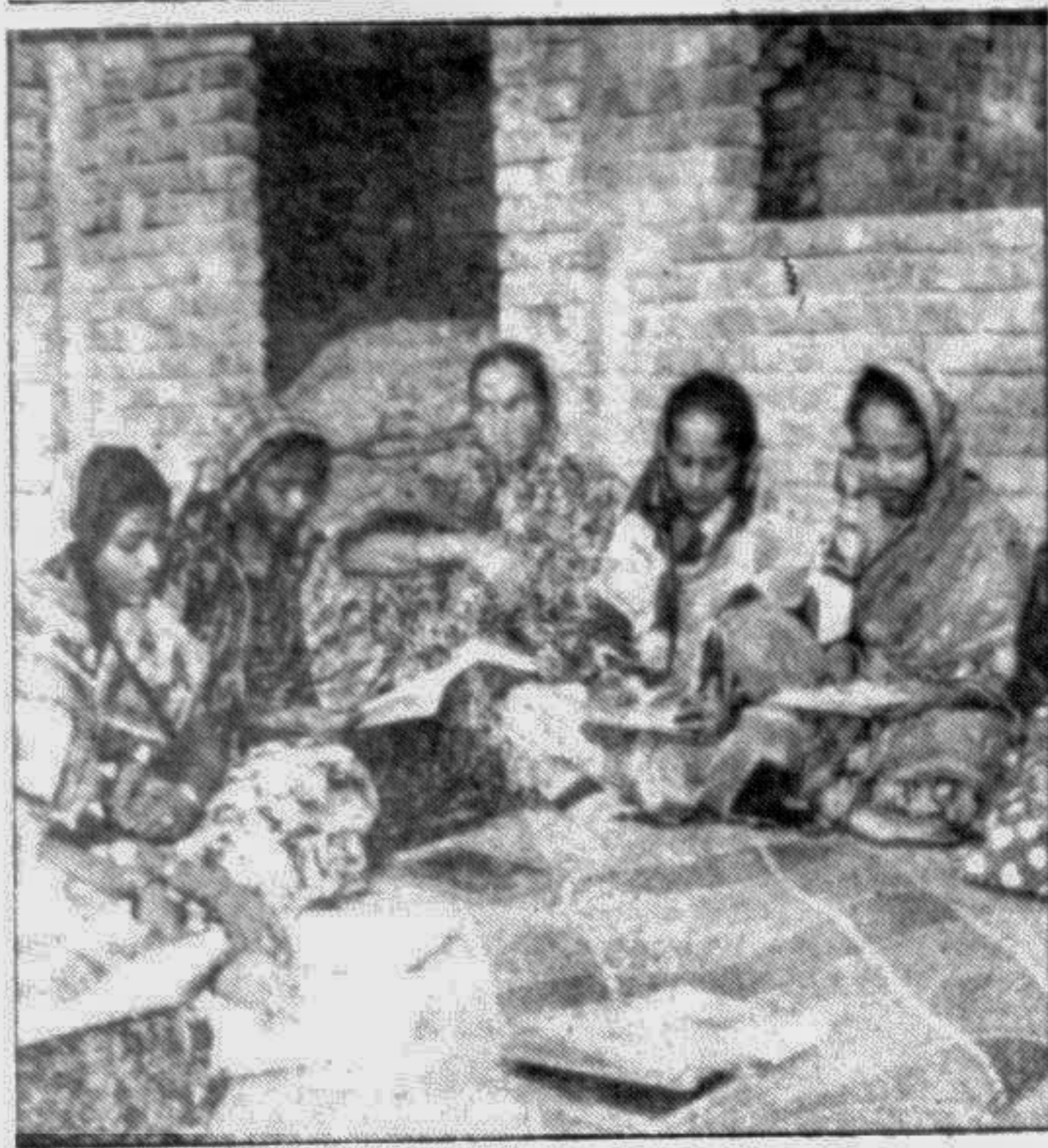




# WOMEN ON THE MOVE

## Adolescent Girls' Education



Where education is the concern, age is no bar — photo: INFEP

### The Impact of Adult Literacy among Women

by ANS Habibur Rahman

BA NGLADESH has a long history of adult literacy, although this was very limited before the 1970s. After the Liberation War of 1971, some voluntary organisations included literacy along with relief and rehabilitation programmes.

Books were distributed and volunteers were appointed, but the results were very poor. A trend of submitting false statements was seen everywhere. It was proved that relief and literacy cannot go together. During the last part of the decade BRAC, a reputed national NGO introduced the Freirian methodology of co-education into the literacy programmes.

This brought a new dimension into adult literacy. It was popularly named as Functional Education, but BRAC failed to integrate literacy and functional knowledge together. In spite of this, BRAC's programme brought a qualitative change in the adult literacy programmes run by the NGOs. In 1980, the government of Bangladesh launched an adult literacy campaign. However they did not pay any attention to the previous experiences. That campaign was a total failure due to its weak implementation policy.

In 1981 FIVDB another NGO of Bangladesh, innovated functional literacy materials with a new approach. This time they considered all the materials existing within the country. It is an effective approach. Freirian methodology has a great influence over the materials. The innovation of these materials brought new light among the NGOs and they started using FIVDB materials.

At present more than 250 NGOs are using these materials. 300,000 women and men graduate with these materials and this approach every year. From the statement of the organization it can be seen that 75% of the learners are women. A six month course of 240 hours is mostly completed by the women. The dropout rate among the women is much lower than that of the men.

The post literacy and continuing education programmes in Bangladesh are slowly advancing. Many organizations are developing easy reading materials for people with limited reading ability. The NGOs of the country play a vital role in successfully promoting adult literacy.

How are women being empowered through literacy programmes? Firstly, rural women get the opportunity to discuss their own problems in such groups. The class situation is very much participatory which inspires them to be vocal in their own problems. The facilitators come from the same socio-economic background as the learners. The discussion sessions are lively and interesting for the learners. Thus solidarity grows among the groups. After the six month course, more than 60 per cent of the women learners achieve the following skills:—

a) They can realize and pin point the cause and connection of their problems. They feel that problems cannot be solved by solitary steps. Building organizations is very important for collective development.

b) They can read simple books and the simple newsletters designed for neo-

Today Bangladesh, alongwith other countries of the world, observes the international Literacy Day. There is little doubt that the most powerful agent to bring about change in women's life is education. An educated woman always commands respect from her husband, her family, and her community.

The Daily Star, with its commitment to the issues relating to the empowerment of women, brings out this special feature on the International Literacy Day.

## Educating the Other Half in a Non-formal Way

by Raana Haider

The overall picture of girls' education is one of: limited opportunity; numerous obstacles and questionable relevance.

Primary school enrolment figures are deceptive, since no more than 15 per cent of all school children pass the primary level. The situation among girls is worse; estimates of successful female completion of primary school is about 3 per cent. Around half of all dropouts occur in the first year of school, when the utility, cost and irrelevance of education becomes apparent to both parent and child.

Obstacles to the pursuit of education are many:

- Unmotivated or absent teachers
- Lack of motivation and encouragement from parents
- Non-participation of the community
- Large classes
- Uninteresting curriculum content
- Lack of books and other material
- Lack of appropriate clothes
- Fixed timing of schools
- Gender of teacher
- An economic situation which compels the child to work within or outside the home.

### Skewed Priority

The Fourth Five Year Plan (1990-1995) has earmarked 3.58 per cent of the total budget for this sector which is relatively higher than allocations in the past but still highly inadequate in comparison to the need. In neighbouring countries, 4.4 per cent of the GNP is spent on education. Furthermore, much of the expenditure is in urban areas whereas over 80 per cent of the population are rural residents.

The female literacy rate is even more alarming, only 19 per cent. While 37 per cent of all eligible girls for primary education (6-10 year old) in rural areas go to school, the rate is 50 per cent in urban areas. According to a World Bank study in Bangladesh, the proportion of the education budget spent on girl students is: 44 per cent of primary education, 32 per cent of secondary education and 13 per cent of university education.

Almost all NFPE outlets which have incorporated the above factors into their schooling programme, have reported that the participation of girls is higher than boys. Most NGOs which undertake such educational programmes, limit their activities to the landless and the poor. The students thus come from very poor families and yet, more than two-thirds of the students are girls, which negates the popular belief that

poverty is the root cause of female illiteracy.

Given the low level of literacy in Bangladesh, the move is towards providing basic education for the maximum number of people in non-formal settings i.e. Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE).

### Profile

Successful innovative educational programmes, focussing on girls' education, by two Bangladeshi development organizations have relied on the Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) approach.

The BRAC programme is designed to serve the non-starters and dropouts; empha-



Learning the hard way — photo: RDRS

sis being on girls, of rural poor landless families who are largely unreached by the formal primary educational system. The programme has succeeded in implementing since 1985, an innovative 3 year curricula for children 8-10 years of age and in 1988, a 2 year curricula for children 11-16 years old.

Villages are selected on the basis of parent demand, availability of target children and teacher. Class hours are flexible, meeting for two-and-a-half hours daily. The timing convenient for each school is decided jointly by the teacher and parents to suit seasonal

work and religious needs. Classes are held 6 days a week for 268 days each year and one teacher for each BRAC school.

As of January 1992, 75 per cent of BRAC enrolment was made of girls and 180,000 children were enrolled in over 6000 schools all over the country. Schools report a dropout rate of less than 5 per cent and over 90 per cent of students graduating from BRAC schools gain admittance to Class 4 in the formal primary educational system.

Calculated on the basis of their education, the cost is low — an estimated 25 to 50 per cent lower than costs in the formal system.

DAM (Dhaka Ahsania Mission) works for improvement in the life situation of disadvantaged groups, both in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. In rural areas, the focus is on the illiterate landless poor, marginal farmers and fishermen, destitute women and people having little education. In urban areas, beneficiaries include unemployed youths, child labourers, destitute women and slum dwellers. Target beneficiaries have to meet the following criteria: Those who earn their livelihood from physical labour. Those who sell their labour for around 180 days a year. Those who have a maximum land holding of 0.50 acre of land, including the homestead.

Women constitute more than 70 per cent of beneficiaries. The Mission's package of development support services include nonformal primary education, need-based and work-oriented functional literacy, human resource development training, skill training, credit for income generating activities and health care. However, the priority is education in general, non-formal education in particular and overall, the enrolment of girls.

The success of the NFPE programme can be measured by the fact that in 300 centres throughout the country, 70 per cent of the students enter the formal primary educational system and in the Sirajdikhan Upazilla, the figure reaches 90 per cent. More girls are enrolled at all centres and their continued presence at school is proof that a girl-friendly educational environment can go a long way to increase female literacy in Bangladesh.

The writer is a Bangladeshi sociologist currently residing in Cairo, Egypt.



The joy of learning — photo: Rafiqur Rahman

It is now 4 o'clock in the afternoon in a small village called Khamar Bhopala in GOREYA Union, 10 km east of Thakurgaon district town in northwest Bangladesh. The August sun is subdued and the sweltering heat is cooling as the wind sighs through the mango trees. The azure sky is fading to a dull copper and the air carries the sweet smell of sun-baked soil and straw. Crows strike a shrill, discordant note, breaking the silence of the emerald rice fields.

At the southern end of a courtyard, amidst a few bamboo huts, 19 young girls are attending a literacy class under a make-shift thatched roof supported by bamboo poles. The open classroom has a chalkboard and a Hip chart. The teacher, aged about 22, sits on the mud floor with the girls and helps them read the primer.

These adolescent girls are taking part in a pilot training project organised by RDRS. In addition to literacy, the girls receive education on the laws relating to marriage registration, dowry, divorce and rights of women; health and nutrition; mother and child care, and income generation. Of the 19 girls attending, 10 never went to school at all and 9 dropped out of the school system. In Thakurgaon Upazilla, 165 girls received this kind of training in eight groups. 32 have been subsequently married, 25 of the marriages were duly recorded with the Marriage Registrar — an important deterrent to husbands against abandoning or divorcing their wives.

The introduction of education and skills training for adolescent girls to give them a better chance of achieving a happy, dignified and less impoverished married life is a new initiative designed to increase the development opportunities RDRS offers to women.

All 19 girls in the Khamar

Bhopala class will soon complete their literacy training. They will be able to read, write and calculate. They have already received basic training in sewing and tailoring, poultry, home gardening, health, nutrition and legal rights. All of them grow vegetables and raise chickens at home and some of them have substantial savings. They are now more aware and much better prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead.

All the girls were born and brought up in Khamar Bhopala village. Some of their parents had migrated to the area from greater Mymensingh district twenty-five years ago.

Abdul Bari Depari, now in his late fifties, still remembers the circumstances which compelled them to leave their homes in the green, riverine eastern district and settle in the arid, highland district in the far north of the country, nearly 500 km away. The Brahmaputra continually eroded its banks, devouring crop fields and gradually advancing towards the village. The situation worsened with each flood and every year the families became steadily poorer as their land disappeared. Finally they had to leave.

Depari and his next of kin sold their homestead land and one night boarded the North Bengal Mail which brought them to Dinajpur. Then they took another train to Thakurgaon. From there they came to Goreya and bought a piece of land in Khamar Bhopala village. As Depari narrates his life story he looks much older than his age, battered by life but unbowed.

The girls also seem resilient. They attend their lessons with enthusiasm and soon they will finish the course. They want to live a life different from that of their struggling parents — a life of dignity and satisfaction.

Worldwide, women are a disadvantaged group. Compared to male counterparts, they receive lower wages/salaries, treated as subordinates by men. Women have less legal rights and lower educational qualifications than men.

It is anticipated that increased enrollments of girls will occur in the succeeding years due to the incentives provided by the government for their education. As a consequence, the Government will have to provide bigger budgets for stipends, additional hostels and transport services. Alternative sources and programmes may be developed to absorb the expansion of girl enrollments.

Girls participation in school has increased through the years although it is considered low (29.3 per cent) in intermediate colleges; 23.6 per cent in degree colleges; 20.3 per cent in university and 16 per cent in institutions of higher learning.

Provisions by the Government are needed to liberalize girls' access to education.

The present article is a shorter version of chapter IX of 'Post-Primary Education Sector Strategy Review', conducted by Govt of Bangladesh, UNDP, and World Bank.

## Promoting Female Education

in life, implying that at post-primary levels, provisions for their greater participation in education be made available. What provisions may the government make to promote female education at post-primary levels?

Social customs generally accord women less than the legal rights to which they are entitled. Only about 68 per cent of the primary school-age girls (as opposed to 78 per cent boys) attend school. The female adult literacy rate is

around 22 per cent which is less than half of that for men. In some rural areas, the female literacy rate is as low as 5 per cent.

At the secondary level (grades 6-10), the enrollment of girls increased marginally during the last one decade. In 1981, girls constituted 28.40 per cent of the total secondary enrollment, while in 1991 their enrollment accounted for 33.91 per cent of the total. In 1991, girls' enrollment in grades 6 and 10 were 37.01 per cent and 30.36 per cent respectively.

In the post-secondary institutions, female enrollments are still low — 29.37 per cent in intermediate colleges; 23.67 per cent in degree colleges; 20.32 per cent in the universities; and 16.09 per cent in the professional institutions. Increasing the proportion of girls in the institutions in the professional institutions, deserves priority.

Promotion, retention, and dropout rates at the primary level, by grade and sex do not vary significantly. There is, however, scope for improving the promotion rate to around 95 per cent and reducing the retention rate to 2-3 per cent. The dropout rate at 1 (which is higher than those at other grades) can and need to be substantially reduced for both

boys and girls.

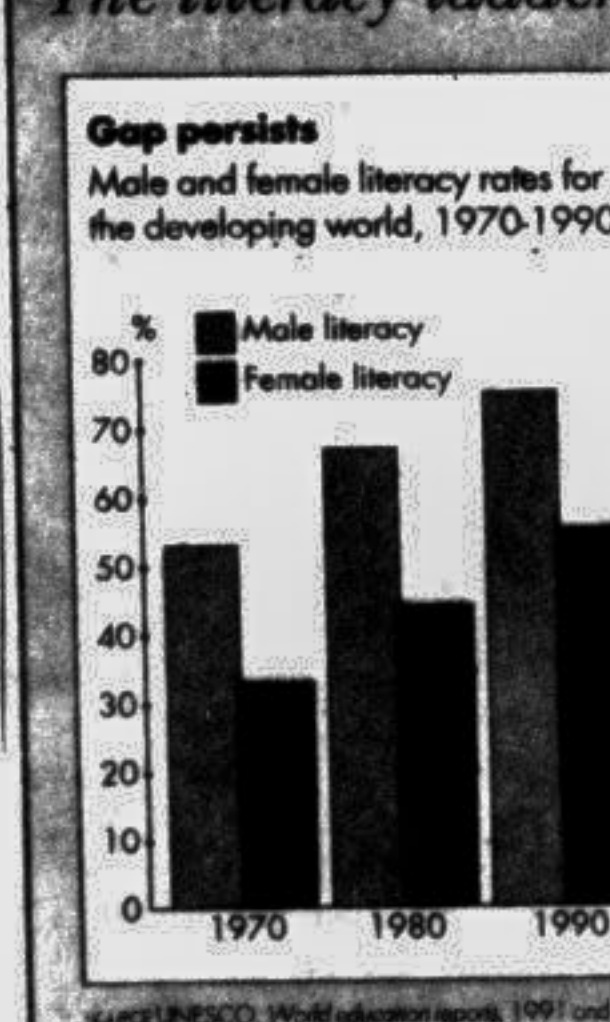
Except in grade 8, the promotion rate for girls is higher than the promotion rate for boys. Retention rate for girls is lower than that for boys in each of the secondary grades. While the dropout rate for girls is lower than that for boys in grades 6 and 7, in grades 8-10, it is the reverse. For the secondary level as a whole, the dropout rates for girls, boys and both sexes are 65.0 per cent, and 60.5 per cent respectively. The transition rate from the primary to the secondary level for both sexes is 55 per cent, while for girls it is 43 per cent.

The available statistics suggest that there has been an improvement in the level of educational attainment of the Bangladesh population during 1981-91. A recent BBS report (Bangladesh Demographic Statistics 1992) mentions that the proportion of males having SSC/HSC level of education increased from 12.4 to 16.0 per cent during this period, the corresponding increase for females being from 4.5 to 8.2 per cent.

### Findings

Women in Bangladesh have improved their lot in establishing government bodies to look after their development when the Government established the Ministry of Women's Welfare (MWA) in December 1978. MWA's functions include policy development, Women Welfare, participation of women in development. The Fourth Five-Year Plan gives

### The literacy ladder



Country	% women literate 1990
Philippines	93
Mexico	85
Viet Nam	84
Brazil	81
Indonesia	75
China	68
Nigeria	60
India	54
Bangladesh	22
Pakistan	21

Country	% women literate 1970	% pt. rise
Saudi Arabia	2	46
Jordan	29	41
Kenya	19	40
Tunisia	17	39
Zaire	22	39
Libya	13	37
Turkey	34	37
Algeria	11	35
Ghana	18	33
Indonesia	42	33
Iraq	18	31
Syria	20	31