

Editorial Introduction

Peter Ngomba

Background

Over the last two decades the winds have become more persistently chilling for many developing countries whose economies have fallen into the throes of profound and unprecedented economic crises. The halcyon years of the 1950s and 1960s, which were characterised by rapid expansion of many socio-economic sectors, have been replaced by a period of restraint and decline. Falling Gross National Product (GNP) and per capita incomes, retrenchment in public expenditures and cuts in take-home pay have occurred more frequently and proved enduring.

The economic crises and resulting financial squeeze have had damaging effects on education systems which are under severe pressures. On the one hand they suffer from financial stringency, caused by deteriorating domestic and global economic conditions. On the other hand, they have and will be expected in the future to satisfy a rising demand for education as a result of rapid growth in population, the drive for universal primary education, a general desire for more education and higher qualifications, and a continuous concern for improved quality in education.

In the face of adverse financial circumstances and increasing social demand for education, the central challenge to educational policy-makers and managers in developing countries is to find ways to use their limited resources more efficiently and effectively, and to augment these resources by tapping new sources of revenue. The daunting questions, however, have been: how can more be achieved with less resources? Can educational innovations help resolve the dilemma? How should education systems in developing countries adjust to economic crises and how should they, in general, adapt to a changing techno-economic international context?

The articles in this special issue of the *IDS Bulletin* on 'Adjusting Education to Economic Crisis' attempt to deal with some of these issues. They provide a set of authoritative analyses of the choices currently confronting education policy-makers in hard-pressed economies. Discussion of some of these issues had earlier been pushed up the political agenda by a recent World Bank policy study on *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalisation and*

Selective Expansion [World Bank 1988]. This 200-page report is perceptive, well-written and full of insights. It places educational problems in the context of the social, economic and political transformations that are now taking place in sub-Saharan Africa. Like most of the papers in this *Bulletin*, the World Bank report highlights the problem of deteriorating quality in education caused by the financial squeeze, and the resulting inadequacy of non-salary recurrent funding for education.

The articles in this *Bulletin* can be divided into three main categories. The first consists of country case-studies showing the extent of the economic and educational crises in particular developing countries (Hinchliffe on Nigeria; Fuller on Malawi; Hoppers on Zambia, and Aedo-Richmond and Noguera on Chile). The second category consists of more general, regional and sectoral analyses. Carnoy presents an update of his earlier paper in *Prospects* (1986) relating to developing countries as a whole, Tilak examines the Latin American and Caribbean region, while Heyneman and Etienne explore the higher education sector. The final category consists of articles principally concerned with adjustment strategies to deal with the crises (Adams; Psacharopoulos, Jimenez and Tan; Lewin and Berstecher) as well as the implications for education and training of industrial restructuring in developed countries (Kaplinsky). Below, I provide a summary of the major issues dealt with in these articles.

Economic Slowdown and the Educational Crisis

Most of the articles in this *Bulletin* present ample evidence of the detrimental effects of the economic crisis on the quantity and quality of education in developing countries. In Nigeria, Hinchliffe notes that in primary education the crisis, and the government policies to deal with it, have led to reduced numbers of teachers, a large decline in educational materials and more education charges on communities and parents. The result, he claims, has been a reduction in enrolments. Meanwhile in the universities, the impact has been a severe squeeze on non-salary goods and services, particularly those imported. The detrimental effect on the quality of education has been overwhelming.

Similarly in Malawi, Fuller reports that the protracted period of adjustment in that country in response to harsh economic factors since the beginning of the 1980s temporarily lowered school enrolments. This occurred as rural families drew on their children's labour to backstop erosion of subsistence and surplus production. But Fuller notes that this slowing of school expansion was short-lived. Popular demand for primary education rebounded strongly, far outpacing the government's limited fiscal capacity to build more schools and train more teachers. As static or declining levels of resources were stretched more thinly over a burgeoning number of pupils and students, educational quality declined. Hoppers also describes a similar situation in Zambia where the current economic crisis has led to a disruptive impact on the education system. But far from having only negative effects, Hoppers notes that the crisis has led to some positive outcomes. In particular, it has mobilised a remarkable amount of energy among parents, administrators and teachers that had laid dormant during periods of government abundance. According to Hoppers, these responses from the 'grassroots' (that is, the schools and the community) to the economic crisis have actually contributed to the implementation of the government's educational reform proclaimed in 1977.

Referring particularly to higher education, Heyneman and Etienne also argue that there is a major crisis of quality in education in developing countries due to the economic recession, unchecked private demand and political naivete about higher education functions. The low and declining quality in education has led to higher demands for tertiary education in the industrialised nations. To survive the crisis, Heyneman and Etienne note that developing countries need to develop 'centres of excellence' in higher education based on comparative advantage, as well as substantial and stable sources of financial investment. Such excellence must relate to a universal definition of excellence, since in years to come, local definitions will lose popularity and universal standards will be admitted with increasing candour. Tilak, focuses on Latin America and the Caribbean region, and points out that under the recent deteriorating economic conditions, and given popular pressure for more education, quality has tended to be traded off for quantitative expansion. A more specific examination of the effects of the economic crisis on a particular country within the Latin American region is provided by Aedo-Richmond and Noguera, who examine the Chilean case.

Adjustment Strategies Examined

The combination of financial stringency and increasing social demand for education has precipitated a review of alternative strategies for action. Prominent among these are cost recovery, management and structural

reform strategies. In reviewing adjustment measures open to education authorities in developing countries, Adams takes each level of education and specific areas of policy and makes specific recommendations as to what constitutes adequate measures for dealing with the crisis. These measures relate to cost recovery in educational financing (through the maintenance or increase of user fees), better resource management (of staff, materials and programmes) and more decentralised systems of educational management. Similarly, Psacharopoulos, Jimenez and Tan argue persuasively for increased cost-recovery in higher and secondary education, involving a shift toward greater private financing (user fees). This policy, they argue, would permit a reallocation of public spending toward levels and types of education with the highest social returns, particularly primary education. It would however be desirable, they point out, that the move toward private financing be complemented with the provision of widely available student loans and a limited number of selective scholarships. Furthermore, they argue in favour of decentralisation in educational management and the encouragement of private and community-supported schools.

Similar proposals are also made in the recent World Bank report. According to the report, adjustment should take the form of cost-recovery and unit cost containment (or reduction) and should include a structural reform strategy. Cost-recovery, the report argues, can be obtained through the institution, maintenance or increase of user fees as well as the reduction of subsidies. Meanwhile, unit cost can be contained or reduced by recruiting 'untrained but educated young people' (p.47), their slower movement up salary scales, their more intensified use, and the shortening of the duration of their pre-service training, while providing them with more in-service training and distance teaching. Furthermore, costs can also be contained by the reduction of the rate of educational wastage (repetition and drop-out rates) as well as the movement towards more day schooling. With regard to structural reforms, the report recommends structural simplification, decentralisation through more local autonomy in the generation and use of resources and in decision-making, as well as through the de-regulation of private initiative and the encouragement of private schools.

Proponents of cost recovery schemes that are based on user charges argue that by transferring direct costs away from public budgets to the individuals or communities who benefit directly from educational services, budgets are relieved of expansionary pressures and the urgent problem of the sustainability of large education budgets no longer poses itself. Furthermore, it is argued that user fees improve accountability and mobilise extra resources necessary to maintain or improve the quality of education. However, there are many who are sceptical about user

fees, and who feel that they may not be the answer to the crisis. This scepticism is echoed by Lewin and Berstecher. Their article focuses on the need to improve the flow of non-salary recurrent funding to schools, and asks whether user charges would lead to a significant increase in such funding. Moreover, they point to the possibility that user charges may be inequitable. Since many families might not be able to bear the cost of additional fees, user charges may exclude many children from poor families from attending school altogether. Lewin and Berstecher therefore emphasise the importance of a balanced response that values the educational participation of the most vulnerable sectors of the population against the need to finance provision at a viable level.

In fact, user charges pose a real dilemma. The economic hardships that prevail in many developing countries make the idea of recovering costs quite attractive; on the other hand widespread poverty, made worse by the economic crises, makes charging or raising fees a big problem indeed.

Concerning management and structural reform strategies, decentralisation and privatisation are prominent among measures deemed necessary for bringing about managerial efficiency. However, on privatisation a critical note is sounded by Aedo-Richmond and Noguera, who undertake a thorough examination of policies for the municipalisation and privatisation of education in Chile under Pinochet's military regime. Despite official justification for such policies on grounds that they bring greater administrative efficiency, improve the quality of education, and that they are more responsive to local circumstances and parental choice, as well as being cost saving, Aedo-Richmond and Noguera echo the views of critics of Pinochet's municipalisation and privatisation policies. Among other things, they note the hasty way in which the policies were implemented, which did not allow any public debate, nor for the promised experimental stage for proper evaluation of the programme. Moreover, the municipal authorities who now control the schools were appointed directly by Pinochet, and usually had no experience in educational administration.

However decentralisation can be an important means of improving the efficiency and effectiveness in educational management, if the process is well intentioned, acceptable, well designed and properly implemented. It can liberate managerial potential from bureaucratic restrictions and facilitate information and decision flows. It can also improve the ability of schools to respond to specific needs and resource opportunities within their local environments. But, it must be recognised that decentralisation may also pose certain problems. The meaning of decentralisation is not always self-evident; the measurement of decentralisation presents problems; the form of decentralisation

is not pre-ordained; decentralisation can be disintegrative and can be very expensive in terms of resource requirements. Bearing these problems in mind, and also recognising the forces working to maintain rigid centralisation in many developing countries, it is clear that there is a need to tread carefully and not simply regard decentralisation as an easy and self evidently beneficial prescription for improving educational management.

Even more importantly, there is a need to recognise that the question of centralisation-decentralisation is not an either-or question but one of degree. Because the bias of discussion is so often skewed towards the assumption that decentralisation is good and centralisation bad, it sometimes seems that two quite different and contradictory models are being counterposed — one characterised by tight unified control at the top and the other by considerable autonomy and initiative at the bottom. In reality, however, we are never talking about polar opposites presenting such a clear choice. Some central direction and control is always present, otherwise systems and organisations simply fragment and disintegrate. On the other hand, some local discretion is always needed, otherwise nothing gets done. The problem is how to combine centralisation and decentralisation in a way that contributes to greater efficiency and effectiveness. In fact, efficient organisation and management requires both as complementary components. A bureaucratic paradox, according to Perrow (1979), is that efficient organisations centralise in order to decentralise. The questions that need to be asked for each particular country, therefore, should include the following: how much decentralisation is necessary? What kinds of controls and management processes should be instituted to assure overall direction, at the same time as effective delegation, de-concentration or devolution?

Concluding Remarks

Most of the discussion in this *Bulletin* issue focuses on how education systems in developing countries can, have been, and should be adjusting to the economic crisis. The closing paper by Kaplinsky, however, examines the implications for the education and training systems in developing countries of industrial restructuring in developed countries. It argues that a movement is taking place in these countries from the production of standardised to differentiated goods, and that this has led to a growing emphasis on multi-tasking and the abandonment of the inherited emphasis on the division of tasks. However, for multi-tasking to prevail, it is also necessary that detailed labourers be multi-skilled. He then looks at the implications of all this for LDCs. Multi-tasking and multi-skilling, he claims, pose a serious challenge to educational planners in LDCs. Should they not be

responding to this in a proactive rather than reactive manner?

In a short update to his earlier paper published in *Prospects* in 1986, Carnoy seems to echo this challenge, and warns against the negative effects on long-term growth of cutbacks in educational spending. The cost of reduced educational spending, he emphasises, is even higher in a world economy being transformed by information technology. Such technology requires more highly educated manpower and higher quality education.

Many of the issues discussed in this *Bulletin* are, of course, very controversial and raise questions that go beyond the confines of the present discussion. It is to

be hoped that further debate will be stimulated by this discussion.

References

- Coombs, P. H., 1985, *The World Crisis in Education: A View from the Eighties*, Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Perrow, C., 1977, Three Types of Effectiveness Studies, in Goodman, P. and J. Pennings (eds.), *New Perspectives on Organisational Effectiveness*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass
- 1979, *Complex Organisations: A Critical Essay*, 2nd ed. Glenview, IL: Scott, Foresman
- World Bank, 1988, *Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: Policies for Adjustment, Revitalization, and Selective Expansion*, World Bank, Washington DC