

# THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT – REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A DONOR-FUNDED PROJECT

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## 1. THE CONTEXT OF THE PROJECT

### THE ECONOMIC CONTEXT

Dominica's economy experienced buoyant growth during the 1980s with bananas fetching all time high prices on the European market. But growth in the 1990s weakened as a result of deterioration in external sector performance. According to the Ministry of Finance, merchandise exports comprising mainly bananas and coconut products decreased from an average of 36.5% of GDP during 1986-90 to 24.7% of GDP during 1991 – 1996. At the same time the deficit on the balance of trade grew from an average of 17.2% of GDP (1986-90) to 22.2% of GDP (1991 – 96). The drop in banana prices and export volumes, coupled with the unfavourable exchange rate of the pound sterling, was the single largest contributor to this slow down in economic growth during that time. This underscored the need for economic diversification and helped to provide a focus on the possible role for education in the desirable economic transformation and the broadening of the revenue base.

### THE CASE FOR REFORM

In a 1980 Education Policy statement the Minister of Education asserted: " The development of primary education must have priority attention. Unless the foundation at primary level is strengthened, one cannot look for much improvement at the secondary or higher levels ..". At the same time the Government acknowledged that the output of graduates from the educational and training systems was, for all practical purposes, largely incapable of taking advantage of job opportunities as they emerged.

A 1981 UNESCO Education Sector Survey for Dominica stated that; " Education has been largely inappropriate and inadequate... What is certain is that Government's efforts to develop the economy will be frustrated unless major educational and training reforms are undertaken... An educational programme to service the very specific development needs of Dominica in the 1980s requires considerable change at all levels..."

The World Bank reflects the limited achievements of the aspirants of education reform for the period 1980 to the early nineties in a 1994 assessment. In a commentary on Dominica the Bank noted; "the success of this economic transformation will depend in part on human resource development, to ensure the labour force required for an increasingly competitive international economy. To secure the requisite modern labour force, standards of education and learning must be raised significantly..."

### THE STATE OF EDUCATION AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 1990s

As in sister territories of the region the 1990s were marked by an education system that had evolved into four distinct levels; early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary. The 59 primary schools were predominantly public but included five private and five government assisted schools. Of the 14 secondary schools five were public and one private. Apart from teacher education and nursing education post secondary training was restricted to the Clifton Dupigny Community College. Over the years this institution has been operated as a technical division devoted to technical / vocational training at diploma and certificate level and an academic division in which both 'A' level programmes and secretarial courses are offered.

Universal primary education was achieved as early as the nineteen sixties with equal opportunities for males and

females. But quality education and the inequitable distribution of learning opportunities remained major issues and the general state of school plant was generally unsatisfactory. Of a total of 634 primary level teachers at the end of school year 1993/94, only 37% were trained. Specialists accounted for 2% and teachers classified as temporary made up 35%. The state of school plant was reflected in a 1994 survey by a World Bank-sponsored technical team, which reported that 25% of existing classrooms were in need of replacement and 35% qualified for serious rehabilitation work.

Limited access and inequitable distribution of learning opportunities characterized the secondary system. By the mid 1990s transition rates from primary to secondary averaged 30% of the examinees and 57% of all secondary school places were located in the capital, compared with about 29% of the general population. A general paucity of pedagogical skills and unsatisfactory mastery of subjects limited the effectiveness of teaching. In 1994, 24% of secondary teachers were graduates, 11% were professionally trained and specialists accounted for 8%. Even as late as the academic year 1997/98, the ratio of trained graduates to students stood at 1: 188, although the overall teacher:student ratio was 1: 16.

Added to these were growing concerns about the relevance and adequacy of the secondary curriculum and what was perceived as an increased marginalization of males at all levels. Between 1975 and 1985 the ratio of boys to girls selected by the Common Entrance Examination was exactly 1: 2. The continuance of this phenomenon during the next decade has ensured the persistence of interest in resolving what appears to be a decline in the academic performance of boys when compared to girls. See Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Number of students selected for Secondary School 1995 –2000 by Gender

Year	No. of Boys Selected	% of Boys Selected	No. of Girls Selected	% of Girls Selected	Total Selected
1995	372	38.8	587	61.2	959
1996	439	43	582	57	1021
1997	389	37.2	658	62.8	1047
1998	462	41.4	654	58.6	1116
1999	487	42.5	660	57.5	1147
2000	592	46.4	684	53.6	1276

Source: Ministry of Education Statistics

Table 2: Enrolment in Secondary Schools by Gender

Year	No. of Boys	No. Girls	% Boys	% Girls	Total
1995/96	1967	2735	41.8	58.2	4702
1996/97	2063	2865	41.9	58.1	4928
1997/98	2307	3148	42.3	57.7	5455

Source: Ministry of Education

Although the factors mentioned previously were very important at the local level, it is fair to argue that they were overshadowed by the impact of economic factors such as the growth in trade liberalisation; particularly the new policies of the WTO, and globalisation. The new WTO policies effectively meant a loss of preferential treatment in a traditional market that had been historically perceived as both safe and reliable. The implications were significant not only because of the dominance of bananas as a foreign currency earner but also because the banana crop was primarily grown by small farmers who were scattered throughout the island. From a socio-economic perspective this allowed for decentralization of economic activities and favoured rural development. The WTO rulings now

forced farmers who had never enjoyed real economies of scale to compete with large multinationals who were in the banana business.

Added to these were the attractions offered by the newly emerging knowledge-based and other service industries as alternative pathways to economic diversification. It can be argued that these were the real imperatives that fuelled interest in education reform.

## THE POLICY CONTEXT

The education policy of the 1990s reflected a search for heightened collaboration with other members of the subregion as well as an interest in bolstering a projectized approach to sector development that was supported by the international donor community. Some experience had been gained from the World Bank-sponsored Regional Vocational and Technical Education Project 1987 –1995. This project had allowed the Junior Secondary Programme to secure a number of centres (new classrooms) as well as equipment and a cadre of teachers who were trained for the delivery of specific subjects. One of the key lessons that emerged from this project was the need to link project objectives to broader sector policies and macro-economic objectives if political and fiscal commitments at the local level are to be enhanced. The importance of a full time project manager and careful management of procurement services had also surfaced as worthwhile lessons for future operations.

The Freedom Party administration resumed office for a third consecutive term in 1990 and remained committed to the formulation and implementation of what evolved as a framework for local and regional initiatives in education and the involvement of the international donor community. Insofar as it enabled the achievement of local consensus and sustained the interest of the donor community, the OECS Education Reform Strategy was probably the single most important factor that shaped the development of the sector during the this 1990s. During the period 1990–95 the Government endorsed collaboration with the Canadian Government through CIDA and commenced dialogue with the World Bank on the possibility of what became known as the Dominica Basic Education Project; the first attempt to use a planned approach to innovations in the sector. These policy positions were direct outcomes of the OECS Education Reform Strategy.

The general election of 1995 brought to office a United Workers Party administration that declared itself the Education Government. It pledged to launch a new era in the education system with initiatives that would address quality, equity and access at all levels of the education system. The party's manifesto made reference to free text books, increased transition rates to secondary schools and the establishment of new facilities in areas that were previously underserved.

At the primary level the UWP Government's policy was aimed at qualitative improvement in education through enhancement of the physical environment, an increase in the number of teachers with effective pedagogical skills, strengthened strategies for student support, enriched and more relevant curricula, a textbook provision scheme and an increase in physical resources for the classroom.

The secondary school system was targeted for universal secondary education, more equitable distribution of school places, improved relevance of curricula and improvements in student retention and overall performance at the CXC examinations. These desirable ends were to be brought about by a civil works program aimed at constructing new schools and upgrading others, curricula reform, preparing a cadre of teachers with more effective pedagogical skills and the institutionalization of more effective support systems for teachers and students.

The developments proposed in the tertiary education sector were aimed at building a sustainable approach to post secondary education and training that offered varied and relevant opportunities for an expanded output from the secondary schools. The expansion and improvement of physical facilities, the consolidation of the components of tertiary education and training and the introduction of new curricula were among the measures adopted to achieve these objectives.

Together with a deliberate policy of increasing the budgetary allocation to education and strengthening the projectized approach, the new administration hastened to effect the conditionalities for the Basic Education Reform Project (World Bank) and promoted this initiative as the main vehicle for education reform. The Project was designed with three major components: *Strengthening Management and Planning*, *Qualitative Improvement of Basic Education* and *Expansion and Conservation of School Places*.

The first component sought to reorganize the management of the school system and to strengthen the Ministry's capacity to plan and manage the sector. Deliverables included a unit for educational planning and statistics and a permanent project development and management capacity.

The *Qualitative Improvement of Basic Education* component was designed to enhance the quality of teaching and learning through improved curricula, increased support for acquisition of learning inputs, strengthening the school library service and support for teacher education.

The *Expansion and Conservation of School Places* component would assist the Ministry to provide more secondary school places in the most underserved districts to reduce long distance travel and facilitate access to educational opportunities. It also provided for rehabilitation of selected primary and secondary schools. The primary deliverables were a new secondary school in the eastern section of the island (Castle Bruce Secondary School) and expansion of the Portsmouth Secondary School in the north.

The emphasis on educational reform at the local and subregional levels also required a review of existing legislation. Having inherited a CIDA-funded and OECS-supported model of legislation for the education sector, the new administration completed the preparations for adoption and enacted a new law (The Education Act) for education in 1997; thereby repealing what until then were statutes dating back to 1940.

The period of economic difficulties, the climate of sympathy for the processes of educational reform in the subregion and the heightened interest in reforming the Dominican education sector and increased mutual understanding on the part of donor agencies and local policy makers all contributed to the context in which the Secondary Education Support Project was developed, designed and implemented.

## **2. THE SECONDARY EDUCATION SUPPORT PROJECT**

At aid talks held in August 1995, the Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica (GoCD) made it clear that the construction of a new secondary school at Grand Bay was the top priority for support by the then Overseas Development Administration (ODA, now the Department For International Development, DFID). A feasibility study of school accommodation needs and the technical assistance required to improve educational standards was carried out (Morrisey and Williams, 1996) in April 1996. The Secondary Education Support Project was based on the findings and recommendations of the study. The Project Memorandum, agreed between the British Development Division (BDDC) in the Caribbean and the GoCD, was finalised in May 1997. The Inception Visit of the Project's Team Leader took place in November/December 1997 and the first technical assistance inputs occurred in early 1998. The contract for the construction of the new secondary school at Grand Bay was signed in April 1998 and construction began in May of that year.

At the time of the finalisation of the project memorandum, the Grand Bay Secondary School was sharing a site with the primary school and the Junior Secondary Programme (Forms 1 – 3) that was attached to it. This site consisted largely of a building, constructed with CIDA funds in the 1970s as a primary school. Because of prolonged failure to address maintenance needs, the physical condition of the plant was deemed unsatisfactory. The school was dominated by the growing secondary school population, with the primary school children spread out over a range of buildings of very uneven quality. The junior secondary students were housed in a building with a corrugated iron roof, and no interior insulation. This meant that the education of all students was inadequate, and there was increasing recognition (and resentment) in the community of the problems faced by the students and their teachers. The strength of community involvement in the school is considerable, and this has enabled the school to draw upon a range of resources from within the community. Detailed population projections carried out by the GoCD Statistical Office showed a steady rise in the 0 – 15 age group in the Grand Bay area from 2569 in 1991 to 3010 in 2015, suggesting that there will be a steady demand for secondary school places.

The construction of a new secondary school was to be complemented by refurbishment of the existing school so that it could then return to full and effective use as a primary school once the new secondary school was in operation. It would then be able to support a total of about 500 students in 23 classrooms, of which up to 6 could be for specialised use, including early childhood education and a library.

The second major component of the project involved the use of technical assistance to support a number of activities of priority importance for the GoCD, with a focus on the needs of the less academically able students. The areas selected were curriculum development (Forms 1 – 3), teacher education and education policy and management. In addition, it was agreed that support would be provided for eight persons to undertake Master's degree programmes at UK universities, 4 in Guidance and Counselling and 4 in Learning Support.

There was no nationally agreed curriculum at the junior level (Forms 1 – 3) of secondary schools, and the curriculum at Forms 4 and 5 was (and still is) derived from CXC syllabuses. This did not appear to be a matter of great concern when the transition rate from primary to secondary school was 40% or less, but the UWP administration was committed to a policy of Universal Secondary Education (USE) and it was envisaged that the new school at Grand Bay would be a test bed for the implementation of this policy. The GoCD priority therefore

was the development of new curricula for Forms 1 - 3 in a number of core subjects, with an emphasis on the needs of the the less academically able students. (The Education Act (1997) proposes that there shall be a national curriculum, but this has not yet been developed).

A relatively low proportion of teachers in the secondary education sub-sector are both qualified and trained. In 1997, about one-third of the teachers were trained. This meant that Dominica was and still is in the position of having to appoint untrained teachers, many of whom are A - level leavers, for whom teaching is very much a second best alternative until such time as they can obtain entry to a tertiary institution. Given the impending demands of the much wider ability range as USE is implemented, first at Grand Bay and then elsewhere, the need for an effective in-service programme of teacher education was clear.

There were a number of concerns about education policy and management, including the low (by international standards) contact time between teachers and students, the need to involve local communities more effectively in schools (by introducing Boards of Management, starting with Grand Bay SS) and the need for a training programme for school Principals. If these concerns could begin to be adequately addressed the management of schools should be improved and therefore their ability to deliver quality secondary education in a context of USE..

The GoCD, or more specifically, the Ministry of Education, was very concerned about the need to provide more effective and focussed support for schools as the transition rate from primary to secondary was increased, with the eventual target of USE. This would include learning support strategies for the less academically able students. In addition, the situation in secondary schools was such that there was a clear and demonstrated need for guidance and counselling services for students, given the range of behavioural and other problems being experienced in schools.

## **PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGEMENT**

### **A. School Construction and Refurbishment**

The Grand Bay community had expressed considerable concern about the secondary school, and this was reiterated during the 1996 feasibility study. It was therefore important that the community should be involved in all or some of the aspects of the siting and design of the new school. The design exercise was to be undertaken by the Ministry of Communications Works and Housing (MoCWH), and preliminary discussions about the siting of the new school resulted in a proposal by the community for a change to take account of a potential water hazard. The school was to include a large assembly hall, which could also be used for community activities, as well as specialised rooms, such as workshops and a computer room, all of which might provide additional training opportunities for the local community. This in turn raised the issue of the management of the school, since a Board of Management would include one or more community representatives, and could help to influence the ways in which the school would be perceived and used as a local resource.

As far as management of the project was concerned mutual agreement had been reached on giving that responsibility to the Project Management Unit of the Ministry of Education. That entity had been established as part of the capacity enhancement / institutional strengthening strategy under the World Bank-financed project. Apart from a full time project manager the unit staff included a dedicated accountant, and others responsible for procurement and building construction and maintenance.

The design of the school (by an architect in the MoCWH) was completed by the end of 1997. After completion of the tender, the proposed scope was reduced so as to fit the project within the available budget and the contract for the construction was awarded in April 1998. Construction began in May 1998, and it was intended that it be completed by October 1999 . The new building was completed in March 2000 and the student body was able to move to its new location on March 22. This delay in completion resulted in the new entrants (admitted on the basis of USE from its six primary feeder schools) being housed in Pichelin primary school, some miles from Grand Bay

There were a number of management problems associated with the construction of the new school, some of them arising from the procedures used for management of the project funds provided by DFID. According to the arrangements, payments to the contractor were made by the London - based Crown Agents Financial Services whose services were procured by DFID. But the monies were only paid after approval from the Barbados office of DFID. This approval followed receipt of the appropriate documentation from the Project Management Unit and the unit depended on staff of the Ministry of Communications, Works and Housing. When compared with the approaches adopted by the World Bank and the GOCD, whereby the Project Management Unit implemented the BERP which was about twice the dollar value of the SESP, the

procedures implemented in the construction component of the latter were inefficient and a source of some frustration. Effectively, the Ministry persistently fell short on its contractual obligations as these related to the stated period for payments and the contractor addressed his wage bills by making use of overdrafts - a factor that contributed to delayed completion.

Implementation of the planned rehabilitation of the existing primary plant proceeded much more smoothly. Three separate contracts were issued while design works were prepared in respect of the new secondary school. The Project Management Unit relied on its staff for preparation and supervision and completion preceded the commencement of works on the new school.

## B. Technical Assistance

### I. Curriculum Development

During the early part of 1998, there were discussions about the nature and extent of the curriculum development which would be desirable and/or necessary for secondary schools. It was agreed, with policy direction provided by the Chief Education Officer, that the aim should be to produce curriculum materials (for teachers) in four core subjects (Language, Mathematics, Science, Social Studies) for Forms 1 – 3. Given the timespan of the project (4 years) and the lack of a tradition of curriculum development at the secondary level a process of rolling curriculum reform was proposed and agreed. Table 3 illustrates the process.

Table 3

<b>Academic Year for pilot testing of draft curriculum materials</b>	<b>Date of national implementation of revised/edited materials</b>
1998.99 – Form 1	September 1999
1999/2000 – Form 2	September 2000
2000/01 – Form 3	September 2001

Draft curriculum materials were prepared by teams (of teachers, teacher educators and others) and the Form 1 draft materials were piloted in 5 schools as from September 1998. There were problems associated with the lack of consistency of personnel in the teams, and the initial lack of qualified and trained personnel in the Curriculum Development Unit, which placed a considerable strain on practising teachers. This situation was eased by the return (from fellowships undertaken as a result of the Basic Education Reform Project) of staff members to the CDU as from October 1998. (There was and is no full time Science staff member).

There were a number of issues which did not receive the attention they deserved. These included the specific needs of the less academically able students, the selection of texts and effective teacher preparation. The inputs of a 'multi level teaching and learning adviser' from late 2000 (see Section 5) should help to focus on the issue of the needs of the less academically able students, including teacher preparation. In addition, the monitoring of the implementation of the draft materials did not yield as much useful and critical feedback as anticipated.

### II. Teacher Education

Reference has already been made to the high proportion of untrained teachers in the secondary education sub-sector. Any proposal for a full time programme of secondary teacher education would have serious financial implications for the Ministry of Education, since the costs of replacement teachers would have to be found. A proposal was developed, with assistance from a number of regional specialists, for an Associate Degree programme, to be taught on an in-service basis at the Dominica Teachers College. The programme would last for about 2 ½ years, and the first intake started in September 1998, with a target date for completion of early 2001. There was no agreement about the timing of a second intake but there was general agreement that a second and subsequent intakes would be necessary if there was to be any chance of reaching the goal of a fully professionalised secondary teaching force.

Participants in the Associate Degree programme were expected to travel to DTC two afternoons a

week to undertake their courses of study (usually involving a Major and a Minor academic subject, as well as courses in pedagogy, history of education etc). There were also summer courses, as well as a practical teaching component.

The programme, which it is hoped will be accredited by UWI, is to be reviewed and finalised in December 2000/January 2001, prior to a second intake. The first intake began as a group of 40, which was quickly reduced to 37. By the latter part of 2000, this was further reduced to 26. The high drop out rate is of concern to both GoCD and DFID, since this has serious implications for the long term goal of a professionalised secondary teaching force, It underlines the difficulty of sustaining a part-time in-service programme over an extended period, and the impact of trainees seeking other forms of post-secondary education and training. The Ministry will need to review its policy options if it is to be able to reach the stage of appointing trained teachers **only** and allowing a 'grace' period for those already in the system but untrained.

### III. Education Policy and Management

There were three distinct sub-components, each of which is briefly described in turn:

#### i. Teacher/student contact time

The 'standard' school teaching day at secondary level lasts from 8 am until 1 pm. Most schools have to lengthen the day to take account of the SBA requirements of CXC syllabuses, and of 'extra-curricular' activities. Given the relatively short teaching day, and the impact of term time 'lost' to holidays, examinations etc, there was considerable concern about the extent of effective teacher/student contact time. As a result, there was a consultancy input, during which a proposal was made for a standard school year of 195 days, including 5 set aside for staff development. This was implemented first in 1999/2000.

#### ii. Community involvement in schools

The Education Act (1997) allows the Minister to appoint Boards of Management for government secondary schools if he so desires. (Government assisted schools **must** have such Boards, according to the Act). As a result of consultancy inputs, a paper on the phased introduction of Boards of Management for government secondary schools was prepared in late 1998/early 1999 by Ministry officers with support from a consultant. This paper is still being reviewed within and without the Ministry. The School Advisory Committee continues to function at Grand Bay SS, but could form the basis of a Board of Management. If there is to be a movement towards the devolution of authority in education, and a concomitant involvement of communities in the management of schools, there will be a need to appoint such Boards of Management, with responsibilities (and authority) as stated in the Education Act.

#### iii. Training Programme for School Principals

Few of the 15 school Principals had received any directly relevant training to prepare them for the range of tasks to be undertaken. A modest programme, which began and ended with a workshop (for Principals and senior teachers), was implemented from late 1998 to late 1999, drawing upon resource materials developed by the Commonwealth Secretariat for use in Africa, in the first instance. It was recognised that such a programme could not address in depth the range of training needs, which have if anything increased with the move towards USE. As a result, the proposal for additional resources (see section 5) contained a request for a Master's degree programme in educational management (to be studied by distance). 15 participants should begin this University of Leicester programme in early 2001.

#### iv. Guidance and Counselling and Learning Support

Two persons undertook a Master's degree programme in Guidance and Counselling in 1997/98, and six others undertook such programmes in 1998/99 (two in Guidance and Counselling and 4 in Learning Support). Of the eight persons, seven have returned to Dominica. The Ministry, in early discussions, had proposed that the persons returning to Dominica should form a 'Learning Support Secretariat' although there were considerable divergences of view about the roles and responsibilities of such a body. This issue has not yet been resolved, although the CEO proposes that the initial input (January/February 2001?) of an Institutional Development Adviser may help

to clarify roles and responsibilities, including, detailed job descriptions. The broad issue confronting the Ministry is that of effective management of resources in light of changing circumstances in schools, with particular emphasis on the implications for teaching and learning of USE.

#### **4. THE REVIEW PROCESS**

The Project Memorandum contains a commitment to a "mid-project output to purpose review", and this would be the formal review process. In addition, the project was to be monitored by a member of the BDDC/DFIDC staff on a regular (6-monthly) basis, usually associated with meetings of the Project Steering Committee. On a less formal basis, there was continuous reflection on the state of the project as between the Team Leader, CEO, PMU and other Ministry officials, to try to ensure that the client obtained maximum benefit from TA inputs.

The formal Output to Purpose Review (OPR) of the Project took place in October 1999, with Terms of Reference having been agreed by the Ministry of Education and DFIDC in advance. The Review was undertaken by four members of staff of DFIDC assisted by two members of staff of the Ministry of Education.

Apart from reviewing relevant documentation (and the state of progress of the new school building) there was an opportunity for members of the review team to interview a range of stakeholders, including representatives of the Grand Bay community. One interesting innovation was the involvement, on a daily basis, of a group of students from the Grand Bay SS.

The report of the OPR was made available to the Project Steering Committee, which met in November, 1999. Although broadly supportive of the progress made, the report makes it clear that the needs of the less academically able students had not been met by the new curriculum (Forms 1 – 3). This is true, but there is a broader set of policy issues, to which attention is drawn in the following section. It would be interesting to elucidate the overall reaction of the Ministry of Education to this review process, since it is, in theory at least, carried out on behalf of both the donor and the client, but is funded and driven by the donor agency.

#### **5. ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

The outcomes of the Review, as stated previously, were broadly supportive of the Project, although it was recognised that the needs of the less academically able students had not been properly addressed. The Project Steering Committee (chaired by the CEO) normally meets twice each year, and there was a meeting in November 1999, at which the OPR report was discussed. During and after the meeting it was made clear that there were additional resources potentially available from DFID. As a result of these informal discussions, a rough first draft of a GoCD proposal for additional resources was prepared, taking into account the findings of the OPR. This first draft was further developed and expanded in January 2000. The final proposal document was forwarded to DFID (by hand) in March 2000. At no stage had the GoCD been made aware of the dollar value of the additional resources.

This proposal was discussed at the April 2000 PSC meeting and most of the 20 sub-components were approved in principle, subject to costing by the company responsible for providing the TA/consultancy inputs, Cambridge Education Consultants. The costed proposal required far more resources than were available, so that the GoCD was asked to prioritise the list of sub-components. In order for this to be meaningful, it was necessary to obtain information about the actual amount of resources likely to be available, and the basis for the costing of each sub-component by the consulting company. During June and July, 2000, the proposal was reviewed, revised and finally forwarded to DFID (Caribbean) in July. Final approval for the revised and costed GoCD proposal was given in October, after the PSC meeting of October 12. The process had been long, and could have been much shorter if there had been real transparency in the discussions between DFID and GoCD. The latter was put in a very difficult position from the beginning.

The additional resources were made available to support a number of consultancy inputs, and also the participation by 15 Principals or/and senior teachers in a Master's degree programme (taught by distance) in educational management. Some of the proposed consultancy inputs were direct continuations of work already initiated. This included, for example, the review and finalisation of the Associate Degree programme by regional specialists, and the review and finalisation of the Year 3 curriculum materials, by some of the same regional specialists. New inputs proposed included those of an Institutional Development expert, (who will review and make recommendations for changes in the structure of the Ministry), a School Development expert (who will assist schools, starting in the Grand Bay area, with School Development Plans and their implementation), a Multi Level Teaching and Learning Expert (who will review the curriculum documentation (and the Associate Degree programme) and make recommendations for ways in which the needs of the less academically able students could

be met) and an ICT expert (who will draw up proposals for a programme of computer maintenance).

These additional resources will be used in the Project until the end of 2001 or perhaps early 2002, although the participants in the Master's degree programme will not complete their course of study until some time in 2003. Each of the inputs/activities should contribute towards the overall goal of improving teaching and learning in secondary schools in the context of USE.

## **6. PROJECT MANAGEMENT AND IMPLEMENTATION – RETROSPECT AND PROSPECT**

In this final section of the paper, we try to draw together strands that will have been evident in other sections, and provide some considered reflections on the management and implementation of the project. In so doing, we review the processes by which the project was developed and agreed between GoCD and DFID as well as some of the key features of project management and implementation. In each case, we hope to provide some pointers to the future, such that educational projects (and programmes) developed with and for Dominica will be sensitive to these issues.

While the evidence suggests that the SESP was patterned after its forerunner the BERP, the arrangements for management were dissimilar. Under the BERP, the Project Management Unit was responsible for complete implementation. This entailed all goods, buildings and services as well as management of the complete procurement process. This decision had been arrived at as a result of experience with the World Bank-financed Technical / Vocational project and the history of implementation records in other countries.

According to the Project Memorandum, "The project will be managed on behalf of MoE, by the Project Implementation Unit established under BERP with overall responsibility vested in the BERP Project Manager (Head of PIU)". Yet from the outset the project was effectively managed by various persons who operated at various critical steps along the implementation ladder. Among these were managers of the financial resources and those who were given responsibility for the selection of consultants as well as universities and programmes of study. Also, at the local level the CEO effectively operated as a project manager. (The issue of effective intra-government communication about roles and responsibilities often arises in these situations, and requires careful planning and foresight to minimise potential problems). The office of DFID (Caribbean) was therefore forced to communicate with a wide range of personnel in order to achieve its objectives. Among the results were inadequacies in the transfer of information, limited transparency and the inability of the beneficiary to take timely decisions. While this kind of operation may not be too uncommon among donor agencies, there are sufficient grounds to revisit the model where future operations are concerned.

Another important issue to be considered is that of project design and its implications for implementation. Conflicts between the agendas of bilateral and international agencies on the one hand and those of recipient countries on the other are often cited as a source of challenges in the design of projects (Magnen, 1991). In the case of the SESP, the participation of DFID has been justified by a policy commitment to contribute to the halving of world poverty by 2015 through economic growth, equity and security. While hardware in the form of infrastructure at a dollar value in excess of 50% of project cost appeared to be an unlikely attraction, the GoCD successfully convinced the donor that this was indeed a priority and strengthened its case by participating in an objective situational analysis of the communities in question. The end result was a project that was tailored according to needs that were established internally but one which was nonetheless compatible with the agenda of the donor. Again, this might have been enabled by regional trends and the fact that earlier commitments and accomplishments under the World Bank project (BERP) attested to Dominica's interest in reforming the education sector. Some aspects of the project were aimed at a particular geographical area of Dominica, whereas others had a more general significance. Although a UK-based consultancy company was contracted to provide the technical assistance components described in section 4 B, it was crucially important that there should be a clear and unambiguous sense of local ownership of the project. Experiences with other initiatives suggested that this would determine the level of sustainability. In addition, there was need for clarity about the contribution of each sub-component to the overall aims and goals of the project. The sense of local ownership began at the project design stage, and it was made clear that the issues and concerns of the various stakeholders would be taken into account and, where appropriate, used to shape the project.

The initial stages of implementation are then crucial for establishing that the assistance provided is just that, with the local 'client' – in this case the Ministry of Education – providing the policy framework within which project activities can be undertaken. As the World Bank (Verspoor, 1989) has pointed out, implementation is the phase of the change process that most critically affects project success and needs to be given top priority. In this case, much of the first year was spent in establishing that this was so, and it seems that both the donor and client may be sufficiently persuaded of this that there will be a follow-up project. This is now being discussed by the GoCD,

World Bank and DFID, as a potential jointly funded project, although it would not be a national but three-island project with similar aims for each national project.

Another major issue is that of the policy framework provided by the Government of Dominica. Traditionally, increased investment in the education sector reflects acceptance of what has been called the modernizing influence of education; particularly the role of education in economic development (Fagerland and Saha, 1986). Dominica's decision to launch an education reform program has been driven by a conviction that an improved human resource base is a prerequisite for economic diversification and economic sustainability and in particular; the broadly accepted view that globalization and technological changes, especially in information technology and telecommunications, are increasing the demand for workers with higher qualifications and the capacity to continually learn and adapt (World Bank, 1999). Arguably, the Government's interest in the donor community is a consequence of the magnitude of necessary financial resources and the realities of the local economic climate. Also noteworthy is the increased allocation from local revenue; a trend that was characteristic of the majority of Latin American and Caribbean countries during the nineties (World Bank, 1999). Thus, the adoption of a subregional framework for education reform was consistent with a wider movement throughout the hemisphere; a wave of change that heightened interest on the part of stakeholders, influenced the decision to commit scarce resources at the local level and generated interest among donors such as DFID and the World Bank. This combination of factors is more critical to success in small countries like Dominica than is the case in larger economies that are less open and that are less dependent on external sources of aid in national problem solving. In this project, perhaps the key issue of policy was that of the GoCD's commitment to USE. There were also subsidiary issues, mostly arising from the Education Act (1997).

The commitment to the implementation of USE at Grand Bay SS in the first instance presented a major challenge both to the school and to the secondary education system more generally, since the transition rate from primary to secondary school was less than 35% until a few years ago. Although the Ministry recognised some of the issues early on, it was reluctant to take decisive action, and it could be argued that the students at GBSS suffered as a result. The major problems/concerns of the school included:

- i. The need for a curriculum of sufficient breadth to take account of the needs of students of **all** abilities.
- ii. The associated need for some form of certification (other than CXC examinations) at the end of five years of secondary schooling which would provide a locally acceptable measure of student achievement.
- iii. The need for teachers to be assisted/trained in the greater range of skills needed for diagnosis and remediation of a wider range of learning (and behavioural?) problems.
- iv. The need for effective linkages with the primary feeder schools, since there will be a need to try to address the learning (and teaching) problems at that level in the future. (The Ministry seems to be suggesting at present that **no** student should leave primary school without having the basic tools of literacy and numeracy – this is not being achieved as yet).

Each of these issues has been discussed extensively, particularly in 1999 and 2000, and, in some cases there have been actions taken, such as the provision of Learning Support personnel to assist with iii). In addition, there has been some very useful work done on performance standards in the primary schools (see, for example, the Grade 2 national assessment, recently completed) Yet some of the key issues such as i) and ii) have **not** yet been addressed. But the history of educational reform suggests that these kind of experiences are not too uncommon. Innovations are ultimately intended to benefit people and since people are always organized into systems, innovations are also intended to benefit systems. An innovation may not in itself constitute the benefit or may not provide the benefit directly; rather it is supposed to be a positive change or improvement in the way the system operates; so that the benefits will sooner or later occur for the people in the system (Havelock and Huberman, 1977). In the case of the SESP, long term benefits may not yet be sufficiently discernible. While transition rates have been significantly increased, these have exposed the ineffectiveness of the primary system by showcasing system-wide problems with numeracy, literacy and the limited preparedness of teachers. Even if these are viewed negatively, insofar as they informed decisions on additional inputs (added technical assistance) they contributed to positive changes among the beneficiaries across the system.

The final major issue, which overlaps with the first two, is that of enhancement of local capacity. This reflects the greater range of skilled and trained personnel available as local resources at the end of a project. In this case, the project has contributed to some useful additional resources, such as:

- i. Teacher Education - trained teachers (26 due to complete Associate Degree programme in early 2001).
- ii. Curriculum Development – involvement of a (small) number of people (mostly teachers) in the processes of curriculum development at junior secondary level.
- iii. Training of School Principals – involvement of 20 or so Principals and senior teachers in a local programme;

and 15 to undertake a Master's programme in Educational Management.

In each case, the key issue for the Ministry will be that of effective management of an increased quantity of local resources such as to provide maximum benefit to the education system – and students in particular.

This brings us to the subject of evaluation. Proponents of the projectized approach point to the advantages of a logical structuring of problems, development objectives, proposed solutions along with projected investments and outcomes (Magnen, 1991). The experience of the Secondary Education Support Project underscores the limited usefulness of evaluation approaches that assume that a particular project has been insulated from other interventions within the system of which it is part. Not only does this offer a case for in-depth scrutiny of such indicators as "Objectively Verifiable Indicators" (OVIs) and overall intended impact but it proposes an objective assessment of possible additional contributing factors in the case of project failures. Beyond this, formative evaluation should be accompanied by a reexamination of the validity of the various assumptions that were factored into the original project design. Further, one can assume that in cases of weak, unstable economies for which inputs from aid donors are critical, initiatives that are simultaneously mounted throughout the system will inevitably result in shared impact

Finally, the foregoing discussion raises some issues that relate to sector planning at the level of the beneficiary country. Seemingly, this should favour improved coordination and promote optimal use of local resources. But implementation of the BERP and SESP preceded the preparation of the education sector plan. This may help to explain the unexpected emergence of issues that reflected, for example, the limited preparedness of a significant number of primary students for the expanded opportunities at the secondary level that the SESP was meant to facilitate. When one considers the history of education in Dominica, it is clear that BERP and SESP were the first major projects. Yet despite this and the absence of a sector plan; albeit there were project preparatory studies, both projects have been judged successful by the beneficiary and the donors. On the one hand this experience raises questions about the classical approach to sector development for which the literature is replete with models, case studies and theories. The concern is the extent to which the development of projects at the time of elaboration of the plan is a prerequisite for successful implementation (Magnen, 1991, Havelock and Huberman, 1977). On the other hand there are positive lessons to be drawn from the institutional arrangements for implementation that were arranged by the beneficiary and the prevailing policies on use of local resources.

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