



Encourage professional capacity building

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But we can agree that the quality of education is not at all as per our expectation. Our respected ex-minister said that in USA or UK also, they talk of education quality, but there is a difference between quality there and in Bangladesh.

We heard about resource constraints for education. Ministers sit on one side of the desk where they see resource constraint. But from the opposite side of the same desk, I see problems in resource utilization. Then we talk about professional capacity and a future-looking strategy. Let me ask a question. We see our primary school teachers engage in a protest wearing burial shroud. Is it only a politically motivated movement? This is a matter of quality and forward-looking strategy.

I want to identify the education policy itself as an important issue. Because, we have multiple systems of education in our country. You have talked about curriculum change in Madrasa education; we needed a study conducted on it and a monitoring process, which never happened. Today the issues that we face are the JMB, fundamentalism, violence against women, mass or gang rape and other issues affecting women. Are these the products of Madrasa education? This needs to be examined.

Education is a human right. But how is this education being imparted with regard to women? What are the attitudes of society? I want to emphasize the shape and character of education that we want. One point raised here which appears to be a dilemma. We want better quality of education and at the same time we are asking for 60 percent female teachers. I want to draw the attention of the ex-minister that this was recommended as an affirmative action. We supported this, but there was a need for continuous monitoring here too, which was lacking. As a result, you have filled 60 percent of the vacancies with women who were matriculate. We recommended it for a specific period, not for all times to come. A large number of women with intermediate qualifications are available now. Proper steps are needed to be taken by the policy makers.

I am very sorry to say that we submitted a report to CEDAW [Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women] monitors in the United Nations regarding women's development, and then we changed the policies at home later. We have many contradictions on these issues.

Are we very satisfied about the gender situation in education? Manzoor said that we are on track only on gender disparity among all the Millennium Development Goals. I am not as sure about it as you may be. We have gender stereotypes in our education content and method, which may be discussed for hours. I firmly believe that we are not on proper track. We need to consider this for the sake of a better future. I think education policy must be based on a philosophy. There may be differences of views between governments, but we must be very clear about one thing - we need an education policy that upholds secularism, democracy and equity.

Resources and Costs

Dr. Akbar Ali Khan, Former Advisor, Caretaker Government



I will not discuss numbers because in this country discussion on numbers may cause defamation charges in the court of law. I just want to talk on three points. The first issue is that, as Dr. Kholiquzzaman told us, we can only try to reach the goals by 2015, while making our pledge to support the goals. I say this because we do not have sufficient resources to achieve the goals.

According to the calculation of UNDP and World Bank, in 2006 we needed US \$ 42 per capita in Bangladesh in order to implement MDGs. In 2010 we will need US \$ 55 and in 2015 it will be US \$ 75. But we get now only US\$1 per capita as external assistance for education. In Europe they spend US\$730 as subsidy per annum on a cow. Our budget allocations are not even 30 to 40 percent of the funds calculated by the Planning Commission to be necessary to implement education targets in the PRSP.

We have to adopt non-conventional strategy in primary education to achieve the 2015 goals. We have to involve the NGOs and other institutions. We have to arrange schooling even in thatched huts or in the open. We have disparity between different areas in the country. For example, the attendance rate in Faridpur, Tangail and Jamalpur are about 48 percent and in some other places like Khulna it is 75 percent. We should identify the areas that are lagging behind and make an extra effort there.

We have talked about the disabled people. Apart from them, as per ILO survey, in Bangladesh we have 17 percent child labour in the age range of 7 to 14 years. About 36 percent of these children engage themselves in both study

and work. So there are about 63 percent who do not have access to education. In Chile, they have 10 percent child labour, but 96 percent of them have access to education. We have to accept that we cannot stop child labour. So we need to think about how to bring them on board. We have to formulate strategies for these specific conditions.

World Bank conducted a survey last year. They said Bangladesh would not meet the MDG targets if its overall economy does not develop rapidly. This is very pessimistic. If we want to overcome the obstacles, we will have to proceed with a strategic vision and we have to adopt non-conventional strategies.

Quality education depends on textbooks as well. We have seen the work of the Textbook Board for the last fifty years and it has not served the system well. The reason is very simple. Monopoly, be it in private sector or public sector, is a very bad thing. But public sector monopoly is worse, it's a nasty affair. We need competition here. We cannot allow all publishers to publish books. We need to identify a few pre-qualified publishers and organisations like BRAC may also be involved. We need to allow them to compete. If they compete, changes will follow.

Finally, I would like to say that our technical education is obsolete. The reason is that the technical education curriculum was prepared considering the requirement of the manufacturing industries. But now 50 percent of our economy consist of the service sector. Jobs will be created in the service sector and a large number of our people are working abroad. Therefore, the government needs to invest considerably in the technical education, but there is a need to think about the appropriate curriculum and issues of implementing it properly. At this stage I have identified only these three issues. Thank you.

Rights of the Indigenous People

Sanjeeb Drong

General Secretary, Bangladesh Indigenous People's Forum



I work with the indigenous people of Bangladesh. I think I am the only one here who is not a Bangali, rather a person from the indigenous people like Garo, Chakma, Santal and Marma. The first thing I want to say is that in our country there is a need to value and promote cultural diversity. Ours is a multi-cultural and multi-language nation, but this is not reflected either in the education policy or in the curriculum. If we

respect other cultures, if we mention them in our text books, our country becomes richer. Our people would become more humane, a culture of respecting others who are different would then develop, which is now absent in our country.

One of the brothers here has spoken about the disabled. There may be physically, psychologically or intellectually disabled people. But we the indigenous people of Bangladesh are in a real sense politically disabled. We do not have rights, do not have constitutional recognition. There is no participation of indigenous people in the decision-making process.

There is the 'Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues' where we talk about issues like education on indigenous culture, language etc., and being able to study in our mother tongue up to at least class five. The two ex-education ministers can bear me out. The education policy that we have now does not allow even establishment of primary school in our indigenous villages. In order to establish a primary school we have to have a certain type or size of land. But, in the Khasia hills or in the forests of Madhupur or wherever the indigenous people live, we cannot provide the ownership deeds for ancestral land and forests.

By our education regulations, you cannot run a school if you do not have a certain number of students. You could do that in Gazipur, but you would not get so many students together in the Garo or Khasia hills or at Chimbuk in Bandarban. Rules should allow an element of flexibility for the people with different cultures and languages in the country.

What is there in the curriculum? In the class four and class five books, it is written about Santals that their favourite food is red ants and lizards. Whatever is written about us is not meant to promote mutual respect and understanding. I want to speak about yearly school calendar. Most of the Khasias are Christian, some others are Buddhist. I don't suppose even one percent of the indigenous people are Muslims. So when they observe their religion and festivities, say Christmas, they should have a longer holiday. Or when in Chittagong Hill tracts the parents leave their villages for jhum (slash and burn cultivation), the children also need a holiday then. There is a need to review all these in light of the values and life-style of the indigenous people.

A few days back I spoke to the teachers at the Teachers' Training Institute. Many of them have no knowledge about Garo, Santal, Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Koch or Tongchanga for that matter, about the 45 or so indigenous cultures in Bangladesh. The curriculum that is followed for training of teachers does not say that Bangladesh has different ethnic people, that their languages are different, and that their cultures are different and that the differences need to be respected.

In PEDP II there is an allocation of resources for the education of the indigenous people. I proposed that indigenous people should be involved in the decision-making process at DPE. Also in making changes in the curriculum, one or two representatives from indigenous people should be involved. I handed over these recommendations in January 2006, but I do not know if these are being implemented or not. The indigenous people have values, if taught to our children, could help overcome many of our national problems. Ideas of collectivism and pluralism taught properly can make our country become a beautiful multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-language land.

Continuity in Policy and Better management

Kazi Fazlur Rahman

Chairperson, Education Watch & Former Advisor, Caretaker Government



The theme for the EFA Global Action Week is 'Education is a Human Right'. I think education is not only a human right; it is also a means to achieve other human rights. A point was made time and again that we have turned all schools into masonry buildings and there are no thatched schools anymore. I studied at a high school with thatched hut; the quality of education was not bad. We are thinking of providing 'Education for All' by building

buildings. If this is our plan, then we are building a castle in the air.

It's easy to make a building. Give the job to a contractor; there are many interested ones, they will do it. Whether it is with external donation or through domestic financing, we seem to be very interested in making buildings. The largest portions of development funds are spent on physical construction. I am not against buildings, but these should not be at the expense of other essential things.

I consider the question of continuity in policy as the largest single problem. After a change in government, the first strike is made on education. Whatever was there during previous administration, good or bad, all are turned upside down. For example, the literacy movement was stopped. This was not just once. You may remember that there was a 'mass education movement,' although not very large, towards the end of the seventies and the beginning of the eighties. When the next government, a military regime, came, they stopped the literacy programme.

On management of education, whether the size of the ministry is judged big or small should depend on what it does. So far whatever I have heard, whatever the ministry does today, the same used to be done when I was a part of it. Even recruitment of a teacher for a primary school, or transfer of a secondary school teacher, is dealt with by the ministry.

Dr. M. Osman Farruk

As I mentioned, 98 percent of secondary schools are private; we have no say on hiring or firing in these. In the remaining two percent government schools, we get involved. In case of primary schools, the majority are private; the government has nothing to say on these, everything is done by the management committee. There may be some deviations, but not a great deal.

Kazi Fazlur Rahman

Ok, but it is there. And, in the specialized institutions like NCTB etc., if there is a vacancy for a science specialist, there is lobbying for a particular person, irrespective of his credentials. This used to happen in NCTB for long, but now it happens on a large scale.

To talk of the future, we have to face the reality. Dr. Akbar Ali Khan has put it well on availability of resources. We have to increase the proportion of allocation and expenditure in education. And we have to think how best to utilize the allocated funds.

I want to end with decentralization and politicization issues. I read in the newspaper that one of the ex-MPs is currently the chairman of the managing bodies of 26 high schools. Some of these people possibly did not themselves pass primary school.

Speaking about the current government, as Dr. Saadat has said, it has two responsibilities at hand - to arrange

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