

INTRODUCTION

The achievement of Universal Primary Education in developing countries has been set as an educational goal by a number of high level international meetings since the 1960s. Some individual member states have declared as long ago as the nineteenth century their determination to provide primary education for every child. Yet for a great many of them this goal has remained stubbornly unattainable.

In recognition of the continuing efforts by member governments to make progress towards that objective, the Seventh Commonwealth Education Conference in Accra (1977) recommended, inter alia, that "the Commonwealth Secretariat, in consultation with the governments concerned, should assemble information on the steps being taken to implement programmes of universal primary education in member countries and make this information available to other countries." As a response to this recommendation, the Secretariat commissioned and published in 1979, a study entitled "Progress Towards Universal Primary Education: A Commonwealth Survey".

A further recommendation of the Accra Conference was that "the Secretariat be asked to consider arranging a series of meetings on universal primary education, beginning with countries that are farthest from achieving it. The regional seminar in Dacca, Bangladesh of which this is the Report, was the first of such meetings. It brought together representatives from member countries in Asia and the Pacific to examine progress towards UPE in their regions, formulate possible conclusions concerning the educational and administrative implications of UPE and consider alternative strategies through which it may be more effectively achieved in member countries.

As will be seen from the Report, the discussions pointed to a number of factors that make UPE particularly difficult to implement. Some of these factors are common to every country, others are peculiar to the countries concerned. But it was evident that given sufficient political will and adequate advance planning, UPE could be achieved with enrolments maintained at a level as high as 90% and above.

This report presents a summary of the deliberations at the seminar and recommendations which participants believed would go a long way in facilitating progress towards UPE. It is offered to member states as part of the Secretariat's continuing efforts to encourage the exchange of educational information and Commonwealth experience.

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