

# Universal Primary Education

—A. K. M. Obaidullah And Rajab Ali Biswas

THE provision of basic education for the children, who had no access to primary educational opportunities, has been a major concern of most of the developing countries of the world. This is also true for the South Asian countries, most of which suffer from the scourge of excessive population growth and acute resource constraint.

This concern for providing broader educational opportunities to all children of school-age group may be noticed in the attempts of these countries to recognize their educational system and to seek new ways and means for achieving the goal of universal primary education as early as possible. Expression of their commitment is also enshrined in the constitution and rational development plans of many of these countries, where higher priority is given for providing relevant universal education to all concerned, irrespective of their class, creed and economic status.

The present paper aims to compile and synthesize country experiences from available documents of early eighties, regarding universalization of primary education, of some South Asian countries, which are now organizing themselves for greater collaboration in all development sectors under the aegis of South Asian Regional Cooperations.

All countries of the region adopted national policy for universalization of primary education. Though a slight difference is observed between the policy of one country and the other, there are commonalities among them. The present government policy of Bangladesh is to universalize primary education by 1990 and with this end in view, a massive UPE Programme has already been implemented during 1981-85. The second phase of the UPE Programme has also been taken up from 1st July 1985, which will be completed in June 1990 at a cost of Tk. 5340.00 million (US \$ 178 million). The main objectives of the project are:

(a) To increase primary school enrolment from present 60% to about 70% of the 6-10 year age-group.

(b) To ensure a great majority of those who enrol in 1985 complete the 5 year primary cycle.

(c) To improve internal efficiency of primary school system through better management.

The authors in a paper presented at a recent international seminar on Regional Cooperation in Education, Science and Culture held in Dhaka, discuss the experience of a number of South Asian countries in the universalization of primary education.

supervision and quality of instruction.

India adopted the national policy to universalize primary education from class I to VIII by 1990 in most parts of the country and to achieve this goal the government earmarked 35.9 per cent of total outlay of Rs. 25,240 million allotted for education in the Sixth Five Year Plan of the country.

Up to 1980 the duration of primary education in Nepal was from class one to three and since then it has been extended from class three to five. The Government of Nepal is desirous of introducing universal primary education by 1995.

The government of Pakistan intends to introduce universal primary education during the Sixth Five Year Plan extending from 1983-88. All the boys of the relevant age group will be admitted into class I in the middle years of the plan and all the girls by the terminal years (87-88). A minimum of five years of schooling will be made compulsory to begin with and the duration will gradually be increased to ten years.

Sri Lanka is in a better position in introducing universal primary education. The origin of compulsory education started there in 1907 and in the meantime the country accepted compulsory education for all boys and girls between the ages of 5 and 14 years. The duration of primary education is six years for the children of 5 to 11 years age-group and the percentage of enrolment is expected to be 91.4 by 1990.

**Primary School System:** Primary education in Bangladesh comprises five years of schooling from class I to V for the children of 6-10 years of age. Administration has recently been decentralised, according to which the Upazila Parishad (local self government of the sub-district level) is to look after primary education at the lowest level. The parishad will recruit teachers in accordance with the recruitment rules prepared by the Government and make appointment.

level officers. They will grant leave and take disciplinary action against the teachers. The Primary Education Committee with the Upazila Education Officer as its Member-Secretary will assist the Parishad in running the administration.

At the district-level there is the District Primary Education Officer who will act as the representative of the Ministry of Education. At the centre the Directorate of Primary Education executes the policy prepared by the Ministry of Education. At the highest level the Ministry of Education formulates policy matters regarding primary education including development issues such as training of teachers, preparation of curriculum, textbooks etc.

The structure of primary education in India, a federation of 22 States and nine union territories varies from one State to another. The primary stage consists of five years of schooling comprising classes I to VI in some States and four years of schooling comprising classes I to IV in others.

The administration of education is organised both at the central and State levels. Both the central and State/union territory Govt. have their own machinery for administration. The Department of Education at the central level in the Ministry of Education and Culture responsible for all matters connected with education including overall planning and guidance.

At the State level, the Department of Education, headed by a Secretary to the State government is responsible for formulation and implementation of all educational policy. Each State has a Directorate of Public Instruction headed by a Director called the Director of Education/Public Instruction. In some of the States there is separate Directorate for looking after primary education. At the district level, the responsibility for educational administration belongs to the District Education Officer/District Inspector of Schools who is assisted by block

level officers.

In Nepal the Ministry of Education and Culture is the central executive body in respect of education. The country is divided into five development region and in each region there is a Regional Education Directorate. At the District level there is the District Education Office. This office is responsible for implementing the educational programme, supervising the schools & distribution of text books, approving establishment of new schools and maintaining educational quality and standard. There is no separate administration for primary education.

In Pakistan primary education comprises classes I to V and admits children of age-group 5 to 9. Educational Administration at the centre is carried out by the Ministry of Education and the executive authority is vested with the Secretary of Education. The Central Government implements educational policies in close collaboration with the provincial Education Department.

Education is a provincial subject in Pakistan and the Department of Education in the province controls, supervises and implements the policies of Central Government with the help of Directors of Education at the Provincial/Divisional levels as well as District Asstt. Education Officers at the District and Tehsil levels. There is also no separate administration for primary education.

In Sri Lanka the executive head of the Education Ministry is the Minister for Education. The Secretary of Education is responsible for the effective implementation of educational policy and the authority to supervise all activities and functions of the Ministry as well as the department and agencies under its control. The functions include the provision of buildings, furniture, equipment, school books and mid-daymeal for the school children.

The regional department at the district level, responsible for the actual implementation of educational programme, is managed by a Regional Director. Each district is divided into several circuits and each circuit consists of 30 to 40 schools. In each circuit there is a circuit and Education officer whose main function is to supervise the schools of the circuit.

(To be continued)