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Assisting Education Development In Small States

by Asif Khan

LONDON— Fourteen countries are cooperating in a new Commonwealth project to help improve the running of education ministries in small states which form the majority of the association's 49 members.

The 14, themselves small nations in various Commonwealth regions, are producing national case studies of their ministries of education as part of the project.

The studies will be used a manual for senior officials in ministries of education, which it is hoped, will help them improve the management of education systems.

The studies will also assist national and regional training institutions in the design of programmes in support of Education Programme of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the London-based international organisation at the service of all Commonwealth governments. They form part of a secretariat programme of activities in support of educational development in small states. The activities are in response to mandates from Commonwealth Education Ministers, who last met in Nairobi, Kenya, in 1987.

The studies will be analysed by Mark Bray, a senior lecturer in education at the University of Hong Kong, who will produce a draft for the manual.

Dr. Bray is being assisted by Professor Charles Farrugh, Head, faculty of Education, University of Malta, Dr. 'Ana Taufe' ulungaki of the Ministry of Education, Tonga, and Mr. Hubert Charles, Coordinator, Caribbean Network of Educational Innovation for Development (CARNEID), based in Barbados.

The 14 countries taking part in the project are Brunei Darussalam in Asia, Kiribati, Solomon Islands and Tonga in the Pacific, Maldives and Seychelles, Indian Ocean;

Jersey and Malta, Europe; The Gambia, West Africa, and Barbados, Dominica, Montserrat and St. Lucia, the Caribbean.

Structure

The studies contain information on the ways in which ministries of education are structured, organised and managed and on how they are actually run.

Area covered include national educational priorities and organisation and responsibilities of ministries. Shared functions such as youth, culture and sport are also examined.

Professional development, inter-personal relations and education ministries' links with non-governmental organisations, the private sector and international agencies concerned with education are discussed.

The studies followed a decision of a Commonwealth meeting on the organisation and management of ministries of education in small states held last year at the University of Malta.

The meeting, arranged by the Commonwealth Secretariat, was attended by senior education officials from The Bahamas, Cook Islands, The Gambia, Maldives, Malta, St. Lucia, Seychelles and Tonga.

Also attending were the universities of Hong Kong, Malta, the South Pacific and the West Indies; UNESCO, the Commonwealth Council for Educational Administration, based in Australia, and CARNEID.

Project Aim

The meeting agreed that the Secretariat should initiate a project

whose aim will be to:

- Produce a manual for senior education officials, highlighting options of relevance to small states in organisation and management;
- Assist the development of training, advisory and research capacities in National and regional education and management institutions; and
- Increase the efficiency and the effectiveness of ministries of education through the development of improved organisational structures and managements.

The project will benefit 24 Commonwealth members whose populations are under two million and another 16 associated states and territories with up to 100,000 people. Many of the 44 are small island states in the Caribbean, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean.

The diversity of these nations is reflected in the populations, land areas and wealth as well as in the range of historical, social, political and cultural traditions.

For example, Lesotho in Southern Africa has 1.5 million people compared with the 8,000 of Nauru in the Pacific; the vast expanse of Guyana contrasts sharply with the widely scattered 100-odd atolls that make up the Maldives, and the US\$17,570 per capita income in Brunei which dwarfs The Gambia's \$230.

This diversity is also a characteristic of organisational structures of education ministries in small states, points out Steve Packer, a chief project officer in the secretariat's Education Programme, who helped organise the Malta meeting.

Mr. Packer, from Britain, says education management is a highly visible activity in small states whose politicians and officials are known

to many locals. This affects management style and decisions.

Education ministries are often concerned with several areas, besides formal education. These include non-formal education, culture, youth, sport and information.

Larger countries on the other hand, have different ministries or departments to deal with these matters. Small states cannot afford too many specialists.

Small Ministry

"The small ministry has great potential strengths," he said. "Efficient lines of communication, a ready understanding of the roles and responsibilities of others and team work are all within the grasp of small systems."

"This can go some way in allowing the ministry to overcome a shortage of manpower. The challenge then is to create an environment conducive to using these strengths, and to develop a culture that promotes commitment and confidence through cooperation."

Mr. Packer said the Secretariat was encouraged at the response by the 14 countries which were invited to do case studies.

"All the studies have been done by people who are working in the education system, and we are very pleased about that. Most of them are senior officials-permanent secretaries or chief education officers-who attended the Malta meeting."

The draft manual being prepared by Dr. Bray of the University of Hong Kong will be finalised at a meeting in June in Britain. The intention is that it will be ready in time for presentation to Commonwealth Education Ministers at their next three-yearly meeting in Barbados late in 1990.

—Commonwealth Feature.