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Non-Formal Primary Education – Proshika Approach

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PROSHIKA is a national NGO, working in 146 thanas in both rural and urban areas of Bangladesh through its 110 Area Development Centres (ADCs). The organisation considers the abilities of poor people as the best tool of development. It helps them to organise under the umbrella of their own institutions. So far, Proshika has been working with about one million organized people, among whom more than 60% are women.

Since its inception in 1976, Proshika has been giving emphasis to empowering the poor through education and training, so that they can think critically about their problems and take necessary steps for development. Children's education is one of the felt needs of these organised people. Since 1990, Proshika has been conducting a schooling campaign at the beginning of each academic year. Families are motivated through this campaign to send their children to primary schools. The coordination committees of the People's Organisation (POs) are actively involved in this motivational process.

Upto June '96, 142,000 children were enrolled in primary schools through this programme. Proshika workers and the members of the People's Organisations make frequent visits to the schools to ensure that the children attend the primary schools. As a result, the dropout rate of these learners is less than 15% against more than 50% of the national rate.

In 1992, Proshika started a Non-formal Education Programme for the 8-11 years age group. In the initial stage, the programme used BRAC materials. Three hundred centres enrolled about 8,000 learners. With this approach, learners can complete education upto the level of class three. The members of the People's Organisations showed interest to have a course for their children equivalent to class five, so that they can be admitted to secondary schools. Proshika found this request

very logical and accordingly designed a new structure of non-formal primary education.

The children who are the learners of Proshika's schools are older than the children of formal primary schools. They grasp facts and concepts more quickly than the younger students in primary schools. So Proshika has designed a course to complete the primary phase in four academic years instead of five years in the formal sector.

Again, reducing the vacations and holidays, each academic year (200 effective days) is completed in nine months. So the learners are able to complete an equivalent level of formal sector primary education in three years. Proshika reviewed the national curriculum and developed its own curriculum accommodating most of the essential learning con-

NPPF curriculum.

d) Children who complete this course will be qualified for admission in secondary schools.

Proshika has established a Material Development Cell (MDC) to develop curriculum and materials for the new structure. In 1994, the MDC developed curricula which was reviewed through a workshop attended by experienced personnel of different NGOs. The Cell has already developed and field-tested the materials upto year two. The structure and the materials were found to be satisfactory.

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tents. English language is taught from the textbooks of NCTB.

Each Proshika school is run by a single teacher. It is not possible for her/him to teach all the different religions. So religious education is not introduced in Proshika schools. We hope that the students can cover this gap in the secondary school.

Proshika's Non-formal education structure can be illustrated with the following points:

a) Children of 8-11 years age group can complete equivalent level of primary education in four academic years.

b) Each of the academic year consists of nine months. There are 200 working days in each academic year.

c) Most of the essential learning contents of the NCFB curriculum are accommodated in the Proshika

national qualification of a teacher is SSC. The teachers are given 15 days' foundation training. Four days' training is provided at the beginning of each academic year. Besides this training teachers participate in a two-day workshop every month. In each of the ADCs there is at least one trained person to monitor the progress of the centre. Centrally, a well-equipped team has been working to support the smooth running of the programme.

The traditional classroom culture does not exist in Proshika schools. The learners sit in a U-shape and the teacher is always kept busy helping them. The teacher feels herself/himself to be a co-learner and the learners sometimes play the role of a teacher.

Process teaching is given emphasis rather than the teaching of content.

The learners do not memorise everything like parrots. The active learning process is maintained in teaching the children. It helps them to be creative. Telling stories to the learners, listening to stories from the learners, using flash cards, observing real situations — these are some of the methods of teaching which keep the learners interested and attentive. They sing and dance in the classroom.

Like other programmes, local people participate in the management of Proshika schools. They are involved from planning to implementation. They participate in providing opportunities for running the schools.

The people bear a small portion of the expenditure for their children's education. The guardians pay taka five every month for each of their children. The coordination committees of the People's Organisations keep an eye of all the steps of managing the schools. So the dropout rate is less than 3% in Proshika's schools. Generally the community centre is also used as the school. Such a school can accommodate 35 children sitting in a U-shape. The teacher-guardian cooperation ensures community-oriented school management. Meetings of the parents are held on a regular basis to solve the problems. Through involving the People's Organisation in the programme actively, the NFPE teachers and the workers of Proshika feel themselves as part of the community. Proshika has a target of operating 10,250 schools by the year 1999 to arrange primary education for 380,000 children.

This year Proshika is observing its twentieth founding anniversary. Non-formal education is a recent programme of Proshika. But in a short period, this programme could draw attention. We hope, this programme will be able to bring a significant result in the years to come.

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