

Poor resourcing hits education system

By Our Staff Correspondent

The capacity of the education system to address the issues of poverty and population growth has been seriously constrained by inadequate financing and management.

This was stated in the country paper submitted by the Bangladesh side in the Saarc technical committee meeting held last week in Dhaka.

On average about 1.9 percent of the GNP is spent on education. This is much below compared to the regional average of 2.4 percent, while recurrent

expenditures for education are averaging about 16 percent of the total government recurrent expenditure.

The total public spending for education has averaged a low 9.3 percent of total public spending compared with 12.7 percent for the region and 14.7 percent for all developing countries.

As in other sectors, the government has been hampered by the lack of trained manpower and adequate institutional capacity to plan, implement and manage its educational programs.

It was stated that due to low level of investment, progress in education has been inadequate. Adult literacy rates improved only slightly during the seventies, rising from 26 percent in 1974 to 29 percent in 1981, the date of the last census.

Primary education enrollment has increased slowly since 1981, but overall enrollment rates have remained stable and, in some instance, have declined.

The paper stated that wastage in the system was high at all levels, marked by high dropout rates in primary education and failure rates for terminal examinations were skewed toward males, the relatively well to do, and those who live in urban areas. There is growing discontent and frustration with the poor performance of the system.

About the declining trend in literacy rate the paper held that ever-increasing population, constraints of resources and frequent natural calamities had been adversely affecting the progress of literacy in the country.

The literacy rates of population 5 years and above age for males and

females in 1981 were 31 percent and 16 percent respectively.

It was stated that efforts for improving the literacy rates were not yielding positive results, was indicated by the decline in the literacy rate from 24.3 percent for both sexes in 1974 to 23.8 percent in 1981.

The decline in literacy was among the male population (from 32.9 percent in 1974 to 31 percent in 1981) while the same for females registered a marked increase from 14.8 percent to 16 percent during the same period.

Criticizing the education policy it was stated that sufficient consideration has not been given to the long term manpower needs of the country and by and large the traditional system has been expanding.

It is seen that while on the one hand a large number of university graduates with liberal arts degree do not find jobs, there is a shortage of skilled manpower in the field of science and technology, on the other hand.

It is noted that the total education expenditure of the Government of Bangladesh jumped from Tk 282 cr. in 1980-81 to Tk. 1382 cr in 1989-90.

This seems a big leap in absolute value but taken as a percentage of the total outlay of the government, the expenditure showed an increase from 7 percent in FY 1981 to 10 percent in FY 1990.

Taken as a percentage of GNP the expenditure has gone up from 1.1 percent in 1980-81 to 1.9 percent in 1988-89.

But the increase was not in conformity with the rapidly growing population in Bangladesh which is

facing limitations regarding financial and professional resources to invest.

Besides all these negative elements in the education sector, wastage in education has been a major factor for the increased cost in education.

Almost one-third of all first graders dropout before the second grade as they are discouraged by overcrowded classes and other socio-economic reasons.

Repeater rate at the primary level remains at about 10.12 percent per annum. In the primary level grades only about 30 percent of the students are able to reach fifth grade.

At the secondary level the dropout rate is quite low, under one percent. However, repeater rate is estimated to be at over 25 percent. In the degree colleges, there seems to be few dropouts or repeaters, but the failure rates for those who take their BA or BSC pass exams average 30 to 35 percent.

The paper pointed out that due to non-formal alternatives to meet the education needs of the underserved population, lack of quality in the education system, diminishing role of private schools and private funding, lack of effective participation of women in the developing process have been major causes of backwardness in education in which the enrollment ratio between male and female continues to be 2:1.

Similarly 40 percent of urban adults are literate compared with only 20 percent of the adults living in rural areas.