POST-LITERACY AND VOCATIONAL TRAINING IN THE CONTEXT OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AND INCOME GENERATION IN AFRICA

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Abstract — This article views post-literacy and vocational training as well as rural development in the wider context of holistic human self-development, particularly income-generation and economic issues. It is suggested that rural unemployment and poverty have gone beyond being matters of regional concern affecting only a section of a community, to becoming critical issues of national survival. Two educational solutions to these problems are discussed. First, the integration of productive work into school education, as in Tanzania, and in one of the states of Nigeria. Second, post-literacy and out-of-school training projects through which education, skill-training and income-generation are achieved pari passu.

Descriptions are given of the Village Polytechnic of Kenya, the Builders' Brigades of Botswana and the Folk Development Colleges of Tanzania, after which elements of the dynamics of their success are discussed.

The article concludes that the economic advantages of the models outlined make it imperative for other African countries to adopt similar approaches to adult non-formal education, whatever the differing ideological orientations of the countries may be.

Some Conceptual Clarifications

Post-literacy education should be understood to mean the whole gamut of educational offerings which are open to the following varieties of people.

First, there are the products of adult literacy schemes, programmes and projects, whether such schemes belong to the traditional or functional variety. These are adults who have acquired some tolerable working-skills in reading, writing and numeracy. Their level of literacy may be regarded as the equivalent of some primary schooling at the formal level, or may be graded in stages on its own, as in Tanzania's functional literacy stages. In general, they can be described as 'literacy graduates' ready for post-literacy programmes.

Secondly, there are the products of the complete primary levels of the formal education system.

Thirdly, there are the early school leavers (otherwise called the dropouts), with at least basic reading, writing and numeracy skills.

Finally, there are the products of various non-formal education programmes whose training has included some smattering of literacy educa-
tion, and who are, therefore, ready to update and improve on their skills through post-literacy programmes.

In general, post-literacy education will be regarded as the further education, irrespective of form and setting, that is available to those who hold literacy certificates, or who can perform successfully at basic literacy tasks, but have not reached that stage of functionality at which the skills are taken for granted and used.

From this definition of post-literacy education, it is obvious that vocational education is part of the gamut of educational offerings. Vocational training is only one part of the whole education of an individual, although a very important part. In a loose way, it may be defined as the training of the hand if a contrast is to be drawn between it and the training of the head and the heart, or a training for employment and other economic ends as contrasted with general and cultural education of the individual.

These contrasts, however, are only to emphasise a particular dimension or aspect of education, because it is quite tenable to hold that work is really the essence of a person’s life, a manifestation of his quality and worth. Humankind, in this sense, is an *animal laborans*, an animal that finds meaning, self-fulfilment, self-perpetuation and immortalisation in the products of its hands. In this interpretation, vocational education (or, more narrowly, vocational training) assumes a new dimension, and may become equated with the whole of education. It is in this amplified sense that vocational training is taken in this paper, without however losing the prime economic emphasis. Vocational training will be concerned with equipping the individual with skills either for self-employment or employability by others, the ultimate purpose of which is to achieve economic, psychological, social and spiritual self-reliance, self-confidence and security.

The concept of rural development is a little more complex, but is of greater significance for our topic. It defines for us the boundary of our discussion, since post-literacy education and vocational training can equally take place in urban and rural situations, or meet peculiar problems of either or both. The problem of definition in this case is more complex because, in spite of years of scholarly endeavours to arrive at enduring criteria of what area should pass for rural in contrast to the urban, all that we have as criteria are still more ‘rules of thumb’ or stipulative definitions than definitive statements.

For the purpose of this paper, we shall adopt the criteria listed by Axim for defining a rural area. According to these criteria, a rural area is one:

(i) which is remote from concentrated urban groups (in spite of the rapid encroachment that the so-called urban areas continue to make on the rural);

(ii) in which people tend to live in relatively small and isolated groups;