

Education And Development

Learning is a process which begins at birth and ends only when we die. Formal education is a tool by which we learn to make sense out of what we see around us and begin to comprehend our relationship to our immediate environment. Those who are unfortunate enough not to receive this formal education remain at a constant disadvantage. For without education, it is simply not possible to utilise to the full such technologies which are available to us. Therefore much emphasis is being laid on the need for providing education to the masses for hastening the development process in the country.

However, Bangladesh also inherited a system of education handed down from pre-Partition days, which was designed for producing clerks and administrators the colonialists needed to help them perpetuate their rule is not in doubt. But conditions were such that we continued with this system when it was no longer pertinent and was totally unsuited to the needs of an independent state. Today with the system almost unchanged, and still elitist in character, it does not even begin to serve the needs of a modern state.

With the demand for education increasing, the government is now faced with the knowledge that existing educational institutions within the country are not only insufficient to meet the needs but the standard of education being imparted in them is frequently without any relevance. Therefore, in recent days there has been a greater effort to improve the present infrastructure and to replace it with something more appropriate. But as enrollment figures which doubled almost overnight following Liberation continue to expand, this too is no easy task but is, nevertheless, one which has to be undertaken if the country is to develop.

By perpetuating the school system based on the established elitist system whereby a child entering school at class one received 10 years of schooling, followed by two years of higher secondary and a further three years at university for a first degree continued to produce too many graduates in the humanities and far too few in the field of science and technology with the result 45% remain unemployed, even today more than twenty years after independence.

Although the solitary Institute of Business Administration (IBA) is trying to fill the widening gap at middle level management, and the universities are turning out graduates in management and business and related subjects, there is still a vacuum. But the problem is not so much at the higher levels of learning as at the primary and secondary levels. For, so far barely a dent has been made in the high illiteracy rate. But it was not until the end of the eighties that the government really began to comprehend the enormity of the problems they faced in the educational sector, and it is only during this decade any serious attempt has been taken to resolve the crisis.

The continuous rise in population, coupled with the fact that Bangladesh has one of the highest incidences of poverty in the world, makes it increasingly clear the poor are being disadvantaged under the present econo-social set-up. Hence the need for implementing the compulsory free primary education system as quickly as possible which would take in all children between the ages of 6 to 10 years. Further to this, actual numbers of illiterates rising each year until today—they are estimated to be in the region of 80 million—a well planned and sustained mass literacy campaign is imperative if development activities are to be geared up.

That there is an obvious need for reforming the existing syllabus and for establishing a more effective mass education scheme is abundantly clear, especially for those who have to survive at mere subsistence level, usually on the land. For, although government assistance to local village schools has been provided for some time, the education imparted is still too academic for the average person to relate to and a new system must be devised by which people will be able to take better control of their lives. To this end more practical based subjects must be introduced as early as possible while, at the same time, not neglecting to build a solid foundation for those who wish to pursue a more academic career. In other words a system which also provides equal opportunity for getting ahead. For, obviously, if the next generation is to be led successfully into new era of economic well-being, developing our vast human resource is the only way.

27 MAY 1993

The Bangladesh Observer