

Education for All: Are We Doing Enough?

by A M Sharafuddin

ONE of the significant international developments of the recent years is the emphasis on human development, and as a part of that process, on the right to education as an inalienable human right, and especially on the rights of the children. This is reflected in the adoption by the United Nations, after about a decade of ground work, of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), the holding of the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in early 1990, the Summit for Children later the same year, and the follow up initiatives by the United Nations and other world bodies. In the developing world, Bangladesh has been one of the countries that has associated itself with these initiatives with much enthusiasm. This, of course, is as it should be, considering the rather poor state of the country's economy and the ramshackle education system. Few countries of the world today have a lower rate of literacy, and the UNDP's Human Development Report 1994 places it at the 146th place among 173 countries.

Bangladesh was a party to the world declaration on Education for All the World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) at Jomtien as well as a signatory to the World Declaration on Survival, Protection and Development of Children at the World Summit for Children in New York. Since then Bangladesh has taken a number of steps to achieve the goal of Education for All. A Compulsory Primary Education Act was passed in 1990. The law began to be implemented partially in 1992, and primary education was made compulsory throughout the country in 1993. Some steps have been taken to promote female education in the rural areas. A number of measures have been taken through the General Education Project for qualitative improvement of primary education such as curriculum dissemination programme, cluster and sub-cluster training, continuous pupil assessment, and satellite schools. An Integrated Non-formal Education Project (INFE) has also been initiated.

Some results of all these efforts have started to be visible. Although the number of primary schools has remained almost static, the official enrollment figures show significant improvement — from 12.05 million in 1990 to 15.20 million in 1994. The rate of increase is almost double the rate of population growth. The

proportion of girls has also shown some improvement from 45 to 47 per cent over the period, and the overall enrollment ratio at the primary level is reported to have already reached about 87 per cent of the 6-10 age group

Universal Primary Education

The realisation that the economic performance and quality of life of the individuals is highly correlated with the basic education received has today become fairly widespread. The Education for All programme, officially launched in March 1992, aims at involving people from different sectors to form a network towards implementing the EFA. In EFA National Plan of Action the government has set the following targets for EFA in Bangladesh:

Table 1: States and Targets for EFA in Bangladesh

	Status in 1991		Targets for 2000	
	Million	Per cent	Million	Per cent
Gross Primary Enrollment	12.87	75.6	18.71	95
Completion Rate	5.19	40.3	13.10	70
Adult Illiteracy	40.29	65.4	28.7	38

Along with the nine most populous countries, Bangladesh has adopted the following goals to achieve by the year 2000 or at the earliest possible time:

- Ensure a place for every child in a school or appropriate educational programme
- Eliminate disparities of access of basic education
- Improve the quality and relevance of basic education
- Accord to human development the highest priority, and:

- Rally all sections of society toward education for all.

It is well to remember that the plans of Bangladesh for compulsory primary education do not fully match the World Declaration. In Bangladesh, the primary stage comprises only the 6-10 year age group while the World Plan of Action defines the target as minimum 80 per cent enrollment for all children of 14-year age. However, given the conditions in Bangladesh, even the limited goals set for raising the primary enrollment ratio, improving the completion rate, and the most difficult of all, increasing the adult literacy rate from 34.6 per cent to 62 per cent, would require massive efforts.

The task of universalization of education is a complex one.

The enrollment ratio of the primary age group must be raised, rural-urban and gender disparities narrowed down, drop-out rates reduced, the quality of teaching, supervision, curriculum, text-books and other teaching-learning materials improved; various non-formal channels of education must be utilised and the resources of the communities, families and individuals put to use for the achievement of the target of universalization of education.

Nonformal Education Programmes

Nonformal education programmes are being implemented by the government's INFE, programme partly through its own centres and partly through the NGOs. INFE has opened literacy centres in 69 thanas. During

with the mainstream NGOs having major education programs. This coalition is called the Gono Shakkharata Ojiva (Campaign For Popular Education - CAMPE)

According to a survey conducted by CAMPE in 1992, as many as 326 NGOs at that time had operational programmes in nonformal education. That number has now grown to at least 300. Among the major NGOs having successful non-formal education programme are Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), Proshika, Manobik Udayan Kendra (PMUK), Gono Shahajjo Sangstha (GSS), Rangpur Dhanpur Rural Service (RDRS), Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB), Mass Education Programme-DANIDA, Saptagram Nari Swasthivar Parishad (SNSP) and

years are the target group. The course duration is 27 months divided in three grades, each grade being of 9 months duration. School premises are provided by the community.

(d) RDRS Children's Education Programme: RDRS has education centres managed by people's organisations. The target group is children of 6-8 years. In this programme RDRS uses government curriculum. All expenditures for this programme including the school house is borne by the federation of people's organisations.

(e) Terre-Des Homes (TDH) Street Children Programme: Street children of 8-10 years who work at railway stations, bus and launch terminals, etc., are the target groups. The children are assembled for teaching under some shades of railway stations, bus and launch terminals with the assistance of local authorities including the police. BRAC curriculum and materials are used.

(f) UCEP School: This is a specialised programme designed for working children of 6 to 14 years. The programme has a duration 7 years and is an admixture of general and technical education.

(g) CMES Technology School: In order to make children conscious of the importance and impact of science, in real life they are given lessons on basic scientific knowledge including general education in grades 1 and 2 pupils have general education, in grades 3-5 science lessons are given. Pupils are taught about environment, popular science and technology.

(h) Govt. Satellite School Programme: Under this programme feeder school are set up in the catchment areas of the govt primary schools so that the small children who are not able to walk a long dis-

tance can receive early education of grades 1 and 2. These schools are generally thatched or of corrugated sheet, run by the local community, and teaching is done by a couple of teachers who work primarily as volunteers for a small honorarium.

There are similar innovative programmes for the adolescents run by the Dhaka Ahsania Mission and BRAC. Similarly, there are various innovative programmes for adult education run by SNSP, Grameen Bank, etc. There are also various kinds of continuing education programmes. Continuing education, aimed at providing sustainable education to the neoliterates is a new concept in Bangladesh. So far, rural library services are being set up to serve the needs of continuing education.

Some Limitations

In spite of considerable progress made since the launching of Education for All in Bangladesh, the programme still suffers from a number of limitations. Some of the major limitations are highlighted here:

a. Quality of formal primary education is poor. The primary schools generally have dilapidated buildings, pupil-teacher ratio is high, number of teachers is inadequate, teacher attendance irregular, teaching methods are mostly traditional and unattractive, and there is poor supervision of the schools. There is much scope for improvement in these areas.

b. Attendance rates are still very poor. A recent survey conducted by the government and UNICEF in various districts found attendance to be of the order of only 60 per cent of the enrolled pupils. Even districts where the enrollment ratios are shown to be very high (e.g., in Feni enrollment of girls is reported to be 92.5 per cent of the 6-10

age group but attendance is only 49.2 per cent, vide Progotir Pathy, August 1994, p. 58). In the NGO schools, on the other hand, pupil-teacher ratios are low, attendance rates are high and drop-out is negligible.

c. Drop-out rates are unacceptably high. Official statistics would have us believe that with the introduction of the Food for Education programme, the drop-out rates have been substantially reduced — the figure coming down from 60 per cent to 40 per cent in three years. But the Food for Education covers only a small number of unions and only about 15 per cent of the children. Hence the validity of some of the official statistics need to be carefully weighed.

d. The primary curriculum is weighed with too many languages. The present curriculum has been recently revised to make it more life-oriented but the load of languages still remains. Most of the children do not continue after primary education and for them the burden of a second or third language acts as a disincentive to continue in the educational programme.

e. A system of continuing education is still lacking. So far basic literacy has been the main thrust in literacy effort of both the government and the NGOs. But it has been found from experience that a one or two year literacy programme is really not adequate to sustain literacy. Suitable materials must be developed and made widely available in various areas to help the neoliterates sustain their literacy and also derive benefit from it.

f. Innovations need to be promoted. Some of the non-governmental agencies have developed innovative programmes in education. These should be properly evaluated and disseminated for wider application. This would lead to

a healthy competition in the field of instructional methods and materials, learning materials, assessment, monitoring and evaluation techniques and thereby towards evolving a cost effective model in the days ahead.

g. Educational finance is still inadequate. Over the past several years, the education sector has been receiving increasing attention in the series of national development plans and annual development programmes. However, the level of budgetary allocations is still insufficient to maintain improvements in the quality of and access to education, as well as to sustain the delivery process itself. The education sector currently receives about 16% of the recurring public expenditures — comparable to those for general administration and for defence. This share is, however, rather low compared to most developing countries and is one of the lowest in the region. Such low allocation for education is reflected also in the development budget of the government — usually of the order of 4 per cent. The total public expenditure on education — under both revenue and development heads — usually does not exceed 2 per cent of the rather low GDP of the country.

h. The scale of present programmes is too small to attain the goals. The present efforts are producing some results but the scale is too small. For example at present there are about forty million illiterate adults in the country. The efforts of the government and the NGOs together are covering at most 1.5 people through the nonformal education programmes. Of these, the coverage for adults would be less than half a million. If we proceed at this rate, it would take several decades to attain the goals of education for all.

The goals of Education for All certainly need much greater effort from the government and the entire nation to prepare the country for the 21st century which is knocking at the door.

How to Scuttle Credibility

Waheedul Haque

THE crowning glory of Bangladesh's electronic media was it, without an iota of doubt. To fashion it a wide-ranging and truly high-level involvement, and very active at that, was necessary. Perhaps the Prime Minister acquiesced or approved or perhaps she was who gave the first instruction. And the Information Minister and his Secretary must have played a nervously positive part in materialising the big information-act of the year. Without an all-in resolve and application this world-beater in suppression of information could not have come about.

On December 28 the news of the year, of the day, of the nation took place. All of opposition's 147 Members of Parliament resigned. The BT and Radio Bangladesh did not underplay the news. They blacked it out totally. Why? The entire print media of the nation, published the news with due importance, the next morning. The suppression of the news proved hopelessly ineffective. What was there to suppress it? True, the government did not relish the news, but what good would the black-out do to the party or the government? For no purpose at all the government chose to do something in gross violation of people's right to information. If the two organisations are governed at

all by any set of formulated policy, the blackout must have violated that, too. By dangerously undermining the credibility of the two most important information channels of the nation, government only harmed itself enormously. Governments come and go but the institutions remain. A disgusted citizenry would call the government an assemblage of mean people. No great harm would be done by that. The justification for running these behemoths with taxpayer's money, namely cementing the people into a true nationhood and heightening the quality of the nation as a socio-political entity by promoting the awareness level of the whole people — is what has been harmed beyond easy repair.

How could they do it. In any other country such an act could have led to the resignation of the information minister. In a more civilized one, governments would face a crisis of survival. Why is there no such aftermath? There is a simple answer to that. General indifference and an all-enveloping apathy towards — the worst of political and economic crimes — almost a state of nirvana — help the incredibly wrong actions to pass without raising as much as a ripple.

But there is an element here of a more effective contribution to the making of the fantastic news black-out. The acquiescence of national politics, specially the opposition's consistent refusal to react and challenge. Indeed, why doesn't opposition challenge the rape of people's right to information? Wrapping up their duty in the matter by encoding one *dafa* among many others demanding an end to state control of radio and TV can be a very good device to get along with the bad things government is constantly perpetrating.

This only pushes us into a realisation that the role of the electronic media has gone beyond an easy understanding and not altogether difficult healing, by dint of what people expect of these. In 1975 the changing governments evolved one long-acting approach to broadcasting and telecasting. The electronic media's main use, their predominating business would be entertainment.

And certainly not information, culture and education. If a decade of Ershadiana did not wholly finish radio and TV as purveyors of truth and knowledge and art, one-third of that time under the iron madam's rule is running fast to accomplish that to the full. No one needs to hear or view any news

or information-related programme on the radio and TV. If anyone willy nilly comes to be exposed to these anyhow, things are such that they have no reason to take these items with any amount of seriousness.

People on their part have become inured to fascist-style monopolistic use of the electronic media. They don't buy what the ruling governments want to sell hard by way news and assorted propaganda, always very very artlessly done. Perhaps the technical people involved in producing these awful trash aim more at pleasing the coarse and boorish egotist in power than beguiling the citizens.

When some day, if it all, some regime will try to take its hands off the information aspect of the nation's existence, difficulties will be created by, first, the newsmakers who would take inordinate pains to find quarters to please and take orders from in order to ease off newly arriving responsibilities. The next difficult group would be the people who wouldn't want to take electronic news seriously. For due to long and unrelenting abuse of the radio and TV, things have come to such a situation when almost all listeners and viewers would dance with delight if these doesn't have any news programme whatsoever.

For a Louder Voice

Continued from page 9 the election is over. This lends to the possibilities of government and the opposition political parties deciding their own agenda and than imposing it on the public, all the while claiming to be doing all this in the name of the people, who have not been consulted in the first place.

Therefore, during the coming year The Daily Star promises to make a serious effort to introduce PUBLIC OPINION POLLS and publish them periodically. Through the process of public opinion polls, we will endeavour to empower the voters by conveying signals of their approval or disapproval to both the leaders in power and those in opposition. Voters must not be on the sidelines once the election is over. We are convinced that if authentic methods were available to express public opinion

on the caretaker issue then both the opposition and the government party would not have dared to deal with the public in the way they have so far done.

Then there is also the question of ASSERTING OUR RIGHTS AS TAXPAYERS. There is also the fact that not too many people in our country pay taxes. But that is true only in the case of direct taxation. Indirect tax we all pay, and that itself gives us a lot of say as a taxpayer. The point we are making here is that we as taxpayers, are not given the importance and attention that taxpayers anywhere else in the world receive. We want to announce through the columns of The Daily Star that we will no longer accept the sloppy and shoddy service from the government, because we pay tax. We want basic public amenities to work, because we pay for it.

We want services from government bodies because we pay for it. We want clean cities, well-kept roads, safe and filth-free streets, dependable railways, germ-free water, steady electricity, courteous government servants, service mentality oriented officials, etc. because WE PAY FOR THEM ALL. In other words services are our RIGHTS as taxpayers, and not a FAVOUR that is to be doled out by anybody, or any party on the basis of personal connection or in exchange for bribe money.

It is our considered view that political leaders, both from the government and from the opposition give a damn to public opinion because we as voters and taxpayers have NOT ASSERTED OUR VOICE. Otherwise, we would not have had the type of politics that we saw last year. Throughout 1994 the issues that occupied the attention of our political leaders, and as a conse-

quence that of the national media, had nothing to do with the development priorities of our people. Yet for one whole year, and it is far from having ended, other issues occupied the centre stage of public political debate. Did we, the VOTERS and the TAXPAYERS have any say in them at all? None what so ever.


So, during 1995, it will be the endeavour of this paper to empower the voters and the taxpayers. By giving increasing coverage of their problems, opinions and suggestions we hope to create a strong current of public opinion which give clear indication to the policy makers as to the thoughts and preferences of the general public. It is only by empowering the voters and taxpayers that we can strengthen our economy and our democracy. We most humbly and earnestly invite our readers to help us in this endeavour.

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