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Education And Health

That there is a correlation between female education and the number of children a woman may have during her life-time has been well documented but that education among women is linked to the health of her children is less understood. According to a recent study, every year a mother spends in school reduces the risk of her children's premature death by almost 10%. This we think is logical for an educated mother understands better how to care for herself and her children. It is also borne out by statistics. For instance in India, the mortality rate among children of uneducated women is more than double that of educated women.

According to UNICEF, 855 million people — almost one-sixth of humanity — will be functionally illiterate as they enter the 21st century. Dr. Cesar Chelala, an international medical consultant and author of a Pan American Health Organization publication on child health in the Americas says, "lack of education, particularly among children, continues to be one of the main challenges to the well-being and quality of life of children worldwide. Unless some wide-ranging measures are implemented soon, this could translate into a crisis situation which could have serious effects on children's health and development, particularly those living in developing countries."

Millions of children in our country learn under sub-standard or otherwise inadequate conditions, therefore the link with health should be taken seriously by us, for two-thirds of children who do not attend school are girls — the mothers of the future. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) is also concerned because they estimate 250 million working children are disadvantaged in access to education. Contributing to this situation is the fact that in Bangladesh, our uneven development in which mass poverty co-exists alongside highly advanced technologies has found its reflection in the educational sector.

But with education resources scarce and worse perhaps, unevenly spread, the emphasis has always been on creating an educated elite than on mass education and apart from the rhetoric, this has in no way changed. Whereas this is a situation that many have found to be appalling, it has been impossible to either change or eradicate. This is because the problems of providing primary education to the masses have not been resolved to date although the educational authorities can show that primary level enrollments have increased, the number of drop-outs at 39 per cent is not only unacceptably high it may be on the increase. However now that we know a lack of education affects the health of children, we must do something positive to stop the trend before it is too late.