

CHAPTER 1

Basic Considerations

Introduction

Ten years ago few Commonwealth administrations foresaw today's "youth problem". A few percipient academics raised thin voices of foreboding but these were lost in the gale of enthusiasm with which governments embarked on schemes of rapid educational expansion. Encouraged by international resolutions and spurred on by challenging targets, such as "universal primary education by 1970", governments devoted unprecedented resources of finance and personnel to the formal educational process. Thus embarked, few questioned the means or doubted the eventual outcome. The spread of education and national growth appeared to have been interrelated during the European industrial revolution, and most developing countries accepted the consequential concept that economic development must follow necessarily from educational expansion. Post hoc ergo propter hoc. In 1971 the sequence seems less inevitable. Ten years is a short time in which to judge education or economic development, but social and political pressures have become even more urgent. On the evidence available, assessments must be made, policies formulated and programmes initiated.

In simple terms, it is apparent, and not only in the developing countries, that educational systems are not producing the expected results, insofar as any precise objectives have been defined. Societies can show something in terms of economic development, though not as much as was hoped. They can show little in terms of general social betterment. What has been achieved has often been at high cost, in terms of finance, personnel and social stability.

Not all of today's problems can be attributed to the formal education system. Medical advances have helped to create

rapidly growing and ever younger populations. These have brought associated social problems. World trading patterns have exercised a profound effect on economic development. Political considerations have distorted the composition of many budgets. International aid has influenced many local decisions, not all of which have taken into account sufficiently the long-term effects.

Against this background the young people of each country - and in the developing countries they make up the majority of the population - face, for the most part, bleak prospects owing to world tension, social uncertainty, and unrealised personal aspirations. They are confronted by continuously increasing chances of being unemployed, underemployed or mis-employed even if they have succeeded in completing a course of education. For growing numbers of young people education leads to frustration rather than realisation. These outcomes demand assessment, not alone in terms of the efficiency of the educational system, but in terms of a country's social, economic and political health. Prescriptions to improve the situation can be effective only if they take into account the attitudes of the young people for whom they are designed.

Identifying the major problems

Reports from Commonwealth countries in the Asia-Pacific region make apparent the wide disparity of problems in terms of their relative importance and dimensions. At the same time a number of basic issues recur, such as the pressures caused by increasing, and increasingly youthful, populations, or the heightened aspirations resulting from educational provision expanding at a rate disproportionate to the growth of employment opportunities in the modern sector of the economy for school leavers. In this context the fundamental issue of the apparent contradiction of the rights of the individual and the needs of his society demands extensive consideration.

The youth problems in the region are not essentially problems of youth, but problems of national development occurring in countries with mainly youthful populations. Nor can the young people in these countries be regarded as one homogeneous group, for the differences between various sectors of the youthful population are frequently as wide and divisive as those separating young people from their elders. Nevertheless, the pattern of population distribution and factors common to the development of the countries under review result in certain major problems appearing in similar

forms in these countries, with resultant strains on their social, economic, educational and political structures.

(a) Social problems

Many societies display uncertainty of the role which young people ought to play. In consequence goals are indeterminate and directions towards them unclear. Familiar norms have disappeared under the influence of rapid social change. Disoriented young people discover their traditional roles rendered obsolete by social change without the development of satisfactory substitutes. If young people feel disillusion with the society created by their elders, their parents, too, are uncomfortably aware of their society's shortcomings. Both sides fall prey to uncertainty. The young are reluctant to accept an authoritarian transmission of traditional values, their parents are increasingly hesitant about passing them on. Where traditionally minded elders continue to exert pressure on young people tensions are exacerbated and additional social strains created. This outline, of course, oversimplifies a complex situation. Individual older and younger members of any society display different attitudes and reactions, from active encouragement of change through indifference to positive traditionalism. With the exception of a minority of enlightened realists, attitudes held tend to reflect directly the self-interest of the individual in preserving or changing the existing form of society.

Other social problems arise consequentially from changes in the economic, educational and political systems. Minorities benefiting from educational provision are not infrequently alienated from their immediate social group, a phenomenon recorded recently in societies as widely separated as English cities and New Guinea villages. Social and cultural divisions promoted by the uncritical absorption of alien values and patterns of behaviour, frequently transmitted by the mass media, threaten uncontrolled dislocation of existing systems. The unsettling effect on young people of changing family structures, and the tensions occasioned by some family structures too rigidly unresponsive to change, characterise societies differing hugely in quantitative terms, as, for instance, India and Tonga. New patterns of employment often undermine social structures. The increasing employment of women on equal terms with men, for example, while laudable in some ways, can result in some places in the unemployment of traditional male breadwinners and in other areas, where both parents are employed, in the creation of a new phenomenon of "latch key" children. This absence of a secure and loving home, uncharacteristic of the

East, may be said to result directly from attempts to compete with the West on the latter's terms. Other problems can be cited. Enlightened legislation on the employment of young people can produce an annual output from the schools of leavers who have completed their courses but are under age for legal employment. In many cases, too, the examples given by those who achieve material success in rapidly changing societies are not those calculated to promote the health of any community.

(b) Economic problems

As foreshadowed by the first lead speaker, the spectre of unemployment remained a constant preoccupation of the Seminar. (Chapter 2 outlines the considerable discussion which took place throughout the meeting.) Societies, it was recognised, may survive social and cultural dislocation of the most far-reaching nature but cannot survive if the essential economic needs of their members are not met. Frequent secondary effects of changes in the economic pattern of a society are changes in its dietary habits, especially when crops are altered in favour of cash products and away from subsistence foods. Fundamental to economic health, too, are realistic wage structures reflecting in reasonable measure the value of each particular form of work to the society. Many countries in the region have inherited great disparities, especially, but not solely, between returns to those engaged in the modern and traditional sectors of the economy. Few have yet found the means to restructure their systems. In consequence, even within the government service, it is not unusual to find a ratio of 20:1 between the highest and lowest salaries, where a healthy ratio may be considered as 6 or 7:1. Young people see the value in cash terms placed on some occupations as compared with others, they see how those controlling the system benefit themselves, and their disillusion is reinforced. Economic realities can be used to engage the idealism of youth. Not infrequently they achieve the opposite effect.

(c) Educational problems

Dissatisfaction with existing educational processes marked many contributions to the discussions, to the extent of schooling being identified as a major cause of unrest, instability and unemployment. Yet educational systems, under the political pressures of public opinion, and without clear objectives being delineated, continue to expand in a hopeless attempt to provide for the mass what they have in the past achieved for the minority. The irrelevance of the form and content of much contemporary

education attracts justifiable criticism, but the fact is not always appreciated that the irrelevance is not intrinsic but derives from the changed nature of the pupil body. Frustration originates in the lack of realisation on the part of parents and children that as the general level of mass education rises so, too, does the threshold above which entrance is possible to desirable employment opportunities. The belief that five O levels, for example, would guarantee employment and the "good life" is giving way to the realisation that this is no longer "legal tender". This lesson is not limited to developing countries, for it is only now being learned painfully in England, where the numbers receiving higher education have doubled in the last ten years.

The traditional Eastern concept of education is of a character-building process, yet Western forms of schooling are designed primarily as stages of vocational training in preparation for employment in the modern sector of the economy. Increasingly out of context with the needs of society, formal education as at present conceived prepares its pupils inefficiently and for indefinite ends; it raises aspirations without providing the means by which they can be realised. The thwarting of parental expectations in respect of their children has a direct effect on the family and society. The sense of failure inculcated in many of those who through no fault of their own fail to achieve some of the limited rewards available to school leavers is demonstrated in the self-deprecation of the "grass knives" in New Guinea. The desperate persistence of others despite the evidence all about them may be judged from the numbers of unsuccessful job hunters who nevertheless decline those unpretentious employment opportunities which alone are available to them, such as those categorised "choosy applicant" in Malaysia.

(d) Political problems

Young people, disappointed in their hopes and unable to influence their future, represent a political problem on several levels. The development of increasingly articulate and frustrated cadres of youth gives rise to concern among governments and public opinion at large, who see in them direct threats to the continuing stability of the society. Yet these dissatisfied young people are heavily in the majority in most countries of Asia and the Pacific, and will be so increasingly in the future. Measures to defuse the situation before it explodes thus become of prime urgency to governments seeking rapid and controlled progress for their peoples. Realism demands recognition of the need to make available greater opportunities for this majority of young people

to exercise a degree of real control over policies and decisions affecting their own future and that of the society which they will inherit. The problems then arise of how representative opinions of youth may best be canvassed and how young people can be involved directly in decision-making processes in a way which will attract the confidence of their peers.

The needs and aspirations of out-of-school youth

The fact that out-of-school young people increasingly make demands on their societies does not imply identical needs or similar aspirations for all. The heterogenous nature of the young population results in their seeking a range of vaguely-formulated objectives from an equally wide number of starting points. It may be, however, that needs vary more than aspirations, many of which are widely felt. Needs differ as between rural and urban young people, for example, and particularly between the urban-born and those who have migrated to the towns. Origins and manifestations of disadvantage, for which compensatory measures should be sought, occur in many different guises: social disadvantages, for example, may originate in poverty, remoteness or the traditional attitudes towards young people. The increasing proportion of people in Hong Kong and Singapore living in high-rise apartments in high-density new residential areas, too, causes increasing concern to social welfare workers. Deprivation, unemployment, delinquency, all call for remedial action.

A novel feature of the contemporary situation is the awareness of young people of their unsatisfactory role. Schooling, improved communications and the mass media have combined to bring home to the new generation in most developing countries the extent of their deprivation. They have to adjust themselves, as Illich says, to thinking rich while living poor. The problem has much in common with that endured by the poorer sections of rich countries: how to educate young people to their full potential and at the same time reconcile them to an almost inevitable life of dully monotonous, poorly rewarded hard work, thus tempering their aspirations to reality.

Adult goodwill is no longer enough. The major need of young people is for recognition as full and responsible members of their communities at an age when they are able to accept these responsibilities. One answer to the youth problem, therefore, is to lower the age for the achievement of adult status, as has been done in those countries which have progressively reduced the age of suffrage. In addition, adult pressures on the young

must be reduced, so that those leaving the formal education system at points below the university no longer feel the taint of failure. To this extent the youth problem is an adult problem. Realistic expectations in respect of their children on the part of adults and a readiness to accept the potential contribution of young people to their society could go a long way towards meeting the needs and tempering the aspirations of the young.

Problems of opportunity and involvement

It became apparent during discussions that opinion differed on the degree and level of involvement considered appropriate for young people. In an interesting process of reasoning one participant seemed to suggest that because in developing countries senior officials and public figures are often under the age of, say, 35 years, the age-limit for defining "youth" should be set to exclude all such individuals, so implying that young people who succeed in attaining those positions of influence to which youth is aspiring forfeit their right to be classified as young people. This evokes a fundamental consideration for the youthful societies of Asia and the Pacific as to how far youth is a matter of chronology and how far a description of inferior status.

Views were expressed which varied from the opinion that young people cared little for participation in decision-making provided that jobs were available, to the suggestion that youth should be drawn earlier into direct political involvement by reducing the age of suffrage to 18 years. The question was raised as to whether young people should be invited to take part in policy-making before they requested such participation or whether action should be taken only in response to demand. It was generally agreed that young people should be more directly involved in the decision-making process but that the problems of implementing this were formidable. At lower levels - the level of village, district or city - selection of representative young people was feasible. At the national level this presented much more difficulty. Selection at this level implied national youth organisations, which in turn involved decisions as to the basis for such organisations. The promising initial activities of the Malaysian National Youth Consultative Council and the Malaysian National Youth Council were noted.

The effectiveness of some apparent concessions to youth was questioned, as when one student may be appointed to a university's academic board as against 30 faculty members. "Tokenism", it was agreed, is at best a temporary palliative.

It was noted with interest, however, that an investigation had shown that students nominated to such "token" posts frequently exercised considerable influence among their fellows even though they might participate infrequently in the official body to which they had been appointed.

The problems of traditional opposition to youth involvement cannot be underrated. In societies such as those of New Guinea and Tonga age remained the criterion by which fitness for decision-making was determined. In New Guinea this situation resulted directly in numbers of young people declining to return to their villages after spending time away at school. (By contrast the Seminar learned with interest of the nomination to the Senate of a Caribbean country of a representative of youth.)

Restrictions to the involvement of youth were seen at several levels resulting from different causes. Problems arise such as those of identifying acceptable representatives and of convincing public opinion of the desirability of such participation. Social, political and economic factors exercise restraints on youth participation in many societies. The magnitude of the need emphasises the lack of resources necessary to produce expertise and leadership. Noting Eisenstadt's comment that the giving of special status to youth generally co-incides with giving little real power to youth, the question arises whether the crux of the problem, in fact, is not how to enable youth to participate, but rather how to facilitate the transition of young people to full adult status.

The Canadian Opportunities for Youth Programme illustrates one means by which a government has responded to the demands of youth by inviting young people to identify projects and implement them with financial assistance from public funds. The Canadian example emphasised the need for adequate preparation and funding if effective programmes were to be developed.

Planning priorities for out-of-school youth

Priorities may be allocated on the basis either of identifying groups of persons in most urgent need or of determining particular activities which merit early attention.

Governments, too, must face the basic dilemma of the choice (if a choice must be made) between allocation of priority on a basis of response to greater need or demand for optimum potential return.

In terms of persons deserving of priority certain groups stand out in many countries - young people lacking basic care, schooling or employment; women and girls; rural dwellers; urban immigrants; and members of specific ethnic or social groups. Further education for school drop-outs was advocated as a means of ensuring some return for an investment already partially made.

Suggested as priorities in activities were the need to build up a clear picture of the youth situation in each country, concentrating on their problems, training and employment, prior to the working out of short- and long-term national policies adequately reinforced by political and administrative structures. In building up this picture attention should be paid to gaps in the provision. The implementation of such policies would depend heavily on an effective partnership between government and non-government agencies. This, in its turn, would require the involvement in youth welfare and social education of new sectors in the community, particularly industry and commerce. When all available resources have been mobilised and their proper utilisation determined, priority of action should be given to the recruitment, selection, training, assessment and deployment of leaders.

As specific activities, physical education and sport were put forward as deserving of priority because they were socially helpful and politically neutral activities for potentially dissident youth.

Emphasis was laid repeatedly on the need to regard provision for youth as an integral component of national development, designed to involve young people at a responsible level and to lead to full participation in their society. Planning has too often been dominated by economic considerations. Education has been valued for its productive role while its human role has been overlooked.

Participants recognised that radical improvement in financial resources is unlikely in the short-term in most countries. Governments are committed to formal educational programmes and cannot divert large sums to informal education. Out-of-school provision must share the budget with other items which may promise quicker returns. Nevertheless, much could be achieved, not least by broadening the base of existing institutions to link them more closely to the community, and by increasing the efficiency of ongoing operations by conscious motivation of those

for whom the facilities are provided.

Formal and informal education

Existing formal educational structures have many glaring defects. Their alien origin leaves a legacy of irrelevant content and unsettling attitudes; their conservatism reinforces their separateness from the communities which they are intended to serve. Yet they are still regarded in most areas as the key to self-advancement, so that radical changes would inevitably encounter heavy opposition from local opinion. Changes in the short term can be introduced only in the measure which may be politically feasible, and not to the extent which is educationally desirable. The solution to the problem seems to lie in seeking greater efficiency in the use of existing educational resources while attempting to supplement them with a varied range of out-of-school activities.

Some consensus must be reached about the purpose of the school if evaluation of its operation is to be made. For example, it is generally agreed that the academic-type curriculum has many deficiencies, but particular philosophies of education would regard these deficiencies as of minor importance. In much of Asia education is conceived as a character-building process which can be effectively carried on against a background of curriculum content divorced from a pupil's immediate practical needs. The value of the school in this context lies in its processes and not in the content of its curriculum.

There was, however, general agreement that curricula could profitably be restructured to meet positive needs, although it was emphasised that vocational training is an inappropriate function of first-level schools. Such training is frequently inappropriate to the age-groups subjected to it, and often out of phase with evolving patterns of employment. Similar criticism may be directed at curricula which attempt to cater too exclusively for specific groups as, for example, rural or urban, social or ethnic.

The essential purpose of general education is to secure an informed and cohesive society willing to co-operate in controlled change.

Realism requires recognition of the likely pace of change in educational structures. In many countries it must be anticipated that only limited resources can be diverted from formal

to informal education in the immediate future, despite governments' growing awareness of the vital role of the out-of-school sector. On the other hand, much can be achieved by less severe departures from traditional practice. For example, progressive measures can be introduced to integrate the school into the community where it is set and to promote more efficient use of educational plant through its use for more hours by successive groups. The establishment of sandwich courses, the reorientation of teachers as local leaders, and the identification of underutilised sources of finance in, for example, industrial and commercial concerns, the recruitment of volunteer teachers and trainers, all these measures would serve the triple purpose of advancing effective education, involving the widest range of community members in education as teachers or students (or both), and blurring the distinction between formal and informal education.

Educational technology - the mass media, programmed learning, correspondence courses, and so on - can play an increasing and effective role in out-of-school education if introduced with discrimination after adequate preparation.

Within the terms of political feasibility and subject to educational and economic practicability, the Seminar considered that educational provision for out-of-school youth should be widely promoted, redressing the present imbalance between formal and informal education.

Employment

The distressing employment situation together with its side-effects was a recurrent theme throughout the Seminar. The disillusioned school leaver has become almost the standard figure of the young person in the developing world. He represents waste in educational provision, waste in economic potential and waste in social well-being. The educated young woman is in a particularly difficult situation. Unemployed, she reinforces prejudices against education for girls; employed, she may well contribute to social dislocation by filling a post which would otherwise be filled by the sole bread-winner of a family.

Employment opportunities for young people in all but a very few countries in Asia and the Pacific are limited, in numbers or variety or both. How far the situation is aggravated by increasing educational opportunity may be difficult to quantify, but the relationship exists. Public opinion would resist arbitrary limitation of educational opportunity based solely on forecasts of

employment possibilities. While these political pressures make difficult any artificial restrictions on educational expansion, the output from the schools forms an increasingly articulate group frustrated in its ambitions, disillusioned in its expectations, and potentially responsive to extreme political ideas. Even where controlled development of educational services has been possible, efforts in the past decade to link educational provision to estimated manpower requirements have enjoyed, at best, limited success.

The social effects of the employment situation facing young people gives cause for deep concern. Family structures become weakened, tensions grow between parents and children when the sacrifices of the elders go unrewarded by compensatory success on the part of the youngsters, the weight of parental expectation lies heavy on the student who knows the chances against his finding such employment. At the same time the unemployed youngster feels himself less of a full person because he cannot play a satisfying role in his community.

Even when a job is available it may be essentially unsuitable for the individual, for it may leave him still under-employed or misemployed. Problems of opportunity are many and take different forms in different countries and different sectors of the community. Tonga, for example, has a body of young people for whom no work of any sort is available in either the modern or the traditional sector of the economy, while Hong Kong's problem is that of qualified young people having to accept employment at levels below their full capabilities. Within a country distinctions have to be drawn between the problems facing urban and rural youth. Nor can urban youth be regarded as a homogeneous group, for the problems facing town-bred young people tend to be different in kind and intensity from those encountered by youngsters making their way to the cities from the rural areas.