

UNIT 15

Education in SAARC Countries:

Case Studies-I

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Learning Objectives

This unit aims to:

- appraise the education scenario in SAARC countries;
- explain economic and educational development in SAARC countries;
- discuss country wise educational development in these countries; and
- explain educational reforms and strategies adopted by the government of SAARC countries.

15.1 Introduction

In the previous Unit 14, you have already studied the issues of pluralism, and multiculturalism in education. The geo-political region of SAARC represents a varied context of pluralism and multiculturalism. In this unit, we shall apprise you with the economic and social scenario of SAARC region and discuss strategies adopted by the governments of the SAARC countries for education as well as educational reforms in their respective countries.

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) was established when its Charter was formally adopted on December 8, 1985 by the heads of Government of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka – the seven South Asian countries. It aims to accelerate the process of economic and social development in these countries.

These countries have many common historical, geographical, climatic and socio-economic features and also common disadvantages of educational backwardness. In recent years there has been a considerable expansion of educational opportunities and significant scientific and technological advance in the region. However, there are disparities between and within SAARC countries in terms of urban and rural, gender, class and ethnic consideration.

The South Asian economies have grown at an average growth rate of more than 5 per cent over the last 20 years. However, about 40 per cent of the people of this region still live below the poverty line. It also represents 40 per cent of the world's non-literate population. Only two-thirds of the total number school-age children enrol in schools, and more than 40 per cent of them drop out before reaching the fifth grade. Thus, the fraction of children who are able to continue up to fifth grade (completing primary education) is rather low. Sri Lanka and Bhutan however, are able to maintain their enrolment at about 90% - pretty close to China's numbers, Nepal's is above 75%, Bangladesh's is at 65% while India's is at less than 60%. This is a reflection, in India at least, inefficiency of literacy programs (where children are superficially exposed to

some form of reading and writing rather than a sustained effort at providing these basic skills to children). (<http://www.thesouthasian.org/archives>). Hence, these countries, which comprise one-sixth of the world's population face many challenges of economic development in general and educational development in particular. The challenge is enormous, where the world's lowest per capita income of \$ 309 exist in this regions (Rampal, A. 2000).

15.2 Education Scenario in SARRC Countries

The educational programme has been provided through government, non-government agencies, i.e., NGO communities, and the private sector of the SAARC countries. For instance, in Nepal schools are being transferred by the government to communities for day-to-day management. In Bangladesh NGOs play an important role in providing primary education, and the government subsidizes an almost fully privately managed secondary education system. Three million children do not have access to primary education in Bangladesh, while in Pakistan the number is probably closer to eight million. India accounts for one fourth of the world's 104 million out of school children. It leads to social debt accumulated in a low adult literacy rate with a large number of children out of school and high incidence of school dropouts.

Of the total population in the SAARC region, 75.18 per cent is in India followed by Pakistan (11.04%), and Bangladesh (10.46%) respectively. The Rest of the countries have less than 2 per cent of the population each as shown in Table 1. Enrolment rates at primary level in all these countries have risen rapidly between 1990-2000. Enrolment rate at the secondary level was significantly lower, but has shown a substantial increase recently. For example, in Bangladesh net enrolment rates at the secondary level have risen from 16 to 32 per cent between 1999-2000. In India, gross secondary enrolment rates have risen from 40 to 50 per cent over the same period. In Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives gender parity has also been improved at the secondary level. At the tertiary level, enrolment rates in the region have increased by 10 per cent. These countries are having high dropout and repetition rates and lowest rates of completion of education at the primary level in the world. Of all the students who start the primary education, less than 10 % complete it and go to the secondary education. Moreover, those who complete their education perform poorly in their respective examination. For instance, in Bangladesh and India only less than 40 per cent of students pass 10th and 12th standard examination.

Table 15.1: Population, Literacy and Public Expenditure on Education in SAARC Countries

Countries	Population ¹ In 2005 in thousands	Per centage to total South Asian Countries	Per centage of adult illiterate (age +15 years) population (2000)	Public expenditure on Education as % of GNP (2000)
Bangladesh	152592	10.46	59.2	2.5
Bhutan	2392	0.16	40.0	5.2
India	1096917	75.18	44.2	4.1
Maldives	337	0.02	56.0	3.7
Nepal	26289	1.80	58.6	3.4
Pakistan	161151	11.04	56.7	1.8
Sri Lanka	19367	1.33	8.4	3.1

¹ <http://esa.un.org/unup>; <http://devdata.worldbank.org/edstats/summary>

15.3 State of Education in Different SAARC Countries

SAARC countries are focusing on attaining the targets specified in the Millennium Development Goal by 2015. These goals provide tangible benchmarks for measuring progress in eight areas, with a target date for most of them of 2015. These goals are presented in the following box:

Millennium Development Goals	
Goal 1	Eradicate extreme number of poverty. Lowering the proportion of people living on less than \$ 1 a day and having malnutrition.
Goal 2	Achieve universal primary education. Ensuring that all children are able to complete primary education.
Goal 3	Promote gender equality and empower women. Eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary schooling, preferably by 2005 and no later than 2015.
Goal 4	Reduce child mortality. Cutting the under-five death rate by two thirds.
Goal 5	Improve maternal health. Reducing the maternal mortality rate by three-quarters.
Goal 6	Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases. Halting and beginning to reverse HIV/AIDS and other diseases.
Goal 7	Ensure environmental stability. Cutting by half the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation.
Goal 8	Develop a global partnership for development. Reforming aid and trade with special treatment for the poorest countries.

Source: *Human Development Report 2005* (<http://www.undp.org>).

In the forthcoming discussion, we shall apprise you with the current economic and education scenario of each of the countries of SAARC and government strategies to achieve its target related to education.

Bangladesh

Bangladesh ranks as one of the poorest nations of the world. The economy of Bangladesh is underdeveloped and depends almost entirely on agriculture. About half of its GDP is generated through service sector despite the fact that two-thirds of its people are employed in the agriculture sector. About 82 per cent of the people of Bangladesh live in rural areas. The per capita gross national income was US \$ 440 in 2004. The annual growth rate in Bangladesh has 6 per cent in 2005.

For decades Bangladesh has remained educationally backward even though a section of the population is highly educated. Education was mainly reserved for the rich people under British rule. The language of transaction was English as schools were run by religious nuns and British people. After British rule, Bangladesh came under Pakistani regime as the state of East Pakistan. During the Pakistani era along with Bengali, Urdu also became the medium of instruction. Bangladesh became an independent nation in 1971.

In Bangladesh, the literacy rate is low and there is a significant disparity between female and male literacy rates. Only about 30 per cent of all Bangladeshis can read and write. However, with the government and NGOs' intervention in recent years, literacy rate has been going up. The education system is divided into 4 levels— Primary (from grades 1 to 5), Secondary (from grades 6 to 10), Higher Secondary (grades 11 and 12) and tertiary. Alongside

national educating system, English medium education is also provided by some private enterprises. There is also Madrasa system which emphasizes Arabic medium Islam-based education. This system is supervised by the Madrasa Board of the country

The Government spent 2.4 per cent of GDP on education during 2003. The adult literacy rate was 41.1 per cent in 2003 in the country. The gross enrolment ratio was 95.9 per cent at the primary level, 47.5 per cent at the secondary level and 6.2 per cent at the tertiary level in 2003. On the other hand, the net enrolment ratio was 84 per cent at the primary level and 44.5 per cent at the secondary level. The completion rate was 73.3 per cent at the primary level in 2003. The ratio of students to teachers was 55.7 per cent at the primary level during the same year. Bangladesh has about 31,700 elementary and high schools and about 300 colleges and technical schools. The University of Dhaka is the nation's largest university. Dhaka is also the home of the Jahangirnagar University and Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology. Other universities are in Chittagong, Mymensing (Agricultural University), Khulna (Shahjalal Science and Technology University), Rajshahi and Sylhat. There is an Open University in Dhaka.

Reflection and Action 15.1

On the basis of experience gained from this unit, what according to you, may be the right approach to consider for achieving education for all (EFA) in your country?

Bhutan

Bhutan is one of the smallest and least developed economies. The primary sector (agriculture and forestry), provides the main source of livelihood for more than 90% of the population. The secondary (industrial) sector is technologically backward. However, the natural beauty of Bhutan attracts the attention of a large number of tourists there. Very recently modern education, social development, and environment programs are underway with support from multilateral development organizations. The per capita gross national income was US \$ 590, 720 and 760 during 2002, 2003 and 2004 respectively. The annual growth rate was 7 per cent in 2002 and 2003, and 5 per cent in 2004.

Bhutan adopts a 7 years primary followed by 4 years of secondary education leading to tertiary education. At present, about 87% of students, reaching the end of primary (grade VI) continue to the next level of education, while others repeat and a few drop out. Students have to appear at the National Examination at the end of the class VIII, X and XII. At the end the higher secondary education students enroll at the only undergraduate college in the country and go to other countries for high studies. Bhutan has a national curriculum. A major policy shift in recent times is to make secondary education more relevant by introducing a basic skills training programme in the form of clubs and introducing career counseling or orient youth to the world of work. Before the introduction of modern education, the only form of education provided in Bhutan was monastic education. At present, Bhutan has 433 schools, with enrolment 135,987. Girl students' enrolment at the primary level is 48.4%. The emerging trends indicate that the girls are outnumbering the boys in some of the urban schools. One of the main policy objectives is to enhance the quality of education in order to achieve competency in language, communication skills and mathematics comparable to international standards. Information and communication technology has been incorporated into the school curriculum (<http://www.lbe.unesco.org>).

The country spent 5.2 per cent of GDP on education in 2000. The completion rate was 45.6 per cent at the primary level in 2003 and students reaching at grade 5 were 91 per cent in 2000. The ratio of students to teachers was

37.9 per cent at primary level and 33.6 per cent at the secondary level in 2003. The country has shown improvement in the last couple of years.

India

The Indian economy encompasses rural people, modern agriculture, handicrafts and a wide range of modern industries and services. The service sector has shown phenomenal growth in recent years, even though more than 52% of the workforce is engaged in agriculture. The per capita gross national income was US \$ 620 during 2004. The annual growth rate was 7 per cent during 2004-05 (www.finmin.nic.in).

India has achieved phenomenal educational development since independence. India's expenditure on education as a per centage of GDP increased from 0.64 per cent in 1951 to 4.11 per cent in 2000-01. However, the national goals of universal elementary education and total eradication of illiteracy have still remained a distant dream. India spent 4.1 per cent of GDP on education during 2002 but about 40 per cent of its adult population still remains to be made literate.

The adult literacy rate (age 15+) was 61.3% in 2003. Gross enrolment ratio (GER) has increased from 32.1 per cent in 1950-51 to 82.5 per cent in 2002-03. The rate of increase in GER for girls has been higher than that of boys as presented in Table 2. The rates of drop out have decreased from 64.9 per cent in 1960-61 to 40.7 per cent 2000-01 in primary classes. Similarly, the rate of dropouts, which was 78.3 per cent in 1960-61, has come down to 53.7 per cent in 2000-01 in the upper primary classes.

Table 15.2 : Gross Enrolment Ratio during 1950-51 and 2002-03

Level	1950-51			2002-03		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Primary (I-V)	60.6	24.8	42.6	97.5	93.1	95.4
Secondary (VI-VIII)	20.6	4.6	12.7	65.3	56.6	61.0
Elementary (I-VIII)	46.4	17.7	32.1	85.4	79.3	82.5

Source: Annual Report 2005, MHRD

In India, the literacy rate has increased in 2001 to 64.8 per cent from 52.21 per cent in 1991. Significantly the growth rate of literacy was more in rural areas than in urban areas. Again the female literacy rate increased (14.41%) more than male literacy rate (11.17%) during the same period. Moreover, the number of non-literate population declined from 328.88 million in 1991 to 304 million in 2001. There has been considerable increase in the growth of educational institutions also. During the last 5 decades the number of primary schools increased by three times, while the upper primary schools and higher secondary schools increased by 15 and 17 times respectively. The number of colleges for general education and professional education increased by about 21 and 11 times respectively, while the number of universities increased by 9 times during the same period.

In the Tenth Five Year Plan (2002-07), the Government of India initiated various steps towards achieving education for all. During this period along with *Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan (SSA)*, other schemes have been introduced, which include:

- National Programme for Education of Girls at Elementary Level (NPEGEL),
- Education Guarantee Scheme and Alternative and Innovative Education (EGS & AIE),

- District Primary Education Programme (DPEP),
- National Programme of Nutritional Support to Primary Education (NP-NSPE), known as the Mid-Day Meal Scheme
- Strengthening of Teacher Education,
- *Kasturba Gandhi Balika Vidyalaya (KGBV)*, and
- *Mahila Samakhya*.

SSA is a time-bound mission, with the objectives of ensuring Universalisation of Elementary Education and bridging gender and social gaps by the year 2010. The Government of India recently opened 66,147 elementary schools, constructed 17,454 new elementary school buildings and 33,777 additional classrooms and appointed 310,506 additional teachers under SSA scheme in 2004-05. NPEGEL is an important component of SSA and it provides additional support for girls' education in educationally backward blocks by way of girl-child friendly schools, stationery, uniforms etc., for elementary education of under privileged/disadvantage girls. EGS and AIE is another important component of SSA, which is specially designed to provide access to elementary education to children in school-less habitations and out of school children. Elementary education has been provided to 856.7 thousands children under this scheme during 2004-05. DPEP was launched in 1994 in 42 districts of seven states with the aim of providing access to primary education for all children, reducing primary dropouts rates to less than 10 per cent, increasing learning achievements of primary school students by at least 25 per cent and reducing gender and social gaps to less than 5 per cent. The programme is now implemented in 272 districts of 18 states and it is now continuing in 129 districts of 9 States. KGBV scheme was launched in August 2004 with the aim of setting up 750 residential schools at elementary level for girls belonging predominately Backward Blocks (EBBs), where female literacy was below the national average and gender gap in literacy was more than the national average. Government has approved 662 KGBVs during 2004-05. Value of EFA Developed Index (EDI), developed by UNESCO, has improved in the case of India from 0.658 in 2003 to 0.696 in 2004 (www.education.nic.in). The educational policies of India will be dealt in detail in Unit No. 18 of this Block.

Maldives

Tourism industry is the backbone of Maldives' economy. It accounts for 20 per cent of GDP and more than 60 per cent of the Maldives' foreign exchange receipts. 90 per cent of government tax revenue comes from import duties and tourism-related taxes. Fishing is the second leading sector. Agriculture and manufacturing continue to play a lesser role in the economy, constrained by the limited availability of cultivable land and the shortage of domestic labor. Industry, which consists mainly of garment production, boat building, and handicrafts, accounts for about 18% of GDP. The per capita gross national income was US \$ 2350 in 2003.

The country spent 3.7 per cent of GDP on education in 2000. The adult literacy rate (age 15 +) was 97.2 per cent in 2003. The duration of education consists of 7 years for primary level and 5 years for secondary level. The gross enrolment ratio was 101.3 per cent at the primary level, 48.5 per cent at the secondary level and 10.0 per cent at the tertiary level in 2003. The net enrolment ratio was 92.4 per cent at the primary level and 51.4 per cent at the secondary level during the same year. The ratio of students to teachers was 20.0 per cent at the primary level and 15.0 per cent at the secondary level.

Higher education in Maldives is provided by the Maldives College of Higher Education (MCHHE), College of Islamic Studies (CIS) and Centre for Continuing Education (CCE). Many students pursue higher education and training overseas. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), is the government

agency responsible for facilitating the growth of higher education and training and to provide policy and logistical guidance to the sector in Maldives. At present, 2600 students are enrolled in certificate, diploma and degree programmes in these institutions. Private sector participation in higher and continuing education is growing. Presently, eighty-six private institutions are registered with the Government. It is estimated that about 3000 students would be enrolled with these institutions in the near future.

The Maldives Accreditation Board (MAB) of the DHET manages the Maldives National Qualifications Framework (MNQF). This Framework consists of 11 levels of qualifications including Certificate I, Certificate II, Certificate III, Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree. MNQF sets out minimum entry requirements, credit hours and credit points for each of the 11 qualifications. All qualifications issued by MCHE and private institutions must fit into the requirements of one of the 11 qualifications of MNQF. MNQF provides a coherent framework that facilitates quality improvement, quality assurance, and private sector participation in post-secondary education. (<http://www.aparnet.org>)

Nepal

The economy of Nepal is one of the poorest and least developed in the world. About 40 per cent of its population lives below the poverty line. Agriculture is the mainstay of the economy, providing a livelihood to over 80% of the population and accounting for 40% of GDP. Industrial activity mainly involves the processing of agriculture production including jute, sugarcane, tobacco and grain. The small size of the economy, technological backwardness, remoteness, its landlocked geographical location, civil strife, and vulnerability to natural disasters are the characteristics of economy of the Nepal. The per capita income was US \$ 230, 240 and 260 during 2002, 2003 and 2004. The annual growth rate was -1 per cent, 3 per cent and 4 per cent during the same period.

The country spent 3.4 per cent of its GDP on education in 2000. The adult literacy rate (Age 15+) was 44 per cent in 2003. The duration of education was 5 years for completing primary level, and 7 years for secondary level. The gross enrolment ratio was 119.3 per cent at the primary level, 45 per cent at the secondary level and 5.3 per cent at the tertiary level in 2003. The completion rate was 78.1 per cent at the primary level and 64.9 per cent at the secondary level during the same year. The ratio of students to teachers was 35.7 per cent at the primary level and 34.7 per cent at the secondary level (www.moe.gov.np). Nepal has also formulated its priorities towards achievement of its target i.e. 'education for all'. Some of them are:

- to eradicate illiteracy by the end of the 12th five year plan;
- to expand National Literacy Campaign gradually in all the 75 districts. Priority to low literacy rate geographical locations;
- to reduce gap between male and female literacy rate. Priority to women, girls and other disadvantaged groups in promotion of literacy. Undertake appropriate advocacy and motivational measures;
- to strengthen mechanisms for co-ordination among GOs/NGOs/INGOs at different levels (grassroots level to national level). Mobilize more NGOs/INGOs to launch national literacy;
- to provide basic education; equivalency programmes;
- special literacy classes for prisoners in the jails;
- to emphasize on gender sensitivity in literacy classes (<http://www.aacu.or.jp>)

Pakistan

Pakistan is an underdeveloped country and has low levels of foreign investment. The Government of Pakistan has made macro economic reforms during the last couple of years. The country has raised development spending from 2 per cent of GDP in the 1990s to 4 per cent in 2003, which was essential for reversing the broad underdevelopment of its social sector. The per capita income was US \$ 600 in 2004. The annual growth rate was 6 per cent during the same period.

Since independence, attempts have been made by the governments to relate the education system to the needs and aspirations of the country. The 1973 Constitution made it mandatory for the state to promote with special care the educational and economic interests of backward areas, remove illiteracy and provide free and compulsory secondary education within minimum possible period, make technical and professional education generally available and higher education equally accessible to all. The country spent 1.8 per cent of GDP on education in 2000. The adult literacy rate (age 15+) was 41.5% in 2000. The duration of education was 5 years for primary level, 7 years for secondary level and 5 years for compulsory schooling. The gross enrolment ratio was 68.5 per cent at the primary level, 22.5 per cent at the secondary level and 2.8 per cent at the tertiary level in 2003. The net enrolment ratio was 59.1 per cent at the primary level in 2000. The ratio of students to teachers was 40.4 per cent at the primary level in 2003.

Presently country is facing major challenges due to low literacy rate particularly for rural females, inadequate access, high dropout rate, teacher absenteeism, shortage of trained and qualified teachers, poor management and infrastructure, lack of physical facilities, low operating budget, outdated and irrelevant curricula, and political interference. The government has designed Education Sector Reforms (ESRs) on the long-term perspective of National Education Policy, 1998-2010 and ten-year Perspective Development Plan, 2001-2011. The targeted groups for EFA goals include disadvantaged communities emphasizing the needs of out-of-school children particularly girls and illiterate girls and women.

The prime objectives of Education Sector Reforms are (a) universalization of primary education and adult literacy; (b) mainstreaming Madarasas to diversify employment opportunities for the graduates; (c) strengthening the quality of education through better teachers, upgraded training options, curriculum and textbook reforms, and competency based examination system; (d) improving the relevance of education – introducing a third stream of gender and area specific technical and vocational education at secondary level with innovative approaches for students' counselling; and setting up mono-technic/polytechnics at District and Tehsil levels.

Some of the major achievements of ESRs program up to 30th June 2002 are: 10,000 schools rehabilitated and 2000 NFBE schools opened and 6000 Adult Literacy Centers established, Technical Stream introduced in 50 secondary schools during 2001-02, 385 science labs constructed, First women's polytechnic established at Quetta, revised/updated National Curriculum & Textbooks for Class I to XII and National Educational Assessment System (NEAS) launched (www.moe.gov.pk).

Sri Lanka

Sri Lankan economy revolves on food processing, textiles, food and beverages, tele-communications, and insurance and banking sector. GDP grew at an average annual growth rate of 5.5 per cent in the early 1990s. The economy rebounded in 1997-2000 with average growth of 5.3 per cent, but saw the first contraction in the country's history, – 1.4 per cent in 2001, due to combination of power

shortages, then several budgetary problems etc. Growth recovered to 4 per cent in 2002 and 6 per cent in 2003 and 2004. The per capita income was US \$, 1010 in 2004.

The present educational system in Sri Lanka derived from the British educational system, which was introduced by the British colonial masters in the 19th century. The British colonial government established colleges for boys and girls separately. These colleges consisted of primary schools, lower secondary schools and higher secondary schools. In 1938, education in Government schools was made free of charge as a consequence of the Universal Franchise granted in 1931. Many Government schools called *Maha Vidyalayas* were started in all parts of the country. The medium of education of these institutions was either Sinhala or Tamil.

The Government of Sri Lanka spent 3.1 per cent of GDP on education in 2000. The adult literacy rate (age 15 +) was 92.1 per cent in 2003. The duration of education consists of 5 years for primary level, 8 years for secondary level. The gross enrolment ratio was 110.5 per cent at the primary level, 86.5 per cent at the secondary level in 2003. The primary completion rate was 98.1 per cent in 2000. The ratio of students to teachers was 23.4 per cent at the primary level in 2003. At present, some of the priorities of Government of Sri Lanka are:

- to provide compulsory education to all children between the ages of 5-14 years;
- to provide educational opportunities for those who have failed to enter the formal education system or those who have dropped out;
- to prepare alternative structures through non-formal education for continuing education.

Reflection and Action 15.2

What have been the major concerns of educational reforms in SAARC countries?

15.4 Education in SARRC Countries: An Overview

The above case studies have given an idea of the educational development and governments efforts for educational reforms in SAARC countries. Despite their efforts, issues like poverty, women's education, dropouts and scarcity of funds for providing education for all still exist in this region. The *Human Development Report in South Asia, 2003* underlines the issue of employment which raises concern about the current patterns of economic growth and trade, the systems of education and training, the protection of the rights of all workers including women and children, and the global trading rules as they impact on food and livelihood security of the poor people.

The SAARC countries face the common problem of women's education. In developing countries as a whole, there has been an appreciable increase in female literacy in the past two decades. In the Arab States female literacy increased by more than two-thirds. In East Asia female literacy is 83%, and in Latin America and the Caribbean it is 87%. In South Asia it is only 55 per cent. This is the only region in the world where women are far outnumbered by men (94 women for 100 men in South Asia as compared to global ratio of 106 women to 100 men (Rampal, A, 2000). The Governments of these countries initiated different project to achieve its target to some extent. For example, BRAC project in Bangladesh, Lok Jumbish and Sarva Shiksha Abhiyan in India and Bunyad in Pakistan. These programmes have successfully achieved their targets especially in girls' education.

In addition to women's education, child education is another problem in this region. Despite of fact that child labor has been legally banned in all South Asian countries, child labor problems still exist and the region has the largest number of working children in the world. Several efforts are now being made to make education accessible to children in all these countries.

All countries in the region are committed to providing education for all. The formal system alone cannot meet the growing demand for education in this region. On the other hand, countries in this region share a common heritage, background and also a common set of problems. There is a great deal of commonality in the curriculum, educational organisation, learning material, examination, and certification at school level. There is also the possibility of duplication of efforts diverting considerable amounts of money which could otherwise be saved to support the rather poorly financed educational system in this region. In order to realize education for all, we must find a mechanism of dispensing education to such a large number. The formal system alone cannot meet this growing demand for education. Therefore, Open and Distance Learning System has been initiated in this region, which is providing education through Open Universities, Dual Mode of teaching institutions and Open Schools. Distance education is now an essential feature of the national education systems of these countries in South Asia. Open universities are already established in India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh.

Maldives will be going to setting up a new virtual university for small states of the Commonwealth. The proposed university would be based on collaboration through a consortium of existing education providers. Developed and piloted by a Commonwealth of Learning (COL)-led consortium of South Asian open universities, the Commonwealth executive master of business administration/ master of public administration programme began enrolling students in Bangladesh, India and Sri Lanka in January 2002 and in Pakistan in 2003. The Commonwealth Fund for Technical Co-operation (CFTC) assisted with funding the course development (www.col.org).

Another problem is the need for a highly skilled and qualified workforce in SAARC countries for high growth rates and to compete in today's globalizing world markets. Hence, the need of the hour is also to improve and expand secondary and tertiary education in addition to primary level education. India is in the process of developing strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and quality of tertiary education in this region. Recently, India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, proposed to set up a South Asian University in his speech at Dhaka (Bangladesh) on November 12, 2005 during 13th SAARC Summit. His argument was that South Asia was "at the progressive of scientific and technological research and in the front ranks of the knowledge society across the world". With the right facilities and environment, South Asian scholars could combine to create "a centre of excellence" with world-class facilities and faculty and produce research "in the service of human advancement". India, he said, would be willing to make "a major contribution" towards the setting up of the university and indeed would be willing to host it. The Indian Prime Minister's vision has two crucial parts to it. The first is the idea that the university should concentrate on the progressive areas of science and technology. The second is that it would primarily be an institution devoted to research, which suggests that it would be a post-graduate university. It has two purposes. On the one hand, it could, given the right mix of subjects and people, truly contribute to the advancement of knowledge. In this sense it would be a contribution to the welfare of the region and indeed to the world. On the other hand, a South Asian university could play a role in bringing the peoples of the region closer together and softening their suspicions and fears of each other. In doing so, it would give life to the notion of peace and conflict management that are at the heart of SAARC. However, there are a great many political, procedural, hiring, funding, legal, and academic matters that need to be thought about in the setting up of a South Asian university (MIT 2005).

15.5 Conclusion

In this unit, we have discussed the education scenario and issues related to literacy rate, gross enrolment ratio, dropout, women education, child labor and demand for skilled labor in SAARC countries. We have also discussed the initiative of the government of each country and of international agencies like World Bank, UNESCO and COL for education reforms in these countries and perspective plans towards providing education for all.

15.6 Further Reading

Rampal, A. 2000 "Education for Human Development in South Asia". In *Economic and Political Weekly*. July, 22

Haq, M. 1997. *Human Development in South Asia*. Oxford University Press: Karachi