

# Universal Primary Education

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**R**ECENTLY elementary teacher education curriculum has undergone revision in many States as per recommendation of the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE). It recommended that the two-year course might be converted into a four semester course with 72 credit hour courses and the structure of curriculum should consist of three major areas, namely (a) pedagogical theory (b) working with the community and (c) content-cum-methodology and practice teaching including related practical work.

At the state level short term training courses and summer courses are organised for elementary school teachers. In view of the large number of elementary school teachers however the effort made in this respect is quite inadequate.

In Nepal the Institute of Education conducts one and two year teachers training programmes. Those completing the one year programme become trained primary school teachers and those completing the two-year course become lower secondary school teachers. The Institute of Education also conducts 'B-level' primary teachers training for teachers who have not completed high school education. The Institute also offers secondary school course and primary teachers training course for the teachers of remote mountain districts.

A radio teachers training programme is run by the Ministry of Education and Culture for underqualified and untrained primary school teachers. Self learning materials and radios are supplied to the enrolled teachers. Contact sessions are arranged in the campuses of the Institutes of Education where final examinations are held.

There are 86 training institutes in Pakistan which offer one year training course for primary school teachers. Recently these institutes have been reorganised and renovated to make them up-to-date in respect of curriculum, teaching staff, equipment etc. so that they might make the training more effectively. An alternative curriculum has been designed for the training of primary school teachers. A good deal of inappropriate materials from the existing curriculum has been eliminated and replaced by what is more selected to professional needs to student teachers. There is also provision for bringing the old students to the teachers training institutes after the lapse of a certain interval so that they may discuss problems of common interest with

In this concluding instalment of a paper read at a recently held international seminar the authors summarise the problems that have worked against the realisation of the goal of universal primary education in the countries of South Asia.

their own teacher trainers.

In Sri Lanka, at present there are 16 training colleges where courses for primary school teachers are conducted. The annual total graduates of these institutions is approximately 1000. The course provided at a teachers' college is of two-year duration. The curriculum comprises of a professional course consisting of principles of education and educational psychology and a general education consisting of mother tongue, religion and health physical education English aesthetic education agriculture second language home science mathematics, science and social science.

A programme of in-service training for primary school teachers was implemented when the integrated curriculum was introduced. This programme involved the training of nearly 10,000 teachers per year as well as orientation of school Directors, Circuit Education Officers and the staff of the regional education departments.

## SYNTHESIS OF PROBLEMS

South Asian countries appear to face complex and inter-related problems in attaining universal primary education. The problems listed below may be considered as vital and more or less common to most South Asian countries. While narrating the problems, strategies used in the countries to resolve them will also be highlighted.

**SHORTAGE OF FUND:** Shortage of adequate finance appears to be most crucial problem in almost all countries in implementing UPE. This is due to meagre allocation of fund for the education sector in comparison to other development sectors. Overall position of national resources may also be accounted for this. In order to solve the problem greater budgetary allocation of fund, often through the procurement of aids and loans from the International Agencies, is being made in a few countries. Percentage of GNP, when liberally spent for education, ensures attainment of UPE even in the developing countries. The name of Sri Lanka could be cited as the best example in this regard.

**POOR SUPERVISION:** The need for efficient planning, im-

plementation, supervision, monitoring and evaluation of UPE programme form a major problem in most countries. Lack of expertise and commitment in the UPE personnel including the teachers, in addition to usual fund constraint may be accounted for this. With a view to overcoming this problem, greater attention is being given to train and retrain UPE personnel in a decentralized manner. Efforts are also being made to increase provision, both for extensive pre-service and in-service training of the primary teachers. Emphasis is given to formulate right types of strategies through applied research for the implementation of UPE.

**CURRICULUM:** The primary curriculum, sometimes developed in an unsystematic way, is not quite relevant to the needs of the children and local community in a few countries. The text books are not also attractive to the children in some cases. Such inadequate curricular materials are bound to stand on the way of implementing UPE. With a view to minimizing the problem national curriculum development centres and text book boards are established in the countries to review and revise the curriculum in a continuous manner based on minimum learning needs of the children.

**ENROLMENT:** The problem of low enrolment and excessive drop-outs in the schools often associated with overall socio-economic status of a country, is a major cause of concern to most of the countries. This is especially true in the case of girls and socio-economically disadvantaged groups. Mass illiteracy stands on the way of motivating the rural people to send their children to schools. Poor parents fail to bear educational expenses of their children, which is increasing day by day. Poor facilities available in the schools and lack of qualified teachers may also be accounted for this problem. Measures being taken by the countries to solve the problems of low enrolment and high drop-outs include the following:

Expansion of educational facilities in remote and disadvantaged areas; Establishment of non-formal feeder schools; Deve-

lopment of relevant curricula and recruitment of more qualified teachers, especially women; Provision of stipends, free textbooks, school uniform and mid-day meals in some cases; Special enrolment campaigns including the use of mass media; Literacy drive for the adults; Greater involvement of the local people in planning and managing UPE programme. Provision of multiple entry in the primary schools along with condensed non-formal educational course for out-of-school children; Flexibility in fixing school hours; making primary education both universal and compulsory etc.

In the backdrop of acute financial constraints, poor physical facilities are perhaps the major problem faced by most countries of the region. Large number of primary schools in these countries have extremely poor structures with little or no furniture and basic teaching aids. Facilities for pure drinking water and toilets hardly exist in many of the schools.

The following are some of the measures taken by the concerned countries in order to minimise the problem: Use of religious places (mosques, temples, churches etc.) and community centres as primary schools; greater allocation of fund for construction of low cost school building, provision of furniture, teaching aids; and toilet facilities, sinking of tube-wells in the school premises etc.; motivating the local community to contribute more for providing basic facilities in the schools.

**CONCLUSION:** In the light of what has been narrated so far regarding the present status of UPE in some of the South Asian Countries, it may be concluded by saying that universal primary education is and will remain for quite some time a difficult proposition for the countries of this region suffering from excessive population growth vis-a-vis acute resource constraints, unless: The share of GDP for education is increased (it is around 2 per cent in many cases) to say at least 5 per cent with allocation of 50 per cent or more of that earmarked for primary education; Extensive non-formal primary education programmes are developed or activated for covering children of groups, handicapped from social, economical, cultural, religious and political points of view. Linkages will have to be established between this non-formal primary education with the formal primary education through provision of multiple entry points into the

See Page 11

## Primary Education

From page 5

ter: Provision is made for one sort of need-based and relevant skill development at the upper grades of the primary school curriculum; Sincere efforts are made to continue experimenting for solving the problems of UPE within the

framework of national situation and resources in place of borrowing models of affluent countries in this regard; And lastly national commitment (in the true sense of the term) is made to view UPE and mass education not in isolation but from overall national economic planning. (Shortened)