

# Role of Education in Family Planning

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

THE current family planning programme (1992-96) called the Fourth Population and Health Project was officially launched in Dhaka on April 27 this year. The project builds on three earlier family planning programmes implemented between 1975 and 1990. During the period of 15 years, the population growth rate could be brought down from 2.9 per cent (Bangladesh Fertility Survey, BFS, 1975) to 2.11 per cent (Ministry of Health and Family Welfare, MHFW, 1992). This has resulted from substantial increase in contraceptive prevalence rate (i.e. percentage of eligible married couples currently using contraceptives) from about 10 per cent in 1975 (BFS) to present 39 per cent (MHFW), and a gradual rise in the mean age at first marriage from 15 (BFS) to 18 years (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, BBS, 1990). On an average, a married woman is now giving birth to 4.3 children during her child-bearing age (MHFW) known as total fertility rate, TFR, as compared to 6.3 children in 1975 (BFS).

## Education and family planning

The multi-sectoral strategy of implementing the current population and health project does not mention the need to strengthen education, specially, at the primary level. This is perhaps due to prevalent notion that education is a separate sector like energy or industry, and should therefore be left to the Education Ministry and its professional educationists to run all education programmes.

In a family planning programme, people have to learn to change their fertility behaviour while raising family of their own. And education viewed as learning helps bring about that change. The point is proved by the fact that in Bangladesh, in spite of almost universal awareness about the need for family planning and knowledge of contraceptive methods it has not been possible to achieve more drastic reduction in birth rate so far. The problem is that the programme serves a largely illiterate population mired in poverty and ignorance, and it is very difficult to make them understand and appreciate the desperate need to keep their family size small.

For example, people have to understand that even in 60 years time, between 1901 and 1961, the population in the area now constituting Bangladesh less than doubled from 28.9 million to 50.8 million; while in 30 years time between 1961 and 1991, the population has more than doubled from 50.8 million to 108 million, and the density of population is at the point of reaching 2000 per square mile. Which is the highest in the world excepting few city states. Again, because of young age structure of the population (about 47 per cent are under 15 years of age) population may grow even faster in future heightening the possibility of economic and ecological catastrophe.

The continued preference for multiple children in a family seems to lie in the lack of education. Around 30 per cent of adult population in Bangladesh are illiterate. Two-thirds of them are male and

one-thirds female. One great advantage of education is that an educated person becomes better informed and knowledgeable. This improves his cognitive ability. For example, education opens his mind to the realities of population pressure on everyday life more easily.

## Basic level education

In this article, the term education has been used to denote acquisition of literacy and numeracy as a life-time skill, and the ability to use that skill in dealing with daily life situations intelligently and with self-confidence. It is a basic stage of education which can be broadly equated with our 5-year cycle of primary education. According to UNESCO standards a minimum of 4-year of schooling is required to attain a level of functional literacy that can be maintained by average individuals under ordinary circumstances. If completed successfully, primary education may lead to other kinds of post-primary education or skill training for employment and income generation.

The Nairobi seminar for education and planning officials (1974) organised jointly by the UNESCO and the UNICEF drew up the following definition of Basic Education:

"Basic education is the minimum provision of knowledge, attitudes, values and experiences which should be made for every individual to

those who have acquired and retained literacy and use the skill in dealing with daily life situations. In no case their educational qualifications exceeded grade VIII.

The other characteristics of the respondents (250 literates and 250 illiterates) were the same, namely, they were all Muslim males and heads of household coming from rural background; aged between 30 to 40 years; and owning between half an acre to two and a half acres of land. The respondents were interviewed by 50 assistant upazila education officers (AUEOs) serving in greater Dhaka district. The AUEOs were briefed about the purpose of the study and the questionnaire before each of them took interview of 5 literates and 5 illiterates randomly selected at their free will from within their respective areas of work, and using the same questionnaire.

The results of the interview were tabulated separately for literates and illiterates and classified according to frequency data on the respondents' income, number of children, attitude and adoption of family planning methods. The data were analysed to test their significance for drawing inferences based on null hypothesis. It was found that compared to illiterates, literates: (a) earn more; (b) have fewer children; (c) are more self-reliant in their attitude; and (d) practise family planning in greater number. In

of children which Bangladesh is honour bound to promote. There are many children from poor families who come to school half starved and without proper dress, and have ultimately to give up studies for want of support from their parents.

Since early 80s, primary education was made universal with free tuition and provision of free textbooks for all students. But the results have so far been disappointing. It still suffers from chronic problems of inadequate and poorly maintained physical facilities, low enrollment, poor pupil attendance leading to high incidence of drop-out, poor quality of classroom teaching, lack of community support, and unattractive school atmosphere for students.

Time has come to reappraise the performance of primary education and assess its needs under the prevailing social and economic conditions of the country.

Considering the widespread poverty and low nutritional status of majority of children there is perhaps no other alternative but to introduce school lunch programme together with health programme to create a favourable climate for disadvantaged children to enrol and continue their studies. For regular health check-up and treatment of students, the existing health infrastructure in the country can be utilised. Both the programmes are equally important for chil-

**The author argues that universalisation of primary education stands much better chance of success if supported by school lunch and health programme. The cost of providing such important services to children could be met by setting up a trust fund in cooperation with donor agencies. The benefits in terms of literacy and its influence on fertility will far outweigh any investment made in the programme.**

develop his/her own potentials, creativity, and critical mind both for his/her own fulfilment and happiness, and for serving as a useful citizen and producer for the development of the community to which he/she belongs."

The idea of basic level education described above was adopted by the World Conference On Education For All held at Jomtien, Thailand in March 1990.

The conference recognised primary schooling as the minimum foundation on which countries should gradually and systematically build network of further education and training. Primary schooling can take the form of different modes of delivery like formal schooling and non-formal education for out-of-school children and youth; or a massive literacy programme for illiterate adults with targets to be set by each country prioritised by age and sex.

## Benefits of education

In May-June 1991, I had a survey of 250 literates and an equal number of illiterates carried out in 49 (rural) upazilas of greater Dhaka district (2884 square miles with a rural population of about 6.1 million according to 1981 census) to find out the effect of literacy on: (a) income; (b) number of children in a family; (c) attitude to life in their being self-reliant or fatalistic; and (d) adoption of family planning. For the purpose of the survey literates were identified as

each case the difference was found to be statistically significant.

It is significant to find that literates have scored better than illiterates both in respect of income and having lesser number of children in the family by adopting family planning. Thus in a sense, basic level education has been able to break the unwanted cycle of poverty and the propensity to have a large family. The findings of the survey are corroborated by Bangladesh Contraceptive Prevalence Survey 1989. The survey found that a higher proportion (33 per cent) of eligible married women who completed primary education or received some primary schooling practise family planning compared to those with no schooling (27.4 per cent). The proportion rose higher (54 per cent) for those who studied up to class VIII or above.

## Supportive school lunch and health programme

In the face of unmistakable evidence that education influences fertility, primary education cannot be left out as a sector unconnected with population programme as long as Bangladesh aims at reaching the demographic goal of zero population growth rate sooner than later. Education is also an essential ingredient, along with health and nutrition, in human resource development which influences all sectors of development.

Moreover, primary education is one of the basic rights

and attractive to parents.

An education programme which combines health and nutrition aspects of children will at once capture the imagination of parents and community. Children will have something to look forward to every time they go to school. As school lunch and health programme will have to be organised and managed by school involving local community, the latter will find something worthwhile to pursue for the benefit of children. This will bring about a fundamental change in school-community relations. Local people will come forward with helping hands to solve many of the problems faced by school from time to time.

## Role of Union Council

The proposed transformation of primary education into child welfare oriented activity would thrive best under decentralised administration. In rural Bangladesh, the lowest tier of administration is union council (an area of about 12 square miles with a population of about 20000), each run by a popularly elected chairman and members.

Recently, union councils (there are 4401 of them) have been entrusted with the responsibility of implementing compulsory primary education programme. This new responsibility could be enlarged to include total management of primary education including local level planning of school facilities and budgeting, con-

struction and repair of schools, and appointment and discipline of teachers. Assisted by a full time education officer and given adequate administrative and financial power, union councils should be allowed to run the schools. Any attempt at dual administration would harm the programme. However, academic supervision, training, and curriculum including production and printing of textbooks should be the responsibility of the central government.

Union council is an age-old grassroots institution dating back to over one hundred years; and there is every reason to believe that it would prove equal to the task to management of primary education under proper supervision and guidance and financial support. True, there would be instances of incompetence and corruption committed by union councils. But then, the government bureaucracy is not immune from these maladies.

## Financing school lunch and health programme

Universalisation of primary education has to succeed in Bangladesh and without loss of time. The programme leaves no scope for any excuses for it would be suicidal for the nation. There is no other way of eradicating illiteracy in an overwhelmingly illiterate population which will endure. It is only a literate population that will respond to the advocacy of responsible parenthood for a more drastic reduction in birth rate. Basic literacy is required to understand and implement measures to protect the environment and the ecosystem which has now become both a local and global issue of urgent importance.

Viewed in above light a school lunch and health programme for over 12 million primary children (as the present gross enrollment indicates) has to be introduced and supported outside normal education budget.

Although a gigantic programme, it will be a school-based activity. The cost which

will run into millions can come out of a trust fund. It will be a big amount, but the world community is already talking in terms of billion dollars to save the earth from environmental degradation in which the fast growing population is the main culprit. Considering the influence of education on fertility, the donor agencies should be too willing to generously contribute to the fund to strengthen primary education through a supportive lunch and health programme.

For Bangladesh, primary education is no less important than Jamuna Bridge which is to be built at a cost of more than half a billion dollar, being jointly financed by the government and the donor agencies. While the bridge will serve as a life line for the growth and prosperity of the country, universal literacy, if it can be achieved, will result in sharper reduction of the present fertility level promoting all round development to the benefit of the whole nation.

(Mahmood Aminul Islam was formerly additional secretary to the Ministry of Education)

# Making Language Useful

by Mark Timm

TO call the situation facing Laotian development officials frustrating would be an understatement. These officials were eager to address the many health, nutritional, educational, and industrial development problems facing their tiny, landlocked country — one of the poorest in the world. They had a library of 13,000 scientific and technical books to help them do it.

But the books were in French and English, with a few in Russian. These were of little use to any but a handful of senior technocrats who had the good fortune to be educated overseas in one of these languages.

Scientific and technical literature are an essential part of the infrastructure that supports development in a country. Without access to this literature, many of the developments taken for granted by the rest of the world just passed Laos by.

Information is the lifeblood of science," says Paul Mc-

Although the Centre National de Documentation et d'Information Scientifique et Technologique (CNDIST), which was responsible for the project, started off with only modest resources, it did have a plan for developing its services.

With IDRC support, it was able to convert this plan into action. Initially, this meant some basic things like proper lighting at the centre's premises in a former USAID building. Another portion of the money had to go toward training in photocopier maintenance.

There were also significant signs of success in acquiring and disseminating information. By the end of the project in 1989, more than 7,000 new volumes of scientific material and 20, 3-year periodical subscriptions were obtained by the centre.

Actual use of the CNDIST library increased almost 10-fold after IDRC project. The centre

was guided by their government's economic plan, which stresses the development of the country's agriculture, small-scale manufacturing, and services. They brought back everything from rice-planting manuals to volumes filled with pesticide data, from rattan-processing guides to information on how to set up a small ceramics business.

Many Laotian government agencies have their own specialized libraries on these individual subjects, but the IDRC project resulted in the first, comprehensive interdisciplinary collection of science and technology literature.

As such, CNDIST contains information on topics like environmental conservation or remote sensing that would otherwise fall through the cracks of bureaucratic specialization.

"Even the decision-makers call on us now," says Mouk Savanh, the current director of the centre. "Many government ministers are now our members."

It is important that the centre not just collect information but disseminate it to as many levels of society as possible, Mr Savanh adds. To increase awareness, advertisements are regularly published in the local newspaper about what literature is available. More comprehensive lists of about 1,000 titles are occasionally distributed to researchers and development workers nationwide.

IDRC's project also included training in information packaging at the Bangkok-based Asian Institute of Technology.

In early 1991, the centre experimented with a quarterly, mimeographed scientific review for specialists. The journal carries news on recent developments in the field of science and technology relevant to Laos. The centre is also planning weekly articles on new developments in science and technology to be published in the local newspaper. Mr Savanh also speaks of a need to set up data bases on research and development in Laos.

"Right now there is a great deal of information in Laos, but it is not centralized and, therefore, not easy to find," he says. "We have to organized some kind of national network."

"Our ministry's goal is to coordinate and supervise research and technology transfers at the national level," Mr Savanh explains. "If people need information, they now know they have our centre."

— IDRC Reports



Council of IDRC's Information Sciences Division. "When a country is attempting to build up its capacity in science and technology one of the first places to begin is by strengthening the information infrastructure." That is why IDRC's willingness in 1987 to fund the acquisition of literature in Thailand was welcomed with enthusiasm at the Laotian Ministry of Science and Technology. The Lao language is similar enough to Thai that the new books could be used by a much wider spectrum of the country's 4 million people. This was IDRC's first project in Laos.

now has 600 members, compared to fewer than 100 before the project. These figures do not include members of the public who use the library but do not borrow books.

Through dealing with Thai literature and interacting with more users, the CNDIST staff has learned valuable lessons in information management.

The project has enabled the centre to establish contacts with key research institutions and documentation centres in Thailand, like Kasetsart University and the Asian Institute of Technology.

During three book-buying trips to Bangkok, Laotian offi-

# Emergency Education Programme for Angola

UNESCO has prepared a six-part emergency education programme for the educational and social rehabilitation of Angolan children affected by war which is expected to cost some USD 18.757 million over the next 18 months.

Based on the findings of a two-week Portuguese Government/UNESCO mission to Angola, the programme stresses the need for immediate and time-limited action in priority areas, as well as the need to develop the basis for an efficient education system, with emphasis on pedagogical infrastructures, curriculum development and the training of personnel.

Official donors are being contacted and some countries have already indicated their willingness to help finance the programme.

"Solutions for the serious problems affecting the Angolan children call for urgent action. Education is the only possible factor which may favour... the linking of short-term relief activities with longer-term oriented human development strategies," says the document on the Education Emergency Programme of Action for the Child Victims of the War (EDEPA).

The size, gravity and complexity of the problems generated by the war, particularly with regard to the most vulnerable groups of the population (children, youngsters and women), can only be addressed on the basis of active and intensive international solidarity and aid without any discrimination, as well as commitment of all the various components of society, with a view to creating conditions for sustainable development," says the report.

EDEPA, to be presented to the Angolan Government for approval, has the following strategic guidelines: convergence of interventions on existing initiatives; the mobilization of concerned target groups to take control of their own rehabilitation process; and facilitating and providing

resources for their initiatives.

The six components of the programme are:

- \* extending and improving the network of "open schools" (basically non-boarding institutions) for some 5,000 orphans and abandoned children aged between 11 and 17 years. This part includes the rehabilitation, construction and modernization of 13 to 20 open schools; qualifying 39 trainers in 13 provinces in educational, social and local development issues for the training of another 200 teachers, craftwork instructors and social workers;

- \* "Solutions for the serious problems affecting the Angolan children call for urgent action. Education is the only possible factor which may favour... the linking of short-term relief activities with longer-term oriented human development strategies," says the document on the Education Emergency Programme of Action for the Child Victims of the War (EDEPA).

- \* providing access to education to about 2,500 children with special education needs a year. The programme includes training 35 mobile resource teachers from four provinces each year; orientation courses in special education for 1,000 primary school teachers annually; and the supply of special equipment and teaching aids to about 500 children a year.

- \* "A basic principle for the development of services for children with special needs is to avoid, as much as possible, the creation of special structures which are both too costly and at the same time tend to segregate these children from the rest of the society. They should, instead, be integrated into existing or planned programmes for other children," says the report;
- \* creating about 150 locally constructed community-based

integrated units for about 45,000 displaced and returnees' children and their families. The programme includes the training of 60 qualified trainers in 15 provinces for the training of another 600 personnel;

- \* offering multi-purpose education and training-oriented opportunities to street children, who are among the hardest hit by the war and live under extremely difficult conditions with few possibilities to improve their situation. Some 1,500 street children are expected to benefit from five open centres to be established in Luanda, Benguela, Huambo, Kuito and Malange.

Open street centres will serve as contact points for street children and offer various services such as health, education, nutrition, sports and cultural activities. One-week sensitization and training courses with 40 participants each will be held for professionals working with street children;

- \* emergency fund to support public/private (governmental institutions, churches, NGOs) educational initiatives. The fund is basically expected to benefit some 10,000 children aged between three and 10 years and their families. The main objective is to promote innovative action towards meeting early childhood educational needs; and
- \* technical assistance for educational change to meet the need for sustainable educational development.

The key element of an emergency programme is time. As much as possible the programme management must be flexible and rely on already experienced management mechanisms such as those of UNDPs. The operational implementation of the emergency programme will mostly take place at the provincial, municipal and community levels... This will require flexible but efficient monitoring at both provincial and central/national level," says the report.

— UNESCO

# Different First Languages Enroll

by Anna Rahman

ONE objective of the language survey taken by homeroom teachers and advisors during the first semester was to make everyone more aware of the languages used by everyone in school. It also gave us the information that there are 27 different first languages spoken in American International School/Dhaka (AIS/D). Because of absences and late enrolment, we can only tentatively offer the figures: 207 students in the school speak

English as a first language, whereas 224 speak other languages at home. A total of 431?

Well, that doesn't add up to the enrolment in November, which was 458. Now in January enrolment is 478. We cannot say for sure which way the balance would tip if the count were accurate; it's so nearly 50/50 as it stands, but it looks as if there are just a few more speakers of other languages than speakers of

English as a first language. Here are the languages and approximate numbers of speakers:

This list gives you a good idea of the range. But who are the individuals? Ask yourself now, who do I know here who speaks Gujarati? Who are those two Finns? Seven Spanish speakers, who are they? As for that Viking invasion of Danes, it's King Canute and the Danelaw all over again (Or for

Danelaw read Danida).

The sources of the survey's inaccuracies are not only late arrivals, but also, for one thing, the difficulty that the younger elementary school students had in naming their first languages. For instance, there is no such language as "Filipino" which is listed by default. "No, I don't speak Tagalog, but what do I speak? I'll have to ask." If this brief listing (or long discussion, depending on the in-

terest of the class/group had at the time), has led to everybody being more aware of valuable language skills and variety, then one of the survey's purposes has been served.

Definitions are definitely disputable and another time will have to be clearly stated. When is a language a first language? Many Bangladeshi students who speak Bengali and English at home but who cannot read or write Bengali well, put English as their first language on the survey form be-

English	207	Flemish	4	Tamil	2
Bengali	61	Malay	4	Filipino	2
Danish	25	Nepali	4	Telugu	1
Korean	24	Norway	4	Gujarati	1
Dutch	16	Hindi	4	Italian	1
Arabic	12	Japanese	4		
French	10	Indonesian	3		
Urdu	9	Serbo-Croat	3		
Swedish	9	Sinhala	3		
Spanish	7	Thai	3		
German	6	Finnish	2		

than are monolingual (use only language). I would bet on a recount and using the "first equals first heard" definition that AIS/D has more than 50% of its students speaking a first language which is not English, and therefore more than 50% of AIS/D students, like a true microcosm, are bilingual.

What do you feel about the definitions and about speaking different language? I would welcome some comments. (By arrangement with Monsoon Mail)



Can all these targets be achieved?