

Education as a Human Right: Where are we?

A roundtable on "Education and Human Right" was held in Dhaka on 28 April 2007, jointly organised by CAMPE, The Daily Star, UNESCO and BRAC University. It was participated, among others, by former education ministers, scholars, NGO members and distinguished citizens. We publish the transcript of the proceedings below.



Welcome note from the Daily Star Mahfuz Anam, Editor (Moderator)

Welcome to everybody. All of us here have attended many roundtables, like this one, where some surely have also talked on 'Rights to Education.' Therefore, I wonder, if there is anything new to discover today, 28th of April, 2007? But we could definitely identify where we stand today and what the way forward may be. We may have some differences of opinion in relation to priorities. But all the clusters of problems and issues are known to us and we may arrive at a consensus about what to do.

The main focus of our discussion will be on how to move forward effectively. In the beginning of today's proceedings, Dr. Manzoor Ahmed will present a brief summary on where we are. A two-page paper will be distributed on a summarized version on our current situation. And on the opposite page you will find basic ideas on the priority actions. I think these two pages will help to keep our discussion on focus. If any one differs with our version of 'where we are' or the analysis of the problem, and have very strong opinion about adding some points, that will be OK.

I believe that we shall be able to have a broad

convergence of views. Definitely at the end of today's meeting, we shall want a commitment from all of us here. We shall also want that, all of us here will try to connect the people from different walks of the larger society with our commitment in order to move ahead. At the end of the day, the future of Bangladesh lies in the spread of quality education in the country. We very much hope that we shall be able to go from here with a strong sense of directions. And that in future most of us will get involved in appropriate actions. At the outset, Rasheda K. Choudhury, Director, CAMPE and UNESCO's Country Representative will give out their welcome addresses. And after that Manzoor Bhai will start the discussion.

Introduction from CAMPE Rasheda K. Choudhury, Director



Happy Bangla New Year. On behalf of the organizers, I welcome you all. And also thank you from the core of our heart for being here. You may have observed that four different organizations have joined hands to invite you, and you have responded positively. Thanks for your commitment.

It's a multi-stakeholder group present here, who had been, and still are, working at the policy/decision making level. There are activists here; we have the honour to have our respected teachers here as well. We would be happier if we could call more of them but because it is a policy roundtable, we could call only a few.

Like Mahfuz Anam, I shall also make a request to you. We all have some responsibilities at the state and societal level to ensure 'Right to Education'. But, field level evidence and realities demonstrate that we have failed to ensure the rights of many. Although our Constitution says that, 'education is a fundamental principle' and not a 'fundamental right', yet the state has ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the Millennium Declaration.

We are hoping that Bangladesh will soon ratify the 'Convention on Rights of the Disabled'. We also have a 'Compulsory Primary Education Act' and other such instruments of responsibilities. As Mahfuz Anam has said, irrespective of our position and placement, we must let everybody know where we stand [on right to education]. This is very important to know in order to understand our future, to analyze if we shall be able to fulfill our commitments by 2015. If we think we shall not be able to do so then what are the actions we should take now?

The second stated goal of Millennium Development Goals is Universal Primary Completion (UPC) by the year 2015. We have the same goal in our PRSP, in our CRC and in our Dakar Framework for Action on 'Education for All'. Here we have among us the political leadership who represented us at Dakar and at the Millennium Summit.

If UPC by 2015 is our goal, then we want to see each

and every child is in school by January 2015. That means we have to have primary education completion by each child by December 2014 (the end of our school calendar). That also means that we want all of our children enrolled in school by January 2010. Now, can we achieve that? Where are our disabled children? Where are the hardcore poor? Where are our children from 'chars' and 'haors'? Will we be able to really get them enrolled by January 2010? It's already the middle of 2007 now. If that is the reality then I suppose we need to decide on renewing our commitments and rethink our strategies on how to fulfill those.

I therefore request you to focus on and what we could do together, what we need to do. I shall now, with the permission of the moderator, request all of you to kindly stand up for half a minute and raise your hands to vow and declare that, we are pledge-bound to ensure education for all by 2015 from whatever position we are in.

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PRIORITY ACTION POINTS?

- Guarantee of Minimum Quality:** Move towards minimum standards of quality in primary and secondary education with a core curricular framework and criteria for facilities and teachers among mainstream schools, madrasas, and private schools; expand pre-school and early childhood education; ensure bilingual proficiency in Bangla and English, math, science and computer literacy for all.
- Major Decentralisation:** Take steps towards major decentralisation, local planning and greater school level authority with accountability to improve quality and equity and fulfil right to education. To ensure success, undertake piloting in each division for school, upazila and district planning, decision-making and devolution of authority with accountability. Involve NGOs and academic institutions in piloting, research and development.
- Resources for Education:** Increase substantially public resources; allocate these on the basis of child population in each upazila, and utilize these, together with non-public resources, to achieve quality and equity objectives based on local decentralized and school-level planning.
- Relevant Vocational/Technical Skills, Literacy and Lifelong Learning:** Expand vocational/ technical skills including literacy at basic level through a network of community and NGO-managed multipurpose learning centres, and at a higher level, through institutions with authority to offer flexible courses according to market needs, in partnership with employers and the private sector.
- Professional Capacity Building:** Change personnel policies and take a ten-year plan to encourage professionalism with greater authority in key operational and support agencies - Directorates, Boards of Education, NAPE, NAEM, Curriculum Authorities etc along with general devolution of authority to local and school levels.
- A Permanent National Education Commission:** Establish a statutory permanent National Education Commission (answerable to the Parliament) to guide, monitor and assess major reforms and changes that government has to embark on.
- One National Ministry of Education:** Create one National Ministry of Education with responsibility for all education to ensure continuity in curriculum, teacher training and assessment of learning; and to achieve educational reforms and human resources goals in an integrated manner.

Re-examine and modify PEDP II, SESIP, PLCE, NPA II etc in the light of above priorities.

(The above summary points were prepared by the Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University as a background for the Roundtable.)

EDUCATION AS A HUMAN RIGHT

Where Are We?

- % A large number of primary and secondary age children cannot complete respective stages of education; especially deprived - those with disabilities, in urban slums, ethnic minorities, and in extreme poverty.
- % Official adult literacy claims are mostly disputed. Generally accepted rate is between 40 and 50 percent, with large gender and urban-rural disparity.
- % Education system is now a vehicle for reinforcing social division rather than for social mobility - ironically, more so, as the system expanded.
- % Expansion, with highly politicized and centralised governance and without enough resources for essential quality inputs, has caused major quality deficits.
- % Education system and personnel management does not permit professionalism and professionalisation in key specialized and technical functions and decision-making.
- % Lack of consistent, transparent and accountable policy making and policy follow-through has led to ad hocism and donor driven-changes which often have not succeeded.

EFA goals and education-related MDGs for 2015 are not on track, except removal of gender disparity in enrolment