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Expert Group Meeting

Training to Popularise Scientific and Technological Culture
Singapore 28 - 31 May, 1997

Objective and Expectations:

By Ved Goel
Education Department, Commonwealth Secretariat

As a result of the impact of rapid scientific and technological change, faster economic, social and cultural changes are taking place. It is therefore necessary that while considering the adaptations of science and technology to development needs, attention will have to be paid to its relationship with productive work and community development, to environmental and cultural dimensions and to social relevance. It is therefore necessary that science and technology education should be linked with the world outside the classroom, to the daily life activity of the people. In most cases the science in the classroom and the world outside have tended to remain separate. The situations need to be remedied. Relating science & tech to the real-life problems, needs and experiences can make science and technology and their application more real to the learner. These consideration apply to both in-school, out of -school education and to the education of youth and adults.

Education does not take place in a cultural vacuum. During the last decade, there has been a rapid growth in awareness that the cultural context in which education takes place is a major influence on it. There appears to be a ‘universality’ about science and maths that renders their teaching relatively immune to local cultural influences. In fact the belief is far from sound. Culture is something in which whole society participates. For science and technology to influence it, the whole population must have access to such education.

The science and technology curriculum reform projects have been deficient in linking science and technology with the surrounding and daily life of the people. There has been greater emphasis on pure science, I am not saying teaching pure science is wrong but what is needed is to relate it to the surroundings and daily life of the people. Most of the science curriculum programmes have tended to look inwards to themselves for relevance. They have done little to show the relevance of that science to the world outside. The change will come by introducing more reference to social implication into the existing science courses.

We know that conventional activities of women involve lot of science and technology but have we included them in the teaching of science. This had not only resulted in the rejection of science and technology by women but also in marginalising women. For social and economic development we cannot afford to keep science and technology out of the reach of women.

It is being realised that knowledge is the major factor that will determine whether human kind will be able to create a sustainable future on this planet. Therefore, how both scholars and public policy makers are recognising the importance of various local or culture-based knowledge systems in addressing the problem of development and environment. A Maori lawyer of New Zealand Whaimutu Dewes said “Traditional knowledge is an enabling component of development. We have not just to preserve it, not because it makes us feel good to have it; we have to be able to use it for development. For the development to be socially and environmentally sustainable, it must take into account and draw upon the values, traditions and cultures of the people in the countries and societies that is serves.”

The significance of traditional knowledge for sustainable development was also recognised in the Brundland Commission Report, ‘Our Common Future’ (1987) and at the Earth Submit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992.

Traditional knowledge must not be seen in contradiction with development. On the contrary traditional knowledge should be review as a ‘tool’ or ‘instrument’ to promote culturally sensitive or appropriate form of development.
To summarise this project aims as considering ways of

1. Linking science to the world outside and daily life of people
2. Integrating science and technology involved in the activities of women in the teaching of science and technology
3. Incorporating traditional knowledge in the teaching of science and technology.