

Liberation Through Education

by Rashida Ahmad

THE struggle for Liberation, the independence War... 'Liberation', 'Independence' - what these words represent to us in Bangladesh today? The fight for freedom, among other things, must be foremost in our minds when we reflect on these words. But then we are faced with another question: freedom from what? The birth of Bangladesh was founded on sentiments that may be expressed in the following words: "The spirit of freedom in Bangla Desh cannot be extinguished. We cannot be conquered because each of us is determined to die if need be to ensure that our future generations can live in freedom with dignity as free citizens of a free country." (extract from a speech made by Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on March 15, 1971).

The fight, even to death, for liberation was fought in order to gain freedom from tyranny and persecution. Not only against the subjugation and domination of one people against another by undemocratic means, but against oppression of any kind. Undoubtedly, one path to this goal lies through education. Education is seen today as a basic human right. Until it is made available to all, therefore, we cannot have fully achieved the aim of freeing the people of Bangladesh from oppression. For the withholding of a basic human right is contrary to the ideal of liberation.

The fight for independence in Bangladesh was also a fight for democracy. But, democracy cannot be realised in an atmosphere of ignorance and poverty of knowledge. Education is a necessary means to a democratic society. A democracy must not only allow, but actively enable its citizens to make enlightened choices.

Education must be made available to all. And indeed, the Bangladesh constitution makes this one of the fundamental principles of state policy. Various governments have shown commitment to its implementation, but the fact remains that there are millions of un-schooled and uneducated women, men and children in Bangladesh. Primary schools lose, on average, 60 per cent

of enrolled students as drop-outs (making the overall drop-out rate the highest in Asia). Out of approximately 17 million of 6 to 10 year-olds, almost 7 million are not even enrolled at the primary level.

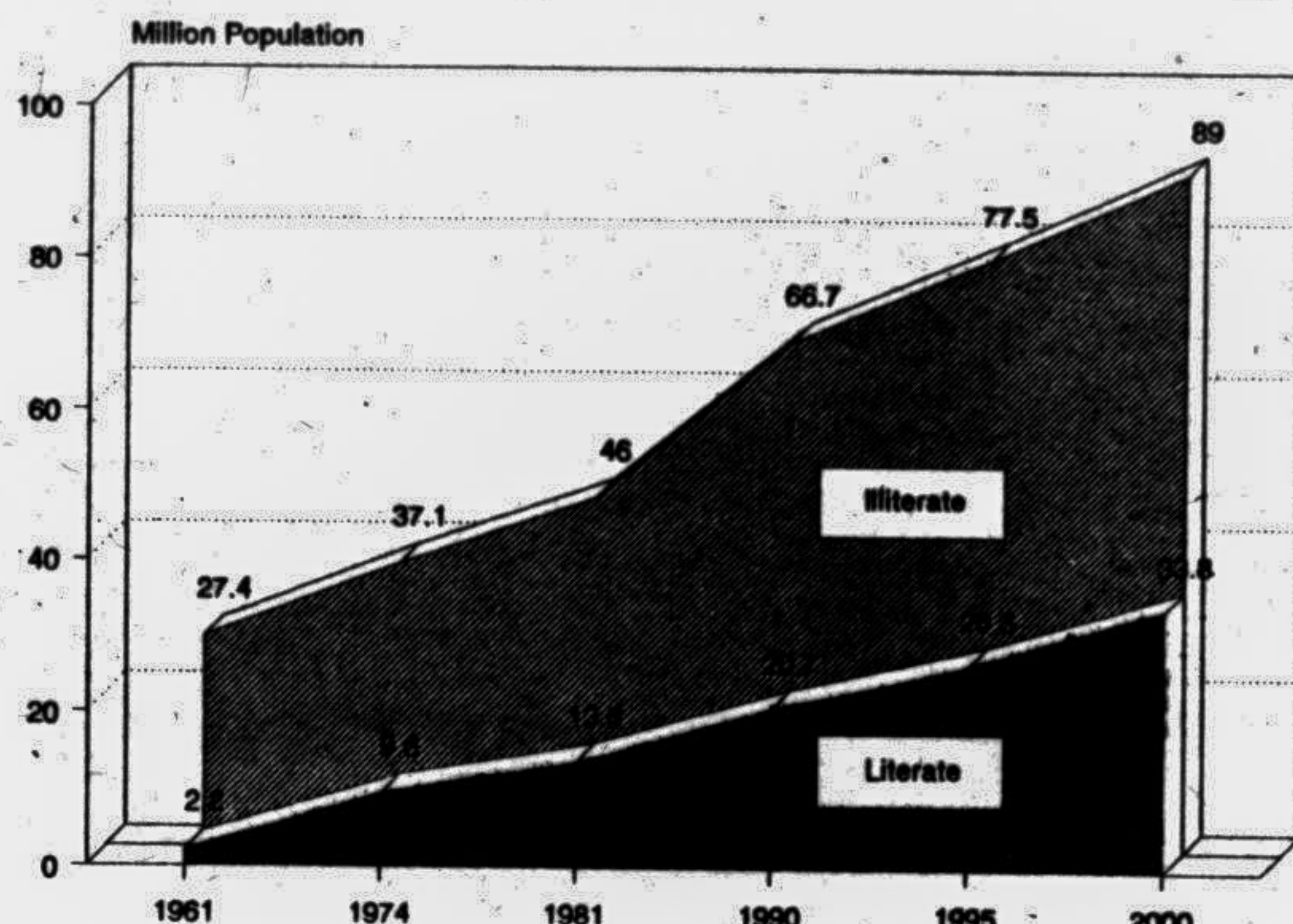
About 10 per cent of those who do complete primary education do not have basic reading and writing skills. 64 million adults are illiterate, the majority of whom are women - over 85 per cent of rural women cannot read or write. A large section of the population is being deprived of the basic right to educational opportunities.

But can we seek reassurance, at least, by observing some progress in the state of education since Liberation? Quite apart from the quality of education, it appears there has been little improvement in quantitative terms. It seems that literacy, although it has increased, has done so at a steady rate, not much altered since Liberation. (Fig.1). Taking into account the rise in population, we see that literacy rates, expressed as a percentage of the population, have not increased greatly. (Fig.2). Certainly in comparison to other Asian countries the increase is a poor one (to refer back to an

article printed last week on this page). The rate of illiteracy on the other hand rose steeply in the 80's. (Fig.1). It is doubtful whether we are any near on target for the professed goal of Education For All by the year 2000.

It may be concluded, sadly not surprisingly, that liberation through education has not taken place so far in Bangladesh - we have a long way to go. The struggle for emancipation has not ended, and must not cease until we have wholly realised the goal of living "in freedom and with dignity" for all.

BANGLADESH ADULT (15+) LITERATE POPULATION Fig 1



*These statistics were compiled in 1990 (based on the best available estimates of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Directorate of Primary Education and World Bank). Figures shown for 1990-2000 are projections.

Adult Literacy Rate Fig 2

Year	M	Fem
1970:	36	12
1990:	47	22

Primary School Enrolment Ratio Fig 2

Year	M	Fem
1960:	80	31
1986-92:	83	71

Source: Unicef, 1995.

Literacy Drive Helps India Boost Food Production

INDIA, which used to be heavily dependent on massive American food aid in the 1950s and '60s could now boast of a complete turnaround in food production.

"Food is plenty with 22 million tonnes of crops stored in various warehouses. People are growing wheat and rice in massive quantities almost everywhere in the country. What has brought about this 'food revolution'?" Credit which links literacy and food production campaigns. Loans have been made available not only to ordinary farmers who toil from morning till night in their farms but also to literacy agents who have brought education to remote villages all over the country.

Fifty-year-old Swaran Singh explains: "Education helps. We have two educated sons and there is the local district development officer who helps us with our government loans for fertilizers, tube-wells, better seeds, insecticides. And the result is, we have bumper crops."

Pratibha, a 20-year-old graduate, gave up his job as clerk in Tamil Nadu to set up 20 learning centres. He is a proponent of what he calls the total literacy campaign plus farm revolution.

A shining example of success in literacy campaigns and improving food yields is the state of Kerala, where about 98 per cent of the people are educated.

The Kerala Literacy Society has launched a programme to educate illiterates. An army of 28,000 instructors has been deployed to improve the people's literacy while teaching them to grow better crops.

The Kerala programme provided the role model for the literacy mission undertaken in 200 districts under the National Literacy Mission. As one woman said: "We are not becoming literate to improve job opportunities. We want to enjoy signing our names. We are then privileged

people. We also want to produce more food."

One of Pratibha's favourite students is 11-year-old Soma-sundari. Only an eighth class student, she is also involved in educating women old enough to be her grandmother. Her students are mostly aged 55, 50 and 45.

In the southern states, including Kerala and Tamil Nadu, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) have sprung up to help in the literacy campaign. Agricultural techniques are woven in the "curriculum".

The result: a picture of prosperity, although only for the landed, so far. There are many millionaires among farmers, for there is no tax on farm income.

But the landless labourers, numbering about 200 million, still have to see their lot improved. They are already lucky if they earn 10 rupees (about 30 American cents) a day. The government has pegged the minimum wage rate to Rs 40 (US\$1.28) a day, not enough to buy sufficient food for the entire family.

But the food revolution for the so-called second green revolution in India has accomplished enough to make it an example for other developing countries which have to prepare to meet the needs of the expected big jump in population over the next three decades.

Global population is expected to grow by 90 million annually.

The International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in Washington DC had estimated that food crop yields must increase by at least 40 per cent in the next 20 years to keep up with the demand for food.

The food intake of 500 to 700 million people has been found to be insufficient to permit normal growth and physical activity.

Projections indicated that population numbers could in-

crease by more than 20 per cent by the year 2000.

To help ensure food security, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has launched a new five-year Regional Programme for Farm-Centred Agricultural Management (FARM) with a grant assistance of over US\$12 million.

Initially, the programme will cover eight Asian countries—China, India, Indonesia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Thailand and Viet Nam. More countries may be added during the implementation stage.

According to UNDP sources, massive resource degradation is taking place in the region due to commercial activity and population growth.

Hence, there is the need to intensify agricultural production. The FARM Programme will particularly benefit poor farmers in the marginalised watershed, upland and rain-fed lowland regions, which have so far remained beyond the reach of Green Revolutions.

At the same time, it will achieve equitable and sustainable development through improved conservation, management and utilisation of natural agricultural resources and systems.

Officials from the UNDP, the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and the UN Industrial Development Organisation (UNIDO) are to help implement the programme.

Asia's top agricultural expert from the United Nations (UN), James G Ryan, said: "To meet the additional food demands in the developing world, it would not be enough to merely produce additional quantities of food."

"The incomes of the poor should be enhanced and the natural base on which they depended should be maintained," he added.

Mr Ryan, also the director-general of the International Crops Research Institute for Semi-Arid Tropics, said there should be greater biological

control of pests, better agronomic methods of farming to reduce soil erosion, advancing bio-technology and a better understanding of the socio-economic links between poverty, food consumption, nutrition and natural resource management.

The UN expert laid down a new agenda for food production and distribution. While before the agenda was food first, now people have to think in terms of rural poverty, malnutrition, population boom and environmental problems.

He lamented that the international community was becoming complacent about these concerns.

He said the concern about environmental sustainability and the conservation and management of natural resources must now be the first priority.

In India, scientists are in the process of evolving a new strategy to lower costs of farm production, by putting more emphasis on environment.

Microbiologists from the Indian Agricultural Research Institute said bacteria can provide a viable solution to the nagging problem of cutting down fertiliser subsidy without hurting the farmers.

These scientists have identified a group of bacteria which can help cut phosphate application costs by up to 50 per cent while increasing crop yield by 10 to 40 per cent.

With UNDP's financial and technical support, India succeeded in developing commercially viable hybrid rice production technology.

Agricultural scientists in this country have also collaborated with the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) in the Philippines in developing some pest-resistant varieties.

Analysts predict an export surplus policy for the Indian government that could eventually turn the country into the rice basket of South Asia.

—Depthnews Asia

Filipino TV Show Helps Improve Science Education

by Perla Aragon-Choudhury

SCIENCE education in the 21st century should develop in children a critical understanding of the scientific process, of the sciences' inherent risks and benefits, of how technology shapes the world and of the link between technical education and human values.

But science education for Filipino children, however, appear to have a lot of catching up to do if they are to achieve these goals set by Dr Marcelina Miguel, director of the Bureau of Elementary Education of the Philippines' Department of Education, Culture and Sports (DECS).

For the Filipino broadcast network ABS-CBN, the link between good science education and economic success seems quite obvious.

ABS-CBN has been airing Sine'skwela since school year 1994-95 opened last June.

The pilot phase of the Filipino-language programme is currently seen in 463 schools of the National Capital Region (NCR) or Metro Manila, and in three schools each in four regions in northern and central Philippines.

Various scientific phenomena that occur in the lives of ordinary people are dramatized with the help of popular entertainment personalities. There is even a new Sine'skwela MTV and a catchy jingle.

Sine'skwela brings the outside world to the classroom through prime science footages from encyclopedia Britannica and from other video and film resources. It also uses the data base and expertise of the Philippine's Department of Science and Technology (DOST).

A team of writers and researchers coordinates closely with DECS so that the Monday-Friday episodes — one day each for Grades 2-6 pupils — meet predetermined Minimum Learning Competencies.

The TV programmes are complemented by the development of materials like instructional guides, teachers' notes, staff and facilities development; monitoring and evaluation; and impact research.

Preliminary monitoring shows that the TV-assisted instruction (TVAI) has helped students — including those considered below average — to participate quite actively and confidently in class discussions

and to grasp difficult concepts and processes with the aid of graphics and visuals.

Students and teachers have also commented that the informal setting of the show (a family interacting with neighbours and friends) has lessened the psychological reservations of children about studying or doing homework.

As they became more relaxed, the children expressed themselves freely and more effectively and were more eager to raise questions about points that they did not understand during the show.

Surveys by the independent Media Pulse Research Group reveal that, despite its non-prime time slot (9:30-10:30 in the morning), the educational programme is among the general viewing public's ten most-preferred multi-weekly daytime programmes.

These research findings have encouraged Sine'skwela cosponsors to extend the programme by ten years and to beam it nationwide via satellite to 2,000 schools by next school year.

DECS Secretary Ricardo Gloria, once a schoolteacher himself, called science and technology "the battlefield if we want to win the future and bring our country to a level of dignity and honour". Recalling sharing a microscope with 39 other students, Senator Leticia Ramos-Shahani, chair of the Senate Committee on Education, Culture and the Arts, said Sine'skwela breaks grounds in education.

DOST Secretary William Padolina expects the programme to contribute to accelerating the pace of technology. "That technology," he said, "should enable the Philippines to leapfrog — not just walk but run, fly and move forward 101 per cent — through satellites, computers, wafers and optical fibres."

Congressman Salvador Escudero III, chair of the House Committee on Education, Culture and the Arts, raised the possibility that the programme might increase the gap in the quality of education between the city and the barangay (village).

Another problem is financing especially with the planned expansion of the programme. Can the programme find enough donors to pay for the additional sets needed? —Depthnews Asia

A Profile of Non-formal and Formal Primary Education

by Jerome Sarkar

FOR attaining empowerment and development of the masses the dissemination of literacy and knowledge, education is quintessential. In consonance with this universally shared line of thinking, brisk activities are afoot to have a broadly enlightened populace.

To achieve the declared goal of "education for all by 2000", speeches are being delivered, seminars/meetings are being held and countless valuable write-ups are being published in various Newspapers. Much funding has already been channelled through different avenues to achieve this goal. Government Education itself has launched a massive education programme both for formal and non-formal. The stress has been given specially to minimize drop-out and mobilize un-schooled poor children towards schools.

Poverty and illiteracy are twin curses and unfortunately they seem to be perpetual phenomena in our country. According to the experts, a little farsightedness, more ordinate long-term planning and efficient handling of the issues may give the desired results. Often the gap between academia and reality is not noticed. The majority of the targets being rural based, sometimes urban stationed trouble shooters miss the targets. Hence redesigning development policies, as well as planning, is imperative in the context of the prevailing condition of the country as a whole and particularly in education.

People's general contention in the emerging situation, on the other hand, is that it is better to have some means for survival with little education than to live under the curse of unemployment with higher education. Hence school curricula must be streamlined to have practical relevance such as equipping the subjects to generate income. Mentionably, we have human resources but they are not harnessed with skills.

Education should be made to cater to the needs of individual families. Then it will sound meaningful to the poverty-stricken people who comprise approximately 80% of the population. Here the National Planners have to decide whether to plan for the 20% or the 80%.

The National Committee on Education at the International Conference Centre on 12th October 1993 and 13th November 1993, emphasized the need of NGOs' involvement, mainly in Pre-primary Education (4-5 yr), Non-formal Education (6-14) and Adult

Education (15-45), for the sole purpose raising the literacy rate to at least 55 in 2000. The conference was primarily arranged for gathering feedback on the progress of educational activities.

In the course of deliberations by some of the speakers, the following points were highlighted:

- Classes are overcrowded and teaching aids are scanty.
- Lack of adequate number of teachers.
- The teaching staff lack motivation, discipline, and professional skills.
- Teaching as a profession has lost its nobility.
- Education Officers are to be animated enough for prompt action, and graduated to a level possess integrity and professional ability.
- Teachers do not take classes regularly; there is no proper system for supervision and evaluation. In the absence of any meaningful evaluation system, the assessment of impact is almost impossible.

While mentioning the above problems, the speakers also put forward some suggestions:

- 'Quality of teaching depends mainly on the teacher's quality and integrity'. As such, trained, dedicated and honest teachers should be recruited through a proper recruiting method.
- Teaching methodology should aim at encouraging the students to become 'Active participants in learning, rather than passive recipients of information'.
- Professional efficiency and sense of responsibility among the Thana Education Officers and District Education Officers must be maintained.
- To carry out continuous monitoring, evaluation and data collection of educational progress, at all levels specially at thana level, the process should be strengthened by properly punctuating it with accountability and transparency. Data collection at Thana level needs to be updated.
- Nationalizing the educational institutions should cease instantly.



Non-uniform School Day Benefits Colombia

by Jim Kelsey

SCHOOLCHILDREN in some 2000 British educational establishments paid not to wear their school uniforms on 3 February to raise funds for Colombia's street children. The schools were participating in the seventh UNICEF National non-uniform day when students give a minimum of fifty pence not to wear their uniforms or, in some cases, get dressed up in whatever they like for that one particular school day.

The excellent free information pack distributed to all British schools by UNICEF, were designed to support teachers working to national curriculum guidelines. They encouraged students to study the economies of other countries and be made aware of the needs of their children.

In schools where children are not uniformed they can choose to wear fancy dress, or a theme is set for the particular day. In the past, schools have held Hawaiian days or reversed roles with pupils dressing like their teachers and vice versa. UNICEF are working in co-

operation with the Colombian Institute for the Welfare of the Family (ICBF) to rescue an estimated 5000 street children and over a million under age youngsters who have to work. Both categories are easy prey for drug peddlers and often the victims of street violence.

The first national non-uniform day was the brainchild of Melanie Rees, a Liverpool teacher. In 1989 she teamed up with Pat Heath, UNICEF's regional officer in Northern England, to encourage 500 schools to raise £56,200 for water and sanitation in Sudan. A year later primary health care in Afghanistan was the beneficiary of British schoolchildren's efforts. Since then non-uniform day funds have gone, through UNICEF, to finance nutritional programmes in Vietnam, maternal and child health in Mexico and education in Zambia.

In 1994 over 1,500 schools took part in the non-uniform day and raised £160,000 to help children affected by war in Sri Lanka. —LPS

It is not known how far the weaknesses/draw-backs have been noted and how seriously the suggestions are being taken into consideration and implemented by the concerned authorities. But what is apparent is that there have been strong moves for opening new schools, which is essential and indispensable for spreading literacy. However, it is reported that the schools are mushrooming and the school authorities are seeking government recognition (registration) particularly for entitlement to allowances/food for education etc, as educational privileges.

It was also mentioned that the blessings of DEOs are being received. At a distance of 5-100 yards from already existing NFPE centres some of the schools are being set up.

The newly set-up school authorities even try to pull learners from the already existing schools and/or lure guardians to bring their children to the new schools.

Alternatively, in certain cases, they don't hesitate to change their school hours to make attending other schools possible; thus the school-going children attend classes for the second time on the same day. The set criteria required for opening a new school is perplexing. The concerned authority has to look into these sorts of irregularities, wastage of resources, duplication and deception.

Some NGOs are pursuing need-based teaching materials of their own. The lessons, in the text for Non-formal education, are taught through different media like staging dramas, role-playing by the students, personalizing the problems and involving students in conversations, drawing, singing, dancing, working in vegetable gardens, caring for forestry declaring prizes for commendable results, taking them for outings, etc. through such methods the learners assimilate knowledge more deeply, enthusiastically and joyfully.

Thus they are inclined to be responsive to the process of learning. The pupils do not consider the lessons to be burdensome, monotonous or meaningless. They find learning interesting and comfortable. While under taking a massive programme for Non-

formal education nearly 3-4 years ago, the Government selected a number of NGOs to supplement their efforts. In the field of education certain NGOs have a long experience with trained personnel support. With this long experience, and experiment and training, the NGOs have been trying to follow the government prescribed guide lines.

Proper management is a pre-condition for better output. Success of literacy programmes by the year 2000 depends on sincerity and honesty of purpose. Shortcomings and hindrances will be inevitable but a speedy solution to the problem is important for reaching the desired goal within the stipulated time.

Trifling differences sometimes become the main hurdle for achieving the greater interest. These differences should be minimized and action be taken before it is too late.

As learned, the on-going NFPE programme under GEP will conclude at the end of December 1995 as per agreement between Government and NGOs. As the programme has achieved a commendable result in the field of education, it is a common demand that it should continue. Having observed this programme, poor and illiterate parents are so anxious to send their children to schools that communities are even ready to support with labour and indigenous materials at their disposal for the construction of schools.

Government efforts in this direction have been a start; we wish for continuity, specially for the good of the out-reached poor community. This programme should be spread out to the Char people who live in inaccessible, isolated uncertainty, with lack of communication, in acute poverty. Some of the NGOs have experience of working in the Char areas. They could be encouraged to join in this programme. Thus by education, the poor may be empowered and they will find means for their future survival.

NGOs could be encouraged to follow NCTB curricula and authorities should look into the possibility of removing superfluous formalities for the smooth running of the programme.

It is pertinent to mention here that the issue demands substantial support from the leading donors, because constraints in finance may cause havoc to the whole process disrupting and dislinking the phenomenon.