

JAMAICA AND THE LIFELONG EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PARADIGM

Lifelong learning is education for the knowledge economy. In order for Jamaica to transition from a **Developing Country** to a **Developed Country** whether it be a Jamaica Labour Party Administration or a Peoples National Party administration it will be highly necessary to create a Knowledge based society, the inability to seriously overcome this challenge will mean we will be in transition to a developed country for an infinite number of years.

Within this lifelong learning framework, formal education structures—primary, secondary, higher, vocational, and so on—are less important than learning and meeting learners' needs (Dr Ralph Thompson may disagree here but, his thinking although quantitatively correct may lack the 3 dimensional response required for Jamaica to make the quantum leap required). It is essential to integrate learning programs better and to align different elements of the system. Learners should be able to enter and leave the system at different points. The learning system needs to include a multitude of players, such as learners, families, employers, providers, and the state. Governance in the lifelong learning framework therefore involves more than just ministries of education and labor.

A knowledge-based economy relies primarily on the use of ideas rather than physical abilities and on the application of technology rather than the transformation of raw materials or the exploitation of cheap labor.

Knowledge is being developed and applied in new ways. Product cycles are shorter and the need for innovation greater. Trade is expanding worldwide, increasing competitive demands on producers. The global knowledge economy is transforming the demands of the labor market throughout the world. It is also

placing new demands on citizens, who need more skills and knowledge to be able to function in their day-to-day lives.

Equipping people to deal with these demands requires a new model of education and training, a model of lifelong learning. A lifelong learning framework encompasses learning throughout the lifecycle, from early childhood through retirement. It encompasses formal learning (schools, training institutions, universities); non-formal learning (structured on-the job training); and informal learning (skills learned from family members or people in the community). It allows people to access learning opportunities, as they need them rather than because they have reached a certain age.

Lifelong learning is crucial to preparing workers to compete in the global economy. But it is important for other reasons as well. By improving people's ability to function as members of their communities, education and training increase social cohesion, reduce crime, and improve income distribution.

Developing countries like Jamaica, risk being further marginalized in a competitive global knowledge economy because their education and training systems are not equipping learners with the skills they need. To respond to the problem, policymakers need to make fundamental changes. They need to replace the information-based, teacher-directed rote learning provided within a formal education system governed by directives with a new type of learning that emphasizes creating, applying, analyzing, and synthesizing knowledge and engaging in collaborative learning throughout the lifespan.

The emergence of the global knowledge economy has put a premium on learning throughout the world. Ideas and know-how as sources of economic growth and

development, along with the application of new technologies, have important implications for how people learn and apply knowledge throughout their lives. Lifelong learning is becoming a necessity in many countries, Jamaica is no different. It is more than just education and training beyond formal schooling. A lifelong learning framework encompasses learning throughout the lifecycle, from early childhood to retirement, and in different learning environments, formal, non-formal, and informal. Opportunities for learning throughout one's lifetime are becoming increasingly critical for countries to be competitive in the global knowledge economy. The Jamaican challenge in its transition from a developing to a developed country speaks to this on a daily basis as this movement to the highest stage of the countries development appears to be a painful experience full of peril and promise.

Consideration of lifelong learning extends the traditional approach to education, in which sub sectors are examined in isolation. Many World Bank studies: In 1995 *Priorities and Strategies for Education* emphasized the need to look at the education system in a more holistic manner. The 1999 *Education Sector Strategy* discussed the role of new technologies. In 1999, when he articulated the *Comprehensive Development Framework*, World Bank President James Wolfensohn referred explicitly to lifelong learning as a part of what education means for poverty alleviation. In 2002 the World Bank completed important new policy work on tertiary (higher) education reforms as well as a vision paper on the role of science and technology.

Many developing countries like Jamaica either have not read these reports or if they have do not grasp the serious importance or impact.

The challenges to education and training systems in developing countries like Jamaica that the knowledge economy presents requires policy options for addressing these challenges and developing viable systems of lifelong learning in developing countries like Jamaica.

Four questions need to be answered:

- What does a national education and training system, including its formal and non-formal components need to do to support knowledge-based economic growth?
- How can developing countries like Jamaica promote lifelong learning, and what challenges do they face in doing so?
- Given limited resources, what type of governance framework promotes lifelong learning for people in general and disadvantaged groups in particular?
- How can financing of lifelong learning be inclusive, affordable, and sustainable?

A conceptual framework for education-related lending activities reflecting the latest knowledge and successful practices of planning and implementing education for lifelong learning must be seriously examined.

In Jamaica we need to look beyond traditional approaches to education and training and to engage in a policy dialogue on the economic consequences of

lifelong learning. Our failure to do so, we will remain a LIFELONG DEVELOPING COUNTRY, no pun intended.