

Feature

Education

FOCUS ON PRIMARY EDUCATION

Community Supported Satellite Schools

A Possible Answer To Achieving Universal Primary Education In Bangladesh

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

The article describes how it has been possible to almost treble primary enrolment in a rural government primary school by extending classroom facilities to community provided accommodation and teachers near to the immediate neighbourhood of younger children.

FOR some time now Bangladesh has been striving to attain higher enrollment and greater retention of children in primary schools in quest of achieving universal primary education (UPE). With all the investments and efforts that have gone into primary education during the last ten years there has been some improvement in enrollment and drop-out situation. But much remains to be done if we are to reach the national goal of UPE by the turn of the century.

Reasons for Slow Progress

The factors commonly identified as responsible for slow progress towards achievement of UPE are: shortage of classroom accommodation, resulting in staggered morning-afternoon shift and lack of space for underaged children who come to school for morning (unrecognised) 'Baby' class; location of school beyond walking distance of a great many younger children; unattractive atmosphere in school; and absence of provision for readiness learning in school for children most of whom come from poor and illiterate families.

The above problems can be largely resolved with willing community participation. Traditionally educating primary age group children has been a community based activity. But this was disturbed when in 1973 the government nationalised most of the primary schools greatly diminishing earlier individual and collective urge of the community to take any real responsibility for primary education.

Idea Behind Satellite School

The idea behind satellite school is based on certain assumptions. It was felt that the community had to be directly involved in organising educational activities for local children in order to ensure their universal access to primary education. It was thought that if teaching of younger children in pre-primary grade and classes I and II could be arranged in community provided structure for use as extended classrooms away from the primary school but within easy reach of different localities, the parents might feel persuaded to send their children to these new locations for schooling. The

extended classrooms to be called satellite schools are each to be placed in charge of a primary teacher and run with the assistance of volunteer teachers taken from the community. The primary teacher would teach in classes I and II while the volunteer teachers would take pre-primary class. The school hours would coincide with morning shift to allow the primary teacher to hurry back to mother school for afternoon shift.

This arrangement would result in higher enrollment

up by holding several meetings with local people in quick succession to explain the main features of satellite schools. They were specifically told that the government had no intention of taking over the management of satellite

ment would provide: a primary teacher from the local primary school for teaching and management of each satellite school; all teaching-learning materials; teacher training; supervision and monitoring; and drinking water and toilet facilities. Local people would appoint a convener who is to mobilise community inputs and perform liaison functions.

Four locations for satellite schools besides the mother school (which would function as satellite school during morning shift for children living nearby) were selected. The community came up with the names of conveners and volunteer teachers for each school.

During this preparatory phase (Dec '87-Feb '88) pre-primary curriculum was partially developed by an expert committee, and a socio-economic survey to assess the total number of 4-5 years old and 6-10 years old children and their schooling status was carried out. It was found that there were 566 and 727 children respectively of the above age groups living in the primary school catchment area in early 1988.

During the same time the volunteer teachers along with primary teachers and conveners were given orientation training. Learning materials were supplied and teachers from the mother school were assigned to each satellite school. The community offered mud huts at two places and in the remaining two places

temporary sheds were put up to accommodate the schools.

Impact of Satellite Schools

The five satellite schools including the one located in the mother school started functioning from mid February 1988. It had an immediate and dramatic effect on enrollment which went up from 291 in 1987 (before satellite school) to 611 in 1988, to 802 in 1989 and to 867 in 1990 plunging to 764 in 1991 in classes I-V corresponding to 6-10 age group population. The current drop in enrollment is being looked into. In 'Baby' class enrollment jumped to 447 in 1988 compared to 65 in 1987. It gradually came down to 189 in 1991 as admission of 4-year olds was discouraged.

In senior classes (III, IV and V taken together) enrollment increased from 111 in 1987 to 152 in 1988, to 218 in 1989, to 306 in 1990 and to 309 in 1991. But what is more striking is the phenomenal increase in girls enrollment - from 27 in 1987 to 158 in 1991.

There were also more girls studying in these classes than boys (158 girls to 151 boys).

However, the disquieting feature about enrollment increase is that about 20 per cent children who were in class I in 1988, 1989 and 1990 respectively did not join class II in the following year. A greater per cent of children (52 per cent in 1990) dropped out from class II.

Present Status of Satellite Schools

The operation of satellite schools has entered into fourth year. The volunteer teachers are now (since July '91) being paid a monthly remuneration

of Tk. 400/- by UNICEF. This has been introduced as it was found that local people, mostly poor, are unable to pay the teachers. A design for 3-roomed satellite school costing under Tk. 40,000/- has been prepared. Part of construction cost for purchase of materials will be met by UNICEF. The community has now to mobilise resources and work untidily to build the schools.

Lessons Learnt

The marked rise in enrollment after opening of satellite

schools has proved the value of community participation in promoting primary education. The innovative idea of extended classrooms for teaching younger children in the immediate vicinity of home caught the imagination of the local people. They readily made available classroom space and teachers in return of certain educational facilities offered by the government. Encouraged by frequent supervision and guidance from authorities in Dhaka and with the support of upazila administration the community as a whole and the teachers in particular went on working for the satellite schools for nearly four years without any prospect of immediate material gain.

The sudden jump in enrollment proves the existence of latent demand for education which the community proceeded to meet. However, with closer co-operation between the parents, teachers and community the large number of drop-outs that occurred in classes I and II could have been prevented.

The satellite schools also offer possible solution of how preparatory learning ('Baby' class) could be organised without the government taking direct responsibility for it.

Replicability of Satellite School

The idea of satellite schools seems to have worked. It provides a practical framework for launching government-community collaborative effort to maximise primary enrollment at minimum cost and thus leading to UPE. It also solves the problem of overcrowding at the existing primary schools. While admittedly a great success, the satellite school approach has to be carefully evaluated before adopting it for replication. In particular, serious thought will have to be given on the possibilities of long term financing and management of satellite schools on the basis of shared responsibility.

(Mr. Mahmood Aminul Islam, formerly Additional Secretary, Ministry of Education, along with UNICEF Dhaka, developed the satellite school idea and tested it on the ground from 1987 to 1990.)



Orientation training of volunteer teachers in progress at Bhaluka upazila headquarters.



Children of pre-primary and classes I and II inside the classroom of a satellite school.

Attitudinal Impediments in Education and Development

Helaluddin Ahmed

IT is axiomatic that the system of education in a country has to meet the individual and collective needs of a country. The educational system is the instrument a society uses to equip its members with the means to lead productive public lives and fuller private lives. This system must provide opportunities to gifted individuals for developing their skills. It should cater to the training needs of a leadership group and at the same time provide for flourishing of vocational abilities which is essential for a progressive democratic society.

During the colonial days, the attitude of the rulers towards our people and their education was that of paternalism, while the people eyed the government with passive submission. The people looked to the state for satisfaction of their social-economic and educational needs. The government build roads and schools framed policies on education, maintained law and order and dispensed justice. In return the people were expected to obey and cooperate, learn the lessons of education as per the preference of their rulers, and perform the tasks assigned to them. Initiative in education or any other sector was neither expected nor encouraged. The people-government relationship was an impersonal one between the subject and the ruler.

Our present education system in fact has its roots in those dark colonial days. The educational system was designed to produce government servants whom operated the state and served their Masters. The range and scope of education was confined to those fields which contributed to attainment of competence in some particular governmental skills.

As the nationalist movements reflecting the natural aspirations of the people of the subcontinent to become free gained momentum, the outlook of the people towards the government underwent transformation. All action of the government, whether actually good or bad, met with

protests. Even those that were in public interest were criticised.

The government was viewed as a devil and non-cooperation became the badge of patriotism. The indifferent passivity of earlier days found its utility in the newer form of passive resistance. The goal was freedom, tactics negativism and the people's attitude and actions were inspired and governed by the end to be achieved. This phenomenon spread very rapidly in our educational arena and the student community in fact played a glorious role in this grand struggle for freedom. But sadly, as a consequence to this, we were left with two unfortunate legacies which continue to haunt us even today. One was lack of acceptance of a recognized public authority-weather legitimate or not, and the other was a spirit of indiscipline especially amongst the politically conscious student community.

Spurred on largely by the nationalist movements for freedom and justice, transfer of power from the British began even before independence was an accomplished fact. During this latter period of the British Raj we frequently witnessed undignified scramble for positions and a propensity to place the self before the community. The often disruptive forces of communalism, regionalism and provincialism came to the fore time and again.

This trend continued even during the Pakistan days. Immediately after the emergence of a newly independent Bangladesh the emergence of a seven and half crore people turned to the task of building a proud and prosperous nation. For a moment at the dawn of freedom our colonial attitudes momentarily change, but only to reemerge with a newer intensity very soon.

In those hectic days there was not much opportunity to take the long look, or to dispassionately analyze our past experience and our future opportunities. After the first great surge that launched the nation, the magic was gone. Slowly the old attitudes that

were absorbed during the past century returned to plague our nation and our education and continued to impede our progress. One after another we witnessed, the resurfacing of passivity, non-cooperation, indiscipline, corruption, and opportunism.

In a situation where the overriding objective of the state is that of nation building, and where these opposing attitudinal forces simultaneously exist, the immense task of social-political, economic and educational upliftment can only be accomplished when a strong dedicated, and responsible leadership exists. Such leadership must be strong enough to moderate, balance and overcome these harmful attitudes. Unfortunately, with the exception of a few dedicated souls such as Shaheed President Ziaur Rahman this leadership had failed to emerge in our country until the recent transition to democracy.

The 21st year of our independence has started rolling amidst widespread dissatisfaction with what has been accomplished. But one does not get the picture of a citizenry, both on and off campus, imaginatively and energetically working towards eradication of their socio-economic malaise and educational ills. Rather it is the government that sets the direction and determines the criteria for national and educational development. In the field of education, although our leaders are now the formulators of policies, the sector was neither in fact nor in theory given the attention or importance that might enable it to face the local or global challenge. Those within the system has failed to develop appropriate attitudes, habits, and skills, consistent with the needs of a people who controlled their own destiny. Our curricula, teaching methods, educational facilities, administrative structures and system of examinations continue to reflect the old apathetic attitude and conflicting values. These are the attitudes of a subject people rather than that of free men. Thus the need of the moment is a revolution in attitudes through which the cynicism, lethargy,

opportunism, suspicion, dishonesty and indifference that have characterised the outlook of our people for so many decades in the past will give way to a spirit of individual initiative, personal integrity, pride in accomplishment, trust in one's fellow being and a private sense of public duty.

Our education sector can shoulder its responsibilities properly only if a revision of attitudes on the part of the professionals is accompanied by a change in attitude in the governmental hierarchy and the general masses. In the past the fundamental role of education in the programmes for socio-economic development was little appreciated. The concept of education as an investment socio-economic growth and its value as a socio-economic asset has never been fully comprehended. In education, as in all other sectors, it is impossible to ignore the economic reality, that "one receives largely what one pays for".

Good education is expensive and educational expansion needs more expense. As we the people are the beneficiaries of this expansion, the sacrifices required must be borne primarily by us.

All our educational problems, and in fact all our national problems are inseparably entwined in a web of attitudes and values that is inappropriate to an independent national entity, and incompatible with our commitment for national progress and development. People's attitude can not be changed overnight, but they can certainly be changed. This is one of the precious lessons that we have learned from recorded history. In fact the real importance of education lies in the fact that, it is the basic instrument for promoting such a positive change in our attitudes and values. We should provide our political and academic leadership with an opportunity to instill that new attitude in us and thereby promote the noble cause of national upliftment.

The writer is presently serving in the Press Information Department as an Information Officer.

INDIA is reversed its decision not to accept external funding for its education programme.

With significant developments in the literacy front, international funding agencies are apparently willing now to accept the Indian government's terms in the running of education projects.

India earlier decided not to accept money from organisations such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), Swedish International Development Agency (SIDA) and the World Bank.

A senior official of the Education Ministry explained that the World Bank, for instance, after long negotiations, agreed that there should be no conditions attached to the spending of foreign exchange loans.

The official said, "Earlier, we had thought that external agencies, with their Western thinking, can slowly influence the Indian education system and even corrode it." There were also fears, initially, that the country might become overly dependent on external funding for its education projects and that imbalances could be created through over-investment in certain areas of education. These fears were expressed by Indian delegate to the World Conference on Education held in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990.

But following the experiences of Pakistan and Bangladesh in the implementation of World Bank-assisted education programmes, India changed its attitude.

Now several international organisations have offered to extend huge loans to India to hasten the reduction of the country's very high illiteracy rate.

These offers followed the release of the latest census report which showed that the country's literacy rate has now increased to a respectable 52.11 per cent. Indian experts have expressed confidence that this census result is an indication that the illiteracy problem in their country is being gradually overcome.

Based on the census results, India's literate population increased from 234 million in 1981 to 352 million in 1991. This means a 50 per cent increase in the country's literate population during the last decade.

India Shifts Gear in Literacy Campaign

Indian officials are jubilant, as the latest census indicates the illiteracy problem is being gradually overcome. by Prakash Chandra

jumped up by 160 million, the rate of illiteracy would have been lower."

Prior to this development, it was feared that India, the second most populous country in the world, would have at least half the world's estimated one billion illiterate population by the year 2000.

Now experts are optimistic that India will account for only a third of the world's illiterates by then. They are confident that if the literacy campaign is sustained, India's illiterate population will decline further.

Despite this very significant accomplishment, the task before India remains daunting. For one thing, the number of illiterate Indian women remains high despite gains made by the literacy campaign. Women account for three-fifths of the country's illiterate population.

India is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of making women literate as it

has been noted that high female literacy rates often mean lower infant mortality and population growth rate.

Significant increases in female literacy rates have been recorded in the states of Haryana, Manipur, Nagaland, Sikkim and some other smaller states. The increases ranged from 14 per cent to a little less than 20 per cent.

The South Indian state of Kerala continued to lead in literacy with a rate of almost 98 per cent. Tamil Nadu, another southern state, did quite well in its literacy campaign, making it the tenth most literate state in India. Delhi, with a literacy rate of 76.05 per cent, was sixth.

The Hindi-speaking states - Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Bihar - continued to suffer from poor literacy. These states also registered the highest reproduction rates. All attempts to slow down the population

growth in these states have so far failed.

India will need the money for its education, and literacy, programmes. The World Bank has noted that India continues to be short of resources for education and is badly in need of support. But with the new shift in India's education policy, assistance has started to pour in.

UNICEF is providing US\$100 million for the Bihar education project. The World Bank is making available US\$240 million for a project in Uttar Pradesh. SIDA has proposed assistance worth US\$75 million for Rajasthan's People's Movement for Literacy and Development.

It has been estimated that if the goal of Education for All by the Year 2000 is to be achieved, elementary education alone in India would require about 800,000 million rupees in the next 10 years.

INDIA TRIES TO RUB OUT THE THUMB PRINT

WITH the Indian census for the first time showing more literates (352 million) than people who cannot read or write (324 million), hopes have been raised that the country might avoid being the world's most illiterate nation by the end of the century, reports Aisha Ram in New Delhi.

The current literacy drive has abandoned the old method of running adult education centres and begins with a six-month motivation campaign, using folk artists and street performers who decry 'angootha chaap' (thumb print) and extol the world of knowledge.

Teaching is then carried out in people's mother tongue or the language of the district. The National Literacy Mission

feels 200 hours of learning are needed to achieve a satisfactory level.

The whole of Kerala and Goa states and the territory of Pondicherry have been declared literate.

In Midnapore in West Bengal state - which recently won a literacy award from the UN Scientific, Cultural and Educational Organization - the cry is 'shakshata, shachitanata aur sakshamata' (literacy, awareness and empowerment) and rival political parties are working together on literacy programmes.

Thousands of postcards and letters from new literates are pouring into the offices of the district organisers, expressing thanks and excitement.

In two Kerala villages it was reported that communal tensions dissipated within two days of erupting because learning together under the mellow light of the lamp had softened enmities.

A contractor at Durgapur steel mill tried to bribe learners to drop out of classes because he feared literate workers would find out how much they were being exploited.

Reading rooms and libraries are opening up, and in West Bengal newspapers for new literates are being produced. Some existing newspapers offer special columns for new literates, providing information about government schemes and bank facilities as well as news.

The estimated cost of achieving full literacy in 100 districts of the country by 1993 is \$120 million./PANOS

