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## ABSTRACT

Melanesian education systems generally reflect the biases of their former Western colonial masters in that formal education is regarded as a means of preparing for employment in a formal market economy. This bias is evident in resource allocation, with formal education getting the lion's share of education spending. Focusing on the market economy marginalizes indigenous culture and renders invisible the totality of nonmarket production, including subsistence production and care of family members, done primarily by women. Even nonformal education is biased toward the market sector. Most courses are oriented toward vocational skill development or income generation. Male students outnumber females by two to one, reflecting the reality that nonmarket production is women's work and not the primary focus of nonformal education. But Melanesian policymakers and practitioners are working to forge a nonformal education system that better meets the needs of their rural majority. All the Melanesian states are developing qualifications frameworks that seek to integrate vocational training and rural skills development into a unitary structure, giving legitimacy to nonformal education. Recognition by Western development agencies of the importance of nonmarket production and the role women play in this work will facilitate recognition of nonformal education as integral to improving the quality of life as well as economic development. A review of nonformal education in Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, and Fiji discusses rural dependence on subsistence activities, school enrollment, literacy, vocational training, qualifications frameworks, women's programs, and the contributions of nongovernmental organizations. (Contains 46 references.) (TD)

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# Breathing New Life into Education for Life: a Reconceptualisation of Non-formal Education with a focus on the Melanesian Pacific

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## Abstract

The purpose of this presentation is to challenge mainstream views of what counts as 'work', and to explore the implications of a reframed view of non-formal education in the context of the Melanesian Pacific. It is hoped that participants will be challenged to rethink their practice of adult education in the wider global context.

In the context of developing countries, non-formal education has long been regarded as an alternative to western models of formal education, which, quite apart from being prohibitively expensive, are judged inappropriate in meeting the educational needs of the rural majority.

Yet attempts to develop a viable alternative system of non-formal education have met with limited success. It has suffered hugely from lack of resources, lack of a clear consistent policy, and a second rate status in relation to formal education.

This study focuses on the conceptualisation of non-formal education in the Melanesian Pacific, specifically, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. Drawing on recent surveys of non-formal education in these countries, and also unpublished reports and policy drafts relating to non-formal education, this study describes the current state of non-formal education in the region.

It offers a fresh look at the issues by focussing on the linkages between education and economics. Informed by feminist and indigenous perspectives of what counts as work, it challenges traditional linkages between education and work. Narrow (western) views tend to equate work with paid employment in a market economy, but this renders invisible the non-market production carried mostly by women, that sustains majority peoples at the most basic level of their everyday needs for food, shelter and care. This includes subsistence production as well as unpaid domestic work.

A reconceptualisation of non-formal education as education primarily (but not exclusively) for the rural majority takes into account the contribution of both non-market and market-oriented production in sustaining human well-being. It has the potential to become a key aspect in a dynamic rural development strategy to improve the quality of life, and not just incomes, for majority peoples. By recognising non-market production, and the critical role women play in this work, it may help us, as educationists, to break the stranglehold that the market-driven ideology has over education, and enable us to breathe new life into education for life.

# Breathing New Life into Education for Life: a Reconceptualisation of Non-formal Education with a focus on the Melanesian Pacific

## Introduction

It is over three decades since Philip Coombs (1968) coined the words “world educational crisis” (cited in Simkins, 1977, p.2), and yet for much of the developing world, including the Melanesian Pacific, we are no further in achieving the goal of education for all, a goal that was brought to the fore again in this decade at the World Conference on *Education For All* held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990 (UNESCO, 1997). Public expenditure on education has swelled, at times, to a quarter of the total national budgets, yet universal primary education is a goal yet to be achieved, and adult literacy rates remain relatively low (Simkins, 1977, p.2).

While the goals may not have changed, our conceptions of education and the wider economic contexts in which education functions have. Western educational models, quite apart from the fact that they are hugely expensive, are judged to be largely inappropriate to the educational needs of the rural majority (Wasilewski, 1986). Formal education is blamed for exacerbating rural-urban migration, and increased social dislocation (Preston, 1987, O’Connor, 1989, Barr, 1996). Young graduates are unable to secure the jobs education promised them. As many developing nations, and certainly the Melanesian nations have found, expansion of the formal education system does not result in an expanded formal economy to absorb the increased number of graduates. “Education does not create jobs” (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea, 1985, p.47). Yet Simkin’s (1977) assertion of two decades ago is perhaps even more poignant today than it was then, that “formal educational systems are proving extremely resistant to change, despite the steadily accelerating rate of political, social, and technological change in the world today” (p.3). Public pressure has been for the continued expansion of primary and secondary schooling over alternatives, and governments have responded by continuing to put massive resources into continued expansion of formal education throughout the 1990s. Alternative approaches in adult and non-formal education, or out-of-school education for the out-of-school majority, remain the Cinderella of the education system (Apelis, 1987). Once again, the assertions of more than two decades ago remain a relevant as ever; that what is needed is “a reappraisal of the school’s supreme, or reputedly supreme, hegemony in the world of education” (UNESCO, 1972, quoted in Simkins, 1977, p.3).

This study offers a fresh look at the issues by focussing on the linkages between education and economics. Informed by feminist and indigenous perspectives of what counts as work, it challenges traditional linkages between education and work. Narrow (western) views tend to equate work with paid employment in a market economy, but this renders invisible much of the productive work carried mostly by women, that sustains majority

peoples at the most basic level of their everyday needs for food, shelter and care. This includes subsistence production as well as unpaid domestic work ('housework' and parenting). If we as educationalists are seriously concerned about meeting the educational needs of the world's people, then we need to radically rethink what counts as work, and who sustains people's lives. We need to redirect our educational efforts accordingly. It means beginning with where the majority peoples are at, putting "learners in the center, where their processes and indigenous knowledge are respected and acknowledged" (Ramdas, 1997, p.15). It means "doing away with the ... 'deficiency' discourse commonly disseminated" (ibid.) and incorporating a gender perspective into adult education, positively appraising the value of the contribution women and subsistence producers make to human well-being. This recognition of non-market production may help us to break the stranglehold that the market-driven ideology has over education. It may also help to redirect our efforts to developing a reconceptualisation of non-formal education so that it becomes an integral part of development strategies for majority peoples, strategies that are focused on education for life rather than education for employment.

### **Methodological Issues**

This study is essentially an historical study. It seeks to describe the state of non-formal education in the Melanesian Pacific today using as recent documentation and data as is available. It is grounded in a post-modern approach, acknowledging that all historical research is culturally embedded (McKenzie, 1984, cited in Olssen, 1987) and reflects the norms, values and perspectives of those involved in its construction. Thus, the position of the researcher, of the authors of sources used, as well as of those researched is a primary concern, and one that I will come back to in a subsequent section.

Historical research has a critical role to play in the process of decolonisation. This applies in particular to historical research in the field of education since compulsory state schooling has been one of the "major agenc[ies] for imposing positional superiority over knowledge, language, and culture" (Smith, 1996, p.15).

In a post-modernist context, it entails a *re-reading* of history, *de-centering* to incorporate 'difference', and deconstruction of those histories. Only then are the people, perhaps through the mediation of a researcher, able to "*re-place*, [and] claim back what was displaced" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffen, 1989, p.87.) to *re-construct* and *re-write* their own histories in a way that will be meaningful to them.

Because of limitations in scope, this study constitutes only a beginning step in this process, which is ultimately the preserve of the Melanesian people it concerns. By the same token, it presents a challenge to policy makers and practitioners in non-formal education, to rethink the assumptions that form the basis of their activity. Perhaps more significantly, it challenges western

agencies who may be engaged in the construction of policy and resourcing of programmes in the developing world in one way or another. This may include former colonial administrations, government and non-government agencies, international agencies such as UNESCO, the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and aid agencies. These agencies tend to be dominated by westerners who may have little conception of life in a traditional non-market economy. These economies have sustained the world's majority peoples for thousands of years, and continue to do so today, despite incredible changes that have been imposed on them, particularly in recent times as a result of contact with the west and colonisation. There is an urgent need for westerners to recognise the significance of this non-market production, so that policy and resources may be reoriented toward the needs of majority peoples.

### **Location of Self**

My interest stems from involvement in working in non-formal education in New Ireland Province on Papua New Guinea during the 1980s. I was privileged to have been given an insight into the real life experiences of the rural peoples, and in particular the rural women with whom I worked. I gained some understanding of life that was sustained primarily by subsistence production on the periphery of a market economy.

Over the last decade my primary orientation has been my work as a mother at home (i.e. in unpaid work, outside the bounds of the formal economy). My partner and I have a family of five young children, and we consider our marriage a partnership with equal responsibility for our children. However, while my partner has been our primary income earner, I have had to struggle for recognition and legitimacy of my role as a mother at home. I am regarded merely as a non-employed spouse, a dependent, and my work is rendered largely invisible in an economic structure that gives recognition only to paid employment in public policy. Thus, I have begun to make connections between my experience and that of the women who work in subsistence production supporting their families in Melanesia. We are both engaged in work that is absolutely vital in meeting day-to-day needs of our families, yet it is not recognised as work in a market economy and is consequently marginalised by those structures. It is on this basis that I hope to straddle across the old boundaries created by an "us and them" mentality, and begin to construct new ways of thinking about work and consequently, education.

As a Pakeha New Zealander, I am conscious of issues of authenticity in relation to this research, which is primarily located in Melanesia. An essential element of colonisation is the process by which "the west came to 'see', to 'name', and to 'know' indigenous communities... [With their] systems of representation... classification, and fragmented artifacts of knowledge, ... observers [were able] to make sense of what they saw and to represent their new found knowledge back to the west with 'authority'" (Smith, 1996, p.13). It is significant that this 'authority' has as its basis

western power over knowledge and has nothing to do with authorisation by the people researched. My position is one in which I make no pretence of being able to 'speak for' Melanesian people. I simply offer my findings and interpretations as a koha (gift) I return to them for the privilege of having been "let in" to their place and made welcome on their ground during the five years in the 1980s when I worked in non-formal education in Papua New Guinea. The extent to which it is taken up and accepted by them I would take as an indication of its validity.

### **Education and Work: Macro-Economic Linkages**

A persistent question that lies at the core of the literature on non-formal education is the question of 'education for what?' This question encapsulates deeper questions on the linkages between education and work, and the wider socio-economic milieu in which people live.

The dominant discourses in education have tended to be oriented toward very narrowly conceived instrumental views of education - that the purpose of education is to prepare one for employment in a formal market economy. Hart (1992) describes this as "the view from above ... [a] one dimensional identification of education with the needs of business and industry" (Hart, 1992, p.2).

Over the course of the last decade, this view has been reflected in global trends in the construction of qualifications frameworks, which reflect neo-liberal market-based policies (Walters, 1997). Deeply embedded within these constructions is a belief in economic rationalism, New Right philosophy, and the inevitability of the forces of globalisation.

Yet new discourses are emerging which call these views into question. Jesson, in his final work published just weeks before his recent untimely death 'Only their Purpose is Mad' (1999), argues that unquestioned belief in the marketplace is not rational. He says "left to itself, the market will cause havoc to the environment, to people, and to the economy" (Jesson, 1999, p34). I would suggest a fundamental reason for this is that non-market production neglected as having any relevance to human well-being.

In a developed economy such as ours, it has been estimated that almost half of the productive activity that meets our basic daily needs never enters the market economy (Ironmonger, 1995, cited in Waring 1996, p.100). In developing nations, the proportion must be weighted even more (perhaps 90% or more) on the side on non-market production. Women are over-represented in both developed and developing economies as the ones who do this work.

Our western perspectives are afflicted by a myopic view the importance of the market, and what counts as work. This tyranny of the market over human needs "misrepresents the experiences of the majority of [the

world's] people" (Hart, 1992, p2), especially women's. It not only misrepresents people, but also actually serves to marginalise them by rendering invisible the basis of their existence, their non-market production, which has "real material consequences for colonial peoples" (Smith, 1996 draft, p.3). Jesson suggests "the ultimate solution is to organise the economy on a non-market basis, although markets will obviously be a feature of it" (Jesson, 1999, p.34). Thus, in considering the linkages between education and the economy, we need to look at the whole of the economy, market and non-market production, and consider how they are both integrally linked in sustaining peoples lives everywhere, in the so-called "developed" and "developing" world.

This identification of work with engagement in the market economy has served to privilege the position of the "white adult male worker", and in so doing, has marginalised all others, even when we constitute the majority population. Closely related is the belief in the identification of work and the market economy and the liberatory power of technology, "the idea that technology will eventually free us all from the ties that bind us to nature" (Hart, 1992, p.8). Embedded in this philosophy is the idea that somehow civilisation, modernisation, and development are processes that are in opposition to a life closely tied to the earth and nature. Hence indigenous cultures whose livelihoods are based on subsistence production are somehow seen as primitive, and inferior to a "modern" industrialised lifestyle. Development is seen very narrowly in term of increasing engagement in the market economy.

However, "such beliefs are illusory, and constitute an inversion of the actual relationship between commodity and subsistence production, or production for profit and product for life" (Hart, 1992, p8).

Hart offers an alternative perspective, which she calls "the view from below". It involves "disrupting and rearranging boundaries...of mainstream thought in order to reveal inequalities and power hierarchies" (Hart, 1992, p3). It means, "looking at the experience of those who are actually left out or misrepresented in general analyses" (ibid.). It concerns legitimacy, validation of one's work, and recognition.

Hart suggests "the insane separation of work and life impoverishes both, making the former deadly, and the latter empty. In fact, it destroys life" (1992, p.201). It is important that we reassert the primacy of life, that we work to live, not live to work. In practice, we are all, to a greater or lesser extent, engaged in both paid and unpaid work, in production for profit and production for life. Both need to be recognised and affirmed in ways that enable us to create a balance that enables us to ensure our basic needs are met, and that we are able to construct and live lives that are meaningful to us; and that we are enslaved to no one, least of all the dollar.

Thus, "work is ...not simply an economic category. It is the major nodal point for a number of fundamental relations: to the self, to others, and to nature" (Hart, 1992, p.8). It is the means by which we actively construct



meaning in our lives, and our relationships with those we live. Its product is what sustains us on a day-to-day basis. It sustains life.

It is therefore fundamentally important that we as people, as women, men, indigenous peoples, parents, grandparents, carers, gardeners, fishers, teachers, builders or whatever, reclaim some validation of our work, whether it is paid or unpaid, whether it enters the market economy or not, and value it for its contribution to sustaining life, not profit. Education, in as far as it is concerned with the preparation of members of society for life within that society and beyond, must relate to what sustains life, not just what the market demands in terms of employment.

### **Rethinking Development Theory**

Education policy constitutes a significant aspect of any nation's development strategies. But development theory itself has undergone major paradigm shifts over recent decades. The post war decades were characterised by a period of "modernisation". War torn economies were rebuilt, and enjoyed a period of massive growth and technological development. At the same time, new nations were emerging, as former colonies were decolonised and became independent. The expectation was that these emergent economies would simply develop along the same lines as their former colonisers had, by a process of industrialisation, urbanisation, and gradual "modernisation", and that continued expansion of the modern sector would eventually result in absorption of the traditional sector (Rostow, 1961).

During the 1970s an alternative paradigm, known as "dependency theory" began to take root, grounded in a Marxist analysis of capitalism. Its basis is that Third World economies are locked into a global economy in a dependent relationship as peripheries to the centre. It proposes that the West is developed *because* it underdeveloped the Third World. It suggests that the only way Third World countries can hope to develop is by cutting ties with the West and becoming self-reliant (Frank, 1971).

Development debate during the 1970s and 1980s was dominated by these two paradigms that represented two opposing camps. By the end of the 1980s they had reached an apparent impasse. What emerged in the 1990s became known as post-modernist thinking, where both modernisation theory and dependency theory were soundly critiqued. However, rather than proposing an alternative paradigm, post-modernists are suspicious of any "large" theory as a solution to the problems of development. Instead they draw on a host of "small" theories based on ecological or environmental concerns, gender issues, indigenous movements, and people's participation or "bottom-up" approaches to development.

More recently, a new discourse of globalisation has taken hold in development thinking. It is characterised by economic liberalisation, deregulated markets, privatisation of public assets, a reduction of state

governments, and integration of local and national economies into a seamless global economy (Korten, 1997). It is closely aligned to the political ideology the New Right or neo-liberalism. Economic growth is once again seen as central to development, not just for developing nations, but also for the developed economies. Alongside this, a belief in the “trickle down theory” appears to have resurfaced with the expectation that the benefits of strong central economies will “trickle down” to the periphery. The only chances peripheral economies appear to have is to get on board with this “globalisation” thing and become more integrated into the global economy.

Education is seen as a key to this process. State governments globally are urging their people to buy into (literally –as education is becoming privatised) an ideology of a “knowledge economy” based on expectations of increased productivity of a highly skilled workforce. The development of qualifications frameworks is integral to this process which emphasises “self-directedness” and individualism with respect to “privately determined goals” (Hart, 1992, p.13). Thus qualifications gained are easily transferable across industry and national boundaries, making the paid workforce increasing flexible and responsive to industry demands. Developing countries as well as the developed are rapidly becoming hooked into this process (see Walters, 1997).

In many respects, this notion of the “knowledge worker” (Hart, 1992, p.13) and the “knowledge economy” is identical to human capital theory characteristic of neo-classical economics and the now discredited modernisation theory. Human capital theory “assumes that people’s productive capability, or the value of their work in the productive structure, is determined by the amount they ‘invested’ in income-producing human capital investments. Some of these are in better health, schooling and training” (Carnoy, 1977, p.26). The consequence of this focus on the individual is that “unemployment is blamed on those who are unemployed” (ibid. p.27). This analysis of the linkage between education and employment, let alone the wider economy, is reductionist to say the least. The experience of Papua New Guinea (Department of Education, Papua New Guinea, 1985) and many other developing nations is that education does not create employment, as the growing number of unemployed secondary school graduates would testify.

Thus, there appear to be strong parallels between the largely discredited modernisation theory, and the new discourses on globalisation. The focus is singularly on the market economy, to the neglect of non-market production, including subsistence production, and all the human activity that sustains majority peoples in their traditional economies. A major difference is perhaps the role of the state, but one could argue that the ability of newly independent states to control their own political and economic affairs is severely limited anyway, as colonial dependencies were merely transformed into neo-colonial economic dependencies.

Yet, modernisation, and now globalisation, has not delivered as promised.

Hoogvelt, (1978) notes that despite significant growth in many “emerging” economies, expansion of their industrial sector “has not been accompanied by an increase in the labour absorption rate” (pp.80-81). Schoeffel Meleisea reiterates this point in relation to the Pacific: “There is little evidence to suggest that the positive effects postulated by orthodox development theory apply to nations where people have, until recently, been engaged in a primarily subsistence economy” (quoted in Crossley, Sukwianomb, and Weeks, 1987, p.19). Cole (1996) also notes:

*“In recent years, despite vigorous efforts to promote economic performance of the island states, the outcome in terms of growth and employment has employment has been disappointing. Modest levels of growth [have] ...had only a marginal impact on employment.”* (p.9).

In other words, the expectation that the modern sector would expand to eventually absorb the whole population in modern sector employment is misguided; it is simply not happening.

One could take this argument further and suggest that in fact, the impact of modernisation has, in many cases, been negative. The imposition of “modern” systems has usually meant the destruction of traditional ones, often for the simple reason that the colonisers were largely oblivious of indigenous social structures and economies; and where it was recognised, as in their language and culture, it was judged to be inferior, and primitive, destined for extinction.

However, significantly, new discourses are emerging that reappraise traditional economies. They are being recognised as dynamic systems in their own right that function alongside (and often in spite of) the modern sector (see Turner, 1980<sup>1</sup>). The colonised themselves are being attributed with agency rather than being seen as “inert objects pushed around by some impersonal ‘logic of the system’, or more concretely by government and settler” (Worsley, 1980, p.311). Yet little is documented of indigenous production, much less by indigenous peoples themselves. Any effective development theories must take cognisance of this side of the story, and await its development.

### **Non-Formal Education and Development**

For the purposes of this paper, the concept of non-formal education shall be limited to developing economies where a significant proportion of the population have their basic day-to-day needs met outside of the market economy, i.e. in traditional subsistence production. Designed to meet the

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<sup>1</sup> Turner (1980) describes the extent of small holder production in copra as contributing to a significant proportion of the export market in Papua New Guinea even as early as in the early 1900s. Indigenous food production also underwent significant changes as a result of exchange of root stocks of sweet potato, yams etc. following increased mobility of indigenous populations, mostly to work on modern sector plantations.

educational needs of the rural “poor”, non-formal education has emerged as an alternative to the formal education system, which is primarily oriented to meet the labour-force requirements of the market economy. It is argued that “formal and non-formal education should be seen as complementary, having different functions which meet different needs” (Simkins, 1977, p.23), yet in practice non-formal education finds itself a poor second in terms of allocation of educational resources and status in the public eye. However, before this debate can be taken any further, it is worthwhile to take time to consider in more detail the definition of non-formal education.

The concept of non-formal education has its origins in Coombs and Ahmed’s writings in the early 1970s. A frequently used definition is that it encompasses “any systematically organised education activity carried on outside the framework of the formal school system to provide selected types of learning to particular subgroups of the population” (Coombs and Ahmed, 1974, cited in Roakeina, 1987, p.6). It encompasses a wide range of educational activities may be divided into three categories:

- basic education–literacy and numeracy aimed at second-chance learners
- education for social and economic well-being aimed at improving living standards and subsistence production –e.g. health and nutrition, family planning, home making and child care, sanitation and water supply systems, sewing, bread-bakery, traditional handcrafts, basic carpentry, joinery and mechanics, subsistence agriculture, community development, leadership training,
- training in small income generating projects, co-operatives, small business development, and perhaps employment in local industry.

These programmes are targeted at the whole of the adult “out-of-school” population in rural and urban areas. They may include centre-based or village based programmes, conducted over short or long terms, on a part-time or even fulltime basis.

Unlike formal education, which is the preserve of government departments of education, non-formal education programmes may be offered by a wide range of government and non-government agencies. Government departments involved in non-formal education include agriculture, health, youth and women’s affairs, sport and recreation, and commerce or business development. In fact, often the educational component of their programmes is not their primary goal, but is contingent upon some other goal, such as reducing infant mortality rates, reducing youth crime rates, improving agricultural subsistence production, introducing a new cash crop etc. Nevertheless, the non-formal educational component of their programmes cannot be disregarded. The existence of a Department of Non-Formal Education in its own right in government structures varies between nation states and the current “fashion”. As an entity in itself, it has suffered from being regarded as a bit of a political football, in that it is continually being “restructured” from department to another. This uncertainty as to its status in government structures goes some way

perhaps to explaining the difficulties it has had in achieving any measurable level of success.

Non-government agencies have also played a major role in the provision of non-formal education, particularly churches, youth groups, and community organisations. In many respects these agencies have been better placed in their ability to respond to local need, unhampered by the structural problems and resource constraints that affect government departments.

Thus, the term non-formal education has come to encompass a range of educational activities that in other circles may be termed community education, continuing education, life-long learning, second chance learning, functional, vocational, recurrent learning or adult education (Wasuka, 1987). Its potential in offering a real alternative to meet the educational needs of those failed by the formal education system is increasingly being recognised. But this brings us back to examining the relationship between formal and non-formal education, which I will now take up.

### **The formal vs. non-formal educational debate**

The general consensus appears to be that “non-formal education should never be regarded as a substitute for or in competition with formal education” (Cole, 1996, p.ix). Yet historically, it has suffered a second-rate status, both in the public mind, and in terms of government policy, as reflected in resource allocation. The reasons for this may be best explained in terms what is known as “Foster's classic vocational school fallacy” (Crossley 1987):

*Educational policies in developing countries that aim to fit school leavers back into village society can, for example, be perceived as condemning rural youth to limited future prospects, to a life outside the modern economic sector, away from the personal economic and political benefits available to the urban elite. Such perceptions help to explain the negative reactions of parents and students, [and have] fuelled perennial opposition to dualistic measures to provide academic curricula for the elite and practical or adapted curricula for the rest (Crossley 1987, pp.56-57).*

Yet it has become manifestly apparent that the modern sector has not delivered. Preston (1987) notes that “expansion [of the modern sector] is too limited to absorb ... more than a small fraction of those who seek work within it”(p.28). She quotes 1980 statistics when “in Papua New Guinea, for example, more than 53 percent of the population is aged less than 20 years. There are some 4000 new jobs created in the formal sector of the economy each year and 40 000 new entrants to the labour market

(National Planning Office 1979-1980)" (Preston, 1987, p.28).

Therefore it has become "counter-productive for governments not to recognise, in a proactive manner, that there are other routes whereby their people might gain the quality of life that they manifestly desire for them" (Cole, 1996, p.ix). The only way out of this dilemma is for governments to recognise the importance of adopting balanced macro-economic policies that focus on development of the traditional subsistence or rural sector as much as on the modern sector.

To a degree this is already happening. In recent writings there is increased recognition of the importance of the subsistence sector in national development strategies. Cole (1996) notes that "if the subsistence sector is to maintain and enhance the role it traditionally plays in the life of island communities, change –and perhaps quite radical change –is needed, both in the perception of the sector and in the manner in which it is treated by the various authorities responsible for the future of these islands" (p.10).

Relating this to education policy, there is a strong case for maintaining a distinction between the two types of education. Olsson (1987) explains that "it is not so much [a distinction] between formal and non-formal as between those programmes oriented towards skills that self-employed village people will be using and those programmes oriented towards skills that will be used in waged employment at or near a centre" (p.221). Thus, the differences are not so much method or even content, but in their orientation to the different sectors of the economy.

Yet even here the boundaries between formal and non-formal education are blurred. There can be no denying that a significant number of vocational centre graduates aspire to (and sometimes gain) waged employment, and some centres measure their success in terms of employment rates of their graduates. This is particularly so with respect to centres that focus on training boys in carpentry and mechanics. By the same token, there is an increasing recognition among secondary schools that fewer and fewer of their graduates are going to be successful in obtaining formal sector employment. Hence they are working on developing schemes that facilitate transition back to the village. An example to this is the Secondary Schools Community Extension Project (SCEPP), in New Ireland Province, Papua New Guinea (see Weeks, 1987a).

However, there is increasing recognition that vocational centres should not be primarily involved in training for employment. "As long as they stick to that aim, they will generate growing frustration among their students and school leavers" (Gnaerig, in Crossley et al. p.63). Gnaerig asserts "self employment and improvement in subsistence farming are realistic goals for vocational training leavers" (ibid.). Amongst policy makers, few would dispute this, but the extent to which the public at large accepts it depends upon how well their investments in time and energy in the rural sector pays off. Will it deliver the desired improvements in wealth and well-being? The answer to this lies again in government policy with regard to development

of the rural subsistence sector. Cole (1996) sums it up well stating that:

*The need to accord recognition to the role of non-formal education springs, to a large degree, from the fact that training in the formal education system is designed to respond to the requirements of an introduced economic system which takes little account of the indigenous economic system that is evolving dynamically. While the indigenous system remains unrecognised by the formal system and only catered for by the non-formal education system in an uncoordinated way, it will never fulfil its proper place in Melanesian societies of the future (Cole, 1996, pp.13-14).*

### **Survey of Non-Formal Education in the Melanesian Pacific**

This survey of non-formal education in the Pacific will be restricted to the Western or Melanesian Pacific nations of Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji. It will focus on the question of how education in general, and non-formal education in particular, are linked to the economy, i.e. to the employment market, or to the wider human economy including non-market production.

Papua New Guinea stands out in the Melanesian Pacific as the largest nation state, in terms of both its geographic size and population. Yet the issues Papua New Guinea faces in relation to non-formal education are common to her Pacific Island neighbours (Schoeffel Meleisea, 1987).

While it is beyond the scope of this paper to deal at length with the colonial history of the region, it is important to consider the current situation in its historical context. In the period from the latter half of the nineteenth century to the end of the Second World War, the region was subjected to intervention from a variety of colonising powers whose own economic and strategic interests took precedence over the interests of the indigenous people. Needless to say, indigenous people's rights to sovereignty were largely disregarded. It was not until the fifties and sixties that the colonial governments of the region began to pay any real regard to education of the indigenous people. Prior to that, most formal education available to Pacific Islanders was offered by the churches (ibid. p.15).

The post war years were characterised by a new international tide of ideological liberalism of whereby colonial administrations were pressured to prepare their colonies for independence (Barrington, 1982). The situation in Papua New Guinea was a source of particular embarrassment to the Australian Colonial Administration since, by 1960, only 100 Melanesians had completed secondary school, and there were no university graduates. This resulted in a sudden push for the establishment

and expansion of formal education in the 1960s and 1970s in preparation for Independence in 1975. This pattern was repeated in the other nations states of the region. The Solomon Islands, Vanuatu, Tuvalu and Kiribati all achieved independence in the next decade or so. Only Fiji's history differed, in that basic education was well established in the early colonial period, and it achieved independence in 1970 (Gannicott, 1990).

This process of expansion of formal Western-oriented education systems continued through the 1980s and early 1990s. It was based on the assumption that formal education is fundamental to development. Because Pacific populations are relatively small, and external aid expenditure per capita is relatively high, governments have pursued a goal of universal formal education, at least to secondary school levels. "While there is considerable debate as to the ultimate relevance of the goal itself, it explains why the Pacific Islands governments [have not made] non-formal education a national strategy" (Schoeffel Meleisea, 1987, p.15).

Increasingly, however, this strategy is being challenged as the high costs of this model of education preclude its development as a model of education for all, and the prospects for employment are severely limited anyway.

Thus, in the latter half of the 1990s, there appears to be a shift in thinking, based on a questioning of former assumptions and a desire to develop new models. This is reflected in the statement of the Advisor to the Solomon Islands Development Trust, that

*The traditional<sup>2</sup> education system right across the Pacific is ... in great flux. Government education departments without exception realise that no matter how much money, personnel and technology they pour into their systems, most people's education opportunities lie outside traditional structures (Roughan, cited in Cole, 1996, p23).*

For the most part, however, the rhetoric has been consistent with the need to develop and support non-formal education, but the degree to which this has translated into reality has been limited. In reference to Papua New Guinea, Pala Wari of Non-Formal Education observes "despite its obvious importance, government support for non-formal education has been mostly sporadic and disorganised since independence" (cited in Cole, 1996, p.29).

In a renewed effort to come to terms with the issues, a workshop on non-formal education was held in Port Vila in 1995, bringing together government and non-government agencies from Papua New Guinea,

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<sup>2</sup> It is assumed that "traditional" here refers to western traditions of formal educational school systems, not indigenous traditions in education. That the author has not made this clear perhaps in itself reflects an assumed dominance of western systems.



Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Fiji, hosted by the National Centre for Development Studies of the Australian National University. This is perhaps the first time that non-formal education has been dealt with on a regional basis, and as such it represents a significant step forward. Progress was made in identifying the problems of non-formal educational provision in the region, and forging "a Melanesian model" for non-formal education (Cole, 1996).

While acknowledging differences between nation states, and within states, the conference identified a common goal, that:

*Non-formal education in Melanesia should seek to enhance people's knowledge and skills, particularly those which might be involved with the effective use of natural resources, to give them a wider range of opportunities for livelihoods whether in the formal or informal sectors. It should be seen as an education system more clearly identified with the needs of the rural economy, but not to the exclusion of growing groups of urban dwellers (Cole, 1996, p.19).*

What follows is a general survey of the current situation in Melanesia with regard to non-formal educational provision in relation to the economy.

### **Population and engagement in the market economy**

In Papua New Guinea eighty-six percent of the population live in rural sector, and obtain their livelihood largely from their subsistence production in the "traditional ... agricultural economy, in which the labour provided is mostly female" (Flikkema, 1983, cited in Olsson, et al., 1986, p.101). This pattern is typical for much of the Melanesian Pacific. In the Solomon Islands, of the population of 380 000, eighty percent live in rural areas. Vanuatu's population of 140 000 are scattered over nearly seventy islands in the archipelago, also with eighty percent dependent upon subsistence production for basis needs. Only Fiji's urban sector is larger, at forty percent of the population of 771 000, although a disproportionate are Fijian Indian. Most ethnic Fijians are rural.

### **School enrolment**

Again the situation in Papua New Guinea is typical for much of the Melanesian Pacific (with the notable exception of Fiji). In 1990, 17% of primary school aged children (6-12 years) were not in school, and at the junior secondary school level 37% of 13-16 year olds were not in school (Cole, 1996 p.14). In the Solomon Islands only 65% of the children of primary school age were able to attend school. Of these only 25% were able to proceed to secondary education (Wasuka, 1987, p.89). Enrolment rates in Vanuatu are similar. Fiji has near universal primary schooling, but

only 70% of those completing primary schooling complete Year 10 at the secondary level (Bamford, 1995, p.3).

### **Employment prospects**

Despite slow but steady economic growth on all the Melanesian states over the last fifteen years, "the number entering the labour market has outstripped the number of paid jobs available" (Bamford, 1995, p.3). In Papua New Guinea it is estimated that only 2000 of its 50,000 school leavers annually obtain paid jobs. In the Solomon Islands, there are only 700 new jobs for the 7,500 young people enter the workforce, in Vanuatu 500 jobs for the 3 500 school leavers (Bamford, 1995, p.3). Even in Fiji where the size of the market economy is proportionately larger, only 3000 of the 15,000 school leavers secure paid work. In all these countries, a disproportional number of the paid jobs are in the public service (about 30%), and pressure is being put on these governments, as elsewhere, to reduce the size of the public service.

### **Literacy**

Statistics for literacy rates in Melanesia vary widely. The Solomon Islands Ministry of Education 1991-92 Report put it at just 24% (Barr, 1996, p.36). In Papua New Guinea the rate in 1990 was 52.3% of the population (35.3% females and 54.8% males) (Unesco Statistics Office, cited in Non-Formal Education Sub-Sector Report, 1991, p.7). However, in Fiji the adult literacy rate is 87%. All the Melanesian states place a high priority on literacy, although development of programmes have been sporadic and poorly funded, as has any non-formal education. The contribution of NGOs to literacy training is significant, notably the Summer Institute of Linguistics (an American based international agency which has a strong Bible oriented mission).

An interesting development over the last fifteen years has been the development of Tok Ples skuls (vernacular pre-schools) throughout the Pacific. These have mostly been community initiatives, and in many cases the 'teachers' are not paid (Barr, 1995). In some places they also run adult literacy programmes in the vernacular. As a New Zealander, I cannot help but note the parallel with the development of Kohanga Reo ("language nests" for preschoolers in Te Reo Maori), and Pacific Island Language Nests. There can be no doubt that this movement has made a significant contribution, not only to literacy, but to a growing indigenous renaissance, and an increasing recognition of the value of traditional culture, languages, and the traditional economy which has sustained the Melanesian lifestyle as it has done for thousands of years.

## Vocational training

All the Melanesian states have developed some sort of system of vocational training which is directed to meet the training needs of "school dropouts". Papua New Guinea has its 125 vocational centres, the Solomon Islands has 30 Rural Training Centres and Vanuatu has fifteen; Fiji also has similar centres that go by various names. Many of these centres were established by NGO or church agencies, although an increasing number are government run.

Course content varies hugely between centres since few curriculum materials are provided by the Government. Centres are expected to develop their own according to local needs, consequently the quality of teaching varies greatly. There is no uniform approach, little co-ordination between centres; physical resources are poor, and teacher morale is generally low (1994 Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit (GTZ) Report, cited in Barr, 1995, p.33). Yet most centres would offer courses in agriculture (for both subsistence and market production), carpentry and mechanics (almost exclusively for male students) and 'home economics' only at centres where there are female students enrolled. Some centres would also offer courses in English and language, mathematics, and religious education.

Some, with a particular focus on agriculture, are virtually self-sufficient in food production, while most would spend a significant proportion of their income on rice and tinned fish to feed the students who are usually resident at the centre for the duration of the course. Only some centres operate extension programmes to villages in their region, and these are usually dependent upon additional outside assistance.

An issue common to all these centres is their struggle with second rate status in relation to formal academic education. This struggle is reflected in the constant tension between technical and trade training for lower level employment in the formal economy, and rural oriented development. However, it is important to point out that this issue is more significant for boys than for girls. Boys greatly outnumber girls in the 16-19 year old age group (typically about 70% of trainees), and fewer female trainees have aspirations of finding waged employment upon graduating. This would suggest a linkage between gender and attitudes toward working in the rural economy; subsistence production is considered women's work, and waged employment is primarily a male domain.

## Qualifications frameworks

A significant development in education policy in the 1990s is the move to develop qualifications frameworks. In 1994 the Government of PNG took initiatives to develop "an integrated vocational training programme"

effectively integrating the two separate and independent systems of Vocational and Technical Education and Training (Barr, 1995). Assessment is to be competency based with a focus on quality to meet the needs of “not only the individual, but the client, namely industry and the Community” (GTZ Report 1994, cited in Barr 1995, p.34). Vanuatu has also moved to establish a national qualifications authority, the Vanuatu National Training Council (VNTC), modelled on the Fijian framework.

While these developments reflect global international trends in the construction of qualifications frameworks that are geared towards human resource development to meet industry needs (Walters 1997), there appears to be a significant difference. In general, the Melanesian states appear to want to build into the framework a recognition of community and rural oriented training needs. It is envisaged that the frameworks could operate as a means of integrating the educational needs of the formal market and non-formal sectors, allowing for flexibility and movement across both. For example, in Vanuatu, qualifications gained from Rural Training Centres are integrated at Level 1 of the framework (Vanuatu National Training Council Report of the Working Party 1998, p.8). However, if the new National Training Councils take Fiji as a model (ibid., p.5) these ideals could be compromised since Fiji’s Council is funded by an employer levy, suggesting that in fact it is primarily concerned with training for market sector employment, not rural development.

Nevertheless, the proposal presents a strategy to raise the status of vocational training, improve its quality, and integrate it into the wider educational structures so that graduates may go on to further training elsewhere. Unfortunately no information is currently available to indicate the extent to which the proposal has been implemented, and the effect this has had on vocational centres at the grassroots. Nevertheless, it does hold within it the possibility of finally resolving the educational dilemma embedded within a dualistic education system. Only time and further research will tell.

### **Women’s programmes**

No comprehensive discussion of non-formal education could neglect the significant contribution of women’s groups. Women participants at the 1985 Non-Formal Education Conference in Goroka identified a long list of factors affecting women’s position in society, including “polygamy, gambling, alcohol, mismanagement of family finances, inadequate water, food and fuel supplies, marketing problems, marital breakdown, increasing violence and sexual crimes, desertion, lack of awareness and access to family planning, urbanisation, limited work opportunities outside the home, and low status and subsistence work overloads in rural areas” (Non-Formal Education Sub-Sector Report, 1991, p.16). “Yet” they noted, “most NFE programmes for women only offer home economics” (ibid.). Cox (1987), in her analysis of the problems facing

non-formal education, noted this problem of homogenising the work women do, as if it could all be covered under the one subject of “home economics”. It reflects a gender blindness, and the invisibility of the productive nature of women’s work in public policy. This invisibility is inevitably linked with the invisibility of the traditional subsistence sector of the economy.

However, women’s groups, organised through National Councils, Churches, community groups, as well as Government ministries throughout Melanesia, operate a wide and far-reaching range of programmes that could be subsumed under the umbrella of non-formal education. They include programmes in nutrition and agriculture (market and non-market subsistence production); health (including rural water supply and sanitation, primary health care, family planning); women in business (including a small credit scheme); literacy and communication training; political education; and social action (campaigns against corruption, alcohol, domestic violence and rape, logging and mining awareness) (Non-Formal Education Sub-Sector Report, 1991, p.22). They work from “a deep understanding and appreciation of the economically productive role of our women... and that women are the breadwinners for most of our families” (Non-Formal Education Sub-Sector Report, 1991, p.23). Yet they are constrained by limited funding they receive from National or Provincial governments and recognise that “policy makers and government bureaucrats are not sensitised to women’s role and issues.... Many still regard women’s programmes as welfare related” (Non-Formal Education Sub-Sector Report, 1991, p.25). They accuse administrators of “forget[ing] the fact that women have been in NFE for much longer than one can think of” (ibid.).

### Non-Government Organisations

Finally the contribution of Non-Government Organisations (NGOs) to non-formal education should not be neglected. Barr’s comment in reference to Papua New Guinea could also be attributed to the other Melanesian states, that “many NGOs have been committed to rural development and NFE for decades, although they may label their efforts community development rather than NFE” (Barr, 1995, p.30). He notes “the most successful [NFE programmes] are usually the ones that received the least funding and recognition” (ibid.) often because they are run by NGOs who are highly committed with a strong “grassroots” base, i.e. a high degree of local involvement and support. Of particular significance are the following examples:

- The Solomon Islands Development Trust (SIDT) which is an indigenous development trust and aimed at improving the quality of village life based on principles of self-reliance and sustainability (Barr, 1996). It “operates 57 mobile teams which conduct nationwide training programmes. Topics have included rural water supply and sanitation, disaster awareness and preparation, population education,

resources management, malaria control, and AIDS education” (Cole, 1996, p.35). The success of the SIDT is a testimony of the importance of combining appropriate non-formal education with a positive rural development strategy that has a strong indigenous agenda.

- Village Development Trust (Lae) provides training in village development through the use of its manual Liklik Buk.
- YWCA operates in several main centres throughout Melanesia, and offers a range of services including hostels for women in urban centres; school leaver programmes (similar to vocational centres) adult literacy programmes, childcare programmes, etc. They also act as facilitators for women’s training courses run by Provincial authorities or the Churches.
- All of the major Churches in PNG (Catholic, Lutheran, Anglican/United Church, Seventh Day Adventist) as well as many smaller and newer Churches have made a significant contribution in NFE, running a range of programmes in literacy, leadership, community development, family planning, alcohol and drug awareness, and other social issues. Many of these Churches have desks for Education, Health, Youth, Women, Justice, Peace and Development, and Social Concerns. Inevitably, non-formal education is a significant strand that runs through all of these programmes.

Hence, what may be found today in non-formal education is a multiplicity of programmes, courses, and activities that may in our minds fall under the umbrella of non-formal education but in fact operate quite independently of one another. While in some respects their independence may be viewed as a strength, the lack of co-ordination means they are often left to struggle along in isolation and dependent on local linkages to foreign NGO support. Programmes vary hugely in their philosophy, quality, and their orientation. There is little effective co-ordination, or correlation of programmes from one region to the next, much wasted duplication of effort, particularly in the area of production of programme or curriculum materials, and quite simply a lack of appropriate teaching materials. There is a perpetual problem of uncertainty in funding, resourcing and staffing, consequently many programmes lack stability and continuity in provision. Weeks’ comment made in 1987 is as relevant today as it was then, that the future of NFE “depend[s] on the demands generated from the ‘grassroots’ and the continued interest and backing of the churches and other private agencies. Without them non-formal education may fade away” (1987, p.230).

## Discerning a Pattern

There are a number of common threads that may be identified in the in the conceptualisation of non-formal education in all the Melanesian states investigated, notwithstanding their differences which are undoubtedly important.

First and foremost, there is a clear market oriented bias in both the formal and non-formal systems. This is most obvious in the fact that educational resources are heavily skewed in favour of formal education despite the fact that the benefits are accrued to only a minority of their populations. In 1993 the contribution to education budgets as a percentage of total government expenditure was in PNG was 15%, Solomon Islands 19%, Vanuatu 25%, and Fiji 18% (Cole, 1996, p.26). Yet, with the exception of Fiji, less than twenty percent of the population depend upon waged employment to meet their basic day-to-day needs.

Market sector bias is also evident in the content of non-formal education training opportunities. Many courses offered have a strong vocational bias with the expectation that graduates will obtain employment in small-scale industry, or work in new income generating projects. Typically, these courses involve carpentry, mechanics, and agriculture. Non-market production is neglected. Needless to say, most of these courses are directed at male students, as women are regarded as primarily responsible for non-market production for the support of their families.

Many of the programmes suffer from Western biases, particularly in relation to gender expectations. This is particularly apparent in agriculture. Rarely are agriculture programmes directed at women, the primary food producers. This is doubly misguided since in many Melanesian societies land inheritance is matrilineal. It appears that few Western designed or managed programmes take this into account. The impact on traditional social structure, land tenure, and production is to the Western world virtually unknown. Real change cannot be expected until indigenous women are allowed to reclaim their position in agriculture, as the primary food producers.

In all the Melanesian states studied, programme development has been ad hoc and uncoordinated. Numerous government and non-government agencies have been involved in the provision of non-formal education programmes in the absence of any clear policy or infrastructural support to ensure continuity and stability. Without an established policy and infrastructure, objectives are not clearly defined and integrated into national development plans. Also gaps in provision are not identified, consequently many miss out, and basic needs are not met. Literacy is an obvious example.

Yet there is a consistent thread running through all the literature, that increased recognition must be given to the importance of the rural sector

and non-formal education, as the formal system can no longer deliver. The majority of secondary school graduates do not find formal sector employment, and their frustration is borne out in increased crime and lawlessness, particularly in urban areas and amongst young men. This form of social dislocation can be attributed at least in part to the inappropriateness of the formal education system. These young people must be reintegrated into society and engaged in productive activity that will benefit themselves as well as their society. Their future lies back in their villages. These ideas are articulated in the numerous reports, conferences and workshops held in the region, which call for the development of non-formal education, yet little progress seems to have been made.

Another important thread that runs through all four of the Melanesian states studied are moves to establish qualifications frameworks. These developments reflect global trends to better meet industry needs for skilled labour in an increasingly market oriented global economy, although there appears to be a significant difference. In Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu<sup>3</sup> at least, there has been a serious attempt to construct frameworks with a Melanesian flavour by integrating rural oriented vocational training into the frameworks. This could work to resolve the second rate status suffered by vocational training generally, as qualifications gained are transferable across to market sector employment or further education. However, the extent to which they also integrate non-market production skill development is yet to be seen.

## Conclusions

Melanesian education systems generally reflect western biases of their former colonial masters, notwithstanding significant attempts to incorporate 'the Melanesian way'. Education is widely regarded as the means of obtaining western knowledge and skills in order to obtain a slice of western prosperity.

This bias is evident primarily in the huge imbalance in resource allocation. Formal education, orientated towards meeting the needs of the market economy, continues to get the lion's share of education spending. Even within non-formal education, there is a significant bias toward the market sector. Most courses tend to be oriented toward vocational skill development or income generation. The strong gender bias reinforces this analysis. Boys significantly outnumber girls by two to one, reflecting the reality that non-market production is still primarily women's work, and is not the primary focus on non-formal education.

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<sup>3</sup> The Vanuatu Rural Development and Training Centres Association (VRDTCA), Vocational Non-Formal Education Policy (1998) contains a specific plea for support "from various donor agencies for the development of the rural people of Vanuatu through education". It identifies training activities as "vocational because they provide skill development targeting *primarily* [my italics], but not exclusively, non-formal rural labour markets in order to improve living standards" (p.2).



Consequently rural oriented market and non-market production has been systematically marginalised. It comes as no surprise that non-formal education has likewise been systematically marginalised and has never really got off the ground as an alternative to formal education.

Formal education is closely linked to the market economy in that its graduates are supposedly prepared for waged employment or in a few cases, private business. It has functioned as a mechanism for bringing about 'modernisation' which may be equated with westernisation. It effects a marginalisation of indigenous languages and culture, dislocation from traditional land and social structures, and in the longer term, impoverishment for the majority, although in all cases small local elites have emerged as beneficiaries of these developments.

This process of modernisation cannot be separated from a process of globalisation and an increasing dominance of market economics. Embedded within this process is an ideological commitment to economic rationalism and a belief that the market will deliver if allowed to operate freely. It renders invisible the totality of non-market production, including subsistence production and care of family members, which is absolutely vital in sustaining human populations both in developing countries and in the west.

Policy makers and practitioners in Melanesia have consistently worked to forge a non-formal education system that is distinctive in quality and orientation from the education systems inherited during the colonial period, to better meet the needs of their rural majority.

The history of non-formal education is a history of stalled starts and failed attempts to establish policies and structures that would ensure a well-coordinated, stable, dynamic and well resourced system. Its history reads like a litany of workshops, conferences, reports, and recommendations that appear to have not even resolved where non-formal education belongs within government structures.

Yet the degree of success has to be recognised, a success that has been achieved more often in spite of lack of recognition, funding and support than because of it. That non-formal education is "alive and well in Melanesia" (Cole, 1996, p.32) is a testimony to the dedication and commitment of the many government and non-government agencies, church agencies, and individuals involved in its provision. There also appears to be no lack of political will on the part of the Melanesian Governments. In Papua New Guinea the Government have recognised that "the time is right to do something different with Non-Formal Education" (1991, Report, p.35), and in 1995 produced a new policy document for non-formal education. The Solomon Islands Government have taken similar steps to improve the status of non-formal education. Vanuatu have built into a "master plan" for education increased support for Rural Training Centres (Vanuatu Education Master Plan Summary Report, no date). All the Melanesian states are in the process of

developing qualifications frameworks which, to some degree, seek to integrate vocational training and rural skills development into a unitary structure, giving recognition and legitimacy to non-formal education.

However, the extent to which these efforts are successful depends to a large degree on assistance from outside agencies. Indeed, as even the moves towards construction of qualifications frameworks represent, policy formation in education is dependent to a large extent on donor agencies funding procedures and ideologies (Gina-Whewell, 1997). This study purports that perhaps inertia in development of effective non-formal education plans has been the fault of western development agencies (UNESCO, World Bank, western government and NGO agencies), who have simply not heard the voices of local people in their struggle to establish a system different to the west. A case in point is in regard to the New Zealand Government's response to O'Connor's reports. O'Connor identified that New Zealand "could play a useful role in supporting the development of Non-Formal Education infrastructure in Papua New Guinea" (1989, p.21). Yet, a decade later, Papua New Guinea still does not have a solid infrastructure for non-formal education in place. Have their voices fallen on deaf ears?

A possible explanation is that westerners have simply not understood the significance of non-formal education in national development plans. After all, few westerners have any experience of a subsistence economy, and are thus not able to conceptualise how non-formal education system could relate to this sector. They simply do not hear the voices of indigenous people in Melanesia or anywhere for that matter. It is for this reason that this paper will be directed to western development agencies as much as to policy makers and practitioners in Melanesia itself. I dare say, much of the contents of this study will be well known to them anyway.

Another important point relates to the wider politico-economic context in which non-formal education operates. Barr (1996) asserts

*Because non-formal education can only be used as a strategy in development if it is operating in an environment conducive to a similar model of development, it will be necessary for Governments to seriously come to grips with the inadequacies of the model of economic and educational development currently adopted throughout Melanesia. NFE involves a new paradigm or a new vision of what development is all about (p.53).*

This "new vision" entails, in my view, a reconceptualisation what counts as work, and a recognition of the absolutely vital role non-market production plays in meeting the day-to-day needs of the majority of the population. "The traditional subsistence economy needs to be valued along with the cash economy. Villages need to be valued as well as towns and cities" (Barr, 1996, p.53). Traditional economies have successfully

sustained their peoples for thousands of years, but are under threat because of systematic marginalisation by the market economy. Non-formal education has a vital role to play in redressing this imbalance.

Thus, non-formal education is reconceptualised as education to meet the needs of the rural majority, whose basic living needs are met outside of the market economy. However, it is not exclusive of urban populations, and involves both market and non-market production, since it works to enhance income generation, but does not lose sight of the importance of non-market production in meeting basic needs. Hence, improving access to clean water supplies is as important as developing a small-holder cocoa plantation. The goal is improving quality of life, not just incomes.

Furthermore, if non-formal education could be integrated into formal education qualifications frameworks, problems relating to its second rate status and lack of opportunity to further education could be reduced. It would allow for flexibility in movement across the different sectors. Hannington (1995) asserts "NFE cannot be isolated from the bounds of formal education policy considerations. In effect, these two forms of education are integrally linked and attention must be given to both if much progress in future is to be made" (p.5). An obvious implication of this is that non-formal education must be integrated within Ministries of Education so that the interface between formal and non-formal education can be understood. Non-formal education does not belong in youth/home affairs/women's affairs or other departments where it is fobbed off as welfare. It is not welfare, but is integral to a dynamic strategy for economic development, including both market and non-market production in a balance appropriate to meeting the human needs of the populations it serves.

Thus, there can be no doubt that it is widely recognised that "there is an urgent need for countries to develop national non-formal education policies which, for out-of-school youth, combine training with employment generation and integrate the activities of all the agencies involved, both government and non-government" (Bamford, 1995, pp.16-17).

Two final points need to be addressed: that the position of women in non-formal education needs to be remedied urgently "as experiences around the world indicate that the status of women's education is closely positively correlated with decreasing population growth rates, with increasing quality of family life, and with increasing GNP" (Report of the UN Office on Population, New York, cited in Siwatibau, 1995, p.2); and that literacy is a priority as, not only are adult literacy rates low (except in Fiji), but a significant number of children are denied a primary education. The initiatives taken by indigenous people in vernacular literacy training (Tok Ples skuls) need to be affirmed.

To conclude, a reconceptualisation of non-formal education as education primarily (but not exclusively) for the rural majority, that takes into

account the contribution of both non-market and market oriented production in sustaining human well-being, has the potential to become a key aspect in a dynamic rural development strategy to improve the quality of life and not just incomes for majority peoples. By recognising non-market production, and the critical role women play in this work, it may help us to break the stranglehold that the market-driven ideology has over education and enable us to breathe new life into education for life.

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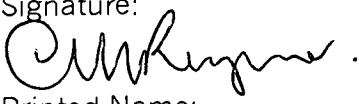
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