely to use.

(b) Disadvantages

The main disadvantages of fee-charging systems are:

- i) They may discriminate against poor families and thus maintain social inequalities;
- ii) They may encounter strong political opposition;
- iii) Because practical subjects are more costly than academic ones, they may reduce demand for practical subjects. This would (a) prevent achievement of some social goals, (b) perpetuate an irrelevant curriculum, and (c) reduce student numbers for some courses to such a low level that the courses could not be offered.
- iv) When fees are low, the costs of collection severely reduce the amount gained.
- v) When individual institutions have to collect the fees, (a) the staff members' time is consumed, and (b) the risk of embezzlement increases.
- vi) Fees which increase at different stages of the system also increase the likelihood of students dropping out before the end of their courses.

One solution to these problems is a scholarship or bursary system. Such a system can be operated either by the government or by institutions themselves. However, authorities must be wary of the administrative costs of scholarship schemes.