Capacity Development of Non-Government Organisations for Basic and Continuing Education

Kazi Rafiqul Alam

The development of functional capacities in an education organisation depends at least three vital factors. These are the professional development of the educators, need-based educational resource development, and the enhancement of organisational capacity. We shall discuss the experience of Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a national level non-governmental organisation (NGO) in Bangladesh, from these three perspectives.

Organisational capacity development

Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM), simultaneous to implementing its own programmes, encourages small organisations at the grassroots level to be activated and strengthened so that they can also successfully and effectively deliver services for basic education. From this perspective, DAM operates a programme of support to local level NGOs (LNGO), helping them build capacity to provide services in literacy and continuing education.

This support is provided through both hardware and software. Software support includes training of management-level personnel and education programme supervisors, organising study visits, supervising and monitoring programmes, and offering consultation. Hardware support covers supplying of literacy materials for running the centres and seed money for programme operations. Three types of interventions are currently offered for capacity development. These are support of (a) enhancement of management capacity, (b) implementation of basic education programmes, and (c) organisation of continuing education programmes. The support is aimed at helping the partner NGOs successfully undertake a high-quality project independently. The degree of support takes into account the existing capacity of the concerned NGO.

The following list of support activities gives an idea of the nature of technical interventions.

- Assessment of organisational, supervisory, evaluation and monitoring needs and potential.
- Development of action plans for participating NGOs and development and production of training materials.
- Development of separate supervision, monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.
- Provision of training to senior staff, covering areas such as organisational management, accounting and financial management, budgeting, project supervision and gender development.
- Organisation of study cum observation visits for senior staff to provide them an opportunity to study operational systems of successful NGOs.
- Organisation of training courses in micro-management, supervision and monitoring techniques, gender issues and leadership development.

To enhance the capacity of the local organisations in the field of continuing education, DAM also provides supplementary support in terms of training and material development. LNGO’s are provided technical support for launching continuing education centre-based programmes for promotion of environment, gender development and economic empowerment. Examples of activities being undertaken by LNGO’s in the field of continuing education include:

- Enriching continuing education centres through a supply of information materials.
- Organising training on gender and development for community workers, volunteers, and group members.
- Organisation of socio-cultural programmes at the community centre.
• Organisation of environment awareness training for community workers, volunteers, and group members.
• Supply of saplings for planting.
• Organisation of training programmes on smokeless ovens for community workers and volunteers.

The activities are planned jointly by DAM and concerned LNGOs, based on the needs of the organisation relating to capacity development. DAM field officials remain in constant touch with the LNGOs to provide logistics and technical support. Monthly progress review meetings are organised jointly by DAM and LNGO personnel.

The results of these interventions are manifold. The organisations have increased confidence in their ability to run quality literacy programmes. In launching national literacy programmes, the participation of experienced local organisations is ensured. Programmes become more community oriented. Continuing education becomes an essentially the follow-up agenda of basic literacy programmes run by the LNGOs.

Professional development of various level literacy personnel

DAM’s programmes for the professional development of literacy personnel include:

• Development of training courses and resource materials
• Organisation of pre-service and in-service courses, both institution-based and work-place based
• Organisation of short- and medium-term courses for various level personnel
• Arrangement of attachment and internship programmes
• Jointly managed courses through inter-agency collaboration.

DAM runs two specialised institutes for the professional development of NFE personnel. These are the Institute of Literacy and Adult Education (ILAE) and the Institute of Primary and Nonformal Education (IPNE). The ILAE offers short-term training programmes for various levels of NFE personnel, while the IPNE offers post-graduate medium and long-term academic programmes for the professional development of mid-level personnel working in primary and nonformal education.

The IPNE works under the Ahsanullah University of Science and Technology, a DAM sponsored private university. Courses offered by IPNE include a B. Ed. in non-formal education, a B. Ed. in primary education, an M. Ed. in primary education, and an M. Ed. in nonformal education. Tailor-made courses are offered in education management, training, academic supervision, curriculum and materials development, continuing education, and monitoring and evaluation.

The ILAE offers a variety of courses for different level clientele, including basic education centre facilitators, education programme supervisors and coordinators, women’s group members, NGO representatives, continuing education centre facilitators, dropout girl students, and community workers. The ILAE also organises national, regional, and international training workshops for mid-level and senior level programme managers and planners. Examples of such programmes organised last year are mentioned include national workshops on women’s empowerment, continuing education for development, and the development of literacy materials for primary school children in rural areas; regional workshops on community learning centres and capacity-building of literacy resource centres for girls and women and of LNGOs; and local workshops on planning post-literacy programmes and the development of continuing education materials.

The ILAE and the IPNE also organise study programmes for expatriate visitors and students to provide them opportunity to get exposure to innovative model programmes in Bangladesh.

In order to act as a resource base for information support for capacity building of the relevant agencies involved in NFE programmes DAM runs the Bangladesh Literacy Resource Centre (BLRC). The centre serves as a documentation centre for literacy activities and as a clearinghouse of literacy materials. At the
centre, information related to literacy activities is collected, preserved, and disseminated; training courses are organized; resource-sharing exchanges are arranged; support services on mass media and documentation services are provided; and communication networks are established at different levels.

**Curriculum and learning materials to suit learners’ needs**

DAM provides technical support for enhancing organisations’ capacity for development or the adaptation of learning materials to suit needs of particular groups of learners. Programmes are designed for improvement of skills at all levels. This support contributes to the overall capacity of the organisation to promote the use of need-based learning materials.

In preparing courses for materials development, DAM largely follows approaches recommended in UNESCO’s APPEAL Training Materials for Literacy Personnel (ATLP). ATLP provides a scientific basis for designing literacy programmes and materials, following some widely accepted principles and guidelines. ATLP contains guidelines for developing literacy programmes by designing the entire training system, starting with curriculum development and proceeding through learning materials development, training of personnel, supervision, monitoring, and evaluation.

In line with ATLP, the courses developed are based on the following conceptual framework.

- Levels of literacy skills with clear demarcation of achievement at each level in terms of 3Rs
- Determination of the functional content of a literacy curriculum based on a needs survey of the beneficiaries
- Integration of functionality and literacy skills
- Division of instructional times over literacy levels
- Preparation of a curriculum grid representing the minimum requirement in terms of functionality and literacy skills and also flexibility in the curriculum design.
- The systems model of teaching and a systems approach to the design of learning materials with simultaneous development of teachers’ guide and learners’ workbook.

At the request of UNESCO, DAM organises courses in other countries. The ATLP series are widely used in the courses offered by DAM institutes.

Besides implementing direct programmes for capacity development of NGOs, DAM helps to develop resources in this field. Under a recent UNESCO project, DAM has conducted a baseline study to identify the capacity development needs of the local organisations for more effective implementation of basic and continuing education programmes. On the basis of the need assessment findings, DAM is now developing three manuals in the identified fields for training of NGO literacy personnel. Three specific themes identified for the manuals are community participation in basic education, participatory planning and management of basic education, and participatory assessment of learning achievement.

*Kazi Rafiqul Alam is Executive Director of the Dhaka Ahsania Mission, a NGO in Bangladesh working at the grass roots level as well as at national and international levels in the fields of non-formal and formal education, poverty alleviation, health, environment, gender development, etc. Beginning as a philanthropic organization, DAM expanded its programme to various development sectors.*