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## The Bangladesh Observer

# The Provision Of Continuing Education In Rural Bangladesh-III

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A survey of the use of the libraries in 1982, however, revealed that the readers found the BARD books difficult to read, and much of the information was out of date. Over a period of about nine months, 73% of those surveyed checked out less than five books each. Eventually it became impossible to procure the BARD books and alternative arrangements had to be made with other books used in the libraries.

Joyramkura also instituted a 'box library' system in 1989, but it was difficult to find appropriate books to include in the libraries. Friends has produced a few books which can be used, and others are available from some of the other larger NGOs. The Joyramkura programme also included some books purchased in the market, but few appropriate ones could be found from this source. In all about 30 titles were included in the boxes. There are more books available now. A recent survey by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE, 1992) lists 58 titles for adults and 13 for children produced by 11 NGOs. Joyramkura supplemented the books by supplying each library with three monthly news sheets. Former learners who were selected by their savings groups are the 'librarians' for the boxes. They were given a one day training course on the care and use of the box libraries. All the groups paid a nominal fee (Taka 20) for the use of the library before receiving it. The groups were responsible for raising the funds from the members. Other NGOs follow similar systems, and the Government also had plans to provide village libraries as part of the Continuing Education strategy. The use of such libraries may be extended to villagers other than new literate to reinforce their literacy skills and to provide access to useful information.

**Reading Circles:** In some countries 'reading circles' have been used to help keep new literates reading, and these may be used as a distribution link (Lorenzetto and Neijls, 1977:433). Each reading circle is usually made up of several new literates who live in the same area and meet on a regular basis to read and discuss books and articles. The books may be loaned to them for a specified period of time and then returned for distribution to other groups. At Friends 'reading circles' were set up for savings group members who had completed the FE course. If more than one group was in fairly close proximity, then members from several groups could be involved in the same 'reading circle'. The groups meet once a week to discuss a topic to do some writing exercises and to return and borrow books (following the library system as described above).

**Short Training Course:** Usually organized to meet specific programme objectives, short training courses also provide reinforcement of the literacy skills of the participants. The courses are usually offered for representatives of savings groups rather than for all the former learners, and participants may include school drop-outs who need to strengthen their literacy skills. A Membership Education course organised by Friends provided training for group leaders. The course lasted for seven consecutive days and concentrated mainly on intensive numeracy and accounts teaching. But the training also provided a forum for discussion amongst members of different groups and practice of reading and writing skills. A similar course was

conducted at Joyramkura but called a Leadership Education course. In it too the major emphasis was on numeracy and keeping savings group records, but reading selections and literacy practice were also included. In Joyramkura the course was conducted one day a week for four consecutive weeks. At Joyramkura the agricultural department also conducts short courses on subjects such as home gardening, compost making, and poultry rearing. These also have proven useful opportunities to provide reading practice for the participants, most of whom are new literate savings group members.

**A Challenge for NGOs and the Government:** I have described a few of the ways that post-literacy activities can be included in an overall continuing education initiative. Many NGOs can make these available to a wider range of participants than has been done in the past. A part of the recently formed Integrated Non-formal Education Programme is the Continuing Education sector.

In order to make an effective contribution to literacy efforts in the country, this sector must face the challenge of making available continuing education not only to graduates of their own adult literacy and other educational programmes but also to the innumerable past participants of the formal school system and NFE initiatives. Newspapers for readers with limited skills, local libraries offering simplified materials and short courses modified for participants with limited literacy skills are some of the avenues that can be explored. Others should emerge as

the challenge is faced.

For Children and adults with limited literacy, the development and production of suitable materials is an essential ingredient of a continuing education programme. The first task is to ascertain what literature is available for the new literate and others with limited literacy skills. In some societies, the perusal of all the possible materials can be quite a daunting and time-consuming task.

In Bangladesh, unfortunately, this is not the case, although this first stage should not be neglected. When I first started working in adult education in Bangladesh nearly 18 years ago, there was very little available. A selection of about 50 short booklets written specifically for new literates produced by BARD was available from government offices. BRAC included a page for new literates in a newspaper for rural areas. This represented just about all the reading materials appropriate for newly literate adults available in Bangladesh at that time. The BARD books soon proved impossible to obtain as the government closed down its Mass Education Programme. Although the situation is yearly improving, most organizations in Bangladesh which are serious about post-literacy work will find that they need to produce at least some materials of their own or form a close link with a larger organization to gain access to its writing resources. There is an urgent need now for organizations to combine their resources and to produce materials that can be used throughout the country. The Government can play an important role by noting the materials now available and making them available to a wider audience as well as by involving experienced writers from NGOs in producing new materials.

Courtesy: Grassroots