

Education in Africa : a study

"Donors and African governments need now to come together to determine what concrete steps should be taken to support the adjustment, revitalization and selective expansion of 'African education,' according to the World Bank.

In a policy study, "Education in Sub-Saharan Africa: policies for Adjustment, Revitalization and Expansion," published in January, the Bank notes that while impressive progress has been made in education in sub-Saharan Africa, enrolment recently have stagnated and the quality of education has declined.

"These reversals have occurred in an environment of unprecedented population growth, mounting fiscal austerity and often tenuous political and administrative institutions," the study notes, and argues that policies need to be identified to renew progress in education and that international support is required to achieve this goal.

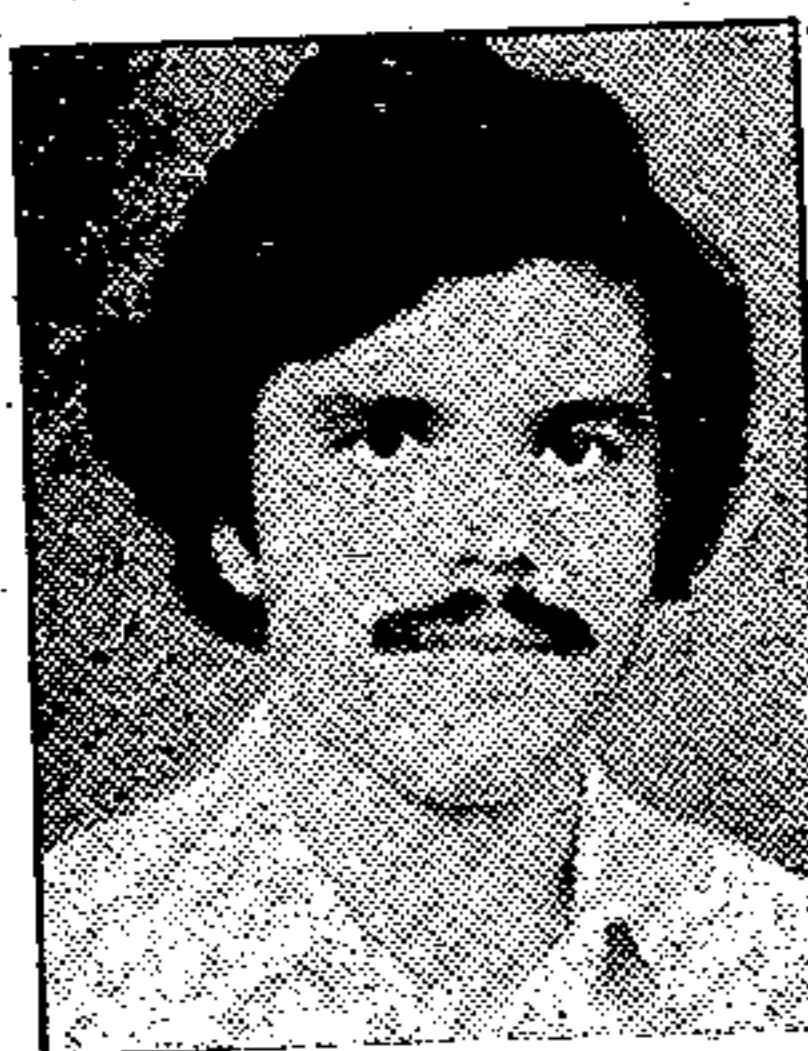
The rate of increase in enrolments in the region fell to 4.2 percent in the early 1980s, the report points out, from an average annual increase of 8.9 percent in the period of 1970-80. This decline was most evident at the primary level, where the rate of growth fell from 8.4 percent annually in the 1970s to 2.9 percent in 1980-83. The population of primary school-age children is estimated to be growing at an annual average rate of 3.3 percent.

Supplies of books and other learning materials are critically low in the region and the few cross-national studies of student performance that have been conducted suggest a decline in cognitive achievement.

The study recommends that each African nation formulate

and implement a set of education policies that address three distinct dimensions: adjustment, revitalization and selective expansion. Adjustment will involve diversifying sources of finance for education, including the encouragement of non-governmental suppliers of educational services. Containment of unit costs will be an important aspect of the adjustment process.

Revitalization, the study states, will rely on three measures: a renewed commitment to academic standards; an efficient mix of "inputs," primarily textbooks and other learning materials; and greater investment in the operation and maintenance of physical plant and equipment.



Mr. Abdur Rahman Siddique, chairman, department of Sociology, Rajshahi University recently got a Ph.D. Degree in Anthropology from Ranchi University in India.

The topic of his thesis was 'Impact of Modernising Forces on Tribal Culture of Bangladesh.' Internationally reputed anthropologists Dr. L. P. Vidyarthi and Dr. V. S. Upadhyay were his supervisors. It was the first research work on the tribal culture of Bangladesh.

Once adjustment and revitalization have begun to take hold, selective expansion of educational services should concentrate on four areas: the long-term goal of universal primary education; expansion of post-primary education (alternative ways of delivering educational services — correspondence materials, radio programs — need to be planned and developed); increased training opportunities for those who have entered the workforce; and research and postgraduate education, which may be best achieved through regional and subregional approaches.

The World Bank report suggests specific policy directions for consideration by national education authorities while recognizing that a monolithic and universally applicable policy is not realistic. It offers to leaders in each country comparative data and analytical tools for developing their own policies and priorities.

While adjustment measures are needed to ease the budgetary burden of education and training, the study points out that all such savings will not be sufficient, in most countries, to cover the costs involved in revitalizing and building African education.

The report calls on the international donor community to provide seed money to assist the development of policies and improvement of management. A source of high-quality specialized technical expertise should be established and financed by international donors to afford help in formulating policies and in monitoring them during implementation. Intensive collaboration among countries should also be supported by the international community, according to the study.