

When the work began

Of course, a lot of effort has already been put into Third World education by government and by voluntary groups, and a lot of progress has in fact been achieved. From a Canadian viewpoint, the story of this educational co-operation begins more than a century ago with the work of pioneering missionaries, but a convenient starting point for the modern period is the early 1950s, the Colombo Plan era, for it was in 1951 that the first trainees came to Canada under government auspices, and in 1955 that the first Canadian teacher went to Asia. Through the 1960s the number rose, the Canadian University Service Overseas emerged as a major channel for educational aid, and the focus shifted to Commonwealth and Francophone Africa, where the shortage of trained educators was most severe.

Overseas service by Canadian educators posted in the Third World has declined — though not necessarily their influence, because while the developing countries have stopped asking CIDA for classroom teachers from Canada, they instead seek Canadian experts in teacher training and curriculum development and specialized technical training.

Our scholarship and training awards for talented citizens of Third World countries have likewise been transformed — partly by linking training in Canada much more closely with the specific needs of CIDA-sponsored development projects, and partly by switching much of our activity into third-country arrangements, which means that we finance a person's training either in the home country or in another developing country, usually within the same region. This plan has the considerable advantages of reducing culture shock and readjustment problems, providing courses more relevant to the students' future working conditions, and strengthening national or regional training centres in the Third World.

Over the years, Canada has sponsored a great diversity of educational projects in the developing countries — from the Accra technical trades training centre in Ghana, co-ordinated by the Saskatchewan Department of Education, to the Thailand comprehensive schools project, assisted by the University of Alberta; from teacher training and university extension centres on small Caribbean islands, to films to help rural people in Africa learn how to protect their basic health. I am confident that all these efforts have been worthwhile and have indeed made things better than they would otherwise have been. We have reached the stage, in fact, where in our dealings with developing countries, we often encounter a generation of officials and leaders, including at least one prime minister, whose careers were shaped by a training in Canada or through Canadian-sponsored education projects.

Specialized training limited

One troubling cloud on the scene should perhaps be given some thought. The Third World still needs access to many forms of training only available in the industrialized countries. This legitimate need is one of the factors that should be weighed carefully as Canadian educators cope with the problems of international student mobility — or in other words, as we make decisions about the differential fees that could deny Canadian education to many Third World students, except for the income elite, thus limiting access to specialized training vitally needed for development.

An important part of Canada's effort in educational assistance to the developing

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