

Bangladesh to provide second chance education

Through World Bank loan

The World Bank today announced the approval of a US\$ 10.5 million credit for a Bangladesh Nonformal Education Project which will provide second chance education to 2.5 million illiterate adolescents and young adults ages 15-24. The credit will be provided by the International Development Association (IDA), the World Bank's concessional lending affiliate.

Despite the Government's efforts to expand access to primary schooling, low literacy rates prevail throughout Bangladesh. In 1994, gross primary enrollments remarkably reached nearly 100 per cent, however less than half of those who enroll in primary school complete the five-years cycle. Of those who have completed primary schooling, less than half achieve sustainable literacy levels. The large illiterate population—estimated to be around 40 million—poses a serious constraint on the Government's efforts to curb the population growth rate and increase labour productivity.

Literacy contributes to poverty reduction both through increased productivity and higher earning capacity and by promoting better living conditions—lower fertility, improved health, and higher child survival rates, says Audrey Aarons, Education Specialist at the World Bank.

The Government of Bangladesh has recognized the limitations of the formal school system to address the magnitude of illiteracy and set ambitious targets to increase the literacy rate from 33 per cent to 62 per cent by the year 2000 through a massive national nonformal literacy programme. Through this project, The World Bank, together with The Asian Development Bank (ADB) will help realize this goal. The beneficiaries will be selected from the 30 dis-

tricts with the lowest literacy rates, which, by implication, are also likely to be the poorest districts. At least half of the beneficiaries will be women. Programmes of basic literacy, numeracy and life skills—including nutrition, hygiene, family planning, civic rights, and income-generating practices—will thus bring substantial pay-offs for Bangladesh in terms of increased economic productivity, better health and schooling for families, and lower fertility. The project's objectives are to:

- * expand and improve nonformal education programmes to reach an estimated 2.5 million learners in the targeted group;
- * strengthen institutional capacity to deliver programmes through Non-Government Organizations

(NGOs) and the district administrations;

- * help the Government establish a nonformal education system that is capable of delivering effective large scale literacy programmes at affordable costs.

While illiteracy is a problem for all age groups, it is particularly serious for adolescents and young adults. Nonformal education aimed towards the 15-24 years age group is a new entry for the World Bank. Aarons stated, "Ninety per cent of this credit will go towards financing NGOs in Bangladesh involved in nonformal education specifically for this age group."

Large NGOs already have the necessary management and administration structures; smaller NGOs

will be supported, as needed, through training in managing larger numbers of programmes and in budgetary procedures. Because of their reputation of effectiveness and innovation, NGOs have received increasing levels of grants funding from donors.

Over 200 NGOs in Bangladesh are currently delivering 75 per cent of Bangladesh's literacy and nonformal education programmes. High attendance levels and low drop-out rates in their classes demonstrate their effectiveness and direct relevance to the needs and aspirations of the students. The project will allow NGOs to continue to be the primary providers of services, directly involving them in the programme, development, delivery process, as well as pilot programme of alternative models of non-formal education.

Upon successful completion of the project, Bangladesh will have a strong institutional capacity for implementing large-scale affordable literacy programme. There project will provide:

- * proven adult literacy methodologies suitable for the country;
- * trained and experienced staff at the central and local levels to handle literacy programmes;
- * improved instructor knowledge and delivery of programmes

- * stronger management and monitoring of programme, and
- * long-term positive benefits of health, nutrition, and family planning.

The project will be parallel-financed with ADB as the lead agency. This is unique to the region and will pull together the strengths of the two Banks. The total project cost is \$51.0 million of which IDA will provide \$10.5-million, the ADB will provide \$26.7 million, the Swiss Development Corporation will provide \$3.8 million, and the government will provide \$10.0 million.