UNESCO SOURCES

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LEARNING WITHOUT FRONTIERS
WHAT A PLEASURE
Thierno Madjou Bah
Guinean Federation of UNESCO Clubs and Associations
Conakry (Guinea)

It is was a real pleasure to read issue numbers 93 and 94 of your magazine. I got a lot out of them. The dossier on bioethics was of particular interest in light of my studies in biology at the University of Conakry. I share the magazine with the other members of the UNESCO Club so that they too can benefit.

BEYOND DOLLY
Bell Joselson
Retired radio journalist
Cannes (France)

Your issue on bioethics (No. 94) was rather interesting. What’s more, it was very timely - a description I wouldn’t necessarily extend to the International Bioethics Committee (IBC). It took four years to hammer out the famous Universal Declaration on the Human Genome and Human Rights. Now, the delay is obviously understandable given the complexity of the issues involved. But what real impact can it have? I am thinking of the infamous declaration of Dr. Seed in Chicago (USA) who plans to clone humans - one of the only two practices specifically banned in the IBC Declaration.

While this situation clearly points to the need for a binding international convention, we may well ask - as Sources did in the interview with Ms. Noëlle Lenoir (IBC President) - whether or not the IBC can keep up with the pace of science. Ms. Lenoir insisted that it was possible, “because the aim of bioethics is to reflect on the implications of progress before it is too late to do so.” She pointed as an example to Dolly, the cloned sheep of Scottish scientists. Their work, “brought out a new awareness of the tremendous ethical questions posed by the possibility of transposing the technique to humans. And so we find the many legal propositions under study to banish the spectre.” But here, Ms. Lenoir may have been caught up in wishful thinking as those laws appear far from catching up with the tremendous financial and social powers supporting men like Dr. Seed.

GOOD CHOICE
Michel Temovsky
Specialist in education sciences
Nice (France)

I just wanted to express my admiration for the quality and objectivity of your work as evidenced by the choice and treatment of the subjects covered.

BE AWARE
Mariela Peña Segui
Librarian
Camagüey (Cuba)

Having had the chance to read a few issues of Sources, I always find the themes presented very interesting. The articles make people around the world more aware of problems in Africa in addition to those involving women and children “without rights” for example.

A STARTING POINT
Eduardo Amijos Gutierrez
President of the Ecuadorian Association of Veterinarians
Loja (Ecuador)

For my colleagues and myself, your magazine is a point of departure for a knowledgeable debate of current issues involving us all.

THE LIST GOES ON AND ON...
Donna Nairn
Student
Sydney, (Australia)

Your December dossier on the 25th anniversary of the World Heritage List highlighted the many unquestioned achievements of the World Heritage Convention since its inception. But I can’t help but feeling that its underlying principles, and the prestige of the World Heritage label, are being undermined by the rapidity with which sites are added to the List. Your January issue reports that another 46 sites have been added, bringing the total to 552 sites in 112 countries. How can such an extensive list be managed, and quality control exercised?

I can’t help but feel that World Heritage status is being handed out more on political grounds, or as a means to help certain countries kick start their tourism industries, rather than in recognition of the “best of the best” of human beings and nature. Can such a list continue to grow indefinitely? Where are the limits?
FORCED OR FARCE

The major American news networks have mobilized more journalists and devoted more air-time to Bill Clinton’s alleged shenanigans than for any other story ever before. While the story continues to unfold and claim its place on the front pages, some of those media giants have now launched into a critical self-examination, casting doubts on the wisdom of the attention they have paid the story and the often ill-considered treatment they dished out to the president. They are also pointing the finger of blame at the Internet.

“The Internet made this story. And the story made the Internet,” writes TIME magazine essayist Michael Kingsley in the February 2 U.S. edition. “Clintegate ... is to the Internet what the Kennedy assassination was to TV news: its coming of age as a media force. Or some might say media farce.”

On the one hand, we have armies of journalists armed with formidable means of investigation and guided by a professional code of conduct: the first rule of which is that a so-called “fact” is not publishable unless it has been corroborated by at least two reliable and independent sources. On the other though, we have a lone “internaut” seated in front of his computer screen, hooked up to the web, and operating without the least concern for ethics. Any old rumour will do. And the incredible thing is that the “dwarf” has dictated to the “giant”: the internaut has taken the lead in the information race, and the media giants - worn down, they now say, by their frantic attempts not to be beaten to the scoop or left behind - have sometimes resorted to questionable short-cuts.

Force or farce. The force has been proved. Questions are now open as to the farce. And the repositioning of the traditional media to deal with the rising power of the Internet has only just begun.

René LEFORT

(See pp. 18-19 on the latest World Communication Report.)
W ithout getting bogged down in dry details, this book explores why there is a rising demand for antiquities. Based on years of research, practical experience and fascinating interviews with those on both the supply and demand sides, the author explores long-term policies needed while recognizing the difficulty in reaching a consensus given the complexity of the trade.

After examining existing instruments for reducing thefts, the report turns to ways of changing the antiquities market by, for example rendering certain forms of collecting anti-social. W hile looking to research on how young people construct their identities, the articles look at previous initiatives for peace education before considering proposals for the future.


**TO LIVE TOGETHER: SHAPING NEW ATTITUDES TO PEACE THROUGH EDUCATION**

Aiming to soothe the trauma of conflict while reinforcing peace, this book explores a long-term research project undertaken by Israeli and Palestinian academics and field-workers.

The articles explore various psycho-political perspectives on Middle Eastern conflict before turning to prospects for grassroots cooperation despite the “shadow” of past and possible future fighting. W hile looking to research on how young people construct their identities, the articles look at previous initiatives for peace education before considering proposals for the future.


**GENERAL HISTORY OF THE CARIBBEAN - THE SLAVE SOCIETIES**

“Throughout the tortuous history of the Caribbean region nothing exceeded in fundamental importance the twin experiences of slavery and the plantation system... (They) were, without much doubt, the overwhelming crucible that fashioned the indelible mould of the present Caribbean reality.” W ith this introduction, the third volume explores the region’s slave societies from the 17th to 19th centuries. A look at the radically altered demographics in the region sets the stage for understanding the impact of the sugar revolutions. The book then examines the sweeping changes in the slave economies in the wider contexts of Atlantic trade. Studies on the changing social structures shed light on the constant interplay of colour, gender, occupation, caste, class and economic status. At the same time, we discover communities generally hidden by the slave plantation society before examining the most important and longest surviving of these: the Caribbean Maroon.


**MONITORING LEARNING ACHIEVEMENT**

Part of the follow-up to the World Conference on Education for All (Jomtien, Thailand, 1990), this handbook provides a detailed account of the joint UNESCO / UNICEF Monitoring Learning Achievement Project in five pilot countries (China, Jordan, Mali, Mauritius and Morocco), and the implementation strategies for capacity building through national and inter-agency partnerships. It also presents some common core and country-specific tests in literacy, numeracy and life-skills including questionnaires on the conditions of learning at home, in the community and at school. A framework is also proposed for collecting, analyzing and reporting data.

- Learning Achievement - Towards capacity building, by Vinayagum Chinapah, UNESCO / UNICEF Follow-up to Jomtien, UNESCO 1997, 122 pp., 120 FF.

**PERIODICALS**

THE UNESCO COURIER

"Does medicine treat patients or combat illness? Is illness caused simply by the intrusion into the body of an outside agent or is it the sign of an imbalance, a disrupted harmony which the body tries to rectify, where necessary with medical assistance?" Under the banner "Medicine and Tradition", doctors, psychotherapists and anthropologists offer a range of possible answers to the far-reaching questions asked by the editorialists in the February issue of The Courier. Covering a range of contrasting and complementing traditions, the articles offer a panorama of practical medical advice: from a Buddhist-inspired approach to treating psychosomatic illness to the techniques of African healers and the holistic outlooks of Chinese medical practitioners.

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GLORIA MONTENEGRO: TRAILBLAZING BOTANIST

Her culinary speciality is prawns in pepper sauce. But she is even more renowned for her expertise in “the morphological convergence of plant species of different phylogenetic origin living in similar climatic conditions.” In short, she studies the ways plants adapt to their environments. Gloria Montenegro, 55, is one of four women scientists selected from 94 candidates for the first Helena Rubenstein Awards for Women in Science with support of UNESCO, presented at Headquarters on January 7.

Today, Montenegro is an internationally recognized specialist teaching at the Pontificia Catholic University of Chile and she was President of the Chilean Botanical Society for two periods. She is presently working on the preservation of certain wild plant species as well as rehabilitation schemes in areas that have been ravaged by fire or are being desertified.

She puts part of her success down to her belief that “women scientists are more sensitive to people’s problems - because of their role as mothers - and to the environment. And we need to be close to people, and also to communicate, and therefore to put things simply.

“It’s a real challenge for a woman to have a scientific career because she also has a family and domestic responsibilities. It was the men who decided it would be our job to keep house.”

Fortunately my husband has been very understanding. He is a scientist as well, and he realized that when I had to go off for two weeks into the mountains, he would have to look after the children,” acknowledged Montenegro - a mother of two and grandmother of four.

The other three winners of the prize include Nigerian biochemist Grace Taylor, French biochemist Pascale Cossart and Korean microbiologist Myeong-Hee Yu. The four $20,000 awards will be presented at Headquarters on January 7.

“Some things just shouldn’t be done - like digging and dynamiting at a reef. But at what point do you limit fishing, for example? Is all coral mining bad? It’s difficult to answer without at least the medium-term data.” Which is why Rubens will help develop a “socio-economic manual” for monitoring a reef.

“I love diving, but that’s not why I got involved with the project. I started out interested in natural habitats and wildlife,” he says, pointing to his NGO experience in Uganda’s chimpanzee forests and Tanzania’s coastal forests. “But then I saw the tension between conserving a natural area for its own sake and the fact that people’s livelihoods often depend on chipping away at those resources. It’s very complicated in scientific and human terms - which makes it just fascinating.”

JASON RUBENS: THE REEF MAN COMETH

It has the makings of a great comic-strip: the adventures of the Reef Monitor. Various kinds of lives depend on the dashing young diver on a mission to protect South Asia’s corals. Nothing can stop him - not the dynamite blasts of fishermen, nor hordes of spiny sea creatures awash in foul tides of waste and algae.

Shedding his wet-suit, the superhero emerges as the dedicated Jason Rubens, a 30-year-old British development expert armed with a master’s degree in coastal management and seven years experience with the non-governmental Society for Environmental Exploration. A mere “social scientist interested in conservation”, Rubens ploughs through the paperwork and builds the contacts for the mythic Reef Monitor.

Dramatics aside, Rubens is coordinating the South Asian wing of the Global Coral Reef Monitoring Network set up by UNESCO’s Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission (IOC), the UN Environmental Programme and the World Conservation Union, to enable governments and communities to monitor and manage their own reefs.

Based in Colombo, Rubens moves about Sri Lanka, India and the Maldives to recruit volunteers - from a marine biologist to a social scientist working with local fishing communities. But the job gets tricky in trying to train them. Besides the lack of funds, questions remain over ways of gathering and comparing information on the reefs. While there are basic techniques to measure coral cover and fish abundance, “it’s a lot easier to get information out of a reef than people,” reminds Rubens. For example, the growing trade in aquarium fish may reduce the numbers of fish grazing on algae which compete with corals for space on the reef.

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The Director-General named the former President of Iceland, VIGDIS FINNBÓGADOTTIR, chairperson of the World Commission on the Ethics of Scientific Knowledge and Technology on January 12. She will initially be responsible for advising him “on the terms of reference and composition of the future World Commission, and propose the names of 20 or so persons prominent in scientific, legal, philosophical, cultural and political circles from all parts of the world.”

Last November, UNESCO’s General Conference requested that the commission be set up “to promote ethical, multidisciplinary and multicultural reflection on a number of situations that might become a risk to society as a result of advances in science and technology” such as that concerning freshwater resources or the information society.
RADIO IS A POWERFUL MEDIUM FOR REACHING AND TEACHING REMOTE COMMUNITIES, THOSE LACKING TRADITIONAL EDUCATIONAL INFRASTRUCTURE, AND PEOPLE WHO SIMPLY CANNOT GET TO REGULAR CLASSES: HERE A MONGOLIAN WOMAN - LEARNING BY RADIO FROM HER YURT (Photo © S. Nowak).
LEARNING WITHOUT FRONTIERS

Learning must be geared to learners’ ever changing and varied needs - no longer the monopoly of standard education systems. By seizing all forms of exchange by all means, we find new possibilities to learn for so many purposes (see below).

Peter Kempadoo moves from the city to the villages of rural Zimbabwe to share and make the most of his experience in self-reliance (p.9). Paradoxically, Mozambique’s disastrous legacy of educational breakdowns offers a chance to wipe the slate clean (p.10). Meanwhile, American teenagers use Internet to explore their local environments while building a learning community with fellow students the world over (p.11). Thanks to a community radio station, farmers in the Philippines are doubling their rice harvests (p.14) while children in Bangladesh take a fresh look at their culture through photography (p.12-13). Learning to read becomes a family affair in the Netherlands (p.15) but those who cannot sit down with a book or write a letter can still find a tool for professional training with multimedia in Central America (p.16).

When did you, dear reader, last learn? I don’t know what you are doing right now, but I am pretty sure your answer will be like mine. I’m learning now. I am tempted to say that this is what Learning Without Frontiers (LWF) is about. This explanation may not satisfy you if you had in mind something like Doctors Without Borders. The frontiers that LWF refers to are barriers to learning. Not only the geo-political ones, but also barriers of time, distance, languages, socio-cultural and economic circumstances, as well as those inside us.

I’m learning while I write. It makes me think and search my memory. I sit in a room where there are books and journals that I will consult. There are people around with whom I will talk. Letters, words, whole sentences appear on a computer screen in front of me. The first lines are there. They will likely have changed when this article is finished. They reflect my thinking at one point in time. Next time it may be different. Interacting with what other people think may help me change my mind, may help me learn. This can occur in face-to-face interaction, by telephone, in a classroom, the workplace, a community gathering, through media, e.g. e-mail or web-based electronic conferencing, during a ceremony or a casual conversation.

I was learning yesterday when Adama Ouane, who heads UNESCO’s section for Literacy and Adult Education, and I sat together, discussing how we would write this article, how we would explain that Learning Without Frontiers is not utopia, that it’s not just media, that it’s not just distance education, that it is real, that it is here, that it is where you are, dear reader, and that you can engage in it any time you want. It is made possible thanks to your environment. The better that learning environment, the better you will be able to satisfy your learning needs. It will stimulate you to be in touch with people who have similar interests to learn in forming a learning community.

DRINK YOUR TEA

Actually, you may be part of various learning communities, because there are different groups of people who have diverse learning interests. So you may sit in classes at one time, hours later you may drink your tea, sitting outside a small cafe in a big city, but you’ll be sitting with other people and may be discussing something you saw on TV or read in the paper that made you think. Though you may be far away from where I am, my imagining you where you are makes you, in a very ephemeral way, part of one of my learning communities.

Even though Adama and I had decided we would do this differently, I will soon give him a call and fax this piece to him, ask him to reflect on it and continue the line of thought. He will then send me back what he wrote and we will probably have a couple more interactions, continuing our learning exercise. Then other people will work on it and we’ll continue to interact. Eventually, you will learn because we learned. That’s Learning Without Frontiers.

We learn throughout life. It starts at birth. It ends when we die. Learning to learn is now becoming of key importance. Whatever we may have learned in the structured systems of education is rapidly becoming obsolete in a fast changing world. This is a reality in rural Africa as much as in the Parisian suburb my colleague Jan Visser is writing from. We may interact face-to-face, exchange thoughts and information via the Internet or do so by fax. But our learning may equally be mediated through the beat of the drum, the sound of a cora or a collective battle for freedom. Learning takes place in school or in halls crowded with children who study the Koran, but it is also present in the initiation rites that bring us face-to-face with the harmoniously interwoven complexity of all different aspects of life, so vividly
and imaginatively described by Amadou Hampâté Bâ when he narrates his Fulani childhood in Mali in his famous novel Amkoulel. The process of initiation, of apprenticeship, of shaping oneself to the values of life and the creation of an open community to which each person contributes, and takes away from, in order to grow, that is learning as well. Learning builds on previous learning. The cumulative effect of it has no limit.

Learning Without Frontiers is thus far from utopian and far from a mere collection of anecdotal cases. Breaking down barriers to learning is common practice in both rural and urban Africa. In very remote and poor areas, dry-cell batteries are used to compensate for lack of electricity and satellite dish made from odds and ends by local blacksmiths capture images from all over the world.

THE LONELY SAVANNAS

The Fulani shepherds, during their long and solitary seasonal passages, have discovered the tape recorder as an inseparable companion in addition to their famous multi-functional stick. They have added the tape recorder to the radio and other community media, particularly the rural press, that give them access to useful knowledge and that allow them to develop new ways of life. They use it not only to listen over and over again to the epic accounts of what happened in times immemorial, but also to record their own voice, their own literary creations. In fact, it offers them the possibility to enhance their memory, to multiply the volume of texts and poems they compose in the loneliness of the savannas.

Opportunities to learn, to create knowledge, to recognize the value of traditional knowledge, abound. Every day one can see how barriers to learning are being pushed back. Take Timbuktu. In the Anglo-Saxon perception it is that imaginary city in some remote region, so far away that it seems no longer to be part of this earth. And yet, I just returned from Mali where we discussed the establishment of a multipurpose community telecentre precisely in Timbuktu, and five other places. Those pilot centres will provide access to the Internet. They will provide public services for education, health, agriculture, the environment, cattle breeding and fishing. They will also offer space for the development of handicraft, for the promotion of small enterprises, and for the empowerment of women. The centre in the ancient city will be of particular value to the Ahmed Baba Cultural Centre as it will allow instantaneous worldwide access to the archives and famous manuscripts of the Sankoré University, one of the oldest in the world, which finds itself righteously in Timbuktu, the mysterious one, as the inhabitants of Mali call her. Here, past and future meet. That too is Learning Without Frontiers.

As an area of concern in UNESCO, Learning Without Frontiers is very much a transdisciplinary effort. A small core group of people, handling a budget of less than $100,000 a year, is responsible for its coordination. Others, in different entities of the Organization, for instance in Basic Education Division and Informatics, contribute to it by their own means. But Learning Without Frontiers is much too large to be just a UNESCO activity. It belongs to the world and should therefore be seen as a non-proprietary concept. All need to participate in making it happen. It requires vision, commitment, imagination and practical abilities to do things on the ground, seriousness in looking beyond the achievements of the past, willingness to learn while creating new modalities to facilitate learning, and above all, partnership.

Therefore, the programme aims in the first place at encouraging exchange around three main concerns. The first of these is to bring about a change of perspective, to create a new-mind set. This is done through publications, meetings – both real and virtual ones – and, above all, by identifying innovative experience that can serve as models. The LWF web site – http://www.education.unesco.org/lwf/ – is a major mechanism to allow people to learn from each other’s experience and to join the LWF partnership. Through it one can get access to a wide range of other web sites on LWF related experience.

A second major concern is the exploration of the potential of available and emerging technology to facilitate learning. This is much more than a question of installing hardware. More important is how we use technology to create learning modalities appropriate to the present day context, i.e. concentrating on learning that empowers and that engages people collaboratively.

DIFFERENT EYES

The third concern is to bring about diversity. The most interesting breakthroughs can be found where people had the courage to leave the trodden paths. In some cases, circumstances make it easier to look at the world of learning with different eyes. This is for instance the case in Mozambique where much of the existing educational infrastructure vanished during the civil war. A sad situation, but also one that offers the opportunity to build things up thinking anew, rather than by replicating what was. Paradoxically, many industrialized nations may be less innovative than Mozambique, being held back by their past achievements.

LWF, as a UNESCO field of action has been operational since January 1996. It is too early to judge its effectiveness. Most evident at this stage is the wide acceptance of the underlying ideas and the fact that LWF is generally seen in the world as a force to be counted on. More difficult, not surprisingly, is to bring about change in the existing educational practices. The aim of LWF is to provide integrated responses to the full diversity of learning needs in society. The traditional systems of schooling must also be rethought. Schools need to become key institutions to prepare the new generations for lifelong and life-wide learning. That requires different attitudes and a different set of skills for teachers, learners and administrators alike. It also calls for the involvement of a broad range of additional partners. Much work still needs to be done. Much still needs to be learned. That too is Learning Without Frontiers.
MR PETER AND HIS PRINCIPLES

This Guyanese-Asian teacher of Gandhian principles has based his life on learning by doing, and is now helping others to do the same.

When I grew up on a sugar plantation in Guyana, all the skills required for rural living were at my fingertips. I could build my own furniture, I could make my own clothes. People learnt things and developed on their own..."

Today, a thatched village house at Matsheshe in Zimbabwe’s arid southern Matabeleland region is the part-time home of Peter Kempadoo, a Guyanese-Asian teacher of Gandhian principles. “Mr Peter” was first asked to help run an emergency food programme for children when visiting in 1989. On his return some months later the village chief gave him land to live on so that he could lay the foundations of what is now a successful and expanding community-based rural development project. He in turn brought this “hands-on experience” to UNESCO’s Learning Without Frontiers Task Force.

At 71, this tall, white-haired figure speaks of his work with energy, enthusiasm and humour, drawing from childhood experience the basic truths of self-sufficiency that he sees as the birthright of every villager.

CHERISHED

“My father was committed to helping others. But we were desperately poor and the family had to be sustained. It was my very good Indian mother who made sure that we had skills. If left to my mother we could have ended up very wealthy because my father was the sort of person if someone knocked at midnight and said, ‘Repair my car’, he’d repair the car and say ‘Go in peace!’ Left to my mother she’d say, ‘Charge him five dollars’. We never accumulated money but we were extremely happy and that was something you cherished in your heart.”

Arriving in London in the early 1950s, Kempadoo found work at the BBC’s World Service. Without much money, access to books meant long hours spent at the local library, first reading classical literature and then, questioning his own Catholicism, anything he could find on comparative religion and philosophy. Through his links with the Roman Catholic church he met members of the socialist and progressive Fabian Society (founded in England in 1884) and became familiar with the movement for colonial freedom.

When his first wife joined him in London from Guyana, Kempadoo landed a regular job with the Gallup Poll organization and set about finding a cottage in the countryside for a growing family. Learning by doing was the way of life for their 14 children (five of whom were adopted), with his wife being the “genius” who organized their home-schooling. Now scattered round the globe, there’s at least one professor and a TV producer as well as several published authors in the family diaspora, writing being a trend started by there was very different from Kenya or West Africa. It was totally inhuman. People were dumped in our district (Matabeleland), uprooted from very fertile valleys and thrown unto land which could not sustain anything but sub-sufficient agriculture.”

But anger finds no place in his outlook on life. “It’s better to light a candle than to swear in the dark,” he says. His way of doing this was to introduce soybean cultivation at Matsheshe, and encourage small dairies to produce yoghurt. Vegetable crops have been established and fish ponds built and cared for. This work is all done by the women.

“WHY DON’T WE..?”

“The men spent all their time arguing about the Bible over a bottle of rum,” he says. “The women had to hold the family together. They were the hard workers. It was the women who came to me and said, why don’t we form a programme?”

The programme at Matsheshe is entirely managed by the village women and its young people. Basic construction skills have been acquired in building kitchens and accommodation. Women are taking up rainwater harvesting and agro-forestry.

Perhaps best of all, children have grown up learning from these activities. Building on this experience, they formed a group to take on an even more ambitious programme after a Canadian affiliate of the Commonwealth Broadcasting Association offered a broadcasting unit. But there was no power supply. “Everything has to be done step by step.” So the kids decided to complete their A-level maths to learn how to build solar panels. “So now we can take the next step” in preparing quality programmes. For Kempadoo, “radio is part of the informal learning by doing. It’s not about people sitting around and just listening.”

While the process of change may be slow, Peter Kempadoo’s success lies in having the vision to see what is possible, the compassion in finding the way to do it and the patience to see it through.

Peter Kempadoo with his first novel, “Guyana Boy”, published in the 1950s.

He spent years travelling from one rural development project to another for UN agencies. Then, after his wife died in 1986, he went to South Africa to visit a project at Phoenix Farm in Durban based on Gandhi’s principles. There, the whole concept of Sarvodaya, the upliftment and welfare of all, based on concepts of truth, love and compassion, with non-violence as the guiding principle in building communities and nations, came into sharp focus.

By the time he reached Zimbabwe three years later, he clearly understood how colonialism had changed African village life. “You realize that there is an amalgam of cultures at the village level. People in Zimbabwe now wear westernized clothes and a lot of them have gone through programmes which enable them to communicate in English. The colonial experience
STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Everything needs to be rebuilt in the Mozambican province of Nampula, starting with the education system. But attention should be paid to avoid the mistakes of the past.

The civil war completely wiped out Mozambique’s education system. In the northern province of Nampula as elsewhere, progress made in formal education after independence (1975) has all but vanished. More than half of the scholastic infrastructure has been destroyed and the primary level enrolment rate dropped from 95% in 1981 to 59% in 1988, and, today, a meagre 35% for boys, 28% for girls. “For every 1000 pupils, it is estimated that in Nampula only 48 will complete primary school,” wrote Jan Visser, director of the Learning Without Frontiers coordination unit in a recent report. More than half of those who succeed in primary school will abandon their studies later on because of inadequate facilities.

MEDIocre AND OUTDATED

The report also notes that the world’s second poorest country (US$20 per capita GNP in 1994 according to the World Bank), suffers from excessive centralization, mediocre curricula, the use of outdated methods, a lack of teaching materials and poorly trained teachers: a quarter of them have never had the least formal education and more than half have only received six years of primary education followed by just one year of professional training. The majority of schools are overcrowded and function in shifts, with students most often seated on the ground. Certainly, a network of schools has largely been reconstituted. At national level, the number of schools rose from 3,381 to 5,165 between 1993 and 1996.

According to Helena Taipo, a chemist and director of the Office for Employment Promotion, “all districts in Nampula province have a school again.” But the barriers that block access to formal education are so numerous that the classic responses set into motion before the war are no longer acceptable. For Zacarias Ivala, a teacher and representative of the Nampula Teaching Institute, the problem lies in the inadequacy of the national education system. He explains that the people of Mozambique expected their leaders to innovate and improve on what had existed pre-independence. Experience has proved the contrary. In a country where 80% of the population depends on agriculture for a living, “individuals, most of them from rural communities, go to school to discover ‘civilization’. After five years in primary school, they know how to read and write and even if they don’t continue their studies they are convinced they are ‘civilized’ and feel cut off from their community. There is nothing they can offer it because they’ve forgotten all that tradition taught them. “As long as our system has not found mechanisms to allow pupils to find a real knowledge, adapted to their environment, we will make mistakes.” Ivala sees growing up in ignorance of one’s own identity as the worst kind of illiteracy.

He also highlights the excessive distances between pupils’ homes and their schools. “I know boys who travel 30 kilometres a day to and from school and the higher the level of studies, the greater the distance.” As for girls, they don’t usually even get to make the trip. “The most important thing is that they marry well,” explains Alberto Viegas, a former teacher turned writer and assessor for the National Planning Office. “They make do with whatever they learn from their husbands. If he is capable of feeding his family, school takes second place,” says Viegas, adding that concrete incentives such as job quotas are needed to fix this.

Language is another problem. Viegas claims it is urgent to institutionalize teaching in mother tongues because Portuguese is a first language for just over 1% of the population. In Nampula, most Mozambicans speak the Bantu languages, Emakua and Koti. “Just imagine the gymnastics they have to go through first to think in these languages, then to translate them into Portuguese which is often a third language in the learning order.”

Outside the dispersed efforts of local and foreign NGOs, non-formal and professional education organizations are practically inexistent. There is only one adult literacy centre in the province, which has an illiteracy rate of 60% for men and 80% for women (against 42% and 77% respectively at the national level). Fifteen other learning centres exist only on paper. There are multiple needs in addition to literacy. Before the war, the province was the country’s principal zone for agricultural, fish and timber production. Now, farmers want to learn how to access loans and to commercialize their products, skills they were never able to acquire in the past because of the state-dominated economy.

“Formal and non-formal efforts must be conjugated in order that religious, traditional, family and school education combine to form Mozambicans who are active and implicated in community life,” concludes Viegas.

Easier said than done. With support from the Netherlands and help from a variety of local and foreign contributors (NGOs, media, etc), UNESCO and the Mozambican authorities are working on it. Their report is expected mid-1998.
THE WORLD’ S BIGGEST SCIENCE CLASS

Science students around the world link up via the Internet to share and compare their knowledge and improve their skills.

Linda Maston’s students were once cut-off from the rest of the world. Their eighth-grade science classroom in Pease Middle School in the tough inner-city neighbourhoods of San Antonio (Texas, USA), even lacked windows. That suddenly changed when computers with Internet connections were placed in the classroom: Linda’s students then had virtual access to the entire world. Yet as useful as Internet resources can be for science education, the greatest resource connectivity provided was access to other students.

“What are some of the CO₂ levels that people are getting inside their various classrooms? Ours are extremely high.”

Linda’s students issued this simple message while studying their local environment as part of The Global Laboratory Project, an international, full-year, introductory science course designed around telecommunications. Funded by the US National Science Foundation, Global Lab was created by Dr. Boris Berenfeld, a Russian-born scientist and educator, at TERC, a leading educational research organization in Cambridge (Mass., USA) and member of the Learning Without Frontiers Task Force. Since its creation in 1991, Global Lab has linked over 300 middle-school classes (generally between the ages of 12 and 15) from more than 20 countries.

A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS
What sets Global Lab apart is its use of telecommunications to create a global community of learners. Students use low-cost but accurate instruments, specially developed for the project, to measure key characteristics of their local environments such as air, soil and water temperatures, soil and water pH, water salinity, light intensity and UV radiation, and ozone and CO₂ levels. Each class creates its own web site that is linked to that of the project (http://globallab.terc.edu/). Students use the web to share and compare their findings, just as scientists do. Once they have acquired basic investigative skills, they collaborate with their peers worldwide to choose and conduct their own investigations.

Linda’s students had measured high CO₂ levels in their classroom. Thanks to Global Lab, they then were able to turn to their peers for help. Global Lab colleagues at Kennedy Middle School in Aiken, South Carolina, USA, replied to the above message.

“We read your report and have a similar case here. All our classrooms have windows but we tested the carbon dioxide levels in the trailers where a lot of our classes are. (Our teacher) thought they would have higher levels. Not!! The regular classrooms had higher levels...We explained this by the hallways. Regular classrooms open into the hallways, while the trailers open into the outdoors...So when the class changes, you get fresh air in the trailers. In the regular classrooms, you get stale air from the hall.”

Linda’s students then had virtual access to other students.

“The moment of glory came,” Linda continues, “when the officers got exactly the same reading as we got!”

As a result, the school’s ventilation system was repaired and Linda’s students experienced a deep sense of accomplishment and empowerment. “They were so proud of themselves that they had managed to do what nobody else had been able to accomplish in 17 years. They are so used to failure that it’s hard to convince them sometimes that they’re doing good work.”

WORKING TOGETHER
Global Lab also teaches students that when collaborating with peers worldwide, they are expected to work in a responsible and timely fashion not for their teachers but for each other. For example, when students from a Moscow high school detected errors in the data submitted by other Global Lab classes, they sent the following message to the community:

“It is natural for every scientist to make mistakes. But the low accuracy of the data may lead to wrong conclusions. In science, this problem is one of the most important. In our scientific community, we have to overcome it too...We invite everyone who has any idea on improving the accuracy of our work to communicate with us.”

Indeed, Global Lab is the fulfillment of a dream of Dr. Berenfeld and his colleagues to enable students from different nations and cultures to communicate and learn together. “Transnational learning communities make education more engaging and contemporary for students and empower them to learn as scientists, scholars and professionals learn,” says Dr. Berenfeld. “In doing so, the great potential of classroom telecommunications becomes realized as students acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes they will need for life and work in the 21st century.”

Harvey Z. YAZIJIAN
Cambridge, Mass. (USA)
WITH PRIDE, BUT WITHOUT THE PREJUDICE

A group of Bangladeshi children learn a professional skill to build on for the future and in return provide a candid new vision of their own culture that attempts to teach adults a thing or two as well.

Rabeya Sarkar Rima is 13. She is in year nine at school and in two years, will sit for her “Matric” - the equivalent of O levels. But she has already made her mark as a talented photographer, and recently won second prize in a UNICEF-organized regional contest with a picture on domestic violence. She has also been selected to sit on this year’s jury to select the prestigious annual World Press Photo, the first child from Asia to do so.

Rabeya is one of 46 children who’re supported by the Drik Picture Library, a photographic agency in the capital Dhaka, seeking a radically different perspective on Bangladeshi society and culture. Drik helps pay for children’s education, provides them with a camera, teaches them the basics of photography, and encourages them to express themselves through this new medium. Many of these children already have some form of paid work: “15 of them, for example, sell flowers in the streets of Dhaka,” explains Shahidul Alam, Drik’s managing director. “We don’t have cameras for them all yet, so they share some.”

Before joining the Drik project three and a half years ago, Rabeya had wanted to become a doctor. “I was a bright student and everyone thought that was the career I should strive for. It was only much later, when I began to see what I could do with photography that I decided to be a photojournalist.

“The first thing I would like to do is bring up some issues in our home. Dad
gives no importance to Mum, putting her
down constantly saying ‘you’re a woman,
what do you know’... Mum didn’t want my
elder sister to be married off so young, the
doctors blame her early marriage for her
poor health. Mum doesn’t want my next
sister to get married, she’s only 15, but
Dad will not listen to anyone.”

Rabeya is also doing a story on her
brother. “My parents kept having chil-
dren till a boy was born. I want to docu-
ment how life is so different for him than it
is for the rest of us. He gets the best of
everything. The fish head, the full egg,
clothes we would never get. Pavel is okay.
He realizes what is happening... but he is
a boy and a time will come when he will
become like my father. It’s already hap-
pening. It will take me maybe eight to ten
years to document this.”

Her parents were hesitant about this
new, unconventional path for their daugh-
ter. But the UNICEF prize has helped
bring them round. Nowadays she earns
with her photography, and gives most of
her money to her father, which also helps.

One of the remarkable spin-offs from
this project has been the way in which the
children deal with their new knowledge...
and share it. “The children have taken on
the role of teaching themselves - and oth-
ers around them,” says Alam. “Some of
them are now teaching their mothers to

read and write. Others run general lit-
eracy classes in their own community.”

While continuing her own schooling,
for example, Rabeya also teaches photog-
raphy and journalism to other children -
most recently in the remote village of
Phandauk. “That was the first time I came
in close contact with Hindu children. I felt
so good about them. I had always been told
bad things about Hindus - if they came to
the house they would be given food in a
different room. If only I could make others
see...”

Sue WILLIAMS
**SSHH! IT’SSCHOOL-ON-THE-AIR**

In the Philippines, Cabagan community radio’s students not only get a diploma, they also learn to double their rice harvests and cut their expenses.

It was 5:45 and nearing dusk in the town of Cabagan, Isabela, 500 kilometers north of Manila. Pieneta Antonio, a 48-year-old widow, glanced at the clock at the public market. “Oh my God! My lessons will start at 6:00 o’clock. I need to be home.” She quickly grabbed her bag of groceries, begged off from the storekeeper and headed for home. She did not even hear the sales lady asking “What lessons? At your age?!”

The one-hour radio-show, is unlike any programme on the prevention of pests and diseases of palay (rice).

The school-on-the-air targets listeners who have little formal education. Fernando Lago and Teresita Balacano finished only elementary education while Pieneta Antonio got to second year high school. Pieneta proudly claimed: “My neighbours and relatives used to tease me when they learned that I was ‘schooling’. Now, they consult me whenever there are problems in the rice field.” She showed off her certificate of participation in the school-on-the-air and her medal for arriving at the top of the class.

The school-on-the-air is organized by the Isabela State University for broadcast over the 20-watt community radio station, DWRA, one of the community stations belonging to the Tambuli network, set up by UNESCO and the Danish aid agency, DANIDA.

Similar scenes were played out in many other barangays (Philippine villages) surrounding the agricultural towns of Cabagan and San Pablo, as listeners tuned into DWRA’s school-on-the-air (SOA) programme on the prevention of pests and diseases of palay (rice).

The school-on-the-air is organized by the Isabela State University for broadcast over the 20-watt community radio station. Previous broadcasts have dealt with topics such as food preservation, health and nutrition of children, bio-intensive gardening and first aid. “The school-on-the-air pursues the three-pronged university goal of instruction, research and extension,” said Ann Sablan, a development communication teacher and station manager of DWRA.

Sablan says listeners not only gain vital information but the majority of them put into practical use the knowledge acquired through the school-on-the-air. Her claim is backed by formal pre-test and post-test evaluation conducted by the university’s School of Development Communication.

The format differs from the usual instructional programme in that students formally enrol. The subject matter is chosen on the basis of the actual needs of the community radio listeners.

**TANGIBLE BENEFITS**

Over 100 listeners were formally enrolled in the school-on-the-air on the prevention of rice pests and diseases. “Most farmers in this town did not know the modern approach to pest management and diseases. For instance, they automatically spray pesticides at certain stages of rice-plant growth without bothering to look at the presence of the pests. In the process, pest management has become expensive and grossly ineffective. Today, the farmers are familiar with such words as economic threshold level and other technical terms only the technicians could understand,” says Sally Albano who hosted the thrice-weekly programme.

Lago confirms Albano’s observation. “In the last harvest, after the school-on-the-air, I almost doubled my harvest per hectare. Now, I also spend much less on fertilizers and pesticides.” Lago himself asserts he is just one of numerous farmers who improved their productivity as a result of the school-on-the-air.

Dr. Miguel Ramos, the executive director of the university looks forwards to having more structured radio courses for the residents of Cabagan and the neighbouring towns. “Since a formal distance education system has yet to be institutionalized in our country, we are doing our share to give the un schooled members of our community the second chance to acquire organized and practical knowledge via the powerful medium that is radio. Who knows, with proper logistical support, the school-on-the-air might become the forerunner of the open university system in our region.”

Louie N. TABING
Cabagan
A FAMILY AFFAIR

Getting kids to work at home with their parents is the key to a Dutch programme to help children in difficulty learn to read.

Teaching a young child to read and write is not a cut and dried affair. Ask any teacher. Most will reply that there is no one single method that guarantees success for everyone. However, few public school systems have the resources available to offer a range of methods tailored to their students’ varying needs. Those kids who don’t catch on in the time allotted often end up repeating, failing or requiring special and often expensive private help. This is particularly the case for children from low-income families and migrant kids.

The Overstap (Change-over) programme, followed by some 13,000 pupils in 450 Dutch schools, serves as a support for these pupils by introducing more flexibility into the school system, extending the learning process beyond the classroom and making it a family affair.

The programme, which started as an experiment in four communities in 1992-1993, was partly developed as a sequel to Opstapje (Leg-up), a home-based programme for children from four to six years. Overstap is aimed at children in first grade of primary school (age six to seven) and their parents. All the schools involved have a very high percentage - up to 100% in some cases - of students from different cultural backgrounds.

KNOWLEDGE SINKS IN

“The children love Overstap,” says Annemiek van Aarssen, who teaches at the Jules Verne primary school in the city of Utrecht. The idea is simple: children first learn certain characters and words at school. These are then repeated at home on the assumption that this will help the new knowledge sink in. The school provides the children and their parents with specially-developed reading materials corresponding to what the child has learned in class and incorporating a series of activities in which reading aloud is strongly emphasized. There are also picture books that allow those parents who’re illiterate or who feel uncomfortable reading aloud, to participate by discussing the images with their children.

“There are 10 little beautifully illustrated and very colourful books to read at home and 10 books with assignments and one book to read to the children which is also on tape,” says van Aarssen. “The parents can keep the book to read to the kids, but they have to return the rest. The intention is that the pupil and a parent work together at home every week for about 30 minutes. And once a week the children bring their little book with assignments to school - which in turn stimulates the parents.”

About 30% of the pupils in van Aarssen’s class originate from other countries. So the book that is read to the children is also available, for example, in Turkish, Arabic, Spanish and English.

The parents are invited to the school each time the children change books - about every three weeks - and are instructed on how to use the accompanying materials. Other activities such as visits to libraries and the screening of videos on children and reading may also be included.

Apart from extending learning time and increasing the kids’ vocabulary, Overstap integrates reading into the home situation - which Annemiek van Aarssen believes is the key to its success. “It’s important for the children and their parents to know that reading at home is fun. It’s a playful way of learning, and provides a wonderful opportunity for parents and children to spend some quality time together.” It also enables parents to become more familiar and comfortable with the school environment.

Before starting with Overstap, van Aarssen, as all the teachers involved in the programme, received special training at the Averroes Foundation, a centre for early childhood development and the family in Amsterdam, which designed the programme. Up until this year the Dutch government subsidized this training, but from now on schools must pay for it out of their own budgets.

CHASING PARENTS

“The first school year is difficult,” she says. “You don’t know what to expect from the parents or the children and you really have to put a lot of time and effort into the project. You have to chase the parents to get the books back, work out how to convince them to come to the school for meetings, and how to motivate them once they’re there. The first year, not many parents came. But this year more than half of them turned up to the meetings and were very enthusiastic.”

Do the children mind doing their Overstap homework? “No, they think it’s wonderful. And not just the pupils who are learning well, but also the kids that have some problems.”

Jeremy is one of van Aarssen’s pupils. “My mother helps me with Overstap,” he explains shyly. “We sit at the kitchen table and do some of the assignments together. I like the project but I hate going to bed afterwards!”

Sabah says she does the assignments with her 11-year old brother most of the time, and is particularly excited about the book she has just finished. “It’s about a giant who takes a trip to see a girl giant, but he didn’t take her a present so she slapped him.”

Ruveyda, Margaretha and Natasja are best friends, and do their Overstap homework together. “It’s easy and it’s fun!”

“It’s a programme that demands time,” says van Aarssen, “but the investment is certainly worth it.”

Caroline BROEIJER (Utrecht) with S.W.
LEARNING A TRADE THE SIMPLE WAY

In Central America, pictures and sounds are used to teach sought-after skills to illiterate people.

Education isn’t much use if it doesn’t help you to feed yourself and build a future. This is the idea behind the Learning Without Frontiers project to develop alternative, or informal education among the 30 million inhabitants of the six countries of Central America - Costa Rica, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador and Panama.

The aim is to teach trades to adults so they can earn a living. Such skills as making bricks, earthenware plates and utensils and bamboo furniture, elementary sewing, electricity, plumbing and carpentry, and also market gardening and producing natural fertilizer are taught through modules designed for people who cannot read.

All nine courses include a video showing each step, with explanations by the instructor in everyday language. If a video machine is not available, an audio cassette can provide a detailed description of the steps to follow. There is also a manual which shows the entire process in pictures and simple diagrams, rather like a recipe in a women’s magazine where you can’t go wrong.

EASY TO MAKE

The courses are put together in Costa Rica by local professionals with experience in radio and television production and/or training in graphics. They also receive the help of Radio Nederland’s Latin American training centre. Those for making pottery and bricks are now being tested. “The method is clear; the technique very simple and the items very easy to make,” says Deseña Rivas, a 21-year-old village woman who had never touched clay before. “And the earthenware pots and plates are very popular with tourists.”

“It’s a way to generate alternative employment. We can work in groups, with friends for example,” says Martin Solis, a 26-year-old gardener who sees a chance to increase his income to support his young family.

“There are two teachers per class: the project trainer and a man or woman from the community who has already mastered the skills. In this way, the entire learning process is based on interaction between the facilitators (project trainers), participants and their community,” explains Amable Rosario, who is responsible for the courses at Radio Nederland.

Now in the testing phase, the project will be launched in early March. A radio and television campaign in the six countries will publicize the courses and some media stations will actually broadcast them, allowing people to learn at home.

Craftwork isn’t looked down on. In fact tourism has boosted its status.”

“It’s a completely new experience,” says Amable Rosario. “We’ve really tried to make use of multimedia by combining audio-visual, sound and written material. Central American countries have worked with UNESCO before in educational development, but this is the first time they’ve cooperated on an informal education project.”

“In several countries in the region, schools haven’t yet recovered from the wars, so the project is filling a big educational gap created by the fighting,” says Juan Chong, head of UNESCO’s regional bureau in Costa Rica.

A LIVING SUCCESS

Tests have shown that the teaching method is suitable for an illiterate and inexperienced person, but they have also brought to light special requests, such as advice on how to market manufactured goods. The participants are quick to remind that producing crafts is not the same as selling or marketing them -which is a whole different ballgame.

Time will tell how effective the project has been not just in transferring know-how but also in generating income. Just how many men and women will follow the example of Juan Mendez Alvarez, a 50-year-old Costa Rican who learned to spin pots, plates and other items 18 years ago and who now runs a small but prosperous pottery firm? Alvarez opens the video on teaching pottery. His is a living success story which may inspire tens, even hundreds of thousands of others in these six countries where statistics show 70% of people do not manage to earn even a minimal income.

In the meanwhile, preliminary evaluation results are strong enough to send a Costa Rican team to Mozambique where they will help produce similar materials for other Portuguese-speaking countries of Africa.

N. K-D.
with Milena Fernández
in San José
Recent titles:
New Technologies in Education
(No. 102 and 103)
A MEDIA REVOLUTION

New technologies are causing a major shakeout in radio, television and the press, says World Communication Report.

Will the Internet kill off the written press or revive it? Will public audio-visual services be squeezed out by commercial television? Will news agencies have to expand into multimedia and diversify their product? Will digital systems consign our dear old radios to the attic?

In short, how will new technologies change the face of the media? The latest edition of UNESCO’s World Communication Report goes to the heart of a subject which is exercising the minds of all media professionals.

“The world of communications is gradually changing from an economy of scarcity and government controlled controls to a free economy oriented towards abundant supply and diversity,” the report reads. The new scene is set. Now we have to see how the traditional media forces will react and whether new roles will force them out of the spotlight.

“In most countries, newspapers have gone through a serious recession, characterized by a general downturn in sales, a loss of advertising market share, dwindling readership among younger generations and a general decline in the influence of the press compared to radio, television and now computers”, says the report’s author, Algerian academic Lotfi Maherzi.

TImE FOR A CHAnGE

In the rich countries, with a few exceptions like Japan, where daily newspapers reign supreme (72.7 million copies sold every day in 1996), it is time to change direction to ward off further losses by turning the competition (pictures, sound and the Internet) to one’s advantage.

During the early days of the present new information technology, a few years ago, some experts thought the Internet would kill off the written press. Many now think the opposite. “Although they are fully aware that electronic publishing is not a miracle solution for the economic straits (...) many experts feel that the written press may be able to overtake television again, thanks to the Internet.” Thus, “more and more newspapers around the world are opening servers on the Internet” to broaden their traditional products and information services and lure young readers. “In August 1996, there were more than 1,500 newspapers and international magazines available on line, 1,400 of which were on the World Wide Web alone (...) Some, such as the New York Times, complete their texts and photographs with spoken commentaries, while others have set up newsgroup debates with their readers.”

FALLING REVENUES

News agencies are also reorganizing in the face of falling revenues and subscriptions from traditional clients. This very concentrated sector - the three biggest agencies handle and distribute more than 80% of international news - must constantly innovate to reduce costs and diversify products and customers. Some have specialized in an (almost) guaranteed profitable market: financial information.

There are many too who have gone into “the gathering, processing and dissemination of current events pictures, mainly destined for television. With the development of new channels transmitted by satellite, broadcasters no longer able to cover growing reporting costs have turned to services provided by the major agencies.”

But since the market is so promising, with 50% growth predicted over the next decade, outsiders are joining in. “The development of new technology in video transmission and growth in market demand for news have led some of the major television channels (like CNN) to set up their own news agency.”

Radio, the world’s most omnipresent media, “is not immune to technological upheaval, and the current situation is teeming with developments. In terms of the progress that has been made, worth mentioning are multiplexing, the miniaturization of receivers, the diversification of power supplies, frequency modulation and the considerable improvement in quality of reception,” especially through the digital Radio Data System (RDS) developed in the 1980s and operating in several countries. The system enables transmission, at the same time as the main programme in stereo, of additional signals (identity of the station, road traffic news, etc.) which are decoded by integrated circuits in the standard receiver.
Even better, “digital radio is going to do away with the idea of a frequency linked to a station,” thanks to Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB). Now being tested from Denmark to China and Mexico, it is the target of big business because it requires huge investments and replacement of existing receivers.

But nothing is certain yet. “Manufacturers cannot sell large quantities of DAB receivers and other related equipment unless there are interesting and innovative programmes available.” So the public holds the key. For them, the explosion of new technology means having a wider choice of programmes. The trend towards specialist stations (sport, music, 24-hour news etc.) and towards decentralization (local, community and regional stations) will increase.

“This diversification of the radio environment will expand even further with the use of satellites.” The listener will be able to choose from streams of programmes and order a selection of them or special things like current share prices. “The frontier becomes blurred, even uncertain, between radio broadcasting in the classic sense of the term and new, specialized satellite-based pay radio services.”

This abundant supply is going to revolutionize the habits of TV viewers even more. The two main technological foundations of television of the future, digitalization/compression and satellite transmission, “have produced a radical increase in the number of programme streams and services directly accessible,” such as tele-shopping and video games.

But there too, a question mark hangs over what the public will choose. “How are viewers going to react to such a profuse, multifold feed of programmes? Are they prepared to pay subscriptions for video on demand? What future do general-interest channels have in relation to the host of theme streams?” One thing seems sure. Television will now be making a “twist offer” - free programmes available to everyone and specialized ones for those who want them.

“The downturn in viewership has resulted in the ongoing erosion in advertising revenue for traditional general-interest channels. On the other hand, the ratings for pay-TV and theme channels and their revenue from subscriptions and advertising are on the increase.” This has set off epic battles, with alliances and counter-alliances, among the audio-visual media giants to win “control of subscribers and access to programmes”.

In view of this upheaval, what will be the new relationship between money, power and the media? Will humanity’s entry into the “cyber galaxy... create large-scale exclusion and generate constraints which interfere with the democratic processes,” or will it, on the contrary, “mobilize other resources for better serving civic life, collective solidarity and the feeling for shared knowledge and understanding?”

These are vital and very controversial questions which are still being written about, or rather, being debated on the Internet.

Sophie BOUKHARI

THE STUFF SOCIETY IS MADE OF

Bamboo may be making an industrial come-back.
But is it the end of a civilization?

What has been around since the time of the dinosaurs, can grow more than a metre a day and might very well be sitting in your kitchen? Grass. Picture nibbling panda bears and African flutes. Eat the element in question or use it to build a home capable of withstanding earthquakes but save the roots for their healing powers revered from China to Cameroon.

Bamboo is truly extraordinary. With about 1,250 species of 70 genera, the tropical grass comes in many colours, shapes and sizes. One plant can reach just 10 cm while another shoots up 40 metres. Since the Bronze Age, people have been using it for making tools. Flexible and abundant, it’s been a major building material for temples and dwellings dating as far back as 2000 BC in China.

POETS AND PAINTERS
From flutes to spoons, bamboo has made inroads into almost all aspects of life in Africa, Latin America and above all in South East Asia. Poets and painters have long swooned over the stuff kitchen utensils, furniture and musical instruments are made of. And now environmentalists are waxing lyrical about its rapid growth. Some species mature in just a year or two offering an inexpensive and efficient means of preventing desertification and soil erosion. While there are no accurate counts concerning the size of the world’s bamboo forests, China apparently has the greatest area with about 4,4 million hectares.

Yet despite this illustrious past and remarkable features, the experts are worried: "Is this the end of bamboo’s golden age?" The question loomed at an international seminar organized by UNESCO in Ho Chi Minh City (Viet Nam) in December to find ways of promoting and safeguarding traditional bamboo techniques in modern life. For bamboo the bell tolls, the experts warned, pointing to the homogenizing forces of globalization and western development models as the culprits. Its traditional roles in the home are being uprooted by the arrival of cheap plastic goods and the comforts and prestige of cement houses.

And yet, these same experts couldn’t contain their excitement over new developments and interest in their beloved plant. China has clearly taken the lead with a research centre developing new treatments against the arch enemies: termites, worms and mushrooms. Botanical studies are underway alongside tremendous investment in finding new uses and construction techniques, according to Pierre Clément, a French architect attending the seminar. "China faces a major shortage in building materials for housing. Not only is the country scarce of timber, but they cannot use earth for construction because they need it for agriculture." Bamboo may come to the rescue with new glue and pressing techniques producing wall, floor and ceiling panels.

Paper production is another area of interest, with bamboo used for 60% of output. From ethnographic studies to treatment and marketing techniques, the move is on to better understand the wonder grass. Meeting at Ho Chi Minh City from December 17 to 19, 1997, experts from about 20 countries notably recommended developing databases on bamboo’s genetic diversity while also developing an inventory of traditional and modern techniques for cultivating, preserving and using it. By designating “bamboo heritage sites”, participants hope to promote public awareness while pointing to the need to adapt tax laws so that local artisans can profit from international markets. But this leads to an inevitable paradox as craft designs are tailored to satisfy foreign tastes - making the final recommendation clear. Develop local markets.
in India, for example. Viet Nam is looking to its million hectares as a cash-crop for export. And the move is on to inventory Africa’s rich biodiversity which includes unusual species with filled culms (stems - Asian bamboo is hollow). And Costa Rica has found a way of reducing earthquake disasters with new architectural projects making use of bamboo’s flexibility to withstand the shocks.

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“Bamboo from an industrial perspective will certainly survive,” says Clément. “But the risk lies with the civilization. There has been a lot of talk about the ‘bamboo civilization’ in South East Asia. It’s a bit of a paradox because the actual buildings and physical manifestations were really very fragile - being vegetal they perish. In the long term, it isn’t the structures that last but the techniques to build them. This know-how is transmitted through the culture the same way as in an oral society.”

“Today, that know-how risks being lost. Bamboo is either looked down upon as a material fit only for the poor or it is overvalued and treated like an exotic or noble material,” says Clément, pointing to very expensive art work and furniture in Japan. Ordinary artisans are left in the lurch.

“But here you have to be careful,” says Noriko Aikawa, chief of UNESCO’s Intangible Heritage Section. “Whenever you talk about handicrafts you find this tension between people focused on preserving the tradition and implicitly saying that others should adapt this lifestyle when they themselves enjoy all the modern conveniences. It is very easy - especially for men - to say that bamboo utensils should be used in the kitchen. But that may not be practical. This is why we stress adapting tradition to modern life.”

Clément couldn’t agree more. And as Mohaman Haman points out, the job isn’t that difficult either. Looking to his native Cameroon, the architect explains that bamboo homes are part of a centuries-old tradition in the western region where the “filled-culm” species of the plant thrives. But that changed after independence when the highly respected and well-paid civil servants began turning their noses up at local materials and opted for cement homes seen in Europe. Money was no option as the government picked up the tab. “Everybody wanted a home like theirs’. Only the elders stayed with the bamboo. But with the monetary devaluation in 1994, the housing subsidy has been cut for the civil servants and everyone is returning to local materials.”

N O P R O B L E M

For Haman, it’s time for a bamboo comeback. With better transport systems, the entire country could make use of it. “From an architectural perspective, there is no trouble fitting a bamboo house with electricity and running water. The problem is that only the elders know how to build with it.”

Haman is working on two fronts. The first is to introduce traditional skills into the country’s engineering school (there is no architectural school) with the association CICA T (International Cooperation for the Conservation and Promotion of Traditional Architectural Heritage). At the same time, he is following up on a rather interesting proposition. In Japan, plans are underway to build an environmental theme park. Haman was asked to design a restaurant with a capacity of 800 to reflect his country’s traditional architecture. Seizing the opportunity, he plans to have the structure built locally by the elders and a fresh team of assistants and then shipped to its final destination - giving an African spin to a new bamboo civilization.

A.O.

About 160 posters from 15 countries were displayed at the International Salon of POSTER AND STREET ART organized at UNESCO from January 6 to 16 in collaboration with the International Council of Graphic Design Associations (ICOGRADA). Korean O-Young Kwon received the Savignac Prize for the “world’s best poster”. Among the posters exhibited, 80 will be shown in various countries throughout the year.

Romania became the fifth State Party to the Convention on STOLEN OR ILLEGALLY EXPORTED CULTURAL OBJECTS on January 21. The legal instrument was drafted in 1995 by UNIDROIT (the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law) on the request and with the support of UNESCO. With provisions “concerning private law, it complements the 1970 Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property.” Following Lithuania, Paraguay, China and Ecuador, Romania’s acceptance enables the Convention to enter into force as a binding legal instrument for these five States this coming July 22nd.
A new UNESCO initiative will seek to recognize the “cultural spaces” of musicians, story-tellers, acrobats, snake-charmers and others practicing fragile folk traditions forming part of **HUMANITY’S ORAL HERITAGE**. Experts are now preparing a project to protect places like Jamaa-El-Fna square in Marrakech (Morocco) where artists, intellectuals and healers form ephemeral concentrations of collective creativity. The Executive Board will establish criteria for selecting these sites next May.

An appeal for the **GORÉE MEMORIAL**, conceived as an “an instrument for the rapprochement of peoples and a reminder of the exigencies of human rights at the dawn of the third millennium” was launched by the international committee responsible for its promotion during a first meeting held in Dakar, (Senegal), January 13 to 15.

Designed by Italian architect Ottavio di Blasi (see Sources, No. 95), the monument will be dedicated to the memory of the victims of the slave trade. It will be built on a 2.5-hectare plot on the western corniche of Dakar, (Senegal), January 13 to 15. (Photo UNESCO/Dominique Roger).

The authors are selected by a panel of well-known Arab writers and critics, including the Syrian poet Adonis, the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, the Tunisian critic Tawfiq Baccar and the Algerian writer Ahlam Mostaganemi. “UNESCO does not want to impose its choice. There is an Arab proverb that says ‘the people of Mecca know its valleys best’,” explains Chawki Abd el Amir, a poet and writer himself, who is in charge of the project at UNESCO.

The chosen works must have already been published and appreciated by readers. The projects to appear over the next two years have already been selected and, apart from two classical works, are all by contemporary authors. The illustrations, on the other hand, are specially commissioned for each supplement.

Whereas the press in the west has often opened its pages to literature, particularly in the form of serialized novels, Kitab fi Jarida gives pride of place to poetry and drama, which are particularly appreciated by Arab readers. In Arab countries, cassettes of poetry are sold in the streets, poets read their works on television, and the theatre is often appreciated as a place where free speech is accepted.

The first issue of Kitab fi Jarida, in November, selected El Mutannabi, a great 10th century classical poet, as well known in the region as Shakespeare is in Europe. The December issue presents a play by the Syrian playwright Saadallah Wannous, and the January issue publishes a story by the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz.

**THE VALLEYS OF MECCA**

Much interest is generated in literature among readers who buy few books, sometimes because they are simply too poor. Some of the best-known newspapers in the region are involved including Al-Ahram (Egypt), An-Nahar (Lebanon), Al Alam (Morocco), Al Ayam (Palestine) and As-Sahafa (Tunisia). All the Arab countries except Algeria and Iraq are participating.

**HOT OFF THE PRESS**

**Arabic newspapers join forces to offer readers an unusual array of the region’s literary greats.**

Twenty-three newspapers in 20 countries have agreed to publish, on the first Wednesday of every month, as a free supplement, a novel, collection of poetry or a play - illustrated by an artist. The Kitab fi Jarida project (literally, a book in a newspaper) is modelled on Periolibros which, for four years from 1993 to 1997, offered a work of literature each Monday to five million readers in Latin America thanks to the cooperation of 26 newspapers (see Sources No. 76).

The idea is to promote interest in literature among readers who buy few books, sometimes because they are simply too poor. Some of the best-known newspapers in the region are involved including Al-Ahram (Egypt), An-Nahar (Lebanon), Al Alam (Morocco), Al Ayam (Palestine) and As-Sahafa (Tunisia). All the Arab countries except Algeria and Iraq are participating.

**CROSS SECTION OF THE GORÉE MEMORIAL.**

**COVER OF THE NOVEMBER ISSUE OF THE KOWEITAN DAILY AL RÁI AL ÂM.**

The project is supported by the Lebanese government and two private sponsors: a cultural foundation in the United Arab Emirates, Kitab Za’id al Arabi, and a Kuwaiti company, Sakhat. The newspapers finance the print run of their supplement and recuperate the costs from advertisements and increased sales. “Readers’ reactions have been very positive, and the day the supplement comes out there are very few copies of the newspaper returned,” explains Ahmed Youssef Al Qora’i, the deputy chief editor of Al-Ahram.

“It’s a first in Arab cultural and social life,” enthuses Chawki Abd el Amir. “It’s the first time that all Arab countries have worked together on a joint cultural project. Although much is being said about the rifts in the region, this project shows that there is in fact more willingness to work together than people thought. And I am sure that this first initiative will encourage others.”

**N. K-D.**

**UNESCO SOURCES**

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Guatemala’s Mayan people take their education into their own hands.

Though Juana Xilog descends from one of the world’s greatest civilizations - the Mayas - neither she nor her three children can read or write. She ekes out a living making jüipil, the colourful hand-embroidered blouses worn by Mayan women.

School in Guatemala, where Juana lives, has always been an affair for the Spanish speaking population. Textbooks are far removed from the realities of the Mayan people’s daily lives: traffic lights mean very little when you don’t have roads. Schools are scarce, particularly in rural areas where up to 70% of the people are illiterate. Only one Mayan in four reaches sixth grade.

To improve the situation, UNESCO, in 1996, launched an education system based on the Mayans’ rich culture and folklore. The first $1.8m phase, financed by the Netherlands, and now in its final year, is helping to bring about a sea-change in this long-neglected domain. “The signing of the peace agreement a year ago gave us a big boost by completely changing the social and political context,” acknowledges Katherine Grigsby, the project’s chief technical coordinator.

The project is implemented through the National Council for Mayan Education, which comprises some 21 non-governmental organizations. Although not yet legally recognized, it coordinates the work of 50 Centres for Mayan Education (ULEM), managed by the state, community and the municipality. The centres provide courses in 12 of the 22 indigenous languages, and 40,000 adults involved in running the centres. Community members are encouraged to become informal educators, teaching crafts, telling children’s stories drawn from Mayan oral traditions, or preparing meals.

“We have also launched research on Mayan philosophy, science and technology to find out more about the people’s needs, how they live and how their children learn,” says Juan Chong, the director of UNESCO’s regional office in nearby Costa Rica.

The project is supporting the establishment of a Mayan university and urging the country’s higher education institutions to acknowledge Mayan contributions to science and culture. This no longer seems a distant dream. “The education ministry has set up a commission for the reform of education, taking Mayan particularities into account,” says Grigsby, adding that the “power of the Mayan movement has ignited people. We’ve come a long way very quickly...”

Republished from ‘Countdown’ - UNESCO’s quarterly education newsletter.
FROM ABU SIMBEL TO ANGKOR is the theme of an exhibition highlighting UNESCO’s activities promoting culture, March 5 to April, in New York. An expert committee on COMMUNICATION AND COPYRIGHT in the information society will meet with representatives of 49 European Member States from March 9 to 13 in Monte Carlo (Monaco). Throughout the UN system, International Day for the ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION will be celebrated on March 21 and World Day for WATER on March 22. The Intergovernmental Council of the International Programme for the Development of Communication will debate the political, technological and economic stakes involved in PUBLIC TELEVISION AND RADIO BROADCASTING at Headquarters from March 24 to 27. Within the framework of the WORLD SOLAR PROGRAMME, a pan african seminar in Bamako (Mali), March 25-28, will focus on strategies and financing for a list of priority projects compiled for donors. Philosophers and educators will explore ways of developing programmes for teaching PHILOSOPHY TO CHILDREN at Headquarters from March 26 to 27. Leading personalities in politics and the world of culture are expected in Stockholm (Sweden) from March 30 to April 2 for an intergovernmental conference on CULTURAL POLICIES FOR DEVELOPMENT. Through the MOST Programme (Management of Social Transformations), researchers from around the Mediterranean will gather at Headquarters on April 3 to debate their region’s EMIGRATION POLICIES. Organized through the International Hydrological Programme, a symposium on DROUGHT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN will take place in La Serena (Chile) from April 6 to 9.

(Dates and places are subject to change).

OUR NEXT DOSSIER heads to the Slave Route. This UNESCO project aims to secure the place the slave trade historically deserves in our collective memory. Indeed, the ultimate goal is to bring the peoples concerned closer together.