

EDUCATION PRIORITIES

There has been no shortages of debates for identifying one single factor which dwarfs all others in explaining the state of our underdevelopment and poverty. Many theorized that overpopulation was that factor, whilst others thought lack of good leadership was responsible and so on and on. But at the end of this seemingly endless debate what yields supremely is that education holds the key to our all-round national advancement.

Educate the people and fertility will automatically drop. In every place it was witnessed that there was a correlationship between population decline and education. The more uneducated people were the less they tended to listen to population control advices. Agricultural development is at the forefront of our concern. Here too, significant progress can be made and sustained through more and more dissemination of agriculture related education. Industrialization is another vital national objective for us. In order to achieve this objective also, we need an educated industrial work force. In sum, it is extremely difficult to conceive any area of activity where we can progress keeping the present huge number of illiterates in the population at their present state of ignorance.

More and more, the realization is deepening that the magic wand which promises to fulfill all our national aspirations at the earliest involves bringing the light of learning to the greatest number of our people at the soonest. We are now witnessing the phase of the emphasis on primary education and some literacy campaigns. But allocations for literacy campaigns are still not substantial compared to need. The emphasis on primary education is no doubt fine but what we also need to do desperately right away is make an attempt for eradication of illiteracy as completely as possible. Given the determination, it should not be too difficult to mobilize funds through revising budget priorities in order to make an all out attack on illiteracy.

The additional monies spent on education should not be looked upon as expended on something fetching no immediate returns but as long term investments in the economy. The history of economic development almost everywhere proved that more the population of a country became literate and educated the greater was their resourcefulness and productivity in the economic sense. So, suggestions for yet higher allocations for education should not be overlooked due to demands from other sectors or the contention that more spendings on education mean a total one way sacrifice with no corresponding returns. This line of thinking is economically insensible and considered as such.

For any accomplishment the first requirement is the setting of a target and then to go all out for the attainment of the same. It does not then matter if the target is not realized one hundred per cent. For even seventy per cent realization of it may be construed as ample or, satisfactory. In a way, we have set a target to make literate all in Bangladesh by the year 2000. But the state of various illiteracy eradication programmes all too clearly suggest that reaching this goal is impractical and the overall target of education for all by the year 2000 will remain very largely unfulfilled. The outcome can be very different if we are prepared to commit significantly greater resources, work and planning towards realization of this target as fully as possible within the stated time frame.

Apart from meeting education needs quantitatively there is an equally pressing need to allocate more for qualitative upgradation and diversification of our education. Facilities for practical education should be provided very widely or such facilities created where none exist at the moment. Multi-faceted vocational or skill generating education should be systematically encouraged. This is an absolute precondition for successfully attracting foreign investments because foreign investors like to come to places where they can find good reservoirs of somewhat educated and skilled people needed for absorption in intermediate and higher production processes.