

Feature

Education

Provision of Continuing Education in Rural Bangladesh

by James Jennings

THE Government has recently revamped its Mass Education Programme, renaming it the Integrated Non-Formal Education Programme. The new programme includes five sectors: pre-primary education, non-formal primary education, non-formal secondary education for adolescents, adult literacy programmes and continuing education. It is anticipated that NGOs will meet more than half the ambitious targets set for the next two years. It is crucial to note that the eradication of illiteracy is no longer seen as a task for formal schools and adult literacy programmes alone. A broader view has been taken.

Challenge of Continuing Education

Because of the problem of adult new literates not using their skills, post-literacy activities have long been advocated for them. Post-literacy work should not be seen as an isolated effort or simply as another programme tagged on to the initial project. It is part of the 'literacy continuum' which comprises all stages of the literacy process, from pre-literacy to full participation in the literate activities of a society.

The need for continuing education for those who acquire literacy through the formal school system is not as readily recognised. There has been an assumption that children would progress through the school system and eventually be exposed to the myriad forms of reading matter available. However, it must now be acknowledged that the majority of children in rural Bangladesh do not complete the primary cycle and even less progress through secondary. They leave school with limited literacy skills, and they too need opportunities to practice their skills if their literacy is to be maintained and extended.

It is claimed by some writers that as a result of the lack of follow-up materials that as many as 60% of the adults who once knew how to read and write relapse into illiteracy. Speaking of various literacy campaigns and programmes in what is now Bangladesh, Qudus noted that hundreds of literacy certificates were issued, but "on a sample inquiry and text, it was found that within 6 to 12 months, most of the certificate holders forgot almost everything they learnt." He too blamed the situation on a lack of follow-up materials.

The theory of relapse — both for graduates of adult literacy programmes and for drop-outs from the formal school system — is certainly a popular one and sounds quite plausible.

The evidence from Bangladesh points to a similar problem. The most recent comprehensive study on primary education, after referring to several sources, suggests the following rates: — Enrolment of 50% to 60% of the age group — Attendance rate of 50% of those enrolled — Dropout rate of 80% to 90% — Repetition of classes varying from 20% to 50% — Repetition of Class I affecting nearly half the students

Based on these findings, it is estimated that no more than one out of five students acquires sustainable literacy skills at primary school.

What is emerging is a picture not so much of the new reader's relapse into illiteracy but of a failure of adult literacy

for new literates, and several others had read only other material provided by the organisation. There is an obvious lack in rural Bangladesh not just of reading matter suitable for new literates but of all types of books and periodicals. If literacy skills are to be utilised fully, there is a need to create an 'environment of literacy.' This may well be beyond the capacity of NGOs other than in their limited areas of work and even there to a limited extent, but it is a field where the Government could take the lead.

Creating Structures for Continuing Education

The concept of continuing education as an organised activity is rare in Bangladesh even for those well educated in

adult literacy classes because they realise that their skills are weak and they are keen to make them more usable. Although there may be some problems with integrating semi-literates with new learners in the same class, the literacy lessons can prove of enormous benefit to the drop-out.

Follow-Up Courses: As has been noted, at the end of a six-month adult literacy course, although most of the participants have progressed from illiteracy to the level of fluent reading of basic materials designed for them, they are still quite limited in their skills. They are a long way from most of the literature of the country. A series of lessons or booklets is often used at this stage to help the

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programmes and the formal school system to provide many of the learners with skills that are adequate at even a very basic level. Perhaps one of the reasons that so little research has been done on the question of retention is because of the problem of systematically tracking down former participants of programmes (particularly ones who have not continued if a post-literacy programme is offered) and testing them on materials comparable to those on which they were tested at the end of the literacy course.

In many countries creating the bridge to 'regular written materials' may be sufficient, but in others that 'world' is very limited. The programme may find that even when the participants are fluent readers of difficult materials, its role as a provider of reading matter is not over. This is certainly the case in rural Bangladesh.

When new literates were surveyed in the Joyramkura programme, participants of 28 of the 33 groups said that they had read something other than the FE primers. Most of them, however, mentioned children's school books, while a few said they had read newspapers, handbills in the bazaar, posters and sign posts. In a Friends' workshop with former FE participants, 18% reported that they had read nothing at all since completing the FE course, and another 18% claimed to have read only Friends' monthly news sheet

the formal sector. For rural people with limited literacy skills, the opportunities are even less. Because of the scarcity of reading matter in the rural situation, villages have few structures for getting even what is available to the readers, and most of the graduates of adult literacy courses as well as drop-outs from the formal system lack the financial resources to buy what there is on the open market. Thus, NGOs have found that they must help create structures whereby new literates can obtain reading materials and take part in continuing education. In the Bangladesh situation the materials are usually provided free or at a highly subsidised rate. Over the years structures were created to ensure that the newly literate readers could continue to develop their skills. As much as possible, these were made a part of other development activities and according to the expressed needs of the participants. Other organisations have followed similar patterns. Looking at these structures, it can be seen that many of them are appropriate for drop-outs (both children and adults) from the formal system as well as for newly literate adults, that they are much broader than simply 'follow-up' programmes and that they can form an important part of a continuing education programme.

Adult Literacy Courses

Many drop-outs from the formal system are keen to join

learners progressively move to more difficult materials.

News Sheets and Newspapers

One of the most effective ways to ensure that the new readers of an area have regular reading opportunities is through periodical publications such as news sheets, or newspapers, for new literates. At Friends even before the Functional Education programme had developed its own materials and approach, the project was producing a fortnightly (later changed to monthly) news sheet for the village people, particularly new literates, called Gram Bandhob (The Village Friend). This became an increasingly important part of the programme's post-literacy activities. Field level staff helped to gather news for the paper, and over time new literates began to write letters and occasionally articles for the paper. In 1986 a survey was conducted among savings group members to help assess Gram Bandhob's effectiveness. It was found that about 50% of those surveyed read the news sheet regularly, that 74% of the readers passed it on to others and 93% of them discussed the articles with other people in the village.

Village Libraries

A system which has been used throughout the world to make books accessible to new readers is the village library. Almost from the inception of its post-literacy work, Friends has used some form of the

system. The first 'libraries' were wooden boxes with about 50 books from the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) in them. Later tin boxes were found to be cheaper, more durable and easier to handle. A survey of the use of the libraries in 1982, however, revealed that the readers found the BARD books difficult to read, and much of the information was out of date. Over a period of about nine months, 73% of those surveyed checked out less than five books each.

Reading Circles: In some countries 'reading circles' have been used to help keep new literates reading, and these may be used as a distribution link. Each reading circle is usually made up of several new literates who live in the same area and meet on a regular basis to read and discuss books and articles. The books may be loaned to them for a specified period of time and then returned for distribution to other groups.

Short Training Courses

Usually organised to meet specific programme objectives, short training courses also provide reinforcement of the literacy skills of the participants. The courses are usually offered for representatives of savings groups rather than for all the former learners, and participants may include school drop-outs who need to strengthen their literacy skills.

A Challenge for NGOs and the Government

I have described a few of the ways that post-literacy activities can be included in an overall continuing education initiative. Many NGOs can make these available to a wider range of participants than has been done in the past. A part of the recently formed Integrated Non-formal Education Programme is the Continuing Education sector. In order to make an effective contribution to literacy efforts in the country, this sector must face the challenge of making available continuing education not only to graduates of their own adult literacy and other educational programmes but also to the innumerable past participants of the formal school system and NFE initiatives.

Newspapers for readers with limited skills, local libraries offering simplified materials and short courses modified for participants with limited literacy skills are some of the avenues that can be explored. Others should emerge as the challenge is faced.

This is the first part of this feature. The remaining part will be published next week

Educating Street Children: Finding the best alternatives

IMAGINE, for a moment, if all the inhabitants of France and the United Kingdom were homeless, lacking adequate nourishment and living 24 hours a day on the street.

An apocalyptic vision? Black humor? Such a situation must seem to us to be impossible, unimaginable. Yet, according to the estimates in 1992 of the agencies of the United Nations system, homelessness and hunger constitute the lives of 145 million street children. They don't go to school; they survive by finding odd jobs. They are victims of maltreatment and even violence from adults, and all too often they are physically eliminated by the police.

and asserted that the poor, street children and children who work must not suffer any discrimination in access to training and education.

Since Jomtien, UNESCO has been collecting information from its Member States, offering technical support to projects designed to aid street children, working to sensitize the public to the problem in association with the media and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and seeking financial assistance for programmes from multilateral and bilateral sources. Often these actions on behalf of street children are taken in collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and governmental organizations.

lished in 1993), a questionnaire sent to local organizations on the situation of street children, and use of case studies carried out by various Member States have all enabled UNESCO to conceive education models for attacking the issue.

"The two past years have witnessed a surge of public debate about street children and their needs," said Alphonse Tay, who heads UNESCO's street children programme. "Everybody seems to agree — something has to be done to improve these children's lives. But, so far, I haven't seen many Heads of State actually get up and do something about it."

Providing education for street children requires taking



Relentless efforts continue to accommodate street children into classrooms.

One-third of these street children are found in Latin America — 7 million of them in Brazil alone — 5 million are in Africa and another 40 million live in Asia and the rest of the world. In Colombia, there are between 150 and 200 street children living in the sewers of Bogota, while the city's total street children population is between 5,000 and 6,000 according to figures provided by local volunteer organizations.

Anonymous in the streets, these children are not included in government statistics and, until recently, were not taken into account by national development strategies and education budgets.

UNESCO has been involved in developing programmes for street children since 1990, when in that year the 155 nations participating in the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, expressly asked for the expanding of programmes to help such children, minorities, and remote rural populations.

The World Declaration of Education for All state that immediate action should be taken to eliminate the educational disparities that exist to the detriment of such groups

On the ground, projects to aid street children are usually implemented by local NGOs and religious missions which depend on charitable contributions for their work.

One of the Organization's principal partners in developing educational programmes

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for street children is the Bureau International Catholique de l'Enfance.

Two seminars in Africa (Cotonou and Nairobi), study missions to education projects in operation in Asia (Madras and Manila), a book on street children in Africa (to be pub-

an alternative approach, according to Tay. Street children respond better to innovative, non-formal education with flexible hours and a truly committed staff, he said. They respond to curricula combining general literacy and numeracy with job-skills, health, nutrition, legal rights and arts, such as dance, music and drawing.

Innovative programmes in this area cited by Tay include that of the Undugu Society in Kenya, which offers street children free education and allows the best students, after three years, to rejoin the formal education system; and the Juvent Foundation of Mexico, which in offering both formal and non-formal education including health, hygiene and communication.

The difficulty of teaching street children has proven itself many times. The greatest success in providing them education has not come from professional teachers or social workers but from former street children, who, as a result of their own experiences, know how to gain the children's confidence. — UNESCO Press

Schools Learn Capitalist Lessons Well

THE Shenzhen stock market riots in mid-August may have shown China's unpreparedness to cope with rapid changes brought by economic reforms but high-tech companies sponsored by the country's leading science universities are demonstrating not all the lessons from the capitalist world have gone for naught.

While schools often pride themselves as the training ground for young minds many universities in China are going one step further: they are setting up companies themselves that put the skills of talented students immediately to use — and rake in profits at the same time.

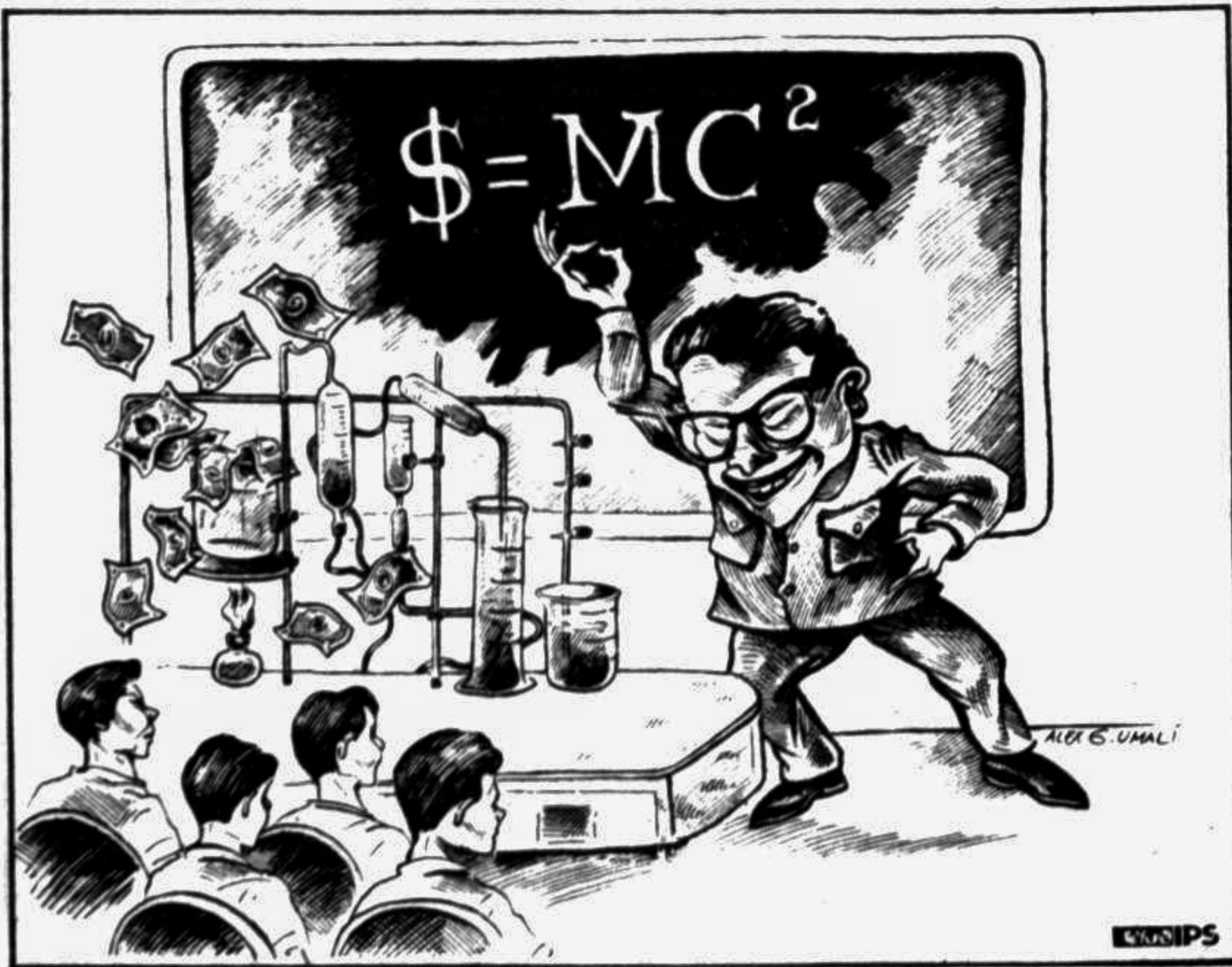
In Shanghai alone, the output value of university-attached firms is expected to exceed one billion yuan (US\$185 million dollars) this year. That is one-tenth of China's total high-tech sector output, according to Shanghai officials.

Already, some observers are predicting big bucks for a Pudra University joint venture, which is producing an uninterrupted power system (UPS) said to be superior even to those made in the West.

Here in the capital, Beijing University's Fangzheng Group has developed an electronic publishing system that is used in newspapers throughout China. For the last two years, Fangzheng has posted an annual output value that exceeded 100 million yuan (US\$18.5 million).

But the trendsetter in university-sponsored ventures is the Landtop Electronics Company, which is a subsidiary of Beijing's Northern Jiaotong University. It is the youngest of Jiaotong's six companies but, after only six years in operation, it has become the most profitable.

While most of China is still acquainting itself with capitalist methods, science universities are demonstrating they already have them down pat. A number of them have set up their own companies staffed by students and teachers — and are now raking in profits. Deirdre Godfrey of IPS reports.



Xiaoquan: "We want to use our majors to make money for the university and compete with foreign companies."

With lighted electronic displays (LED) as its most successful product, Landtop recorded a sales turnover of eight million yuan in 1991. Ten per cent of that was clear profit, out of which 300,000 yuan went of the university.

This year, the company expects to make 20 million yuan from sales of the LED, which are used in readerboards in air-

ports and train stations, or sophisticated advertising billboards.

Founded in 1986 by a handful of young graduate students and teachers from Jiaotong, Landtop can produce LEDs in 256 colours, allowing the movement of advertising messages against backgrounds that resemble paintings.

That cannot be rivalled in either Hong Kong or Taiwan, say Landtop officials. And while competitors from Japan and South Korea can make similar

systems, they cost three to five times as much.

Gong says. It took them only two years to develop Landtop's unique LED system. He says Landtop's access to the talent and resources of a well-known engineering university has been a major factor in their success.

Conveniently located just outside the university gate, Landtop employs some Jiaotong graduate students part-time, an arrangement approved by the school's top offi-

cial but frowned upon by some department heads.

But with Landtop's success and the school's share in its profits, protests have been few. Jiaotong has been happy providing it with buildings, full-time staff members and loans. In the early days, the company also borrowed research equipment from the university. And Jiaotong's reputation and influence have been helpful in opening doors for Landtop.

At 35, Gong is Landtop's oldest employee. He says the staff's youth and discipline acquired through their academic training account for Landtop's vigour and commitment. The workers here feel a close bond and we work harder than people in other companies," he says.

The hard work can also be traced to other factors. While Landtop employees earn far more than they would in the university, salaries here are based on performance. And unlike the university, Landtop offers no security of tenure.

But with its products now sold locally and abroad, Landtop's staff has grown from 20 members in 1991 to 70 this year. And it now has a joint venture with a Hong Kong firm and has set up its own factory in booming Guangdong province. Still to come are its very own branch offices that it hopes can accept orders directly.

The message may not be getting through. In March, presidents of 21 of China's most prestigious universities met in Shenzhen, the country's first special economic zone. The school heads wanted to discuss how to further co-operation between their institutions and China's number one economic boomtown.

Women's Education Fails to Catch up

WITH high schools too far away and rented lodgings to expensive, girls from remote rural areas in Nepal often quit school after a few years of primary education.

With funding from the Norwegian government, Nepal assisted by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) built hostels attached to selected schools where the girls can stay for free and be assured of safety and comfort. In Laos, three schools were built also with Norwegian aid to teach literacy courses to ethnic women and train them in some means of livelihood, UNESCO, which supervises the project, tapped a French non-governmental organisation, Schools Without Frontiers, to conduct the courses. Various other measures have been taken to promote the education of women and girls in developing countries, often with the aid of foreign donor countries and institutions.

Such preferential treatment is deemed necessary to help women and girls hurdle the economic and cultural obstacles that have kept them from getting formal schooling. But much more needs to be done.

The World's Women 1970-1990, a comprehensive UN report on the status of women, says it clearly: women's education has over the past two decades continued to lag behind that of men in terms of literacy, school attendance and participation in advanced study and training.

Statistics from UNESCO show there were 597 million illiterate adult women and 352 million illiterate men in 1985.

"This (literacy) deficit will persist well in to the next century in all the developing regions," says the report. Of women aged 25 and over, more than 70 per cent are illiterate in Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and Western Asia, 40 per cent in East and Southeast Asia and 20 per cent in Latin America and the Caribbean.

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What's more, illiteracy rates have fallen faster for men, so the literacy gap between men is still growing. The picture does turn a shade brighter when viewed in terms of school enrollment.

In most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the developed world, elementary and high school enrollments are practically the same for both sexes. Enrollment among girls have also been increasing faster than boys' in Sub-Saharan Africa and in South Asia, although the former have much catching up to do because of the considerably lower base from which they had to start.

At the college level, women actually outnumber men in 33

countries, according to the UN report. There is almost the same number of women and men in higher education in developed regions, West Asia, some countries of southern Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean.

However, the ratios far less desirable elsewhere. For every 100 men in college and university, women average less than 30 in Sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia, 51 in Northern Africa and 73 in East and Southeast Asia. "Some of the largest countries in the Asia and Pacific region still average fewer than 50 women per 100 men in higher education — with 42 per 100 in China and 48 per 100 in Indonesia," the UN report points out.

The situation is somewhat eased by the increase in the number of women school teachers, who serve as important role models for girls and directly affect their ability to go to school in societies where girls may not study under male teachers.

The report notes that women compose as many as two-thirds and three-fourths, of all elementary school teachers in Latin America and the Caribbean, nearly half in Asia and the Pacific and 39 per cent in Africa. school teachers goes down as the level of education goes up. Large numbers of women have entered male-dominated careers between 1970 and 1985, and made rapid gains relative to men in advanced training for law and business.

However, they are denied access to much of the training in agriculture, forestry and fishery, preventing them from contributing more substantially to economic development. — Depthnews Asia