

8,500 pass out from 301 community schools in 5-yrs

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By A Staff Correspondent

About 8,500 persons have passed out from 301 community schools since 1981, which is less than 50 per cent of the potential capacity.

The community schools project, involving a total investment of Tk. 296.4 million, has been under implementation in phases since June, 1981 and is financed by an Asian Development Bank loan of US dollar 13.5 million.

The programme envisages development of 200 non-government high schools for boys and 200 non-government high schools for girls (one boy's and one girls high school in each of 200 selected upazila headquarters) as community schools offering trade courses. The purpose is to provide low-cost vocational training to the rural out-of school youths and drop outs of secondary schools enabling them to acquire skills in some trades.

The response of trainees to agriculture food processing and food preservation trades has been extremely poor.

Meanwhile, the National Planning and Coordination Committee for Community Schools, has proposed for replacing the agriculture and food preservation trade by electrical wiring and radio servicing for male and type writing for female trainees. But ADB has not given its approval to the proposal. An ADB team is expected to arrive in Dhaka soon to review the whole project.

The national committee will try to get the proposal of change in trade approved by the ADB mission during its coming visit.

Although the project has pro-

vision for distribution of tool kits on loan to assist them in self-employment after completion of training so far none has been provided with tool kits.

The expenditure for civil works has exceeded the allocated amount for the schools brought under the project in the third and fourth phase.

The trades courses varying from two to six months offered in community schools are mechanical building, agriculture, sewing and dress making, food processing and food preservation.

For three trades in boys schools there is provision of three full time teachers and three part time teachers while for two trades in girls schools the provision is for two full time and two part time teachers. Under the project so far 608 teachers have undergone training.

Meanwhile the posts of five specialists (one for each of the five trades) are lying vacant at the Project Implementation Unit (PIU) under the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Secondary Education.

Dearth of trained teachers

The foundation for research on educational planning and development in its evaluation and an evaluation committee constituted by the Ministry of Education have argued in favour of the continuation of the life-time of the project. In view of the absence of trained teachers for the trades in community schools both the reports recommended for preparation of a panel of candidates by PIU for eventual employment as teachers. The future admission to community schools should be restricted to candidates with lower

marks under the auspices of

far failed in creating enthusiasm in the community and recommended a number of steps for creating awareness of the benefits. The recommendations include holding of exhibition-cum-sales promotion of goods produced by the trainees and teachers developing model farms within the school premises; accepting orders for supplies from the community on contract basis on a limited scale.

The foundation for research on educational planning and development in the light of its sample survey of 26 boys and 26 girls schools also suggested guides for all trades and stressed the need for two full time teachers for each trade.

The diploma holders in engineering have not been proved successful as trade teachers and they do not possess sufficient skill; the project evaluation revealed. It emphasised the need for close monitoring and guidance on a regular basis for effective implementation of the project.

Technical aid project

A technical assistance project proposal involving an estimated cost of US dollar 1.5 lakh (Tk. 45 lakh) prepared by the Ministry of Education has been submitted to the Planning Commission for approval. The Planning Commission is likely to give a second thought in view of poor performance of the first phase of the community development project.

It should be pointed out here that out of the fund allocation for implementation of the first phase of the project an amount of Tk. 1.38 crore in foreign currency has been allocated for 68 man-months foreign consultants.

When contacted an official of project implementation unit admitted of the poor performance and said that if the project is abandoned at this stage the entire investment would become a wastage. It should be allowed to continue for some more years. As it is a new concept in the country the response of the trainees is far from satisfactory. The response in some trades is however encouraging he claimed.

As regards the figure of students claimed to have received the training the source said that some schools might have submitted exaggerated figures.

The number of students furnished by some schools and the actual students enrolled to undergo training sometimes differ as is revealed in surprise visits by evaluation team and teams of the PIU the source said.

Under the project an average monthly expenditure for each student is Tk 100 in each trade the source said. The shortage of supervisory staff of PIU has been identified as a major obstacle to the implementation of the project.