

30 DEC 1993
301 46 90

Education For All By The Year 2000: Prospects And Hindrances

by K.M. Wazed Kabir

ILLITERACY can be regarded as one of the great social problems of our time and a major challenge to the international community. Its elimination calls for an effort in two directions. First, securing the general introduction and upgrading of primary education and secondly, organizing systematic educational campaigns for illiterate adolescents and adults.

'Education for All' in Bangladesh by the year 2000 would essentially imply achieving an immediate target of Universal Primary Education for children 6-10 years and literacy and life skills for adolescents (aged 11-14), youths and adults.

But due to the lack of physical, financial, administrative and managerial resources the National Plan of Action proposes realistic strategies that mix unconventional approaches with traditional and conventional ones. Stress is placed on making optimum use of the resources available. NGOs will be encouraged to participate in non-formal education and women's skill development. Efforts will be made to harmonise the curricula of the primary level religious education institutions with those of the government schools. The increased participation of local government bodies will be promoted through revised budgetary allocations. As for successful planning and implementation of 'Education For All' necessitates reliable data the National Plan of Action emphasises the development of institutions for

collection, processing and dissemination of appropriate and relevant information in the educational sector.

One of the main priorities over the next seven years is to foster the development and renewal of Primary Education and to promote the total elimination of adult illiteracy. The goal of universalising the primary education would be difficult to reach if illiteracy in the adult population is not at the same time eliminated. On the other hand, eradication of adult illiteracy is possible only if primary schooling is provided for all children. The eradication of illiteracy and the provision of universal primary education reinforce and complement each other in strengthening the motivation to learn.

Primary education is seen to have a particular long-term value in bringing about social and economic transformation. In national development plans a high priority is given to the achievement of the goal of universal primary education. The targets of UPE are two fold — the year by which all children will be in primary education of the duration as in the present structures and secondly, the enrolments which would have been achieved in an extended span of primary education by the year 2000. The problems associated with universalization of primary education and the importance of overcoming those problems have received much attention in regional meetings and conferences. The Karachi plan, formulated

in 1959-60 by representatives of Asian countries, put stress on the provision of free and compulsory education for a minimum of seven years duration. Subsequent conferences of the Ministers of Education of the region continue to support this Asian Model of Educational Development.

These are three essential dimensions of UPE:

★ Universal Access : This involves providing facilities and incentives for enrolment in primary education on a scale and in forms adequate and suitable to ensure that all children of primary school age have access to and able to benefit from such facilities.

★ Retention and Completion : Educational facilities cannot be effective unless children stay long enough to acquire the basic learning skills.

★ Learning/School Achievement : All the effort and expense of providing school facilities, materials and teachers means little if at the end of the primary school cycle, children have not acquired appropriate skills abilities and attitudes to prepare them for life. Children and their parents will not support a school by attending and cooperating unless they are convinced that there will be a positive learning outcome. Experience has proved time and again that a qualitative improvement and renewal of primary education increasing its efficiency and holding power

and fuller enrolments are all closely intertwined as in a seamless web. Such a renewal calls for a global and comprehensive approach covering curriculum development, teacher training and improvements in teaching methods and materials as well as planning and management.

Curriculum

In several countries, there has been a re-examination of the curriculum in relation to UPE when it was felt that the existing curriculum did not meet the diversified needs of learners, particularly those from disadvantaged groups. Irrelevant curricula and unsuitable teaching methods are seen as an important reason for non-enrolment and early withdrawal from school.

Teacher Preparation : A primary education system for all children impels redefinition of teachers' roles and competences. With increased emphasis on in-service teacher education, a variety of approaches are being used including correspondence courses, radio and television packages.

Three important considerations influence the design of structures for planning and implementing UPE. These are the need to:

★ Bring together the considerations of various departments and agencies of the government concerned with primary education.

(To be Continued)