

Education for All: Post-Dakar Challenges

Mahfuz Anam: I would like to welcome you all to this roundtable which we call the *Education for All Post-Dakar Follow-up*. We had a Jomtien world conference in 1990. Incidentally, I was with UNESCO at that time. I was the Deputy Media Coordinator at that world conference. So I am a little familiar with the process. Then after 10 years we had the Dakar world conference where we had a new set of commitments from the governments and also from the civil society.

The idea of organising this particular roundtable so quickly after the Dakar conference is to chalk out our own national strategy and reiterate our own national commitment. Obviously this will not be a sufficient step. We will have to hold further roundtables like this as we go on, which we intend to do in collaboration with CAMPE because we feel that people have shortcomings about active involvement of the civil society in the Education for All point of view.

From The Daily Star point of view, we would like to add to the national effort. The media would like to be a more active participant in the post-Dakar activities so that we overcome whatever shortcomings there were in the past.

I would like to start the proceedings with a debriefing by Ms Rasheda Choudhury, the Director of CAMPE. She will start the proceedings with a briefing on what happened in Dakar, the principal conclusions of the conference and the new challenges that the global community and Bangladesh, as part of that global community, has adopted in years to come.

Rasheda Choudhury: Talking about the Dakar forum, I would like to take just one minute to brief of all those world conferences that happened during the decade of the 90s. It started with Jomtien. In Jomtien we discovered that the people most involved in the education process, that is the teachers, they were the most absent group there. Then in 1992 there was the world conference on environment, the Earth Summit. I didn't go there, but we were told that for this world environment conference, the conference hall was built up on a 40-acre jungle. Many trees had to be cut down for building

The first global conference on Education for All (EFA) took place 10 years ago in the sea-side Thai city of Jomtien. A global plan with definite goals was chalked out which all member states of the UN system committed to implement. To see what progress the countries of the world made in ensuring Education for All, a second world conference was held in the Senegalese capital of Dakar. This latest global conference took stock of where each country and each region is in terms of EFA and set out a second set of goals, for countries and regions, suitable for the 21st century.

To chalk out Bangladesh's own programme of action in view of the Dakar plan, The Daily Star in collaboration with the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) organised a roundtable conference on Education for All: Post-Dakar Follow-up. This conference examined the new challenges thrown up by the latest world discussion on EFA, and tried to find out what Bangladesh should do to attain the goals of EFA. It is our belief that the following transcript of the roundtable will help all concerned in the task of meeting the post-Dakar challenges.

Shamsul Haque on the education policy of 1997. The question is very much important in this context. We are very much confused about the literacy rate. In the BBS publication, the literacy rate is different. What is going on in PMED or DPE? What do they say? There is a formula I don't understand where we add literacy rate to the adult education. I asked this question to late Dr. Abdullah Al Muti Sharifuddin. How does it make 57 per cent, 56 per cent to 43 per cent day by day? And



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Mahfuz Anam: When a simple question like, what is the literacy rate, requires such an amount of time, you can be sure there is something wrong somewhere. Can anyone give this rate with some element of scientific basis?

Kazi Rafiqul Alam: I have the statement of the Education Minister which he read in the Dakar meeting. He said that the literacy rate for 15+ age group at the end of the year 2000 would be 64 per cent. Now it is 62 per cent. And the country will be illiterate-free by the year 2006.

Shamsul Haque: My second question is, what percentage of national income is spent for education in this country?

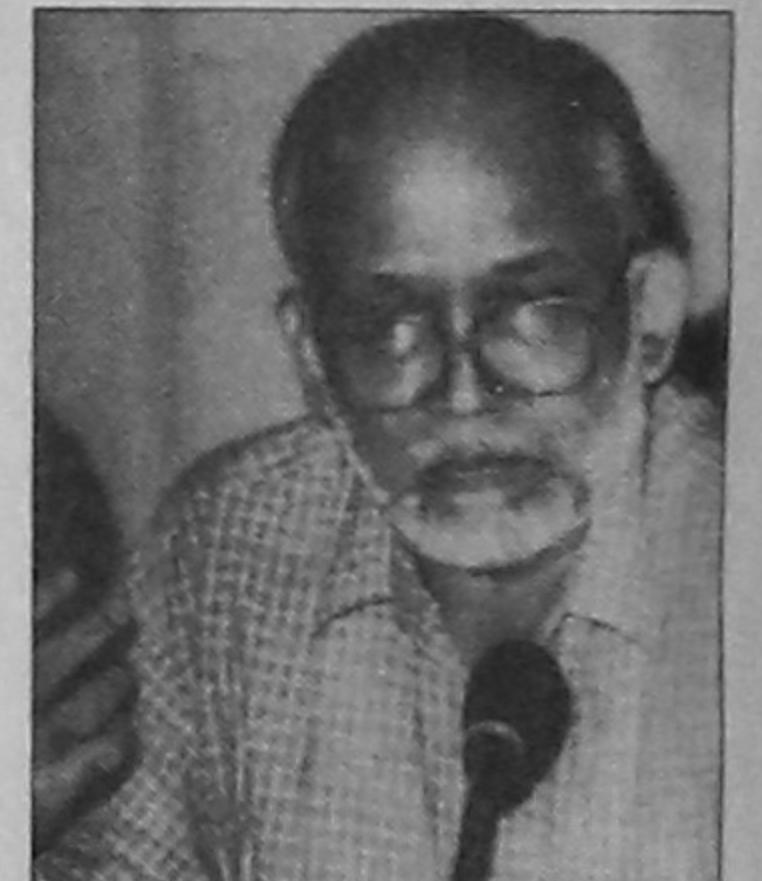
Mahfuz Anam: I think that would be simpler.

Kazi Rafiqul Alam: The Minister says that at least 15 per cent of the national budget is allocated for education. Expenditure on education is nearly three per cent of the GDP. In addition, the private sector contributes about 1.6 per cent.

Shafiqul Alam: Here is a question from me. I do not see any representative from DPE of PMED.

Mahfuz Anam: They confirmed their participation but didn't show up.

Mahmudul Alam: The world conference gives us an opportunity. We have to place ourselves. Bangladesh has done quite well over the past 10 years. If you see the perfor-



mane of other countries, especially the South Asian countries, like India, Pakistan and Burma. We have certain built-in advantages. We are socially, politically homogenous.

Mahfuz Anam: How did we do well?

Haque: We made a commitment for compulsory primary education. So the gross enrollment got caught.

Mahfuz Anam: We made a commitment for compulsory primary education. So the gross enrollment got caught.

Kazi Rafiqul Alam: He says about 15 per cent of the national budget is allocated for education. The share of basic education is nearly 50 per cent of the education sector budget.

The declaration had said that all stakeholders should be involved for the preparation of the Plan of Action. This Plan of Action states very clearly that it is developed by the government leadership in direct consultation with the civil society.

Mahmudul Alam: According to the statistics that I have, in 1990 we enacted compulsory primary education. That was during Ershad's autocratic rule. In 1992 we implemented compulsory primary education. In 1993 it started. So the gross enrollment rate which was about 76 per cent, became 85 per cent and according to our estimates, it has shot up to 106 per cent. We say the net enrollment rate is 77 per cent. The government says 81 per cent, so there is very little difference.

The state has intervened very systematically. It has also accommodated civil society groups and NGOs. What is happening in the 85 per cent of the enrollment in the primary sector controlled by the state?

Shafiqul Alam: I was working for sometime with Professor

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right. We wanted the governments to allocate specific amount of resources with time-bound targets. We wanted the governments to take note of the civil society. We would be ready to provide assistance to the governments who are committed to achieve EFA.

At the same time we recognised the NGO people present there, not only NGOs, all the civil society groups including the human rights groups, women's movement, teachers' groups, they wanted the governments to take education as the core responsibility of the state and to build partnerships with the civil society.

Our declaration was read out in the official forum. Governments took note of it and many of the governments took part in the deliberations. Some of us thought that there was lot of achievement. Some of the NGO delegates, however, expressed their skepticism regarding the outcome of the conference, particularly the official world education forum.

The failures or the pessimism was expressed mainly in terms of three issues. One, the government declaration of the official forum didn't say that there would be national action plans following Dakar with time-bound targets. Only mention of 2015 was made and we asked why we need another 15 years to achieve the goal of Education for All. Why can't we achieve by 2005? That was our question to the governments, but most of the governments stuck to that 2015 target!

The other thing that we wanted was specific amounts of money allocated for achieving Education for All. We wanted the donors to take note of the fact that they need to mobilise only US\$ 8 billion for achieving Education for All. This is equivalent to four days of military spending all over the world and only three minutes of global market speculation.

We wanted the donors to commit that if the governments had the political will to deliver and a viable national action plan, they should not fail due to lack of resources. The donors should commit themselves to provide that kind of resources. But, unfortunately, it didn't come up that way. We wanted the governments to commit at least six per cent of GNP for education, but the Final Declaration reads, "substantial increase of resources". Nothing in substantial terms. We achieved a lot but there is the matter of reaching challenges, of reaching out to all the excluded, marginalised groups like the disabled, the ethnic minorities, women and girl children. We still have all these challenges ahead of us, for the governments, for the civil society.

The Jomtien survivors, those who were there in the conference, told us that the main difference between Jomtien and Dakar was the visible presence of civil society in Dakar which was almost absent in Jomtien. The other achievement of Dakar was that the governments, particularly the African governments, most of whom were either military dictatorships or infant democracies or autocratic rule, committed themselves to achieve com-

pulsory primary education. They agreed that education was a basic human right. This is a difference that we made in Dakar.

Mahfuz Anam: May I call upon Mr. ANM Eusuf who, I suppose, was one of the members of the Bangladesh delegation to the Jomtien conference.

ANM Eusuf: Although I did not join the Jomtien conference, immediately after the conference I was in charge of the Ministry of Education for about two years. So I was involved in some of the follow-up actions on the basis of the Jomtien Declaration and that it will repay many times over in the foreseeable future, the investment will not be made.

Another aspect that is very important for the government is the civil society. The civil society has to believe that investment in basic education is a good investment. Unless we believe this is a good investment and that it will repay many times over in the foreseeable future, the investment will not be made.

There is paucity of resources. Yes, resources are limited. But we must make a conscious choice of where we will spend the money. I can make a choice, I have 101 demands, but I will say that these are my priority demands. I will spend as much money as required for these priority areas, and whatever remains goes to other sectors. I can mention, but I won't, that there are some unproductive sectors where there can be drastic cuts. Even in the development sectors we can prioritise, we can reduce to some extent and divert the money for basic

education.

So basically in declarations, world conferences, everyone hopes that something will happen in the near future, but nothing happens. Nothing will happen unless we make it happen. In this case 'we' means the national government, the national civil society and all the other actors here. We will certainly put pressure on the international community to help us, but the basic responsibility rests with the country and primarily with the government.

Mahfuz Anam: I am glad the way you ended your contribution because the Dakar conference is basically just a point of reference here. The main focus of our meeting here is how does Bangladesh achieve its target of education. If the global community wants to wait for 2015 for 50 per cent elimination of illiteracy, it is not acceptable to us. We want a much quicker and much more comprehensive implementation of our resolution.

The Dakar conference is a point of reference. We would like this meeting to concentrate on if there is any benefit from the Dakar conference how do we take it? But more important is how we go forward without strategy.

In an informal way I also discussed with some donor agencies and asked about Bangladesh. They said, money for Bangladesh is no problem. We have money for Bangladesh and they are not utilising it.

There are some other aspects which have been reflected in this whole declaration process, which I think are direct contributions of the NGOs. At their insistence, early childhood care has been included in the global framework for action. Initially, they did not place so much emphasis on childhood care, we said that this should be one of the major issues to be addressed by the world community.

Then we come to the goals. Access and completion are two important items. And we also stressed quality.

All the time the forum was saying that basic literacy is terminal. But we, from the NGO community, did not agree. Young people and adults should have the appropriate learning in life skill programmes.

Number five was gender equality and number six was quality. These are the achievements of the NGO community.

The second point is about the future course of action. There are two documents. One is the framework for action and the other one is about the future, how they want the EFA goals achieved in the future. It is very important. That needs to be taken forward at a country level.

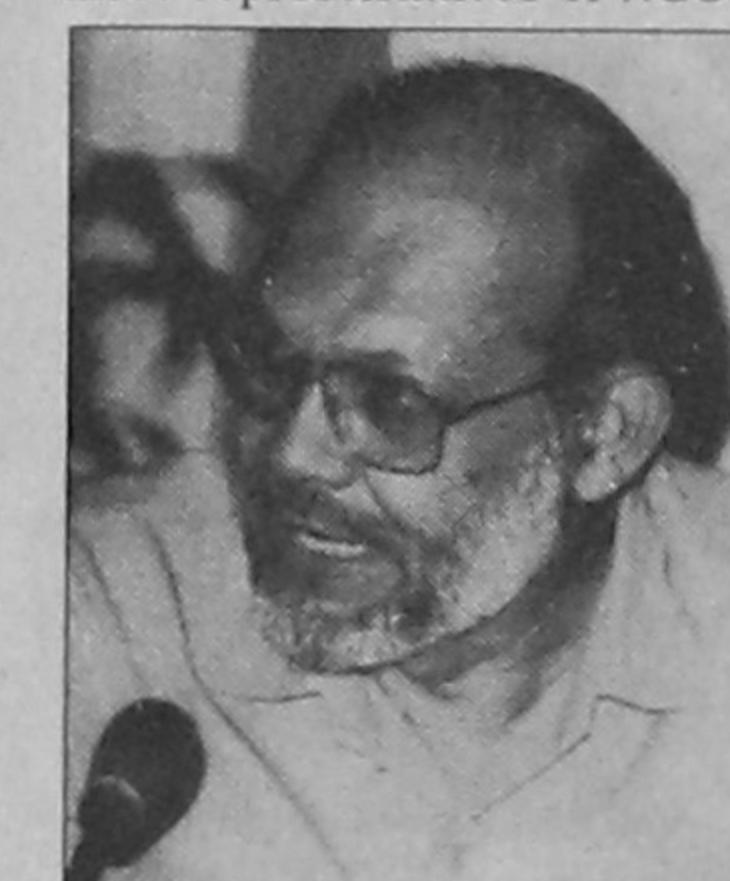
NGOs played a very active role in the whole process. A delegation of five NGO representatives went to see the Secretary General of the United Nations. I was one of them. We had a 40-minute discussion with the Secretary General. We said that there should be partnership at all levels where civil society should be partners. At the national level we see there is no partnership between the UN agencies and the civil society.

These partnerships are with the governments, not the NGOs directly. The Secretary General assured us that he would take up the matter with the relevant authorities of the government.

Then there was the question of representation of NGOs in the UN agencies not only at the UN headquarters level, but also at the regional level and country levels. He said that he would talk to the relevant Director Generals of the UN agencies. I

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Kazi Rafiqul Alam

In that way we put forward the NGO views of what is happening. So since our representative was there, pressing hard, there were ultimately some achievements in terms of getting some commitments from the governments.

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know what is the literacy rate in Bangladesh right now. Is there anybody who can give me this information?

Mahfuz Anam: Getting back to the basics. What is the basic literacy rate?

Shafiqul Alam: I was working

for sometime with Professor