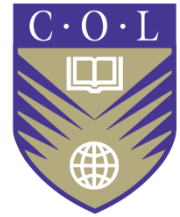


The Role of Formal and Informal Education in Tackling Development Needs and Attaining Development Goals



Opening of the Fifth Pan-Commonwealth Forum on Open and Distance Learning

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By

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Delivered by

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The Representative of the Government of Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, Northern Ireland and Head of the Commonwealth

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I am here to represent His Excellency Yoweri Kaguta Museveni, The President of the Republic of Uganda.

It is a great opportunity for me to meet the Commonwealth fraternity again after CHOGM 2007, which was held in Kampala, Uganda. The goal of the Commonwealth, like the theme of this forum, is to work together for development.

I would like to reiterate what I said in my opening speech during CHOGM 2007. I appreciate the sizeable human resource we have in the Commonwealth. We have, about two billion people in the Commonwealth which is one third of the World population. It is indeed, a big potential resource for development. However, if we are to harness this potential, there is need for accelerated and equitable access to quality education for all eligible citizens of the Commonwealth Countries. The Commonwealth, in her wisdom, established the Commonwealth of Learning as its tool for promoting access to quality education and training by encouraging the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies. This forum therefore provides an opportunity for institutions and individuals in the Commonwealth to meet and share what they have achieved through the catalytic influence of the Commonwealth of Learning and her sister organs.

I am reliably informed that there is a wide variety of nations, institutions and individuals represented here, with diverse experiences in using open and distance learning to transform their communities and greater access to educational opportunities for their nationals. I look forward to sharing experiences as outlined in our four tracks: health, livelihoods, provision for children and young people, and governance, conflict and social justice.

The aim of education is to transform the learner through the acquisition of new skills, competences, attitudes and knowledge. In both formal and non-formal education, there is somebody who knows something more, and therefore one who can guide, moderate, and supervise in passing out or graduating a learner from one level to another.

In order to discuss the link between education and development, we need to agree on what development means. Why should nations and individual households go out of their way to invest in education? I think that parents, people or nations invest in education for the following reasons:

- To prepare all those involved for life's responsibilities
- To enable them cope in a competitive world
- To be equipped with skills to enable them be resourceful persons
- To expose them so that they can make informed decisions
- To enable them play an active role in development.

In other words, I would like to propose that education is aimed at development. The development I refer to here is the development of an individual and also the development of communities and/or nations, each according to his or her or its potential.

In broader terms, therefore, *development* can be defined as a process of structural change in the economic, political, social and cultural domains of individuals, communities and nations. In this sense, education is a crucial aspect of development (Janaki 2006:2). The United Nations Development Program (UNDP), in its first human development report of 1990 described human development as "a process of enlarging people's choices". Development is therefore all-encompassing. It involves people living longer and healthier lives;

people having access to resources needed for a decent standard of living; people being well informed; people knowing their rights; people having families they can manage; and in this modern era, people informed of the dangers surrounding them and how to survive amidst these dangers.

Education as part of the process of development should create a conducive environment for people, individually and collectively, to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. From my experience in governance, the process of development is a function of both formal and informal education. That is why education should be made accessible to all like the Millennium Development Goals and the Dakar Declarations state.

Before the dawn of colonialism in what is now the Commonwealth, most indigenous peoples were educated informally. Traditional livelihoods were sustained through this informal system of education and passed on from generation to generation. Large pockets of our rural populations across the Commonwealth are still fully or partially sustained by these informal education structures. We need to learn from them so as to address some of the weaknesses in the predominant formal education sector.

This forum should take the discussion on education further by looking at it in terms of access and in relation to development. I agree with Tony Jeffs and Mark K. Smith (2008) who say that education is future oriented; it is all about development and growth. The task of education is to address the human development concerns which underpin the four sub-themes of this conference: health, livelihoods, provision for children and young people, and governance, conflict and social justice.

The opposite of development is poverty created by inability to attain relevant education. Poverty often deprives a person of spirit and virtue. It is difficult to make a man or a woman stand upright without education.

There is general agreement in development literature that human capital development is one of the critical causes of economic development. The other drivers of economic development commonly cited are foreign trade, technology transfer, resource allocation, structural transformation, and savings and investment. I wish to add that, human capital is a catalyst to all the other drivers. Todaro (1994) defines human capital development as "the productive investments in humans, including their skills and health, that are the outcome of education, health care, and on-the-job training". The experiences of Countries like India should help to illustrate this point. India has been able to shift more than 400 million people to industry and services partly because of her education system. How much has open learning and distance education contributed to this transformation? Outside of the Commonwealth, experiences of Countries like Japan are instructive. Japan's wealth is partly a result of increased access to education, particularly science and technology.

We need to redefine our development needs and find ways and means of making education accessible to enable us address those particular needs. In our times, our development needs are best described by the Millennium Development Goals, which include:

- Eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and

- Achieving universal primary education

I note that different Countries of the Commonwealth are at different points in achieving these human development goals. This makes the Commonwealth a welcome forum for sharing experiences. I believe that it is better to learn from each other than trying to re-invent the wheel. However, one thing is certain in my view: it is impossible to divorce formal and informal education from the process of achieving any of the stated goals.

Development is enabled by an environment free of destructive conflicts. Peace in all its dimensions is therefore a prerequisite to development. I propose therefore that both formal and informal education should put a lot of emphasis on training for peace building and conflict resolution. Opening access to education for many would go a long way, I believe, in creating sustainable peace and addressing causes of conflict. In our Country, Uganda, formal and informal education has played a big role in sensitizing the populace for peaceful co-existence and against unprincipled conflicts.

A nation's ability to provide Universal Primary Education (UPE) is key to achieving human development goals' bringing about positive social growth and transformation. Education inevitably leads to improved health through immunization, hygiene, nutrition, and behavior change. In Uganda and elsewhere in the Commonwealth, we have embarked on providing Universal Secondary Education as well because we believe that a healthy, educated, skilled and enlightened population is a major resource a Country can possess. The challenge at all levels, however, is in accommodating the large numbers of eligible beneficiaries using the conventional modes of provision. This challenge is even more pronounced in post-conflict nations where infrastructure is run down and older learners whose education was curtailed by conflict, are also seeking a second chance. Open schooling for formal, non-formal and informal education becomes the preferred choice in such circumstances. Countries like Namibia that have taken this path have a lot to teach us. Let us give them a listening ear.

Japan with its 127 million people in a land area of 377,835 sq. km., with limited mineral and oil resources but now with a GDP of US \$ 4.22 trillion, teaches us that a developed Human Resource is primary to all efforts of transformation and development. It is not by accident therefore that Uganda embarked on Universal Secondary Education (USE) in 2007. We shall also widen the network of Technical Colleges to impart skills. We already have 24 Universities, for we believe that education is key to development. Distance Learning (DL) has been in existence in Uganda since the 1960s, being offered by Makerere University. It is currently being offered at formal levels by other Universities and Institutions as well as being informal levels by Ministries and NGOs.

Reports from developing Countries that are using open and distance education to improve on livelihoods should encourage us to soldier on. Open and distance learning as a tool for continuing education and lifelong learning requires further investigation and investment. This is particularly pertinent in the modern global knowledge economy where the shelf-life of skill-sets of the working population is considerably shortened. Open and distance learning has ceased to be an option for adults seeking a second chance; alongside part-time evening and weekend classes which are rampant across the

Commonwealth, open and distance learning has become a major contributor to continuous up-skilling and re-training of the workforce. This should be enhanced even further.

Radio has been successfully used in informal and non-formal education across the Commonwealth. Farmer education programs on radio feature in most Countries. Radios keep the populace informed and educated on health matters. Training and mobilization of Teachers, Parents, School Governors and Managers by use of community radio programs is another popular feature. A lot more can be done on this front to take advantage of this broadly available educational technology.

What about promoting gender equality and empowering women? To ignore gender issue in the development agenda is suicidal. I liken development plans that ignore the full participation of one half of the population as an attempt to participate in a competitive marathon with one of your legs strapped to your backside. I propose the following as some of the ways in which gender equality and women empowerment has been and can be achieved in the Commonwealth:

- legislation to eliminate gender-based discrimination
- enforcement of gender empowerment and equality legislation
- increased access to education at all levels for both women and men
- affirmative action

The developed Countries among us have also managed to reduce child mortality. This has been achieved through proper health education, proper nutrition, increased income, increased provision of health facilities, legislation and enforcement. Efforts have been made to improve maternal health. All the health-related concerns call for increased awareness, which mainly comes through education.

Gross inadequacy of medical workers especially in the developing Countries of the Commonwealth reflects poorly on their human development indicators. As cited by this forum, the ageing populations of the developed Countries have created an almost insatiable demand for trained health care professionals to meet their own growing demands; and in the process creating gaps on the African and Asian continents. How can open and distance learning assist the Commonwealth member Countries to address this glaring anomaly? I am glad to learn that there are many efforts both distance and non-distance to train medical personnel, paramedics and nurses to alleviate the situation. In Uganda, for instance, the Ministry of Health runs open and distance learning programs for health workers. These programs have indeed trained over 7000 health workers. This has improved the status of health services in remote rural areas. There is still more to be done to train higher-level health human resource using this method. We are aware of similar initiatives addressing the HIV/Aids in Ghana (Aggor, 2006) through distance education.

Environmental sustainability is a key Millennium Development Goal. How has distance and open learning been used to address this need? I would like to draw your attention to the fact that the world is polarized over the issue of environment and development. While the less developed Countries seek to industrialize as fast as they possibly can, we are all concerned that this decision is environmentally

unsustainable. High-income OECD Countries lead the league of "Carbondioxide transgressors". With just 15% of the world's population, they account for almost half of all emissions. If the entire world emitted like High-income OECD Countries (an annual average of 13.2 tonnes of Carbondioxide per person), we would be emitting six times our sustainable carbon budget (UNDP:2008:3). The measures taken to combat this, however are commendable. The issue here is the role distance and open learning has played and can play.

So, in a nutshell, has increased access to formal and informal education by use of open and distance learning led to development? What role does education play in achieving Millennium Development Goals? The community-based education has given us opportunity to advocate for sustainable agriculture and the environment, to achieve food security, to acquire literacy skills, to propagate community health messages, and to ensure community engagement in technology use. If communities access education, they become more competent in their skills, attitudes, and concepts in order to gain more control over different aspects of life through democratic participation in their particular contexts.

In conclusion let us note that most of the developing Countries still have a substantial number of illiterate or semi-literate persons. This number, to a large extent, is left out or it contributes below its threshold in development. Sadly, this number is predominately made up of women and girls. Education is still out of reach for most of our people who live on less than one US Dollar a day. The challenge for us as leaders is to make education accessible, affordable, equitable and instrumental.

We need to devise better means of teaching and learning like has been done elsewhere in the Commonwealth. Technology-enhanced open and distance learning has immense potential. And given the commonality of the English language heritage across the Commonwealth, we can more easily also share digital and other resources.

We also have to build capacity in our people to have the confidence to exploit new technologies to improve their efficiency and effectiveness. Our people need to be informed so as to demand for better opportunities.

Governments, institutions and individuals across the Commonwealth need to reflect proactively on how we can use open and distance learning in formal and informal ways to prepare our human resource for the twenty-first century global economy. We need to ask ourselves how our educational policies and practices address the learning needs of women, people with disabilities, the elderly, and people living with HIV/Aids, among others.