Chapter I

INTRODUCTION
1.1 Significance of the Study

The concept of economic development has been considerably widened by development economists in recent years with a view to coming closer to what may be perceived as human well being. Excessive concern with growth of GNP per capita by economists during the fifties and sixties has given way to redefining and broadening the set of indicators that could better reflect what is known as "development with a human face". Conventional indicators such as GNP growth, capital accumulation etc., are no doubt important as they are means for widening the range of choices available to individuals, but they are not end in themselves. Current development thinking emphasises the fact that the most critical and wide-ranging choices are to live longer and healthy life, to be better aware of one's environment through education and to have access to resources needed to satisfy basic human needs.

Every individual regardless of social class and economic status has the right of education. Education enables an individual to discover his talents, sharpens his abilities, develop his own potential to the fullest and to become effective in the process of modernisation and growth. Education is a crucial input in human resource development, which is fundamental to the realization of the goals of national planning for development. In this perspective, there is a need for renewal of national resolve and commitment to provide education to all as an integrated part of national development endeavours.

In this context, universal primary education (UPE) was first adopted as a goal for the countries of the Asian region in the Karachi Plan (1960), which proposed that "every
country of this region should provide a system of universal, compulsory and free primary education of seven years within a period of not more than twenty years (1960-80)". After this declaration all the South Asian countries decided to universalize primary education. In this context the pioneering effort made by Sri Lanka to introduce free education up to the university level as early as 1945 is commendable.

Other South Asian countries made similar commitment to universalize primary education after their independence and this is reflected in their plan documents. The second plan of Bangladesh (1980-85) made such a commitment for the first time. In India a constitutional provision for free primary education up to the age of 14 years has been provided. This also forms a component of the country's Minimum Needs Programme. Pakistan's seventh plan (1987-92) intends to provide primary education facilities to all the children in the age group of 5-9 years. The declaration by Nepal in the year 1980 to universalize primary education has been achieved partially. However, full enrolment of 100 per cent of the primary level has been achieved only in case of Sri Lanka and Maldives.

The major obstacle in the achievement of this problem of UPE in South Asian countries is that its objectives have never been made explicit. At intervals, official documents and political speeches have referred to the goal and they hope the scheme will be accomplished, but many of these statements have been made adhoc and none has even pretended to present a clear and definite list of its purposes. In this context there is enough scope for SAARC to suggest the governments and policy-makers of South Asian
countries to take proper action to universalize primary education. The declaration of SAARC to universalize primary education by the end of this century in this region is to be kept in mind and steps should be taken accordingly.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, the policy-makers are particularly conscious about the regional imbalances. Even though the government has announced to universalize primary education in the year 1980, it is yet to achieve it. With an area of 144 thousand sq. km., the overall spatial distribution of primary schools in Bangladesh works out to be one school per 3.18 sq. km. School mapping exercises however have indicated that there is at least one school in every 2 sq. km. of human habitat throughout the country. The third five year plan did not set definite quantitative targets for minimizing drop outs except for the proposition that measures will be taken to ensure student retention for the full completion of the primary education cycle. However, the magnitude of drop out was considerable in 1988 and continued to be sizeable also in 1990.

In this context, it has become necessary to enlist greater support and involvement of voluntary organizations. One experiment in effective low cost breakthrough is the new school system now being pioneered by Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee by enlisting voluntary parental contribution. Aimed particularly at the children of the poor and the landless, the programme has been remarkably successful in giving three years of basic education to 8-10 years old of whom over the half are girls. Besides economic factors there are number of other socio-cultural factors which obstruct the path of
universalization. Bangladesh, being an Islamic country, does a little more than providing
Madrasha education to the female population. It is important to talk not only in terms of
more enrolment or primary schools but also in terms of the content of the primary
education. Primary education should provide the younger population with the knowledge
which will enable them to explain many things that they see and for which quite often
irrational mythological explanations are given. The development of scientific attitude, an
understanding of the role of technology and love for working with tools should be the
essential content of primary education.

1.2 Scope and Objectives

The scope of this study includes the period beginning from 1980. This is mainly
because it was in this year that Bangladesh officially endorsed the goal of UPE. The study
includes, apart from Bangladesh, the following South Asian countries - India, Pakistan,
Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bhutan and Maldives.

The objective of the study is to analyse the past performance of the UPE
programmes and to assess the problem by taking the existing operational constraints into
consideration.

The objectives of the study are specifically -

i) to obtain policy pronouncements, statements and documents highlighting
government policies with respect to UPE;
ii) to highlight the trends in age, gender, location specific enrolment and drop out ratios;

iii) to analyse the spatial distribution of the infrastructural facilities;

iv) to highlight the respective roles of formal and non-formal approaches to accelerate UPE;

v) to highlight the role of adult education programmes in promoting UPE;

vi) to assess the role played by the voluntary organizations in promoting UPE;

vii) to assess the role of international agencies such as UNESCO, UNICEF as also the role of regional organizations, particularly SAARC in promoting UPE;

viii) to analyse the contents of UPE with reference to curriculum and quality of teachers.

1.3 Hypotheses

While undertaking the study, the following hypotheses will be verified:

i) Enrolment ratios is expected to be positively correlated with curricular facilities, health and nutrition of the school going children, and economic status of parents.

ii) Schools operated by voluntary organizations are expected to sustain higher enrolment ratios.

iii) Expenditure on primary education is likely to suffer with growing non-development expenditure.
iv) Non-formal methods of primary education may be expected to improve enrolment ratios.

v) Improvement in adult literacy rates is expected to contribute further to higher enrolment ratios.

1.4 Methodology

The study is both descriptive and analytical. The statistics is collected from both primary as well as some relevant secondary sources. The various Plan documents of Government of Bangladesh such as Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information and Statistics, Constitution of Republic of Bangladesh, Statistical Yearbook of Bangladesh, Five-Year Plan Documents of Bangladesh and the major source materials. Considering the paucity of available statistics, a field work was conducted in Bangladesh to collect primary data and obtain first hand information by surveying some schools. It was carried out with the help of the voluntary and non-governmental organizations of Bangladesh - "University Research Corporation of Bangladesh" and "Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee". It provided vital information about the role of the non-governmental organizations in promoting universalization of primary education in Bangladesh. Besides, interviews were done with educationists and planners to get idea about necessary changes in policies to universalize primary education. However, the paucity of resources could not provide enough opportunity to deal with the students and take their views regarding the
atmosphere of the school environment, attitude of the teachers and relevance of the
curriculum.

1.5 Chapterisation

The study of the status of universalization of primary education in South Asia with
special reference to Bangladesh is done in nine chapters.

1.5.1 Chapter 1: Introduction

In this chapter a general idea is given about the plan and structure of the proposed
study.

1.5.2 Chapter 2: Investing in Education

This chapter deals with the role of education in economic development and gives
a theoretical framework highlighting the significance of investment in primary education.
This gives us the idea about the social rate of return and private rate of return for the
developing countries. This impact of spread of literacy on productivity is also highlighted
in this chapter.

1.5.3 Chapter 3: Status of Primary Education in South Asia

This chapter mainly deals with the policies and trends of primary education in the
South Asian region. It discusses the policies adopted by different governments to
universalize primary education in a comparative manner. This chapter will substantiate
the neglected status of primary education. Besides, this chapter will deal with some of the
success programmes of this region by highlighting the scope for better community
participation and intervention.
1.5.4 Chapter 4: Universalisation of Primary Education in Bangladesh: Formal Approaches

This chapter mainly deals with the role of the Government of Bangladesh in promoting and achieving universal primary education. This covers the period 1980-90 and deals with enrolment ratios, drop out ratios, completion rates and repetition rates. This chapter provides a regional break-up for the four regions with number of schools and teachers for each division. This chapter provides us graphical presentation showing the enrolment ratios for the last decade and the regression analysis gives us the exponential growth rate for both boys and girls for this period.

1.5.5 Chapter 5: Role of Non-Governmental and Voluntary Organisations

This chapter mainly deals with the roles played by the voluntary organizations in Bangladesh in making this programme a popular movement. Some success stories of different voluntary organizations are highlighted in order to attract the attention of other organizations. Besides a brief idea is given about the existing Madrasha Education System of Bangladesh. In this chapter the role played by these voluntary organizations to motivate both parents and students are highlighted.

1.5.6 Chapter 6: Constraints in Achieving UPE in Bangladesh

After studying both formal and non-formal approaches carried by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, this chapter deals with the constraints in achieving UPE in Bangladesh. All the socio-economic-religious-cultural factors are analysed by keeping and analysing the studies carried out by different institutions and
educationists in Bangladesh. As the scope of study does not permit to intervene at the primary level, utmost care is taken to highlight the constraints.

1.5.7 Chapter 7: Content of Primary Education

This chapter mainly deals with the quality and contents of the course that is being taught at the primary level in Bangladesh, both in governmental and non-governmental institutions. It highlights the existing indigenous form of educational system and the impact of western form of education on it. This deals with the quality of teachers and their training institutes to make them more efficient. Besides this also deals with integration of Islamic and Western education system.

1.5.8 Chapter 8: International Cooperation in Promoting UPE in Bangladesh

This chapter deals with the role of international organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF, IDA and SAARC to help the government of Bangladesh to accelerate the ongoing process of universalization of primary education. The role played by APPEAL and "Education for All" Summit are highlighted in bringing changes in the priorities to promote primary education in Bangladesh.

1.5.9 Chapter 9: Conclusions and Policy Implications

This chapter summarizes the findings of the study. This chapter intends to make some suggestions to bring changes in policies by taking the existing constraints into considerations to make this programme a successful one.