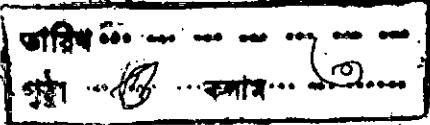


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Literacy And Non-Formal Education As A Means To Poverty Alleviation

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THE government of Bangladesh has recognized the need for education for socio-economic development, alleviating poverty and human resource development. Development plans of Bangladesh accorded high priority to human resource development, poverty alleviation and women's participation.

The constitution of Bangladesh obligates the government to make universal access to education for all. Bangladesh is also a party to the World Declaration on Education for All (EFA) at Jomtien. In fulfilment of the obligations enjoined upon her by the constitution of the country and the World Declaration on EFA 1990 to which she has been a signatory, Bangladesh has attached high priority to education by allocating fifteen per cent of the national budget the share of the primary and non-formal education being nearly fifty per cent.

At the primary level massive programme is underway for making primary education universal. Nation-wide implementation of compulsory primary education began in 1993 under the Compulsory Primary Education Act (1990). In addition, the government has also undertaken massive programme for removing illiteracy from the country within shortest possible time. Social mobilization activities have mounted in order to implement the programme. This helped to increase enrolment at the primary level from 12 million in 1990 to 18 million in 2000. The gross enrolment rate increased from 73% in 1990 to 96% in 2000. We have marginally overshot the decade's target of 95% gross enrolment as a result of the social mobilization programme supported by legislative action, greater financial support, improvement of school infrastructure and introduction of incentive programmes such as food for education programme, stipend programme for the children of poor families.

But primary education alone cannot increase the literacy rate of the country.

We have taken two pronged strategies in tackling the curse of illiteracy. Formal primary education on the one hand and non-formal education for out-of-school children, adolescents and adults. Bangladesh has achieved commendable success in non-formal education. The non-formal education programme is being implemented by the NGOs with government's financial support. The government set the target to increase literacy rate to 62% by 2000 from 35 per cent in 1991. Bangladesh has already reached the target set in the National Plan of Action of Education for All. The adult literacy rate has now reached to 65 per cent (estimated).

Integrated Non-Formal Education Programme (INFEPE) was implemented during 1991-97. Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) headed by Director-General was created in 1995. Non-formal education programme is being implemented through three delivery modes (a) Total Literacy Movement by involving local community and District Administration; (b) Centre Based Approach by engaging non-government organization and (c) Primer distribution approach to philanthropic organisation.

A well designed curriculum has been developed for the learners of non-formal education through participation of stockholders. Training programme has also been developed for the supervisors as well as for the teachers of the non-formal education centres. NFE experts of various government organisations and NGOs are utilized as core trainers. Different kinds of teaching-learning materials has been developed and improved on a continuous basis. The materials have been developed through field testing.

Gram Shiksha Milon Kendra (learning centres for neo-liter-

ates) has been established for continuing education. These kendras are called as Rural Libraries which contain follow-up reading materials, national dailies, weeklies, wall magazines, a radio and some indoor games. Local philanthropic and voluntary organizations has also been encouraged as partners in combating illiteracy. These organizations start the literacy programme with their own initiative and resources. The government provides only textbooks for the illiterates free of cost.

Total Literacy Movement (TLM) has been launched throughout the country. The unique feature of TLM is the involvement of administration and people from all walks of life in the programme. The district administration plays a pivotal role in TLM programme. Government through project provides support to the efforts of the District Administration with financial assistance. The total process of TLM is closely monitored by the directorate (DNFE) and the ministry (PMED). The TLM is very cost effective and participatory programme which involves an extensive motivational programme.

Under various programmes of non-formal education, a total of about 15 million illiterates have been made literate by 2000. On successful completion of the projects under implementation a total of 33.4 million illiterates will be made literate and literacy rate by 2003 will be increased to 80 per cent.

The literacy and non-formal education programmes were taken with the sole objective to alleviate poverty in the first place. In this effort initially basic literacy efforts were taken at a massive scale. At a subsequent state Post Literacy and Continuing Education are undertaken to ensure that the acquired literacy skills are translated into gainful and sustainable income enhancing skills.

We are at the dawn of the twenty-first century. At this point I would like to focus on the vision of education for the new millennium. Consistent with the national aspirations and development commitments, Bangladesh has assigned to education a dominant role in achieving its goal, which is eradication of poverty with social development. Education is conceived as a powerful instrument for engendering improved quality of life and well-being of the people.

With this end in view, the primary focus of the country's education system is directed towards facilitating the following attainments: (a) productivity improvement; (b) employment generation, income generation; (c) empowerment of women and the underprivileged; (d) entry into the scientific and technological realm for sustained economic and social development. In Bangladesh education is well recognised as a pre-requisite for ensuring sustainable development and promoting quality human resources. The government has intensified its efforts to guarantee education for all and its commitment will be fulfilled by ensuring (i) that no child is deprived of education for lack of teaching and learning materials or adequate space; (ii) that no child is subjected to discriminatory access to primary education arising from gender, age, income, family, cultural or ethnic differences and geographic remoteness; and (iii) the quality and relevance of basic education programmes.

The major objectives of the Bangladesh Government are human resource development, poverty alleviation and women's participation in development. By expanding the non-formal education programme countrywide, the government can turn the huge population into a truly developed human resource.

(The author is advisor to the caretaker government).