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RESERVE

THE VILLAGE POLYTECHNIC AND THE FAMILY LIFETRAINING PROGRAMME

Purpose, progress and problems.

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THE VILLAGE POLYTECHNIC AND THE FAMILY LIFETRAINING PROGRAMMES:  
Purpose, progress and problems.

By

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ABSTRACT

This paper is intended to review the goals, progress and problems of both village polytechnic and family life training programmes as instruments of rural development in Kenya. Village polytechnics aim at bridging the gap between increased opportunities for primary education and the limited places for further training and employment thereby reducing the problem of rural underdevelopment. There are about 400 of these institutions 250 of which receive financial aid from the government. The V.P.P. has helped in retaining about two-thirds of the youth in the rural areas (Evaluation Mission Report 1974). The programme thus helps to reduce the gravity of the more dreaded problem of rural-urban migration. Several questions are raised in the paper with regard to the objectives of the V.P.P.; whether leavers work in rural or urban areas, whether their occupations utilise the skills acquired during the training, and whether they work for other employers or they engage in self-employment.

The F.L.T.P. was initiated in 1974 as a modification of the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres that existed prior to the 1960s. The conception of the programme was to educate poor mothers on how to best feed their children, and in critical cases and for demonstration, the mothers and their children were kept at these centres for two to three weeks. It is argued in the paper, however, that this programme is not effective as an instrument of training, mothers on prevention of malnutrition as the centres role is basically curative. The stay in the Centres is also seen to be too short to allow sufficient improvement on the part of the sick children and for mothers to learn the new methods which include diet - balancing. The centres are also faced with serious staffing and general financial problems. It is subsequently suggested that both VPP and FLTP should be merged to enhance the adoption of technology and skill formation to promote rural development. Instrumental in this task it is felt should be the extensive consultation and restructuring of the programmes with the centre for Research and Training at Karen as the Co-ordinator. The solutions to the problems of V.P.Ps lie in increased financial viability, diversification of the courses and particularly the initiation of agriculture - oriented courses other than carpentry and masonry. On the other hand the success of the FLTP depends on the increase in the numbers in order to have an impact on the community, extension of the training time and recruitment of qualified instructors.

#### THE VILLAGE POLYTECHNIC AND THE FAMILY LIFE TRAINING PROGRAMMES:

Purpose, progress and problems.

The Village Politechnic programme and the family life training programme are two programmes within a broad national campaign to improve the quality of life in the rural areas of Kenya. But despite the fact that they have the same goal, there has been no coordination in their administration in the years since they came into being. Accordingly therefore, they are treated separately.

#### THE VILLAGE POLYTECHNIC PROGRAMME (VPP)

A Village Politechnic (VP) is a low-cost training centre in a rural area. It aims at giving primary school leavers from that area skills, understanding and values which will make them able to look for money-making opportunities where they live, and to contribute to rural development by building up economic strength of their own community. <sup>1</sup> The Village Politechnic Programme is specifically aimed at two things-

(i) to bridge the gap between the increased opportunities for primary school education, and the limited opportunities for further training and employment,

(ii) tackle the problem of rural underdevelopment or "underdevelopment."

The Village Politechnic Programme is expected to contribute towards the development of the rural areas by equipping primary school-leavers with needed skills for rural employment and self-employment. It is the express intention of the Village Politechnic Programme to keep the trained primary school leaver in the rural area of his origin.

The main objective of the Village Politechnic is to train the primary school leavers so that he can play a greater part in the modern sector of the rural areas, whether it be industrial or agricultural. <sup>2</sup>

There are today about 400 Village Politechnics in the country, of which upto 250 receive direct financial assistance in the form of grants from the government. <sup>3</sup>

The idea of Village Politechnics was initiated by the National Christian Council of Kenya in 1968, and following recommendations and studies was adopted by the government as a policy of youth development in 1969. It was also decided as part of the same policy to establish a centre for Research and Training which, among other functions, would look into levels of village technology, undertaking staff training and up grading for the Village Politechnic, and carry out curriculum revision.

#### Performance of Village Politechnic Programme

The most appropriate standard for measuring the performance of the Village Politechnic Programme is the stated purpose of the programme. Unfortunately, data on the overall impact of the Village Politechnic Programme or the nature and extent of rural underdevelopment (or rural lack of development) is not readily available. In this paper, reliance is had on the various studies that have monitored or evaluated specific aspects of the Village Politechnic Programme or specific regions of the country.

It is envisaged by the Village Politechnic Programme that promotion of rural development is to proceed through the two related objectives of providing local areas with trained artisans, and helping to stem the drift of youth to the cities. With this in mind, perhaps five indices which could be used to measure the performance of the Village Politechnic Programme are:-

- (i) How extensive the Village Politechnic Programme has been in terms of numbers trained,
- (ii) Relevance of the technology imported to Village Politechnic trainees,
- (iii) What happens to Village Politechnic leavers,
- (iv) Capacity of the rural areas to absorb Village Politechnic trainees in gainfull economic enterprise, and
- (v) Capacity of Village Politechnic Programme in employment creation.

training capacity, it is impossible to assess the extent to which the village politechnic facility has penetrated the rural areas. It is reasonable to assume that the Village Politechnic Programme has enabled a significant number of youths to acquire and/or improve skills in certain economic activities, which skills have provided employment possibilities to these youths. But it must also be stated that in relation to the number of youths quitting formal schooling at Standard Seven, the numbers trained in village politechnics is insignificant. In fact village politechnic training is fast attracting secondary school drop outs and form IV leavers.<sup>4</sup> This new development, a direct consequence of the success of village politechnic leavers in securing paid-employment, is beginning to stultify the original intention of Village Politechnic Programme to train primary school leavers.

In order to equip the youth who undergo village politechnic training for gainful rural employment and rural development, the Village Politechnic Programme must furnish such trainees with skills that are marketable, locally relevant, and capable of independent application to new areas of economic activity. When the Village Politechnic Programme was launched, there was such a serious lack of rural artisans that the crisis of relevance rarely arose. Practically every course was marketable, and most were relevant to the immediate local area. As Village Politechnics have continued to produce artisans in certain "popular" courses like carpentry and masonry, the problem of marketability has started to arise. It has become increasingly difficult to keep the trained youths in their localities as such localities have become "flooded" with village politechnic trainees who have not always been able to locate gainful employment in the immediate locale.

Another problem has been the apparent failure of village politechnics to identify local needs and adjust their training accordingly. For example, despite the fact that the most crucial rural need is presently improvement of agricultural production, village politechnics have continued to produce carpenters and masons in their multitudes.

The tendency to standardise courses<sup>5</sup> which largely results from the inability of the village politechnics to define the precise objectives of the training which they provide<sup>6</sup> threatens to make the Village Politechnic Programme a shortsighted programme. Very soon a flood of artisans are going to fill the rural area and the urban areas, armed with

many such artisans, or because the training received is in an area that is not immediately needed.

The performance of Village Politechnic Programme in this regard therefore has been good without being laudable. So far nearly every person produced has been "needed." But if the situation continues, it is going to be difficult to absorb up trainees in the rural labour markets.

The most important index for measuring the performance of Village Politechnic Programme is the leaver index: What happens to the products of village politechnics? An examination of what has happened to leavers is the best indicator for understanding the achievements, problems and potential of the Village Politechnic Programme. In relation to the objectives of the Village Politechnic Programme the important questions are:<sup>7</sup>

- (i) whether leavers work in rural or urban areas,
- (ii) whether their occupations make use of the skill acquired during training and,
- (iii) whether they work for an employer or are engaged in self-employment.

The Evaluation Mission Report (1974) found that two-thirds of village politechnic leavers remain in the rural areas after leaving village politechnics.<sup>8</sup> This finding is consistent with David Court's conclusion in his 1972 Study of Maseno Village Politechnic leavers - a study in which he found similar distribution among leavers.<sup>9</sup> Dergson and Barker, in a 1979 study, have recorded similar results about village politechnics in Central Kenya. Their survey shows that close to 60% of trainees in village politechnics would like to work in their respective rural areas.<sup>10</sup> It would appear therefore, that two-thirds of village politechnic products remain in the rural areas.

The main reason why the other one-third drift to the towns is that job-opportunities are more easily obtained in towns with greater job security. Infact not all the two-thirds who remain in the rural areas are engaged in gainful employment. There is a significant minority who are at "home", engaged in subsistence farming and/or intermittent

a conclusion concerning the nature of their occupations i.e. whether they use skills acquired during training or not. Of course those who are at home are not using it.

Self-employment is a stated ambition of the Village Politechnic Programme. There has been a deliberate effort by some village politechnics (e.g. Ahero) to help form cooperatives or workgroups for its leavers. In Ahero such workgroups have been very successful in bricklaying and carpentry/joinery. But in general self-employment is the exception, rather than the rule among village leavers. Formation of workgroups needs some form of formalization to sustain and protect the group interest. The cheapest form of formation is through the registration of a Co-operative Society. Yet even this requires capital investment. Since assistance to acquire the fundamentals for a business enterprise is usually lacking, group-enterprise has been rare.

On the other hand, individual village politechnic graduates find it difficult to practice their trade other than through paid-employment because of lack of initial capital even for the purchase of tools, and in many cases because demand for their skills is lacking. The vast majority of village politechnic graduates therefore find that they have to seek out an employer and sell their skills.

One of the major problems in working for an employer is that advancement on the job frequently depends on recognised qualification. This is one of the "feed-back" pressure that tend to focus village politechnic training on Government Trade tests. Many graduates of the village politechnics actually offer themselves for Government Grade Test III and then just join the labour market.

The capacity of rural areas to continue to absorb village politechnic trainees who come out in ever-increasing numbers is obviously a big problem without careful fore-planning. This is related to the question of relevance of the technology imported, and the ability of the Village Politechnic Programme in employment creation. In order to ensure that the rural areas in question will continue to absorb village politechnic leavers, training should aim at the provision of skills and values which, in addition to fitting people for recognised money-making roles, motivates trainees to seek out new latent opportunities but also to perform tasks of community and family improvement which may not have any



Programme cannot be wholly successful if it overemphasises the economic value of training to the leaver. On somewhat impressionistic conclusion, it does seem that this is one of the problems that cause drift to towns.

Finally, the question of employment creationvillage politechnic training alone does not create jobs, and the problem is that of identifying or creating the demand at which to direct village politechnic instruction. The assumption that the village politechnic training can create new job opportunities is (partly) based on an expectation of increased purchasing power in the rural areas. The Evaluation Mission (1974) recognised that potential contributions of village politechnics reach far beyond the provision of directly marketable skills. (p. 22) But so far there is no direct evidence to show that village politechnic training has contributed to creation in the rural areas. Derynson and Barker conclude that the role of village politechnics in promoting rural development is over-ambitious, since the success of the village politechnics tends to depend highly on the pre-existing levels of rural prospects. The Evaluation Mission (1974) foresaw this when it concluded that problems of poverty, unemployment and excessive internal migration can only be effectively met through an increase in the quality of life in the rural areas compared to urban ones (p. 22). Such an increase involves much more than raising the level of cash incomes.

Village Politechnics have provided very relevant training to a significant minority of rural youth mainly standard seven leavers, who have benefitted from this training by increasing their prospects for employment in the rural areas. A minority of those trained have continued to drift to the towns, but both the group that drifts and the other that is left in the rural area have tended to be absorbed in wage-employment. In a very general sense, village politechnic training is meeting a need, and there has not yet been serious problems of absorption of these leavers. However, there is every reason to conclude that bearing rational planning and adjustment in the training offered, very soon village politechnic leavers are going to saturate the rural labour market and problems of joblessness will begin to arise. Within this broad framework of relative success, there is no evidence at all that village politechnic has necessarily contributed in the development of the rural areas - though its potential in this regard is widely recognised.

Problems of the Village Politechnic Programme

Problems of the village politechnics (and village politechnic programme generally) may be divided into two - short - and long-term.

Short-term problems boil down to a lack of finance for various operations or developments. The only other short-term problems seem to be staffing. Financial problems are caused by the fact that village politechnics are run on community self-help basis, with assistance from the government and other interested organizations. Government assistance is provided in terms of grants - but the procedure of qualification is unclear. Other interested organizations also give grants, which are necessarily intermittent. The local community is mobilised through "Harambee" Participation in management and provision of contractual work for the village politechnic. To say the least, it is difficult to make forward planning on the basis of projected Harambee Contributions. As for governmental grants, these are not coordinated with the needs of the institution in question. A strong tendency has thus emerged among village politechnics towards self-preservation. More effort is expended on contractual work and making and marketing of goods from the village politechnic to try to secure sufficient funds to meet budgetary projections, than on training and assistance of leavers.

The specific financial problems have been identified by the Kenya Shelter Sector Study as:- 12

- (i) inadequate capital for buying training materials, tools and equipment,
- (ii) inadequate funds for the construction of staff houses, workshops and classrooms, and,
- (iii) inadequate staff to cover all the institutions throughout the country.

The problem of staff goes beyond inadequacy<sup>of</sup> numbers. Although the centre for Research and Training at Karen was meant to service village politechnic programmes by training staff and monitoring curriculum, the centre is not fully operative, and has tended to concentrate on village technology development. Although the centre does train staff, it is

recruited teachers. In the absence of any suitable standards to use, village politechnics have tended to recruit staff on the basis of government Trade Test and/or experience. Not only does this result in aligning village politechnic training along Government Trade Test patterns, it also confuses the major emphasis of village politechnic training.

The long-term problems are more complex, but start with matters of organization and administration of village politechnics. In matters purely of policy, village politechnics are supposed to fulfil a community need and improve the quality of rural life. This policy can only be effectively realised with a very clear definition of the precise objectives of training which village politechnics provide. Village politechnics must be equipped with the technical and material capacity necessary to determine local needs and adjust their training accordingly. Such capacity has been lacking. But even if such resources were available, village politechnics would still face the dilemma that on the one hand, they must be able to respond flexibly to local needs and they therefore cannot be governed by a centralised and standardised system but on the other hand, some kind of central authority is necessary in order to coordinate mutually useful experience to raise and allocate funds, and to stimulate local management committees.

In the long run, Ferguson and Barker have no doubt at all that the greatest danger to the development of village politechnics appears to be the growing lack of flexibility in organization which prevents village politechnics from reacting quickly enough to changes in the local economy (p. 10)

Although many studies have tended to minimize its significance, the fact of continued migration into the urban areas of trainees of village politechnics is a problem that needs solution. Projections indicate that the percentage drifting into towns is likely to go up over the years, and as Ferguson and Barker record, the scale on which up training is currently proceeding is not sufficient to counteract the strong centripetal forces which continue to underlie the drift to the urban areas (page 2)

Another problem is the continued assumption that village politechnics can contribute to the solution of the problem of rural underdevelopment. It needs to be established to what extent village

rural underdevelopment. Rural development, after all is the only true standard that can be used to measure the success of the village politechnic programme.

On a somewhat generalised plane, the solution to the village politechnic programme's long-term problems involve either financial solutions, or re-examination of policy.

The village politechnic programme is a stated government policy of youth development. Given the problems it is intended to help solve, it is unwise to leave in the hands of rural communities with mere remote control and grants from the government. The government should take over the duty of financing village politechnics and thus release the creative resources of their management committees to concentrate on identifying and adjust training to local changes. This financing by the government should extend to and include staff training and grading.

It is recognised that village politechnic programme can and already does contribute to the solution of rural underdevelopment. Precisely how much contribution the village politechnic programme is making is difficult to tell but obviously very little. This is because the correct measure of rural development is the corresponding quality of life in urban areas. Introducing that quality in the rural area, as has been stated, involves more than just skill formation. However, the village politechnic programmes, must have points in common with all the other programmes, governmental and voluntary, that seek to improve the way of life for the rural areas. It is necessary to coordinate the village politechnic programme efforts with the efforts of the other programmes. By themselves village politechnics can do little to create demand for their services and the skills they teach. But with any increase in the general progress of an area there should be a corresponding opportunity for the village politechnics and their trainees to participate in this improvement. This is a potential area for coordination between the village politechnic programme and the Family Life Training Programme.

#### THE FAMILY LIFE TRAINING PROGRAMME (FLTP)

The FLTP which was initiated in 1974 is an adaption of the Red Cross-Sponsored Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres of the 1950s. The Nutrition Rehabilitation centres existed from the 1950s as voluntary

displaced economically or culturally as a result of the upheavels that accompanied nationalist struggle for independence. Although such centres were originally initiated by the Kenya Red Cross, assisted by the British and Swedish Red Cross, other voluntary agencies, usually Christian Organisations, soon followed their example and established various centres all over the country for the same purpose of poor relief.

After independence in 1963, these centres continued to operate where poor mothers would go for two weeks (in the average) training and for other forms of assistance from the Kenya Red Cross and other organizations. In the first decade after independence, the Nutrition Rehabilitation centres continued to operate with the image of centres for poor mothers who were unable to feed their children. The Kenya Red Cross which was largely responsible for the centres was increasingly becoming reliant on local councils for assistance in addition to the help it was getting from the German Red Cross. When the German Red Cross ceased its help in 1972, the Kenya Red Cross approached the Kenya Government together with UNICEF for assistance.

The response of the Kenya Government was to try to establish the viability of the Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres, an exercise for which the Institute for Development Studies was retained to conduct an evaluation study.<sup>13</sup>

This evaluation study gave the following recommendations (among others):-

- (i) The Kirathine concept attempts to meet a felt need of the people which other institutions do not seem to be meeting i.e. the carrying out of an education campaign against malnutrition, a campaign which is inexpensive.
- (ii) That the concept be spread throughout the country - and to identify clearly the communities' needs in terms of the concept, and secondly from the beginning to clearly define the body that would take the overall responsibility of implementing and coordinating the whole nation - wide programme

As a result of that evaluation study, the government formed

1. To review the evaluation report of the Nutrition Centres,
2. To prepare a policy paper on the centres,
3. To make decisions on how the new programme was to be executed and financed.

The final policy paper adopted followed closely on the recommendations of the Kirathino evaluation Study Paper. The programme was to be executed by the Department of Social Services, which was to be assisted in this effort by a National Advisory Committee with members from the government and other agencies. The government was to meet the salaries of staff at the centres, while UNICEF agreed to meet the training costs (e.g. food) and other training material such as household furniture, bedding equipment for demonstration e.t.c,

The programme kicked off towards the end of 1974.

#### Objectives of the FIEP

The policy paper adopted by the government changed the name of the centres from "Nutrition Rehabilitation Centres" to "Family Life Training Centres" because the former name did not bring out certain aspects of training that the Centres were catering for.<sup>14</sup> The objectives of the FIEP may be stated to consist in:-

- (i) Training of mothers in the uses and preparation of locally available food-stuffs whose use will result in reduction of malnutrition,
- (ii) Training of mothers in simple health techniques so as to bring about improved environmental hygiene,
- (iii) Exposing of training to Family Planning ideals and methods, and
- (iv) Introduction to trainees to appropriate village technology which consist in simple techniques that can be adopted to improve rural life. This last item was introduced as a result of the realisation that part of the malnutrition

It is intended that trainees of the centres should not only adopt the training they receive upon returning to their homes, but influence other people to similarly adopt these teachings.

#### Performance and Problems of the FHTP

There has been an evaluation on the FHTPs by one Dr. Hoorweg which unfortunately, I have not had the advantage of reading due to inavailability. It is therefore rather difficult to pinpoint the specific areas of success and failure which the centres have experienced. A few more obvious problems may however, be mentioned.

The first limitation of the FHTP is that the centres are too few in comparison to the rural population. As of 1981, there are only twelve centres in the whole country. However, successful, and however hardworking the staff thereat, certainly the specific felt community need which the centres are meeting cannot be reaching very many mothers and families.

The second problem relates to the selection procedure. The criterion for enrolment (which enrolment is free) is that the mother must have a child who is suffering from a disease of malnutritional causes. And yet the centres are training centres and not treatment centres. Obviously there is need to expand the training to encompass a greater section of the community. There are many mothers who do need the training offered but who do not have children suffering from diseases related to malnutrition.

The third obvious limitation is the duration of stay at the centres. So far the rule is that mothers stay for three weeks, although this time can be extended if the sick child has not improved sufficiently. One of the more progressive policies of the FHTP which seeks to motivate the mothers in using village technology in their homes is exposed to serious risk of failure because of this duration. Much longer time is needed to adopt to new technology - and perhaps learn how to improvise its equipment. How much longer time depends on the technology and the community in question, but three weeks does look like too short a time.

The duration of stay is also important in relation to the success of the efforts at family planning and diet - balancing. The implicit

false. Most of the problems should be blamed on economic inability. Perhaps locally available food stuffs are not always beyond the economic means of the rural families. But where every waking moment is spent on the struggle to keep alive, balancing of diet becomes a luxury. The training at the centres could import some form of trade which could go along way in improving the quality of life in the rural areas. Three weeks is an inhibition in this regard.

The other obvious problem relates to staffing. There is no qualification stated in the policy of FIETP for their staff. The majority of the staff at the centres were inherited from the voluntary days of the programme, and tend to lack any form of training (apart from experience). The number of staff at the centres, averaging three per centre, is also too low. If nothing else, enough of them should be employed.

The improvements necessary in the FIETP and in the administration of the centres can better be identified after a serious evaluation surely has been carried out. As of now, perhaps one area that needs urgent attention is the village technology effort. There is a lot here that can be combined with the village politechnic programme.

JOINT VPP AND FIETP ACTION - Promotion of skills.

Both the VPP and FIETP are programmes for rural development. A similar emphasis in both is the provision of skills. While Village Politechnic Programme intends skills imported to be either used in paid-employment or to be used in self-employment, the FIETP intends what little of the skills it imports to be used for self-employment in the improvement of the economic status of the family. If the village politechnic and the family life training can be built within close proximity to one another, the effort at village technology adoption and skill formation can be taken as a joint venture. Within the current arrangements, the centre for Research and Training at Karen is best placed to coordinate this effort.

In order that such a joint venture should succeed, extensive consultation and restructuring of the programmes (particularly the FIETP) will be necessary. The starting point will call for the extension of the time taken and the mode of instruction at the centres.



Notes

1. Ministry of Cooperatives and Social Services, How to start a Village Politechnic page 3
2. Kenya Village Politechnic Programme: A report by an evaluation Mission of the Government of Kenya and the Norwegian Agency for International Development, 1974 I.D.S. page 25
3. Estimate taken from oral conversation with staff at the centre for Research and Training, Karen.
4. P.W. Ogwen, General Information on Ahero Village Politechnic.
5. This tendency is observed by Ferguson and Barker, "Village Politechnics in Central Kenya: progress, problems and prospects" I.D.S. Working Paper No. 359 page 10
6. David Court, "Dilemmas of Development! The Village Politechnic Movement as a shadow system of Education in Kenya" in Court and Ghai, (Eds) Education Society and Development: New Perspectives from Kenya, O.U.P. 1974, Nairobi, page 226
7. David Court above identifies these questions at page 223.
8. Supra page 19
9. See David Court "Village Politechnic leavers: the Maseno Story" I.D.S. Working Paper No. 72, (1972).
10. Ferguson and Barker, "Village Politechnics in Central Kenya: Progress, problems and prospects" I.D.S. Working Paper No. 359 page 5
11. "Dilemmas of Development" page 227
12. AID, Kenya Shelter Sector Study and AID's Experience (1971) (p.222)
13. See Gachuhi, Choge and Ascroft, Kirathimo Model Village of the Kenya Red Cross Society: An Evaluation Report (IDS, MP48, 1972)

14. Department of Social Services Family Life Training Programme,  
Annual Report, 1977, page 3.

