

IDRC

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT RESEARCH CENTRE
Box 8500, Ottawa, Canada, K1G 3H9 • Telephone (613) 996-2321
• Cable: RECENTRE • Telex: 053-3753



FEATURE

A monthly features service on scientific, technical, and educational subjects pertinent to development.

Words: 940

BOTSWANA PREPARES FOR FREE EDUCATION

by ERNEST CHILISA

With an area of 582 000 square kilometres and a population of only 800 000, Botswana is for the most part empty. Large land areas, low population, and relatively dispersed settlement patterns give rise to a number of problems in the education sector.

It is difficult and expensive to provide primary schools to a widely scattered population in remote areas because of the problem of gathering sufficient children in one place. Rural children must often walk long distances each day to attend school and many simply do not live within daily walking distance.

In comparison with most African countries, Botswana is culturally homogeneous as about 80 percent of the population belongs to the same ethnic and linguistic group. Setswana, the main language, is spoken and understood by most of the people, if not all, and together with English, it is the medium of business and education.

In the 12 years since independence, Botswana has undergone a faster transformation than most countries experience in a quarter century. Its national income rose from P36.8 million (approximately U.S. \$48 million) in 1966, to over P200 million in 1976. Development expenditure by the Ministry of Education was approximately P6.6 million (US \$8.6 million) during the financial year 1977/78, accounting for 15 percent of that year's total development budget.

Last year, a National Commission on Education issued 150 recommendations and these were followed by a Government White Paper in July 1977. The Commission's major recommendation, which was also accepted by government, was that free primary education be introduced in 1980.

To prepare for the implementation of free education, an inter-ministerial committee of the Ministries of Education, Local Government and Lands, and the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning has been created. The committee is responsible for the areas that will be most affected when free education is implemented: the training of needed teachers, funding, making classroom space available not only in urban areas but also in remote areas, and developing the primary school curriculum.

There are presently three Teacher Training Colleges in Botswana whose output is about 230 teachers per year. In 1976, out of a total of 3,921 primary school teachers in the country, 1,204 were untrained and had only primary school education. Since last year the teacher training colleges have been expanding to cope with the number of pupils expected to enrol in 1980. (The present enrolment in primary schools is about 151 900 pupils; it is expected that in 1980 there will be 183 000 pupils.) The government has also launched a scheme whereby the untrained teachers will be phased out by gradually sending them for further training. By 1980, the teacher training colleges will be accepting twice their present number of trainees and the number of teachers is expected to increase to 5,700. To supplement these efforts, the government is planning to create a fourth teacher training college in the near future.

Although free education will be introduced it "shall not be compulsory", according to the Deputy Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education, Mr K. Masogo. However, no one will be turned away because of lack of adequate accommodation. The Commission found out that there were only 2 271 classrooms in the country but 3 918 classes, which left some 1 647 classes without accommodation of their own. In 986 cases, classes worked an afternoon shift in classrooms which had been used in the morning. By 1980, the number of classes is expected to reach 5 600. The government, under its Accelerated Rural Development program, has started construction of additional classrooms.

The cost of the building program is likely to be more than P35 million per year for the first few years. Substantial funds are expected from the Swedish International Development Agency, through the Accelerated Development Project, to meet the demand for more primary school accommodation.

The primary school curriculum is being revised in order to provide a type of curriculum whose objectives follow the recommendations of the National Commission on Education. Setswana will be used for the first four years of the primary course with the transition to English taking place in Standard Five by which time the children must be fully literate in Setswana. The present practice is to teach in Setswana for the first two to three years of the primary course. Under the new program English will be taught as a second language from Standard One to prepare the children for the transition to English as a medium of instruction.

There will now be a greater concentration on Setswana, Maths and English, as well as more emphasis on Botswana and African history and geography. The University College of Botswana is currently establishing a centre for Setswana studies which will assist the development of reading materials. There is a serious dearth of Setswana literature and the few books used in schools were mostly written and published in South Africa. Teachers with a talent for writing are being encouraged to undertake the production of readers and novels in Setswana.

The primary school curriculum will also be made more practical. Through modelling in sand and clay and using wooden blocks, abstract ideas will be expressed in concrete form so that the pupils can acquire a sense of colour, length, breadth, shape, volume, texture and weight. Models will assist understanding in geography, and dramatic presentations will be used to teach history.

Botswana will also establish intermediate schools to ensure that no children leave school with only primary education. At present, less than 45 percent of primary school leavers find places in secondary schools. With the new schools, education will be made available to all Botswana children for an additional two years beyond primary education.

END

Ernest Chilisa is a freelance writer in Gaborone, Botswana.

IDRC-F94e
November 1978