

The Daily Star and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) Roundtable

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 short-comings 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



Rasheda K. Choudhury

that site for the global environment conference.

Then came in 1993 the world human rights conference in Vienna where we discovered that the civil society groups were placed in the basement. The governments were there, upstairs. Civil society participation was restricted in the official governments' conference - human rights abuse in human rights conference!

Then came the international conference on population and development in 1994 in Cairo. We discovered again that the so-called promoters of human rights and women's rights, joined the Vatican to bar some resolution on women's reproductive rights!

Then came the 1995 World Summit for Social Development focusing on poverty reduction and it was reported in the media about the G-7 group, that in one night the amount of money spent on champagne was equal to some developing country's annual budget.

Then came the other conference in 1995, the World women's conference in Beijing. Women's movement was placed some 37 miles away from the official conference. These are some of the challenges of the world conferences that happened in the decade of the 90s!

I was part of the government delegation to Dakar. It was a high-level delegation and there were three NGO members in the nine member delegation. This Dakar World Education Forum was supposed to take a stock of what happened during the last 10 years after Jomtien. There were 181 government delegations, 75 education ministers, 1500 delegates including 200 NGO representatives, academics, teachers and others. But interestingly enough, there were no national media representatives present. Only the global media were present. We don't know how it happened, but it happened there.

This conference was supposed to be based on the experiences and learnings of the last decade. We started with the NGO forum, the official NGO forum that was organised by UNESCO, on April 24 and 25. We, the NGO representatives present there, had our deliberations, and we wanted four specific things from our governments. It came out in the final NGO declaration. One, we wanted free and compulsory primary education for all, over the world. And we wanted education to be recognised as a basic human

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.



rights. 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 a 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 government, particularly the African governments, most of whom were either military dictatorships or infant democracies or autocratic rulership, 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 the Jomtien Conference.

As for the linkage between Dakar and Jomtien, in Jomtien we had some time-bound targets, goals to achieve. Whether the governments could fulfill those targets or not, that's a different issue. But here I find the focus has been greatly diluted, making 2015 a target for achieving some of the targets. I think it is unacceptable.



ANM Eusuf

The focus should have been more intense and the pressure on the government, the civil society, the NGOs should have been much more to achieve because we have not been able to achieve much during the decade which went by. So we thought there would be a much better and much greater effort to redress the failures of the past decade. But unfortunately it seems as if we are just temporising. By 2015, 50 per cent of adult literacy will be reduced. This doesn't make sense. When we ourselves are claiming that we will be removing illiteracy within the next two or three years, for us to subscribe to reducing or achieving literacy by the year 2015 doesn't make sense.

The other thing I would like to say in the context of Jomtien and possibly in the context of Dakar also, we make a lot of declarations, a lot of commitments, but these are not backed by any action plan. In the instant case, the targets, the declarations, the goals, the objectives can be met only if there is a concerted effort by the governments concerned and these concerted efforts need resources. Unfortunately, there is no commitment of resources. The international community and the national governments have only said that there will be some announcement in terms of the resources. Unfortunately, no country or no organisation has said that we will spend this

much of our resources for basic education or education as such. We must commit ourselves to spend money, resources. There are organisational problems, management problems, these are there. But our basic requirement is resources. Unless we commit resources, we will not be achieving something.

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

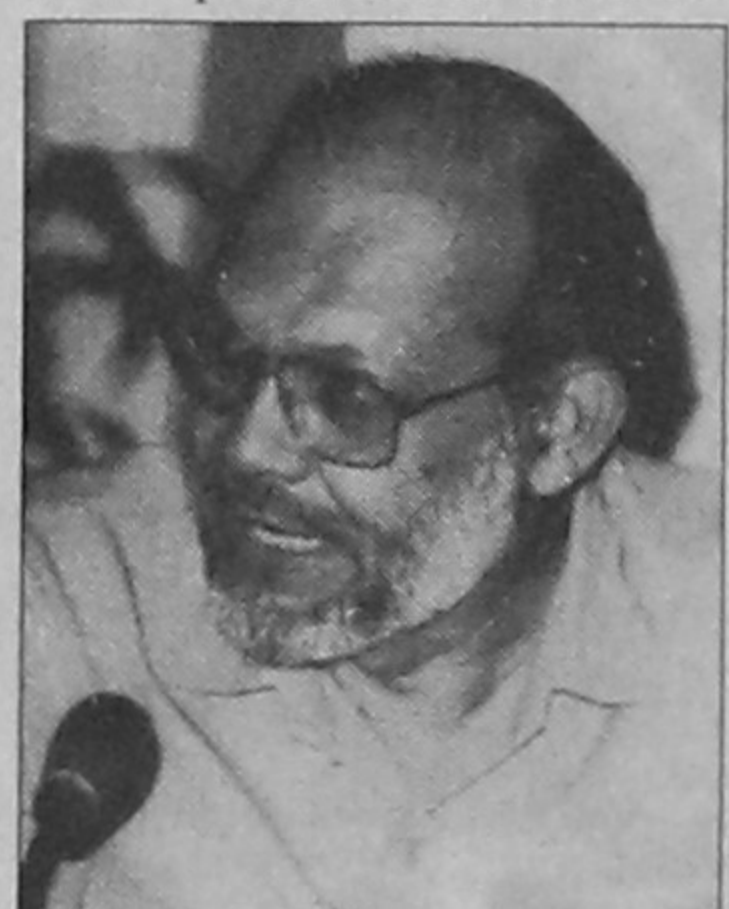
education. So basically in declarations, world conferences, everyone hopes that something will happen in the near future, but nothing happens. Nothing will happen unless we make it happen. In this case 'we' means the national government, the national civil society and all the other actors here. We will 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.

Kazi Rafiqul Alam, Ahsania Mission: I was one of the participants in the Dakar conference. Before this world forum which started on April 26, we had two days of international consultation of NGOs. From Bangladesh Rasheda Choudhury and myself were there. There were about 300 participants from the world NGO community. So we were more or less prepared to face the government delegations. We had articulated all the points which needed change. We lobbied for this. The recognition of civil society was not there in other conferences. In this conference also, the official government forum allowed spaces for only 55 participants from NGOs throughout the world. But due our extensive lobbying more than 200 NGOs could participate. They played an active role in that conference.

The second point of achievement for the civil society is that in the official drafting committees, there were three representatives of NGOs.



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.

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 and the NGOs. 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

am happy to say that in that meeting all the heads of the UN agencies were present, even the World Bank President, UNDP Regional Director, UNFPA, Unicef, all the major actors were there. It was a very high profile meeting. The commitment was there.

Then the point of resources. The declaration should meet a minimum of six per cent of allocation of resources at the country level. Some governments said it would be difficult for them. But the commitment from some of the donors, especially the delegation from the Netherlands and the UK and the World Bank were apparently there. They said this in the open forum. They said that we were not coming up with a good proposal.

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. This is a direct achievement of the civil society.

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.

We stressed the need for partnership not only with the government, but with the UN agencies too.

Mahfuz Anam: Am I to understand that after Jomtien, all these 10 years the country didn't have a national plan.

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.

Then attract, coordinate, support of all development persons. Specify reforms addressed to six issues. Establish a financial framework, time-bound and action related. So when we will have this national Plan of Action, it must be time bound.

Periodic monitoring should be there so that they don't just sit on the Plan of Action. That has been established.

Shamsul Haque: I do not 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?

Shafiul Alam: I was working for sometime with Professor

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 Sharfuddin. How does it make 57 per cent, 56 per cent to 43 per cent day by day? And



Shafiul Alam

how is it increasing? How it is possible? Then Professor Abdullah Al Muti Sharfuddin told me that if you add adult literacy with the normal school goes in this case, it can happen. When we ask PMED what is the actual literacy rate, they can't say clearly. They say, we can do it in this way. It can happen in this way. So we publish sometime and we say that literacy is 56 or 58 per cent up.

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?

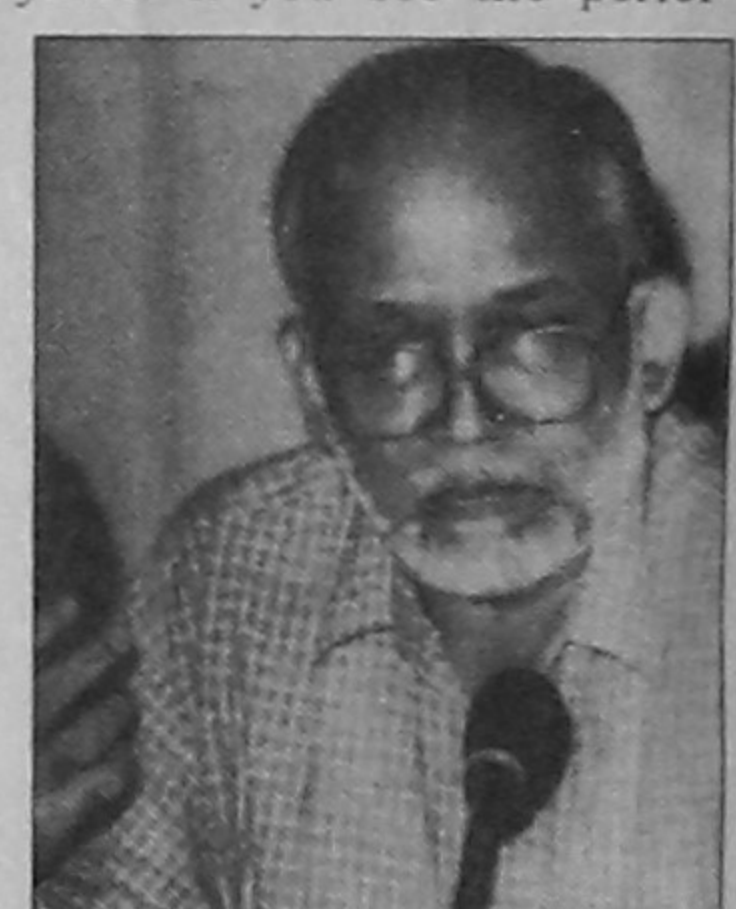
Mahfuz Anam: I think that should be simpler.

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.

Shafiul Alam: Here is a question from me, I do not see any representative from DPE or 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-



Dr. Mahmudul Alam

mance 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 have the Minister's speech, but we can contest it because the government's claims are the government's claims. But let's hear the Minister's figures to start with a basis for debate.

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. Annual public expenditure on education is nearly three per cent of the GDP. In addition, the private sector contributes about 1.6 per cent. That is, the total expenditure on education is nearly 6.6 per cent of the GDP.

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?

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