

Non-Formal Education - Information Database in the Asia-Pacific Region

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Eradication of illiteracy and ensuring full participation in educational programmes are formidable challenges. Yet it is vital for the development, indeed for the survival of the nation, that these goals are achieved within the shortest possible time. The major obstacles in Bangladesh are largely socio-economic on the demand side and structural on the supply side; and the two factors interact with and reinforce each other. No attempt for further education can succeed unless these obstacles are overcome. So far, the measures undertaken by the Government of Bangladesh have principally focused on overcoming supply side constraints and the poverty-related economic constraints. Though some of the measures are recent, the resultant improvement in participation, as reflected in increasing enrolment and retention, is very encouraging. The dropout rate is, however, still high and the gender gap in education and literacy persists. An improvement in the quality and efficiency of education and a more relevant curriculum, along with measures to overcome the constraints stemming from discriminatory and exploitative cultural traditions, values, norms and practices in all social structures, will bring about dramatic improvement and acceleration in the pace of progress.

India

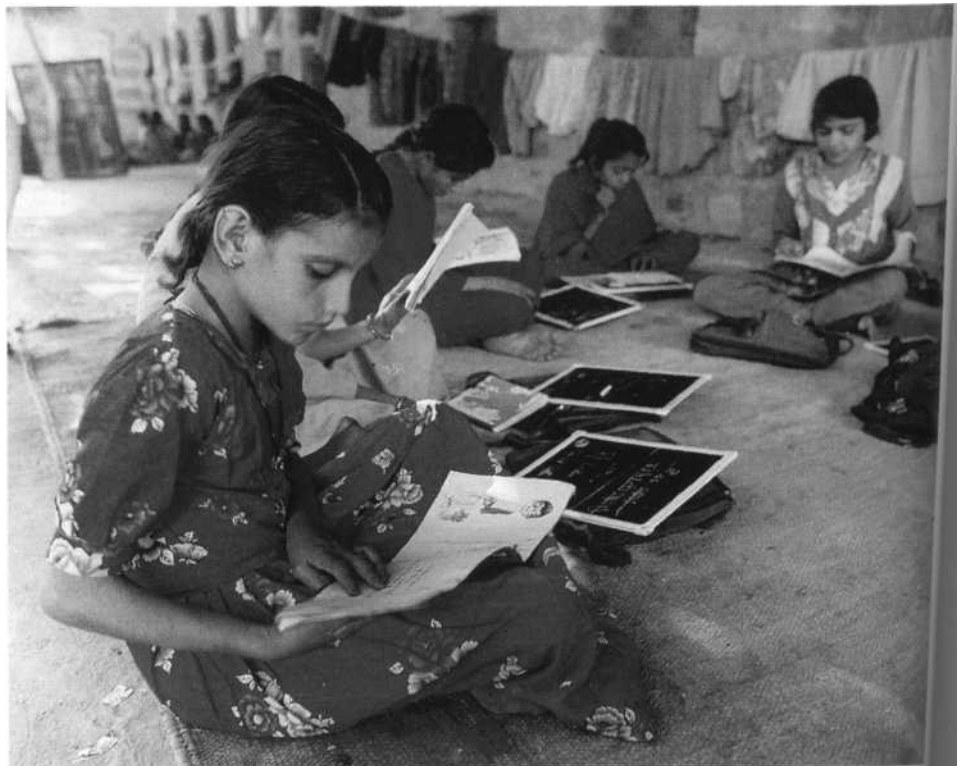
The National Policy on Education, 1986, in India gave an unqualified priority to eradication of illiteracy, through a three-pronged strategy: (i) imparting functional literacy to 100 million non-literate adults in a time-bound manner and full literacy by the turn of the century; (ii) universal free elementary education to all children up to 14 years of age; and (iii) systematic programme of non-formal education to children in the 9-14 age group not covered by formal education. The task of imparting functional literacy to adult non-literates was entrusted to the National Literacy Mission (NLM), established in 1988.

The NLM was launched as a societal and technology mission, based on an objective assessment of experiences. It tried to impart a new sense of urgency, emphasis and seriousness to the task of eradication of illiteracy. The dramatic success of literacy campaigns in the state of Kerala during 1990-91, and then in some other states, demonstrated that eradication of illiteracy is possible and achievable through a campaign approach which is area-specific, time-bound, volunteer-based, cost-effective and outcome-oriented.

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The Total Literacy Campaign (TLC) approach, which became the dominant strategy for eradication of adult illiteracy, has evolved along three principles:

- Creation of a positive climate through mass mobilisation and motivation, generating demand among non- literates for literacy and willingness among the educated to contribute and participate in the literacy campaign on a voluntary basis.
- Designing a cross-representative organisational structure and participatory management system which assures support of government and enables involvement of NGOs, voluntary agencies and all sections of civil society.
- Highly professional project implementation and management structure with in-built monitoring.



Two-three years into the TLC approach, the NLM also evolved a clear conceptualisation of the total programme in which the TLC, post literacy (PL) and continuing education (CE) are distinct stages of the learning continuum. As it now prevails, the basic features of the literacy programme in India include:

- The TLC phase of basic literacy for about 200 hours of guided learning, to reach a specified level of literacy.
- Systematic post literacy programme for stabilisation, retention, consolidation and upgradation of literacy to a self-reliant level.
- Continuing education in the perspective of lifelong learning through a variety of CE programmes and services.

TLCs are mounted after certain prelaunch preparations involving project plan formulation; initial sharing and consensus/support seeking within the administration; and with educational institutions, educated sections of the community and the people at large.

The TLC launch is marked by

- Massive environment-building for mass mobilisation, motivation and participation.
- A door-to-door survey to identify non-literates and other resources such as volunteer teachers and a matching-batching of learners and volunteer teachers.
- A massive three-tier training, starting with resource persons who train the master trainers who in turn train the volunteer teachers.
- Development, production, and distribution of the three literacy primers and other learning materials.
- Commencement of teaching-learning (T-L) centres.
- Setting up a cross- sectional, organisational management structure from district to village levels, to take on the monitoring and supervision of the T-L process and progress.
- Developing a MIS for upward flow of information for the weekly, fortnightly and monthly reviews; and a concurrent evaluation and an external evaluation, besides the internal evaluation at the end of each primer.

NLM has evolved a clear conceptualisation of the total programme in which the Total Learning Campaign, post literacy and continuing education are distinct stages of the learning continuum.

The Post Literacy Programme is taken up at the conclusion of the Total Literacy Campaign, for consolidating and upgrading the literacy levels of neo literates to a self-reliant level as well as for covering the leftouts, dropouts, and slow learners.

The Post Literacy Programme (PLP) is taken up at the conclusion of the TLC, for consolidating and upgrading the literacy levels of neo-literates to a self-reliant level as well as for covering the leftouts, dropouts, and slow learners.

The short duration, often 12-18 months, of the TLC and its hectic pace leaves little time, for objectives other than literacy such as awareness creation, functionality, organisation of neo-literates for participation in development programmes. Post literacy becomes the stage for systematic organisation of programmes for these purposes. Thus, a three-pronged strategy marks all PL programmes: 'Mopping up', to clear the backlog of uncovered learners; consolidation and upgradation of literacy to a self-reliant level; and vocational training and skill upgradation to improve the neo-literates' economic condition. The PLP seeks to create and sustain a literate and learning ambience through distribution of graded and supplementary reading-learning materials, a variety of neo-literate literature and establishment of libraries.

Literacy consolidation and upgradation, awareness-creation, functionality, application and improvement and such other objectives often get mutually reinforced through the wide range of PLP activities. Convergence of services and inter-departmental linkage in respect of sharing government laws, policies and programmes targeted at the rural and urban poor are popular in PL activity focus across the country. Programmes to improve the economic condition of the neo-literates range from education, health and hygiene to environment and skill development.

While the PLPs' organisational structures and management systems are broadly similar to those adopted during the TLC, there is greater involvement of government departments during the PLP, especially the line departments, which have an outreach to the rural and urban poor. There is also a specific thrust on building grassroots networks of neo-literates, especially among neo-literate women and youth, for greater participation in and leadership of the programme. Formation of groups and societies for savings, thrift and credit, cooperatives, etc., are focal points of organisation-building for group solidarity and collective action for improvement.

Continuing education schemes follow PL programmes. The main thrust of the CE schemes is on setting up centres to function as learning centres and also a library, reading room and a centre for

training, cultural activities and other individual interest programmes. These centres also take up certain special programmes for equivalency, quality of life improvement, income generation and individual interest promotion.

CE is envisioned as a permanent programme - centrally assisted in its first five years - and then transferred to the states. The broad approach underlining the CE programme includes flexibility in implementation strategies, long-term sustainability, community participation, and non-duplication of efforts and integration of development efforts.

In sum, three features distinguish the approach and perspective of the non-formal adult and CE programmes in India as it has emerged over the last 10 years:

- In making the initial campaign phase a mass programme wherein the administration's role is instrumental and pervasive, consciously nurturing greater space for leadership by NGOs and the community.
- During the PL phase, there is a transition from the campaign to a more systematic programme mode, and a more pronounced thrust of organisation creation among neo-literates with a view to transferring the initiative to the people.
- In both respects, most PLPs manage to make only a beginning and it is during the CE stage that this approach of planned transition to a more systematic programme mode and the process of transfer of the literacy initiative to the people becomes the major agenda. The involvement of local self-government in the leadership and management of CE is unmistakable.

There is a separate central scheme of non-formal education targeted at out-of-school children. This had been put into operation in 1979-80 to provide education of a quality comparable to the formal system to children who do not/cannot attend school, school dropouts, girls who cannot attend whole-day schools and working children. The scheme was expanded in 1987-99 and again in 1993. Currently, 2,79,000 centres have been sanctioned for imparting education to about 7 million children.

The broad approach underlining the continuing education programme includes flexibility in implementation strategies, long-term sustainability and community participation.