

## **CEF STRATEGY PAPER BANGLADESH 2005**

### **1 Introduction**

The first Commonwealth Education Fund Strategy for Bangladesh (2003-2005) was drafted in April 2003 by the in-country Management Committee, comprised of ActionAid Bangladesh, Save the Children UK and Oxfam GB. An initial six months were spent on laying the foundations for the subsequent roll-out of the strategy- through the undertaking of seven local level situation assessments for baseline and programme planning purposes. The Situation Assessment sought to better understand the education situation and structures in each of the project areas and provided an indication of issues to be prioritised for advocacy efforts. Based on the findings of these assessments, interventions were designed with fourteen local and national level partners.

Across the CEF initiatives in Bangladesh, considerable progress has been made against the initial strategy, with partners and civil society<sup>1</sup> noting examples of positive impact in the following:

- Formation and Functioning of School Management Committees
- Increased School Attendance
- More diverse representation on local level education committees
- Decreased teacher absenteeism
- Increased awareness by civil society of opportunities for participation

This revised strategy has sought to respond to the recommendations made by the CEF Mid Term Review and in particular, to achieve more focussed, coordinated advocacy initiatives and an increased support to innovative practice for quality education.

### **2 Contextual Analysis**

The following information has been updated where possible to reflect changes in the Contextual Situation since the initial CEF strategy, although for most elements there have been minimal changes since 2003. As such, this revised strategy offers only a summary of key points and would refer readers to the prior Contextual Analysis for greater details.

#### **A. Disparities in Access and Opportunities**

Nonwithstanding the constitutional directive for a unified, people-centred secular education system, there are eight types of primary level education institutions that can be found in Bangladesh- ranging from private, English Medium schools through to religious Madrassas. Whilst the vast majority of children are enrolled in government primary schools (61.3% of the overall number of those in schools),

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<sup>1</sup> As noted in the CEF Mid Term Review, January 2005

there are still roughly 4.17 million children who are registered in non-governmental primary schools in Bangladesh.

The Education Watch survey conducted in 1998 revealed that although there is a high overall gross enrolment rate in primary education in Bangladesh (107% average), the net enrolment rate stands far behind at 77%, of which 78.6% for boys and 75.5% for girls. Furthermore, despite a high enrolment rate many children do not attend school regularly as noted in a study undertaken in 2001, “on days of visits, attendance rates were 58% of enrolment rates in government schools and 48% in rural NGO schools”.

A high percentage of parents in rural areas claim distance to schools as the most significant barrier to their children’s education; despite a national policy which aims to provide a primary school within 2 kilometres of each/every child. While remarkable strides have been made in relation to gender equity in educational systems, neither the Government nor NGOs have fared as well in attracting and retaining poorer children into schools. This is evidenced in the considerable variation in enrolment rates across the country, and across socio-economic groups. Three such groups of particularly excluded children are working children, those with disabilities and children from ethnic and linguistic minority communities- all facing limited access to relevant educational opportunities. While efforts have been made by a significant number of local and international organisations as well as the Government to extend Non-Formal Primary Education to those who are unable to attend/complete the primary education,, coverage remains extremely limited. Inevitably, children from marginalized families and communities have access to poorer quality education services- where they are often discriminated against, resulting in high drop out rates and parents unwilling to invest in their children’s education. The drop out rate for girls over the primary period, grades 1-5, is 26.6%, and that for boys 28%. One of the most significant challenges in overcoming this situation is the need to attract and retain teachers who can work effectively with marginalized children, who are often less healthy and less motivated to study.

In 2001/2002, education expenditures represented 2.2% of GDP in Bangladesh. As such, Bangladesh dedicates the least amount of its budget proportionally to education amongst SAARC nations. While loaning agencies and donors have long advocated for greater disbursement of the education budget to/for the school level<sup>2</sup>, the highly centralised financing system in Bangladesh is such that schools have extremely limited independence in budget setting and financial management. This situation is not set to change in the near future, and will require ongoing advocacy efforts as well as practical interventions with schools and a decentralised education system in order to move forward.

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<sup>2</sup> In certain instances even placing this as a condition for receiving grants/loans

## **b. Compromised Educational Quality**

The improvements which have occurred in relation to enrolment rates as highlighted above have not been matched however, by parallel improvements in the quality of primary education. One indication of the low quality educational service is the high drop-out rates in primary, as evidenced by the relatively low primary completion rate of 65%. The widely recognised aim of primary education, the development of basic competencies and life-skills amongst children so as to enable them to effectively pursue further education and to lead active and productive lives remains illusive for most children in primary schooling. It is estimated that 70% of those who leave primary school have not acquired basic literacy skills. A study conducted by CAMPE in 1999, indicated that only 29% of children could satisfy minimum levels in the areas of reading, writing and life-skills. This had risen by only 2% from a similar study conducted in 1993, and points to a consistent lack of quality teaching/ learning mechanisms in schools. In 2 different studies, students were systematically noted as doing better in activities which solely required recall and did not require questioning, or constructive learning. Across all subjects, rural schools have lower levels of achievements than their urban counterparts.

With creativity and innovation in teaching practices for the classroom largely frowned upon by educational authorities, teachers are unwilling to apply principles of participatory, active learning despite a considerable amount of such training delivered over the past few years. In seeking to make policy changes in the area of quality, it must be acknowledged that much of the problem lies in relation to the application of policies and teaching practice—and thereby policies at the school level. As teachers do not feel to be integral and important within the overall education system, there is a direct impact leading to a lack of community participation in schooling. There is a directive stating that all government schools must have SMC's but in gauging the extent to which these genuinely function, CAMPE has noted that roughly 20% of meetings are falsely recorded and the majority of SMCS confine themselves to discussing minor school related issues and taking no action. As such, schools are not accountable to communities and only report to the Primary and Mass Education Ministry. In seeking to make policy changes in the area of quality, it must be acknowledged that much of the problem lies in the implementation of current policies and teaching practice at the school level.

As one element of quality education, there have been significant improvements in the curriculum since the 1990's although problems with the availability of textbooks and teaching materials have continued as well as the availability of teaching aids. One of the most significant difficulties in ensuring children are able to learn effectively in schools is chronic absenteeism and tardiness amongst teachers. A majority of schools start late by at least one hour daily and as noted in a study, "Teachers in over one third of schools do not keep students occupied on learning activities throughout the class period". This situation reduces the

already few hours of instruction and this low number of contact hours has considerable impact on the achievement levels of children.

With a pressing need for increased financing to improving the quality of education, it is concerning to note that external aid, loans and grants amount for more than 50% of the education development budget—implying that a majority of funding available for ‘quality’ aspects in the system are dependant on external funds and are not prioritised within the existing national budget.

### **c. Gender Issues**

Significant progress has been made regarding gender parity within the education system in Bangladesh, with a gender parity index of 0.9 and Bangladesh’s achievement in being one of only two South Asian countries to meet the Millennium Development Goal relating to equitable gender access to schooling. As articulated in the Contextual Analysis however, gender equitable education systems are concerned with far more than access for girls to schools. While girls’ attendance appears to be stronger than boys at both the primary and secondary levels, persistent attitudes remain which prefer educational opportunities for boys when choices between children must be made. Furthermore, this does mask the continued difficulty faced by girls in disadvantaged communities from participating in school as they are often removed when needed for household purposes.

In recognition of this, the CEF in Bangladesh will ensure that all partners understand the implications of gender mainstreaming in their work and are able to reflect this clearly in their submitted proposals. All research and analytical activities undertaken for advocacy purposes will consider gender implications- as will the monitoring and evaluation tool to be developed by the Technical Committee.

## **3 National Level CEF Process**

### **a. Governance and Management of CEF**

The operational framework for the implementation and management of the CEF in Bangladesh has evolved from the initial design proposed in the interim strategy paper and the subsequent strategy document of 2003. In the earlier strategy, several groups were to be created based on their function as facilitators and/or ‘players’- for example a Strategic Support Group and a Technical Support Group. None of these groups were formed under the previous strategy, largely in recognition of the potential bureaucratic ‘heaviness’ to which this could lead. The Management Committee (MC) has therefore been responsible for strategic and operational decisions to date- with the representation of each country director of the three organisations on this Committee as well as one other staff member per organisation. As recommended by the Mid Term Review, the Management Committee will discuss the possibility of including a representative of both local

and national level CEF partners in the MC. This **Management Committee** will have its role altered somewhat in the revised strategy period, to reflect the formation of a **Technical Support Group**<sup>3</sup>. One representative from each of the 3 organisations will have 20% of their time dedicated to ensuring a quality and effective CEF programme. Furthermore, this is expected to ensure enhanced ownership of the CEF and greater mainstreaming across the three agencies. The CEF Secretariat structure will remain unchanged with a CEF Co-ordinator, two programme officers and an accountant. The need to increase the capacity of the Secretariat in monitoring and evaluation as well as policy analysis and advocacy has been recognised. One of the first tasks for the Technical Support Group will be to determine how best these gaps can be addressed.

#### **b. CEF Partnerships**

In order to promote wider ownership of the CEF by national level coalitions/alliances, efforts were made in the first strategy period to involve the largest education coalition in Bangladesh- CAMPE, as well as other far reaching organisations such as BRAC. This collaboration allowed for the identification of the priority issues for the CEF, as well as in exploring the potential role of national level organisations in building on the work of the local level partners. The Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) for example, is now working with seven local partners in order to build their capacity in local level budget analysis which will then be analysed jointly to determine areas of weakness in the promotion of genuine, school based decentralisation. There is a need to review the current and past partnerships across all three CEF objectives as well as to identify to new partners.

CAMPE will be a key partner in this new strategy period for the CEF in seeking to better link local level/decentralised education partners to those sitting at the national level (see section below for further details). Other partnerships which will be sought out in this strategy period will be with the private/corporate sector (beyond financial support to also look into more advocacy support), as well as with the donor community. For the latter, there is a specific need to invest time and resources in communicating the aims of the CEF and the particular policy areas that will be targeted for change.

## **4 CEF Strategy**

#### **a. CEF Goal**

The **goal** for the CEF in Bangladesh is a strengthened civil society which holds the government accountable to its commitments to ensure all children enrol in and complete a good quality primary education.

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<sup>3</sup> This group was formed in February 2005.

## **b. CEF Objectives**

The CEF will seek to address three objectives:

- Strengthening the engagement of civil society in the designing and implementation of education plans and frameworks at all levels, thereby guaranteeing equitable access to quality educational opportunities.
- Enabling communities to monitor the Government of Bangladesh's commitments in providing quality education for all.
- Supporting innovative approaches linked to national policies and commitments, which ensure accessible, quality education, particularly for marginalized children- notably working children, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities.

## **c. Strategic Approaches**

To realise the objectives of the CEF in Bangladesh, the strategy will seek to apply the following approaches across all of its initiatives:

- Broad-based constituency building
- Children's involvement and participation
- Gender equity
- Constructive, critical engagement with government and funding institutions
- Principles of non-discrimination and diversity
- Shared Learning from initiatives

## **d. Outputs/Activities for CEF in Bangladesh**

*Objective 1: Strengthening the engagement of civil society in the designing and implementation of education plans and frameworks at all levels, thereby guaranteeing equitable access to quality educational opportunities.*

This objective will be realised primarily through support to key broad based alliances such as CAMPE and the Parliamentary Caucus on Education, as well as to local organisations working to transform their individual project learning into wider, policy changes.

The following broad activities have been identified for this strategy period:

- 1) To ensure the formal inclusion of decentralised 'voices' into national coalitions. In the previous strategy period, two regional forums were created and a third will be developed in this subsequent strategy period, as well as an attempt to develop a mechanism by which local organisations can be represented more effectively in national level debate.

- 2) To build the capacity of CAMPE in the areas of membership development and advocacy, in order to support this coalition in effectively impacting on government policy and practice. While CAMPE has tremendous potential in taking forward issues identified as barriers to rights to and in education, they have faced difficulties in successfully advocating for related changes to government.
- 3) To build the capacity of CEF partners in advocacy on education related issues, an advocacy manual and a Training of Trainers guide.
- 4) To place primary education budget watch interventions at a national level within an existing coalition/alliance, and in collaboration with the Parliamentary Caucus. While in the first CEF strategy period a body was specifically tasked with taking forward research and advocacy as linked to the education budget in Bangladesh, this group then since then transformed into one looking at broader educational issues. In recognition of the need for continued investment in this area of activity, the CEF will seek to link the school-based education budget initiatives with national level lobbying on financing and equitable resource allocation for the education sector.
- 5) To ensure the inclusion of children and young people in education coalitions and in consultations regarding national education policies and frameworks. This will involve further defining how children's groups can be involved in existing education alliances.
- 6) To better research and document trends in relation to contact hours between teacher and students- both quantitative and qualitative aspects of this and their relationship to levels of achievement. This will involve working with coalitions and organisations to gain their support to take this forward as a key advocacy area.
- 7) To lobby for the transfer of responsibility for the education of children with disabilities from the Ministry of Social Welfare to the Ministry of Education.
- 8) To build awareness, knowledge and interest of journalists in educational issues and capacity building on ways to communicate with children and young people.

*Objective 2: Enabling communities to monitor the Government of Bangladesh's commitments in providing quality education for all.*

This area will seek to strengthen accountability mechanisms of the GOB to communities in relation to the delivery of quality education for all. This will involve the following areas of activity:

- 1) To build the capacity of **School Management Committees**, both formation and operational guidance, and more specifically on their role involving school budget management/analysis. This will involve the finalisation of a school budget tracking manual and the training of SMC's across all areas of CEF activity.
- 2) To facilitate a process by which civil society produce monitoring reports and policy briefs on three aspects relating across the National Plan of Action in Education, the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper and the Primary Education Development Programme II:
  - The defining of appropriate achievement levels and their relationship with economic/ employment opportunities
  - The implementation and impact of incentive schemes (Cash for Education, Food for Education etc)
  - Issues relating to the transition of girls from primary to secondary schooling as a means to taking forward the gender goals in the EFA and MDG.
- 3) To increase civil society's awareness and knowledge concerning education legislation and rights in relation to this. This will involve the continued dissemination of user-friendly versions education policies and frameworks to parents, teachers, children and SMCs.

*Objective 3: Supporting innovative approaches linked to national policies and commitments, which ensure accessible quality education for marginalized children- notably working children, children with disabilities and children from ethnic minorities.*

In recognition of the findings and recommendations from the Mid Term Review, the CEF in Bangladesh will invest significantly in taking forward this area. As such, a portfolio of work will be built up in the three following areas which will

provide concrete models of good practice for advocacy. The three areas listed below are closely inter-related and it is believed that all 3 contribute in taking forwards the concept of Child Friendly Schools.

- a. Community Based Education Management Information Systems (C-EMIS) will be supported and documented as a tool in the promotion of decentralised education planning and management. This will also serve to better understand issues relating to student learning/achievement, and teaching practice (quantitative and qualitative) as already identified areas for advocacy.
- b. Development of innovative approaches for pre-primary and primary education of children in indigenous communities. This will involve building on existing programme experience of a pre-primary school model to further develop relevant curricula and take forward advocacy on the importance of mother tongue educational opportunities.
- c. The success of one particular Government Primary School (Shibram Primary School) in relation to community participation and educational leadership will be promoted across schools where CEF partners are operating. This builds on from the success of a visit to this school by teaching staff from all CEF project areas in the initial strategy period.

## **5 Linkages**

### Linkages at National, Regional and Global levels

The need for strengthened linkages between grassroots organisations and local community groups with national level initiatives was highlighted in the Mid Term Review. As detailed in the previous section, efforts will be made to develop mechanisms by which local level organisations can be represented in and contribute to national level education forums/coalitions.

Whilst informal networking among the CEF Secretariats in South Asia did occur, there has been no formal collaboration to date on specific regional initiatives. As the CEF work has stabilised within Bangladesh, this next strategy period will also seek to contribute to and learn from regional initiatives which are relevant to the work in Bangladesh, in relation to CEF management structures and capacity as well as on programmatic issues. Two opportunities which have presented themselves in the near future are a regional meeting on equity in education which could lead to a regional CEF action plan and an interest by the Islamic Development Bank to initiate a partnership with CEF Bangladesh for a regional initiative.

## **6 Monitoring and Evaluation**

### **a. Partners**

At the partners' level, monitoring and evaluation will be ensured through assistance from the CEF Technical Committee to develop project specific monitoring and evaluation plans- with the promotion of various tools/techniques which can be undertaken by the partner staff for this purpose. As indicated in the Mid Term Review, there has been a lapse in the monitoring of the partners M &E processes – including the submission of timely reports to the CEF Secretariat. As such, efforts will be made to systematically ensure that all partners submit reports on a quarterly basis and that activities not conducted as planned are adequately reported. In order to support the CEF partners in effective M &E, the CEF Technical Committee will prioritise the finalisation of a M&E system, including the development of simple, appropriate tools for this.

### **b. CEF Management Level**

The Technical Committee will draft an M+E plan for the overarching CEF Strategy in Bangladesh, the first activity of which will be the updating of the LFA. The time necessary to ensure sufficient monitoring of the strategy will be factored in by the CEF Secretariat as well as the Technical Committee members. CEF Secretariat will ensure adequate documentation of the outcomes of the projects supported by the CEF ,through written as well as visual means. As arranged for by the Mid Term Review, annual Review and Reflection workshops will be arranged for the CEF partners. A final external evaluation will be planned for 2007, and will be led by an external evaluator accompanied by CEF Secretariat and MC representation.

## **7 Risks and Assumptions**

The potential risks and corresponding assumptions linked to the effective delivery of the CEF Strategy in Bangladesh are the following:

- There is active cooperation from local and national government bodies
- There is effective collaboration and coordination between civil society partners.
- There is reduced frequency of policy changes in education and related areas
- There is fewer incidences of political unrest
- There is a genuine responsiveness of policy makers to engage with civil society

## **8 Budget**

Provided in separate Excel sheet.