

ILLITERACY

"Are those equal, those who know and those who don't know."

1. INTRODUCTION:

It is now a universally recognized fact that mass education is a pre-requisite for the development and prosperity of a country. The main priority of the developing countries, in recent years has been to foster the development and renewal of primary education and to eliminate illiteracy. Pakistan, unfortunately, like the other under developed countries, has made little progress in this aspect. Since independence, she continues to remain in the group of countries with the lowest literacy rate.

Half of the world's illiterate and 22 percent of the world's population live in South Asia. Pakistan does not fare well on account of literacy within the region. Sri Lanka and Maldives have almost attained full literacy. The adult literacy rate for India is 61 as compared to 53 percent in Pakistan. India, according to a recent study done by the World Bank, has attained 100 percent Gross Enrollment ratio (GER) and 90 percent Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) at the primary level.

2. MEANING OF ILLITERACY:

For an Adult, illiteracy means primitive manual labour in agriculture and industry, uncertain employment opportunities and low wages, life-long miserable living conditions, and humiliating dependence on the literates of the community for the day-to-day civic and business interactions and deprivation in all walks of life. For adults illiteracy also means exclusion from most of economic, social and cultural activities.

For the Out-of-school Children, illiteracy means forced labour, vagrancy, sickness and slavery.

For Women, literacy is a survival kit and symbol of status. It means emancipation, participation in the decision making of the family and equality.

3. IMPORTANCE OF LITERACY:

Illiteracy is a small pane in a large window, opening into the world of knowledge based on reading and writing as one of the earliest cultural activities of mankind. Mankind's civilization, and its accumulation, sharing and transmission of knowledge over the centuries has been made possible by written and readable words. Every Muslim knows that the first command revealed by Allah to the Holy Prophet of Islam Muhammad (PBUH) was 'READ'.

Literacy, over the centuries, has become the lever of human progress and the leveler of social and economic conditions. It is a basic human need, and human right to knowledge. Illiteracy is brake on human development, and maps of illiteracy – poverty, underdevelopment, social discrimination and disease are always co-incident. It is a challenge to human dignity and imposes a second-class status on a person in all societies. Life without literacy is life without hope, security and freedom.

4. CRITERIA FOR DETERMINING THE LITERACY STATUS:

The literacy status of a country is determined by the following parameters:

- I. The existing level of literacy.
- II. The rate on increment of new literates.
- III. The volume of the education system's output.
- IV. The demographic factors engage structure, mortality and birth rate.
- V. The last but not the least is the percentage of budget engaged for the education.

5. RAISING THE LITERACY RATE:

Countries have succeeded in raising their literacy rates by taking the following steps:

- I. Universalization of primary education.
- II. Providing non-formal primary education facilities for out of school youth and dropouts.
- III. Launching countrywide programmes for adults backed by political leadership.
- IV. Broad involvement of various social groups, institutions, public and voluntary organizations etc.

6. ILLITERACY SCENARIO IN PAKISTAN:

The picture of illiteracy in Pakistan is grim. Although successive governments have announced various programmes to promote literacy, especially among women, but they have been unable to translate their words into actions because of various political, social and cultural obstacles. Access to basic education is the right of every individual. Education is the most important instrument in enhancing human capabilities, and in achieving the desired objectives of economic development. Education enables individuals to make informed choices, broaden their horizons and opportunities and to have a voice in public decision-making. It is one of the most important factors that act as a counterweight to social and economic mobility imposed by cultural and historical biases. Education is a vehicle of nation building through which a nation's shared interpretation of history and cultural values are reproduced across generations. At the country level, education means strong economic growth due to productive and skilled labor force. At the individual level, education is strongly correlated to higher returns in earning and a more informed and aware existence. The emerging global scenario offers immense opportunities and challenges, and only those nations can benefit from it, which have acquired the required knowledge base and skills.

There are 163,000 primary schools in Pakistan, of which merely 40,000 cater to girls. According to UNICEF, 17.6 per cent of Pakistani children are working and supporting their families.

7. CAUSES OF ILLITERACY IN PAKISTAN:

- 1) Half-hearted planning and management of literacy and continuing education.
- 2) Limited budget.
- 3) Lack of reliable statistics and research researchers.
- 4) Weak community participation.
- 5) Lack of multimedia material.
- 6) Lack of special skilled textbook writers.
- 7) Poor follow up of programmes.
- 8) In-service teachers do not take such work seriously.
- 9) Dependence on foreign aid.
- 10) Dropout rate is high.
- 11) Over-crowded classrooms.
- 12) Panacea of private sector.
- 13) Outdated curriculum.
- 14) Problems of higher education; brain drain etc.
- 15) Corruption.
- 16) Rote learning.
- 17) Unfair examinations.

18) Lack of adequate facilities such as clean water, electricity etc. in the rural schools.

8. EFFECTS OF ILLITERACY:

- 1) Over-population.
- 2) Low-GDP and per capita income.
- 3) Increase unskilled labour.
- 4) Infant mortality and maternal mortality.
- 5) Political instability.
- 6) Poor use of natural resources.
- 7) Heavy international debts.
- 8) Child labour.
- 9) Poor international image.
- 10) Low per acre agriculture yield.
- 11) Halting industrial growth and less trade activities.

9. PRESENT GOVERNMENT POLICY:

According to World Bank Report, Pakistan's spending on public sector education is only 2.3 per cent of the GDP and this is much lower than the south Asian average of 3.6 per cent and the low-income countries' average of 3.4 per cent

I. Millennium Development Goals (MDGs):

Pakistan has committed to all the International declaration to extend the agenda of providing the basic right of education to all of its citizens. Pakistan is among the signatories of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) as well as the Dakar World Education Forum 2000. The Government of Pakistan has taken several policy and program initiatives to achieve these international goals since then. The National Plan of Action for Education for all was initiated in response to the commitment made at Dakar for World Summit. The Education Reform Action Plan (ESR), which is built upon the National Education Policy 1998-2010, is a long-term plan, with three yearly action plans. The ESR addresses the development of the overall education sector through investment in rehabilitation of schools, improving the curriculum and assessment reform system, an adult literacy campaign, mainstreaming the Madressahs, a pilot school nutrition program and technical stream in secondary schools. The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) views education as a strong policy instrument in bringing poverty down.

Three main goals that are the underlying objectives of all of these programs and initiatives include universal access to primary education by increasing the net enrollment and higher rate of survival of children till grade 5, increase in the adult literacy rate and to attain gender equality at all levels.

Currently, adult literacy rate is 53 percent; net enrollment at the primary level is 52 per cent, retention rate for 2004- 05 is noted as 61 per cent and significant gender gaps at all levels especially in the rural areas persist. Public spending on education as a percentage of GDP is 2.1 per cent and has approximately increased by less than one percentage point since 2000-01.

II. Education Institutions and Enrollment

Attainment of Universal Primary Education (UPE) has become a compelling national priority. This is a challenge that has been accepted at the highest level in the federal and provincial governments. UPE is anticipated to increase in access to education by 4%, reduction in gender disparity by 10% and enhancing primary completion rate by 5% per annum. In the past year, 2187 new primary schools were established, 1221 in the public sector and 881 in the private sector. This increase has occurred in both rural and urban areas. Statistical annexure table 9.1 and 9.2, show the number of

the girls in the primary and middle school in year 2004-05. The expansion in the number of institutions is inconsistent with the need to provide easy access to the half the country's school going population. The public sector was able to establish only 999 new primary schools for girls in 2004-05. The responsibility of expanding the primary and middle schools for girls has been devolved to District Governments under the devolution plan.

III. Primary education

Two main indicators that show the changes in the primary schooling are Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) and Net Enrolment rate (NER). The last four years have witnessed 14 percentage points increase in the gross primary enrollment which is more than 3 percentage point per annum increase on average. This increase from 72 percent in 2001-02 to 86 percent in 2004-05 is a result of targeted and resilient policies of the government. Adoption of free provision of universal basic education policies in the provinces (except Balochistan) is gradually delivering the promised increase in the enrolment rate. In the urban areas, the GER is impressive in all provinces, ranging from 84 percent in Balochistan to 108 percent in Punjab. In the rural areas, Punjab has made a marked progress, particularly in female GER, which increased from 61 percent in 2001-02 to 82 percent in 2004-05. The Gender gap has also seen an improvement at the primary level in Punjab and has been modest in Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan.

IV. Gender gap

Gender disparity in literacy and enrollment is one of the key concerns of the Government. Pakistan's overall record in promoting and delivering gender equality has been weak. There are, however, areas in which significant progress has been made and indicators point to a steady though slow improvement in the ratio of girls to boys at all levels of education, the ratio of literate females to males, share of women in urban employment (as proxy indicator for share of women in wage employment in non-agricultural sector) has improved marginally and improvement in participation of women in national decision making process.

Statistics show that gender disparity has been declining since 1998-99, however the recent decline is only marginal from 26 percent in 2001-02 to 25 percent in 2004-05. Reducing gender gap in education at all level will ensure equality of opportunity and economic participation for females. Gender disparity in literacy is lower in urban areas where it is 16 percent, as compared to 29 percent in rural areas in 2004-05. In fact there has been no progress in reducing the gender gap either between the urban and rural areas or between genders in both areas.

V. Public Private Partnership

The Community Support Rural Schools Program (CSRSP) is NEF's largest program and it encourages pilot innovations to promote education in rural areas. Notable among them are Child Friendly School Program and Education for Working Children. Currently, 260 schools are running under CSRSP with an enrollment of 23300 students and another 350 schools are established in 2005 supported by NORAD. Moreover, teacher training has been a significant component of CSRSP, with the goal to enable in-service community teachers to re-learn modern pedagogical principles and techniques to manage today's classrooms.

VI. Higher Education Commission

Pakistan is ranked amongst the lowest in the world in higher education enrollment rates at 2.9 percent. Other Asian developing countries, such as India and Korea, stand at 10 percent and 68 percent respectively. According to a report of the

steering committee for higher education in 2001, only 2.6 percent of the students between the ages 17-23 enrolled in universities, which have increased to 2.9 in 2005. The target is to double enrollment in the next five years by increasing the capacity of the existing higher education institutions and also establishing new ones. The quality of education provided is not up to the mark, which can be gauged from the fact that not a single Pakistani university is ranked among the top 500 universities of the world.

VII. Financing of Education in the public sector

Public expenditure on education as a percentage to GDP is lowest in Pakistan as compared to other countries of the South Asian region. Pakistan spends 2.1 percent of it's GDP on education as compared to India which spends 4.1 percent, Bangladesh 2.4 percent and Nepal spends 3.4 percent.

VIII. National Education Assessment System

National Education Assessment System (NEAS) is a World Bank funded project with a total cost of Rs. 319.364 million including foreign exchange component with World Bank share of Rs. 273.110 million. The government of Pakistan is committed to improve the quality of education at all levels. The NEAS is one of the key programs of the Ministry meant to improve the quality of education at elementary level, with the objective to measure learning achievements of grade 4 and 5 students, to develop capacity in educational assessment related activities, to institutionalization of sustainable monitoring system and information dissemination.

IX. Curriculum Development

The curriculum development is an on going process to respond to global challenges and emerging trends. This process has been initiated in collaboration with the federal units and provincial and regional governments (AJ&K, FATA). The present government realizing the importance of vibrant and dynamic curriculum has decided to review /revise curriculum of class 1 to 8. The committee has initiated consultative meetings to develop a curriculum reflecting the latest trends in individual subjects as well as equipping the education of the country with the requirement of today and tomorrow.

10. SUGGESTIONS:

- 1) A uniform education policy.
- 2) Ability and merit must be declared as corner stones of our national life.
- 3) Adequate educational facilities.
- 4) Removal of fake schools; 23000 present in whole country.
- 5) Fair examination system.
- 6) Updated curriculum.
- 7) High standard of academic research.
- 8) Removal of corruption.
- 9) Training of teachers.
- 10) Removal of rote learning.

"Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive; easy to govern, but impossible to enslave."