

Commonwealth Heads of Government at their Ottawa meeting in 1973 endorsed the decision taken in Lusaka in January 1973 by Ministers concerned with Youth Matters, to establish a Commonwealth Youth Programme. While outlining the purpose and objectives of the Programme and establishing priorities, Heads of Government identified as one of the major objectives, "to seek to eliminate unemployment and to alleviate its ill-effects". Policy oriented, inter-disciplinary research in the field of employment was strongly supported as a priority area by Regional Planning meetings and by the Commonwealth Youth Affairs Council meetings in New Delhi (1973), Nairobi (1975), and the most recent meeting of the Council in Malta (April 1976). Thus, one of the major concerns of the Programme has been directed towards youth unemployment and alleviating its ill-effects.

There are specific elements of the problem which affect young people in particular, yet the problem of youth unemployment can not be considered without also taking into account the overall problem of unemployment and its bearing on the optimum use of human resources. And the problem of unemployment should be examined within the context of the wider issues of poverty and under-development.

Why do so many of us these days - planners, politicians, economists - give so much importance to the employment problem? Why has the ILO launched a World Employment Programme and why is there now a World Employment Conference? Steps leading to this heightened emphasis on employment these days, form a clear, logical sequence and can be briefly outlined.

Let us start by asking ourselves: what is the purpose of development? In the 1950s or 1960s the answer given would have been to increase the GNP - the gross national product, the sum total of goods and services. Since then there has been a process of "dethronement of GNP". We now would say that the purpose of development is to reduce and finally eliminate poverty. This is not to say that those who emphasised the growth of GNP in earlier days were not aware of the poverty problem nor were they necessarily insensitive to it. But there was a tendency to assume rather unquestioningly that if the total cake increased everybody would have more, or in other words that an increase in GNP would "trickle down" to the poorer sections. For many reasons, not least the facts of life as they can be seen, we are now no longer willing to make that optimistic assumption.

But if the purpose of development is to reduce poverty, we must, of course, first define poverty and then measure it - at least in the sense of knowing who are the main groups experiencing poverty and should be targets of main development policy. In defining poverty we must set up a minimum standard of basic needs which must be satisfied before we can declare a household to be beyond poverty. This standard could be defined in terms of a minimum supply of food; shelter; clothing; access to health services, to education, to clean water etc. Alternatively it could be defined in terms of money as was done by the Kenya Employment Mission,¹ separately for the urban and rural population with a lower target for the immediate future in 1978 and a higher target for 1985.

When a minimum needs standard or poverty line is defined it is usually found that: a very high proportion of the total population is below the poverty line; the proportion of women, young people and children below the poverty line is invariably disproportionately greater than the number of men. The number of young school-leavers below the poverty line is high because many of them have not found productive employment.

It is also found that the number or even the proportion of people below the poverty line in many countries, tends to increase, even when the G.N.P. is rising sharply. This is one of the "facts of life" mentioned earlier which leads us to doubt the "trickle down" theory of G.N.P. growth. It is therefore natural to conclude that the provision of productive employment should be the main instrument of reducing poverty and hence the main tool for economic development.

The provision of productive employment sufficient to yield an income above the poverty line is not an easy task. There are many forces obstructing such a policy. One of the most potent of such obstacles is the monopoly of technological know-how by the richer countries which is imported into the developing countries. While this technology suits the conditions of the industrial countries - plenty of capital and high level skills and relatively little unskilled labour - it does not suit the developing countries with their very different problems and very different resource endowment. When capital-intensive technology is introduced in the developing countries it creates what economists call a "dualistic" economy - a

1. *Employment, incomes and equality: a strategy for increasing productive employment in Kenya: ILO, 1972.*

relatively small sector with a technology similar to that of the industrial countries and with high labour productivity with the rest of the economy left high and dry to try to make a living with practically no access to capital. The latter sector, the so-called "informal sector" is often treated as a marginal sector outside the economy as a whole, while in fact it is a victim of mistaken development policies not properly geared to reduction of poverty as a primary objective.

If the reduction of poverty is a primary objective, it is essential that the import of technology should be on a much more selected basis; this will require changes not only in the policy of the developing countries but also in the international system governing the transfer of technology. It will also be necessary for developing countries to acquire much greater powers of adaptation of imported technology as well as creation of appropriate new technology.

The Commonwealth Youth Programme with a remit from Commonwealth Governments, as indicated earlier, has been actively involved in an attempt to seek to reduce unemployment and alleviate its ill-effects. Along with commissioned overview investigations published as occasional papers, by experts in the field of employment and youth, supporting practical research projects, the Programme has organised a series of symposia on employment strategies and programmes in various regions of the Commonwealth with a view to approaching the problem in a pragmatic way which would yield results of immediate practical value. Two such symposia have already been held. The first was in Barbados in September 1975, for the Caribbean region, and the second was in Chandigarh, India in February 1976, for the South Asian region. In each case themes were selected for their relevance to the participating countries. Arising out of these symposia, there have been positive and specific recommendations for effective action, to meet employment problems among young people.

As a continuation of its work in the employment field, the Programme has decided to bring out a special issue on the subject. Its purpose is to contribute by way of information and analysis of employment problems and strategies in the context of an employment-oriented development strategy, at the time when the International Labour Organisation is holding a Tripartite World Conference on Employment, Income Distribution and Social Progress and the International Division of Labour, in

Geneva from 4-17 June, 1976: and when the rest of the international community is also engaged in a dialogue in relation to a New International Economic Order.

This issue contains articles, from well-known experts, on various elements of an employment-oriented development strategy. Louis Emmerij, Chief of the ILO World Employment Programme, in his article on Employment, Income Distribution and Basic Needs has put the problem in perspective. The message is clear that the pattern of development to date has been unable to create sufficient income earning opportunities, and meet basic needs of the large majority of the population. Mr. Emmerij explains, in his paper, how the strategy of redistributing wealth could help to solve the enormous problem of unemployment in the Third World.

Richard Jolly's paper on Employment Problems and Policies is a distillation of ideas on the problem. He raises fundamental questions about the pattern of development which has taken place in the last two decades and recommends redistribution with growth as the central thrust of poverty-focussed policy.

The piece on Rural Development and Employment outlines some of the most important areas in the context of rural-urban migration which require further research and investigation. A clearly defined policy framework for rural development is essential and should be conceived as an integral part of an overall development strategy. This article also appraises one of the most innovative experiments in rural development - The Tanzanian Ujamaa experiment.

In his paper on Education and Employment, Mark Blaug explains the importance of education to the employment problem by discussing some of the misleading opinions that are frequently heard on the subject of schools in the Third World. Blaug blames, in particular, the present tendency of educational systems to grow more quickly at the top than at the bottom and he argues that this tendency can be reversed only by a re-structured pattern of educational finance combined with deliberate intervention in the labour markets and goes on to suggest that it is piece-meal social engineering that will eventually solve the problem.

Hans Singer's paper, "Trade Expansion, Employment and Income Distribution", argues the benefits to the developing countries in terms of employment, of increasing trade between developed and developing countries. This article is, in fact, the result of a large project, on trade liberalisation, which has been centred at I.D.S.

The paper on Youth and Employment is a collation of information and experience exchanged at the various seminars and workshops organised by the Commonwealth Youth Programme to focus on the basic problems of youth unemployment. This article also reports, in the nature of a case study, on the Symposium on Employment Strategies and Programmes, held in the Caribbean in September 1975.

Finally, Ajit Bhalla's paper on Technology and Employment takes up perhaps the most important issue. He argues that the application of modern scientific and technical know-how should be particularly focussed on the improvement of the living standards and income earning opportunities of the rural and the urban poor. Bhalla emphasises that efficient technological alternatives exist and the range of technological choices can be widened by the use of secondhand equipment, the adaptation of existing machinery and processes, the revival of obsolete techniques, and the local manufacture of equipment. The emphasis is on the use of appropriate technology.

It can be said that, just as employment policy is the bulk of development policy but not the whole of it, so the technology problem is the bulk but not the whole of employment policy. It is, therefore, right that it is one of the main but not the only subject for discussion at the World Employment Conference. If the World Employment Conference can bring progress in this field, by improved international arrangements in the creation, transfer and dissemination of appropriate technology, this will be a big step forward towards the improvement of the employment situation and the International Economic Order.