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RELEVANT EDUCATION: SOME CRITICAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR ZIMBABWE

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## INTRODUCTION

Very often debates on relevant education are confusing. The confusion arises from the ambiguities in the definition of the concept itself and carry over into specific programs adopted to achieve relevancy. It stems also from the failure of educators to define in functional and measurable terms what constitutes relevancy in education.

In this paper, it will be argued that the problem derives largely from the nature of the concept itself. Relevancy cannot be addressed as a single issue but rather as a number of inter-related issues which have to be considered simultaneously.

This paper starts with a critique of relevant education in developing countries, before focusing specifically on Zimbabwe. In the opening section, the discussion centers on the various meanings attached to this concept. The section on Zimbabwe begins with an analytical description of efforts made during the colonial era to introduce relevant education. The paper also explores why these earlier efforts were failures. In this section, the paper argues that the debate on relevancy has largely focused on the structure and not the content of education.

The attainment of independence by Zimbabwe in 1980 opens a new chapter in the debate on relevant education. Therefore, it is important to try and place the current aims of the new government into their historical context. Since considerable attention has been placed on the concept of "Education with Production", this is accorded special attention.

## THIRD WORLD PERSPECTIVE

For over a century, the educational debate in black Africa has in one way or another focused upon the issue of "relevancy". However, the debate has been at its sharpest during the post-colonial period. Yet, the controversy is no nearer a resolution than it was in its beginning. Considering the attention attached to this issue, it is surprising that relatively few attempts have been made to examine critically the various issues involved in relevancy and their implications for educational planning.

The basis for the debate on relevancy is the contention that education systems inherited from the colonial era are largely irrelevant to the socio-economic environments of developing countries. Carnoy (1974) states the case bluntly:

"Western formal education came to most countries as part of imperialist domination. It was consistent with the goals of imperialism - the economic and political control of the people in one country by the dominant class in another. The imperial powers

In addition to the general areas of agreement, there is a whole gamut of other "related" criticisms. For example, the educational systems are blamed for inculcating the "wrong" attitudes and values in the pupils such as their apparent dislike of rural life and hostility to manual labour. They are criticised for being examination oriented, thereby promoting rote learning, competitiveness, individualism and elitism.

More importantly, they are blamed for being too academic and therefore for not equipping their graduates with the skills required in the world of work.

The stream of criticisms by scholars, planners, and politicians against colonial education is almost endless. It is easy to be caught up in this rhetoric and to be persuaded that there is nothing worth retaining in the inherited education systems.

Two points must, however, be noted. First, there is a need for educational reform, not for its own sake, but for sound educational reasons. Second, it is obvious that an education system should be made to harmonise with the society it is intended to serve. If the majority of the people in developing countries live in rural areas and depend upon agriculture, it is only natural that the education system should be related to this environment and the main activity of the people.

In spite of these general areas of agreement, there is a lack of agreement on the nature of a relevant education. For example, what would a relevant education look like? Of what would its curriculum comprise? Most important what are the objectives that underly the whole notion of relevancy? There appear to be four more or less implicit types of objectives.

First, developing countries wish to adapt education to their traditional social structures. This cultural adaptation rests on the assumption that some sort of consensus can be created between the school and society. One of the most basic functions of educational institutions is thought to be a homogenizing one. In the broadest sense, this means that educational institutions are concerned with the inculcation of values and appropriate modes of behaviour and the teaching of skills which prepare the individual to participate effectively as an adult member of a community.

This objective rests on very weak grounds. Formal education is in most developing countries of Africa a relatively recent

phenomenon. From its beginning, its intimate relationship with a differentiated occupational structure meant it had a differentiating rather than homogenising function. Therefore, western formal education was, and still is dysfunctional for traditional social structures, since it constituted a new dimension of social structure. The critical issue is whether this dysfunctionality, carried with it negative normative aspects. If a country's objective is modernization, be it along socialist or capitalist lines, education will continue to be disruptive of traditional values and ways of life.

The second objective rests on the general belief that a well articulated and applied relevant education will contribute to political development. The term "political development" is itself normatively based and it revolves around such notions as political stability, creation of political consciousness among the masses, creation of national unity and erosion of tribalism etc. It is assumed that educational institutions are effective agencies of political socialisation in that they generate the appropriate skills, attitudes and values that are vital to welding the nation through producing sentiments of common citizenship.

The evidence that educational institutions can justify such aspirations is scanty. Correlations between levels of education and various indices of political development tell us nothing as to how schools actually create conditions of political stability for example. But this is not to say that education is not conducive to political development, only that the proof is lacking.

Third, the argument for a more relevant education rests upon its contribution to the employment of school leavers. Schools are alleged to cause unemployment because they fail to provide young people with the skills and training required by public and private employers. Since the cause of unemployment among school leavers is normally attributed to the academic curricula of the schools, it is assumed that a relevant education which means normally vocational and agricultural education will solve the problem.

However, most of the evidence suggests that unemployment of school leavers is not as much related to the character of schools as it is to the consequences of too rapid an expansion of education relative to economies which are either stagnant or growing too slowly to absorb the annual output from the schools. By assuming the schools are at fault, there is a tendency to ignore the complex question of the demand for labour. The problem then, is not that schools are producing too many people with an

academic education, but that they are simply producing too many people.

The nub of the problem lies in the slowness with which subsistence economies are converted to modern exchange economies. In most developing countries, the majority of the adult population is involved in purely subsistence activities. Only a very small proportion of the population is employed in the exchange economy. The products of schools have always been motivated by a desire to enter paid employment within this relatively small sector of the economy. Hence, education is regarded as an investment in future employment opportunities and a bridge from the subsistence to the modern sector. Thus, unemployment among school leavers would be a consequence irrespective of the type of education given, as long as slow rates of economic growth are maintained.

Finally, relevant education is thought to contribute to national economic development, and particularly to rural development. The basic argument is that the present education systems train their pupils for scarce "white-collar" jobs. If the curriculum could be made more relevant, education would stimulate the rate of economic growth in the rural and traditional sectors. Considerable evidence exists that education is one of the main determinants of economic growth. More limited evidence demonstrates a high correlation between years of schooling and agricultural productivity. However, what is overlooked on the debate on relevancy is that these findings are based on the very same educational systems which are deemed irrelevant. In fact, most evidence at least would argue that it is basic educational skills such as numeracy and literacy combined with the creation of new attitudes and values which account for these relationships. If present systems are accomplishing this already, the question may be not to destroy these systems but to strengthen them to do the job that they are doing better.

As Ogionwo (1969) found, the real value of education in rural development is:

"Above all to broaden horizons and raise expectations. It provides the individual with some familiarity with modern concepts and institutions. When an educated farmer settles down to farming, when he develops some commitment, and abandons the off-farm occupation that also appears to be the result of education, he is likely to be a more aggressively innovative farmer. There is evidence that such a farmer is somewhat more likely to seek out useful knowledge more aggressively from other agencies

and institutions where it is available. There is also evidence that he is likely to use modern farming inputs more intensively and, in general, be more commercially oriented." 2/

The relationship between education and rural development is a complicated, multidimensional process. There is a tendency to see it as a simple relationship where education is merely seen as a lubricant of the rural development machinery. But it also contributes in undesirable ways. For example, education by making pupils aware of the existence of alternative means of earning a living, other than through agriculture, contributes to rural to urban migration. In a free society, it will be difficult to stimulate the positive aspects of education without encouraging the negative as well.

The four objectives of relevant education discussed above indicate that policy makers often engage in planning without consulting the clientele or taking into consideration the weight of evidence. Sir Christopher Cox (1956) warns:

"Intentions and fulfilment are very different things, particularly when those responsible for policy and those for whose benefit it is designed have very different aims and values..." 3/

In other words, the support of the clientele is probably the single most crucial variable in determining the effectiveness of any education program.

The proponents of relevant education work on the underlying assumption that formal education is easily manipulable and that it can be modified to meet whatever is wanted. This view is simplistic and ignores a series of crucial variables that must be taken into account if education is to change. Education has acquired so much inertia that any moves to change it will meet resistance from those with vested interests in maintaining the status quo. Those with vested interests include teachers, education ministries, students and parents. Thus education systems cannot be changed without a profound understanding of the socio-economic context in which they function.

Zimbabwe has only recently attained political independence and has only begun the process of reforming her education system with a view to making it relevant to her new circumstances. However, Zimbabwe had a rather unique colonial experience shared by only a few countries in Africa. Zimbabwe, like Kenya and South Africa, was not a "Protectorate", but a "Settler Colony" and thus her affairs of state were not determined and controlled by the Colonial Office in London, but in Salisbury by a white minority community. Therefore, whereas most African countries

blame the British colonialists for transplanting metropole institutions without adapting them to their new environments, Zimbabwe cannot do the same, she has to articulate the problems of her colonial inheritance quite differently. On the whole, the Zimbabwean colonial situation reflected the dominant position of whites and the subordinate position reserved for blacks. It is within this context that an understanding of Zimbabwe's educational system will be achieved.

### ZIMBABWE. THE COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

What is surprising in the recent emphasis on relevant education is not its originality but its focus on a number of arguments that were first stated in equally cogent fashion before Zimbabwe was born. As early as 1847, the British Colonial Office received a comprehensive memorandum on education which included some suggestions on how to make the school more relevant to the then existing colonies. Among the specific steps proposed were the establishment of industrial and farm schools, with the inclusion of agriculture, stock management and land surveying in the curricula of teacher training institutions 4/

At the turn of this century, the missionaries who had set up schools in Rhodesia were criticised by the settler colonialists for providing the African with an academic curriculum, which was thought to be inappropriate, because among other things,

"many people object to what seems to them the "cheeky" manners of mission natives and others complain about the laziness or the airs they give themselves...." 5/

Accordingly, it was suggested that the native be given

"an industrial continuation school, where simple handicrafts could be mastered which would send them back to their reserves, rather than out into the labor market, and make them the apostles of sweetness and light to their own people." 6/

The attitude of the missionaries to industrial and agricultural training was rather cautious. To them, the evangelical outcomes of education were more important, and, though the missions did eventually develop programs of industrial and agricultural training, this was undertaken only where it could be proved to be the sole or best means by which church members might live a consistent Christian life. 7/

Actually, in addition to realising the value of an

academic education as a catalyst of evangelization, the missionaries were also fully aware of the African's strong preference for academic education. To the African, education meant writing and reading books, counting and talking in English. He did not want to be taught how to plough or weed the fields, for he knew how to do these things and to learn them was not why he had come to school. Therefore, when the authorities focused their attention on vocationalisation of curriculum, "...the missionaries found themselves essentially in the position of salesmen attempting to distribute a product for which demand was limited and where the problem of modifying the nature of the product in the light of consumer preferences was all important " 8/

As far as education is concerned, the early 1920's belonged to Thomas Jesse Jones and his two missionary-inspired Phelps-Stokes Commissions on education in what was former British Africa. The commissions recommended mass education with its curriculum adapted to the people's local circumstances. The Colonial Office endorsed these recommendations in the 1925 memorandum which states thus:

"Education should be adapted to the mentality, aptitudes, occupations and traditions of the various peoples conserving as far as possible all sound and healthy elements in the fabric of their social life, adapting them where necessary to changed circumstances and progressive ideas, as an agent of cultural growth and evolution." 9/

The Government in Zimbabwe then must have felt that it was a step ahead, because it had been working on a similar line before the Phelps-Stokes Commission visited the country in 1924 and before the Colonial Office published its recommendations. Keigwin helped to set-up two colleges at Domboshawa and Tjolotjo in 1920 and 1921 respectively. Murray (1929) says that the schools had

"a bias towards industrial work, not only for practical purposes but also to break down the conception that school and work are two different things." 10/

Accordingly, twenty-one out of the thirty-six hours of the working week were given to agriculture, management of stock, building, carpentry, forestry and gardening, "with the aim of equipping the pupils to improve conditions in the reserves when they return." 11/

In the end, the recommendations of the Phelps-Stokes Commissions and the colleges established by Keigwin failed to achieve their original objectives. The causes of their failure were fundamentally two. First, they failed to take into account the degree to which traditional African society had changed since the arrival of settler colonialism in 1890.

Second, the government failed to realise the extent to which money and wage labour had become important elements of black society and they did not fully grasp the role education was playing in this new socio-economic milieu.

The impact of settler colonialism on traditional Zimbabwean societies was, to put it bluntly, devastating. A political unit with definite boundaries (then called Rhodesia) was created overnight; a new administrative system, based on the doctrine of separate development was established and a modern economy introduced. At the same time, urban centres mushroomed, road and railway networks were established and a new occupational structure was set up. A person was free for the first time to travel beyond his tribal boundaries and seek wage employment elsewhere. Imported goods were introduced and new secular ideas joined Christianity to undermine long-held values. The following observations made by the Chief Native Commissioners in the period 1903 to 1909 show the extent of change in traditional African societies:

1. "There is a steady increase in the demand for trade goods, of which the articles most in request are hoes, picks, cutlery, blankets, clothing, salt, beads, etc. with occasionally such luxuries as coffee, sugar, golden syrup, and corned beef..."
2. "The natives progress is becoming more marked each year. This does not apply to any great extent to requirements of articles of civilised manufacture but of correspondence by post, railway travelling, cleanliness in dress and person...."
3. "The large number of town and country stores catering for the native customer is a striking illustration of the increasing wants of the native. The stock-in-trade comprises agricultural implements .... boots and shoes, ready-made clothing of all descriptions, hats, shirts, drapery, coffee, tea, sugar ...and such luxuries as golden syrup, cigarettes, confectionery and perfumery....." 12/

Obviously, money was important to buy these commodities. But there were also other things for which money was a necessity. For example, a hut tax of 10 shillings for every adult male and 10 shillings extra for each wife exceeding one was imposed as early as 1894, and ten years later it was

replaced by a poll tax of one pound on each male over 16 and 10 shillings upon each wife exceeding one 13/ To get the money required to purchase consumer items and pay taxes, the Africans turned to wage labour.

Formal education must be viewed within the context of African participation in the wage sector. It was not a mere coincidence that average attendance in mission primary schools, after stagnating at around 45,000 for over a decade, shot up from 46,000 in 1936 to over 86,000 in 1943 and to 140,000 in 1947.14/ Why did education undergo this rapid expansion during World War II and the immediate post war period?

Formal education was an instrument, valued not for its own sake, but for its cash return. Better paying jobs were available in the modern sector. To obtain these better paying jobs, an individual had to have education. Because employers preferred workers with an academic background rather than those with vocational and agricultural training, preference was given to schools with a strong academic base. Hence, as Foster (1965) observed:

"African demands for academic education had little to do with the curriculum of the school but reflected their realistic perception of the differential rewards accorded to individuals within the occupational structure."..... 15/

The authorities in Rhodesia appear to have had other hidden purposes for their scheme of education in addition to the noble idea of equipping African people with agricultural and industrial training. It was these hidden purposes which contributed in no small measure to the failure of Phelps-Stokeism. Du Bois (1903) arguing against Phelps-Stokeism and its influence on the education of American blacks, stated that it was an education which "practically accepts the alleged inferiority of the African" and was intended to keep the African in "his position" as a drawer of water and hewer of wood. In Africa itself, people accused Phelps-Stokeism of attempting "to make the African fit in with the Europeans scheme of exploitation and control."16/ Perhaps the following questions of a black Rhodesian teacher best illustrate the doubts of the Africans about the purpose of industrial and agricultural training:

"Why do you teach our children only to use the Native axe and knife, and prevent us using saws, and hammers? Why do you tell us to make wooden spoons? Do you want us to climb the ladder of civilization? We buy metal spoons from the store. Is it wrong for our children to want to have chairs and beds, and be like the Europeans? It is not easy to tell our children, No, you must want to be Native, No you must make spoons because it is hand

and eye training. No, the Pass Laws are not all bad because they are made to protect you."17/

The post Second World War period up to U.D.I. was a watershed for economic and educational development in Zimbabwe. Chidzero and Moyana (1979) point out that the Zimbabwe economy which was until then largely oriented towards primary export production (tobacco, gold, copper, etc.) turned to import - substituting manufacture of textiles, clothing, metal work and food processing 18/ The manufacturing and agricultural boom during this period resulted in increased demand for skilled personnel and this led to a surge in British immigration and cheap labour from the neighbouring countries, particularly Malawi, Zambia and Mozambique. This is also the period which the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland was formed and it increased the size of the internal market.

During this period, the education system expanded phenomenally, particularly at the primary level. Primary enrollments increased from 147,000 in 1947 to 341,000 in 1955. This was a natural response to the industrial sector's call for a more educated labour force. Also the curriculum became decidedly more academic. Structurally, the education system as it was to remain until Independence was in place - a broad-based primary level with highly selective secondary and post-secondary levels.

After being dormant for almost two decades, the theme of relevant education re-emerged in the ten-year educational plan of 1966. Under this plan, twelve and a half percent of primary school leavers were to follow a four-year academic secondary course, followed by a two-year course for those for university. Thirtyseven and a half percent were to enter a two year terminal junior secondary school whose curriculum was to be designed to prepare pupils in vocational skills to become semi-skilled workers. In these schools, a third of the time was to be spent on handicrafts and activities suited to the area in which the school was located. The balance of 50 percent were to be given the opportunity of pursuing formal secondary education by correspondence courses. In summary, 62.5 percent of the secondary school students were provided with an academic education.

The 1966 plan coincided with the Unilateral Declaration of Independence by the white minority government.

U.D.I. made the country an international outcast and led to the imposition of economic

sanctions by the international community. In the short run, the economy suffered and employment opportunities began to contract when schools were producing more graduates.

The 1969 constitution led to the entrenchment of the racial policies of the Rhodesian Front Government. Of particular importance was its Land Tenure Act, which divided land into equal halves. One half was set aside for four and a half million Africans and the other half was reserved for a quarter of a million whites. It is therefore not surprising that the provisions of the new educational plan, with its vocational orientation, were seen as another way of providing Africans with an inferior education. Any merit which the 1966 plan might have had was cancelled by these political considerations. Unemployment of the black school leavers increased and even a secondary school certificate could no longer guarantee a job in the wage sector. Moreover, the school leavers could no longer bank on returning to the rural areas and becoming subsistence farmers like their parents because African land was on the whole overpopulated. It was against this combination of political injustice and the frustration caused by working on unrewarding rural farms that led school leavers to join the ranks of the nationalist movements and their emerging armed forces. It should not be forgotten that it was the educated rather than the uneducated who initially took up the cause of national liberation.

The discussion has centred on the structure of education and the strong preference for an academic education on the part of Africans despite attempts of policy makers to vocationalise the curriculum. These historical trends have important implications for the formulation of relevant education in a post-independent Zimbabwe and cannot be ignored if curriculum changes and modifications are to succeed. It is against this background that the discussion in the next section turns to the content of education and what it means within the development context.

### THE CONTENT OF EDUCATION

The school system is made up of a number of interrelated sub-systems, namely, primary, secondary and institutions of higher education. The products of one sub-system constitute the intake of another. Thus, primary schools feed secondary schools: secondary schools feed tertiary institutions of higher education and some institutions of higher education in turn feed the secondary and primary schools.

As a result, institutions of higher education have enormous influence upon the curriculum and instruction methodology of the lower ones. For instance, university entrance requirements have been a major constraint upon the development

of the secondary school curriculum while secondary school entrance examinations stressing the academic and literary skills have been the focus of primary education and have severely restricted attempts to diversify primary curricula.

In order to free the primary and secondary schools to develop more relevant curricula and to adopt other kinds of learning approaches, it is necessary, first, to persuade the university and other post-secondary institutions to accept students with different educational backgrounds from the one to which they are accustomed. Keeping this in mind, the discussion turns to each sub-system beginning first with primary.

The primary level is the largest component within Zimbabwe's education system. It is also the poorest in both money and quality. Although it accounts for 92% of the school population, it receives relatively less money than secondary education and expenditure per pupil is 4.8 times less than it is in secondary schools. To expect any immediate improvement in the financial prospects of primary schools is to be unrealistic. Populations are rising, economic growth is barely keeping up with these figures, and the country is committed to a policy of quantitative expansion of the primary school system to overtake the population growth. Within this context, it is virtually impossible to see how more money per child can be spent on primary schools.

Primary schools are part of a broader education system which is selective and competitive. About 80% of the primary school age cohort goes to school, selection at this stage being influenced by factors like availability of schools, motivation, cultural considerations and socio-economic factors within the family and local community. However, only a proportion finish the full seven years of primary school and a much smaller proportion (12-13%) pass through a selective examination to secondary education. But for those who pass through, the rewards may be very high. Wage and social differentials between those who have, and those who do not have secondary education are enormous. For this reason, it is hardly realistic to expect parents and their children to regard primary as an end in itself.

The formal character of the primary curriculum is made up of English, a vernacular language, mathematics, social and environmental science and Bible knowledge. This curriculum is reinforced by the final examination which is designed to select the few to proceed to secondary education. The examination determines the teaching in the primary schools and has far more influence on curriculum than does any printed syllabus.

But unfortunately, in most primary schools, as Hawes (1972) observed, it is neither the syllabus nor the examination requirements which are the determinants of what and how teachers teach children; rather it is a kind of dreary oral tradition of "survival teaching" handed down from one hard-pressed, under-trained teacher to another. Again as Hawes observed, this teaching tradition survives because it is easy, popular and safe, because it preserves the teacher's dignity and it gets children through the examination. It may also be the easiest way to operate in what are otherwise difficult physical conditions with overcrowded classes and a scarcity of necessary equipment. 19/

Therefore, discussions of curriculum change need to take into account two problems. The first relates to the close link between what is taught in the schools and the examination. The second is the environment in which this curriculum is taught which is characterised by untrained and isolated teachers.

### Secondary Schools

Only 12-13% of those who enter primary school go on to secondary school. Thus, secondary schools are exclusive institutions in the sense that their enrollment is highly restricted.

Formerly there were two types of secondary schools, namely, academic (F1) and vocational or technical (F2) schools. Most pupils in the academic schools did the following subjects:

English language	History
Mathematics	Vernacular language
English literature	General science
Geography	Bible knowledge <u>20/</u>

Pupils in the vocational schools took the following subjects: English, vernacular language, environmental studies, science, and mathematics. Boys also took two practical subjects from the following selection:

Agriculture	Building
Metal work	Woodwork

Girls selected two practical subjects from the following:

Agriculture	Housecraft
Needlework	

This bifurcated system has now been replaced by a more comprehensive one. Pupils are now streamed according to ability, so that the 'able' ones write the "0" level examination after four years and the "slow" ones after five years. The curriculum is an assemblage of academic and vocational core subjects. But the teaching methodologies and even what the schools teach are geared towards the examinations.

In the past, there were three examinations within the secondary level. The first was taken after two years, the second after four years, and the third in the sixth and final year of secondary education. As the Minister of Education and Culture, Dr. Mutumbuka said,

"The whole African education system under the colonial regimes was a kind of 'ambush' system. African pupils had to survive a series of 'ambushes' before they could get to the end of the system; therefore, it is not surprising that very few of them ever got to the end." 21/

Also much of the criticism of secondary education centres on the "lack of integration between the secondary school system and the industrial and economic needs of the country." 22/

Whilst the frustrations of the unemployed school leavers and politicians are understandable, the simple truth is that no society can guarantee jobs for school leavers, and there is no way job-corps, vocational or agricultural curricula in the schools, or other panaceas, are going to prevent unemployment from being a chronic feature of any economy with a slower rate of economic growth than growth in school leavers.

Thus, the debate on relevancy must focus on two central issues. The first issue deals with labor demand and reflects the rate of expansion in job opportunities for people with different levels of education and skills. The second issue relates to the content of the education and skills. Both issues relate to the content of education and training received. Both issues must be treated together in any debate on relevancy. One should not lose sight of the fact that unemployment may simply be a quantitative education problem, too many graduates, rather than a qualitative one.

### Higher Education

Higher education includes all post secondary level institutions such as agricultural colleges, polytechnics and technical colleges, teacher training colleges and the university. However, this paper concentrates on only two of these, the university and teacher training colleges.

#### (1) The University

Zimbabwe has one university modelled along the lines of a British university. It initially operated as an extension of London University before becoming more autonomous. The university is the apex or highest level of the tripartite

division of the education system in Zimbabwe. Being the most prestigious of the system, the university inevitably influences much of what goes on in the primary and secondary levels.

The overall enrollment at the university in 1981 was .03% of the total population and 14% of the school population. Hence it is an elitist institution. Its elitism, however, goes beyond the issue of mere student numbers and extends into its curricula and methodologies.

The university has been accused of "staying in the clouds" and of ignoring the needs of a new Zimbabwe. The university concentrates upon high-level academic and professional preparation, leaving the development of intermediate level training to smaller institutions. The university has yet to make real significant progress towards patterns of organization, teaching and evaluation closely related to local realities. As Coombs (1968) notes,

"Instead of seeking new truths, they have busied themselves building academic ramparts to protect old beliefs. Instead of keeping merely at arm's length from society's untidy confusion, they have removed themselves astronomical distances from the urgent problems of society." 23/

The crux of the matter is that the university is overtly pre-occupied with the question of standards, not its own standards, but those defined by the international company of universities all over the world. But of course as the Nigerian Commissioner on Post School certificate and Higher Education in 1959, argued:

" A country can stay on the intellectual gold standard without, as it were, having to adopt the imprint of another coinage." 24/

## (2) Teacher Education :

It is stating the obvious to say that teachers are an important, if not the most important, ingredient in education. It is they who are supposed to interpret the goals of the curriculum and translate them into reality in the classrooms. Often the proponents of curriculum change assume that the teacher is some kind of super-person whose intellectual capacity is matched by a diversity of skills and a strong motivation. Thus, a teacher is expected to be capable of teaching well an array of academic and vocational subjects. What is forgotten or overlooked is that most Zimbabwean teachers are not qualified and have themselves limited background. Many of them took up teaching not because teaching was their first choice, but rather they failed to get into other institutions of post-secondary education. In the first term in 1981, 40% and 5.5% of the primary and secondary school teachers respectively were untrained.

Furthermore, it should be recognized that the trained teacher is really an average teacher who is modestly qualified, moderately well trained with limited motivations. In all likelihood, he probably views the drive for curriculum changes with indifference, if not suspicion, because he feels secure with his former practices. While these are unpleasant generalisations, they must be taken into consideration in any discussion of relevant education or curriculum change. They are provided with further education and training in yet more school-type institutions and then they are certified as teachers capable of returning to schools from which they originally came. This, as Thompson (1980) noted, constitutes a cycle: school - college - school, which is more suited to the perpetuation of existing practice than changing it.<sup>25/</sup> Moreover, student teachers often arrive with inadequate standards of general education and a good deal of time is spent on upgrading their academic skills. As a consequence, the college curriculum becomes overcrowded with professional teaching studies competing for time and attention with the academic studies.

The most important and significant post-independence change in teacher education is ZINTEC. (Zimbabwe Integrated National Teacher Education Course). This new approach addresses the urgent need for expanding teacher training rapidly as the educational system also expands rapidly. The main aim is to produce as many teachers as possible in the shortest available time. ZINTEC training centres enrolled a total of 2130 teachers between May 1980 and December 1981 as opposed to the 1755 teachers enrolled in the traditional three-year colleges.

ZINTEC combines pre-service with in-service training. The student teachers spend only the first and last term of a 12 term course of 4 years in a training centre and the rest of the time is spent in the schools (mostly rural). These students, in fact, work as full-time salaried teachers. As in the old system of teacher training, the school - college - school cycle is also present in ZINTEC except that the stay at college is shortened. Thus, it is important to consider whether ZINTEC student teachers are any freer from the influences of the established patterns in the schools in which they teach than traditionally trained teachers.

Whether trained in the new or the old ways, teachers are responsible for preparing young people for life and employment in an increasingly demanding and complex society outside schools. Yet their own experiences tend very largely to be confined to the society of the school. This is especially true with the ZINTEC student teachers. These teachers have very

limited experiences beyond local communities. They have little knowledge of the realities of urban living, about the employment sector, and about the way their government works.

Furthermore, many teachers enter the teaching college not out of choice, but because they have failed to achieve selection for a further stage of formal education, or because they could not get a job in the industrial or commercial sector. Teacher training and teaching itself are considered by these individuals as second best. It is not surprising that many trained teachers have recently left teaching to take jobs in an expanding public and private sector.

If teachers are to play their full role in relevant education, there have to be changes in teacher education not only at the pre-service level but also during the in-service period. It is often taken for granted that once a teacher has been trained and has received his certificate, he is equipped sufficiently for a life-time of teaching. This assumption overlooks the fact that training can at best only hope to do little more than equip the teacher to start out on his career. Any changes in teaching methodology, syllabus and new school organization render the teacher's training out of date and will require retraining. Thus, the problem of untrained staff is exacerbated because curriculum changes in a rapidly expanding system require, not only training more new teachers but also significant retraining of old teachers.

#### ALTERNATIVES IN EDUCATION: THE EXAMPLE OF NON FORMAL EDUCATION

Growing awareness of the inadequacies of formal education has led educationists, policy makers, and developmental specialists to focus attention on alternative forms of education. It is in this context that nonformal education has been refined and made into an effective tool for learning, especially for adults. Nonformal education is mainly divided into three categories:

1. Supplementation of formal education - where the objectives syllabuses, examinations may be identical to those of the school and the clientele consists of those who wish to undertake, complete or further their formal education but have no opportunity of entering or returning to school;
2. Complementing formal education - where education and training not necessarily offered in schools is provided to people who need it whether or not they have had previous schooling; and

3. Replacing formal education - where through the institution of learning networks, the formal school may be dispensed with altogether 26/

In analysing the strengths of nonformal education approaches, it is helpful to compare and contrast it with the formal school system. Through such a comparison, it is possible to see how the two forms of education may complement or supplement each other.

The main advantage of nonformal education lies in its purpose. Whereas schooling is intended to provide the knowledge and skills a pupil will need for all aspects of his life, nonformal education seeks to provide for a person's specific and immediate need. Schools deal with packages of theoretical and abstract knowledge and standardised content, but nonformal education focuses on the specific tasks and skills which are needed, and will be able to deal with modular units of learning derived not from some accepted concept of the way knowledge is structured but from the problem which is being faced.

Furthermore, formal education is relatively inflexible, requiring full-time attendance over long periods of time at a particular place. Nonformal education is likely to be more flexible since it will normally be available on a part-time and sparetime basis as and when the person is available and for as long and as often as may be required or possible. Many nonformal education activities may be located close to the life and work of the individual whereas schooling tends to withdraw people from their normal life context and to isolate them in specially designated institutions.

The close relationship which nonformal education has with learning and application gives it a further advantage. While formal education may communicate certain skills, it commonly finds that the motivation of its pupils, while strong, is not the kind which teachers and the curriculum developers prefer. But the skills learned in nonformal education will be selected according to their immediate applicability in the daily life and circumstances of the learner.

One of the strongest arguments in favour of nonformal education is that while schooling is heavily state subsidised, many forms of nonformal education can be entirely paid for by the participants, firms, groups and individuals who will benefit from them. And it may be argued that where they pay a good proportion of the costs, they are likely to value the learning experience more highly.

Also of importance, there is a closer tie between costs and benefits in most non-formal education activities. Since these activities are practical and specific it is easier to make an assessment of their benefit. On the other hand, formal schooling is costly and the benefits are less easily measurable.

In the next section, the significance of nonformal education within the Zimbabwean context is explored.

### NONFORMAL EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE

Zimbabwe has a long history of nonformal education. The term nonformal education is new, the activities to which it refers are not. Any attempt at making an accurate survey of nonformal education is frustrated not only by administrative and logistical problems, but also by the very wide range of the activities involved and the definition of the concept itself.

Russell (1976) tried to make a survey of nonformal education activities in 1976. He found over 452 agencies involved offering 7,258 courses a year to 194,000 people.

The problem of keeping an accurate count of nonformal education activities is compounded by the transient nature of the activities themselves. Each activity's birth, life span and death are defined by its unique circumstances. In essence, nonformal education activities reflect the changing problems of the people they serve.

Coombs (1974) has defined nonformal education as "any organised, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular sub-groups in the population, adult as well as children."27/

Instead of seeking to provide a broad, multi-purpose and common form of education to the population as a whole, non-formal education is concerned with identifying different groups of people, diagnosing the specific learning needs of each group, and then seeking the most appropriate means whereby these needs may be met. It is obvious that nonformal education techniques draw upon a different set of traditions from formal education. nonformal education begins with the people and their needs and makes the realistic assumption that no single tool or technique will serve all purposes. On the other hand, formal education seems to be regarded as a tool to provide for the wide range of learning needs of a particular age range within the population.

Learning needs are very difficult to define and to assess. However, Coombs and Ahmed (1974), identified four main kinds of learning needs. In addition, they also identified three main groups of people which could be considered in nonformal education activities in the rural areas in which they worked.

The learning needs are:

1. General or basic education, including such elements as literacy, numeracy and understanding of one's society. Some educationists would also include liberal and cultural studies.
2. Community improvement education to provide for the strengthening of local and national institutions and organisations, to enable people to participate more effectively in civic affairs, in the management of co-operatives, credit banks, associations and clubs, and in undertaking community improvement projects.
3. Family improvement education to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes which would help people to raise their standards of health, nutrition, child-care, family planning, home construction and repair, in order to improve the quality of their domestic lives.
4. Occupational education, to assist people to make a better living for themselves and to contribute more effectively to the economic development of their community and country.

The three main rural groups identified are:

1. Persons directly engaged in agriculture - farmers, herders, fishermen etc., groups which would vary in their activities and needs according to the areas in which they lived. Distinctions would be made between commercial and subsistence farmers, subsistence and semi-subsistence, ranchers and herders and so on.
2. Persons engaged in off-farm commercial activities, such as traders, large and small traders, large and small repair and maintenance workers, construction and transport workers.
3. General service personnel, including local civic leaders and planners, administrators and managers responsible

at various levels for the provision of public services such as schools, clinics, transport and supply, storage and marketing etc 28/

In view of these considerations it becomes abundantly clear that the 1976 study underestimated the range of non-formal education activities going on in Zimbabwe.

Russell himself conceded that the study does not include the more "informal appearing" types of nonformal education, such as that carried out under a tree by an agricultural demonstrator, a community adviser or a savings club development fieldworker. And it does not refer to on-the-job and other training provided in industry, the courses offered by correspondence colleges, nor, with a few minor exceptions, does it refer to the activities of the young farmers' club movement and master farmers' organisations.

In summary, before it is possible to know how nonformal education may be an alternative approach to meeting the learning needs of young people and adults in Zimbabwe, it is necessary to have a better understanding of the range of existing non-formal education activities. Such a study should not only take into account the types of learning needs met, and groups served but also the problems and limitations they face. Furthermore, there should be an analysis of the linkages between these non-formal education activities and the formal system. That is, the extent to which these linkages build on the formal system or actually offer an alternate system for people by-passed by the formal system. Such a study would likely shed considerable light on the relevancy issue, since it would indicate the relationships between people's learning needs, and the various formal and nonformal education activities designed to address them.

### POST INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENTS

The political independence of Zimbabwe on 18 April 1980, brought with it a government committed to eradicating poverty, ignorance and disease among the poor. This government replaced one that was, by and large, committed to the protection of minority white interests and privileges.

The new government's principles for education were enunciated in Z.A.N.U.(PF)'s election manifesto:

1. The abolition of racial education and utilisation of the education system to develop in the young a non-racial attitude, or common national identity and common loyalty.
2. The establishment of free and compulsory primary

and secondary education for all children regardless of race.

3. The abolition of sex discrimination in the education system.
4. The orientation of the education system to national goals.
5. The basic right of every adult who had no or little education opportunity to literacy and adult education.
6. The special role of education as a major instrument for social transformation.

The manifesto also identified three stages in the education system:

- (1) Pre-school education: mainly of a nursery form for children aged 3-5 years..... it would make it possible for the present long period of primary schooling to be reduced.
- (2) Primary education: this will be pre-secondary and will build upon nursery education as it projects itself into the secondary sector. It should emphasise equally the development of literacy and psychomotor abilities and create in the child a comprehensive educational base.
- (3) Secondary education: this form of education will build itself upon the primary base and, while remaining comprehensive in character, must sharpen the child in the direction of his aptitudes. It should prepare children variously for university, technical and vocational courses.

Furthermore, "a ZANU (PF) government will launch a vast network of technical and vocational schools throughout the country and will establish Zimbabwe Institute of Technology, which will offer courses at university level."

And, "a ZANU (PF) government will expand university education and reorientate it to the needs of the Zimbabwean nation, emphasizing more the courses necessary for the development of the country. University education should be largely free." 29/

However, there is no clear definition of priorities between the six goals or principles and the various levels of education. The document avoids potential conflicts caused by limited resources. Despite these criticisms the government has made significant progress in implementing its education program.

1. The education system at all levels has been expanded. Education is now free at the primary level, but it is not yet compulsory. Although the secondary level has been expanded, it is still not large enough to absorb all the primary school graduates.

2. Racial discrimination in school attendance has been removed.
3. A new system of teacher education (ZINTEC) has been introduced.
4. "Education with production" has been introduced into curriculum.

Since this paper focuses on the issues involved in relevancy, it is on the introduction of "Education with Production" (EWP) that the discussion now turns. EWP has implications for changes in teaching methodologies, textbooks, equipment and school organization.

### III. EDUCATION WITH PRODUCTION

First and foremost, EWP is not a new concept to Zimbabwe. It has been tried before, albeit under different labels and different circumstances.

EWP has also been known in other country contexts. For example, Ghandi called it "basic education", Nyerere called it "education for self-reliance" and Van Rensburg had his "Serowe Brigades".

EWP attempts to link education and training with production. Van Rensburg (1981) defines it:

"School and community must be linked so that teachers and learners are involved in real life activity, cultural, political, economic and social; it means linking theory and practice in every way possible. At the core of these links lies the combination of education and production."<sup>30</sup>

Although EWP has a core of academic subjects, like English, mathematics and science, they are linked to activities both in the institution and the community. Therefore, teachers participate in production to discover its principles and problems and how to relate their teaching and subjects to it.

Another important aspect of EWP is the attempt to move towards joint responsibility, consultation and participation in decision making as a collective learning activity involving the community, teacher, student and employer. Also through EWP, education is to become a part of the changing environment as well as a result and function of it. As Luria has written:

"Mental processes depend on active life forms in an appropriate environment ..... human action changes the environment so that human mental life is a product of continually new activities in social practice ..... moreover, some mental processes cannot develop apart from the appropriate forms of social life."31/

In short, education must or should be organically linked to its socio-economic environment.

How has EWP been translated into practice? To date it largely consists of a few discrete projects. It is yet to be integrated into the system in any large scale way. Most of the existing projects are in their infancy. A number have met with initial success. Yet in measuring success one should not forget that most of the students are former combatants and refugees who lived a similar life during the war. Whether this success can be transferred to the larger population remains problematic.

In considering the significance of these activities to the larger environment, it is useful to reflect on the Serowe Brigades. The story of the Serowe Brigades has demonstrated that there are still too many vested interests protecting the formal system.

The concept of EWP runs the risk of being narrowly interpreted. For example, it is easy to assume that people live to work, instead of working to live. In other words, the kinds of training which people get in EWP can be translated into programs which do not make up the whole of the learning needs of society. Society continues to need people with a broad and deep knowledge of problems and the world environment in which Zimbabwe finds itself which transcend the need for a trained workforce.

The capability and capacity of the existing institutions of EWP to stimulate the development of the communities in their "sphere of influence" is questionable. Institutions like Chindundurwa and Rusununguko are so psychologically distanced from rural communities that they have no direct linkage to rural development. If the intention is to make the graduates from these institutions of EWP the catalysts of development by sending them "back to the land" on completion of their courses, two problems are likely to arise. First, the graduates will be motivated to seek work in the modern sector in the urban and mining areas rather than seek work in rural areas. Second, these graduates may face difficulty in getting support from the tradition bound rural communities. This is a problem because of their relative youth and the isolation of their training from the problems of rural communities.

The most critical question, however, is the extent to which the concept of EWP is capable of contributing to the solution of the problems confronted by Zimbabwe. Considered as a solution to the school leaver problem, it is clear that this depends upon the capacity of the country to employ school leavers.

At the moment, the government seems to be moving cautiously. It seems to be weighing two possible ways to develop EWP. The first would be as a means to provide some of the intermediate level skills required by the economy. The second would be as an alternative education system. Achieving the former strategy will be far easier than achieving the latter.

### CONCLUSION

The post-independence national debate within Zimbabwe on improving the relevancy of education is in its infancy. How the concept of EWP will be transformed into the realities of the classroom and teacher training remain to be seen. In this debate, it is important to take six factors into consideration in shaping curriculum changes.

First, there are the past experiences. To many blacks in rural areas, EWP sounds all too familiar to Phelps-Stokism and the vocationalisation of the curriculum advocated by Keigwin. Therefore, EWP cannot simply be another name for the vocationalisation of education. It must avoid the negative connotation of being an instrument to keep rural people in rural areas, denying them access to modern sector employment. Therefore, policy makers must attempt to demonstrate how the new concept of EWP differs from previous efforts to vocationalise education.

Second, efforts to change the curriculum in the name of relevancy must take into account the multi-dimensional nature of education and the way in which people in rural and urban communities view education. Thus, changes in curriculum need to harmonise with the aspirations and perceptions of the people served. This suggests participation of local people and groups in the formulation of national education policy to achieve grass-root support for educational change.

Third, curriculum reform cannot ignore the linkages between levels within the education system. That is, a change at one level will succeed only if it is tied to corresponding changes at other levels. Therefore, a program such as EWP is not merely one designed to change primary or secondary education in isolation. It has to involve changes in examinations and post-secondary education.

Fourth, in considering how to make education relevant, it is important not to lose sight of the evidence on the relationship of education to overall economic growth. Most of the studies on the determinants of growth indicate that so-called irrelevant systems are already major contributors to economic growth. Thus, the issue should focus on whether the envisaged changes in the name of relevancy will strengthen or weaken this relationship. Therefore, the marginal or net gain to be achieved must be weighed against the cost of the changes. Introducing agriculture, wood working, metal working, and other skills training into primary and secondary schools is costly. Thus, are their costs justified in terms of the gains to be realised?

Fifth, what alternatives exist which might achieve the same or better results but at a lower cost? For example, the high correlation between basic education skills such as literacy and numeracy strongly suggest that emphasis on improving the way these subjects are taught might have greater economic pay-off to society than introducing vocational subjects. This is particularly true in primary education where children are often too young to begin occupational skills training. One thing is certain, the cost of improving the quality of instruction of subjects already taught is likely to be considerably cheaper than introducing vocational/occupation skills training in each secondary school.

Sixth, and finally, it is important to raise the question whether it is the responsibility of the formal primary and secondary education system to offer differential occupational skills training or should this form of training be left to specialised post-primary and post-secondary institutions. The bulk of the evidence argues for the latter rather than the former approach.

In summary, consideration of the above six factors suggests that a strategy for curriculum reform would have the following features:

1. At the formal primary and secondary level reform would be directed at strengthening the quality of basic subjects such as language, mathematics, science and history.
2. These qualitative changes would encompass developing learning materials and teaching methods which were relevant to the environment in which most children live. Thus, rather than teach agriculture as a separate subject, practical knowledge and agricultural skills would be integrated into the teaching of the core subjects.

3. These qualitative changes must be rewarded in terms of the instruments which measure success within the education system, that is, they must be reflected in examinations which determine advancement to higher levels within the system.
  
4. Occupational skills training should be left to institutions and structures outside the formal primary and secondary education system. Ministries other than Education and Culture, such as Ministry of Manpower, Ministry of Agriculture, and Ministry of Health, should acquire adequate financial support to strengthen their programs. Furthermore, nongovernmental organisations which offer complementary skills training programs should be promoted. And finally, private and public sector employers should be encouraged to expand their in-service and on-the-job training programs. For the private sector, this can be accomplished through incentives such as tax rebates for on-the-job training.

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