



Education Priorities and Aid Responses in Sub-Saharan Africa



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Foreword

by the Rt Hon Timothy Raison MP

Not all that many conference reports mean much to anyone other than the participants themselves. The writers of this report are aiming at a much wider audience, and they have worked hard to draw out the general principles that surfaced during this unique meeting. I should like to thank the Director and staff of the University of London Institute of Education for all the energy which was put into the organisation of the Conference and the writing of this report.

It was a very successful Conference, and I am only sorry that the unforeseen Lomé signing ceremony which I had to attend that week took me away from what were clearly absorbing discussions. Naturally I do not agree with all the views expressed at the Conference or in the report, but I am glad that distinguished educationists were able to put them forward so freely at such a lively and stimulating forum.

The strength of the Conference and its report lies in the stress they put on the importance of the relationship between education and the key problems of food production, population increase and the environment in general. While the crisis of food shortages in Africa stares us in the face, we need to look beyond it to the longer term. That is why the British aid programme emphasises the development of Africa's manpower and looks to the strengthening of key institutions as the basis for future development.

I am sure that readers of this report will find for themselves that once again something new has come out of Africa.

TIMOTHY RAISON
Minister of State for Foreign and
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for Overseas Development

Editorial note

This report attempts to synthesise bodies of information and opinion from a number of sources:

- 1 Verbatim transcripts from the Conference itself
- 2 Lead papers submitted by the four theme speakers
- 3 Reports of working groups submitted during the Conference on two sets of discussions: Theme I — Priorities, and Theme II — Aid
- 4 Background documents commissioned for and submitted to the Conference
- 5 Individual views ('think pieces') submitted prior to the Conference by the majority of participants.

Selection and omission from this wealth of material are bound to reflect the particular viewpoints of the editors, however impartial they have tried to be. Moreover, the report does not merely record the proceedings, because from time to time the editors have attempted to interpret and extrapolate from what was said.

There was never any intention of presenting this report as a document officially sanctioned by the British Government. That would have run quite contrary to the whole intention of the Conference. As was agreed from the outset by the Conference Steering Committee, the report has been compiled by a group of editors from the Department of Education in Developing Countries of the University of London Institute of Education. Various people have kindly read through and commented upon the draft. As Editor-in-Chief, I have been responsible for all final decisions of what to include and what to leave out.

HUGH HAWES

African education under siege

Peter Williams

Introduction

Consider the following statements:

(We) cannot (be) blind . . . to certain lingering shortcomings. These are both quantitative and qualitative, and must at all costs be remedied in the next few decades, to ensure that Africa may enter the twenty-first century on an equal footing of opportunity with the other regions of the world. One inescapably comes to a twofold conclusion: the Addis Ababa Plan's forecast of universal primary schooling by 1980 has not been realised, owing mainly to a higher rate of population growth and an initial underestimate of the actual population of Africa; and the number of illiterates has grown steadily greater in absolute figures. In many cases, serious disparities persist in regard to access to education, adversely affecting in particular people living in rural areas and women and girls, especially at the secondary and higher levels of education. These shortcomings and difficulties, like those connected with premises, equipment and materials, and the widespread lack of adequately trained teachers, are attributable in many cases to lack of resources. In some cases they stem from social causes, such as family poverty. The high rates of student wastage through drop-outs and repeats, which are a cause of illiteracy and which reduce the intake capacity of education systems, are both social and educational in origin. Often, it is the very conception of education, its aims and content, its structures, the values that it instils and the spirit in which it operates that are at issue.¹

African education today is not a pretty picture for anybody to contemplate, and there can be few who had anything to do with the painting of it who can regard the results of their work with complacency or self-congratulation.²

These two statements reflect the rather sombre contemporary mood about the state of education in Africa. The first of them was made by African Ministers of Education in the Harare Declaration issued at the end of their most recent UNESCO Regional Conference, the Conference of Ministers of Education and those Responsible for Economic Planning in African Member States held at Harare, Zimbabwe, 28 June – 3 July, 1982.

The second statement was in fact written in 1969, by a British commentator on education in Africa, as part of a paper prepared for a Conference rather like the present one. But I suppose it might equally have been written in 1949, and will I fear be equally appropriate in 1989. One of the unchanging fashions in African education is to declare that it is not a pretty picture to contemplate! I shall first argue that such a statement is not really quite fair. Few if any aspects of life in a rapidly changing society — whether it be the England of yesteryear or contemporary Africa — are likely to present an entirely 'pretty' picture. The quantitative inadequacy and qualitative deficiencies of social provision will always be painfully evident in societies in the course of transition. One must not be unrealistic by expecting too much progress too fast.

For references see page 105.

Table 1. Africa: enrolment (millions) and adjusted gross enrolment ratios (per cent), 1960, 1970, 1982

| | 1960 | | 1970 | | 1982 | |
|--------------|------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|
| | No. | Ratio | No. | Ratio | No. | Ratio |
| First level | 19.3 | (44) | 33.4 | (57) | 68.5 | (81) |
| Second level | 1.9 | (5) | 5.4 | (11) | 17.0 | (25) |
| Third level | 0.2 | (1) | 0.5 | (2) | 1.6 | (4) |
| All levels | 21.4 | (20) | 39.2 | (34) | 87.1 | (44) |

Source: *A Summary Statistical Review of Education in the World*, prepared by UNESCO Office of Statistics for the 39th Session of the International Conference on Education, Tables 4 and 10.

Progress

The bare facts of recent African educational expansion are remarkable. Data for Africa as a whole (including North Africa and the Republic of South Africa) has recently become available for the period up to 1982. Even if, as African Ministers themselves confirmed, the 1961 Addis Ababa targets were not all achieved, these pan-African figures (Table 1) show a really massive increase in enrolment at each level over a relatively short time-span. Opportunities for access to schooling have been completely revolutionised in a very brief period with a dramatic effect on equality of opportunity to enter school. The rise in second level enrolment is particularly great. This is significant in that a society where 25 per cent or so will have attended secondary school is going to be qualitatively different, because of the 'density' of educated people, from one with only 5 per cent. Similar conclusions might be drawn from the literacy figures, showing a drop in adult illiteracy from 71 per cent in 1970 to an expected 54 per cent in 1985, which is predicted to fall further to only 35 per cent by the year 2000.³

Such quantitative data are admittedly crude and partial indicators of progress. One knows for example that nominal enrolment and actual school attendance can differ quite markedly. The indicators say nothing of the quality of education given, except that the literacy figures, if true, appear to indicate some acquisition of basic skills, presumably through primary schooling for the most part. But to complete the record one must also take account of some qualitative achievements by African countries in terms of the range of educational services offered, the localisation of cadres of educational personnel, the rise in qualification of teachers on average, the unification of the previously fragmented education systems, the enhanced educational opportunities for females.

African educators may justly claim that they have wrought qualitative changes not only in African schools but in African societies too. These have become schooled societies, different in kind from pre-school societies. There is a new and greater awareness of what lies beyond the immediate homestead and village; a comprehension that there are objective truths, independent of the authority of senior kin or community elders. This marks a complete change in people's outlook. With the substitution, as determinants of social mobility, of 'achievement criteria' in the form of educational certificates, diplomas and degrees, for the 'ascriptive criteria' of inherited social status, school education seems assured of a future.

Constraints and challenges

Population and the economy

The 'crisis' in African education is largely one of physical and economic difficulty in meeting the level of education demands, and of closing the gap between population and resources.

Population growth is very rapid indeed, more so in sub-Saharan Africa as a region than in any other region of the world. The effect of this can be dramatically illustrated. Between 1985 and 2000, numbers in the 5–14 age group are expected to grow by 5 per cent in more developed countries; by rather under 30 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean; but by as much as 60 per cent in Africa.⁴ More starkly, in developed countries one in seven of the population will in 2000 be in the 5–14 age group, whereas in Africa the figure will be one in four. Not only therefore is there a bigger school expansion job to be done in Africa, but there are proportionately fewer people in the working population to carry the burden of that schooling. In the year 2000 in developed countries the ratio of people aged over 19 to those aged under 19 will be 71:29. In Africa it will be 45:55.⁵ So in developed countries every 100 adults will have 41 'minors' dependent on them, compared with 122, three times as many, in Africa. The dependency ratio in Africa is thus extremely unfavourable and limitation of the population growth rate (not necessarily of ultimate population size) in sub-Saharan Africa takes on an extreme urgency.

In the face of this population growth the economic juxtaposition of low and declining income per head and comparatively high education expenditure per head is particularly serious. The World Bank's recent report *Toward Sustained Development in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Joint Programme of Action* opens with the following grim passage:

No list of economic or financial statistics can convey the human misery spreading in sub-Saharan Africa. A special study by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), *The Impact of Recession on Children*, has documented how children have been the victims of economic decline. In Zambia's poorer northern regions, height-for-age ratios have fallen in all age categories under 15 years. Child mortality in sub-Saharan Africa was 50 per cent higher than the average of developing countries in the 1950s: now it is almost double the average. Moreover, despite the surges in food imports and food aid, an estimated 20 per cent of Africa's population still eats less than the minimum needed to sustain good health. The number of severely hungry and malnourished people is estimated to have increased from close to 80 million in 1972–74 to as many as 100 million in 1984.

The illustrative scenarios in the World Bank's World Development Report 1984 suggest that, even with some fundamental improvements in domestic economic management, per capita incomes in sub-Saharan Africa will continue to fall during 1985–95.⁶

According to the Report total Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in sub-Saharan Africa — after growing at 3.6 per cent per annum between 1970 and 1980 — declined by 1 per cent in 1981, by 0.2 per cent in 1982 and by 0.7 per cent in 1983. It is when one remembers that population growth was about 3 per cent per annum that the seriousness of the position sinks in, for this meant that *per caput* GDP fell by 4 per cent, 3.3 per cent and 3.8 per

cent in 1981, 1982 and 1983 respectively, or about 11½ per cent over the three-year period as a whole.⁷ This would be a development of catastrophic proportions if it were to continue for at all long. Even though the recession will not hit all countries with the same impact, it is clear that economic conditions are unlikely to become more favourable for sub-Saharan Africa as a whole. The oil crisis, depressed prices for many of Africa's commodity exports, external indebtedness, the severe drought and accompanying famine, are all taking a harsh toll of economic development and cast a long shadow over education development prospects.

High unit costs

Cost constraints hit sub-Saharan Africa particularly hard. The unit costs of education have proved to be high compared with those elsewhere. Primary school teachers in sub-Saharan Africa are paid on average 6 to 7 times per capita GDP, compared with 2.5 times in Asia and Latin America.⁸ There is tremendous variation by country. The ratios have been estimated at 4 in Ghana and 22 in Mali.⁹ As the World Bank observes, the high ratios in Africa are a reflection more of their scarcity value at independence than today. Spatial factors are another contributory factor — low densities of population mean that primary schools in rural areas cannot always reach a viable size and they also necessitate boarding facilities in rural areas at secondary level. Costs of distributing materials, of providing effective supervision of schools, of holding in-service courses and conferences for teachers are high because of the great distances involved. Budgetary constraints are pressing hard on governments at the present time with revenue falling short, and much of the public budget being pre-empted by defence and other public services. Many African countries have 20 per cent or more of their budgets devoted to education. In Kenya at one point about 30 per cent of the budget was spent on education and the country as a whole was devoting 7.2 per cent of GDP to education expenditure. In Africa as a whole, public expenditure on education rose from 2.7 per cent in 1960 to 4.7 per cent in 1981.¹⁰ The outlook for educational expenditures is bleak, not only because many African economies are in poor shape, but also because of a number of inbuilt cost escalation factors as education systems expand. In particular there is the problem that the thrust of enrolment expansion is moving to secondary and higher levels which for a number of reasons (better qualified teachers, smaller teaching loads, smaller classes, expensive plant and equipment, residential facilities etc.) are much more expensive than primary school. The ratios of *enrolment* between primary, secondary and tertiary education in Africa were 90:9:1 in 1960; but 78:20:2 in 1982.¹¹ When these data are plotted against *unit costs* as a percentage of GDP per capita one finds that for Eastern Africa the percentages are 16:85:1040 at successive levels and in francophone Africa 29:143:804.¹²

This highlights one of the major cost-related policy issues facing African countries, namely how to move from UPE to ULSE. The data shows that countries have made notable progress in moving to universal or near universal education at elementary level over a primary cycle of six or seven years duration. The problem now being grappled with in so many countries

is what happens in grades 7 to 10 and the various restructuring exercises currently in train (to 6-3-3 in Nigeria, to 8-4-4 in Kenya, to 7-2-3 in Zambia and Botswana, to 6-3-3 at some distant date in Ghana) attempt to solve the issue. There is probably much useful insight and experience to be shared on issues such as this, and one question the Conference could usefully address is how one can reduce the possibility that African countries may individually try to reinvent the wheel, instead of sharing experience and adapting solutions others have developed. How can useful ideas, practices and techniques be communicated more rapidly and effectively?

The serious obstacle to solving the universalisation of lower secondary education is the inherited model of high cost specialised secondary schools existing in many countries. The old model of secondary schools — large, specialised curriculum, graduate teachers, big compounds and often boarding attendance — cannot be afforded for everybody. Policy makers are reluctant to leave prestigious existing schools intact and to provide pale imitations as part of an overtly two-tier system of secondary schools. Parents in any case reject an explicitly dual system as the fate of Nigeria's secondary moderns and Zimbabwe's F2 schools testifies. For economic reasons one wishes to provide something local and with day attendance and therefore modest in size.

But all this poses a tremendous challenge in organisational and curricular terms if one is to create a system which is equitable, economical, and provides the kind of broad curriculum appropriate to the lower secondary level. There is a challenge here to find something which is genuinely intermediate between local inexpensive unspecialised primary schools and regional expensive specialised secondary schools. Kenya and Botswana, to name just two examples, offer interesting models of low-cost, part community financed, localised lower secondary schools; though whether these can become the basis of mainstream provision, rather than a voluntary supplementation of what government provides, remains to be seen.

Matching demand and supply

The high cost per pupil in the upper reaches of African education systems raises problems. High private rates of return to education, particularly at secondary and higher levels, are juxtaposed with low social rates of return. Education at these levels is in a sense underpriced to the consumers in relation to the private financial benefit it can bring, because wage differentials for additional years of education are so high (and protected by lack of competition in the form of jealously guarded public service salary scales). The private costs of education to the individual are a small part of total cost, and private benefits are high. To the state, costs of providing education at secondary and tertiary level are high (partly because of those same high wage differentials) and the social return in terms of actual increased productivity (as opposed to salaries paid), is sometimes low. High private pay-offs from schooling and low social benefits are a recipe for trouble for education policy makers for they suggest that parental demand for education will be high, yet difficult or impossible to meet because of lowish benefits to society. However budgets are limited and governments

find it difficult to expand public employment at prevailing high wage rates. Thus even in economies with surplus labour, the message comes down to aspirants for further education that there is no 'manpower requirement' justification for their having more education.

But the task of aligning the private and public benefit is difficult politically. Dampening private demand by transferring more of the cost of education to private households and by limiting pay differentials for higher qualifications is unpopular: just as the adjustment of social rates of return through making cost savings in education and raising productivity (but not pay) of graduates is fraught with political complications.

The net result of all this is paradoxical. Logic, supported by research findings, may suggest a shift of emphasis to primary education because of its ostensible higher social rate of return, with productivity gains outweighing the cost of primary school. But strong parental demand is directed to the expansion of education levels which are most expensive to the state to provide.

Expansion-induced dilution of quality

My earlier emphasis on the achievements of education in sub-Saharan Africa, before confronting the darker side of the picture, was deliberate. This was only partly because I consider African education has too many detractors. It is also because I believe that the 'crisis' that many people identify arises in part from education's very success and from the disappointment of expectations that educational expansion inevitably brings in its train: 'more' means 'worse'; 'more' means less scarcity and therefore lower rewards. In some senses more means worse in the course of rapid educational expansion. When a system doubles or triples its size in only a few years, the average quality of teachers and buildings tends to decline, teachers tend to be less well trained and the average teacher is less experienced. It is quite possible that on average the ability of pupils to perform well in school also declines, regardless of whether classes get bigger and the system gets more impersonal, simply because more marginal populations are coming within the school net.

It is equally true that the expansion of education automatically reduces the 'premium' education bestows, whether in terms of social exclusivity or of a place well up the queue for good jobs or marriages. As much in London and Los Angeles as in Lusaka and Lagos, the social consequences of universalisation of education worry the socially more advantaged parents who would like their children to attend 'select' schools in the course of their preparation for further education and professional careers.

The universalisation and comprehensivisation of schooling can sometimes appear a threat to these concerns. As a result high-status parents may seek out more exclusive schools, often necessarily in the private sector or abroad, or pay for private coaching for their children. Certainly there is more to the quality 'crisis' in Africa than universalisation, as I will discuss. But I do believe that the 'crisis' is in part the direct and inevitable consequence of educational expansion and the recruitment to the school system of pupils more disadvantaged intellectually, physically, geographically, economically and socially.

It is also obvious, so obvious that I will not devote much space to it, that scarcity diminishes as supply expands. Any given level of education qualification appears to command an ever lower premium in the job market. In relation to any stated job, higher qualifications will be asked for by employers as the supply of candidates becomes more plentiful. Paradoxically, the message that reaches parents is not that schooling has lost its point as a result of the 'diploma disease'; rather the lesson many of them learn is that their children need *more* education if they are to get a job!

Unmotivated teachers

The economic constraints referred to above have bitten deeply into the real value of salaries of teachers and other education personnel. They are tempted to engage in other economic activities to supplement their income, 'moonlighting' by doing unauthorised supplementary work and — in urban areas particularly — drawing an increasing share of their income from private coaching. Absenteeism has become more widespread. In consequence regular teachers have in many instances become virtually part-time in their service, devoting much of their time to other economic activities in trading or farming and running private businesses.

Contemporary management structures in education are not always adequate to check this — the teachers normally cannot be removed or disciplined by school heads or local boards of management. They have thus become non-accountable to those most affected by a poor level of performance — parents and the community. There are widespread complaints that teachers no longer deport themselves with the same commitment to their jobs as hitherto. Alternatively qualified teachers may resign, causing high wastage rates and forcing governments which once seemed to be getting on top of their teacher supply situations to revert to the employment of untrained teachers. In Ghana for example, the proportion of untrained teachers rose between 1979–80 and 1982–83 from 44 per cent to 46 per cent at primary level, and from 28 per cent to 30 per cent at middle school level. In Botswana, the proportion has been falling but is still 31 per cent in 1984. In Zimbabwe 50 per cent of primary teachers were untrained in 1983.¹³ Eicher cites figures of 61 per cent for Sierra Leone and 70 per cent for Chad.¹⁴ In some special situations there is an outflow abroad to countries which offer better salaries for secondary graduate teachers and where demand has been high. Nigeria and Zimbabwe have both been recruiters from abroad. Many African universities have witnessed a serious outflow of senior staff to university posts elsewhere in the continent, to international organisations, or posts in the industrialised countries.

Erosion of public confidence

The squeeze on budgets also tends to result in allocations for books and materials being reduced more severely than other items. In any objective sense this represents an irrational development, since such materials represent an important support for teachers and constitute pupils' only survival kit if teachers are not functioning properly.

The result of these developments is a growing erosion of parental confidence in the quality of schools in the public system, and a decline in the respect in which teachers are held in their communities. Those well-to-do parents who can afford it exercise the alternative option of patronising private schools. They 'buy' an almost guaranteed place in the remaining good quality primary and secondary schools by sending their children to private nursery schools, preparatory schools, international schools and private tutors; all this in order to get high qualifying marks on the entrance exam.

At higher levels the wealthiest parents may even opt out of the local university system if they doubt its quality and find it prone to protracted closures, and send their children abroad for higher education.

However, the great majority of parents cannot opt out. They cannot afford to. Some may feel discontented with the local schools — they want more effective teaching, proper discipline and order, good examination results. Others are even less ambitious. For their families this is the first generation of schooling and they cling to the hope that comes from exposing their children to a new world of knowledge, to a different culture associated with paid jobs, a more sophisticated lifestyle and the ability to manipulate the modern world.

Given the problems of morale and resource shortage, the remarkable thing is the degree not only of tolerance but of active support that schooling continues to enjoy in Africa south of the Sahara. Despite all the criticisms of irrelevance and poor quality of the schools, parents continue in their hordes to patronise them. According to the recent *Summary Statistical Review of Education in the World* prepared by UNESCO's Office of Statistics for the International Conference on Education in Geneva in October 1984, first level enrolment in Africa was still increasing — by 2.4 million per annum 1970–75, 1.2 million per annum between 1975 and 1980 and by 4 million a year since 1980.¹⁵ To be of any real interest these figures require disaggregation but they do appear to contradict suggestions made in the 1970s that demand for primary education in Africa was about to dry up.

Table 2: Average survival rates by region for cohorts starting first level education around 1980–81

| Regions and groups of countries | Number of countries indicated | Percentage of 80/81 cohort reaching grade | | | |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|----|----|----|
| | | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
| Africa: Arab States | 6 | 100 | 91 | 91 | 83 |
| French-speaking | 16 | 100 | 84 | 82 | 74 |
| English-speaking | 12 | 100 | 82 | 77 | 72 |
| Portuguese-speaking | 4 | 100 | 57 | 43 | 26 |
| Total Africa | 38 | 100 | 83 | 80 | 71 |
| All developing countries | 88 | 100 | 82 | 76 | 69 |
| Europe | 19 | 100 | 99 | 99 | 98 |

Source: *A Summary Statistical Review of Education in the World*, prepared by UNESCO Office of Statistics for the 39th Session of the International Conference on Education, October 1984, Table 17.

To be sure the picture is marred by the high incidence of early school leaving — a more accurate term than 'drop out'. This remains a major challenge and much remains to be done to eliminate it as Table 2 shows. At the same time it is unrealistic to expect that in the transition from an unschooled to a schooled society all those groups being brought within the fold of the school will at once be able to manage a full six- or seven-year primary course. It takes time for the household economy to adjust to the loss of children's services as child-minders and helpers in the home and on the farm.*

Meeting the challenge

These constraints and challenges — and I have deliberately been selective — amount to a situation where one could speak of education in sub-Saharan Africa being under siege. Africa must identify appropriate strategies to cope with this siege.

The two most pressing tasks if the siege is to be lifted are non-educational: to bring the rate of population growth to a more manageable level and to revitalise the economy. Internal policies and action and external assistance, particularly with resolving the indebtedness problem, are both called for. While both tasks are non-educational in the short-term, in the longer-term a fully relevant education would make its contribution to resolving them.

When we turn to educational strategies themselves as ways of overcoming the siege the three main possibilities would appear to be passive reaction, radical restructuring and planned improvement. I will dub these the 'sit-out', the 'break-out' and the 'work-out' options.

The 'sit-out' option

One approach is reacting by responsive adjustment, rather than by premeditated intervention, to successive pressures afflicting the system. One could argue that this is in fact the main strategy that African governments have pursued. Remarkably little study has been made of the processes of adjustment, of how the resource gap is actually handled: writings about the size of the problem and advocacy of alternative — often improbable — solutions, seem more plentiful. Observers with long memories cannot help reflecting that 20 years ago, when education systems were a third of their present size, treasuries and aid agencies were already claiming that 'the crisis' was imminent and that insoluble resource gaps were developing. But enrolment growth has continued and in some cases even accelerated, while tuition charges to parents have generally fallen.

How in the face of economic difficulty has it been possible to continue funding the education system?

* For this reason the use in these transitional situations of 'input-output ratios' (measured in terms of school years actually invested as compared with those needed for graduation) as an indication of system efficiency can be positively unhelpful. A country which puts only half its children through a full six-year course, leaving the other half totally unschooled, will score high. It will decrease its rating dramatically if it manages to get the remaining 50 per cent into school for an average of four rather than six years schooling in the first instance. Real and dramatic progress may earn a completely negative rating according to the input-output ratio.

Salaries have been allowed to decline in relative value so that teaching has become a depressed profession. The main symptoms have already been discussed. They are an unwillingness to enter teaching on the part of the best qualified graduates, heavy teacher turnover and wastage, high rates of teacher absenteeism, and 'moonlighting' by teachers. In some countries the qualification pattern of the teaching force has worsened, manifested on the one hand by a high number and proportion of unqualified teachers, and in other cases by a deliberate decision to recruit less highly qualified and paid teachers as a substitute for graduates or diplomates. Third, the class size has risen in some countries. Fourth, the length of the school term has been curtailed with schools starting late and finishing early, particularly those residential institutions where fewer days of school operation involve the saving of expenditure. It would be interesting to compare the actual number of school days per year in 1984 with what it used to be in 1964.

The point has already been made that the ability spread in schools may now be wider than hitherto. There is also the suspicion of qualitative erosion. It is sometimes alleged — though difficult to prove — that supposedly fixed standards have actually fallen and that attainment certificates in anglophone Africa represent a lower level of achievement today than they used to decades ago. The provision of books and materials is less generous than formerly. Transport for inspection and supervision is in seriously short supply.

In short, there are within an education system very many possibilities of subtle adjustment and dilution. The scope for qualitative erosion, without any direct challenge being made to the managers, has been considerable. The concerned professional is unhappy to see the erosion of standards. But it has often seemed in the past as if maintaining quality of education has been regarded as bringing less political reward than numbers of schools and teachers and particularly of enrolments. Is it still true even today that an attempt to climb back to former standards of provision, though laborious and time-consuming, would in fact be politically unrewarding? Or can public support for school improvement be marshalled, even though it demands more economic sacrifice?

The 'break-out' option

The second option might be described as the 'break-out' option, just as a besieged army might try to rush through the encircling forces. In education terms this might involve radical approaches and solutions, which involve redesigning the basic institutions of the school, the existing pedagogical organisation and the examination system.

The *school* can be (and is) criticised as being an institution which cuts pupils off from their traditional communities and, through its hierarchical system of grades and its formalised structure of teaching, often fails to produce genuine learning by the pupils. Individuality and creativity are suppressed in favour of rote learning, standardised content, artificial measures of achievement. The content of the curriculum is said to be theoretical and formal. Schooling is somewhat expensive because teachers are full-time and salaried and pupils have a full school day and five-day week. Radical alternatives could involve part-time instruction of students

either on the basis of a shorter day (or week) in formal schools, or else by using other religious and community institutions as providers of education. On the fringes of education systems, often by accident rather than design, some of these alternatives can be seen in embryo.

But whilst it is true that the closed nature of schools and the poverty of their material resources is a serious obstacle to learning, there is evidence from the public debates on the Zambian education reforms for example, that the notion of radical restructuring may not commend itself readily to parents. The school is an institution which is cheap to run and its standardised nature is a positive advantage in terms of equity and mobility of students and teachers. It is easily replicable as an institution, and it serves social functions of certification and custodianship of children which would be hard to replace. If schools have in a sense failed, it is arguable that it is partly because they have not been given a fair chance, with adequate resources or effective management.

Complete redesign of the traditional *pedagogy* and its *organisation* is sometimes advocated. An extreme model of the type of alternative solution that might be contemplated is exemplified by Project Impact in Asia. It includes the use of older students (rather like the former monitorial system) as a learning resource for younger pupils; voluntary and cheap assistance from the community to amplify teaching resources and reduce the number of paid teachers; extensive provision of materials and books for independent learning to supplement what the teachers themselves can do; and a range of different-sized physical spaces for learning. Clearly there are many ideas here which are pedagogically attractive, and although teachers and parents in Asia have not apparently seen Impact schools as preferable to the traditional schools, their objection may be more to the inbuilt dualism implied than to some of the innovations embodied in the model as such.

A quite different set of radical pedagogical reforms would involve substituting TV, radio and other mass media for traditional school inputs. Extreme versions of this option, using TV, have been tried and abandoned in Ivory Coast. Experience suggests that with younger learners the use of mass media can more usefully serve to enrich the work of teachers within the framework of the school system rather than to replace teachers. This neutralises their value as a cost-saving device. As an aid to self-learning by older out-of-school students at the upper levels of education they may have more to offer.

Finally *the examination system* is under fire. There is proper doubt as to what many of the examinations currently in use actually measure. The cramping effects of exams on the curriculum are much criticised, seeming as they do to shape the curriculum instead of being moulded to it. However traditional examinations do ostensibly provide an objective measurement, convenient as a criterion for job selection. This in the public view gives them a marked advantage over personal recommendation systems of appointment to jobs or admission to higher courses. Kinship and other social ties are recognised to be so strong that safeguards against them are vital. Although attempts have been made in some countries to supplement the evidence of written examinations with performance in community

service or political commitment, it seems clear that the complete abandonment of examinations would be both technically and politically unrealistic. So the most attractive course must be examination improvement rather than replacement. Some pioneering work in Kenya has suggested that examinations can be a lever for bringing about curriculum reform rather than an obstacle to it.

Educational renewal: the 'work-out' option

Is there some middle way between passive reaction and radical restructuring, between 'sit-out' and 'break-out'? Can some middle way of purposeful educational renewal be worked out, confronting the surrounding problems and overcoming them by skill and will? There is some urgency about this, if Africa is not to succumb to another 'dark age' of dependency on others, for the gap in learning achievement between African pupils and students and those in industrialised countries could grow to virtually unbridgeable dimensions if the quantity and quality of resources available to African learners should lag further behind those in Europe and North America where there is increasing emphasis on both applying and learning new technologies in the education system. Priorities would seem to include:

Professional commitment and the restoration of morale

There is no short cut to restoring standards. The main task is surely to give teachers and students confidence in what they are doing. In the first instance this involves improved professional leadership and management of the teaching profession. The first challenge is to educational leadership to strengthen professionalism in education. This is needed at all levels, but most particularly perhaps the primary which is still regarded in too many countries as an area with no profile or expertise of its own, which can be run by subject specialists trained for secondary schools. The notion that promotion for primary teachers automatically lies in the secondary sector must be ended. On the management side prompt payment, a sense of fairness in postings and promotion, are all part of what is required. It is possible that new mechanisms of data storage and processing systems can help to achieve a speedier and more effective system for handling personnel work and payment of teachers. But equally important is the question of commitment and concerned attitudes on the part of managers which will show teachers that their interests are being protected and promoted. Improved teacher management must have high priority for reasons both of cost reduction and of effectiveness of the education system. But there is surprisingly little written about efficient operation of a teaching service commission in Africa, ways of improving the effectiveness of staffing sections and so forth.

Professional support

Support for teachers should go beyond the personnel function. A climate of professional ferment, excitement, experiment among teachers, is missing. There is a need to provide a multi-pronged programme to assist teachers with professional development and adequate resources to do their job. This involves proper advisory and supervision services through a local inspectorate or advisory cadre; the encouragement of professional meetings

and in-service training; the provision of opportunities for self-improvement through study programmes, possibly using distance teaching; creation of resource centres and facilities making it possible for teachers to engage in curriculum development and the making of low-cost teaching aids. Teacher associations can play a useful role in cutting down the isolation of the individual teacher. The articulation of teacher opinion on professional matters should be encouraged. Surely the whole area of teacher support should be a major priority for foreign aid, including recurrent funds for support of organisational expenses and travel in connection with teacher professional activities.

Teacher accountability at local level

Support for teachers must be balanced by greater teacher accountability. If teachers are to take pride in their work they must be properly supervised and managed at local level and have a sense of being responsible to an identifiable authority close at hand. Teachers in Africa have successfully campaigned for a unified system of education and for national managements negotiating with national teachers' unions. This brings many advantages over the former system of multiple managements and of a fragmented teaching profession but it has contributed to a situation where the local control and supervision of teachers has become weak. It is unlikely that effective education can be given unless teachers are in some sense accountable to their school head and beyond her or him to a local management committee on which are represented the interests of the community and parents most closely affected by the quality of a particular school. Decentralisation has its dangers: uninformed arbitrary decisions in which local politics play an undue part may make the lives of teachers miserable unless they are properly protected. But the need is evident to make teachers more accountable for their performance. As experience has shown, in Botswana for example, it is possible to combine local authority management of schools with national conditions of service for teachers. Below the district level, creation of local school boards and management committees is also necessary so that parental and community concern can be brought to bear on the management of schools and to give back to communities a sense of responsibility for schooling of their young people. Nigeria quickly recognised her initial mistake, when UPE was launched, of relieving local communities of the responsibility of school management and support. Community contributions for schools may be tapped more readily where institutions are community-managed. But I have the impression much more detailed work needs to be done on the nature and extent of community contributions and the variety of mechanisms which may be used to elicit a fruitful partnership between community and government.

Strengthening independent learning

One can look at this as 'pedagogical decentralisation'. On grounds of economy, on grounds of equity, on grounds of cost-saving, there is a strong case for providing students with improved possibilities for learning without total reliance on teachers. One priority is strengthening the learning resources within schools, colleges and universities through adequate

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provision of equipment, paper, books, libraries to support the work of regular teachers. An effort must also be made outside the schools to assist potential learners to undertake part-time study not only of academic kinds but also with an orientation towards the practical knowledge and skills required to earn a livelihood. African governments have done something — Zimbabwe is a notable example — to exploit the possibilities of supporting students through access to formal institutions in out-of-school hours. Library facilities, tutors, correspondence courses, distance teaching facilities can all be mobilised to support self-study by out-of-school learners but the full potential has yet to be exploited. I see this as another major priority for external assistance. Since so much 'material' assistance is required, much of it in the form of imports, one would expect it to appeal to aid donors. The learning resource famine in Africa may be less newsworthy than the food famine, but it may prove almost as destructive of Africa's future.

Cost reduction

There is surely great further potential for cost-saving measures. This is closely tied up with issues of decentralisation of management. There must be an incentive for heads of institutions and local administrators to bring about cost-savings. The issue here is really to align private interest with the public interest. Heads of private institutions often achieve a far higher productivity than the managers of public schools. The latter receive no credit for, or share in results of, economies achieved. Funds that are unspent tend to lapse, and monies saved revert to government. State school heads could frequently complete construction projects using direct labour at a fraction of the official tender prices. Staff overestablishment, resulting from poor organisation and supervision, is a major problem. It can probably only be tackled successfully if institutional managers themselves are provided with incentives to bring about a more economical use of teachers. The problem is worst of all in some higher education institutions where staff student ratios of between 1:4 and 1:8 are not uncommon as averages for whole institutions.

Improved planning and management of national systems

More work is needed — and donor support could be helpful — on improving basic data on the education system through the regular collection and publication of reliable statistical information. The development of management tools — resource allocation criteria, indicators of performance and cost effectiveness, formulae and norms — to assist better administration of the system should be a priority concern.

External assistance

This is mainly a province for other writers within the Conference. Outside resources can help African education to raise the siege which it faces. My own prejudices about the form those resources can most usefully take would put stress on materials (paper, equipment, books); multi-purpose facilities for teacher support and supervision (transport, resource centres); development of information statistics and management instruments that are most amenable to use and adaptation in the most flexible way by participants in education systems themselves, and which make the lightest

possible administrative demands on hard-pressed recipient governments.

It is simple to prescribe remedies for the educational ills of Africa: but so difficult to change the behaviours, resting on social values, that in the final analysis determine whether the remedies can be effective. African societies and cultures contain in abundance energies and creativity. The task is to try to release them in the interest of children and the schools. How can one strengthen the perception of, and commitment to, the public good as a counter-balance to the deeply-rooted web of personal and social obligations to particular groups of kin, fellow tribesmen or clansmen, community, neighbours? How can one ensure that the state, the government, the school are regarded as 'our' state, 'our' government, 'our' school instead of a source of patronage, power and resource for advancement of private networks of social relations? While education professionals have an important role to play, this task is one primarily for the national political leadership. Exhortation is not a sufficient answer. It has been tried and will be tried, but has limited effect. Personal example has more effect. But beyond personal example one needs to create systems of management and incentives which return to communities, teachers, parents and students greater control over the education process. How best can that be done? Here one must throw the ball back to political leaders. Their contribution at our Conference will be the most important of all.

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