

BUDGET FY2019-20

Social-sector allocation far from adequate



THE population structure of any nation provides the country with a window of opportunity to reap economic and social dividends from the structure. In the language of demographers and economists, this is known as first demographic dividend. The first demographic dividend occurs when the proportion of population in the labour force increases relative to other age groups (e.g. children and the elderly). It is a transitory event that provides a one-time "window of opportunity" for investing heavily in human resource development to accelerate economic growth and social development. With the population ageing, the dependency ratio increases again, the "window" gradually closes, and the dividend is no longer available.

Bangladesh has entered into this window of opportunity in 1990s; it is argued that Bangladesh would benefit from its demographic dividend until sometime between 2031 and 2041. The realisation of a double-digit economic growth depends to a large extent on reaping the maximum benefits of the first demographic dividend. This requires adequate resource allocation to the social sector—education and health sector. Moreover, achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (ensuring healthy lives and promoting well-being for all at all ages) and 4 (ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all) rests on the adequate funding of these sectors in the national budget.

A review of budgetary data of the last ten years suggests that primary education expenditure has never crossed 7 percent of the total budget between the fiscal years

2009 and 2019. The primary education expenditure reached the peak of around 7 percent of budget only in FY 2010 and FY 2016. Thereafter, a sharp decline in primary education spending has been observed. The expenditure on primary education declined to less than 5 percent of the budget in FY 2019. The expenditure on the education sector, although higher by about 2 percentage points compared to the primary education spending, revealed similar trends with respect to the total budget. The highest expenditure on the education sector has been found in FY 2016 when it reached 9 percent marked in the last ten years. Similar to the expenditure pattern of the primary education sector, the education sector expenditure also dipped after FY 2016. It dropped from 9 percent in FY 2016 to 5.4 percent in FY 2019. The total expenditure on education ranged between 15.6 percent of the budget in FY 2016 and 10.2 percent in FY 2019. In terms of GDP, the education expenditure has been around 2 percent of GDP during the last decade.

The expenditure on health is lower than the expenditures on the primary education sector and the education sector. The expenditure on the health sector, which crossed the 6-percent mark just once, in FY 2010, remained around 5 percent for most years of the last decade before dipping to 4 percent in FY 2019. Health expenditures have been around 1 percent of the GDP during the last decade.

Against these declining allocation trends, the government has proposed a 17 percent increase of education-sector allocation in FY 2020 compared to the revised allocation in the outgoing fiscal year (FY 2019). The total allocation for the education sector stands at Tk 61,118 crore. In terms of the total budget, the allocation is around 12 percent. The education allocation is 2.1 percent of GDP. The allocation for the health sector has been set at Tk 29,464 crore—which is 5.63 percent of the total budget, or only 1.02



SOURCE: CSE.DU.AC.BD

percent of the GDP. When these allocations are compared to the trends of the last decade, it tends to suggest a continuation of the historical trend.

Now it may be imperative to ask: are these allocations adequate to reap the demographic dividend or attain the SDGs 3 and 4? A comparison of allocations in the developing countries may help answer the question. In a study for the General Economics Division of the Bangladesh Planning Commission, Khondker and Rahman (2016) compared the investment in education in Bangladesh with the average of developing countries. Using the available data of 2015, it has been found that the education expenditure gaps in Bangladesh

at primary, secondary and tertiary levels are USD 373, USD 419 and USD 1,965 per student respectively, compared to the average education expenditure of developing countries. The total expenditure gaps in Bangladesh as a percent of GDP at primary, secondary and tertiary education are respectively 3.64, 2.92 and 2.08. Finally, the estimated investment gap in overall education as a percent of GDP is 8.65. It has been also observed that the gap between the average expenditure of developing countries and that of Bangladesh is widening across all types of education.

Furthermore, according to available WDI data of the World Bank, education expenditures in Malaysia, Thailand and

Sri Lanka have been significantly higher than Bangladesh. For instance, education expenditures as a percent of GDP in Malaysia was 4.83 percent (2016); Thailand 4.12 percent (2013) and Sri Lanka 3.48 percent (2016). Similarly, the public expenditure per primary student has been lower in Bangladesh compared to these three countries. Per student primary education as percent of GDP per capita in Bangladesh is 9.31 (2016), whereas they are 1.4 percent for Sri Lanka (2016), Malaysia 16.4 percent (2016), and Thailand 23.3 percent (2016).

A 2017 GED report titled "SDG Need Assessment and Financing Strategy: Bangladesh Perspective" estimated that Bangladesh needs to increase its average total health spending to 5.25 percent of GDP to attain SDG 3. The country would also need to increase public spending on education from its current level to 4.00 percent of GDP to attain SDG 4.

The above statistics envisaged that social-sector allocation is on the lower side in Bangladesh. The allocation in the FY 2020 budget is far from adequate. Bangladesh must allocate significantly more resources to the social sector to bridge the gap with the developing nations. However, among others, low revenue efforts in Bangladesh are a deterrent.

Moving forward, Bangladesh must improve its revenue efforts to 16-17 percent of GDP within the next two years—and to 20 percent of GDP within the next five years—from the current level of 11 percent of GDP. Eventually, 2-3 percent of additional revenue efforts must be allocated for the social sector. Also, there should be a greater focus on the quality of education and health services. In this context, Bangladesh must create institutions to produce trained, good teachers and health professionals.

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Caring for ageing parents: Is law the only solution?



THE Maintenance of Parents Act 2013 has made it a punishable offence for the children to fail to fulfil certain duties and responsibilities towards their parents as described in the Act. Although this law didn't receive adequate attention in the last six

years, a recent announcement of a draft Rules under the Act by the social welfare ministry has attracted new debates regarding a specific provision contained in the draft. While describing various duties of children towards their parents, the draft Rules proposed a specific provision elaborating on "care of parents" which entails that if the child is not living with the parents, then his "wife" along with other family members would have to take care of his parents. Thus, the assumption is, a child who is not living with the parents for any justifiable reason must be a male child, and as such, the question of whether a son-in-law would have similar responsibilities if the daughter lived away from her parents had not been considered. This provision is simply a reflection of the traditional gender-specific role assigned by the discriminatory patriarchal standards. However, the entire premise of the draft Rules appears to be a somewhat weak attempt to hold onto the traditional family values and morality by means of a law.

The 2013 Act says that every child has to provide "maintenance" to her/his parents and the child has to live together with the parents for that purpose. The definition of "maintenance" in the law includes providing for "food, clothing, medical and housing facilities" as well as "to give company". Thus, by maintenance, this law is not referring to any monetary award; it is rather referring to certain services and duties towards the parents. The law provides that every child has to regularly look after the health of the

parents, arrange for their medical support and services, and in case they're not living together, has to regularly visit them. As such, if a child fails to provide "maintenance", the law is giving a scope to the parents to file a criminal complaint, as a consequence of which the child may be fined or sent to jail.

The meaning of the term "to give company", included in the definition of "maintenance" in the 2013 law, has been further elaborated in the proposed draft Rules. It says that every child has to regularly give company to the parents. However, if the child cannot live together with the parents for jobs or any other appropriate reasons, then she/he has to visit them twice a year. The proposed Rules even included, within the definition of "giving company" to the parents, communication via telephone and other modern mediums of communication. This means that all these duties will fall within the definition of "maintenance" and as such,

any non-compliance by the children will amount to a punishable offence. From a plain reading of this law, it may be construed as morally justifiable, but from a legal-analytical perspective, it is rather difficult to understand how matters of social norms, morality and values can be subjects of a law. Contents of a law should be such that they are specific and enforceable; otherwise the law will remain confined within the black letters only.

The 2013 law contains further ambiguities which the proposed Rules could have clarified. The law is silent about any age-limit, source of income or financial capabilities of the parents. Also, in case of defining "children", the law is referring to any capable child, without mentioning her/his minimum age or financial status. The draft Rules further explains that a capable child is one who is able to bear the expenses of the maintenance of the family. This means that even a person below the age of

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18 can be held liable under this law, if she/he is the earning member of the family. The law and the draft Rules are also not clear as to how the responsibilities as regards the maintenance of parents will be decided when there are more children than one and they cannot mutually decide among themselves on the issue. In addition, the law is also silent about parents who may have been abusive or negligent towards the wellbeing of the child. The law is also assuming that the father and mother of a child are always living together and does not include situations where parents may have been living separately due to, for example, divorce.

Another aspect of this law is that the definition of "child" refers to either a male or a female child. This may appear to be a positive aspect of the law, but it does raise an important question. While women are still given unequal or no rights over the property of parents in personal family laws, in terms of sharing expenses for parental maintenance, this inequality has not been reflected in the existing laws. Additionally, how freely a

daughter can use her own income should also be considered. This is crucial in the context of how patriarchy often dominates financial independence of a woman in the family.

Among the Asian countries, India and Singapore are useful examples where parental maintenance has been made legally binding upon the children. However, the difference is, under these laws, the court can award a certain amount of money as maintenance to the parents by way of a civil remedy. But when maintenance is defined by social and moral duties instead of any monetary award and when its breach is punished with criminal sanctions, it does pose serious doubt as to whether this law can be at all implemented in practice, and if implemented, whether that will effectively address the social security questions of the senior citizens.

Enacting new and more stringent laws cannot always be the only solution to tackle a social crisis. To address the plight of the aged parents, we also need to address the related social realities. Attention must be given to the indicators of progressive social changes. At the same time, we also need to address the weak social protection mechanism that leaves no choice for an aged parent other than to be at the mercy of their children after a certain age. The number of our ageing population has naturally increased over the years, but compared to that, existing social protection benefits for the aged population remain inadequate. This draft Rules does entail provisions regarding establishing national-level bodies to protect the interests of parents, including provisions for establishing parental care homes. However, the criminal responsibility of negligent children on the one hand, and the state's commitment towards ensuring social protection on the other, are two different issues and should not be made dependent on each other to be legally implemented.

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QUOTABLE Quote

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
(1856–1950)
Irish playwright, critic, polemicist and political activist

The liar's punishment is not in the least that he is not believed, but that he cannot believe anyone else.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Bewildered
- 6 Pathetic person
- 11 Brutes
- 12 Not available
- 13 Wildcats
- 14 Act the siren
- 15 Tatso setting
- 16 One pointed at
- 18 Writer Rita – Brown
- 19 Curved letter
- 20 Grammys category
- 21 Print measures
- 22 Skilled
- 24 Babysitter's bane
- 25 Less colorful
- 27 Street boundary
- 29 Writer's reference
- 32 Is for two
- 33 Feeling down
- 34 Easy target
- 35 Battleship letters
- 36 Some amount of
- 37 Bonanza stuff
- 38 Writer Sontag
- 40 Canal sight
- 42 Vote in
- 43 Played a role
- 44 Malia's sister
- 45 Takes ten
- 4 Greek vowel
- 5 Nineveh's kingdom
- 6 Illuminated
- 7 Binary digit
- 8 Vacation destinations
- 9 Sevilla setting
- 10 Makeup exam
- 17 Muffin choice
- 23 Ball
- 24 Entreat
- 26 Soap option
- 27 Things to fight for
- 28 Address of "Dr. No"
- 30 Goal
- 31 Ignore the limit
- 33 Annual visitor
- 39 German cry
- 41 Great serve

DOWN

- 1 Woolly mammal
- 2 Saw the sights
- 3 Lightweight garments

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

A	S	T	R	O	B	L	O	T	S
T	U	R	I	N	R	A	D	I	O
A	B	A	T	E	I	N	D	E	X
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A	R	E	N	A	G	A	M	U	T
G	R	E	E	N	E	M	Y		

BEETLE BAILEY by Mort Walker

BEETLE! I NEED TO TALK TO YOU!
I'M SORRY, SARGE IS MAKING ME RUN THE OBSTACLE COURSE.
ARE YOU UP TO GOING TO THE BIG BALL WITH ME ON SATURDAY?
GREAT! MORT WALKER

BABY BLUES by Kirkman & Scott

HI, HONEY! I'M ON MY WAY HOME.
GOOD, IT'S BEEN A LONG DAY.
DO YOU NEED ME TO PICK UP ANYTHING?
TWO TICKETS TO TAHITI.
I MEANT FOR DINNER.
WE CAN EAT ON THE PLANE.