

THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL

of

ECONOMICS

The Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society

Editorial Board:

A. M. Hawkins (Editor), M. S. Brooks, M. L. Rule and P. Staub.

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TRENDS IN AFRICAN EDUCATION IN RHODESIA¹

DR. M. I. HIRSCH

Mr. F. Rich's optimistic presentation of the Economics of African Education in the August number of this Journal calls for a closer scrutiny of the subject.

The economic fundamentals set beneath the "New Plan" which is calculated to produce "dynamic expansion in African education" are limiting the annual increase in government expenditure at 4% and pegging the total fiscal contribution to 2% of the gross national product. The plan and these limitations are not considered together. The plan is necessary in the national interest. The limitations are dictated by what government considers the economy can afford. Whether financial barriers cancel out declared intention seems irrelevant, and yet the relationship between the two is the key to the whole problem.

The Judges' (Education) Commission² (quoted by the Government and Mr. Rich as the authority for a number of radical changes) assessed that a 12% increase in expenditure is the minimum necessary just to keep pace with the population increase, rising costs etc. But this vital advice of the Commission appears to be ignored. Pegging the national expenditure to 2% of the Gross National Product (already reached in 1966) reaffirms the 4% limit but in addition makes it contingent on a consistent rise in national productivity of this degree, which we have certainly not enjoyed during the last four years. This limit has already been invoked and because it had to be exceeded last year the additional African registration school fee was introduced.

The impact of these limiting criteria for expenditure puts any expansionist policy in the realm of make believe. In fact unless the 8% shortfall can be made up in finance from other sources or effecting recurring economies, retrogression and not expansion will be the reality.

Mr. Rich believes, however, that "the record of the past 20 years is one to give confidence for planning for the future regardless of how insurmountable the difficulties may appear to be". But one needs a closer look at the official statistics to determine what produced past achievements and thereafter whether confidence for the future is justified with the new approach.

1. A reply to "*The Economics of African Education*" by F. Rich, Rhodesian Journal of Economics, August, 1967.

2. Report of the Southern Rhodesia Education Commission CSR 37-1963.

Growth of Expenditure on African Education

In the post-war period until 1962 the rate of expansion in terms of expenditure averaged 35% per year for most of the time, falling to 28.5% in the last four years. This put Rhodesia well ahead in the Africa Education Stakes. Translated into increases in pupils, schools, literacy, teacher training and narrowing the gap of race disparity in education, the endeavour made up the proud record which is still the official boast. But this progress was also part of the political reaction that the African was being pushed too fast. The change in government and political outlook in 1962, not surprisingly, coincided with a drop in the annual increase in expenditure to 9% until 1966, to 6.5% in the 1966/67 year to 5.8% for the present fiscal year. Correcting the latter three figures for the contribution to revenue by school fees levied and which did not apply in earlier years, the reduction is still greater and the 4% limit of annual increase has now more or less been achieved.

The pre-1962 era gave confidence in the future because the monies voted provided for expansion of education over and above the "standing still increase"—the critical minimum of 12%. The new economic outlook is so far below this level that the ingenuity of the administrators is being taxed to the hilt to slow the backward slide.

The next fact of importance in gauging whether confidence is justified is the extent of the backlog as the background of the new economic determinants.

The impression is given in the 'New Plan' that full primary education will be available to "all who can reach a school" and that half the rising population will obtain some secondary education. The claim is made that 85% of African children receive some schooling, that the lower primary facilities have met demand and that the bottleneck in the transition grades (from lower to upper primary) should now be met. The department envisages 80,000 completing primary education in 1970 or 1971, of which 40,000 will proceed to secondary education—10,000 to formal secondary schools. All in all, in spite of difficulties a reasonably favourable picture and basis for confidence. And all this will be achieved with little more than 50% additional annual expenditure by 1978.

But of the 4.2 million Africans one half are under 17 years of age. Of the 2.1 million not more than 900,000 are under the age of 6 years. The African population of school-going age (6-17 years) is unlikely to be less than 1.2 million if the official vital statistics are correct. With 650,000 estimated registrations at all levels (and this includes those over 17 years of age in some educational institutions) the percentage "at school" is about 50%. Diminishing annually with the passing out of each 17 year old group, the number will be more than replaced by the greater number of six year olds entering the educational field. The lower primary picture is rosier than the overall canvas

but the fall out before the upper primary is immense—50% (fall out at this level compares with the European fall out at Form 4!). And in the shadows is the fact that only 1.85% of children at school are above the primary level (and below 1% of the potential pupil mass)—the European level being 40%.

Importance of the Backlog

There is no need to go into more detail to establish that the backlog is immense and substantiate the official comment that “the Rhodesian educationist has to run very fast even to stand still”. But the backlog is reiterated because one needs to bear the picture constantly in mind if one believes, as the government says it does (in referring to educating the African) that “the country’s future depends on the utilisation of all its resources and to the utmost” and “this vast potential (of African children) must be realised if Rhodesia is to forge ahead as she planned to do and if she is to remain serene and stable”. And again, “what the country can afford” must be seen in the light of the backlog and the national need, not in separate compartments.

There is another aspect of the backlog which cannot be ignored or dispensed with by superficial justification—namely the race disparity in education. The European is served by a comprehensive compulsory education system in which every child is carried through a secondary education until the minimum school-leaving age, irrespective of his ability to absorb it or his parents being able to afford it. The service may be equalled elsewhere but could scarcely be surpassed whatever temporary difficulties it is experiencing.

The gap between African and European Education

To raise African education in the short term to such a favourable pattern we all know would be financially and in practice impossible. Bringing European education down to the African level in expenditure and policy would not rectify the deficiencies in the African sphere and would jeopardise the European presence, for the European places no less store on his children’s education than the African now does. The significance of the disparity lies in the need to evolve policies in both systems to give practical effect to the declared desire to narrow the gap progressively.

The official outlook ignores this factor in practice. The introduction of new principles in the African field not applied to the European will widen the gap. There is no limit of 4% on the annual increase in expenditure in European education, the increase being determined solely by need to maintain the system (economies and school fees notwithstanding). There is no pegging of expenditure on European education to a percentage of the Gross National Product (and it stands at the 2% level now). As a pointer, the increase in

expenditure on non-African Primary and Secondary education in 1966 with 1023 extra enrolments was £385,000 and the comparative additional expenditure on African education with an increased enrolment of 21,000 was £320,000. The rising cost of European education per pupil contrasts with the almost static African equivalent. Implementing the Judges' Commission recommendation of making primary education a community responsibility is nowhere on the European horizon. Transferring additional financial burden from the national to the local African level must in practice be restrictive when applied to the poorest section of the community. And the Judges' recommendation makes a point of warning against doing so. The mass of African primary education has been state-aided throughout the post-war phase, the European always nationally borne, apart from the recent introduction of school fees. The new move is accentuating the difference in treatment and must inevitably widen the gap in results.

Anxiety for the Future

These overall considerations thus lead not to optimism, but to serious concern and anxiety for the future.

It behoves one then to see whether the conclusions drawn are substantiated by practice? Is the trend which I have indicated apparent in the changes taking place? In drawing conclusions of course, curtailment has to be differentiated from economies. The official intention is to achieve economies with greater efficiency or without loss of standards

But the changes taking place are deeper than the gloss. None dispute that teacher availability is as great a limiting factor to educational expansion as finance, and especially in Rhodesia which is so dependant on untrained or elementary trained teachers. Mr. Rich's figures and the 1967/68 budget reveal that national expenditure on teacher training (government and state aided) which dropped appreciably since 1962 will only regain the 1963/64 level this fiscal year!

The new procedure of using six teachers to run seven primary classes is held out as advantageous. There will be no reduction in instruction and children will be encouraged to learn for themselves. And this superimposed on contracting the last three primary grades into two. One doubts if the consensus of educational opinion would concur. One thing is reasonably certain, it would not be acceptable in the European sphere. The overall savings will be the salaries of 2,000-3,000 redundant teachers. Is this economy or part of the backsliding?

There is no mention by Mr. Rich or the department of the counter requirements for more teachers to achieve the planned 80,000 qualifiers in primary education by 1970—presently at the 30,000 mark. At the average of

35 pupils per class (deduced from Mr. Rich's figures of total primary enrolment and total number of teachers) the additional teachers needed for the anticipated numbers in the last two primary (condensed) years would be not less than 2,600. In addition if 30,000 are to go to junior secondary schools this will require an additional 850 teachers for the first of the two year course, and these salaries will be at much higher scales than those declared redundant. An increase in salaries, especially if equal salaries will apply to European and African for equal qualification, will boost the cost. The latest proposed salary increases in non-African education poses a greater problem and may lead to a return to differential scales based on race. The inescapable conclusion is that the intention, finance and practice do not fit by any stretch of imagination.

The magic answers lie in transferring more of the financial burden (certainly not the control or direction) to the local community and in curtailing the growing number of potential pupils to "reasonable proportions". Both these trends are becoming increasingly evident.

The right of missions to open new schools on the old basis has been withdrawn. Only local councils may do so. What the missions have they may hold but they cannot acquire more. The advantage of community instead of mission initiative and management also conveniently absolves the government from any additional teacher costs or from those it feels it cannot afford. Under local initiative and management this escape will be easier under the principle of primary education being a local responsibility as the Judges' Commission advised.

In compensation the missions have been promised the right to open private schools, i.e. without the right to teacher salary assistance (which amounts to £7.10.0. per pupil per year). But we are yet to see whether they will receive a £10 primary pupil grant which applies to non-African private schools and this problem may be the reason for withholding the go-ahead.

Then we have the effect of school fees, the introduction of registration fees, the withdrawal or reduction of boarding grants. No matter how keen the African may be, or how he may strive to cope with the burden of cost being handed to him, there is little doubt that children are not entering school or are being withdrawn because their parents have not the money.

In "Rhodesia Invests in Education", the Ministry of Information admits that "Far more are kept from school by parents who genuinely cannot afford the very moderate fees involved or who prefer to exploit their children's

labour in the fields. . . . But by far the greatest proportion of those who are not at school are missing the advantage of education simply because there is no room for them in upper primary schools". And those who attempt to make the room are now precluded because of shortage of government funds.

Finally, in the exercise of transferring the financial burden, the reduction of a year in the upper primary sphere and its replacement by a two-year part primary course, will provide a further let-out for the treasury (whatever educational advantages may result from the change of curriculum). The normal grant-aided basis is to apply to Junior Secondary Schools but only those African councils or responsible authorities who have proved their ability to develop and manage their primary schools will qualify to establish a junior secondary school. Considered with the overall limits to national expenditure laid down for African education, the government will be able to control the expansion far easier than heretofore and will have to do so if they are to keep within their prescribed financial limits.

As for the government accepting the burden of urban African primary and secondary education we have only to look to the growing number of children in the major urban and peri-urban areas who cannot attend school to realise that we are falling behind.

Conclusions

It is no wonder that the Secretary for African education observes—"The whole foundation for expansion relies upon an adequate contribution from the Treasury, plus assistance to the national effort from the people themselves. It will be remembered that there were many doubts and misgivings about the financing of the Judges' recommendations. It was hoped that the Planning Mission would point the financial way—it did not. The prevailing thought was that community development and local government would have to shoulder much of the burden of primary schooling".

The government must know that the policy laid down will lead to relative curtailment of African education. It is difficult to believe that this is not the intention. But to dress it up as "dynamic expansion" is unforgivable and dangerous. The task it has set its departments must be unparalleled, and their efforts under the strain are to be congratulated.

This analysis does not include alternative proposals to meet Rhodesia's immense educational problem. These have been purposely omitted, being beyond the scope of the exercise given me. But there are ways and means of a practical and progressive policy—if one wants one.

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