

Perils and Misuses

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Billions of illiterates and out-of-education has had no meaning of 21st century, will not

ir jobs, both e state. But y ends. From id honoured. oner, by con- ad to lurk in rking any- itance. There at he does. It he appalling South Africa of Nelson Mandela, like s, must have desires when nt, but he de- m to a bare evable ones he frame. In shall have in ny duty to my ople. I do not 0 years still a solution to issues". The choice is there- tion's life. k in the early find is that a Action (NPA) d presented in nference on (WCEFA) held at Jomtein. IPA proposed s that mix in- nconventional conventional ones. The pressed in the d that NGOs raged to partic-

ipate as partners of educational development particularly in the non-formal mode of delivery. In brief, Bangladesh's NPA was supported by the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Act 1990, higher recruitment of female teachers (60 per cent against the prevailing 15 per cent) and tuition-waiver for girl students upto grade VIII (now enhanced to grade X). Thus in the rural areas, a remarkable beginning was made under the leadership of a young, energetic and committed Education Minister Sheikh Shahidul Islam and a competent civil servant secretary Hedayat Ahmed. A hard-core team was commissioned, in which this author was deputed as Joint Secretary assisted by an able Deputy Chief Dr Delwar Hossain, to carry trouble shoot- ing in the basic education pro- grammes. The team prepared within nine months in 1989 a comprehensive programme (under the title General Education Project) to deal mainly with the quantitative aspects of the primary educa- tion.

NGOs were involved for the first time to work shoulder to shoulder with the formal sys- tem run by the government. The World Bank, ADB, SIDA (Swedish), NORAD and UNCEF provided technical and finan- cial assistance (US\$ 320 mil- lion — the single largest donor

assisted project in the primary education). Reportedly, on com- pletion of the project in 1996, no major follow-up was made by the government. Thus, what we find today is that almost 53 per cent of the total population are illiterate and almost 4.4 million (out of the total 19 mil- lion primary school-age boys and girls) or about 23 per cent are still out-of-school children. Some of the deficiencies in the system threaten to undercut the nation's growth prospects in the 21st century by leaving it short handed when it will need a large literate work force ca- pable of competing in technical skills even with other Asian countries. Almost 57 per cent of the students who enter primary schools do not complete their 5- year course (Ref: Bangladesh 2020 — A Long Run Perspective Study: The World Bank and BCAS Report Published in 1998).

Unfortunately, the belief of the early 90s are now turning sour, if not disbelief. A new wave of controversy appear to have emerged in the education parleys. For instance, a recent household survey and study in- terpretations sponsored by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a con- glomerate of NGOs working in the education sector, under- scored the need for inspiring in- ternal efficiency of primary ed- ucation. Among the key find- ings of CAMPE, on an average, one student needs 6.6 years to complete the 5-year primary cycle. Although the reported completion rate is high, the re- peaters (38 per cent) and drop- out rates are still very high too. The rural children lag behind their urban counterparts by one academic year. However, the

Education Minister ASHK Sadeque did not agree with the study results of CAMPE. He cat- egorically mentioned that not only the government definition of primary education differed with the CAMPE analysis, the recent NPA for Education for All by 2000 has been set at 95 per cent enrollment target, 70 per cent completion and 62 per cent literacy from the existing figure of 56 per cent in December 1998. Incidentally, the year 2000 is less than 100 days ahead of us (and reportedly the adult literacy rate rose to 39 per cent in 1995 from 31 per cent in 1990).

To conclude, let me recall a statement of the president of the World Bank James Wolfensohn. In his most recent address to Board of Governors, he said, "We meet today on the threshold of a new millennium.... Will we begin to judge our efforts not by the prosperity of the few but by the needs of many? Will we be prepared to hold ourselves ac- countable, to make the effort necessary to bring about change?" These are very signifi- cant remarks and pointers for us as well. It is therefore im- perative that the torch of learn- ing must be carried to millions of illiterates and out-of-school children for whom the declara- tion about the right to educa- tion has had no meaning so far, otherwise our posterity, who will face the challenges of 21st century, will not forgive us for our failures. The holy Hadis said, "Educate your children for they are born for a time that is not yours."

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and Chairman of the Board of Unocal Corporation, Los Angeles, a speech focusing on "Common Vision — Shared Success" at a dinner in Sonargaon Hotel. Terry Budden, President and General Manager of Ltd. (centre), also delivered his speech on "A Celebration of 100 Years" at the Sonargaon Hotel commemorating the 100th anniversary of Bangladesh. Also seen in the picture is Tim Ling, Executive Vice President and Financial Officer of Unocal Corp, Los Angeles, California.

— Unocal photo

at BOT, PPP project meeting