Chapter V

ROLE OF NON-GOVERNMENTAL AND VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS
5.1 The Need for Non-Formal Education

Any systematic survey can show the state of unevenness of the development of primary education which varies considerably from area to area. The magnitude of the unfinished task, therefore is very unequally distributed between the various areas. The capacity of the different parts of the country to support a programme of universal primary education are also unequal. Under these circumstances the equalization of educational opportunities assumes great significance.

A process of equalizing opportunity in primary education has to be attempted at different tiers. When the family is responsible for the primary education of children, inequality develops between children from the rich and those from the poor families. These can be equalized at the local government level. That should be the legitimate concern of the institution at the grassroots level. It should be the duty of the District Primary Education Authority - to equalize opportunity between different villages and towns within these areas. But the economic capacities of districts and their load of the task to be completed are very uneven. It is, therefore, the responsibility of a provincial government to strive to equalize the opportunities as between districts through the mechanism of grand-in-aid. Finally similar inequalities appear at the provincial level in the development of primary education achieved, in the magnitude of the unfinished task and in the economic capacity of the provinces to support a programme of UPE. It is the responsibility of the government to strive to equalize opportunities at the provincial level.
Expansion of facilities at the primary stage and the universal enrolment of children and their retention in school till the end of Grade V is only one aspect of UPE. The most crucial aspect is qualitative improvement so that the instruction imparted becomes good education and helps children to grow intellectually and contribute by enhancing the real effectiveness of UPE. Another equally significant dimension pertains to the introduction of work experience as an integral part of the primary education. Besides this, the teaching of science and mathematics has to be neutralized and modern methods of teaching have to be adopted.

The rigidities of the formal education system are mainly responsible for this low level of participation and achievement in Bangladesh. These are mainly

i) Unattractive school plans with overcrowded classes with very few facilities for play.

ii) Extra emphasis on memorization, chanting and drill.

iii) Emphasis on autocratic teaching rather than providing for democratic learning.

iv) Extra-rigid school rules and regulations demanding utmost conformity.

v) A sizeable segment of the society existing below the poverty line for whom it is really difficult to meet the social costs of the education of their children over and above their opportunity costs.

vi) Traditional apathy towards girls education.1

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1 Pakistan Towards Universalization of Primary Education in Asia and the Pacific, (Bangkok, 1984), p.36.
Education implies learning, irrespective of where and how it takes place. It is a life long process of acquisition and dissemination of knowledge, information, values and skills from infancy to old age, assuming different forms of which formal school is only one.

Nonetheless the consciousness that learning has to be coexistent with life is as old as mankind. All traditional societies had some learning practices as part and parcel of overall activities. It is only in more recent times that learning and education become time and space bound, which has resulted in limiting the scope and coverage of education in Bangladesh.

Ideally the formal and non-formal systems of education should have complementary roles. They should be able to work co-operatively. There should not be any competition. There is likely to be a need, at least in the beginning, for the two systems to share facilities, training and personnel. However, the idea may not necessarily be achieved. Thus creating an atmosphere for learning that is less formal than the classroom, or using a vast variety of techniques as part of the process of NFE, may also be viewed on a challenge to those whose status is very closely linked to the formal system.

5.2 The Role of Non-Formal Education (NFE)

Nevertheless, due to changed outlook in the society and the government, non-formal learning is getting more emphasis and acceptance in this country as an important
approach to education. It is claimed that the non-formal activities involve social justice, equalization, democracy and disparity reduction in the society. It can therefore be associated with overall efforts, when and where they exist, for the removal of poverty and for framing of policies in the interest of those who are downtrodden, exploited and deprived.

However, generally the NFE activities are organized outside the established formal system, whether functioning separately or as a significant component of a broader programme. They are designed to serve identifiable clientele and educational objectives. What seems to be required is a broadly-ranging conceptualization of NFE that can accommodate variations in different cultures, a wide range of activities and provide scope for changes in the time dimension. The inherent advantage of NFE in this country is that because of linguistic and cultural homogeneity excellent opportunities exist for its expansion.

The main artisans of non-formal programmes are usually small, community based NGOs. But at times they allege that they have trouble coping with "bureaucratic intricacies" of the government. Government on the other hand, generally believe that NGOs are no miracle makers. They often build up mini-bureaucracies, incur high administrative cost and still worse, they lose their voluntary character as they expand. Given the situation, it is also perhaps true that except for a few, their voices are rarely strong enough to draw the attention of the government priorities, perhaps because there is an inherent tendency in them to remain perpetually within the subvention framework
of the government.

Notwithstanding these problems, NGOs are primarily responsible for providing NFE services. NFE can be delivered through a flexible system regarding both timing of schools and methods of teaching. Operating feeder schools, satellite schools, using maktabs and mosque-based facilities, as well as other teaching centres provided by the community. However, if NFE is to be taken as an efficient contemporary to formal education, its quality has to be comparable and the systems have to be so designed that after appropriate assessment, students from the non-formal system should be able to join the formal system.

In this context, NFE has to be carefully planned and coordinated with long and short-term well defined objectives. For implementation of such programmes, inter and intra-ministerial coordination must be established since the activities involve a number of ministries like Information, Communication, Health, Manpower, Agriculture etc. The Primary and Mass Education Division should of course act as coordinator and work out details of action plans.

In order to overcome all these hurdles, the role played by the local community and local private non-governmental agencies are of great importance. The role played by the non-governmental organisations are mainly to:

a) Involve the local community and to bridge the gap which exists between the school and the society;
b) Mobilize a mass campaign ushering parents to send their children to school;
c) Open schools in mosques and at places nearer houses;
d) Recruit teachers/assistant teachers from within the community even though they are less qualified, and
e) Make some arrangements for a mid-day meal within the school.

Of late, the government has become more serious about the issue of non-enrolment and is contemplating a number of practical measures with a view to enrol each and every child of school going age.

5.3.1 Meher Universal Primary Education Project

The Meher Universal Primary Education Project is a community based education project using non-formal schools to supplement the local primary schools in order to attain universal enrolment and retention of primary school age children. It began in 1976 on a pilot project on universal primary education when four non-formal schools were built by the villages of a local multi-purpose cooperative, the Meher Panchgram Cooperative, in Meher Union, a rural union situated 22 miles west of Comilla.

The schools were built on land donated by the members of the community who also contributed materials and labour. These schools were called "feeder schools" because they would educate the children for one or two years and then "feed" them into the
By 1977, the scheme has expanded to all the 24 villages of Meher Union (north) and in total 22 feeder schools were built by the community. There were eight primary schools in Meher Union and the feeder school children were sent on to those schools at the beginning of class-II.

In the mid-1970s when the project started, only about two-thirds of the primary school age children were enrolled in schools. Of those, 60 percent dropped out by Class III. The distribution of enrolment in any rural primary school was far from the norm, with two-fifths in Class I and less than one-tenth in Class V. There were few women primary school teachers. School facilities were poor and few schools had enough benches to accommodate even 100 children easily, let alone the average 250 they were each meant to hold. Thus the attainment of UPE would entail costly expansion of facilities and a rapid doubling of the teaching force. In such a situation the Meher UPE project wanted to find out if community contribution was possible, how non-formal schools could be integrated with the formal schools to improve enrolment and retention, how to encourage enrolment, especially of poorer students and of girls, and how to utilize more women as teachers in order to help girls' enrolment.

The onus of the Project is on the local officials and the Union Education Committee. The community participation is vital and their continuing interest in sustaining

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the project is quite essential. This local element is one of the most important features of the scheme. It is a scheme whereby the local community has to contribute and has to sustain interest. A second important feature of this project is the employment of local people. The members of the Union Education Committee, together with all the employees, make over 100 individuals concerned with education. Then a large number of people in the project are interested in and aware of the educational activities and their progress.

Two independent evaluation of the Meher UPE project could be identified. By and large, both reached a positive conclusion and praised community involvement, girls enrolment, low costs and replicability of the project. However, the study by Mazharul Haque and others, stated some inadequacies also. The important findings of the evaluation were as follows:

1. Although the feeder school system made a significant achievement in attracting almost all children of the age group to the innovative class called Pre-I (a pre-primary class), the system could not do so for class I and class II. In fact, nearly two-thirds of the enrolment in the pre-primary class appeared to consist of children of other age groups who might have been attracted unduly to the pre-primary class and retained in it for years.

2. The impact of the project upon primary education on the whole in the area was very impressive. The classwise distribution of enrolment showed a very clear

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imbalance which was similar to the situation in Bangladesh as a whole.

3. It was found that about four-fifths of the total enrolment in class I to class V of the schools in the project area belonged to the proper age cohorts. The participation rate was 60 percent of the potential population for enrolment in class I to V. The situation was only marginally better than that obtaining in the country as a whole.

4. The feeder school system seemed to have been successful in attracting girls to each class in maintaining a sex balance with almost 50 percent of the enrolment constituted by girl students, and in motivating these girls to continue their primary education. The percentage of girls in the total enrolment in classes I to V went up rather rapidly (from 36 percent in 1976 to 49 percent in 1979). The situation regarding the enrolment of girls elsewhere in Bangladesh was not known to have changed so rapidly. This achievement was largely attributable to the existence of a large number of female teachers and "Ayas" in feeder schools in the system.

5. The attendance rate for the primary education system in the project areas was found to be around 75 per cent of the enrolment. This was not much better than the attendance rate in the country on a whole. However, the attendance rate of girls appeared to be higher than that of boys in the project schools.

6. The project had not been able to effect universalization of primary education in the area inspite of a huge effort although it had set the process in motion.
7. There was a wide variation in respect of physical facilities in the feeder schools and the primary schools in the project area and many of the feeder schools and some primary schools did not have the basic facilities required for such institutions.

8. It was revealed that economic problems were the main obstacles to the achievement of UPE. Although innovative projects like Meher UPE can achieve impressive results, there was a limit imposed by the socio-economic constraints. Unless these constraints are removed, true universality in primary education was likely to remain unaccomplished.

9. The communities in the project areas were willing, but only slightly able to donate, on a cooperative basis, to cover only a part of the cost of primary education.

10. Rural educated women were motivated to work as teachers on a very small salary and few benefits.

11. An adapted version of the project may be introduced for universalisation of primary education in the country. But its introduction elsewhere should be preceded by organizing rural cooperatives consistent with the socio-economic and environmental conditions of the communities.

5.3.2 The "Shwanirvar" Experiment

The Shwanirvar experiment was primarily concerned with raising agricultural
output, enhancing family planning acceptance and utilizing local resources through self-help efforts. In 1980 the experiment became involved with the mass literacy movement. However, under this project the benefit to the primary education of children including girls appeared to be indirect. The primary schools in "Shwanirvar" areas are reported to be above the national average in all cases. The enrolment is said to have been enhanced, the distribution of students between classes is claimed to conform more nearly to the norm and the ratio of boys to girls is shown to be 46:44.4

It has been observed that as the general standard of living in the Shwanirvar area rose somewhat over the past few years, there was a spin-off effect in to education. More parents sent their children to school and girls enrolment increased more quickly in the Shwanirvar areas in the rest of rural Bangladesh. Though the drop out rate is still high in these schools, there can be reasonable hope of a continuing improvement of retention in the Shwanirvar primary schools. In the year 1990, the Shwanirvar programme has 400 mass literacy centres out of which 210 centres are for females only. The number of learners is around 10,170 out of which 66 percent are female students. In case of teachers appointment, it has given more emphasis to the appointment of female teachers that is 68.5 percent. The most important part of the story is that the major constituents of the students are females and above the age 15 years. This has been really successful in giving non-formal education to the children who are out of school in Bangladesh.

5.3.3 Religious Education Projects

The "Maqtah" is a kind of religious school found in Bangladesh villages. The "Maqtabs" are informal schools imparting elementary religious teachings. Small children both boys and girls go to these schools to learn their prayers and recitations from the Quran (the Muslim holy book) and "Dinial" (the Muslim way of life). Usually the local "Imams" take these classes and the pupils may meet on a mosque premise or in a homestead guest house. Normally up to 10 or 15 children attend these religious schools early in the morning before going on to the primary school at 10 a.m. For some village children these "Maqtabs" are the only educational experience they ever have.

The "Maqtabs" and the "Imams" are a potential means of helping to achieve universal primary education in Bangladesh. It has been estimated that there are over 200,000 mosques in Bangladesh.5 Except for prayer times this vast investment is unutilized. Nearly every mosque has a "Maqtab" attached to it and so the mosques can be utilized as schools for literacy as well as for religious instruction. The mosque is the real community centre for the Muslim in the rural areas and mosque schools could cater to the needs of adult literacy as well as primary school age children. The mosque as a centre of learning is well established in Islam and to utilize the mosques and the Imams for primary education would be a logical step in the Islamic tradition.

This idea was used in the 1960s by Akhtar Hamid Khan, the then Director of the Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development in Comilla, when he established "Imam Feeder Schools" around Comilla. The Imams taught the children reading and writing as well as religious studies and they were sent to the primary school after one or two years. This scheme died out after the emergence of Bangladesh, but some years later the idea was taken up by the "Shwanirvar" movement in cooperation with the Islamic Foundation of Bangladesh. The Imams are now trained by the Islamic Foundation, a government organisation, the Mosque Society of Bangladesh, a non-government voluntary organisation, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs. The Imam training courses aim at equipping these rural religious leaders and other related fields. After the training they are sent back to their mosques to help in the local development work. The Imam training courses can include a component of primary education.

During the last few years the idea of Imam as teachers of school children is reported to have been incorporated into the training sessions. The Mosque Society of Bangladesh started a programme in and around Dhaka city through which the Imams would teach small children. Under this programme matching funds are provided to the community in order to pay the Imam a small honorarium and to supply books to the children. These mosque schools teach Arabic and Bengali along with traditional religious teachings. This idea was developed further by the Islamic Foundation which started a pilot scheme of "Maqtab Feeder Schools" in 1981. Given the present socio-economic conditions obtaining in the country, especially poverty in the rural areas attaining
universal primary education through the formal schools only seems an extremely difficult task. The problems involved are so gigantic that the country needs to utilize all available facilities and people to achieve universal primary education of the year 2000. "Maktabs Feeder Schools" yet prove as an important innovation in Bangladesh as the Sunday Schools of England which originated with the same end to make the children literate along with imparting religious teachings.\textsuperscript{6}

Such schools may be of special value to girls. Girls do attend "maktabs" and many of them receive informal religious training from tutors at their homes. As girls are more often attenders at school than boys and as their general literacy rate is lower, the use of "maktabs" to concentrate attention on the educational needs of girls could be of great significance to them.

The religious school system form a parallel education system in the country. It is strong and expanding and ought to be utilized to aid the drive for universalization of primary education. At present the preliminary stage of "Ebtedayee" is equivalent to that of primary level of education in government schools.

"Ebtedayee" is a five year primary level education in Madrasah system. Parallel to primary school systems about 16,000 separate Ebtedayee madrasahs are now functioning in Bangladesh. All of them have been established under private initiative and Madrasah Education Board only accorded registration to them and introduced necessary curricula and syllabus proceeding 67 percent general education and 33 percent Islamic education.

\textsuperscript{6} Sattar, n.2p.109.
Government has a plan to incorporate all these madrasah in the existing primary education programme since the course content is very close to the formal sector.

The Ebtedayee Madrasah education system is widely spread all over the country giving education to 1.7 million children and giving employment to 57,698 teachers. Mostly these teachers are called the Imams and they belong to that particular community by which they become able to win the confidence of the people to send their girl children to the Madrasha schools.

However, a recent study shows that there are about 1.16 million Buddhists in the country. They have 3,589 Buddhist temples (Vihars) supported by the community they serve. Each Vihara has at least one Vikhu (Priest). In addition to religious rites, his duties include giving lessons in morals, social values, literacy, numeracy and in some cases handicrafts. It is reported that about 85 percent of Buddhists are literate and Buddhist children do better than others in schools. This is remarkable and worth study and follow up.7

The Government has expressed its commitment to basic education through formal and non-formal programmes. Allocation of resources to basic education is increasing. But a matter of vital importance such as education cannot be left exclusively to the care of Government alone and professionals only. It is imperative that all sections of the society are awakened to the importance of basic education and all institutional facilities are utilized as extensively as possible. Religious educational institutions await to be exploited

fully. Reasonable investment in such institutions is sure to yield satisfactory results.

Religious charitable organisations also give strong support to education through the establishment and maintenance of "Madrasas" orphanages and non-formal education activities through development programmes for the poor and disadvantaged. Such institutions could do far more in the formal primary education sector if assistance and support was extended to them on a continuing basis. In terms of cost also support to improvement of existing institutions is far cheaper than establishing new ones. So it seems logical that some recognition and financial assistance should be given to "maktabs" and "maktab feeder schools" which can be included in the drive for the universalization of primary education.

5.4.1 Non-formal Primary Education Programme of BRAC

The non-formal primary education programme of the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee started in March 1985. BRAC is a private non-profit organisation involved in socio-economic development activities for rural men and women. Since its inception immediately after the war of liberation BRAC has been running a project on adult education which is known as "fundamental literacy programme". But the non-formal primary education programme (NFPE) started in 1985 has been undertaken mainly for the children in the rural areas who have never been enrolled in primary schools or are drop-outs. Target pupils are the rural disadvantaged children between 8-11 years and 50 percent of them should be female children. The target pupils are the children
of the landless families under the development projects of BRAC in different parts of Bangladesh.⁸

5.4.2 Objectives

Acting upon the needs of the rural poor and with a view to eradicate illiteracy and achieve Education for All by the end of the century, BRAC initiated the Non-formal Primary Education Programme. The objective of the programme is to develop a replicable primary education model which will provide, in a three year period, basic literacy, numeracy and social awareness to the poorest rural children who had not yet been touched by the formal school system or had dropped out. Women are the main focus of this programme. In view of the low female literacy status special emphasis has been given on employing women as teachers and enrolling girls as students. Till date the programme goal of enrolling 70 percent girls has already been achieved. More than 90 percent of the total number of teachers are female. The overall objective of the programme is to assist the government in its efforts to disseminate primary education throughout the country.

The programme aims at:

a) Reducing mass literacy and contributing to the attainment of basic education by a significant proportion of the country's children... especially those from the poorest families;

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b) providing a basic education package for left outs and dropouts;

c) contributing towards the strengthening of the government's universal primary education programme;

d) ensuring increased participation of girls in education;

e) enhancing the multi-sectoral potential of education in other areas such as population planning, public hygiene and health.  

5.4.3 BRAC School

BRAC has developed two primary school models targeted towards two different age groups. The first started in 1985 is a three year programme for children aged 8-10 years who have never enrolled in any school or have dropped out during class I. This model is called Non-Formal Primary Education and covers a curriculum equivalent to class I through class III in the formal schools.

The second model, Primary Education for Older Children (PEOC), initiated in 1988, is another three (originally a two) year programme for children aged 11-14 years who have never attended school. With the introduction of the third year in 1992 the PEOC model schools are now comprising five phases which cover the curriculum of class I-V. Since this model is geared towards providing schooling to adolescents, the programme expects the graduates of this model to continue in secondary schools of the formal system. In both models, education as well as books and other materials are free.

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BRAC schools enable these children to continue their education and prepare them for entrance into formal schools.

The criteria for selecting villages where schools are to be located include parent's demand, availability of teacher and students and proximity to a cluster of villages. Normally, areas are selected within the "thana" where there is some ongoing BRAC activity. However, since 1991 BRAC schools are also being opened in non-BRAC areas, i.e. areas having no BRAC activities of any kind. Alongside the survey, actions are also initiated towards mobilizing the community (the educationists, the elites, the poor, the political and religious leaders etc.) and orienting them about PFPE programme. The next stage consists of assessing the demand for NFPE schools. If a demand exists, then an office is set up and student and teachers selection is undertaken and a list of students and teachers is drawn up. The number of schools to be opened depends on the number of students (33 per school) in the village. Once the list is made, it is cross-checked with the government primary schools of the locality in order to ensure that it consists only of drop-outs or those not attending formal schools. This ensures that BRAC schools complement the government education programme and not compete with them.

5.4.4 School Features

i) Reasonable class size: 33 students per school.

ii) Easy accessibility: Children as well as teacher develop a sense of security as the schools are located near their house. This enables the children to receive
individual attention from the teacher even after class hours, if necessary.

iii) Participatory and life related curriculum: The BRAC NFPE curriculum is designed to be relevant to rural life and to suit special needs of rural children.

iv) Flexible school timing: Classes are held for two and a half hours to three hours each day, six days a week, 270 days a year. A convenient timing for each school is decided jointly by the teacher and the parents to suit seasonal work and other familial needs. This allows the child to stay at home and help families when needed and attend school also.

v) Active parent and community involvement: An essential feature of BRAC schools is the involvement of the community through parent teacher meetings and through the school management committee.

vi) Focus on girls: The programme policy places special emphasis on the enrolment of girls, as a result 70% of the students are girls.

vii) Allowing for fun time: BRAC schools are student friendly. A good amount of time is spent each day on games and for activities like singing, dancing, storytelling and role playing.

viii) Non formal examination and no long vacation: The progress of students is measured through carefully recorded, continuous assessment by the teacher and by weekly and monthly tests. There are no formal annual examinations. The programme also believes that long vacation disrupts the learning process and therefore the maximum vacation period is fixed only for ten days annually.
ix) Very little or no home work: Usually no homework is assigned to the students. If at all assigned, it is very little, only that which can be independently done by the student themselves and which require no assistance from parents who are mostly illiterate. It also saves the parents from the pressure of appointing a tutor.

x) One room school: Most BRAC schools are bamboo or walled one room typical village structure with thatch or tin roofs, with a minimum floor space of 320 square feet. The school home is usually hired by BRAC at a nominal rent. In most cases a local resident volunteers to construct the school home, often with the advance rent paid by BRAC.10

5.4.5 Rapid Expansion

The efforts of non-governmental primary schools in Bangladesh should be set in the national context. The programme has expanded rapidly from 22 schools in 1985 to 2,500 schools by the end of 1989, with a planned expansion to 4,500 by 1991. Donors are offering money to BRAC to expand even faster. Another major international donor agency is offering money to expand to 7,000 new schools for the 8-10 year old children by 1993; another donor is proposing funds to BRAC to open another 6,000 schools for the 11-14 year old children in the same period.11

10 Ibid, p.4.

The main factors that have facilitated the rapid growth appear to the BRAC's experience and operational mode and the support systems that were already in place and available to the programme. BRAC has had almost 15 years of experience in running rural development programme. One of them a very large-scale nation wide health programme. BRAC already regularly works in some 2,500 villages with more than 5,000 village organisation. Over the last 15 years, it has provided functional literacy to hundreds of thousands of village adult for which thousands of teachers were trained, in a programme that received UNESCO's NOMA prize for outstanding contribution to adult education. BRAC's five Training and Resource Centres have trained several hundred thousand villagers in income generation and leadership skills in addition to providing training to staff, many other NGOs and government officials.

BRAC's experience with community participation, its knowledge of the values and behaviour of village people and its programme implementation experience were essential ingredients for the success of the non-formal primary schools. But, equally important has been the availability to the school programme of all the essential support systems that BRAC has built up over the years. The rapid growth would have been impossible without their own infrastructure in which they regulate all the activities to universalize primary education. One of the significant side-effects of the programme has been the employment of several thousand young adults, primarily women, in an activity where they gain a sense of self-worth and earn respect from the community.
5.4.6 Constraints

Recently a group of religious activists in some parts of the country have started to malign BRAC, falsely alleging that BRAC has been engaged in anti-Islamic activities and is propagating foreign culture in the country. A section of the rural elite was not well disposed towards BRAC for understandable reasons. They felt threatened by the empowerment of the rural poor, particularly of women who are especially addressed through BRAC's various development activities. In 1993, this anti-BRAC feeling took a serious turn in a number of places, when some religious groups levelled charges against BRAC for de-Islamizing the rural poor particularly through its NFPE programme. These vested interest groups have since burnt over 50 schools. In other places, their threats of dire consequences have led to temporary closure of more than 50 schools and has affected over a thousand schools in areas like Chittagong, Cox's Bazar, Comilla, Hobigonj, Sylhet, Kushtia, Banisa, Bhola, Faridpur, Kishoregonj, Mymensingh and Bogra. They have gone to the extent of slandering the NFPE programme, its staff, teachers and also parents who send their children to BRAC schools.

5.5 Mass Education Programme of Danish International Development Agency

The Mass Education Programme of Danish International Development Agency started in January 1979. It was planned to be executed in two upazilas of Noakhali in two phases over a six-year period.
The primary goal of the programme was to support the poorest section of the population, particularly the landless and marginal farmers, women and non-attending school children aged between 6-11. All the MEP centres have been organised on the basis of the following principles:

i) Easy to reach for students.

ii) Average number of students in each centre is about 800 of whom 45-50 percent should be girls.

iii) Each student may participate for three years.

iv) The centre should have a close dialogue with the local people.

v) It should be home based, have a school committee with 5-7 members who will nominate the teacher.

vi) It should be low cost so that a model may be developed which can be used in other parts of the country.  

All the centres are located in already existing facilities such as "Kutchery" or outer houses, "maqtabs" and private homes. The MEP does not provide any fund for the maintenance of the centres, which is the total responsibility of the community.

\[\text{12} \quad \text{Universal Primary Education for Girls: Bangladesh, } (\text{UNESCO, Bangkok, 1987}), \text{ p.74.}\]
The students of the centres are divided into three groups according to capabilities:

Group A is the beginning

Group B is the medium

Group C is for the advanced students

At present approximately 35,000 children are engaged in about 800 MEP centres. The drop out rate is high. But considering part-time attendance, the actual drop out rate is 5-8 percent. It is done to the fact that the poor parents need the children's help in the farming and domestic work.\(^\text{13}\)

There are 750 teachers with an average education equal to Senior Secondary School (SSC). They undergo internal training on three modules for a three-day period with an interval of three to four months. The MEP has 50 field organisers and coordinators for motivational field work in every village in the project areas. Before setting up new centres they discuss problems of the non-attending school children aged 6-11 years old. Basically, teacher training, among other things, is based on folklore. Drama, songs and traditional dances are used as means of expression in the training seasons. The MEP has formed a travelling folklore group which aims to motivate the people in continuing education.

From a pedagogical part of view, the mass education of children is closely linked to "learning-by-doing". There are two models:

a) learning skills (dramas, songs, bigger issues)

\(^{13}\) Ibid, p.75.
b) survival issues centred around activities including gardening, plantation, poultry etc.

After completion of their schooling, the children receive "MEP Graduation Certificate" stating their participation and its duration.

5.6 Under-Privileged Children's Education Programme (UCEP)

Founded in 1973 the UCEP was originally designed to educate 400 street children in Dhaka city. The objectives of UCEP schools are:

i. to provide basic education to the working children,

ii. to provide facilities to the students to learn while they earn,

iii. to provide training in a trade so that the trainee is able to improve his earning capacity,

iv. to inculcate among the pupils a sense of dignity of labour, self-reliance and responsibility,

v. to provide within the limits of resources, other ancillary facilities like health care, nutritive diet, physical education and games to the children along with schooling; and

vi. to develop the overall personality of the working children in order to mould them as good citizens of the country capable of making a contribution to society.14

14 Ibid., p.76.
UCEP recruits new children from among working children twice a year in June and December. In recruiting new children, UCEP seeks permission of the children's parents of employers to allow them to attend classes. Close contact between the parents and employers and the UCEP schools is maintained throughout the time children stay in school.

UCEP schools are housed in a building or land donated by the local and community authorities. They are located in urban and semi-urban areas. In UCEP schools students earn a living for themselves and their families. Only these working children who are nine years old can be admitted to UCEP schools. Shortening the duration of the courses from one year to six months is also a prominent feature. The UCEP pupils spend only two hours a day in the school as most of the boys are working. The short duration of the school and the completion of each class in six months have necessitated a shortening of the syllabus. Discipline is maintained through a system of self-government. Special provision has been made for the health care of the students. School workers provide a strong support to the programme by maintaining close contact with the pupils, guardians and teachers.

The Impact of the UCEP on different aspects of life of students was measured by an evaluation study which revealed the following:

1. About 84 percent of the students used their leisure time in more useful ways like reading, writing and helping parents instead of spending time in playing, loitering and gossiping.
2. Most of the students observed that the hopes and aspirations of their life had changed.

3. Almost all the students reported that after joining the UCEP schools the attitude of parents, guardians and neighbours towards them changed favourably.

4. About 28 percent of the students reported an increase in their earning, 63 percent said income had not been affected and only 9 per cent reported fall in their income after joining the UCEP schools.¹⁵

5.7 Children’s Education Resource Centre of Village Education Resource Centre (VERC)

Of all the activities and programmes of VERC, which was established in 1977, the Children’s Education Resource Centre (CERC) project deserves special mention as its objectives are directly linked with primary education in the non-formal sector. To promote non-formal education programme for out-of-school under-privileged children, a CERC was established by VERC. To attract poor and delinquent children to education, CERC developed innovative techniques and educational resources.

The objectives of VERC’s CERC are designed to:

i. Prepare the underprivileged illiterate children of the society with a minimum basic education.

ii. Help the school drop-outs to acquire income generating skills.

iii. Develop in the poor children appropriate attitudes and behaviour to enable them to function as future citizens of the country.

iv. Make them ready for formal schools.

v. Develop a non-formal curriculum for children, and

vi. Disseminate these ideas and techniques to other interested groups and individuals.¹⁶

These objectives are intended to be achieved through regular classes, home visits, parent-teacher meetings, prize giving ceremonies, exhibition of children's work and study tours.

VERC's educational programme is innovative in producing educational resources from local and indigenous products. Also the programme aims at developing a positive attitude among the children towards basic education. Girls participation in primary education is likely to be promoted by using and learning from the experiences gained from educational programmes of VERC.

5.8 Suravi

The meaning of the Bengali word "Suravi" is aroma or fragrance. The name indicates the objective of this locally financed non-formal organisation engaged in education and technical vocational and skill training of the multitude of underprivileged children. The main aim of this organisation is to give hope, meaning and light to these unfortunate children of the big cities.

Initiated and managed by a notable woman social worker, Suravi has undertaken the responsibility to offer a bright fortune to the poor urban children and has earned a reputation for its work. In 1979 Suravi started its work with only six children. At present there are 82 branches of Suravi in the big cities of Bangladesh with 72 branches in Dhaka city alone. The number of students at Suravi schools is now 95,000. In six years the enrolment figure of Suravi rose to an outstanding of 95,000 speaks eloquently of the dedication and success of its founder, workers and organizers.

The aim of the Suravi is to reshape the future of the teeming millions of the underprivileged urban children of Bangladesh. Here the founders’ vision offered an alternative approach. The students of Suravi belong to the roads. They have no fixed rules and regulations guiding their living and profession. They are ill-clad, barefooted and dry-haired but when they come to Suravi, they are all alike, Suravi is financed through the personal efforts of the founder.\textsuperscript{17}

Suravi is primarily an educational organisation of the non-formal type. It has offered the urban have-nots with free education, books, stationery, school clothing, free ration, medical check-up and guidance whenever necessary. There is no rigid regulation about the age of admission. The main batches of Suravi work in three shifts. The curriculum of the formal school system is used with necessary modifications and adjustments. There are 550 paid teachers working at the different branches.

The programme includes a provision for offering technical and vocational training

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, p.81.
to students in order to improve their chances of earning and self-employment. Suravi’s technical centres offer training in shoe-making, ceramics, tailoring, tie and dye, cane articles making, pot plant, block print training, candle making, flower making and brick binding. Their products are sold at various city centres at competitive prices.

5.9 Savar Gono Pathsala

"Gono Pathsala" means people’s primary school. It is a part of Gonovidyalaya. Hence the problem of rural illiteracy and poverty is attacked from a different angle. The organizers understand the basic realities of the poor people and set up an experimental school in an alternative system accommodating within the school programme, the duties that rural children perform at home and devised a curriculum suitable to village life. Gono Pathsala’s primary purpose is to spread education among the children of landless and marginal farmers who otherwise have no opportunity for education. The students are involved in activities in which they would find interest and which would develop in them skills considered valuable by their families. The teachers teach five days a week and spend one day supervising village schools run by student-teachers. The founder of Gono-pathsala visualized the realities of Bangladesh and realised that there were a few benefits to be gained by parents in the formal system of primary education and that the poor parents did not have the means to afford the cost involved therein.

The school started with 50 students in 1977 and the number increased to 296 in 1984. There is an increasing demand for more accommodation and more place for
children. The authorities do not accept government assistance to avoid intervention and to develop the spirit of self-reliance. Gono-pathsalas has two big rooms subdivided into seven rooms. Unlike other schools, the students sit on the floor for the sake of economy. There are three blackboards and necessary toilet facilities. The students have their own wall board for information about the villages and news on health and nutrition. Students are given a printed survey sheet for information about villages which they fill up in their own hand and discuss in the class. This exercise helps to raise their consciousness about the village social structure and their own place in it.

The school programme is devised in such a way that absence of students is not marked if his service is demanded during harvesting period or at home. Besides, during harvesting season the whole school may go and help to harvest. Students are accepted in the nursery for a ten month period. They are taught basic literacy and numeracy during the first two years. Civics, Geography, Crops, climate, demographic features national historical background and the struggle for liberation, plant and animal biology, primary health care, personal hygiene, sanitation and environmental care are included in the curriculum of class III-IV. The School programme also includes music, dance, recitation, drawing, drama, physical exercises and swimming lessons to add variety to the programme and for a balanced mental and physical development of children.

Sevar Gono Pathsala is a unique example of absorbing rural children in an education system which seems to be realistic and life oriented and which can cater to the needs of the rural girls. It helps to raise the consciousness of the poor children.

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5.10 Education for Handicapped Children

There is as yet no clear cut national policy on the care and education of physically handicapped and mentally retarded children in Bangladesh, although the government has been supporting such activities by private bodies.

In December 1977, an association "Society for the Care and Education of Mentally Retarded Children" (SCEMR) was established in Dhaka. Two of its objectives were to establish vocational training centres for the educable mentally retarded and persuade the schools to operate special classes for the mentally retarded children.

In the first national workshop held by the society in June 1980, the following recommendations were made:

1. To have a deliberate national policy formulated by the government for the care and education of the mentally retarded children which should be reflected in development plans;

2. To create general awareness in the society through mass media for the special needs of these children;

3. To start a diploma course in mental retardation through collaborative effort of the Institute of Education and Research, University of Dhaka, Teachers' Training Colleges, Medical Colleges, and Departments of Psychology of different universities; and

4. To start special classes for mentally retarded children in as many as primary schools as possible.

An institute called Bangladesh Institute for the Mentally Retarded was established in January 1982 by the Norwegian Association for the Mentally Regarded in collaboration with the SCEMR. The Institute is equipped with a vocational training centre, a toy library
and a counselling and guidance service centre.

The Dhaka based society for mentally retarded children is keen to extend its activities throughout Bangladesh and has affiliated with several similar associations in the outlying districts. The society has so far been able to start special classes in four schools in Dhaka, including a school for slum children.

5.11 Primary Education for Special Groups

Bangladesh has a tribal population estimated to be 500,000 in the eastern districts of Chittagong Hill Tracts and Bandarban. This is a sparsely populated hilly region with forests and difficult communication. The members of the dominant tribe "Chakma" are Buddhists, but others mostly do not profess any religion. All of them have their own lifestyle, attitudes, social norms and dialects. There is, however, a sizeable population of Muslim settlers from the plains who live in separate colonies among the tribal people.

The tribal people have been brought under the UPE scheme. According to a survey carried out by NFRHRD, there were 387 primary schools (354 rural and 33 urban) in the two districts with 1,291 teachers. The schools use the normal curriculum and textbooks. However, special efforts are made to recruit women teachers and supervisors from the tribal people by relaxing educational and age qualifications. Residential accommodation is being provided to primary school children in selected schools of the inhospitable terrain and difficult communication.
The importance of universal primary education, and in that context, the necessity
of taking special measures for the promotion of girls education have been explicitly
recognized in the national educational policy. Delineate on a fundamental human right in
the constitution of the country, basic education or literacy has also received support from
the highest political leadership in the form of Presidential declaration. Further, that
literacy is an essential condition for national progress has clearly appeared in the national
development plan documents. Indeed, policy and plan initiatives for making the national
population literate have repeated themselves, with reinforcements in ideas and schemes,
at subsequent plan periods since 1974. Yet the dissatisfaction over the poor level of
achievement. The current low enrolment and retention rates of children in primary
schools, particularly of girls, reflects among others the bureaucratic organizational failure
in dealing with the problems that account for low school participation rates.

Plan implementation has been plagued with a number of paradoxes, despite policy
declaration in favour of literacy promotion, resource allocation has been disappointingly
lower than the desired level, and actual spending has been disproportionately higher for
secondary and higher education favouring mostly the urban and the privileged groups.
When increased resources were made available for literacy or primary education,
mismanagement and wastage of resources were conspicuous. The overall development
efforts of the country over past plan periods have not brought about any improvement in
the household conditions of the majority of the population, nor have they positively
changed the parental outlook in regard to children’s education. Whereas the vast majority
of the population are poor and live in rural areas, new facilities or resources spending
dynamics hardly go for compensating the deprivation of the poor rural masses.

Some special projects in the Government sector, administered on a small scale, with heavy imports for physical improvement in schools, peripherally touch the problems related to low enrolment and retention rates, particularly of girls. This small improvement in the situation is overshadowed by the lack of efficiency in the implementation of the projects.

On the contrary, some innovative projects, generally in the non-government sector try to address themselves to the needs and abilities of the children in a flexible way and also to the parental problems so that positive changes towards children’s education become more natural. Some of these projects use special learning contents, some others adopt special teaching methods and materials, some of them try to integrate children’s primary schooling with economic activities of the locality and use of flexible time schedule, and some others maintain close link with parents and community with the school within a network of economic and social programmes particularly for the poor.

The role of voluntary organisation has gained the necessary political space within Bangladesh to carry out its own programmes by fostering a relationship with the Government that is constructive and based on mutual respect. This cooperative atmosphere has led the government to study the role of voluntary organisations in accelerating the universalization of primary education programmes which has resulted in more dependence on these organisations. The role of non-governmental organisations in bringing universalization of primary education in Bangladesh is very significant and much can be done with the cooperation of the government.