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LOCAL PRODUCTION OF SCHOOL SCIENCE EQUIPMENTS

1. It is recognised that in most developing countries of Africa, the non-availability of adequate teaching materials in the form of books, teaching-aids, laboratory equipments, etc., is a serious problem that is hampering the progress of education that is conducive to the needs of a developing economy. The high cost of imported material and scarcity of foreign exchange place a severe limitation on their availability and subsequent use. Very often spare parts of the imported equipments are not there when required. All these and other restrictions point to the need for proper government policies and plans that will encourage and promote the local production of education supplies.

2. It is believed that by a careful selection and development of low-cost equipment using locally available materials, through government backed organisations, most countries will be able to overcome these difficulties. Organised mass production by equipment centres or by the small-scale industrial sector is practised in many developing countries outside Africa. This must be encouraged in the local context as well.

3. There is a need to raise the standard of education, and in particular science education that can meet the demand of technical and scientific manpower who can cope with the developments in agriculture and industry. For this, new curricula have to be developed or are being developed. These require active student participation and learning through discovery. However, the necessary equipment and teaching aids for such an approach are lacking. Only local production can guarantee that all schools and teacher training institutions can be equipped with such teaching aids and in sufficient quantities. Many of the equipments used can be manufactured locally, using locally available resources, at lesser costs than when they are imported.

4. A study of the situation in selected African countries - Sierra Leone, Senegal, Kenya, Ethiopia, Zambia and Tanzania, was carried out by the ECA, and a report is attached. It has been found that the development of prototypes, and the production of school science equipments are done on a small-scale, not enough even to meet local requirements. There are no explicit national policies on the supply of such equipments to schools.
5. The study has revealed that there is a potential for sub-regional and regional co-operation in the field of large-scale manufacture and distribution of school science equipments. Policy-makers seem to be desirous of co-ordinated efforts at producing low-cost science equipments, and there is scope for participation in joint ventures at sub-regional and regional levels using current local investments and any available international support in the form of skills, materials and resources.
6. A workshop is being planned for such policy-makers and experts from selected countries in Africa, for the second quarter of 1986. The purpose of the workshop is to enable the policy-makers and experts to come up with a strategy for such a sub-regional/regional co-operation in the mass production of school science equipments.