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Non-formal Education For The Youth

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It is rightly said that the future of a country belongs to the youth. For Bangladesh, a statement like this carries enormous significance when we consider the fact that in the population of Bangladesh there is a preponderance of youth. More than 30 per cent of the total population of the country belongs to this age group ranging from 6-21 years of age who would number more than 30 million.

With the vigour and vitality that is characteristic of the youth, this group of Bangladesh manpower possesses the potential for making meaningful and significant contributions to all the fields of development of the country. Unfortunately, due to various reasons the desirable contribution has not been forthcoming from the youth of the country. The reasons are many. First, due to lack of education among the rural youths who constitute a vast number, the necessary awareness and readiness are lacking among them. The educated youths although a microscopic minority compared to the youths who are illiterate, suffer from a sort of inertia and directionlessness for doing something for the country. The irrelevant nature of the curriculum of higher as well as secondary education is mainly responsible for failure to give a direction to the educated youth. The problem of educated unemployment is another cause for creating widespread frustration and hopelessness among the educated youth for whom the future holds nothing to look forward to.

Needless to say that this situation can be potentially dangerous for a country like ours faced with multifarious problems some of which are really formidable to attempt to solve. If this is the situation of the educated youth, the condition of the illiterate rural youth is even worse.

There may be non-believers but it has been proved beyond doubt that minimum of edu-

cation and awareness among the people is a pre-condition for economic development of a country. It has been said many times that the value of education to the individual and ultimately to the society can be immeasurable. On the other hand, the deprivation of education can create innumerable problems for the society as well as for the individual. Perhaps this is one reason for our failure to make a breakthrough in our vital national development programmes, such as, increased food production, family planning, health and sanitation programmes and education mainly primary and basic education. The following table will provide an idea about the magnitude of illiteracy among the youth in Bangladesh.

Illiteracy among the youth (5 to 24 years of age)

Age Group	Percentage
5 — 9	87.8
10 — 14	64.6
15 — 19	63.2
20 — 24	67.6

Source: NFRHRD, Dhaka, 1981

Any one looking at the above statistics must feel disturbed at the magnitude of the problem of lack of education among the young people. If the only hopes and aspirations of a country, the youths live in total darkness due to lack of education, what the future can hold for such a country? It is high time to think seriously about educating this vast number of young people who are facing many problems due to lack of education. Of course it is not possible to educate all of them through formal schooling but they may be provided the minimum of general and vocational education through the non-formal way which is to be tailored according to the age and characteristic of each age group.

Some Suggestions: It is necessary to identify the needs of the youth groups before any non-formal education pro-

gramme can be designed for them. This is very important for ensuring the functionality and relevance of the curriculum and the learning materials prepared for them.

However, it is suggested that any non-formal education programme designed to benefit the rural and educationally disadvantaged youths should have two basic objectives: (1) to provide them functional education in order to raise their consciousness leading to the improvement of conditions in the rural life, and (2) to provide training in rural skills which will open up employment opportunities for the educationally disadvantaged rural youths who are unemployed and, provide part-time employment for the low-income groups.

More specifically, the following may be the types of non-formal education programmes for the young people without education: (a) consciousness raising through functional education for the illiterate and the semi-illiterate youths. Such education should be aimed at improving the personal life and the respective communities of the illiterate youths. It should provide literacy and numeracy, personal and community health, nutrition practices, agricultural and community development practices, recreation through village games and sports, etc.

(b) School equivalence or "second chance" education programme for those who are relatively young so that they may be able to enter the formal education stream at a suitable stage depending on the achievement of the participant.

(c) Providing opportunities for skill learning leading to gainful employment for increased personal income through self-employment projects for the youths who are landless and small farmers. Such programmes may include HYV rice cultivation, vegetable growing poultry and goat breeding pisciculture, making small and cottage industry products.

handicrafts, etc.

(b) Providing opportunities for work and entertainment for the youths by organizing recreational and community development projects through formation of youth clubs in the villages

(e) Promotion of cooperatives by village youth groups. These cooperatives may be organized in agriculture, fisheries, marketing, poultry and livestock breeding, etc.

(f) Increasing the employment opportunities of the rural youths by upgrading their skills through training in existing village occupations, such as, carpentry, basketmaking, pottery, house wiring, black smithy, etc.

For the female youth, in addition to the functional literacy and numeracy education, appropriate vocational non-formal education programmes capable of generating additional income should be undertaken. Such vocational programmes for young women may include cottage industry items, such as, handicrafts and doll-making dress-making, weaving and knitting etc.

It should be carefully noted that non-formal education programmes for the youths suggested above have to be truly integrated in order to achieve positive outcomes. The various components of a programme, for example, numeracy and literacy, agriculture, fisheries poultry breeding etc, should not be treated in isolation, rather they should be integrated in the total Curricula for non-formal education. In terms of planning and implementing, all the government agencies representing the various components of the programme should be involved so that true integration may take place.

Needless to mention that in order to ensure positive outcome from the projects, it is essential to decentralize the administrative and decision-making channel so that proper supervision and monitoring devices can be built into a programme.