

Out of school science education

It is needless to emphasise the importance of science and technology in our socio-economic development. This is the age of science and technology and it is through a process of technological changes that we can achieve socio-economic development. It is only through systematic and sustained exploitation of the technological changes that the western world have achieved their developmental goals. Technology is perhaps the most important factor which separates us from the developed world.

Unlike the distant past, when technology was based on accumulated knowledge and skill, in the modern world this is primarily science-based. This presupposes the creation of a human resource base with scientific knowledge. A pool of human skills endowed with scientific knowledge is a must for technology-based development. For development of technology a conducive climate is also essential. This is all the more necessary in countries bound by tradition.

In the recent past there has been a growing realisation of the importance of scientific and technological education right from the school level in the developing

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countries of the world. But in the overwhelming majority of the developing countries lack of proper and adequate facilities has posed a serious problem. In Bangladesh the number of people in the age group 15 to 25 years is about 20 million, but of this only about 1 million are students. The remaining 19 million either did not have the opportunity of attending schools or dropped out mainly due to financial problems. The situation has become all the more grave as there are about 35 million out-of-school adults.

In the given situation dissemination of scientific and technological knowledge through informal means is of paramount importance in order to turn this huge population into a productive force. To create a conducive climate a movement for popularisation of science and technology should form an integral part of our long-term technology development plan. This would help stimulate industrialisation. The major goals of the movement should be to: a) develop a scientifically educated citizenry in the country; b) encourage people to develop a habit of applying

elementary technical knowledge to everyday life; and c) encourage every one to acquire skills.

Every society should realise that technology is the master key for development. This realisation can be nurtured and developed by awareness campaigns in newspapers, radio and television. Although relatively more expensive, technological expositions are very useful means of popularising technology. The National Museum of Science and Technology; non-governmental scientific societies; associations and science clubs can play an important role in popularising science and technology. Publication of popular scientific and technological literature should also be encouraged.

For dissemination of out-of-school science and technology education, we have to evolve and identify appropriate ways and means by sharing experiences of the countries of the region.

The author is the Secretary, Science and Technology Division. The article is excerpted from an address he delivered in an international workshop in Dhaka recently.