

Education for All : A National Priority

REACHING THE VULNERABLE CHILDREN

Issues persisting in the Primary Education Sector

vulnerable to economic shocks and likely to become dependent on safety nets and other forms of assistance. This means an ongoing cycle of poverty, as under-educated adults are less able to ensure the health, well-being and education of their own children.

Current Scenario

Over the last decade, the education sector in Bangladesh has channeled substantial resources toward achieving the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) of "Universal Primary Education" for 20 million primary school aged children. There has been impressive progress in the net primary enrollment which is now 91.1%. If children drop out of school before achieving basic competencies their prospects of finding gainful employment are limited, they are more

M. Habibur Rahman Director, Education, Save the Children USA made a graphic presentation that highlighted most of the issues that put Education for All away from realization. Mr. Rahman identified the major problem areas and placed before the assembly the consolidated recommendations of the three regional consultations. He provided the right kind of cue so that others felt prompted to participate in the lively discussions that followed.

Education is the right of every child and an obligation of the State. Nonetheless, in Bangladesh this is a daunting



and Grades 1 through 8. Furthermore, government capacity to provide quality education has not been able to keep pace with the rising enrollment rates. According to official statistics, one out of two children in Bangladesh who start primary school, dropout before completing Grade 5 and only 22% of children who actually complete primary school attain acceptable standards of numeracy and literacy. The majority of these dropouts are from socio-economically vulnerable groups who live in char, haors, and coastal areas and in the remotest rural area of the country. Bangladesh needs

concerted efforts to make the education for all vulnerable children irrespective of geographical area, socio-economic status, disability, gender, language, ethnicity, etc. The urge for such concerted needs, the asking eyes of the deprived children and the realization that goalposts for education for all are being repeatedly shifted in terms of quality and quantity in the last few years, prompted three important actors, namely Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Save the Children and The Daily Star to organize a roundtable discussion.

9% OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE CHILDREN NEVER ATTEND SCHOOL

- Many out of school children live in remote disaster prone areas in rural and coastal areas, river chars, and marshlands (hoars)
- Children living in serious poverty do not have the opportunity to attend formal schools regularly as they often need to help support themselves and their families.
- Disabled, sick or ethnic minority children face greater barriers in accessing primary education.

Distance to School

Education Watch (2008) collected data on distance between home and various types of educational institutions providing primary education to see whether there was any relationship between children out-of-school. Results showed that as the distance between home and school increased the proportion of children out-of-school increased.

Chief Guest

Md. Motahar Hossain

Hon'ble State Minister, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education

I appreciate the initiative to hold such a roundtable meeting. The Government's success to hold the Primary Completion Examination should be recognized. The goal of enrolling every child in schools within 2011 will be fulfilled. I urge the guardians to become aware of their children's academic progress. There is an initiative to give recognition to those schools of my constitutional area which have performed well. Each of them was awarded with computers to materialize the Prime Minister's dream of making 'Digital Bangladesh' within 2021. The government is determined to implement the new Education Policy by 2011. I expect everyone's support and help to overcome all challenges.



Points raised

Professor Mesbah Kamal
General Secretary, RDC



The enrolment rate of marginalized children such as in The Chittagong Hill Tracts and in the Dalit community in Jessore, Satkhira and Khulna is very poor. If we fail to target these communities, we will not be able to achieve the target within 2011. To prevent dropout from school, the conditions for getting stipends should be flexible. A recent research shows that the children from the Harijan community in Dinajpur was unable to avail this opportunity as they failed to fulfill the conditions for stipend. Apart from that, early marriage and the stigma of untouchability should also be tackled to prevent dropout. Emphasis should be given on the importance of supplementary educational support.

Syed Milky
Education Section, UNICEF



The Government's stipend program should be extended to those areas which are lagging behind in education. To retain children in school corporal punishment must be avoided. Teachers need to be trained to deal with children with special needs.

Khandaker Jahurul Alam
President, NFOWD



It should be the responsibility of the Education Ministry to ensure that children with disability can access education opportunities. The government has started sanctioning stipends through social welfare ministry to the disabled in primary, junior and secondary levels, but education ministry should actually perform these duties.

Latifa Akand
Educationist



The common tendency of all of us is to regard poverty as one and only barrier in spreading education. But there are also some financially able children who do not have any access to education due to other problems like social safety etc.

PPrashanta Tripura
Chief, Implementation, CHTDF UNDP



Local government in Bangladesh can perform a great role in expanding primary education to grassroots level. District, Upazila and Thana councils should be provided with adequate resources so that these can perform their ascribed responsibilities.

Mohammad Mohsin
Advisor, Plan Bangladesh



Pre-school is very important before primary education. The Government's policy of establishing pre-schools and primary schools to achieve Education for all within 2015 is laudable. Education in urban areas must be seriously addressed as the trend to migrate to city is ever increasing. Education for children in slums and street children need to seriously be looked into. The 'satellite model of primary education' which was operative in the 1980's should be revived with some modifications. It is suitable for people living in char, marsh lands and hilly areas.

Matiur Rahman
Senior Program Manager, SC_UK



Educational institutions should be built in such a way that these can stand against climate change. A large number of child laborers in Dhaka are victims of climate change.

Mahfuz Anam
Editor & Publisher, The Daily Star



Both print and electronic media should play vital roles in the movement to ensure Education For All. The marginalized children should be incorporated into the mainstream. Media should report stories of the successful schools as role-models. People should recognize and appreciate specially those teachers who are working in remote places with dedication and sacrifice. The Daily Star will play a pivotal role in spreading education; other media may wish to do the same.

Rasheda K. Choudhury
Ex Advisor, Caretaker Government of Bangladesh & Executive Director Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)



Media can play a great role in raising awareness for the education of most vulnerable children. Though many things have already been done, we have to still go a long way. The inclusion of the children of commercial sex workers in the 'vulnerable' group should be looked into as they are not allowed to enroll in institutions at some places. The alarming tendency of eve teasing or sexual harassment will result in early marriage which will augment the rate of dropout. 'Flexible school calendar' is a good answer in some areas like the hilly areas where in the time of 'Joom' cultivation children hardly come to school. Public awareness should be raised against corporal punishment. It is now a crying need to shift the responsibility of the education of the disabled from social welfare ministry to education ministry. We are hopeful of achieving UPC (Universal Primary Completion) within 2015.

Salim Chowdhury
Director, JCF



We have still a long way to go before we can achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). In many districts, there is still acute shortage of schools. The government and NGO should come forward to work out a plan so that the enrolment of every child can be ensured.

Dr. Shafiqul Islam
Director, BRAC Education Programme



The conventional method of teaching is faulty. Children from extremely marginalized community are often discriminated. The poor parents cannot provide private tuition and therefore the children fail to acquire the required competency in subjects like Mathematics and English. Besides it has also been observed that children come to school without having any food and therefore remain hungry and cannot concentrate on their lessons.

Momtaz Latif
ECCD Specialist



The reasons behind the success of some schools should be explored first and then compared with the less successful schools. Successful schools can become role models for them. Special attention given by teachers to the children of illiterate parents and on the system of pre-school should be taken care of. The primary school teachers should not perform other governmental responsibilities apart from teaching, teaching.

Azizul Karim
Director, RDRS



The traditional teaching method should be replaced by effective methods to augment the rate of enrolment in schools and prevent dropout. Raising awareness and incorporating people from all strata can ensure education for all. Private tuition is barriers to effective learning.

Suman Sengupta
Country Director, Save the Children UK



Save the Children UK as the technical research and advocacy partner in the SHIKHON-Learning Alternatives for Vulnerable Children project has conducted a series of Upazila and Regional Round Table forums to analyze constraints and barriers to reaching excluded vulnerable children and potential strategies for incorporating their participation in the future. SHIKHON is one of the largest non formal primary education programs in Bangladesh covering 1,55,000 out of school and marginalized children living in char and hoar areas. Led by Save the Children US (SCUS) the program is being implemented by FIVDB, Jagorani Chakra Foundation and RDRS in the northeast, northwest and central southern regions respectively of Sylhet, Rangpur and Barisal Divisions. We believe this is a universal right of all children and a shared responsibility the Government and civil society. Today's forum seeks to further examine the barriers and constraints for the inclusion of the most vulnerable children in the national primary education system as well as review the accumulated recommendations from the decentralized Roundtable forums. The ultimate goal of the National Roundtable is to formulate experienced based policy recommendations and provisions to reach the country's least advantaged and most marginalized children with quality primary education.

The Objective of the Roundtable is to prompt analysis of Bangladesh's fulfillment of the mandate of Education For All and to generate and share potential strategies proposed by civil society in 3 Regions of the country.

Moderator

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed
Senior Advisor, IED, BRAC University



Decentralizing the education ministry's power by strengthening the local governments and institutions is a must. Instead of district based plans, 'Upazila' based program should be in place. As poor children come to school without having any food, tiffin for every child should be provided along with regular stipend. The government shortage of resources to undertake such mammoth tasks is, of course, a matter of serious concern.

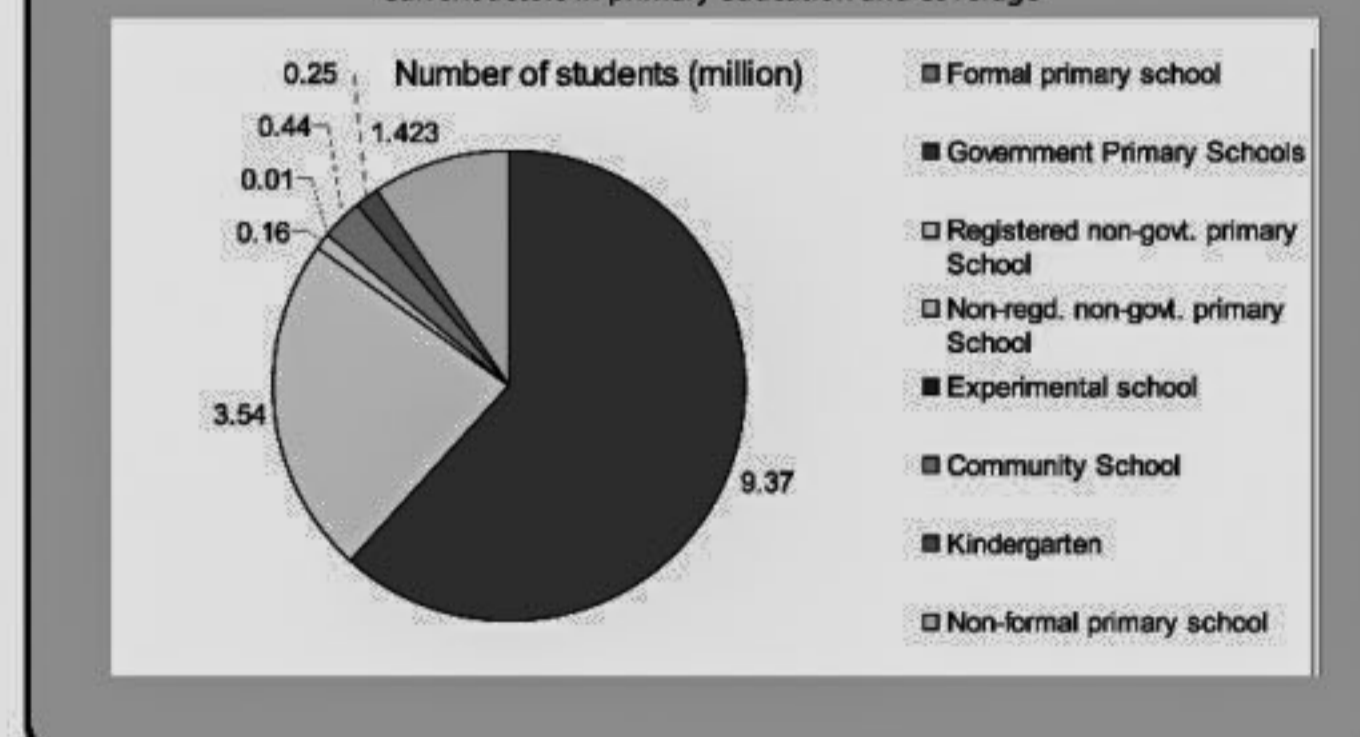
Conclusion

Despite the laudable efforts of the government to meet the Millennium Development Goals of universal primary education and gender parity by 2015, the current policy environment fails to address the needs of half of the primary school age children of Bangladesh. Creation of a centralized, uniform public school system will not be possible in the immediate future so even more vulnerable children will be left out. A comprehensive approach is required to reach the children who live in extreme poverty, have disabilities, have special needs, live in urban slums or in remote rural disaster prone villages or come from ethnic minorities. Non formal primary education programs are viable options which can ensure these children attain educational outcomes equivalent to students in formal public schools. A wide range of NGO-led non-formal education initiatives operate throughout the Bangladesh, attempting to improve education attendance and achievement rates for children who would otherwise be excluded from education. Government should capitalize on these public private partnerships and coordinate these initiatives to expand their reach and exchange best practices with the formal government primary school system. Small, flexible and inclusive NFPE schools close to children's homes and with strong links to the formal school system can provide a large scale solution for underserved vulnerable children. Investing in such a 'non formal' model of delivering quality education may be the most cost-effective option for Bangladesh to reach universal primary education by 2015.

Most remote and rural areas have lower academic achievement, lack suitably qualified teachers and either lack sufficient schools or they are too overcrowded to meet the needs of disadvantaged children. This could be resolved if the following steps are taken:-

- Eligibility requirements for community teacher's adjusted pre-service and regular in-service teacher training from qualified NFPE providers provided.
- NFPE teachers who meet MoE standards by 2015 are given teacher accreditation
- Permission to NFPE participants to take official assessments and end of year exams or their equivalent is granted.

NON FORMAL PRIMARY SCHOOLS CURRENTLY PROVIDE EDUCATION FOR OVER 1.5 MILLION CHILDREN
Current actors in primary education and coverage



According to MoE statistics 14,199 villages do not have primary schools. Out of this total 1,943 villages have more than 2,000 people, the criteria for establishing a government primary school.

In observance of Global Action Week (GAW) 2010



April 22, 2010 VIP Lounge, National Press Club Dhaka