Needed: the creation of a more functional system of education . . .

Ethiopian Education: Challenge of the '70's

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DURING a period of almost one hundred years, formal, Western-oriented, educational systems have been transplanted from metropolitan countries, notably Britain and France and in more recent years the United States of America, to what are now known as the developing regions of the world. In most cases little or no adaptation was made to suit local situations. In fact, the external examination system, originating in both Britain and France determined to a large extent the nature and content of education systems in these countries.

In the wake of independence has come considerable concern with the education systems which prevail in newly emerging nations, since strategic human resources are needed for all development. At the same time, in many regions considerable pressure is being exerted by the people for the provision of educational opportunities. There is also the growing realization that the transplantation of systems poses serious threats to the fabric of old societies. It is evident that the educational leaders in emerging nations must face up to the challenge of the '70's—the challenge of using the accumulated knowledge of the world to suit their special requirements. Galbraith expressed this quite succinctly when he said that developing countries

> . . . cannot simply adapt from the older models. Having come late to development, it is the good fortune of the new countries that they can learn from others. But it is their misfortune that so much of what exists in other countries cannot be copied without serious cost. Adaptation . . . is as demanding in its own way as innovation.[1]

This article attempts to set out in general terms the problems of educational development which are being faced in the African continent at this time and to discuss some of the solutions being sought in Ethiopia, which are in many ways unique.

More Functional Education

African educational leaders got together for the first time in 1961 when the Conference of Ministers of Educa-

[1] J. K. Galbraith. *Economic Development.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964. p. 86.

tion in Africa was convened at Addis Ababa under the joint sponsorship of UNESCO and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. This conference was preceded two years earlier by a similar conference convened in Asia. At Addis Ababa the Ministers of Education were concerned mainly with discussing educational developments as a long-term investment in the human resource potential of the African Continent.

The Addis Ababa Plan which emerged gave due importance to the investment potential in the educational process and accorded the highest priority to the development, at secondary and post-secondary levels, of the kinds of skills required for economic development. It also stated that African countries should aim at providing universal primary education within twenty years. At the same time special attention should be given to adult education and to "on the job" training. Much thought was also given to the reform of the content of education.

It was recommended that educational systems in Africa should seek to rediscover the African cultural heritage and to stress those cultural and social features common to African countries in order to provide a basis for unity within the Continent. It was realized that the teaching of scientific and technical subjects should receive much greater stress than it had in former systems and that preferential treatment should be given to the teaching of history and geography which related to Africa and the African needs. It was noted, however, that African educational systems, while rooting themselves in Africa's past, should not seal themselves off deliberately from the rest of the world.

It was for the African states to make necessary changes in traditional attitudes and to achieve, in their curricula, a synthesis of their own values and of universal values, as well as of the requirements of economic and technological development.[*]

The first evaluation of the progress made so far will be attempted at the Conference of Ministers of Education to be held, in March 1968, in Nairobi.

Present indications are that, although quantitative development has been achieved in some countries, there is reason to doubt that significant qualitative changes, particularly in curriculum development, have taken place since 1961.

There still appears to be some reluctance in Africa to take the great leap forward into a more functional type of education which the prevailing social and economic conditions warrant. Educational leaders are still greatly concerned about the necessity to retain "standards," that is, the standards which are part of the metropolitan systems they have inherited.

Little has been done to overhaul the system, particularly rural education for developing economies. There is also the fact that youth, with a few years of primary schooling, have fled the land and poured into the cities without preparation for useful service there. Most of these young people could be gainfully employed in the production of food to satisfy continental needs and to provide a surplus.

It is essential, therefore, that a firm

[*] UNESCO. *Final Report.* Addis Ababa: Conference of African States on the Development of Education in Africa, 1961. p. 39.

commitment be made in Africa to the total revision of the school system to meet what are actual situations in various countries. Further, if Africa is committed to investing in its human resources, then it must consider this investment as purposefully as any other form of capital outlay. Galbraith points out that the older and more developed countries do not necessarily need to do this.

> Their traditions are different; wealth has made it possible for them to be much more easy going. A new country cannot be so permissive toward those in whom it invests. They are a privileged group who must work to deserve their privileges. The teachers are custodians of scarce national resources which must not be wasted. The country must be sure that its educational investment is adapted to its needs.[3]

Parallel Systems

When we consider education in Ethiopia specifically it must be with the realization that Ethiopia shares common problems with the rest of Africa but in many ways her situation is unique. Education under the auspices of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has been in existence for about sixteen centuries. The system has served mainly to prepare members of the clergy and, through its higher institutions, ecclesiastics and scholars in theology. It has also served as an agent for the preservation of the national culture and heritage. It has spread literacy in the Amharic language and has provided the basic education needed by laymen, particularly those who have served in the government structure.

[3] J. K. Galbraith, *op. cit.*, p. 87.

A Western-oriented system was not introduced into Ethiopia until the beginning of the twentieth century. It was very slow in taking root and whatever existed at the time of the Italian invasion in 1936 was destroyed. Consequently, it is fair to say that "modern" education was only firmly established some twenty-five years ago. Today, two parallel systems of education exist, the old Church system and the new Government system under the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. Even today, however, the former system reaches considerably more students than does the Government system and no real liaison between these systems has as yet been established.

The Government system is, by and large, a conglomeration of the ideas of a variety of people drawn from education systems all over the world. This is mainly because until recent years the majority of teachers came from all over the world and they inevitably reflected their backgrounds in their teaching. It is only within the past five to six years that the primary system, for example, became staffed by Ethiopian nationals and the national language became the language of instruction. Secondary education at all levels, as well as higher education, is taught in English and still by a variety of teachers. Qualified Ethiopian staff at the secondary level is less than two percent.

The Ethiopian educators themselves, both those who teach and those who are in administration, by and large, represent different systems of thinking, since they have been educated in different countries around the world. It still remains, therefore, for the educational

leaders of Ethiopia to try to bring the system under control and to so reorient it that it can indeed serve the needs of the nation as these are seen and realized today, and as they appear for the future. Efforts in this direction were begun some ten to twelve years ago but implementation is slow.

It is convenient to examine the situation from three points of view. First, from the point of view of implications for investment; second, in relation to the outputs needed from the system; and third, from the point of view of the inputs that must be made if implementation is to be achieved. In planning for national development, it must be accepted that education is not only an investment but it is also a consumer item: therefore, economic planners have to face up to the reality that short-term losses must be endured for the sake of long-term gain. Therefore, considerably more sums of money than would appear feasible must be invested in the short run to produce the kinds of talents needed in the longer period.

Development plans must be internally consistent so that they can provide for the accommodation of students to the needs of the nation as well as provide for the incentives that are needed to attract students into one profession or the other. This means that fundamental social and economic developments must keep pace with education and training at all levels.

In Ethiopia attempts have been made to establish an integrated system, from grade one through college. Within this system certain logical cut-off points are anticipated so that children and youth with various levels of preparation can participate efficiently in the social and economic life of the country. The first cut-off point is after sixth grade, when sixty percent are selected for the secondary level. Therefore, forty percent (as enrollment increases in the primary schools this percentage will become larger) must be prepared to return to the labor force. In most cases this means returning to the land.

The second cut-off point is after grade eight, which is the end of junior secondary school. These junior years provide a period of transition to secondary school. There is also an attempt to provide for prevocational training in agriculture, industrial arts, and commerce, and to help children acquire a working knowledge of the English language. Again, about sixty percent are selected for the senior secondary grades. The third cut-off point is after the tenth grade, in secondary school. From tenth grade some forty percent are "tapped off" for various vocational and technical courses, but the majority go to teacher-training institutes to prepare to teach in primary schools. Of those who reach the twelth grade, between thirty and fifty percent are accepted in the various colleges of the university. The remainder enter specialized training courses or join the labor force.

Agro-industrial Economy

The system, its structure, and the social and economic realities with which it is surrounded, determine in part, the inputs that must be made if the schools are to provide for children and youth the kinds of experiences that will be most satisfying and challenging, and at the same time prepare them for tak-

ing on the responsibility of productive activity in a developing society.

The most crucial issue appears to be the kind of curriculum that is designed for the various levels of the system. In a short article it is not possible to deal in detail with all aspects of curriculum development for such a system. Suffice it to say that at the middle, the secondary, and the higher levels, stress needs to be laid on science and technology primarily as they apply to an agro-industrial economy. The effectiveness of organization at the base of the system, will determine to a large degree the success of its upper levels. Most educators in the country are now deeply concerned with student performance, at the secondary and college levels. About a year ago a Commission was set up to investigate the reasons for the high attrition rate at the higher levels and the degree of "failure" that was evident, particularly among twelfth-grade graduates. The Commission examined this problem, but, very rightly, went to the root of the matter which is the primary school. The primary school is critical in the Ethiopian system, as it is in many systems in Africa, because it must provide for two different purposes. In the first place the curriculum must reflect a way of living in an atmosphere conducive to change and it must also provide for the acquisition of knowledge and skill.

The primary school in a rural or urban center in Ethiopia is a place to which young people travel long distances to spend precious hours every day. They have been withdrawn from the labor force to invest their time and energy in the business of learning in order to increase their productivity. As development projects are launched, communities will become more and more engaged in activities designed to raise the standard of living and the productivity of the land. The school must, therefore, become a place where many of the changes envisioned are being tried out on an organized basis and where a process of "initiation" is taking place.

The Ethiopian economy is based largely on subsistence agriculture. In order for the country to progress at any significant rate, it is essential that a modern market economy be created. Agro-industrial planning today incorporates cooperative agricultural credit; markets and marketing procedures; farm supplies and the like, all of which comprise "the package deal" needed for agricultural development. Since upwards of forty percent of all children who go to primary school will complete their formal education at this level, the school has to reflect the best methods applicable in the community for carrying out this agricultural development program. The cooperative effort needed can become a direct experience for children in that school even as their elders attempt to put it into practice on a practical basis.

The Ethiopian school systems are beginning to implement a "Rural Science" program, within which the acquisition of basic skills is directly related to the pupils' experience. In substance, the syllabus is a summary of the scientific principles and facts which concern the everyday life of a predominantly rural population. At the primary level this could be crop husbandry, covering the growing of annual crops, vegetable gardening, forestry,

and methods of building up nurseries, shelters, and storage. This is related to the study of the anatomy, physiology, and nutrition of the human body, to botany and entomology, to bacteriology, to geology and meteorology, to general science notions, to mathematics and mechanics, to economics and farm management. Similar units can be worked out for aspects of animal husbandry, such as beekeeping, poultry keeping, fish farming, and the husbandry of animals common to the Ethiopian high plateaus and the lowlands.

School and Home

The school must also cope with other aspects of development. It must be a place where desirable personal and environmental health habits are practiced and encouraged by children and their teachers. In this respect it can become a model for observation by the community at large. At the same time, children who live in such an environment will know the causes and probable prevention and cure of the communicable diseases that plague the population. The school must further be the place where vocational guidance is built into everyday experience. Prospects opening up in a developing community can be brought to the attention of pupils in a number of ways so that they may acquire skills suited to employment in all types of large and small-scale industries.

Young people who live most of their day in a climate conducive to experimentation and innovation ought also to become active thinkers, able to grasp essentials and to utilize the knowledge they gain to make new

knowledge. If the school can create this type of atmosphere in the totality of its program, it will be releasing the energy of the young and channeling this energy into productive activity.

Life at school which is a vital experience to the pupil could also permeate life at home. Most primary school students in Ethiopia must carry their share of family responsibility either in their spare time, on holidays, or at harvest time. The experience gained in living in an atmosphere conducive to innovation ought to give them the confidence to become innovators in a practical situation. Such experience ought also to predispose them to make good use of further opportunities to acquire knowledge and skill whenever and wherever possible.

A similar experience can open the eyes of another pupil to a variety of possibilities further up the educational system. He can begin to see the real meaning of education to the person and the possible results that can follow the pursuit of knowledge. The Ethiopian boy who answers brightly that he wishes to go to school "to serve his country" can begin to feel the reality behind that statement as he lives in a dynamic school system.

The need to change the primary school curriculum is not unique to Ethiopia and other nations of the developing world. There is much debate in the United States of America about curricular development to meet the demands of twentieth century technology. Many schools of thought exist, and educators must continuously subject various aspects of the educational process to disciplined research.

In Britain, the 1966 Plowden Report on Primary Education has elicited much public discussion, since the clear implication is that basic reorientation is needed in that system.

In Africa we must face up to the challenge of the '70's and effectively reorganize our system so that it meets our needs. In Ethiopia this means giving top priority to the preparation of teachers who can do the job; putting all the resources at our disposal into the preparation of books and teaching materials to meet the need. Yet, more important, is the creation of a clear understanding on the part of those directly concerned with the educational processes, the pupils and their parents, of the objectives and purposes of the school system. On the basis of common understanding we may more easily overcome our prejudices in favor of a "literary" type of "learning" and direct our energies toward the creation of a more functional system in which instruction, as Macdonald puts it, is "characterized by *beginnings* rather than endings."[4]

[4] James B. Macdonald. "The Person in the Curriculum." In: Helen F. Robison, editor. *Precedents and Promise in the Curriculum*. New York, New York: Bureau of Publications, Teachers College, Columbia University. 1966. p. 46.