

CHAPTER 4

Commonwealth Co-operation

Commonwealth countries in Asia and the Pacific channel their co-operative activities through a number of organisations to which they belong. In addition, much is achieved on a bilateral basis, countries negotiating directly with each other. Co-operation on the basis of Commonwealth membership should be designed to make a specific contribution which is not made in other ways and to meet needs which are not met by other arrangements. Commonwealth co-operation should take advantage of the unique possibilities of this world association, making maximum use of informal relationships and avoiding undue parochialism, while recognising the need to relate activities directly to real national needs.

Within this context the Seminar affirmed the need to promote Commonwealth co-operation to assist members in resolving the serious and growing problems associated with the increasing numbers of young people in their countries. Such co-operation should not be limited to programmes of education and training. This would be to treat the symptom rather than the disease, an essential part of the operation but by no means meeting the whole need. The effects of international trading patterns and international aid, for example, exert direct influence on employment and development, and cannot be omitted from a consideration of areas of mutual concern in relation to the youth problem.

The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation

The recently approved Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation offers a range of possibilities for assistance in the youth field. At their meeting in Nassau on 21 September, 1971, for example, the Board of Representatives of the Fund decided that its scope should be widened to include export market development. This meets a need emphasised by several participants at the Seminar. Both the technical assistance function and

the training element of the Fund offer extensive scope for mutual assistance among developing Commonwealth countries. Among possible uses of the Fund mentioned by the Seminar were the construction and reappraisal of manpower surveys, advice on the development of tourist industries, evaluation of development programmes, the training of entrepreneurs and managers, the retraining of personnel needed for reorganised education programmes, and the training of youth leaders.

Exchanges of personnel and information

The Seminar considered that the Commonwealth Secretariat, in addition to its administration of the Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation, should augment its activities related to the exchange of personnel and information, endeavouring always to identify major problem areas and to avoid duplicating the services of other agencies.

(i) Exchanges of personnel

Under the general heading of personnel exchange the Seminar discussed exchanges at three levels: key personnel, including administrators and trainers of youth leaders; operational staff, such as youth workers and youth leaders; and young people themselves. Although general programmes of training youth workers outside their own culture are to be discouraged, the contribution made by a small number of workers who have been trained in this way may give a valuable leavening of comparative experience. As for exchanges of young people, it was felt that the exchange of young farmers, young teachers, young scientists, young politicians, etc. would be more worthwhile than the simple exchange of young people as young people.

Suggestions were made for facilitating such exchanges and for reducing the foreign currency difficulties which often operate against an expansion of exchange arrangements.

The Seminar agreed that when youth exchanges were arranged it would be helpful to provide a work experience for the youth in the receiving country; it was not considered adequate merely to provide familiarisation visits. Both from a training angle as well as a social development one, work experience was regarded as necessary. In this connection, it was felt that more attachments, of, perhaps, six months to one year, should be encouraged and that resources should be made available both at the local level and at the international level to enable a comprehensive

programme of exchange to be initiated and sustained. An expansion of the Commonwealth Secretariat Clearing House Fund was recommended. The limitations of exchange within a region were pointed out and, while the financial constraints were recognised, it was felt that every opportunity should be taken to promote inter-regional and Commonwealth-wide travel.

(ii) Information exchange

The Seminar suggested that the Commonwealth Secretariat should assume responsibility for finding out from all Commonwealth countries such on-going projects as were likely to be of interest to others. These should be carefully studied and reported upon. The production of follow-up reports on settlement schemes and co-operatives were particularly mentioned. It was important to produce concise, objective reports rather than verbose discursive accounts. The Secretariat should also compile a handbook of evaluation techniques for youth programmes. The view was expressed that not enough was known about some of the resources available, such as the Clearing House Fund and the Technical Assistance Fund. The Secretariat would be well advised to give greater publicity to these, especially through voluntary agencies. It was suggested that the Secretariat might keep a register of existing training facilities, key organisations and personnel in the field.

It was suggested that the Commonwealth Secretariat should sponsor a youth journal in which reports of innovative and successful projects could be included, designed essentially for the benefit of those involved in similar activities. The difficulties of producing this kind of publication were recognised, but it was agreed that the idea should be further explored, the more so in view of the time lag which frequently occurs at present between action and reporting.

It was recognised that the Secretariat could disseminate only such information as was supplied to it. Additionally, little purpose would be served by increasing the flow of paper unless it filled a positive need. The distribution of material in the form of abstracts offered one positive solution to the dilemma.

The Seminar commended the Secretariat for organising pan-Commonwealth and regional meetings on topics related to the needs of young people. The Seminar welcomed proposals for a Commonwealth Conference on Teacher Education projected for 1973, and two series of regional meetings, one on educational

planning and administration, the second on methods of selection, testing and measurement. It was suggested that a meeting of youth representatives from Commonwealth countries should be convened just before or after the World Assembly of Youth World Assembly to consider matters of particular relevance to Commonwealth members. The Seminar noted that this principle had been found economic by Commonwealth medical representatives who arrange to come together at the time of the World Health Organisation general meetings.

Training

It was suggested that there should be established an institution for providing appropriate training for the trainers of youth leaders and other senior administrative personnel, something in the nature of a staff college. While the idea gained some support, it was emphasised that the question of institution building as opposed to on-the-job training should be approached with extreme caution. The Seminar agreed that the most realistic way of approaching training for leadership at most levels is in the field. Where this is not possible certain courses already available in higher education might be considered appropriate to particular needs. Only if such alternative arrangements proved inadequate should a special institution be created.

Other activities

Attention was drawn to the fact that an inadequate number of requests was received for some forms of assistance. This, it was thought, might have been due at least in part to the fact that there is little expertise available for formulating projects appropriately. It was suggested that the Commonwealth Secretariat might be of some assistance in project preparation.

The need has arisen in the Commonwealth countries of the region, notably in Australia, for assistance in the teaching of Asian languages. In so far as this need could be met through youth exchange schemes and other appropriate strategies, the Commonwealth Secretariat could play a useful role in their organisation.

The Commonwealth Secretariat

The Seminar recognised that its suggestions would involve the Commonwealth Secretariat in a considerable increase in its activities. It recommended, therefore, that the Commonwealth Secretariat should be significantly strengthened in both personnel and financial resources in order to discharge effectively the role envisaged for it.