

Primary Education: Promises and Perils

by Nuruddin Mahmud Kamal

It is imperative that the torch of learning must be carried to millions of illiterates and out-of-school children for whom the declaration about the right to education has had no meaning so far, otherwise our posterity, who will face the challenges of 21st century, will not forgive us for our failures.

ONE evening in the mid-seventies, a sticker pasted on the bumper of a car parked in the campus of Pennsylvania State University, USA, attracted my eyes. It was inscribed, "If you think education is expensive, try ignorance." For a moment I was puzzled. Then I laughed at my heart's content and enjoyed the deep sense of humour. The western world, being aware of the inner meaning and implications of the subject, took adequate measures to spread the benefit of education. Our societies, on the other hand, did not take full advantage of educational pursuits. Rather, visibly, there is little or no conscious biting on the low progress of our own education development. Frankly speaking, we seem to have done very minimal to even restore the weaknesses and deficiencies of the system.

Twenty-five years later, I became more puzzled when the contents of the inscription reappeared in my mind. After my re-retirement from the public service in May 1999, I decided to devote more time on reading and writing on the three subjects that has an initial of English letter 'E' ie, Energy, Environment and Education. So far, I concentrated on writing about the primary energy issues (the latest on October 1, 1999, entitled "Gas Export: Let's not be called a bottomless basket again," published in *The Daily Star*). In fact, I have spent the best part of my service career in the primary energy and primary education sectors respectively and could never rise above the primary level during the twenty-three year period between 1972-95 except some years spent within the com-

pany of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs as Director-General, External Publicity of the Government. In this background, I now wish to share with the readers some events and experiences in the education sector, more specifically the dreams and realities in the primary education development in this decade.

We all know, development is for man, by man and for man.

The same is true of education. Its purpose is to liberate men and women from the restraints and limitations of ignorance and dependency. Education, particularly basic education, enhances mental freedom to increase their control over themselves, their own lives, and the environment in which they live. Education implies learning, irrespective of where and how the learning takes place. It is a lifelong process spanning all the years from infancy to old age, assuming different forms, of which formal schooling is only one form. As distinct from hierarchically structured and chronologically graded formal system, non-formal education consists of mostly assortment of organized and semi-organized educational activities operating outside the regular structures and routines of formal frame, aimed at serving a great variety of learning needs of different age groups, both young and old.

However, at times I wonder, whether we offered our most valuable thing i.e., education to some wrong people at a wrong time. Perhaps because of the wrong holders of education and their ill-gotten money, social values are greatly declining. Otherwise, why it is so that their utterances and activities

they had developed normally. However, due to the near collapse of these countries' economies they are no longer producing GHGs at the level they were previously, thus creating a deficit of GHGs not emitted called "Hot Air". It is theoretically possible for the countries who are continuing to produce more than their share of GHGs to "buy" GHG credits from Russia (and other former Soviet bloc countries) and thus fulfill their quota of GHG reductions. However, this is still a controversial form of trading and it has not been sanctioned by the COP.

Joint Implementation (JI): This is a process under which two countries agree to jointly carry out a GHG reduction project in one country (usually a developing country) and allow the GHG reduction benefit to be shared with another (usually developed) country in exchange for financial investments. The rationale for this is that if a developed country found that it was relatively more expensive for it to reduce GHG emissions in its own country but it could achieve the same reduction of GHG emissions in another developing country at a lower cost, then by making the financial investment in the developing partner country it could get some of the benefit of the GHG emission reductions achieved by each developed country by the period 2008 to 2012.

The Kyoto Protocol has set binding targets for GHG reductions for the developed countries (although the US which is the main GHG producer has not yet submitted the Kyoto Protocol for ratification to the US Congress and Senate which is necessary before it becomes national law).

Carbon Trading

The Kyoto Protocol also allowed the principle of carbon trading to enable countries to trade their quotas of GHG emissions. There are several mechanisms under which carbon trading can take place.

Clean Development Mechanism (CDM): This is a mechanism which was created at Kyoto to allow some form of carbon trading to take place internationally under UNFCCC auspices which would be certified

and approved by UNFCCC and would also allow some of the funds created through the CDM to be allocated for particularly vulnerable countries (such as Bangladesh) and for adaptation measures.

While this remains one of the most promising and interesting avenues opened up for carbon trading it still remains bogged down in procedural difficulties about how it was to work, who would make it work, who will monitor it and who will allocate the proceeds. Nevertheless it's likely that these problems may be largely sorted out and some form of CDM may begin within a year or two.

Sixth Conference of Parties

The sixth COP is due to be held in Bonn, Germany from 25 October to 5 November and will discuss these different opportunities of carbon trading and perhaps move the process forward. This has great significance for Bangladesh for a number of reasons.

Firstly, as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change Bangladesh has a vital interest in moving the global community forward as quickly as possible to reduce the GHG emissions.

Secondly as one of the lowest per capita GHG emitters Bangladesh has an opportunity to benefit from carbon trading (in whatever form).

Thirdly Bangladesh is one of the countries earmarked to benefit from the Clean Development Mechanism directly and fourthly, because Bangladesh has a clear and unequivocal moral position as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change which is the creation of other (developed) countries. This last moral argument is a very powerful one if

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