

**SOCIAL ISSUES IN BUDGET**

# Addressing school safety

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IN the budget for fiscal year 2011-12, the government has proposed Tk.19,873 crore for the education sector with Tk.10,850 crore for the education ministry and Tk.8,957 crore for primary and mass education ministry. The proposed volume is Tk.1725 crore more than that of the existing allocation of Tk.18,148 crore. This is good as investment in human capital in a proper manner is a must here.

Nowadays school safety has become a very crucial issue in the context of Bangladesh but unfortunately this is hardly addressed in our development plan. Natural disasters frequently hamper the education system especially to kids in the rural areas but in the urban areas it cannot be ignored that millions of children are at the risk of earthquake. It has been observed that most of the earthquakes take place when the kids are in school.

Noticeably, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti reportedly killed 222,517 people and injured another 310,928 (UNOCHA, 2010). This high death toll reflected the exposure of large numbers of people, and vulnerability factors such as extreme poverty, corruption, fragile democracy, and a lack of earthquake experience in a country where they only occur infrequently (Keefer et al., 2010).

In contrast, the February 27, 2010, earthquake in Chile was by any standards an extreme event, releasing five hundred times more energy than the earthquake in Haiti the previous month. However, it only killed 486 people, a fraction of those who died in Haiti.

In contrast to Haiti, exposure was lower, and Chile has a history of dealing with earthquakes. It is also an upper-middle-income country with a consolidated democracy and low levels of

corruption. So, even the massive destruction for earthquake proves weak governance in the country.

The experience of earthquake in Lima, Lisbon and New Zealand and their comparative analysis show that the low casualty rate in the later two events reflect tough building regulations, strict enforcement, and experience in dealing with earthquakes.

According to Roger Bilham a big earthquake is overdue in the Himalayan region, and Bangladesh is one of the countries that lie in active seismic fault zones. The United Nations International Decade for Natural Disaster - RADIUS Initiative, identified Dhaka as high-risk zone, considering its high population density, poor physical structure, poor economic condition and least response and recovery capabilities. So, although we are not aware, Dhaka facing similar situations like Gujarat, Sichuan or Pakistan or Haiti is not impossible.

The Food and Disaster Minister Abdur

Razzak admits that "the government has prepared a list of 70,000 houses in earthquake risk in Dhaka city through a survey conducted by scientists from home and abroad as Bangladesh is under earthquake risk." To him, at least 2.5 lakh buildings of the country are extremely vulnerable to earthquake and tsunami. Schools are not excluded from the list in deed.

Students are the most vulnerable to earthquake for a number of reasons. Now in Dhaka there are lots of schools in integrated buildings other than being in separate buildings. The modern and costly schools are in high-rise buildings and the government old schools are in poorly constructed ones. They cannot save them from any adversity for their physical weakness and the other reason as we mentioned earlier -- most of the earthquakes happen when kids are at schools.

Earthquake is such a tricky disaster that one can prepare for it by receiving any early warn-

ing and cannot adopt any prepared measure. Moreover, we are making ourselves more vulnerable to earthquake through our expanded and unplanned urbanisation; without being unaware of the ferocity of it.

The Global Assessment Report (2011) shows that a large area of Dhaka is highly susceptible to liquefaction during earthquakes and many have been used as construction sites for buildings and infrastructure in recent decades.

With little contemporary experience of earthquakes, Dhaka is vulnerable and ill-prepared. The older part of the city is home to densely populated, multi-storey, unreinforced brick buildings predisposed to heavy damage in a strong earthquake (Paul and Bhuiyan, 2010).

So, for our national interest, it is vital that all of us comply with the building codes and importantly ensure school safety. Saving the children is one of the most important issues for a country. But allocating the highest amount of money for the education sector is not sufficient, rather in the same time, allocating some money for school safety is very essential. For this, proper construction of the school buildings, renovating the existing weak buildings and awareness raising among the student and teacher are mandatory.

Some International Non-Government Organisations like Islamic Relief Worldwide, Plan International and Action Aid Bangladesh has initiated the culture of school safety under the 5th DIPECHO Action Plan, which is expanded under the NARRI consortium represented by eight international organisations.

NARRI DIPECHO aspires to make schools against earthquake in particular targeting three major city corporations and build disaster resilient communities through a process of empowerment, collaborative efforts and capac-

ity building.

The process includes development of disaster management plans through active involvement of school teachers, students and the management. In the process, they come to know existing structural and non-structural weaknesses. Efforts are made to ensure that the school community takes ownership of the plan and makes the necessary updates in the future. The DRR message spreads as the students share information and knowledge to their parents, relatives, friends and neighbours.

But this initiative in non-government level is not sufficient and it is important that government replicate the initiative in wider level. In this situation, proper plan for school safety and allocation of money according to these is mandatory.

NARRI urges the government to go with the following things immediately for the existing schools:

- Risk assessment in school level and take proper measures;
- Integration of risk reduction into the school curricula so that student can be better prepared;
- Ensuring safer construction of school buildings; and
- Knowledge and experience dissemination.

Now the budget is on the table and it is the crucial time for the planning of the upcoming fiscal year, otherwise we will bear the responsibility of being the flute players of Hamilton, we will be at fault of the damages and harms to our school going children if there is any incident like this.

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# Measuring gender sensitivity

MAMUNUR RASHID

THE national budget for the financial year 2011-12 has been passed in the National Parliament on June 30, 2011. During pre-budget campaign and advocacy, a number of women's and human rights organisations demanded allocations in the national budget for implementing the National Women's Advancement Policy (NWP) 2011.

The finance minister too mentioned in his budget speech that this budget takes into account implementation of NWP. In this backdrop, we have reviewed the proposed national budget with emphasis on a number of important sectors and issues. In light of that analysis, a set of observations and recommendations has been construed for further advocacy.

**Some general observations:**

- The gender budget report needs to specifically mention expected achievements for next fiscal year. It should also clearly mention which achievements have been made last year. To be precise, the report should show specific areas of changes made through the allocations for gender in the identified sectors.
- The supportive institutional framework to implement gender responsive budgeting is absent in our country. Women's participation at the decision-making level in different ministries is less than 10 percent, which is a challenge to implement gender responsive budgeting.
- A national level GRB monitoring committee can be formed to oversee whether the allocations are being spent the right track and if they are really making any change.
- Gender-sensitivity of the personnel involved in implementing the budget is an essentiality.
- Allocation for MoWCA has reduced significantly, which might be due to mainstreaming women's issues in different ministries. We believe MoWCA will still have to play a coordinating role among all line ministries. So it needs more budgetary allocation.

**Sector-wise concerns and recommendations:**

**Education**

- The government made a commitment on free girls' education up to degree level, which has not yet been materialised in the budget. Allocation for girls' higher education should be made including adequate hostels and residential facilities.
- With a view to developing future aware citizens, more budgetary allocation is needed for children's ethical and ideological education. Programmes should also be taken to enhance gender awareness of parents and teachers.
- Sexual harassment is a severe problem that hampers girls' education. Proper steps should be taken to ensure social security of girls at social and institutional level.

**Health and family planning**

- Apart from reproductive healthcare services, budget needs to ensure access of women in general health care services. Healthcare should not be only viewed from a service perspective but it is also a right.
- The programmes on population control have mainly targeted women as participants. The budget needs to give directions on actively involving men this type of programmes.
- The total health budget has decreased significantly. Bangladesh needs to invest more on the health sector since it is a very important area of human resource development. 'User fee' system in the hospitals should be withdrawn for women.

**Agriculture**

- Despite their huge role in agriculture, women are not recognised as farmers. As a result, women do not have equal access to agricultural services including farmers' card, credit, farmers' club, ownership of seed, agricultural materials etc. Measures should be taken to promote

women's access in various aspects of agricultural sector.

- Land is a very important means of agriculture. However, in Bangladesh women do not enjoy equal share in land ownership due to discriminations in inheritance. Measures should be taken for free registration of land that women inherit.

**Social security and welfare**

- With a view to reducing early marriage, some incentives can be offered to parents for ensuring their daughters' marriage after the age of 18.
- Budget intends to distribute allowance for 92 thousand distressed women. But identifying those women in distress is a difficult job. Proper steps should be taken to remove the difficulty.
- Seven percent of the total population is elderly people for whom there are no welfare programmes. Special efforts should be made to ensure healthcare facilities for them including separate units in the hospitals.
- Facilities for women in industrial sectors including garment factories should be expanded.

**Disaster management**

- Women often do not want to go to cyclone or flood shelters due to lack of security (e.g. fear of sexual harassment). Measures should be taken to make the shelters women-friendly (e.g. separate toilets, breastfeeding corners).

**Expatriate welfare and overseas employment**

- Security of overseas women labours is a matter of serious concern. There are reports of many women becoming subject to violence and torture including sexual harassment in their workplaces abroad. Government needs to consider signing of special bilateral agreement with the receiving countries on the issue of security.

**Building women's employment and entrepreneurship**

- Training alone cannot ensure women's advancement unless that is followed by scope of employment. The learning and experience women gather in the one or two months long training courses become useless without practical opportunities to utilise them. Government needs to expand employment opportunities side by side training programmes.
- Overall environment should be made women-friendly e.g. gender-sensitive institutions with code of conduct, zero-tolerance on violence against women, etc.

**Violence against women**

- Though allocation has been made for the acid survivors, but rehabilitation of those women who were subject to physical distortion or loss of organs due to violence has not been addressed. Allocation should be made for them too.
- Allocation is necessary to implement anti-domestic violence act. Budget should be kept for introducing helpline to combat violence against women.

In the last few years, the demand for gender responsive budgeting (GRB) has gained momentum both in the government and non-government arena. It is fairly a new approach to make the budgets friendly towards women and girls. The concept has evolved in the backdrop of a growing realization that traditional approach to budgets is mostly male-dominated and thus women's concerns are often neglected or sidelined.

So there arises a need to look into the budget process with a gender lens. There is a need to take affirmative action or special measures to ensure equity of women since their issues have continued to be ignored till date.

Fortunately, the current as well as the last government has recognised its importance. However, things cannot be changed overnight. Bangladesh budget is a highly bureaucratic process and there are many areas to address including change of attitude, institutional framework, gender-disaggregated database and so on. To reach somewhere, there is always a starting point. Our journey has started and there are miles to cross.

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# Social security concern

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THE constitution of Bangladesh in its Article 15(d) clearly declares to introduce the Social Security Programme. The constitution spells "the right to social security that is to say, to public assistance in cases of undeserved want arising from unemployment, illness or disablement, or suffered by widows or orphans or in old age or in other such cases."

In spite of constitutional obligation, no government had come forward to implement this constitutional commitment. The present government's election manifesto pledged that the number of poor people will be reduced to 45 million from 65 million by 2013 and will further come down to 22 million in 2021. To reduce poverty, the government has proposed an allocation of Tk.86,891 crore as poverty reduction expenditure for the fiscal year 2011-12, where it was Tk.73,680 crore in the revised budget of 2010-11.

Social Security may be conceptualised as: "the protection which society provides for its members through a series of public measures against the economic and social distress which otherwise would be caused by the stoppage or substantial reduction of earnings resulting from sickness, maternity, employment injury, unemployment, invalidity, old age and death; the provision of medical care; and the provision of subsidies for families with children" (ILO, 1999).

Over the years governments have proposed budgets for social security and welfare sectors. Continuing this government has proposed Tk.2,2556.05 crore for the FY 2011-12 for the social protection and empowerment which is 13.79% of the total budget and 2.51% of GDP.

Social Safety Net is one of the effective ways to reduce poverty. This framework for poverty reduction is divided into four major categories:

- Cash Transfer (allowance) Programmes and Other Activities;
- Food Security Programmes -- Social Protection;
- Micro-Credit Programmes -- Social Empowerment, and
- Development Sector Programmes -- Social Empowerment.

Accordingly, the government has initiated different safety net programmes for improving social security and to protect the poor. Considering cash transfer (allowances) programmes and other activities, the proposed budgetary allocation is Tk.7,125.80 crore, which was Tk.6,414.81 crore in the 2010-11 revised budget.

For the food security programmes (social protection), the proposed budgetary allocation is Tk.7,102.57 crore, which is lower than the previous revised budget (FY 2010-11).

The proposed allocation for micro-credit programmes (social empowerment) is Tk.4,094.65 crore and is Tk.454.25 crore higher than the revised 2010-11 budget. The proposed allocation for the development sector programmes (social empowerment) is Tk.4,233.03 crore for the fiscal year 2011-12, which was Tk.3,606.18 crore in the revised 2010-11 budget.

Under the Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNP) the proposed number of beneficiary is 768.17 lac, which was 808.03 lac in the revised budget of the previous fiscal year (2010-11). This reduction in the number of beneficiary proposed at a time when, people (especially poor and the people with fixed or no income) are facing difficulties to cope with the soaring prices of essential commodities, especially food prices that has accelerated the food inflation and general inflation as well.

The inflation rate is on the rise (10.67%), while food inflation alone recorded 14.36% (April 2011). Therefore,

the high inflation rate is bound to have a deteriorating effect on the food and social security situation.

Moreover, the government has predicted the inflation rate to be 7.5% for the FY 2011-12, which might be the elusive dream according to past experience. Hence, the allowance and coverage of the cash transfer programmes should have been revised and increased considering the high price and high inflation rate.

Ensuring social safety and addressing human poverty, proposed more social development programmes in the 2011-12 budget. These expand the Ghore Fera (returning home) programmes, Micro-credit programmes, One Union One Associate Organisation (Samridhhi), Social Investment Programme Project (SIPP) of Social Development Foundation (SDF), a special programme titled New Life, expand the One House One Farm programme, Pension Insurance Scheme.

A lot of programmes are taken by the government to provide food security of the population. Though the programmes are expanding, the un-sustainability or ineffectiveness of the programmes are depicted by the small coverage of population.

From the available data it can be inferred that the budgets were proposed to reduce social vulnerability of people in the short run negating structural development that would improve social security of the poor in the long-run.

Therefore, if all the circumstances are considered, the safety net programmes are not likely to bring any sustained enhancement of social security if effective measures are not undertaken to create employment opportunities, hold back the rising inflation rate, increase public expenditure through demand-based allocation, etc.

The prevailing scenario of poverty, safety net programmes and the government spending carried out regionally would lead to a recommendation for proper planning to be carried out at regional level and sufficient monitoring of the expenditure carried out locally. In this regard, it would be crucial for the government to carry on with survey on poverty at regional level in frequent intervals and identify the groups who are in need of specified government services.

The existing cash and food transfer programmes in safety nets may reduce starvation rate of limited number of people in some specific times but for improving social security situation (in its comprehensive sense) more specific measures addressing long term vulnerability must be taken.

Moreover, the problem of limited scale and population coverage of SSNPs may initiate problems of leakage and misallocation which may go undetected because of inadequate programme monitoring. Lack of accountability, transparency and nepotism of the local government authority make it difficult to proper implementation of these programmes and also reduce the effectiveness of the programmes.

Therefore, provisions must be formulated for programme evaluation and also for understanding of the impacts of programmes. The government has claimed to take steps to develop a database on the beneficiaries of the Social Safety Net Programmes. However, specific measures are yet to be undertaken. It is very difficult to manage this situation unless the efforts are accelerated. Hence, the government is creative in formulating policies and programmes in an effective way to strengthen the social safety net programmes.

Otherwise, the aim of these programmes might slip away from achieving the targets.

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