

ILLUSTRATION: **BIPLOB CHAKROBORTY**

Education and growth: Are we asking the right questions?

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

Recognising the urgency of the planetary survival concern, the 2020 Human Development Report makes the point that immense human pressures on the planet have ushered in a new geological epoch, the Anthropocene, or the Age of Humans. A new index, the Planetary-Pressures Adjusted Human Development Index (PHDI), has been introduced to show a country's carbon dioxide emissions and material footprint.

Bangladesh ranked 129th among 191 countries in Human Development Index, as indicated in Human Development Report 2021-22 – an improvement from 133 out of 189 countries in the previous year. Increase in national income was the major reason behind Bangladesh's progress. Inequality, however, grew which is a challenge to sustaining well rounded progress. Among its South Asian neighbours, the Maldives ranked 90th, Bhutan 127th, India 131st, Nepal 143rd, Pakistan 161st, and Afghanistan 180th.

A broader view of development, going beyond GDP, is reflected in the SDG agenda for 2030. SDG-4 goal on education includes 10 targets on education and skills of people from early childhood to youth and adults, which also are linked directly and indirectly to attaining the other 16 sustainable goals. Returning to the connection between education and economic growth, it should be underscored that the relevant question is how the many components of the education system function



with efficiency and effectiveness to contribute to sustainable human development with a broad vision that embeds social, environmental, and economic objectives.

Education is of intrinsic value to individuals and society, besides its contribution to economic growth and productivity. It has a key role in realising human potential and building a society where human dignity and well-being flourishes. It prepares the new generation to learn and live by the rules of sustainable consumption and production. The contribution of education can be derived from effective functioning of its diverse subsectors and stages of education and the wide range of institutions and programmes in the public sector, private sector, and in hybrid state-non state partnerships.

Education activities are carried out in formal, non-formal, and informal modes, and serve different groups of learners and diverse education and skill development objectives. An education system's performance depends on aligning all the diverse actors and actions towards obtaining better outcomes. The limitations of looking at education and its output as one aggregate category are obvious.

Taking the human development index as a reasonable measure of progress, Bangladesh is advancing at a moderate pace, but remains behind more than two thirds of the countries of the world, as noted above. A poorly performing education system obstructs a broad-vision growth. A recent study exploring collaboration of state and non-state actors in education revealed what are described as structural and

operational problems of education. Remedial measures have been proposed (Brac University/Brac Education Program, 2022). These suggestions, noted below, are relevant for enhancing the role of education in advancing

curriculum for all schools. Many of these issues were anticipated in the 2010 Education Policy and flagged here only as headlines.

3. Ensuring adequacy of education resources and effective use to achieve

to achieve the public good aims of education. When our leaders talk about “Smart Bangladesh,” a pre-condition to realising it is to nurture “smart politics” that halts the culture of impunity and lack of accountability.



Thousands of children from different schools and colleges on September 20, 2019 stage a demonstration at Manik Mia Avenue in Dhaka urging world leaders to act against climate change. PHOTO: PRABI

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS



Education prepares the new generation to learn and live by the rules of sustainable consumption and production.

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sustainable human development.

1. Preparation of an overall education sector plan (beyond current partial sub-sectoral plans) to optimise public good functions of state/non-state activities in education and to achieve SDG4 targets deserve high policy priority.

2. Longstanding structural and operational weaknesses in the education system should be addressed to remove barriers to effective education governance. Measures demanding attention include: i) One education and human resources ministry to provide unified lead; ii) A statutory permanent education commission; iii) A right to education law; iv) Moving towards largely autonomous district school education authorities; v) An autonomous higher education commission with necessary capacity and authority; vi) New thinking about teachers including a National Teaching Service Corps serving both state and non-state schools; and vii) Implementing a unified core

results, which calls for a higher level of public resource commitment along with partnerships among diverse actors including households; models of partnerships for subsectors should focus on defined results rather than compliance to rules.

4. Well-designed collaboration and partnerships within a facilitative regulatory framework applied by the government that will serve the responsiveness, academic autonomy, public accountability, and stakeholder participation objectives better than direct government take-over or "nationalisation."

5. Drawing on the social capital—authorities in the education sector and at the political level need to find ways of drawing on the social capital embodied in non-state actors including civil society and NGOs.

Government leadership is essential for leveraging the political dynamics of education policy and decision-making toward building a social compact

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