

University Report

BBC

AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

MS 4572/14

UNIVERSITY REPORT

No. 171

Broadcast 24th, 26th, 27th & 28th October 1971

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

In this weeks 'University Report' two really new and exciting ideas - one for the teaching of history, and the other in adult education.

Malawi University is a young institution - and its department dealing with adult education - which they call Extension Studies - is just three years old. It's also a very small department, but it has nevertheless come up with something absolutely new, to my knowledge, in Africa! More about the experiment later - but first let's go back to the beginning. Malawi's unit, like most others, started with three objectives - firstly, to provide remedial study for people who didn't get an opportunity to get an education to suit their potential. Then to help people in various professional jobs to improve their knowledge and skills. And thirdly general cultural education - in arts and science for everyone who wants it. Now, as the Director of Extension Studies, Mr. Brian Luckham explained to Douglas Lamb, now they are giving more attention to further education of people in various professional positions.

BRIAN LUCKHAM:

For example we have organised a course on Customary Law for senior Police Officers, we've lectured to Members of Parliament, we've organised courses for people involved in running the play group movement. There 's a number of things of this kind where we are helping people who are already doing some kind of work and need extra knowledge and assistance.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

Was there an existing demand and interest in the extension type of course when you came, or have you had to sell yourselves very hard?

BRIAN LUCKHAM:

Well there is always some kind of extra-mural activity being done by a University although perhaps it is not always as well recognised as it might be. For example, there had been some occasional lectures given by members of staff before I came. But so far as planning a programme and looking at the thing as a whole, of course, one was beginning as it were again. There was certainly a very encouraging demand from Malawian citizens to take part in our courses, and one of our problems, of course, has been that the resources have never been adequate to meet the demand.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Brian Luckham echoing for Malawi the perpetual cry. But, in fact, Malawi does present peculiar problems to the people aiming to make adequate facilities for adult education, available throughout the country. There is its shape to start with - it's long and narrow which makes communication more difficult than might be expected in a relatively small country. And it has not been possible there yet to set up centres with resident tutors - centres exist but can only be visited infrequently. However, obviously the whole population does have the right to adult education - and it was in trying to find ways in which to make himself, and his staff, useful to the greatest number of people that Mr. Luckham gave birth to the exciting experiment I mentioned earlier. Of course they had thought about more obvious ways - as Mr. Luckham told Douglas.

BRIAN LUCKHAM:

Now one way in which this can be tackled, of course, is by correspondence. But the great problem with correspondence study is that it's a very slow business, and if it takes two or three weeks for a student to get a reply to any query which he submits, well it may be that the pertinence of the question is lost by the time the answer comes back, and he still feels very isolated even if you give him a regular supply of study notes.

Alternatively one can use conventional radio, but although this has its place there are limitations in that it is really a one way system of communication, and feedback is a vital part of any educational activity. So we have been toying with the idea of using some kind of remote study facilities which would reach people in the more distant places. In Malawi our circumstances are not yet affluent, and we wondered whether we could use radio. And having seen, whilst I was in Australia some years ago, two-way radio being used for school education I felt that there was some potential here. And so just recently we have, in fact, undertaken trials in co-operation with the Malawi Post Office, with Malawi Broadcasting Corporation and a commercial firm, to demonstrate the possibility of using transistorized transceivers. In other words to have your tutor at one end with the radio set and receiver and a group at the other end able to listen and also transmit to him.

We have been able to organise very successful discussion groups by this means, and this had been commented on very favourably by the tutors who found that, although of course they weren't in fact to

BRIAN LUCKHAM:

fact contact with the students, they were getting immediate feedback from them, and so it seemed that there was a much more effective educational communication than would be possible by other means.

Now, of course, this was only a preliminary trial and we need a much longer period of evaluation but it seems to me that a method of this kind may have relevance for many developing countries where there are problems of distance, of communication and where these modern transistorized pieces of equipment can enable us to reach remote groups, even small numbers of people, relatively cheaply. Of course you have to pay for the sets, but it's easier in some ways to get economic aid for capital projects rather than for running costs, and the running costs of equipment of this kind which operate off twelve-volt car batteries is infinitesimal and, therefore, we think that we have something here which will be of practical use in the near future in Malawi and perhaps of interest to other countries as well.

GWYNETH HENDERSON:

Practical, useful and very exciting I think. Well in fact Brian Luckham has now finished his three years in Malawi (incidentally his successor is Ronald Clarke, who was of course previously at Makerere in Uganda). But it was in Mr. Luckham's last week in Blantyre that Douglas talked to him for us. And so looking back Douglas finally asked Mr. Luckham.

DOUGLAS LAMB:

Extension Studies is a sector of the total activity of the University of Malawi. Do you feel that the other fulltime teaching departments of the university have recognised the importance of this work in the development of the country and have you been able to get full support from them in this?

BRIAN LUCKHAM:

Well not surprisingly feelings have been mixed and this would be true I think in any university. There are those who are doing degree work or research who feel that adult education is a marginal activity and perhaps not even the responsibility of the university. But you see the university is the apex of a country's educational system, and the university ought to have a stake in this kind of thing because it can pioneer, it can develop, it can initiate new programmes which perhaps later on other people can take over, and I have certainly been encouraged by the support that I have had, and certainly amongst the Malawian staff - they do agree that this is an extremely important part of the University's work.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: Certainly the Malawian staff do agree on the importance of this work. Mr. Brian Luckham, Ex-Director of Extension Studies in Malawi and now back in the United Kingdom at Manchester University.

And so to that other new and exciting idea I mentioned - this time in history. A few weeks back a very interesting looking folder landed on my desk from Lusaka - it's called 'Safari - Records of East Africa's Past' and it was compiled by Dr. Andrew Roberts, who's just left his post in the University of Zambia. Inside the folder is a polythene envelope full of papers, maps, facsimiles and so-on. It is intended principally for use in schools - though I must say I found it fascinating too, but in fact I passed it over to one of my colleagues, Mick Delap, who's taught history in a secondary school in Nigeria.

MICK DELAP: Well Gwyneth, I wish this sort of thing had been around when I was teaching history. I really needed materials to help bring the subject alive for my students, so that instead of just sitting absorbing my views they would have been encouraged to make historical judgements of their own.

"Safari": African Archives, File One" deals with East African history in the two or three hundred years before the colonial period. Information is presented in various ways - there is an excellent map of East Africa with three overlays; and a date chart entitled "Milestones in East African History". The main part of "Safari" consists of two sets of wall charts. Both sets use writing and pictures to present information. The written sources include extracts from the diaries of early European visitors, facsimiles of manuscripts where the society was literate, and oral traditions. The pictures are of important historical sites, actual artefacts like weapons, or a surviving iron-smelting furnace, and contemporary European engravings. This first set deals in a general way with the societies of East Africa's interior and includes information on their different economies and ways of government. The second set is more specific. It concentrates on just two areas - the coast and the Lakes region and on the trade in slaves and ivory which grew up between them in the nineteenth century. Then "Safari" turns its attention to places and people. There is a twenty-three page booklet illustrating East Africa's historic buildings, and a wall chart which briefly describes the lives of six great East Africans of

MICK DELAP:

of the nineteenth century. Finally, the collection turned to written sources - there is a long poem in Swahili with English translation written about 1810 lamenting the decline of the coastal island of Pate, and a facsimile of a passport issued in 1857 by the Sultan of Zanzibar to the Captain and crew of a dhow sailing to Arabia. "Safari" ends with suggestions for further reading on East Africa's past and this is one bibliography which I would expect students to use - I can think of no more exciting introduction to East African history than this collection of sources. Of course it is highly selective but it does give insights into the past of peoples from every part of East Africa. It is very clearly presented - the basic map of East Africa for instance uses transparent overlay sheets to provide several different types of information and most of the other items are printed on one side of the paper only so that they can be displayed on the wall, and used by a whole class of students. But "Safari" is impressive not just for the wide range of sources used or intelligent design. In itself it is an excellent example of the professional historian at work. Every source is meticulously acknowledged. And in spite of Dr. Roberts' determination to allow the student to form his own judgements, "Safari" is far more than just a random collection of historical facts. The author clearly believes in the vitality of nineteenth century East African societies and in long distance trade as one important cause of this vitality.

GWYNETH HENDERSON

Thank you Mick - well "Safari" is published jointly by the National Education Company of Zambia and Oxford University Press and it sells for 19.50 East African shillings. Well it seems that originally the initiative for it came from the Zambian Ministry of Education - so what about more files for other parts of Africa? In Lusaka Safari's compiler Dr. Andrew Roberts told Graham Mytton about their plans.

DR. ANDREW ROBERTS:

Well we have made plans for further numbers in the series, we are going to have one, or perhaps two, files in the near future on the African side of South African history. There will be one roughly covering the period up to the time of the great trek in the early 19th century, and this will, to some extent, provide a counterpart to this file on East Africa. We also have in mind files on the more recent history of Zambia. One of the nineteenth century which will roughly parallel that on East

DR. ANDREW ROBERTS: which will concentrate on the development of relations between Zambian peoples and foreigners such as Portuguese, arabs, Swahili traders, the gradual involvement of Zambia in the outside world. Another file concerned primarily with the impact of colonial rule on Zambia and the response of Zambians to colonial rule.

GRAHAM MYTTON: Will you be producing this yourself, or are there historians involved in this project?

DR. ROBERT ROBERTS: I hope to be producing one of the Zambian files, but colleagues of mine, here in the Department of History at Lusaka, are also collaborating in the series, and we certainly hope to involve other historians at other universities in Africa in producing files on other important topics in African history.

GWYNETH HENDERSON: And on that hope that soon there will be a library of files covering the whole of Africa from Dr. Andrew Roberts - a fairly universal hope I should think - we come to the end of another University Report. Next week we go to Ghana to hear from Professor Merrick Posnansky of the University of Ghana, Legon about a new development in research and teaching in archaeology there.

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