

Initiatives of BRAC, UCEP Worth Imitating

"Which is Better - Child Labour or Street Children?"

by Lamis Hossain

ANNA Semamba Makinda is a tall and confident woman who betrays no sign of fatigue despite her hectic schedule. She is the Tanzanian Minister for Community Development, Women's Affairs and Children since 1990, a Member of Parliament for the last nineteen years and the President of UNICEF's Executive Board.

Makinda, who has been elected to her position by the 36 members of the UNICEF board, is fulfilling the chairman's custom of visiting developing countries in two regions other than their own. She has already been to Bolivia, Mexico, and Indonesia and is currently visiting Bangladesh to observe UNICEF programmes in action.

This is not her first visit here. The last time I came on my own initiative in 1992, I came to see how the Grameen Bank worked in a programme organised by my ministry and the ILO. Makinda explains. In fact, Tanzania's Women Development Fund based on the Grameen model, started operating this April.

But her current trip is different. As the UNICEF presi-

dent, Makinda is looking into aspects she did not study two years ago, including education in Bangladesh.

Makinda stated the morning of September 19, with an opportunity to see BRAC's work in non-formal education (NFE) at a school in the Agargaon slum area. The Tanzanian MP seemed puzzled at first by the need for non-formal education instead of enrolling children in formal education. The representatives from BRAC, Tajul Islam and Saeeda Anis explained the problem in terms of paying fees, high competition for seats, lack of classrooms in slum areas and the reluctance of schools to accept slum kids. NGO schools are important they asserted, since there would be 100 pupils per teacher if they all attended government schools.

NFE schools also provide flexible hours so that children who are obliged to work or help their parents, are not discouraged from attending classes. BRAC schools educate the children until class three and then link them up with the formal system. Due to a number of different factors,

the dropout rate of students increases once they go onto formal education, but this year a few BRAC students passed their SSC exams, some even in the first division.

The thirty students of the Agargaon school smartly introduced themselves to Makinda as she shook their hands, but were stumped by her question "How old are you". They are all well-groomed, eager looking youngsters between the ages of seven and ten. The pupils who come here are mostly children of rickshawallahs, baby-taxi drivers and market vendors. The class composition is designed in a way so that 70 per cent of the students in this makeshift thatched room are girls.

The majority of the teachers are also women. BRAC's experience shows that female instructors establish better rapport with the children. Teachers need a minimum of class nine education and are trained for two weeks by BRAC programme organisers who are also responsible for supervising 16 schools, meeting parents and checking students attendance.

The pupils of the Agargaon school like other BRAC schools learn three subjects: Bangla, Maths and Hygiene. They are not given any homework which would require outside assistance since most of their parents are illiterate. The students are also proficient in other areas: the youngsters recited children's verses for the visitors, did some acting, danced and played 'name a country' game. Makinda made sure they added Tanzania to the list of nations they knew so far.

Makinda's one hour stop at Agargaon was followed by a visit to UCEP's (Underprivileged Children's Education Programmes) technical school in Mirpur. The organisation which was founded in 1972 is involved with poor working children in city slums who have usually migrated from the rural areas. There are currently 3 million children working in urban areas, of which UCEP reaches 3,000. According to the Deputy Director, Wahidur Rahman, youngsters are to be found in at least 120 different occupations, contrary to the popular belief that they are only involved in a limited number of fields.

UCEP's work is divided into three phases: firstly, to enroll the kids into UCEP's regular schools; secondly to provide vocational training to a selected number of students and thirdly, to make sure they have

jobs at the end. UCEP now has 25 general schools in the country and three technical ones in Dhaka



Makinda looks at the children's classwork.

Courtesy - Unicef

About 40 per cent of the poor working children who study in UCEP's regular schools go on to the technical schools. 35 per cent of the students and 22 per cent of the technical instructors are female. The technical school offers different courses for either the girls or the boys depending on their future accommodation into the job market. UCEP representatives said, "We want women to do anything that they want to (automobile and carpentry, for example) but we have to consider the bad impression it creates when they can't get jobs." Mixed classes of teenagers are also avoided due to the social problems they may cause.

Makinda was able to observe the boys take classes in textiles, automobile, printing and woodwork among others, and watch the girls in electronics, garments, and textiles quality control. Female students can also take courses in computer compose, knitting and tailoring. The girls taking electronics this year are already all booked in advance for jobs with companies like Singer and Rangis with a starting salary of Tk 2000. 196 of UCEP's 206 graduates have been absorbed into the job market.

Following lunch, Makinda visited one of UCEP's regular schools in Rayerbazar. Like

BRAC schools UCEP operates flexible class shifts in the morning, noon and afternoon. The small school building in Rayerbazar houses several classes. Currently a little less than half of the students are

level responsible for mobilising the people and preparing the ground for expert agencies. These government trained workers make it much easier to introduce new programmes. What about the problem of

female. The organisation is trying to equalise the number of girls and boys by giving priority to the enrollment of female students and by arranging transport facilities.

What did the UNICEF president think of BRAC and UCEP's NFE programmes in Bangladesh? "A lot has been going on here. Well done. The system established here can be imitated in other countries," Makinda believes. She thought highly of BRAC's efforts in venturing into slum areas and thought UCEP's job provision for the slum children was "first class". She added that, "Despite problems of congestion and unemployment, you are doing quite well."

How does it all compare to Tanzania or the other countries she has visited? "Each country has its own way of dealing with things, although we are all concerned with the development of communities," Makinda answers. The situation is very different in Tanzania because the country has one-tenth of our population in ten times the area. "God is very unfair," Makinda observes.

There is one aspect of the Tanzanian approach that we may find interesting. The country has community development workers at the village

child labour? We (developing countries) are in serious dilemma now," she believes. "We don't know what to call the child labour problem. Which is better: child labour or street children? Stop one and you increase the other."

Makinda feels that it is impractical to say that governments can just take all the children off the streets. As the problem needs time to solve, she does not see the logic in an outright ban in child labour as some Western states advocate. "Personally, I feel that industries who take below age workers should teach them as kids and let them work. They should let them study and provide health facilities. They should be able to grow up in this life with hope and enlightenment," says Makinda.

UNICEF is now concerned with pressing ahead with the goals declared at the Children's Summit. Among these are sanitation, illiteracy, and the iodine problem. Makinda feels that Bangladesh is making steady progress and that the government is working in close cooperation with the organisation. It makes good sense that the development efforts of any country should be undertaken with the welfare of children in mind. Hopefully, it will continue to be so in the future.



Greeting the eager students at the Agargaon BRAC School. Courtesy - Unicef

EACH stage of a literacy programme is fraught with problems: low initial enrollments in relationship to the illiterate population, extensive dropout, failure to achieve mastery, and relapse into illiteracy. The sum of these problems has made the broad dissemination of adult literacy thus far impossible to achieve. This chapter will review international experiences and efforts to increase efficiency.

Obstacle 1: Low Initial Enrollments

Statistics are lacking, but it appears that a large number (probably the majority) of potential students fail to enroll in literacy classes (IDRC 1979) for unclear reasons. Dysfunctional beliefs may be to some extent responsible (see below), but the beliefs and apprehensions of illiterate adults are not sufficiently understood to combat this problem (IDRC 1979).

The literacy campaigns of Thailand as well as the Total Literacy Campaign of India have attempted to deal with this problem by registering all illiterates in a village. However, financial constraints make it possible only to deal with specific age ranges, for example up to age thirty-five. Given the potential population, even the best programmes may enroll a relatively small portion of illiterates.

Obstacle 2: High Dropout Rates

The biggest scourge of literacy programmes has been high dropout rates: 50 per cent of a class appears to be an average (IDRC 1979; Jennings 1990). Literacy projects tend to start out with enthusiastic subscriptions of enrollment, but attendance soon becomes erratic and after a few weeks only a few learners are left. Even if programmes were extended to cover all adult illiterates, the majority would drop out.

Dropout is frequently attributed to a lack of motivation. People would like to be literate, but the strength of their desire and its ability to carry

The Four Big Obstacles to Adult Literacy

them through to completion may be insufficient (Oxerham 1975). Extreme poverty and exhaustive work make other priorities much more important than literacy. Illiterates may not have a good conception of what literacy can do for them and do not necessarily connect it with information acquisition (Jennings 1990).

Learners, therefore, may become disillusioned when they realize that no immediate benefits are derived from literacy and that prospects for future financial gain are unclear (Lind and Johnston 1990). However, this serious issue of motivation may mask cognitive processes that are not yet understood. (See the section on motivation.)

What reasons do dropouts themselves give for quitting? The reason most frequently stated in a Nepalese study was domestic work. In two Nepalese programmes, for example (New Era 1990), 44 per cent of dropouts cited housework (75 per cent were women, median ages 19 to 20); only 4 to 5 per cent stated a lack of interest. Other factors were marriage (22 to 27 per cent), migration (13 to 23 per cent), sickness (8 to 9 per cent), and transportation (20 to 8 per cent). In a three-year 1988 Save the Children programme in Nepal, which

had a completion rate of 45 per cent, stated reasons for dropout were pregnancy, marriage, sickness, and death. It was also found that women with three or more children were more likely to drop out as well as people over thirty in general. Dropout may also happen for social-cognitive reasons. When informal group

Table 3.1. Efficiency Rates of Literacy Campaigns

Country	Initial enrollment	Examines	Percent	Pass (Number)	Pass (Percent)	Efficiency (Percent)
Tanzania	466,000	293,600	63	96,900	33	21
Iran	94,700	46,900	50	13,900	30	15
Ethiopia	36,800	21,700	59	9,300	43	25
Ecuador	17,500	10,000	57	4,100	41	25
Sudan	7,400	2,400	32	600	25	8
Surkhet (Nepal)	7,474	3,756	50	3,541	94	47

Source: UNESCO/UNDP 1976; data on Surkhet: New Era 1989.

learners drop out, several other participants may also do so (appendix C).

Sometimes dropout is not permanent, and persons who quit one class may subsequently attend another. In Nepal participants who had attended literacy classes previously were found to score higher than learners who had not (Comings, Shrestha, and Smith 1992). However, no data are available from other sources.

The main factor research has identified thus far as associated with dropout has been quality and interest of teachers (see next section). Comings, Shrestha, and Smith (1992) observed considerable variability in dropout, ranging from 100 per cent to less than 30 per cent, and teacher absenteeism was found to be an important reason. Another was teachers' treatment of learners as if they were children, or lack of attention to slower learners. Anecdotal reports ex-

ist of teachers pushing students out. These data point to potential improvements in an area that is complex and expensive, teacher recruitment, supervision, and support. If teachers show up in class and treat people well, then dropout rates significantly lower than 50 per cent should be expected (Comings,

Shrestha, and Smith 1992).

One reason why it has been difficult to reduce dropout is that very little is known about the process. Informal observations indicate that it tends to happen after a few weeks of the class, but patterns have not been studied. Absenteeism seems to be a harbinger of dropout and a predictor of performance, but attendance data are rarely reported. In the few reports that exist, absenteeism averaged 30 per cent in the urban locations of Kenya with the best record and 50 per cent in rural areas (Carron, Mwira, and Rigba 1989), though in some recent programmes it was lower (17 per cent in Surkhet-Nepal). How does performance and attendance before dropout relate to the event? A longitudinal study of Egyptian primary-school children showed that dropouts, or those still in school but about to drop out, were at least two grade levels below those of continuing stu-

dents (Hartley and Swanson 1986). Could the same be happening to illiterates? Since absenteeism contributes to low performance, maintaining participants' attendance in the crucial first few weeks may help raise their performance, reinforce them, and ultimately prevent them from dropping out. But little is known about

the underlying causes and processes of absenteeism.

Dropout in a difficult area to study, particularly when it is necessary to track down the urban poor. As a result, studies mainly consist of surveys that report at face value the explanations given by illiterates. However, the illiterates themselves may not be able to articulate their motives and problems. Since staying in class is crucial to disseminating literacy, sensitive and experimentally robust research (not mere post-hoc surveys) is badly needed.

Obstacle 3: Frequent Low Performance

Many illiterates complete a course and still fail to acquire basic literacy. The UNESCO/UNDP data (table) indicate that fewer than 50 per cent of participants in the campaigns reviewed met the mastery criteria set by the programmes, resulting in efficiency rates around 25 per

The Challenge of Education for All: Northern Bangladesh

by Jerome Sarkar

P RIMARY education is recognised by development experts as the single most effective development tool the struggle against poverty.

No other development investment yields comparable returns — a fact recognised by the Government's declared intention of Education for All by 2000.

Yet Bangladesh confronts a massive challenge in striving to achieve this worthwhile aim. Nationwide, 6.9 million children — or almost two out of every live between the ages 6-10 are not enrolled in primary schools. With high dropout rates prevalent, less than half of Bangladeshi children enrolled complete even five years of primary schooling.

In northern Bangladesh, a recent survey of primary education needs conducted by non-governmental organisation Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service (RDRS) confirms the scale of action required at local level to close the massive gap in primary education. In its concentrated working area of 28 thanas in six districts of Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh and Dinajpur, there is an estimated 737,063 school-age children out of a total population of 6.2 million.

Although the estimated enrollment appears higher than the national average (548,565 or 76%), that still leaves one child in every four deprived of the basic human need of education. The estimated 188,498 children who are left out of the existing school system is equivalent to 6,732 children in every thana, on average. Since there are five boys enrolled for every four girls, these estimates probably understate the number of girls who lack the opportunity of basic schooling. The high incidence of dropout exacerbates the problem.

Like other large NGOs, RDRS has welcomed the recent Government drive to close the gap through its innovative Non-formal Primary Education Programme seeing this as a vital complementary task to its ongoing work of motivation and training among landless and poor rural adults. Over the 22 years RDRS has been working in greater Rangpur and Dinajpur, it has built or reconstructed literally

hundreds of primary schools as well as a large number of secondary schools and colleges. From its own resources, the organisation also runs 26 Children's Education Centres and, through staff voluntary contributions, a further 13 Shishu Nilay (informal education centres) often in remote and inaccessible areas where Government schools are scarce. Above all, the 200,000 families with whom RDRS works each year are themselves educated on the importance of schooling for their own children.

From 1993, the NFPE programme has enabled some progress to be made in closing the huge gap. As part of the nationwide programme co-ordinated by the Mass Education Division of the Ministry of Education, RDRS has built and runs 335 NFPE schools for over 10,000 children and a second phase will enable a further 166 schools accommodating another 5,000 to operate. NFPE schools are an appropriate and cost-effective solution to this massive challenge — by utilising the skills of NGOs to reach out to disadvantaged children through using low-cost buildings and voluntary teachers to teach thirty children an attractive curriculum for three years.

NFPE tackles the under-representation of girls since 70% of NFPE pupils are girls. A similar proportion of volunteer teachers are women. Drop-out rates are minimal (0.21%). NFPE provides three years of basic schooling to children excluded from existing Government or private primary provision, equipping them with basic learning for later life and the chance to progress in the formal sector.

Yet more must be done. The survey estimates a further 6,000 NFPE schools — an average of 214 per thana — are still required simply to tackle the existing non-enrollment problem. In poor northern Bangladesh, the challenge remains great. But recent progress gives hope that, given the will and modest resources, the bane of a poor region — ignorance and lack of learning — can be finally overcome within northern Bangladesh in the foreseeable future.

Data collection source: Thana Education Offices.

A New University for Pakistan

by Pamela Collett

A Group of intellectuals seeking to develop an innovative new university in Pakistan have a clear vision in mind. They see the future Khaldunia University, named after a 14th-century Islamic historian, as an autonomous arts-and-sciences institution that would bridge the gap between the polarized positions of the Islamic and secular worlds.

The vision it turns out, may be the easy part. In February, the government approved a charter and land grant for the future university. Now, the members of the newly formed Khaldunia University working group must develop a curriculum, hire professors, find a way to make its programmes accessible to poor students, and, perhaps most crucial, raise money.

"I'm a little scared," says Eqbal Ahmad, a social scientist who has been working on the project. "Now the work on the really substantive issues is going to begin."

Mr Ahmad has spent more than 30 years teaching in the United States. He is now on leave from Hampshire College, where he is a professor of politics and Middle East studies. He joined the Hampshire faculty in 1983.

LONG HISTORY OF ACTIVISM

Mr Ahmad's role in the Khaldunia project is part of a long personal history of social activism. Active in the movement against the war in Vietnam, he was a member of a group that included the Rev. Philip Berrigan and was charged in 1971 with plotting to kidnap Henry Kissinger, then President Richard Nixon's national security adviser. He was later acquitted.

The idea for Khaldunia began in 1989, when Mr Ahmad visited his native Pakistan to survey the wreckage of higher education. Until the 1988 death of Pakistan's military dictator, Gen Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq, Mr Ahmad and thousands of other Pakistanis opposed to the government felt they could not safely return to

their country. Reading a 1989 World Bank report on higher education in Pakistan prompted Mr Ahmad to return here to verify the bank's findings. What he found was worse than what the bank had indicated. Apart from two private professional schools, not one Pakistani university or college met international academic standards.

Pakistani families who can afford it generally send their children abroad to study. Last year 8,020 Pakistanis studied in the United States, and a total of about 5,000 others in the United Kingdom, Canada, and Australia. Many of those students end up living abroad.

Mr Ahmad wrote to Pakistan's President, Prime Minister, and Education Minister. He suggested that private efforts could provide a model to help reorganize higher education. Six weeks later, he was surprised to receive a request from government officials for a formal proposal. "It started as a one-man show," he says. But within weeks, he helped form a working group to prepare a feasibility study. It was completed in 1992.

The project is named for the 14th-century Islamic historian Abd al-Rahman ibn Khaldun. The Khaldunia feasibility study compares Ibn Khaldun's emphasis in the 14th century on cultivating critical-thinking skills with the ideas of such modern educational theorists as John Dewey.

Mr Ahmad describes other members of the working group as people who were educated abroad, but who had recent experience working in Pakistan. "We had people who usually get \$500 a day working pro bono on the study," he says.

Why the great interest in and enthusiasm for the project? In Mr Ahmad's view, Khaldunia addresses some profound problems in Pakistani society, particularly the division between Islam and modernity.

Courtesy — The Chronicle of Higher Education



Academic Feat

Nawshin Rahman has secured the eighth position in the combined merit list of the SSC exams of 1994. She also stood fourth among the girls.

Appearing in the exams from the Viquarunnessa Noon School, she has got a total 896 marks with 7 letters.