ABSTRACT

Since World War II, educationists have sought for means to improve the lot of the rural poor in Third World countries. Each of the proposed instruments — community development, massive expansion of elementary schooling, and manpower planning — has failed to reduce rural poverty substantially. The latest prescription for socio-economic uplift, nonformal education, appears to suffer from the same inherent weakness as the earlier panaceas, that is, the failure to recognize the need for fundamental politico-economic change if the lot of rural masses is ultimately to be better.

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# Who Will String The Puka Shells? Rural Education and Rural Development in Some Third World Countries/ Review Essay

In the Philippines the making of puka shell necklaces and bracelets is a cottage industry directed at the tourist trade. This clientele does not exclude the affluent Filipino elite, who are most adept at emulating the ways of their former colonial masters, particularly in the ornamentation of their persons.

The cottage industry is one way of giving the poor some minimal income and thus reducing the string of penury and unemployment. What has this to do with rural education and development? It relates to the training of the rural poor for employment or self-employment, to their acquisition of skills, attitudes and values calculated to maintain the stability of the social order and the international economy. Whether viewed from an international or societal perspective, the poor are always a problem for the pockets, not necessarily the conscience, of the rich. With the dissemination of dangerous aspirations through the mass media, the poor have become more insistent on sharing the wealth. If arrangements can be made to make them less poor, then perhaps their demands might become more reasonable.

The nagging problem is how this is to be accomplished. In the fifties educationists saw a possible solution in community development; in the "development" decade of the sixties it was in a massive expansion of elementary schooling. In the later half of that decade manpower planning reached its peak with a strong brief for middle and high level vocational/technical training. By the early seventies there was widespread disenchantment with the schools because of their failure to help reduce the poverty of millions of rural folk. Despite substantial investments in schools through loans, technical assistance and the use of scarce domestic resources, the rural poor of developing countries were relatively poorer and the few rich, richer. This was paralleled by a world economy of wealthier advanced countries and more impoverished less developed countries (LDC's).

Today the proposed recipe is nonformal education, the bandwagon on which renowned and less renowned educators are riding. It is so topical than no less than four major books on the subject have been published, not to mention the numerous proceedings of conferences and workshops, international and national,

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within the last six years. And learning to make puka shell necklaces belongs, not to the schools, now waved aside as bastions of irrelevance (at least for rural development), but to nonformal education.

It is no accident that the widespread criticism of schools and the flood of literature on nonformal training should occur at about the same time. If we are to believe the critics, schools are no more than custodial, credentialing and qualification-inflating institutions which have perpetuated the two-class social structure of Third World countries, to the detriment of the poor majority in the rural areas. They have spread the certificate/diploma disease and favored the children of the better-income class, thereby promoting an intergenerational correspondence of careers and lifestyles. Instead of serving as an avenue of upward social mobility for the poor, they have effectively blocked them from opportunities for advancement through an age-graded, lock-step and examination-ridden curriculum, supported by an economy which requires academic credentials for employment.

Criticisms of the schools vary from the passionate denunciations of Illich and Reimer[1] who would deschool society to Dore[2] who would divest them of their credentialing function. What is not always stated in forthright terms is that any organization that replaces the schools, whether it be convivial skills networks or non-certifying institutions, runs the risk of excessive bureaucratization over the long haul.

In any case, since the schools have failed in the important task of fostering urgent social change, it is time to turn to another way of promoting rural development through nonformal education, defined as

> . . . any organized, systematic, educational activity carried on outside the framework of the formal system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups in the population, adults as well as children. Thus defined, nonformal education includes, for example, agricultural extension and farmer training programs, adult literacy programs, occupational skill training given outside the formal system, youth clubs with substantial educational purposes, and various community programs of instruction in health, nutrition, family planning, cooperative and the like.[3]

This definition suggests that nonformal education has been around for a long time. The only difference is that it is now regarded as a more promising approach to rural development. Most of the books and articles on the subject are informed with high moral purpose: to improve the lot of the poor rural majority through an approach which includes education in its preferred nonformal shape. It is acknowledged that rural people are the most serious victims of the educational crisis and the consequent lack of progress in national development programs. Parenthetically, since some schools are also engaged in education, health, population control, proper nutrition and the like, it seems pertinent to ask whether in so doing they have become nonformal too.

Despite the sobering educational lessons of the fifties and sixties it is hoped that rural development will finally occur with an assist from nonformal education. Rural development is equated with

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[1]Ivan Illich, *Deschooling Society* (New York: Harper and Row, 1971) and Everett Reimer, *School Is Dead: Alternatives in Education* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1971).

[2]Ronald Dore, *The Diploma Disease, Education, Qualification and Development* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1976).

[3]Philip H. Coombs & Manzoor Ahmed, *Attacking Rural Poverty: How Nonformal Education Can Help,* A World Bank Publication (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974), p. 8.

> . . . the far-reaching transformation of the social and economic structures, institutions, relationships and processes in any rural area. It conceives the goals of rural development, not simply as agricultural and economic growth in the narrowness but as *balanced* social and economic development, with emphasis on the *equitable distribution* as well as the creation of benefits. Among the goals are the generation of new employment; more equitable access to arable land; more equitable distribution of income; widespread improvements in health, nutrition and housing; greatly broadened opportunities for all individuals to realize their full potential through education; and a strong voice for all rural people in shaping the decisions that affect their lives.

Although the nature of the economy and polity in which these desirable transformations are to take place is not explicity mentioned, it is implied that it might need to be altered too. However, the authors side-step this cricial issue by asserting that "these, of course, are long-range goals, but they provide the guidelines for shorter-range actions and the framework for rural development strategies."[4]

Why indeed should experts financed by the World Bank suggest outright that those who control the bank's funds must change the political economy of LDC's whose persistent poverty contributes to the continuing affluence of the funders? A man is not likely to give up *his* fortune to reduce his neighbor's poverty. Programs, handouts and loans sufficient to keep the neighbor from starving and from disturbing the international economy could do the job and keep one's own wealth intact as well.

Since the people to be assisted are rural folk, the bulk of the literature dwells on the improvement of agriculture and related pursuits, largely through nonformal training. The titles of articles in the 1974 World Year Book of Education,[5] devoted to education and rural development, are indicative: "Effective Education for Agriculture;" "Non-formal Education for Agricultural Development: A System Perspective;" "The Education of Farm People: An Economic Perspective;" "The Educational Needs of Farmers in Developing Countries." Part I of this book presents general issues, including the following points:

1. An integrated team approach to rural development, including education, requires that government, universities, heads of educational and other institution sacrifice some of their autonomy (resulting in fragmented development efforts) in promoting rural development (Wilson, p. 30).

2. Progress in agriculture depends in part on having multiple sources of out-of-school learning available to rural people, but the education of children of peasants is education for whatever those children will do in life. In other words, their life chances should not be restricted by schooling with a rural bias (Anderson, pp. 45-46).

3. Additional investments in education for a developing country will yield little results unless there is already successful modernization in process (Schultz, p. 64).

4. For effective utilization of rural education, the best and least expensive mix of mass media should be utilized along with corresponding modifications in curricula, written materials, classroom utilization and the retraining of local teachers and other community personnel (Hornik, Mayo and McAnany, pp. 89-90).

5. To modernize agriculture a nation should generate appropriate policies and support for non-formal learning activities as an integral part of its agricultural effort. More resources allocated to this process (even if at the initial expense of formal education) will provide more rapid gains in *productive capacities* both among

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[4]Coombs and Ahmed, p. 13.

[5]Philip Foster and James R. Sheffield, (editors), *Education and Rural Development* (London: Evans Brothers, 1973).

farmers and those individuals engaged in agri-support activities (Green, p. 112).

6. There are two educational objectives which are easily defensible from the standpoint of rural development and from the realities of school institutions: (1) basic literacy, broadly conceived as the ability to use the skills of reading, writing and arithmetic for real and local purposes, and (2) those skills and technologies relevant to survival in particular community contexts, which would seem to be the natural curriculum of schools in any setting (Singleton, p. 134). Comment: Here is an author who has found something for the schools to do vis-a-vis rural development.

7. While certain programs in Nigeria, Bowswana and Jamaica have achieved results in terms of their specific objectives, they have overlooked the necessity of approaching rural development organically, i.e., in its totality. Are such organic models available from the evidence accumulated so far? (Wood, p. 146).

8. If farmers are to improve their production, more attention should be given to them in terms of training, adult education including women who participate importantly in farming activities (Watts, pp. 150-161).

9. The roles of research, extension and schooling in agricultural development should be ascertained to optimize their contribution to agricultural productivity (Evenson, pp. 163-182). But research is deemed as most promising in terms of "pay-off."

It is significant that socialist China, Cuba and Tanzania are singled out for special attention in the case studies in Part II of the Year Book. They appear to have experienced varied success in developing nonformal rural education. In the eminently practical realms of agriculture and public health, the Chinese have demonstrated the viability of innovative non-formal training structures: learning in the communes is characterized by a minimum of theory, the elimination of all superfluous academic subjects, and is neither age-graded nor sex-differentiated. It is addressed frankly to increased productivity. However, the Chinese themselves attribute this success to ideological transformation, political socialization being the over-riding aim of the entire educational system at all levels. Open door education for middle and higher levels insures the orientation of students toward class struggle, increased production and scientific experimentation. Work done by students in factories and farms is genuinely productive work. Nonformal training in the rural areas is run by the people themselves, tailored to the particular needs and problems of the locality. Even research, pursued largely to resolve practical problems in industry and agriculture, is conducted cooperatively to promote the collective spirit. The training of barefoot doctors is another example of nonformal training which has yielded some appreciable results. The adequacy of food supply and the obvious improvements in health conditions suggest the effectiveness of this approach. Whether it will work equally well in the long run is another question. The downgrading of intellectuals who must be red before being expert may have unpredictable results.

In connection with the integration of theory and practice, what would be the optimum proportion for the best results? Schools and universities admit their programs are still experimental. At present, most institutions seem to use one-fifth to one-half of the time for practical work, depending on the type of school and grade level.

With regard to cadre training, a member of a family may be assigned to a cadre school a thousand miles away from homes. If it is the mother who is sent and there are young children, how does the mother resolve her family responsibilities?

Generally, a grandmother of the family or a friend takes over the chores. There are many grandmothers available for this kind of job because female laborers retire at 55. Husband and wife, children and parents undergo periodic separations. This seems to be an accepted fact of life in China. (Reviewer's note: when I asked about this during a visit there in 1976, the reply was that "children are not private property.")

With regard to graduate work, few universities have reopened their graduate programs. Possibly the few that have reopened would be involved in research. With a population of more than 800 million, China has 300 institutions of higher learning (universities of the type of Peking Univerity and Sun Yat-sen University). Enrollments in such institutions number about 6,000 or less at the undergraduate level. Where will the more highly trained personnel of the future come from? There are, of course, the colleges, the universities and the research institutes run by the factories. Will these institutions be able to provide the future manpower of various levels of competence and skills? The answer will come in the next generation when China will be depending on the graduates of the period after the Cultural Revolution.[6]

But insofar as the rural masses of China are concerned they eat enough food, enjoy adequate health and are certainly given attention by the rulers; however, the importance attached to ideological conformity suggests that party leaders regard it as the instrument of continuity, i.e., of the process of socialist construction. The Chinese model also exemplifies what can be done through self-reliance without depending on external sources of funds and ideas to energize the educational and developmental processes. But this is a result of the historical circumstance of self-imposed isolation, one which many LDC's cannot duplicate, since their economies are vulnerable to the pressures of the world market and their educational systems to the persuasive arguments of educational jet-setters.

Cuba's efforts to mobilize education for rural development have had uneven results. In the heady initial years of revolutionary fervor the campaign to eradicate illiteracy in the countryside through the mobilization of urban youth and teachers was quite successful. Equally successful was the land reform program and supportive measures which have won the farmers to the socialist cause.

> In a number of ways, the agricultural population has been singled out for preferential treatment by the revolution. They are now assured employment throughout the year; schools, hospitals, and other human services are available, in many cases for the first time and free to all. They receive the same ration of food and clothing as the urban population and are usually able to supplement it with their own production. They participate in mass organizations such as trade unions, the Communist Party, Committees for the Defense of the Revolution, People's Courts, and the like. In sum, their lives have been radically altered for the better, and they are, for the most part, fervent supporters of the revolution. (Paulston in Foster and Sheffield, p. 243).

The nonformal education programme of sending urban secondary students to work in the rural areas for forty-five days every year, now reduced to six weeks, has been less effective. The number of dropouts from Cuba's elementary and middle schools is distressingly large, as is that of the youth who neither work nor study. Moreover, at the university level enrollments in agricultural science and technological convey are low relative to the national need to mechanize the agro-industrial sector.

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[6]Dolores F. Hernandez, *Revolution in Education in the People's Republic of China,* Professorial Chair Lectures, Monograph No. 26 (Quezon City: University of Philippines Press, 1976).

For these reasons plans are afoot to relocate secondary schools and even universities in rural areas and to mop up the pool of overaged students through special remedial institutions-all this to produce the new socialist Cuban man.

Although it is too early to determine the effectiveness of the Tanzanian strategy for rural education as a means of rural development, it is not too soon to examine the correspondence between policy declarations and actual implementation. Accepting the hard realities of poverty and of the preponderance of rural dwellers in the population, President Nyerere has called for the promotion of self-reliant rural development through schooling and other educational alternatives. In fact rural development is to be the primary goal of all educational effort. This is difficult to accomplish in a country with a colonial inheritance of elitist schooling and vast numbers of rural illiterates. Yet the farmers are to be persuaded to undertake community development in Ujimaa (socialism for rural development) villages through improved farming practices and other crafts. While primary schooling is to be universal, secondary and higher education are to be confined to the able few, owing to the scarcity of resources and the need for the graduates of secondary and tertiary levels to serve the larger rural society. The nonformal education programs for adults, illiterates, members of cooperatives, farmers, youth, craftsmen are not faring too well for lack of qualified teachers and adequate motivation. The latter is an especially difficult problem because the crusade to convince the people to embrace of socialist goals does not seem to have gotten off the ground. While there is great love and respect for Nyerere, it has not been followed as yet by an enthusiastic pursuit of collectivist study and work. Nevertheless the Tanzanian government has declared an overall policy of work and study in all schools and of developing the socialist spirit in all its citizens. The major problem lies in winning the people to this cause. It is hoped that nonformal education will accomplish for rural development what the schools have failed to do. (Odia in Foster and Sheffield, pp. 261-274).

One of the unresolved problems of all societies is that of reconciling the diversity of talent and the thrust toward egalitarianism. Dore has suggested that talent be rewarded with power and prestige, but not with money. There is no certainty that this would work. The socialist examples cited have demonstrated a capacity to improve levels of living among the poor, but not without sacrifice. Sacrifice, self-denial, the collective spirit and hard work — all commendable moral virtues — are the bases for education, formal and nonformal, in socialist societies. Whether these attitudes and the processes of inculcating them are transferable to a different socio-economic context without altering that context remains to be seen.

In their global survey of nonformal training as a means of helping reduce rural poverty Coombs and Ahmed begin with an over-view of rural education in the developing world before presenting 25 thumbnail sketches of nonformal education in action. The cases range from agricultural extension and training programs through training for non-farm rural skills to the use of mass media.

The community development idea is revived in the self-help approach, illustrated by the Indian Community Development Program, the Animation Rurale of Senegal, the Philippine Rural Reconstruction Movement (PRRM), The Commila Project of Banglaesh and the co-operative movement in Tanzania. In a subsequent book Coombs and Ahmed expand their thumbnail sketches into detailed accounts presented as instances of employment — related education programs.[7] These

[7]Manzoor Ahmed and Philip H. Coombs, *Education for Rural Development, Case Studies for Planners* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975).

books do not mention the Vicos project in Peru, perhaps because many aspects of that project, however successful, are not replicable. The Vicos experiment in participant intervention was undertaken by anthropologists from Cornell University in collaboration with the Peruvian Indian Institute.[8] Acting as *patrons* to some 200 Quechua-speaking Indian families whose members were workers in an hacienda, the researchers taught the Indians improved techniques of corn production, management skills, political know-how in managing their own affairs and in the process transferred power into the subjects' hands. That the Indians became adept in these matters and continued their course of self and community improvement after the researchers had left suggests the efficacy of the approach; however, the establishment of a school in the community was a later development, as was the acquisition by the peasants of the hacienda as their communal property. Moreover, were it not for the prestige of Cornell University and its linkages with influential people in the Peruvian government, the experiment might have been a dismal failure. These unique factors make the experiment difficult to imitate, however strongly the authors argue for its transferability. The important point is the steps taken, both instructional and political, to transfer power to the peasants themselves.

In their first book, Coombs and Ahmad draw three basic conclusions. First they stress the need for greater integration of agencies involved in nonformal education for rural development, which does not mean consolidation but proper linkages and coordination. This is easier said than done in view of the empire building tendencies of some organizations. Secondly, greater decentralization would permit adaptation to variations in the needs of different rural areas. This does not preclude an overall systemic view of all programs concerned, but it does entail the training and redeployment of development personnel. Finally, there is need for greater social equity, in the sense that many of the programs studied appeared to benefit those who are already better off, e.g., the farmers in the Commila project.

With respect to educational technology, Coombs and Ahmad recommend a strategy of rural education that puts central emphasis on *self-instruction* and on the production of well-programmed print materials and simple forms of reproduction, radio broadcasts, simple do-it-yourself learning devices and any other means that can facilitate relevant and useful learning of many sorts by many people, whether they are inside some organized education program or acting on their own. In the Philippines, the study of a rural community suggests that a mix of radio, simple print materials such as comic books, and people would probably be effective in getting messages to the inhabitants of remote rural areas.[9] Finally, better management training is recommended for those who operate nonformal education projects as well as for farmers.

To be fair, Coombs and Ahmed consider both formal and non-formal education essential and mutually reinforcing. Nor do they intend nonformal education only for the poor and unschooled people of rural areas.

> Actually, nonformal education exists in industrialized countries. Among other functions it constitutes a principal means by which the most highly educated experts—medical doctors, scientists, engineers and other professionals — keep pace with the fast moving frontiers of their respective fields. Nonformal education is also extensively used by secondary and college graduates to enrich the cultural and general intellectual dimensions of their lives.[10]

[8]Henry F. Dobyns, Paul L. Doughty, Harold D. Laswell, (editors), *Peasants, Power, and Applied Social Change* (London: Sage Publications, 1971).

[9]Priscila S. Manalang, *A Philippine Rural School: Its Cultural Dimension,* unpublished dissertation, University of Pittsburgh, 1971.

[10]Coombs and Ahmed, p. xxxi.

If this is so, why the emphasis on improving agrarian pursuits? It would be more candid to admit that food is a basic necessity and that developing countries should establish priorities in terms of such essentials.

The point that nonformal education is not new bears repeating. As early as 1963, Curle recognized two great enemies of development: traditional inertia and the autocratic rule of a non-egalitarian minority. But even he would concentrate on community development, with emphasis on agriculture, as part of his educational strategy. And even then he doubted the efficacy of formal education in promoting development.

> But obviously we cannot move at more than a certain speed in formal education — it is too expensive and the results are too slow in coming to have the necessary immediate effect on the economy. For all these reasons, we have to find every possible way of utilizing and building on existing skills, abilities, and energies, of making sure that no potentiality is wasted. People have to be mobilized by means such as community development, outside the school system. Schools constitute only one method — though the most important in the long run — of producing a sufficient volume of educated persons for development.[11]

Personally I find the lack of distinction between training and education unsettling, because while the former may lend itself well to various types of skill programs, the latter is what goes into the making of intelligent citizens and reflective men and women.

What are we to make of all these outpourings on nonformal education? We must assume that its proponents mean that nonformal education will create more jobs or opportunities for self-employment. Will it? If there is some ground for doubting this, then perhaps developing societies should be more cautious in following the advice of educational experts to invest more cautious in following the advice of educational experts to invest more heavily in nonformal education. It will be recalled that in previous decades they willingly followed expert advice vis-a-vis community development, primary schooling, manpower planning and vocational/technical training with disheartening results. Perhaps instead of pursuing the new educational orthodoxy, efforts should concentrate on re-educating the ruling elite in such countries. Such education should focus on the unremarkable but upsetting idea that the polity and economy should be transformed first. Elite groups are fully aware that educational systems, whether formal or nonformal, are the tamest institutions for promoting orthodoxies to maintain a status quo which works to their advantage. So it is too with the world economic order. Why should the rich industrial nations participate in bringing about a change likely to reduce their profits in the free market? By all means let us get on with non-formal education to keep the LDC's agrarian and carry on as markets for the finished products of rich countries and help rural folk become less poor and hence less unruly and disaffected.

To answer the question-title of this essay, until that millenial politico-economic transformation actually occurs, the poor will continue stringing puka shell necklaces for the rich to wear.

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[11]Adam Curle, *Educational Strategy for Developing Societies: A Study of Educational and Social Factors in Relation to Economic Growth* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1963), p. 157.

Depuis la seconde guerre mondiale, les éducateurs ont cherché des moyens d'ameliorer le sort des déshérités dans les regions rurales du Tiers Monde. Aucune tentative cependant—développement communautaire, expansion massive de l'enseignement élémentaire, planification de la main d'oeuvre-n'a réussi à dimineur considérablement la misère des milieux. La dernière prescription faite pour élever le niveau socio-économique - l'éducation non-formelle - semble souffrir des mêmes faiblesses que les prédédentes car en faits il faudrait reconnaître la necessité de changements fondamentaux sur le plan politico-économique avant d'espérer améliorer le sort des masses rurales.