

REORGANISATION OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING
TO MEET THE REQUIREMENTS OF AGRICULTURAL
DEVELOPMENT

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1. The Context

Agriculture in Sri Lanka provides 75% of her export earnings and more than 50% of the total employment. The value of the country's exports falls far short of her import needs and one obvious way to reduce the deficit is to produce the maximum amount of food at home. Sri Lanka has a farm work-force of about 2.2 million which provides no more than 1.75 million man years of work.¹ To occupy the under-utilised quarter of its agricultural work-force and absorb in addition any appreciable proportion of the million unemployed young people is a truly formidable task and only partial success can be expected. Development strategy must provide for intensive use of existing agricultural lands, extension of agricultural lands and effective distribution, and supporting productive public works programmes utilising surplus labour for land improvement, irrigation and infrastructure.

The Mahaweli, District Development Programmes and special area projects such as NADSA are already in progress and more are planned. The change from rainfed to irrigated farming, new settlements, intensified land use, innovation and diversification all demand new farming systems, new techniques and new information which can only be brought to the farmers by modern training, extension and information systems. It is therefore opportune that Dr. Prasad, with his wide Indian experience should have come at this time to assist the Education and Training Division of the Department of Agriculture and the FAO in conducting this Workshop. There could be no more opportune time for a stock-taking of what we have done, and what we need to do, to meet the challenge of major new agricultural development programmes.

¹ Matching employment opportunities and expectations -
Dudley Seers Mission. ILO Ceylon 1971.

2 The Preparation

To begin at the beginning, let me quote my favourite author poet Tagore - who described his city-built education as "a luggage van waiting for branded bales of marketable result". As a child in school Tagore felt like a 'miserably caged rabbit in a biological institute'.¹ In those days children sat all day at desks or on the floor and school was a drudgery of chanting after the teacher and scratching on slates at his instruction. When Tagore founded his own school at Santiniketan he tried his best "to develop in the children of my school the freshness of their feeling for Nature, a sensitiveness of soul in their relationship with their human surroundings".

Ghandi in India also pleaded for full involvement of the village environment in education. The whole philosophy of Nuffield Science, Environmental Science and the Problem - Solving Approach - which revolutionised school science teaching in the west - stems from the same basic concept.

The rural environment is a boundless source of fascinating micro and macro revelations which provide a never ending source of problems to be resolved at every level of the child's perception. For a lifelong interest in agriculture and the living environment it is in the primary school that the seed must be sown, and at no subsequent stage should it lack the care to nurture it to maturity. The worst way to introduce a child to agriculture is to feed him on chalk and books, then drag him suddenly from his classroom cocoon into a field to break clods or pull weeds without being prepared, like Blake "to see a World in a grain of sand". Without enlightened natural science and agricultural education in schools the potential of the young work-force to willingly engage in agriculture can never be achieved.

¹ The Religion of Man, Rabindranath Tagore. Unwin.

3 The Position

This Workshop is convened to consider the area of agricultural training that comes after school and is intended to prepare both innovative farmers and the extension personnel who will work with them. I have made my plea to the schools to send young people suitably prepared for further training and other speakers will out-line the roles of the various institutions involved. There is no doubt that compared with many of our neighbours in Aisa Sri Lanka has been at a disadvantage in the resources devoted to agricultural training. This applies to the number and quality of institutional facilities, personnel cadres and numbers of students. From 1980 the situation is more favourable. In terms of new buildings and improvements of existing ones, the World Bank assisted project for agricultural extension will contribute 20 million rupees in capital costs for new and existing institutions. It is planned to have eight fully equipped regional in-service training centres covering the major agro-ecological zones, with a farm school or vocational training centre in each district. A further 15 million rupees will provide additional equipment and vehicles, including spare parts and improved services for the repair of audio-visual equipment and other training aids.

Provision is made for the recruitment of additional manpower, both at the training and supporting technician levels.

A. McCallum¹ in reviewing the manpower situation talks of "the tremendous need for an expanding cadre of professionally qualified agriculturalists in the Ministry of Agriculture" and recommends that resources for agricultural education "especially of teaching staff" are made available. A number of McCallum's suggestions made in 1970 have in fact been implemented but the shortage of qualified manpower in research, extension and training still continues to constrain the speed of progress in all these institutions.

¹ Organisational and Management Requirements for Agricultural Development in Ceylon FAO.Rome 1970 A. McCallum.

It is not only the shortage of manpower but also the lack of specialised preparation of research, extension and training officers in the various subject fields that reduces institutional efficiency. The Post-Graduate Faculty of the University in Peradeniya is a young institution offering a limited range of specialised courses at post-graduate level. The UNDP/FAO Project and other International Agencies have provided overseas training fellowships but so far only a handful of training officers have qualified as subject matter specialists. It is hoped to send an increasing number of training officers under the FAO/UNDP programme in order that important fields such as water management, farm management, crop and livestock specialities and rural home economics for women will be covered. In-Service centres will be built up expertise in the special subject interests of their agro-ecological zone and should be in a position to provide in-country training to subject matter officers in the extension programme and specialist farmers by 1985. If we take the four key objectives in Training Strategy enumerated by Wortman and Cummings,¹ the first "involvement in the development of the region they serve" is certainly on the way at the existing Regional Training Centres if not yet at District level. I will summarise the others and pose them as question for our joint consideration at this Workshop:

- Do all agricultural agencies - including research and extension organisations also *TRAIN* while performing their duties?
- Do training activities provide as their major objectives
 - (a) opportunities for individuals to acquire relevant skills, knowledge, understanding and attitudes?
 - (b) opportunity for young people to assume responsibility early in their careers?
 - (c) inspirations for individuals to work purposefully to devise new ways to speed progress?
- Is the individual enabled to systematically up-grade and broaden his training and permitted to assume greater responsibilities with increasing ability?

¹ To Feed this World, Wortman & Cummings. 1978. Hopkins,

In speaking of the regional emphasis of training activities, credit should be paid to the Department of Agriculture for its forward-looking policy. The programme of reorganisation of research, extension and training, on an agro-ecological basis, with which this FAO project is associated, is now well under way. The credit for this innovation is largely due to a former Director of Agriculture, Dr. E. Abeyratne in association with our Chairman today, Dr. C.R. Panabokke, the present Director, who is largely responsible for the admirable map and tabulation of distinguishing characteristics of the Zones. *An idea, quietly accepted in Sri Lanka with little publicity, is in fact an achievement being watched and admired by many of our Asian neighbours!*

The evolution from the research-extension dialogues to the formation of Regional Technical Working Groups, which began meeting in 1978, provides a face-to-face communication forum in which technical officers from research, extension and training meet together to take stock of the regional problems of the past season and plan co-ordinated strategies for the future. The trainers have a vital role to play in interpreting the findings of research, participating in adaptive research and conveying information in an effective way to extension workers and farmers. The regional training institutions are not only the physical meeting point, the trainers are the intermediaries between agricultural research and farm extension. At the district level, the farm schools and vocational training institutes must pass on the necessary techniques and skills to enable farmers to carry out the recommended management practices effectively.

In future every contact farmers holding will be a demonstration farm. It is also "the ultimate experimental unit." The efficiency of his holding as an extension model to his follower farmers and as feed back to research depends not only on the extension workers who advise him, but on the training received by those officers and the extension practices formulated by research, extension and training staff together.

The team approach which is steadily growing among these officers in Sri Lanka may be rated as another of the Department of Agriculture's major achievements.

AGRICULTURAL TRAINING CENTRES IN SRI LANKA

(EXISTING AND PROPOSED)

- ▲ NATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE
- REGIONAL TRAINING CENTRE
- ★ DISTRICT TRAINING CENTRE

