

31 MAY 1993

Education As A Development Strategy

In order to make education more meaningful for development purposes, policies must be so designed as to take in and modify as needed all the economic and social indicators of the nation. Most governments, however, when trying to define an educational policy specific to development find themselves confronted with the problem of determining which approach may be the correct one. The most common response to this problem is by expanding existing facilities to be able to absorb a larger number of students—thinking, perhaps, this will solve the difficulty.

The alternative to this simplistic approach is the total reform of the system incorporating curricula modification and re-orientation of purpose to reflect the real resource requirements of the state. However, to date, development has resulted only in widespread rural-urban migration. In other words, to the transfer of human resources from rural parts to urban ones. In the process, rural education has suffered from growth and development. Today with growing pressure on the urban areas efforts are at last being made to attract people back to the farms and villages. If, therefore, it is possible to create new rural employment opportunities by encouraging self-employment schemes, it is also essential to make education more meaningful and specific to the needs of the people.

But the employment situation currently prevailing in the country is still such as to indicate a job market in which job specifications are over-exaggerated and, therefore, not really appropriate to the requirement. Far more jobs than at present need, therefore, be created for people with lesser qualifications, rather than expanding the present situation where even the most menial of job vacancies are sought after by the jobless including those with some form of certification.

That this represents the persistent lop-sided view we have that education is only for the acquisition of degrees and certificates and bears no relationship to the needs of development is so apparent. Under such conditions, education itself becomes a national waste. The unfortunate fact is that no government to date has been able to rationalise the real issue which is in a nutshell that education in its present form is useless for development purposes unless it can be related to the needs of the present job market. The need is, therefore, to define a policy for education which will enable us to begin educating the people by meeting all the development aims and targets through wiser planning than has been evident so far.