The data on which this article is based are from research conducted at the OAS General Secretariat, in particular by the staff of the Department of Educational Affairs. These data have been published in the document CIECC/doc.600/82 add. 1, entitled *Illiteracy and Basic Education as a Subject for Inter-American Cooperation*, which was submitted to the Thirteenth Regular Meeting of the Inter-American Council for Education, Science and Culture (CIECC), held in Washington, DC, in October 1982. However, the responsibility for the contents of the article is solely that of the author.

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THE LAST TEN PER CENT

For a long time, the attainment of universal primary education on a global scale has seemed to be too far over the horizon to contemplate seriously. Yet enormous strides have been made in the past two decades. Consequently, in some countries one must start to address the question of whether and when truly universal education can be attained, and whether compulsory attendance in school may soon be desirable and feasible to introduce.

Data recently produced for the Harare Conference of African Ministers of Education in June 1982, showed that for developed countries about 93% of the 6–11 age group was already in school in 1980, and that for developing countries the proportion of the age group in primary school had risen from 48% in 1960 to 68% in 1980, and was expected to be 79% by the year 2000.1 In Latin America by 2000 the enrolment rate for this age group was expected to be 89.3%. So, for some regions of the world it may not be too early to be thinking in terms of the last 10%.

Any political commitment to achieve truly universal primary education requires terminological precision. Is universal primary education to be construed as universal capacity of the system, accessibility to every individual child, universal registration, universal attendance in the first grade or universal attendance through the primary cycle? Logically, I think, it should be the last of these that represents true universal primary education, a concept that is more precisely expressed through net level enrolment rates.

In 1980, net enrolment rates at primary level were only 62% for Africa, 81% for Latin America and 66% for South Asia. Moreover, as Fredriksen in his article in this Issue reminds us, these are average regional figures, and there were many individual countries with lesser proportions of the age group enrolled. It is essential to recognise the wide differences between countries and to accept at the outset that one is using 'the last 10%' more in a figurative than in an exact sense.

Outside the industrialised countries there are few countries where the real net primary school enrolment ratio is as high as 95%, adjusted for the length of the primary stage and nominal age of attendance. True, the statistical returns sometimes show higher figures than this (sometimes even over 100%), discrepancies in census-taking and consequent under-estimates of total population being the usual reason. Close local knowledge of a society and the situation among groups who are geographically, culturally and economically ‘marginal’, will often suggest that even in situations where it is claimed that UPE has been virtually achieved,
there may be a considerable proportion, even perhaps as many as 10 or 15%, of the children not actually in school. When even the compact, highly urbanised and industrialised Hong Kong does not claim to have all primary-aged children actually in school (because of the difficulty of enrolling the 'boat people', refugees, etc.), it seems unlikely that more sparsely populated countries with remote communities and migratory populations have achieved 100% actual school attendance.

Raising Enrolment Rates: The Next 20%

Many countries, therefore, are still at the stage of raising enrolment from 60-70% to 80-90% at primary level and it is premature to consider universalization in the strictly defined sense in their case. Several of these countries have experienced a comparatively rapid surge in enrolments from 30 or 40% to 60 or 70% under the impetus of UPE programmes generating a spate of official plans and greater popular enthusiasm for expanding the primary system. At that stage the urban areas and large villages are brought more comprehensively into the schooled population, and indeed all those groups and communities which are well integrated into the expanding monetary economy tend to be caught up in the movement towards universal schooling.

Depending very much on the characteristics of each particular country there may then be a somewhat slower phase of development in which the 'antepenultimate 10%' (raising enrolment rates from 70% to 80%) and the 'penultimate 10%' (80% to 90%) are brought within the schooling net before the problem of the 'ultimate' or 'last 10%' has in fact to be addressed. Many countries are as yet still grappling with the problem of the 'antepenultimate' and 'penultimate' deciles rather than the 'ultimate' one.

The challenge of raising primary school enrolment rates from, say, 70% to 90 or 95% is partly one of supply and partly one of demand. On the supply side, there is the overall constraint in many countries of the shortage of financial resources generally making each additional one or two percent increase in the primary school enrolment rate a major additional budgetary burden. Often there are also specially difficult logistical problems in physically providing for the unenrolled children, since they tend to be members of more scattered and rural populations which cannot sustain in every individual locality a viable-sized school of the standard size and pattern. A number of special solutions have to be sought, which range from one teacher schools, boarding provision, school transport, alternate years of entry, etc. Because of the difficulty of creating schools of viable size, and the distances that have to be overcome for school supervision and supplies, the costs of building and maintaining standard schools in remote rural areas are necessarily high. In practice, of course, economies are often made by providing a network of sub-standard schools where teachers are less well qualified or unqualified (and so paid less), by operating in makeshift buildings which local communities themselves may be asked to erect, and by providing a less intensive level of school supervision.

Such supply deficiencies however are bound to generate an adverse reaction with respect to people's desire for schooling and so to depress effective demand by parents for places. The groups which are late in demonstrating a desire for schooling tend to be those who are in a variety of ways isolated — economically, socially, culturally, geographically — from the mainstream of society, where the development process puts some premium on the possession of reading and writing skills and