

Feature

Education

# Basic Education: The Foundation Development in Africa

by Inga Krugmanu-Randolf

### What is basic education?

ACCORDING to international consensus, basic education has the task of guiding people to learning, enabling them to learn further and promoting problem-solving thinking. Alongside reading, writing and arithmetic, it is above all about the basic knowledge that people need in order to improve their living conditions. Basic education also includes promoting their capability to help shape society, and motivating them to self-help and careful handling of natural resources.

An adequate basic education creates essential prerequisites for the alleviation of poverty, as well as for economic, social and cultural progress. It lays the foundation for the development of the creative and productive capabilities of individuals and the people as a whole. Basic education boosts self-confidence in general, and thereby also improves the chances of increasing income. These are the grounds from the sector concept 'Promotion of Basic Education in Developing Countries' of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) of 1992, and a report based on experience which was issued by the BMZ in December 1993.

Many good approaches to development are doomed to failure where a basic knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic is lacking. Such as apprentices who are unable to decipher simple workshop drawings, farmers who cannot read information on the better use of fertiliser, women who cannot puzzle out instruction sheets on health care or treating illnesses, and cooperatives in which conflicts arise because of a lack of know-how in book-keeping.

World Bank studies show that in general merely a four-year school education increases the productivity of small farms. It can also have impacts on the birth rate, nutrition and health. Thus, for example, women with more than four years of schooling have about one-third fewer children than illiterate women have. In turn, these children have distinctly better chances of survival—and a greater chance by far in school education. And this is where things come full circle: whoever knows more, can better look after his/her own health (e.g. against AIDS), rather more overcome illnesses, earn more and better help him/herself out of difficult situations.

### The situation in developing countries

It makes no sense to gloss

over the fact that the basic education situation, which worsened dramatically in the 1980s, is bad — despite considerable efforts. It is true that there are now more schools and teachers, but they cannot keep pace with the growing number of children. In percentage terms, in fact, more children are now going to school, i.e. the illiteracy rate is falling (in particular in Latin America and East Asia), but the absolute number of illiterates (above all in Africa and South Asia), is rising. According to UNESCO, the number of primary school pupils increased between 1970 and 1988 from a good 300 million to almost 500 million, and the number of teachers from about nine million to 16 million. But far more than 100 million school-age children, also today have no possibility to attend a school.

More schools and more teachers still do not guarantee

so that they must seek supplementary income. The schools are insufficiently equipped with teaching aids, there are shortcomings in school supervision, administration and curricula.

In most of the developing countries, spending on basic education has hardly grown since the 1980s. In many countries, especially in Africa south of the Sahara, it has even been cut by 25 per cent.

German development cooperation is applied to these short-comings. Until the end of the 1980s, developing and donor countries largely viewed basic education as a task of national competence that was to be mastered by national efforts. But a change has taken place here quite recently. At the UN world conference 'Education for All' which was held in Thailand in 1990, all sides emphasised the need for intensified help. The confer-

ence's action plan calls on the developing countries to draw up national plans for basic education and implement them by means of international assistance.

### Promotion of basic education in practice

"I want to be able to read my private post alone, and not always have to ask someone



an adequate basic education. Their quality fell in the 1980s. There are many pupils who have to repeat classes, and many dropouts. UNESCO surveys say that in countries with the lowest GNP per head, less than 60 per cent of the pupils stay at school to the end of their foreseen attendance. In almost all developing countries the enrolment rates of girls are lower, and their drop-out rates higher, than those of boys.

The effective learning time available to children per school year — an important indicator of the quality of a primary school education — averages 500 hours in the developing countries, only a good half of that in the industrial nations.

The learning conditions in most of the primary schools in the developing countries are poor. There are too many pupils per class, the teachers are paid badly and irregularly

what the bus number is. Like me, many of my countryfolk always need a helper when they talk to the authorities. We never know what we have just signed." That was said by woman worker Samira Awad. That she, like 19 million Egyptians, is illiterate, is not only detrimental to herself, but also the Egyptian society and economy. Expensive machines stand idle because they cannot be operated, or only wrongly, by men and women workers. There are many industrial accidents, and companies must cope with productivity losses of 30 per cent and more.

In order to remedy that, the Worker's Education Association, an educational institution of the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF), has opened in cooperation with the GTZ 30 literacy courses in 15 State firms. Thorough preparatory work preceded the courses. That featured a

three-day seminar with men and women workers in order to analyse their motivation to learn and their problems. The seminar also formulated curricula which are oriented wholly on the needs of the workers, provide opportunities to advance themselves, and should enable them to seek solutions to their social and occupational problems on their own account. In the jargon of the experts, the project's 'life-embracing' approach is called 'functional literacy'. Besides that, special literacy instructors were trained. The response to the project is good, and it is to be expanded long-term.

Equally so is the participation of the staffs in considerations and decisions on future work. All this contributes to heightening the efficiency of rural development projects which, after all, in the long run serve to improve the conditions of life for the people. —INP

# Education Dialogue

by Khurshed Erfan Ahmed

DIALOGUE on education is a participatory process in understanding the need for education reform. Its projection on public media, focussed lately on television, press and NGO forums is certainly the right step in this direction.

To keep up the momentum of this awareness, it is important that the discourse should be further deepened to clarify policy issues, drawing a wider range of people in its deliberations.

These discourses, have surfaced an appraisal of efficiency and equity aspects of recurring questions: Are there enough schools? Is the technology of teaching effective? Is the teacher students ratio just right and is the curriculum relevant? In short are we able to deliver education effectively to fulfil the needs of the learners and the expectations of the guardians?

On another plane and in a broader sense, we also wonder if our education is not a disqualifier and deliberately so. Whether class and site barriers are retained in the state's attempts to educate, to sustain a mind set that accepts the status quo of class and gender disparities.

Quite obviously what we choose to attack in the present system is its inefficiency and inequity in reaching services to people. Perhaps not so obviously, the mainstream in our discourse often projects two different schools of thought defended by the incrementalists and the structuralists.

The incrementalist theory is based on the notion that investment in education has the objective of developing human capital. It aims to increase productivity of labour with improved skills and knowledge. These out puts are assessed by grades and achievement tests. The policy implication indicates that an increase in schooling and its infrastructural benefits will lead to increase education, therefore more employment, improved wages and thus will remove social and economic inequality.

The structuralists defend the notion that education reform cannot be considered in isolation in terms of efficiency alone. Structural changes in the condition of socio economic imbalance must precede incremental changes. In defense of this argument, there is evidence to suggest the importance of non-school factors some of which weaken student performance such as the condition of poverty characterised by poor housing, malnutrition, over population and child labour. The non-school factors that contribute towards education reside within the institution of the family, the community and the

working place. The reformists need to look closely at the non school socio-economic factors, to remove the unbearable injustices here, before it can see good effects of increased and expanded enrollments. The child who tries to accomplish his school task, by a hurricane lamp under a leaking roof has little chance to succeed. Repeated failures will eventually internalise him to the rank of a third class citizen marked by low esteem.

The development of a students personality is to be viewed not only in terms of his productivity as human capital but also in terms of behavioral and mental qualities which can contribute towards the building of a humane society.

The ladder of a value oriented education system implies strategies for functional



and cognitive learning as well as opportunities for emotional maturity (Fig). In many developing countries, desirable social structures as well as education expertise exists to achieve a favourable standard of education that combines skills with values.

Not to mention a variety of opportunities for employment and continued education, and indispensable condition for sustaining a humane development.

If we are to limit our goals to an incrementalist point of view, then increasing schools works on the assumption of creating a supply of labour force.

perpetuating the disparity in class structure. In reality over schooling may result in over supply of skilled manpower resulting in the phenomenon of the educated unemployed and the non educated employed at low wages. Studies (John Simmons: the Education dilemma: 1980) have shown figures of educated unemployed in four countries (Sudan, Peru, Pakistan, Kenya) with higher levels of unemployed at primary completed than illiterates: with highly educated unemployed at a peak in Kenya almost as high as the primary completed unemployed in Pakistan.

The structuralists views expanded schooling without social changes to result in an over supply of an educated work force. This does not ensure employment for all but tilts the wage balance in favour of the employer in position to buy educated labour at lower rates or bargain receding wages for the non educate labour. In Bangladesh the climate for wage bargaining increases with the inclusion of illegal labour of children.

### Press Release

#### IUBAT VC returns from Malaysia

Prof M Alimullah Miyan, Vice-Chancellor, International University of Business, Agriculture and Technology (IUBAT) visited Malaysia and Thailand to attend a workshop and renew academic cooperation with universities. Prof Miyan attended the International Workshop on Islamic Political Economy at the Universiti Sains Malaysia, Pinang. He presented a paper on Industrialisation in the Muslim World: Experience of Bangladesh, and participated in the deliberations of the workshop attended by 60 scholars from Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. The workshop recommended continuing research on Islamic Political Economy and establishment of research centres in the universities of Islamic Ummah. Academic cooperation has been explored with Universiti Sains Malaysia and International Islamic University in Malaysia.

There have been follow-up visits to the cooperative institutions in Thailand (Asian Institute of Technology (AIT) and Assumption University Faculty) computer training and cooperation in consultancy has been agreed with AIT, the on-going degree agreement with Assumption has been extended to cover a Bachelor of Science in Nursing.

This foreign visit of Prof Miyan between December 10th to 18th has paved the way for cooperative development and networking with a number of educational institutions belonging to Islamic Ummah to reinforce the human resources development mission of IUBAT.

Shoaib Mahmood Khan stood 10th in the combined merit list of the successful students of this year's Higher Secondary.

Examination under Council Board. His total marks were 893, with letters in Maths, Physics, Chemistry and Statistics. He also secured 14th position in the SSC Examination. He appeared at the examination from Chittagong Government College. Shoaib is the eldest son of Dr Abdul Awal Khan, Professor of Management, University of Chittagong.

Mr Nadim Reza Khandaker has obtained a Ph D degree in Environmental Engineering from Penn State University, USA. He is youngest son

of Prof R K Khandaker, an eminent Cardiologist and Dr Mrs Halida Khandaker. Their two daughters Nasreen Khandaker and Lopa Khandaker also hold Ph D degrees in Economics and Molecular Biology from Boston and London University respectively.



Principal Saadia Chowdhury presented certificates to students at the recent Graduation Ceremony of Blooming Buds Prep School.

# Children in Chains

by Imarn Munir

IMAGINE a school where attendance is taken so seriously that children are chained to classrooms. Here in the dusty floor of a school in Pakistan's Punjab province, boys are shackled in groups of eight to each other and to heavy wooden blocks. They sleep together, walk together and even go to the toilet together.

The Mianwali school is just one of hundreds of religious schools (madrasas) across Pakistan with children in chains, according to human rights groups that are trying to get the practice banned.

But the campaign faces an uphill battle in a country where radical Islamic groups support the practice, saying it is designed to discipline delinquent children and is specified in the Koran. Chaining children to their classrooms is said to be widespread in religiously conservative and poverty-stricken regions of western and south-western Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and the North-West Frontier Province (NWFP).

Now, the Human Rights Commissioner of Pakistan (HRC) has filed a suit against town authorities running the most notorious of these schools. The Mianwali school is one of them. A team of local and foreign rights activists and journalists recently visited the school to secure the release of 27 boys who have been in chains for the past three to eight years.

"Action will be taken, but give us time because the issue involves religion," says Sardar Muhammad Akram, the cautious deputy commissioner of Mianwali. Anselmo Josue of the Swiss Defence for Children International says after the tour of the school: "This is one of the worst forms of child rights abuse that I have ever observed." Some of the boys are in

their teens, others as young as four years. They are chained together and to two heavy wood blocks. The boys shuffle awkwardly into the school courtyard and pose shyly as the visitors take pictures.

"How long have you been wearing these shackles?" a team member asks one boy. Before he can speak, their instructor, Shah Saheb, replies: "Only one or two years." Saheb does his best to keep the visitors from talking directly to the children.

When questioned why he kept them chained, Saheb says they were habitual offenders who drank and smoked hashish.

### Hundreds of schools across Pakistan believe that disciplining children means shackling them.

"Come forward and tell them what you were doing before entering this place," he orders the boys.

"I drank sharab (alcohol) once," says one boy. AN unchained boy, Ashraff, about 19 years old, says he has completed the course, and is now cured.

Ashraff is introduced as a boy who ran away from home. On Saheb's instruction, he tells his story. "My parents left me in a train. My mother married three, and father twice. My mother now lives with her new husband and my father brought me to the madrasa."

Another boy, aged 15, has spent seven years in the madrasa where he was brought by his brother-in-law after his parents died. Saheb is asked how difficult it is for the children to wear

the shackles around their shalwar (loose cotton trousers). It is the only time Saheb laughs: "Ask any child. It's not that difficult."

The children shuffle awkwardly trying not to move too much because of the pain and discomfort. To change their clothes, a chained boy wriggles his body on the floor to get undressed in full view of others.

"I am doing this for their sake. The parents send them here so they can be reformed," Saheb says.

Asked how he owned property worth millions, Saheb says: "By working in the factory." What about the car, asks one visitor. "The local landlords gifted it to me," he replies. The locals, however, say he is a very rich man and owns the chain of shops in front of the madrasa.

While Saheb is answering the questions, the boys standing behind him gesticulate to visitors that he is lying.

Some Pakistanis send wayward sons or orphans to madrasas for a period of up to three years so they can learn to read the Koran and see life at its most spartan. Others are juvenile delinquents who, it is thought, can be brought into line by strict discipline.

But critics say the madrasas sow religious fundamentalism in their young minds that will later breed sectarian and communal tensions. Syed Bashir Hussain Shirazi, founder of Mianwali's Darul Ulim Shirazi Madrasa, sees no problem. He tells visitors proudly: "I cannot even count how many disciples I have produced, in over two decades."

But for every chained child who goes home with the ability to read the Koran, another goes back to the streets. Says Mohammed Sazad, a social worker in Mianwali: "There are many boys who suffer years in chains to become criminals after being freed." —INP.

# Eager to learn in an Indian village

by Elizabeth Bowne

IN a rural village in the southern Indian state of Andhra Pradesh, 13-year-old Jaipal sits on the ground at the inner edge of a circle of people watching a performance by a drama group called Child to Child Street Theatre. A warm breeze stirs the dust and the moon moves out from behind a cloud, brightening the faces of the 40 adults and children in the audience.

With the others, Jaipal listens to the story of a child who wanted to go to school. But he could not overcome the objections of his employer nor his parents, for they insisted that his small pay was necessary for the livelihood of the family.

The character, named Shiva, learned that other children his age were at Maharaipet, a camp 30 miles away, where they played games and learned to read and write. He begged his parents to let him go, but they refused. They said he must continue to work for the farmer, to whom his father owed a debt. Eventually, though, teachers and students from the camp convinced Shiva's parents that the boy should spend his time going to school rather than working. The play ended as Shiva shouted his excitement and waved good-bye as he left for the summer camp.

The drama moved Jaipal. He smiled and applauded louder than anyone. Later he whispered to one of the actors that the story was exactly like his own life, for his parents and a local farmer, for whom Jaipal worked 12 hours a day, wouldn't allow him to go to school.

As he applauded he saw, out of the corner of his eye, his father frown and his mother glance down. His younger brother and sister looked uncertain. Some of the others in the audience seemed skeptical but offered polite applause. Then the head of the theatre group asked if any of the children would like to attend

the summer camp just beginning at Maharaipet.

"Yes! I want to go!" Jaipal shouted. But his parents shook their heads. Even when the leader of the group explained that after the camp most of the children would be qualified to enter a government school, his father was unconvinced.

Jaipal was determined not to let his dream die. When he saw some of the youngsters preparing to leave with the actors, he slipped into the truck and hid. No one discovered him until the vehicle arrived at the camp.



The next day his parents and the angry farmer came looking for him. They scolded him and demanded he return home. But the camp's organizers, from the non-governmental organization M Venkatarangaiya Foundation (MVF), reminded them that bonded labour is illegal. They said that national law protects people from scheduled castes (also called Dalits or untouchables), such as Jaipal. Calmly they explained to Jaipal's parents about the importance of a primary education. When they

were finished, Jaipal's parents agreed to let him attend the camp — just the result Child to Child Street Theatre hopes its performances will achieve.

MVF, established in 1981, supports rural and community development in India, particularly education. With grants from UNICEF and other organizations, it sponsors night schools, three-day camps and four-month camps for children of all ages.

MVF volunteers go to villages to encourage communities to educate their children. They visit the families in the



evening when the farm workers are back from fields. They spend the night, talk with the parents, the children, the village elders and the employers. They help local teachers by tutoring students, encouraging them to stay in school and to urge their siblings to attend. The best motivators are the students already in school. They go with the volunteers house to house, spreading excitement about what they are learning. Most young people want to learn, and many parents say

they would like their children to be educated. But fathers often say they need their sons to work for money. Many mothers insist that their daughters pluck flowers to sell or work in the home to learn the skills they will need as wives and mothers.

Large landowners, for whom the children are a source of cheap labour, resist any changes. Some teachers object to more students coming into their humble, already overcrowded schools. The result is that, without the efforts of groups like MVF, even fewer children would have the chance to go to school.

At the camp, Jaipal joined the 200 young people as they rose at 5 a.m., exercised and attended classes. Shy at first, Jaipal soon gained confidence as the others encouraged him. There were games lessons and story reading. Twice a week they saw films.

Jaipal took part in the camp's unusual teaching style, in which the children themselves tell stories and recite poems, riddles and songs. These texts are written on a blackboard and the children copy them into their notebooks. Copies are made, and the children get the thrill of seeing their work in print.

After his first week, Jaipal's mother came for a visit. Within the month his father brought the message that he had found a way to pay off his debt without Jaipal's work.

When the children return home, some parents have a new appreciation for education. In some cases they get together to build a school and hire a volunteer teacher, then gradually pressure the Government for a better school building and more teachers. Jaipal does not know whether his parents will get so involved as to build a school in his village. But he smiles as he says, "Someday, I'm going to be a teacher!" UNICEF

Elizabeth Bowne is a US-based freelance writer who travels frequently to India.