

**Financing Education: National
Priorities and Future Directions**
A Right to Development Perspective

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Financing Education: National Priorities and Future Directions A Right to Development Perspective

1. Introduction

The Constitution of Bangladesh, while recognizing education as a basic right of all citizens, obligates the State to adopt effective measures to ensure the access to education as a goal in its own right and as a means to improving the quality of life and human welfare. Article 17 of the Constitution mentions that it is the responsibility of the State *‘to provide uniform, mass-oriented and universal education and to extend free compulsory primary education to all children to such stage as may be determined by the law’*. In addition, Bangladesh has re-affirmed its commitment to basic education through the two world conferences on Education for All (EFA) in 1990 and 2000. Bangladesh also aims to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) which requires the country, among others, to attain universal primary enrollment, adult literacy rate of 90 per cent and secondary enrollment rate of 95 per cent by the year 2015.

In this paper, an assessment of Bangladesh’s record of progress in achieving the goals in education has been made with focus on primary education since the country is yet to secure compulsory primary education. The review adopts a right to development perspective which requires the relevant policies to display certain characteristics such as stakeholder participation and adherence to the principles of equity, non-discrimination and accountability which are essential ingredients of the right to development.¹ The paper is organized as follows. Section 2 reviews the overall record of progress in the education sector providing a picture of the present situation in relation to the commitments made by the State. The policies relating to education development along with issues in financing education are discussed in Section 3. Section 4 highlights the State’s obligations from the right to development perspective with emphasis on primary education and the implications for primary education sector development in the country. It also suggests possible directions for fulfilling the commitments in primary education. In particular, the section examines the National Plan of Action (2003-2015), prepared as a follow-up of the Dakar Conference 2000, in terms of its potential to address the human rights concerns in education. Finally, Section 5 provides the concluding observations.

2. Educational Achievements in Bangladesh: A Progress Report

The development strategies in Bangladesh emphasize investments in education as one of the main pillars of developing human capital and accelerating economic growth. Despite

¹ Bangladesh is a signatory to the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993 along with commitment to implement the Declaration on the Right to Development adopted by the UN in 1986. In addition, Bangladesh has made legally binding commitment to implement the Right to Development by ratifying the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) in 1998 as well as other Conventions including the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Among other rights, the CRC declares the right of the child to education with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity (Article 28). In respect to education, the UN Millennium Declaration resolved that children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling and that girls and boys will have equal access to all levels of education by the year 2015.

such priority, the progress towards realizing the goals of education has remained slow. As a result, Bangladesh is still a poorly educated country. This section uses selected indicators to assess the record of progress in education.

2.1 Structure of Education System in Bangladesh

The structure of the education system in the country is diverse and complex for which comprehensive data are not available. The government institutions are dominant at the primary, technical and tertiary levels while private institutions, supported by government subventions, are pre-dominant at the secondary level. A significant recent development, moreover, is the rapid expansion of the NGO-run non-formal primary schooling in the country. The traditional religion-based system (*madrasahs*), both at primary and secondary levels, is also prevalent. The structure of the diverse system, however, has several broad characteristics:

- i) The system usually starts with one or two years of pre-primary education offered by various institutions (e.g. private schools, kindergartens, and religious schools like *maktabs*);
- ii) The primary education system covers a five-year period for children of 6-10 years age group;
- iii) The secondary education offers five years of schooling (grades 6 to 10) at the end of which the students are screened through a public examination (Secondary School Certificate). For the religious schools, a separate public examination is conducted;
- iv) The students, with demonstrated competence at the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) examination, can enter into two-year higher secondary (or vocational/technical) institutions. At the end of the period, the students appear at the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examination for screening and successful students become eligible for pursuing higher education;
- v) A mix of degree, certificate and diploma education of various durations is available at colleges, universities, and other specialized institutions for higher education. It may be mentioned here that successful completion of a degree (or equivalent) education is a requirement for entry into white collar jobs;
- vi) The post-graduate education (1-2 years) is usually provided in the universities and affiliated institutions.

2.2 Literacy

With a huge backlog of illiterate population, the literacy rates in Bangladesh are still low (Table 2.1). In 1999, the adult literacy rate (15 years and above) was 41 per cent (compared with 24 per cent in 1970) which suggests that nearly 45 million of the adult population in the country were illiterates in 1999 compared with about 28 million in 1970. Moreover, half of the youth population (15-24 years) are illiterates which indicate that the large majority of the young entrants into the labour force have no education and skills to pursue productive and remunerative income earning opportunities. A significant gender disparity in literacy among the adult and youth population also persists. During 1999, the literacy rate for adult males was nearly 80 per cent higher than that for adult females while similar differential for the youth population was nearly 54 per cent.

Table 2.1
Adult and Youth Literacy Rates in Bangladesh

| | (Per cent) | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | 1970 | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 1999 |
| Adult literacy rate (15 and above) | 24 | 27 | 29 | 32 | 35 | 38 | 41 |
| Female | 11 | 14 | 17 | 20 | 23 | 26 | 29 |
| Male | 35 | 38 | 41 | 43 | 46 | 49 | 52 |
| Youth literacy rate (15-24 years) | 31 | 34 | 37 | 40 | 44 | 47 | 50 |
| Female | 18 | 22 | 26 | 29 | 32 | 36 | 39 |
| Male | 43 | 46 | 48 | 51 | 55 | 58 | 60 |

Source: World Bank 2001.

2.3 Primary Education: Expansion of Selected Indicators

After independence in 1971, the government nationalized the primary education sector in 1973 through which strengthening and improving the primary education system became a part of the State's responsibility. Between 1975 and 2000, the number of primary schools increased by 92 per cent while the number of teachers and students rose by 88 per cent and 111 per cent respectively (Table 2.2). As a result, both the average number of students per school and the student-teacher ratio showed increasing trends over the years.

Table 2.2
Expansion of Primary Education in Bangladesh

| | 1975 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| No. of schools | 39,914 | 42,588 | 43,588 | 45,783 | 62,617 | 76,809 |
| No. of teachers (thousand) | 164.62 | 174.16 | 183.86 | 200.06 | 248.78 | 309.34 |
| No. of students (million) | 8.35 | 8.03 | 10.08 | 12.35 | 16.43 | 17.67 |
| Ratios: | | | | | | |
| No. of students per school | 209 | 189 | 231 | 270 | 262 | 230 |
| No. of students per teacher | 51 | 46 | 55 | 62 | 66 | 57 |

Source: GOB 2001.

The disaggregation by type of institutions (e.g. government and non-government), however, indicates that the growth in primary schooling during the period mostly came from the expansion of private schooling (Table 2.3). In the non-government category, the number of schools, teachers and students increased by 416 per cent, 300 per cent and 509 per cent respectively between 1980 and 1998 while similar increases were 0.5 per cent, 2.5 per cent and 68 per cent for government primary schools. This indicates that, despite the dominance of the government schools, the non-government primary schools have played the key role in expansion of the system over the last two decades.

Table 2.3
Expansion of Government and Non-Government
Primary Schooling in Bangladesh

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 1998 |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---|--------|--------|--------|
| No. of schools | | | | | |
| Government | 37,609 | 36,689 | 37,760 | 37,717 | 37,799 |
| Non-government | 4,979 | 6,899 | 8,023 | 24,900 | 25,682 |
| No. of teachers (thousand) | | | | | |
| Government | 149.15 | 153.61 | 162.24 | 161.25 | 152.95 |
| Non-government | 25.01 | 30.25 | 37.82 | 87.53 | 99.76 |
| No. of students (million) | | | | | |
| Government | 6.94 | 8.77 | 10.49 | 11.83 | 11.67 |
| Non-government | 1.09 | 1.31 | 1.85 | 4.60 | 6.64 |
| | | Ratio of non-government in total (%) | | | |
| No. of schools | 12 | 16 | 18 | 40 | 41 |
| No. of teachers | 14 | 17 | 19 | 35 | 40 |
| No. of students | 14 | 13 | 15 | 28 | 36 |

Source: BBS 2001.

Moreover, the primary schooling system in Bangladesh has a pluralist and heterogeneous structure consisting of different types of schools (Table 2.4). In 2000, around 49 per cent of the total number of primary schools were operated directly by the government with about 61 per cent of the students. Besides, there were registered and non-registered non-government primary schools, community schools, satellite schools, kindergartens, *madrassahs*, and other types of schools. Most of the non-government schools receive subsidy from the government including teacher salaries and text books for the students. The curriculum of the majority of the primary schools also adheres to the national competency-based curriculum developed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). In addition, an estimated 2 million children (representing over 10 per cent of the total primary enrollment) received primary schooling during 2000 through the NGO-run schools in the country. Since the late 1990s, the Government initiated a programme to provide grants to NGOs, CBOs and PVOs (private voluntary organizations) to set up primary schools in villages having no schools. As a result, the number of satellite schools increased to 3,884 in 2000 from only 200 in 1996 (DPE 2001).

Table 2.4
Structure of Primary Schooling, 2000

| Type | Schools | | Teachers | | Students | | |
|--------------------------------|---------|----------|----------|----------|------------------|----------|--------------------|
| | Number | Per cent | Number | Per cent | Number (million) | Per cent | Per cent of female |
| Government primary schools | 37,677 | 49.1 | 158,216 | 51.1 | 10.83 | 61.3 | 49.5 |
| Non-government primary schools | | | | | | | |
| Registered | 19,253 | 25.1 | 76,267 | 24.7 | 4.17 | 23.6 | 47.5 |
| Non-registered | 2,126 | 2.8 | 8,603 | 2.8 | 0.31 | 1.8 | 47.9 |
| Community schools | 3,061 | 4.0 | 8,949 | 2.9 | 0.45 | 2.5 | 51.6 |
| Satellite schools | 3,884 | 5.1 | 6,123 | 2.0 | 0.21 | 1.2 | 52.2 |
| Kindergartens | 2,296 | 3.0 | 13,507 | 4.4 | 0.35 | 2.0 | 47.7 |
| Madrassahs | 7,147 | 9.3 | 29,078 | 9.4 | 0.82 | 4.6 | 45.1 |
| Others | 1,365 | 1.6 | 8,598 | 2.7 | 0.53 | 3.0 | 50.0 |
| Total | 76,809 | 100 | 309,341 | 100 | 17.67 | 100 | 48.9 |

Note: Others include experimental schools, primary sections attached to high schools and primary schools run by NGOs. *Madrassahs* include primary (*ebtedayee*) sections attached to high *madrassahs*.

Source: GOB 2001, World Bank 2001.

Besides the above formal system, the government provides support to non-formal education (NFE) which is supervised by the Directorate of Non-Formal Education within the Ministry of Education. The NFE aims at providing literacy and basic functional education to those who remain out-of-school or to the drop-outs before completing primary education. During 1996-2001, 34.4 million learners (covering age groups 8 to 45 and hard-to-reach target groups) were covered under these programmes. In adult literacy, about 330 NGOs are directly involved in the non-formal education programmes of the government aiming to cover nearly 30 million adult learners.

At the output level, the progress has been rapid in quantitative expansion of primary education e.g. in enrollment rates and in reducing gender differentials among primary school students. The gross and net enrollment rates increased to 97 per cent and 83 per cent respectively by the late 1990s (Table 2.5).² Moreover, a significant achievement during the period is the gender parity in primary education.³ A significant factor, which has contributed

Table 2.5
Bangladesh: Selected Indicators of Primary Schooling

| | 1970 | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1998 | 2000 |
|-------------------------------------|------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| | (Per cent) | | | | | |
| Gross enrollment rate | 54 | 61 | 62 | 72 | 97 | 97 |
| Female | 35 | 46 | 52 | 66 | 95 | 97 |
| Male | 73 | 75 | 72 | 77 | 98 | 97 |
| Net enrollment rate | 50 | 60 | 56 | 64 | 83 | ... |
| Female | 33 | 45 | 47 | 60 | 82 | ... |
| Male | 66 | 74 | 65 | 68 | 84 | ... |
| Student-teacher ratio | 46 | 54 | 47 | 63 | ... | 57 |
| Repetition rate | ... | 18 | ... | 7 | 8 | ... |
| Share of pupils reaching grade five | ... | 21 | ... | 47 | 65 | ... |

... data not available.

Source: GOB 2001, World Bank 2001.

² A household level survey conducted in 2000 reports a gross enrollment rate (that is the number of children currently enrolled at the primary level covering grades 1-5 for every 100 children aged 6-10 years) of 108 (107 for girls and 108 for boys) which included all children enrolled in any type of schools (including secular or *madrasah* schools and formal or non-formal schools). The non-formal schools, mostly operated by the NGOs, provide education which is different in duration and quality. Most NGOs provide 2-3 years of schooling although some NGOs (including BRAC which is the largest provider among the NGOs) provide a full five-year cycle of primary schooling following the standard curriculum recommended by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. Although primary schooling age is 6-10 years by law, children beyond the range are enrolled in primary schools. The survey indicates that nearly 33 per cent of the primary school children come from outside the primary school age range: 5.4 per cent from the age group below 6 years and 27.2 per cent with more than 10 years. The net enrollment rate (the number of children aged 6-10 years currently enrolled in any class for every 100 children of the same age) is estimated at 79.8 per cent (79.9 per cent for girls and 79.8 per cent for boys). The above indicates that four out of every five children aged 6-10 years are in school. The remaining one-fifth may never have enrolled in any school at all or may have dropped out before crossing their primary schooling age. See CAMPE 2002. The Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) carried out by the BBS in 2000 (with assistance from UNICEF) provides the net enrollment rate for various groups: Metropolitan slum 55.8 per cent girls, 60.0 per cent boys; Metropolitan non-slum 81.0 per cent girls, 80.8 per cent boys; Other urban 84.5 per cent girls, 83.9 per cent boys; All rural 80.7 per cent girls, 83.0 per cent boys; National 80.7 per cent girls, 82.8 per cent boys. The net enrollment rate from the Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey (BDHS) also provides a figure of 79.3 per cent – 80.3 per cent for girls and 78.4 per cent for boys. See Prगतir Pathay 2000, BDHS 2001.

³ The success in ensuring wide coverage and access to primary education and achieving gender (as well as urban-rural) parity was made possible by interventions on both supply and demand sides including targeted programmes to address specific constraints. Along with the enactment of the compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990, the combined impact of various programmes like the Food for Education programme, and special programmes for increasing social motivation and physical facilities in schools, and for enhancing school attractiveness and education quality through both the government and NGO efforts contributed to higher enrollments and better achievements.

to rapid progress in enrollment and cycle completion rates and other internal efficiency indicators as well as in bringing gender parity in primary schooling, has been the policy emphasis on appointing female teachers in primary schools. At present, more than 40 per cent of the primary school teachers are women, with a much higher proportion in NGO and community schools. The country, however, is yet to achieve complete enrollment at the primary level and reduce the drop out rate which remains extremely high at 35 per cent. In absolute terms, of the 18 million primary school aged children, nearly four million remain out of school and another four million or more drop out before completing the primary education (CAMPE 2002).

2.4 Secondary Education

The secondary education system in Bangladesh consists of two levels – secondary education (grades 6-10) and higher secondary education (grades 11-12). In 1971, there were 6,126 secondary schools and the number increased to 12,614 in 2001. In addition, 2,846 junior secondary (grades 6-8) and 1,422 higher secondary institutions catered to the needs of secondary education in 2001.

The significant increase in enrollments and higher completion rates at the primary level since the 1980s led to higher enrollments at the secondary level in the 1990s. The enrollment in secondary schools increased by almost two and a half times between 1990 and 2001 – from 3.0 million to 7.3 million. At the higher secondary level, the total enrollment also increased: from 0.19 million in 1995 to 0.35 million in 2001. The structure of the secondary education system shows the dominance of the non-government institutions (Table 2.6). For secondary and higher secondary education as a whole, nearly 70 per cent of the institutions belong to the non-government category which provide enrollment to 82 per cent of the students.⁴

Table 2.6
Structure of Secondary Education, 1997

| | Schools/Colleges | | Teachers | | Students | | |
|---|------------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Number | Per cent of total | Number | Per cent of total | Number (million) | Per cent of total | Per cent of female |
| A. Secondary education (grades 6-10) | | | | | | | |
| Government | 5,112 | 27.5 | 65,900 | 30.6 | 1.09 | 15.6 | 31.7 |
| Non-government | 13,461 | 72.5 | 149,600 | 69.4 | 5.88 | 84.4 | 53.6 |
| Total | 18,573 | 100 | 215,500 | 100 | 6.97 | 100 | 50.1 |
| B. Higher secondary education (grades 11-12) | | | | | | | |
| Government | 1,216 | 53.6 | 27,100 | 44.6 | 0.38 | 38.0 | 30.5 |
| Non-government | 1,052 | 46.4 | 33,700 | 55.4 | 0.62 | 62.0 | 36.8 |
| Total | 2,268 | 100 | 60,800 | 100 | 1.00 | 100 | 34.4 |
| C. Secondary and higher secondary education | | | | | | | |
| Government | 6,328 | 30.4 | 93,000 | 33.7 | 1.47 | 18.4 | 31.4 |
| Non-government | 14,531 | 69.6 | 183,300 | 66.3 | 6.50 | 81.6 | 52.0 |
| Total | 20,841 | 100 | 276,300 | 100 | 7.97 | 100 | 48.2 |

Note: Within the system, there exist different types of educational institutions. The government schools/colleges cover secondary schools and intermediate/degree colleges. There also exist religious schools known as *dakhil* (grades 6-10) and *alim* (grades 11-12) *madrasahs*. Similar varieties of institutions also exist in the non-government category.

Source: GOB 2001.

⁴ Although these institutions are privately managed, a substantial part of their expenses is covered by government salary subvention payments for teachers and staff and block grants for construction and maintenance. The government also provides support to the religious secondary schools e.g. *dakhil* (grades 6-10) and *alim* (grade 11-12) *madrasahs*.

Despite its growing nature, the enrollment rates at the secondary level are still low (Table 2.7). The figures show that, while the total and male enrollment rates have not changed much between 1980 and 1997, the female enrollment rates have increased significantly. For example, the female net enrollment rate has increased from 40 per cent of the male net enrollment rate in 1980 to 59 per cent in 1997. The major function of secondary schooling at present, however, is the screening of students to pursue higher education and, in this respect, the system is extremely inefficient: for every 100 students who enter the system at grade six, only six survive through passing the final examination at the higher secondary level which is a pre-condition to continue higher education (Table 2.8).

Table 2.7
Selected Secondary Schooling Indicators

| | (Per cent) | | | |
|------------------------------------|------------|------|------|------|
| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1997 |
| Gross enrollment rate | 18 | 19 | 19 | 19 |
| Female | 9 | 11 | 13 | ... |
| Male | 26 | 27 | 25 | ... |
| Net enrollment rate | 18 | 21 | 22 | 22 |
| Female | 10 | 13 | 15 | 16 |
| Male | 25 | 29 | 28 | 27 |
| Student-teacher ratio | 24 | 28 | 28 | 29 |
| Private sector share in enrollment | ... | 93 | 90 | 82 |

Source: World Bank 2001.

Table 2.8
Survival Rates in Secondary Education

| Per cent of: | Co-efficient | Cumulative |
|---|--------------|-------------------|
| | (%) | survival rate (%) |
| Students entering grade 6 | 100 | 100 |
| Students completing grade 10 | 60 | 60 |
| Students passing Secondary School Certificate (SSC) | 52 | 31 |
| Students entering grade 11 | 81 | 25 |
| Students completing grade 12 | 60 | 15 |
| Students passing Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) | 40 | 6 |

Source: CAMPE 1999.

2.5 Higher Education

The access to higher education is limited with very low enrollment rates (Table 2.9). Two separate systems exist: the universities and the degree colleges. Enrollment in the universities is selective which accounts for about 15 per cent of the total enrollment and mostly serves the urban elites (Table 2.10). Nevertheless, due to lack of employment

opportunities at the lower levels, nearly three out of four students who pass the higher secondary level examination, continue with some form of higher education.⁵

Table 2.9
Gross Enrollment Rates in Tertiary Education

| | (Per cent) | | | |
|--------|------------|------|------|------|
| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 |
| Total | 3 | 5 | 4 | 6 |
| Female | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 |
| Male | 5 | 7 | 7 | 10 |

Source: World Bank 2001.

Table 2.10
Structure of Higher Education, 1997

| | Institutions | | Teachers | | Students | | |
|--|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Number | Per cent of total | Number | Per cent of total | Number (000) | Per cent of total | Per cent of female |
| A. Universities | | | | | | | |
| Government | 11 | 40.7 | 4,000 | 87.0 | 67.8 | 91.6 | 24.2 |
| Non-government | 16 | 59.3 | 600 | 13.0 | 6.2 | 8.4 | 16.8 |
| Total | 27 | 100 | 4,600 | 100 | 74.0 | 100 | 23.6 |
| B. Degree colleges | | | | | | | |
| Government | 225 | 29.3 | 9,600 | 34.9 | 201.0 | 47.1 | 34.3 |
| Non-government | 543 | 70.7 | 17,900 | 65.1 | 225.4 | 52.9 | 31.6 |
| Total | 768 | 100 | 27,500 | 100 | 426.4 | 100 | 33.1 |
| C. Universities and degree colleges | | | | | | | |
| Government | 236 | 29.7 | 13,600 | 42.4 | 268.8 | 53.7 | 31.8 |
| Non-government | 559 | 70.3 | 18,500 | 57.6 | 231.6 | 46.3 | 31.2 |
| Total | 795 | 100 | 32,100 | 100 | 500.4 | 100 | 31.5 |

Source: World Bank 2001.

2.6 Spatial and Gender Disparity

Significant disparity still persists in literacy rate between urban and rural areas, between females and males, and among different administrative divisions of the country (Table 2.11). Similarly, despite the broad-based quantitative progress, significant geographical disparity exists in access to and participation in primary education. A survey conducted in 2000 reveals low net and gross enrollment and cycle completion rates in Barisal and Sylhet divisions compared with other divisions of the country (CAMPE 2002). The survey also indicates wide disparity among villages in terms of access to primary education. Of the villages surveyed, the net enrollment rate was reported at or below 50 per cent in 4.5

⁵ At present, along with 13 government universities, there are more than 30 private universities permitted first time in the 1990s. The private universities are not subsidized by the government and these provide education to the children from the richer segment of the population. In order to make university education more accessible, the Bangladesh Open University was established in 1992 which enrolled 0.18 million students in 1999.

per cent of the villages. This means, in absolute terms, there still exist around 3,800 villages where the enrollment rate is very low. As in the case of inequity in child immunization coverage, these low performing villages are often small villages located in ecologically-fragile, disadvantaged and low-lying areas (Chowdhury et. al. 2002).

Table 2.11
Disparity in Literacy Rate, 2000

| Division | Rural | | Urban | | Total | |
|------------|--------|------|--------|------|--------|------|
| | Female | Male | Female | Male | Female | Male |
| Barisal | 54.4 | 60.7 | 65.6 | 72.2 | 55.4 | 61.7 |
| Chittagong | 37.4 | 46.2 | 45.9 | 53.4 | 38.8 | 47.4 |
| Dhaka | 30.0 | 37.7 | 57.8 | 64.5 | 39.5 | 48.1 |
| Khulna | 38.4 | 48.6 | 61.7 | 69.5 | 42.1 | 51.7 |
| Rajshahi | 34.3 | 46.3 | 53.3 | 65.3 | 36.7 | 48.9 |
| National | 36.1 | 45.5 | 55.3 | 64.9 | 40.1 | 49.5 |

Note: The literacy rate (in per cent) refers to persons 7 years and over and uses the definition of ability to write a letter in any language.

Source: BBS 2001.

2.7 Household Poverty Status and Enrollment Disparity

In Bangladesh, as in many other developing countries, the children from the poor families are less likely to attend schools. Moreover, such disparity between the poor and the non-poor households has gender and location (rural and urban) dimensions (Table 2.12).

Table 2.12
Enrollment Disparity by Poverty Status, 2000

| | Urban | | | Rural | | | Total | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total | Boys | Girls | Total |
| Primary Level (Grades 1-5) | | | | | | | | | |
| Poor | 81.2 | 88.8 | 84.9 | 82.1 | 87.3 | 84.6 | 82.0 | 87.5 | 84.6 |
| Non-poor | 104.8 | 97.3 | 101.1 | 99.1 | 101.8 | 100.4 | 100.3 | 100.8 | 100.5 |
| Total | 93.5 | 93.3 | 93.4 | 88.6 | 92.7 | 90.6 | 89.4 | 92.8 | 91.1 |
| Junior Secondary Level (Grades 6-8) | | | | | | | | | |
| Poor | 26.1 | 37.2 | 31.1 | 29.3 | 42.6 | 35.9 | 28.8 | 41.8 | 35.1 |
| Non-poor | 75.8 | 75.2 | 75.5 | 60.5 | 79.5 | 70.0 | 64.1 | 78.4 | 71.4 |
| Total | 53.2 | 61.1 | 57.2 | 43.3 | 59.3 | 51.2 | 45.3 | 59.7 | 52.5 |
| Secondary Level (Grades 9-10) | | | | | | | | | |
| Poor | 11.3 | 30.2 | 21.0 | 19.3 | 21.9 | 20.5 | 18.1 | 23.4 | 20.6 |
| Non-poor | 88.8 | 83.3 | 85.9 | 72.7 | 77.9 | 75.0 | 76.5 | 79.5 | 77.9 |
| Total | 61.7 | 64.9 | 63.3 | 47.4 | 49.4 | 48.3 | 50.3 | 51.3 | 51.6 |
| Higher Secondary Level (Grades 11-12) | | | | | | | | | |
| Poor | 21.0 | 9.6 | 15.3 | 15.9 | 8.6 | 13.4 | 16.7 | 8.9 | 13.8 |
| Non-poor | 118.5 | 107.6 | 113.6 | 72.0 | 56.1 | 65.8 | 83.4 | 70.9 | 78.4 |
| Total | 90.3 | 74.7 | 83.1 | 48.3 | 38.3 | 44.6 | 57.0 | 48.4 | 53.6 |

Note: Gross enrollment rates are measured as children enrolled in respective grades as percentage of all children in target ages.

Source: BBS 2001, World Bank 2002.

Although the disparity is relatively less at the primary level, the observed gap is much wider at higher levels. Moreover, significant rural-urban disparity in such ratios exists. The achievement in one respect has, however, been impressive: in the aggregate, female enrollment is higher than male enrollment at both primary and secondary levels. Despite these quantitative achievements, available evidence indicates that the children who come from poor families attend schools less frequently, have higher dropout rates, and have lower performance in achievement tests. A comparison of selected internal efficiency indicators over the 1998-2000 period based on comparable surveys indicates that the participation of disadvantaged groups remains low with little change in socio-economic composition of net enrollment of the primary students (CAMPE 2002).

There also exists strong empirical evidence on the importance of socio-economic conditions in determining the enrollment of children in schools. When household food security status is used as a proxy for income, significant differences in net enrollment of children of different households can be observed. The net enrollment rate monotonically declines with food security status: households having a 'surplus' status in terms of food availability reveal a net primary enrollment rate of 89 per cent compared with 65 per cent for households who belong to 'always in deficit' category (CAMPE 2002). Statistically significant positive relationship between parental education and net enrollment is also observed: mothers with secondary or more education are more likely to send their children to school than those with primary and no education. Similar relationship also holds for father's education. Moreover, it is observed that, out of 20 per cent of the eligible children (age 6-10 years) who are not enrolled in schools, nearly 18 per cent did never go to school while the rest had enrolled but dropped out before reaching the age of 10 years. The socio-economic background of the non-enrolled children suggests that most of them (more than 50 per cent) come from food deficit households, nearly 88 per cent live in rural areas, and over three-quarters of the fathers and 85 per cent of the mothers of the non-enrolled children have no schooling. Even in the case of enrolled students, the evidence indicates that only about 22 per cent of the eligible students are 'in the right grade at the right age' and more than 47 per cent of the students are in a class behind their age. The analysis by age shows that less than 45 per cent of the children of age six are enrolled in grade one and, of the children aged 10, only 15 per cent are in grade six.

Along with the fact that the overwhelming majority of the non-enrolled, drop-outs, and poor performers of the primary schooling system belong to the poor families, the 'rural-urban divide' in the education sector is reflected in significant variations in the type of primary schools that the students attend (Table 2.13).⁶ Most of the rural students (around 92 per cent) are enrolled in government and government subsidized schools and *madrassahs* while similar share in urban areas is 76 per cent and relatively more urban students have access to Bangla and English medium private schools (e.g. kindergartens). Since the quality of education in the private schools are considered higher than that in government schools along with the fact that the government schools in urban areas have better qualified teachers and improved facilities such that these provide higher quality education than their counterparts in the rural areas, such quality differential has far-reaching implications on future educational prospects of the children living in rural areas vis-a-vis those in urban areas.

⁶ Some evidence suggests that the most disadvantaged in terms of access to education are those in urban slums. Similarly, children of ethnic minorities whose mother tongue is not Bangla and who generally fall in the low socio-economic category, also are at a distinct disadvantage in respect of access to primary education. See CAMPE 2002.

Table 2.13
Enrollment by Types of Primary Schools, 2000

| Type of school | Rural | Urban | Total |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Government | 75.3 | 55.7 | 70.7 |
| Government subsidized | 11.6 | 19.4 | 13.4 |
| Private (Bengali medium) | 2.1 | 16.3 | 5.4 |
| Private (English medium) | 0.7 | 3.6 | 1.4 |
| NGO-managed | 5.1 | 2.3 | 4.4 |
| Madrasah | 5.0 | 0.9 | 4.0 |
| Others | 0.2 | 1.8 | 0.7 |
| Total | 100 | 100 | 100 |

Source: BBS 2001.

The above indicates that Bangladesh has made significant progress in increasing enrollment rates at different levels of education, particularly in primary education and in closing the gender gaps at the primary and secondary levels. The progress is the outcome of a series of affirmative actions taken by the State, the private sector and the NGOs.⁷ It is equally true, however, that the country needs to go a long way in realizing the commitments made by the State in the education sector.

3. Financing Education: Policies and Priorities

In the education sector, the government plays an important role in Bangladesh. The underlying premise rests on the view that the inadequacies in educational investments are caused, in part, by the widespread existence of poverty. The government, in view of the strong arguments favoring educational investment which has substantial social returns, has followed active policies for expanding the delivery of educational services along with a relatively rapid growth in public expenditure on education.

3.1 Primary Education Development Policies

The government's objectives for the primary sub-sector are to: (i) improve school quality and system efficiency; (ii) establish a sustainable, cost-effective and better-managed education system; and (iii) ensure universal coverage and equitable access to quality primary schooling. The Primary Education Development Programme (1998-2003) of the government delineates policies and strategies to improve access, quality and management of the system with specific targets and objectives for the period. These include: (a) increase the net enrollment ratio from 85 per cent to 95 per cent; (b) increase primary school completion rate from 60 per cent to 75 per cent; and (c) raise learning achievements, reduce grade repetition, and improve school management, academic supervision and institutional capabilities in

⁷ Several such actions may be noted such as the adoption of the Act to provide free and compulsory primary education for all children; free education for girls upto grade twelve in rural areas; stipends for girls at the secondary level; food for education (recently substituted by cash for education) for children from poorer families; creation of a space along with financial support by the Government for the private sector and NGOs to function; and proliferation of NGO-run non-formal schools for the children deprived of formal schooling due to poverty, gender or other reasons. It may be argued, however, that most of these actions contributed to improving the performance in quantitative terms with little efforts geared towards addressing the quality aspects of education.

management, planning, implementation, monitoring and information analysis. For the purpose, the strategic thrusts under the Programme aim to increase the relevance and usefulness of teaching content, improve the quality of learning achievements, and strengthen institutional and management capabilities through decentralization and increased community ownership of schools. For increasing equitable access, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) includes several strategies:

- (i) Establish new schools in underserved areas;
- (ii) Establish early childhood education programmes targeted to children from the poorest families;
- (iii) Undertake school nutrition programmes;
- (iv) Conduct motivational, awareness and other training programmes for the School Management Committees (SMCs);
- (v) Develop gender sensitive pedagogical techniques relevant to girl's education;
- (vi) Provide safe water and sanitary latrines in schools;
- (vii) Provide free textbooks to all children attending any kind of primary school; and
- (viii) Provide additional incentives to the poor families such as free stationery and uniforms.

The non-formal education (also known as mass education) primarily aims at providing literacy and basic functional education for those who have not been able to go to school or have dropped out before completing the primary education. The government supported non-formal education, supervised by the Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) within the Ministry of Education, includes:

- (i) centre-based literacy and survival skills programmes implemented by the government and the NGOs;
- (ii) the Total Literacy Movement (TLM), a campaign approach managed by the district-level administration; and
- (iii) distribution of free primers for philanthropic and voluntary organizations implementing non-formal education.

Although the goal of the non-formal education programme is laudable, the design and implementation of the programme within the adopted framework remains largely ineffective. The effectiveness of the programmes, especially the campaign approach used in the TLM, is weak and has little lasting impact in the absence of any effective post-literacy and continuing education programmes and opportunity to re-enter the regular school system (particularly in the case of the youth).⁸

3.2 Secondary Education

The government's Secondary Education Sector Development Plan (SESDP) covering the period 2000-2010 provides the long term vision and framework for the development of

⁸ The TLM, launched in 1994, postulated that a six-month campaign would 'eradicate' illiteracy in a district. The programme is financed by the Government and the NGOs are kept out of it by design. Under the programme, six districts out of 64 districts of the country have so far been declared free of illiteracy. The authenticity of the claim is, however, under doubt. An 'Education Watch' survey, conducted in 2000, covered 15 clusters of the six districts (Magura, Joypurhat, Gazipur, Lalmonirhat, Rajshahi and Chuadanga) which have been declared 'free from illiteracy' by the Government. It is reported that the literacy rate of the population aged 7 and above was 39 per cent in these districts – only 2 percentage points higher than the national average. In the case of adult literacy rate (aged 15 and above), no difference was observed between the so-called 'illiteracy-free' districts and the remaining districts (42 per cent in both cases). See CAMPE 2002.

secondary education with two major objectives: (i) extension of basic education to eight years; and (ii) restructuring and improving the secondary education. Along with facilities expansion and quality improvement (e.g. teacher training, curriculum and examination reform, and strengthened supervision), the measures for restructuring and improving the secondary education under the SEDDP aim to undertake several interventions like strengthened capacity for policy and planning, improved monitoring and evaluation, and efforts at reaching the underserved populations.

3.3 Financing Education: Public and Private Contributions

Overall, three sources of educational financing exist in the country: the government, the households, and community financing including NGOs. Detailed information on quantity and use of non-government expenses are not available. Some information indicates that the household sector is the most important source of education financing in the country. Although the government primary education is tuition-free, the non-government schools collect fees and contributions (even some government schools are often reported to practice the collection of ‘informal contributions’ using some pretexts). Moreover, the households pay for supplementary educational materials, private tutoring, and other education-related expenditures. A recent survey indicates that the average annual education expenditures by the households are almost similar to government expenditures at the primary and tertiary levels (Table 3.1). The private expenditure, however, is more than two-and-a-half times the public expenditure at the secondary level.

Table 3.1
Public and Private Expenditures at Different Levels of Education

| Level | US \$ per student per year | |
|-----------|----------------------------|------------|
| | Public | Households |
| Primary | 13 | 13 |
| Secondary | 27 | 73 |
| Tertiary | 155 | 151 |

Source: BBS 2001, World Bank 2002.

Although primary education is considered ‘free’ in the country, a survey conducted in 2000 reports that more than 90 per cent of the students of primary classes had to spend money for buying stationeries and three-quarters for examination fees (CAMPE 2002). Similarly, more than a third of the students had to pay for buying and/or collecting text books and 37 per cent for buying supplementary books despite the fact that text books at the primary level are provided free by the Government. In addition, more than one-third of the students paid various fees, 31 per cent paid admission/readmission fees and 21 per cent paid for private tutoring. On the average, the private expenditure per student over the nine-months (January to September) period of 2000 was Tk. 736 (that is, Tk. 82 per month).⁹ Moreover, significant variations over different grades and types of school and between rural and urban

⁹ This reflects a substantial burden for a poor household. Note that the monthly income of a poor household was estimated at Tk. 3,229 in 1999. See BBS 2000.

areas as well as between girls and boys are reported.¹⁰ The distribution of expenditure indicates that 36 per cent of total expenditure of a student are directed towards the purchase of stationeries while another 25 per cent are spent on private tutoring. Although the text books are 'free', 6 per cent are spent on collecting text and supplementary books. The average expenditure per student also varies with the economic status of the household. Compared with Tk. 430 for a food-deficit household, the average expenditure per student is reported at Tk. 1262 for a food-surplus household. Such differences in expenditure among various income groups as well as between rural and urban areas and over different types of schools indicate the differential capacity and access of students to a wide variety of primary schooling that exists in the country creating significant quality differentials and polarization in access to educational opportunities on the basis of household's economic capacity.

Over the years, Bangladesh's public policy has emphasized education. As a result, public resources devoted to education has increased (Table 3.2). Still, despite devoting around 15 per cent of total government spending to education, the level of government spending is low constituting only 2.2 per cent of GDP.¹¹ One important point to note, however, is that the government has been devoting more of its own resources in education development expenditure (through the Annual Development Programme) compared to project aid received from the donors. The share of project aid in total education development expenditure was about 63 per cent in the late-1980s which declined to 28 per cent during the late-1990s. Over the period, the yearly aid-financed development expenditure at constant 1995/96 prices increased from Tk. 1.8 billion to Tk. 3.9 billion while similar expenditure from the government's own resources increased from Tk. 1.1 billion to more than Tk. 10 billion.

Table 3.2
Government Expenditure on Education

| | 1980 | 1985 | 1990 | 1995 | 2000 |
|---|------|-----------------------------------|------|------|------|
| Government Education Expenditure | | | | | |
| % of total government expenditure | 6.7 | 11.7 | 11.3 | 16.7 | 14.8 |
| % of education development expenditure in total development expenditure | 2.1 | 2.4 | 5.2 | 14.2 | 13.3 |
| % of GDP | 0.8 | 0.9 | 1.4 | 2.3 | 2.2 |
| | | At constant 1995/96 prices | | | |
| Total government expenditure in education (billion Tk.) | 7.8 | 10.2 | 18.1 | 37.5 | 42.7 |
| Per capita education expenditure (Tk.) | 89 | 105 | 166 | 313 | 325 |

Source: GOB 2001, Mujeri 2000.

¹⁰ Over the nine-month (January-September) period, the average expenditure per student is reported at Tk. 509 for grade one which increases to Tk. 1,100 for grade five. Wide urban-rural variation is also found among the students of each class. For example, Tk. 332 and Tk. 787 are spent by a student of grade one and grade five respectively in rural areas compared with Tk. 1,797 for a grade one student and Tk. 3,150 for a student of grade five in urban areas. The expenditure for boys is higher than that of girls irrespective of grade they enroll: the average expenditure for girls is Tk. 705 compared with Tk. 765 for boys. Similarly, the mean expenditure per student varies from a high of Tk. 4,899 for English medium kindergartens and Tk. 5,701 for secondary school attached primary schools to a low of Tk. 290 for non-formal schools and Tk. 328 for community/satellite schools. See CAMPE 2002.

¹¹ During the mid-1990s, similar ratio is estimated at around 3.7 per cent in India, 3.4 per cent in Sri Lanka, 2.9 per cent in Nepal and 4-6 per cent in East Asian Countries.

The distribution of government expenditure on different sub-sectors of education indicates that the share of primary education has declined for both revenue (recurrent) and development expenditures whereas the share of secondary education increased representing a significant shift in expenditure from the primary to the secondary level (Table 3.3). Along with the need to accommodate the increasing demand for continuing education for the cohort that completed the primary education, the trend reflects a policy shift to expand the provision of secondary education, especially to the girls.

Table 3.3
Public Expenditure by Level of Education

| Revenue (recurrent) Expenditure | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|-------------------------|--------------|
| Fiscal Year | as percent of GDP | Percentage Distribution | | | | | Total |
| | | Primary | Secondary & Higher | Technical | University | Other Ed. System | |
| 1991-92 | 1.14 | 48.5 | 36.8 | 2.4 | 8.5 | 3.7 | 100.0 |
| 1995-96 | 1.30 | 44.2 | 42.5 | 2.1 | 8.0 | 3.3 | 100.0 |
| 1999-00 | 1.37 | 39.5 | 48.4 | 1.4 | 8.0 | 2.7 | 100.0 |

| Development Expenditure | | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------------|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------------|--------------|
| Fiscal Year | as percent of GDP | Percentage Distribution | | | | | Total |
| | | Primary | Non-Formal Education | Secondary & Higher | Technical | University | |
| 1991-92 | 0.21 | 62.1 | 1.5 | 10.7 | 3.3 | 10.1 | 100.0 |
| 1995-96 | 0.83 | 57.6 | 2.3 | 34.9 | 0.4 | 3.0 | 100.0 |
| 1999-00 | 0.84 | 49.2 | 5.9 | 33.4 | 5.1 | 5.9 | 100.0 |

Source: World Bank 2003.

The equity implications of the policy, however, should also be considered along with the fact that whether this represents a pre-mature shift of resources from primary education which still remains the priority in public education spending. As can be seen from Table 3.1, public expenditure covers only a part of the education costs at all levels. Moreover, private education spending across various expenditure groups is much less equitably distributed than public education expenditure (Table 3.4). The private education expenditures are also lower among the poor indicating their low capacity to access quality education (e.g. through fewer supplies and learning materials and less tutoring support). This indicates that public expenditure in education, through devoting more resources to the primary level and adopting better targeting at all levels, has a major role to play in bringing equity in total (public and private) education expenditures in the country.

Table 3.4
Distribution Profile of Education Spending

| | (Per cent) | | | | | | | Total |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|------|------|------|--------------|-------------------|----------|-------|
| | By quintile | | | | | By poverty status | | |
| | 1 lowest | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 highest | Poor | Non-poor | |
| Per capita expenditure | 8.1 | 12.1 | 15.8 | 22.1 | 41.9 | 26.1 | 73.9 | 100 |
| Population | | | | | | | | |
| 6-10 years old | 26.7 | 24.1 | 19.7 | 17.6 | 12.0 | 58.9 | 41.1 | 100 |
| 11-13 years old | 21.2 | 21.9 | 21.3 | 19.6 | 16.1 | 52.0 | 48.0 | 100 |
| 14-15 years old | 16.7 | 19.9 | 20.0 | 22.8 | 20.5 | 45.7 | 54.3 | 100 |
| 16-17 years old | 12.8 | 18.5 | 20.8 | 22.2 | 25.6 | 38.1 | 61.9 | 100 |
| All individuals | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 20.0 | 49.7 | 50.3 | 100 |
| Private education spending | | | | | | | | |
| Primary education | 6.7 | 11.9 | 16.4 | 23.2 | 41.7 | 25.3 | 74.7 | 100 |
| Junior secondary | 4.3 | 10.0 | 15.3 | 27.7 | 42.7 | 18.9 | 81.1 | 100 |
| Secondary | 1.1 | 5.7 | 11.0 | 26.6 | 55.6 | 9.9 | 90.1 | 100 |
| Higher secondary | 1.0 | 3.2 | 7.6 | 24.8 | 63.3 | 5.9 | 94.1 | 100 |
| Tertiary | 0.7 | 1.1 | 9.1 | 17.9 | 71.2 | 5.3 | 94.7 | 100 |
| All education | 3.1 | 7.4 | 12.4 | 25.3 | 51.8 | 14.5 | 85.5 | 100 |
| Public education spending | | | | | | | | |
| Primary education | 22 | 23 | 22 | 19 | 14 | 56 | 44 | 100 |
| Secondary | 6 | 11 | 16 | 28 | 40 | 24 | 76 | 100 |
| Tertiary | 6 | 6 | 10 | 21 | 57 | 17 | 83 | 100 |
| All education | 12 | 15 | 17 | 23 | 32 | 35 | 65 | 100 |

Source: World Bank 2003.

A feature of public education expenditure which reflects its unbalanced nature, however, is the very high share of resources that is devoted towards teacher salaries in government schools and salary-related subsidies to the non-government institutions. At the primary level, the revenue expenditure is almost entirely devoted to meeting expenses on pay and allowances: in 2000, nearly 97 per cent of the expenditure was devoted to salary and salary-related expenditures (Mujeri 2000). As a result, very little resources can be made available for other purposes such as teaching materials, essential supplies, in-service training and maintenance, and text book related expenditures which contribute towards improving the quality of education. In effect, the present expenditure pattern indicates low priority to complementary expenses needed for the delivery of quality education services indicating an imbalance between labour and non-labour teaching inputs.

One may also note a significant feature of expansion of primary education in the country. Over the years, the expansion of primary education has been pursued both through public sector provisioning as well as by expanding the net of the non-government schools. A special feature of such efforts since the 1990s is the expanded role of the community schools organized by the NGOs and the communities with government support. The advantage of the non-government and community schools lies in their lower teacher salaries, higher number of students per class and higher student-teacher ratios resulting in lower per-pupil costs compared to the government schools.

3.4 Role of the Civil Society

In the human rights context, the civil society has important roles in education. In broad terms, the civil society becomes relevant in two distinct ways. *First*, the civil society can play a pro-active role in helping to realize the right to education. Such a role can take

various forms. For example, the civil society (including the NGOs and other grassroots and community-based organizations) can set up schools, expand the microcredit model to include non-credit components like education and other social development programmes, and undertake targeted and flexible education and schooling programmes for the poor and disadvantaged segments of the population. Such activities of the civil society can significantly complement the government's policies and activities in realizing the right to education. *Second*, the civil society's effective participation in the decision-making processes and activities of the government can promote the realization of the right to education. In this section, we shall concentrate on the first type of role while the participatory role of the civil society will be examined in Section 4.

As mentioned earlier, the NGOs have emerged as important providers of primary and non-formal education in Bangladesh since the late-1980s and accounted for more than 10 per cent of the total primary school enrollments in 2000. Over the years, the evolution of different models of providing basic education within a flexible framework by different NGOs like BRAC, Proshika and Dhaka Ahsania Mission has made successful contributions in bringing the children, especially from the poor and disadvantaged families, to schools.¹² In short, the activities of the NGOs provide complementary support to the government's efforts in the commitment to 'Education for All' and for bringing disadvantaged children into the mainstream education system. While these are examples of innovative and commendable efforts, a large majority of the poor and disadvantaged children still remain outside the purview of the schooling system in view of the limited outreach of such programmes. Moreover, there seems to exist hesitation on the part of the Government in recognizing the current and the potential role of the NGO-run schooling system.¹³

4. Achievements and Challenges: A Right to Development Perspective

In assessing the role of the State in ensuring human rights to education, it is important to examine three elements relating to its duty: (i) respect for rights to education; (ii) protection of such rights; and (iii) fulfillment (promotion and provision) of these rights. The obligation to respect binds the State not to take any action that violates the rights to education of the people. This implies that the State must not deliberately block the participation of any segment of the society in participating in the education process or accessing education. The obligation to protect relates to the duty of the State to take appropriate measures such that the right to education of anyone or any group is not violated or threatened by Third Parties. The obligation to fulfill the right to education is somewhat broad and can be conceived in two parts – to facilitate and to provide. The obligation requires the State to (i) undertake proactive actions to strengthen the ability of individuals to attain the right to education; and (ii) ensure adequate resources for the provision of required quantity and quality of education. Despite the recognition of the right to education, several factors which govern the educational policies and processes constrain the State of Bangladesh in performing the above-mentioned mandated duties in a satisfactory manner. While the factors are complex and interrelated, we

¹² The education programmes of the NGOs are targeted to the children from the poor families who had never enrolled in any school or dropped out from the formal schools due to poverty and other constraints. During 2000, nearly 2 million children were enrolled in NGO-run primary schools who mostly belonged to the poor families.

¹³ Although some endorsement of the system as an important strategy to achieve educational goals can be found in Government policy documents (e.g. GOB 2000), the contribution of the system remains under-recognized. For example, a recent Government document acknowledges the existence of only 92 NGO-run full primary schools (DPE 2001). It is difficult to rationalize such an attitude although these schools are often found to provide 'good quality' education compared with other schools (Chowdhury et. al. 2001, CAMPE 1999).

shall examine these within the human rights framework covering three elements: the process of policy formulation, the content of policies, and monitoring and accountability procedures. But before that, it is important to identify the obligations of the State in primary education from the rights-based perspective.

4.1 Obligations of the State

The minimum responsibility of the State, as defined in Articles 13 and 14 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR), is to ensure the satisfaction of the most basic forms of education.

In view of the present state of the primary education and the need to ensure access to primary education to all children in Bangladesh, the critical concern is to adopt policies to realize the commitments of compulsory primary education. In this respect, the policies and programmes for primary education, as contained in Article 14 of the ICESCR, refer to five important characteristics which should form the pillars of the primary education programme:

(i) Compulsory

The important feature of this requirement is that the decision that the child should have access to primary education is obligatory and not negotiable on the part of the parents, guardians and the State. Moreover, it permits no gender discrimination in access to education. It also requires that the education that is offered must be adequate in quality, relevant to the child, and must promote the realization of the child's other rights.

(ii) Free of Charge

The availability of primary education must be ensured without charge to the child, parents or guardians. Any fees imposed constitute disincentives to the enjoyment of the right. Similarly, any indirect costs (e.g. levies or requirement to wear a relatively expensive school uniform) may also jeopardize the realization of the right and need to be eliminated.

(iii) Adoption of a Detailed Plan of Action

The State must adopt a detailed plan of action covering all actions necessary to secure each of the requisites and ensure comprehensive realization of the right. Participation of all sections of the civil society in drawing up the plan is necessary along with mechanisms for periodic review of progress and ensure accountability.

(iv) Obligations

The State has the unequivocal obligation to adopt the plan of action, if necessary, with international assistance and cooperation.

(v) Progressive Realization

The plan of action must aim at securing the progressive implementation of the right to compulsory primary education within a time-frame fixed in the plan. For this, the plan is required to set out a series of targeted implementation dates for each stage of the progressive implementation of the plan.

These obligations, to which Bangladesh is a party, have several implications for the primary education policies in the country:

- The State must ensure that primary education is compulsory, accessible and available free to all;

- The State must take measures to encourage improved enrollment and retention rates and regular attendance at schools, close the gap between school leaving age and the minimum age for employment, ensure quality education, eliminate gender discrimination and gender stereotypes in educational curricula, materials and education process; and
- The State must ensure that the primary education, as the most important component of basic education, satisfies the basic learning needs of all children with due account to the culture, needs and opportunities of specific communities.

In addition to meeting the above obligations, the role of the government in providing primary education is important in view of the widespread existence of poverty that results in inadequacies in educational investments. The poor households, with limited resources, face a difficult trade-off in meeting educational expense of their children which has a future pay-off at the cost of current consumption that is urgently needed for survival. As such, educational requirements particularly for the poor in Bangladesh manifest characteristics of public goods with positive externalities and the government is, therefore, required to spend more on education to ensure that the poor do not become victims of both market and government failures.

4.2 The Process of Policy Formulation

One of the basic requirements of the rights-based approach is that every person has a right to participate in the process of development in addition to enjoying the outcomes. The process is as important as the outcomes and the right to participate is an integral part of the right to development. Moreover, in the context of Bangladesh where the human factor is the instrument as well as the ultimate objective of development, the participation in and the ownership of development activities by the people are essential in order to create built-in mechanisms for equitable growth.

As for education, the participation of the civil society in the policy formulation process is necessary not only as an essential component of the human rights approach but also to ensure effective implementation of the education programmes. In Bangladesh, the system of education management is highly centralized and the working mechanisms of the Ministry of Education and related agencies, like other ministries/agencies, are hierarchical in nature having vertical communication systems. The major concern within the system is to implement programmes/projects with little space for accommodation of issues like accountability and participation in the implementation process. As a result, the interventions fall short of providing the social basis for creating the sustained educational impact. The existing mode of operation hardly reflects the fact that the efficiency and effectiveness of the education system, to a large extent, depend on its capability to cater to the realities and specific conditions governing social and economic relationships. This has added significance in Bangladesh since poverty is a major factor in violation of the right to education in the country. In a situation like this, although educational needs can be strategically spelled out at the expert level, the process (e.g. detailed design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation) needs to be contextual for which requirements like decentralization, participation and clear delineation of accountability are essential for success.

Within the present administrative set-up, the central government performs multiple functions in the education sector including regulation, supervision, and implementation of policies. With a centrally managed education budget, the bias is to adopt 'expansion and

construction’ as a solution to educational problems to the neglect of the ‘software’ dimensions of the education process. This contradicts the fundamental rationale of the role of the State in primary education. The creation of an effective decentralized management of primary education is an urgent necessity for which a phased plan of action needs to be implemented.¹⁴

Similarly, little delegation of authority has so far taken place to the School Management Committees (SMCs) or to the local government institutions to ensure local participation. The existing SMCs are dominated by local male elites with marginal involvement of parents, females, and concerned community members.¹⁵ For example, a recent survey indicates that, for an average size of 10.7 persons of the SMCs, only 14.3 per cent of the members are females (CAMPE 2002). Similarly, it is found that only 15 per cent of the SMCs are active (PSPMP 2001, TIB 2001). In contrast, an important factor in the success of BRAC’s non-formal primary education programme has been the active participation of the parents in the school affairs (Ahmed et. al. 1993). As a result, the accountability to the stakeholders and the beneficiaries are not effectively ensured which is essential for better educational outcomes. In order to shift the locus of management control close to the communities (e.g. authority over teacher appointments, school budgets and other management decisions) and adjust available resources to local needs and priorities, it is necessary to introduce changes in the existing methods to (i) transfer the real authority of school management to the SMCs or local school boards; and (ii) ensure that such units are representative of the local communities in a ‘genuine’ sense with real participation of the parents, women, the poor and disadvantaged groups, and other stakeholders.

In the context of the right to education in Bangladesh, such participation is also important in view of the availability of limited resources that does not permit the realization of all educational goals simultaneously. This necessitates the adoption of an approach that enables the State to ensure the progressive realization of the rights. For example, the issue of providing primary education of the existing five-year cycle to all children and the need to introduce basic education (with an eight-year cycle) is a case in point. This requires some degree of priority setting in terms of various goals and concentrate on achieving the rights in a phased manner. It may be argued, for instance, that the proposed extension of the duration of primary education from five to eight years is a less urgent objective than improving the quality of the existing five-year cycle of primary education.¹⁶ From a human right perspective, such choices, however, should be made with full participation and consultation with the citizens. Moreover, in order to ensure that the principle of indivisibility of the right to education is held, such decision in the case of one component should not result in reduced provision (in absolute terms) of any other component of education. The progressive realization of the right to education also requires that the policies and programmes are framed

¹⁴ For example, upazilas/districts which are found to have acquired the required capacity to manage the schools effectively can be given the responsibility along with well-managed capacity building efforts at the local level.

¹⁵ The process of formation of SMCs needs to be based on set and transparent rules. Any requirement such as seeking the advice of local political leaders and consulting with local Member of Parliament and the Minister in charge of the district leads to institutionalization of extraneous political influence on management of educational institutions. Such a process cannot promote good management and effective policy implementation.

¹⁶ There does not seem to exist any debate over the desirability of extending the duration of the present five-year compulsory primary education. The issue is: how quickly this is feasible and how the extended primary education can be made universal and its quality improved. Similarly, whether the present junior secondary stage (upto grade eight) should be managed as a part of primary education or not is an issue of implementation. In many cases, universally recognized pedagogic principles and good management practices are likely to be consistent with human rights principles and laws and rules of existing policies.

with time-bound targets based on a participatory mechanism of decision making and monitoring. Such a participatory nature of the process is a significant human rights concern since this enables the State to minimize the ‘moral hazard’ problem and embody the best judgements of the citizens in educational decisions.

While the participation of the civil society is a pre-requisite for both achieving the educational goals and ensuring the rights to education, the existing process of educational planning in the country remains highly bureaucratic which reflects significant class and gender biases. As a result, primary education, in common with other levels of education, is characterized by a lack of opportunity for effective participation of the civil society (including the stakeholders who are directly affected by such decisions) in all aspects of planning and administration of the system. In short, the monolithic control over knowledge, absence of proper accountability, weak supervision, and ineffective monitoring and assessment remain as formidable stumbling blocks in promoting a democratic and human rights centred primary education system in the country.¹⁷

In a fundamental way, the existing nature of planning and policy making in the education sector does not provide the necessary scope for exercising the rights to participate in the process in a transparent and accountable manner. We mention here one example which shows the marginal involvement of the civil society. The government has recently formulated the post-Dakar National Plan of Action for ‘Education for All’ (2003-2015). The process of formulation of the document, however, reflects the dominance of centralized planning and administrative practices.¹⁸ Such ineffective participation of the civil society in the policy formulation and implementation process is inconsistent with the basic thrust of the human rights approach and democratic norms. Moreover, the existing system precludes the recognition of the voices and needs of the citizens especially of the poor, women and other marginalized groups. The present system may have the capability to provide the access to education to a large majority but it fails to generate a sense of ownership of the education system by the people.

4.3 The Contents of Policies

The contents of policies are reflected in a wide range of outcomes starting from the issues related to the perceived role of education in the society and covering quality and equity dimensions of the education system.

The Role of Education

The perceived role of education in the development process and in the society has significant implications on its human right contents. In Bangladesh, the place of education in development policies shows wide variations in terms of its potential role e.g. prime ingredient of human resource development, means of social development providing the foundation of a knowledge based society, and facilitator of empowering the poor and women. The policies often subsume education under the wider umbrella of meeting the basic human needs. No doubt in a developing country with low human development such as Bangladesh, education will have to play diverse roles. However, it is important to explicitly identify the priority of educational objectives and pursue efforts to achieve the desired targets in a phased manner due to lack of resources. Since the varied expectations have different implications on the

¹⁷ The presence of a strong centralized structure has made ineffective all attempts taken so far at encouraging local participation and decentralization.

¹⁸ The Dakar Framework of Action adopted at the World Education Forum 2000, however, clearly articulated that the national plan of action should be formulated on the basis of the broadest consultation with all stakeholders.

contents of education, a singular emphasis on the human capital approach at the expense of human rights commitments has adverse consequences on the perceived goal itself. The past experience indicates that, if the human rights perspective is not explicitly taken into account, even the achievement of the 'traditional' goals such as universal primary enrollment and ensuring education of adequate quality becomes difficult. Without effective participation of the stakeholders and the civil society, even nationalization of the primary education in the early 1970s could not produce the desired results. Such participation, however, would have been a natural outcome of the rights-based approach. This shows that bringing the human rights dimension explicitly into the policy making process, in addition to meeting the human rights requirements, has a significant value-addition since this enables the implementors to pursue the goals in a transparent and accountable manner thereby significantly increasing the chances of success.

One of the factors which contributes to the persistence of a lack of vision and purpose along with a well-defined role of education is the absence of an education policy to guide the educational goals and outcomes. Even after more than 30 years of independence, Bangladesh does not have a socially-accepted broad-based education policy to define the goals of education and articulate the processes through which these would be achieved. Since the 1970s, five Education Commissions were formed by successive governments (in 1972, 1977, 1984, 1987 and 1997) but either the Commissions failed to submit their reports or the reports were not implemented. The present government (which came to power in 2001) has formed an Education Commission in January 2003 in keeping with the tradition of every new regime since independence to set up an education commission and formulate a new education policy as if the preparation of a policy is a substitute for action to address the reality.¹⁹

Primary Education

Along with the challenge of bringing all eligible children into the schooling system, the creation of a wider and deeper foundation of primary education in the country is constrained by low quality of education and learning achievements.²⁰ The evidence from various surveys indicates that the students' attendance rates are low, teacher absenteeism is high, the curriculum is of limited relevance and the teacher-student contact time is low (CAMPE 1999, 2000).²¹ As a result, the learning achievements remain poor with low passing and completion rates. According to a recent survey, only 56 per cent of all children in the age group 11-19 years were found to have completed grade five in 2000 (BBS 2001).

¹⁹ The reasons behind the decision to formulate a new education policy are not transparent although the existing policy was presented to and approved by the Parliament in January 2000 after some three years of deliberation and consultation. It is true that the process followed in preparing the policy and its contents and priorities have been criticized as well as the lack of direction in respect of implementing the policy. The Education Reforms Commission, formed by the new government in December 2001, reviewed the policy, assessed its various implications, and suggested the implementation priorities. Despite the fact that this was an opaque process and little is known about the contents of the report in the public domain, a logical starting point could have been to work on implementing the education policy with whatever adjustments that may be necessary rather than embark on preparing a new policy document.

²⁰ According to a survey by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), an independent institution, less than 2 per cent of the students attained all the competencies tested after completion of their primary education based on 53 competencies which the government had formulated as terminal competencies. The students from non-formal NGO-run schools performed better in rural areas as well as urban than rural students and boys than girls. The survey identified poor physical facilities, inadequate teaching materials, memory-based teaching style, and weak interactions between the teachers and students as the major reasons for poor performance. See CAMPE 2001.

²¹ The findings show that the average attendance rate of students is 62 per cent (which is the highest in informal NGO-run schools), absenteeism among teachers varies from over 20 per cent in registered and unregistered non-government schools, 13 per cent in government schools, to 5.3 per cent in NGO-run informal schools. The assessment of basic competency administered in 1998 shows that only 30 per cent of the children aged 11-12 years satisfied the minimum levels in all competency areas (reading, writing, numeracy and life skills). The basic achievement was 57 per cent among children completing five years of schooling, 21 per cent for children completing three years of schooling, and only 8 per cent for children completing one year of schooling. The primary drop-out rates are high ranging between 8-13 per cent in each grade every year along with high repetition rates. On average, it takes 8.7 years to produce a graduate of the 5-year primary cycle, See CAMPE 1999.

An in-depth classroom observation under the government's Primary School Performance Monitoring Project (PSPMP) indicates that poor physical facilities, inadequate teaching materials including text books, memory-based teaching style and lack of remedial measures in the classroom contribute to poor performance of the students (CAMPE 1999). Although the government plays the dominant role in the education sector, its performance is constrained by poor governance and characterized by inefficient and inequitable service provision, financing and management. The poor results and the low levels of educational skills attained by the entrants suggest that the education system at present is providing a poor value. The mis-match between the development needs of the society and the contents of the education system is obvious from the fact that a large section of the educated people remains unemployed. Similarly, the low success rates in the public examination system indicate a colossal 'system loss' in the education sector. Despite the fact that primary education is considered free in the country, the parents of a primary school student spend about Tk. 1,000 per year on an average in private costs (CAMPE 2002). This represents about 2 per cent of average household income and, for a poor family, considerably higher share of income. While the bearing of such a high 'concealed cost' by the poor households is a testimony to the strong desire for children's education, a significant value of the education, as noted earlier, is eroded due to the poor quality of learning. Since the quality of education is the outcome of the interplay of several factors such as the status, morale and professionalism of teachers; physical facilities and supervision mechanism; and management, governance and accountability procedures, any effort to improve the quality must deal with these factors. For an effective system, the management of primary education needs decentralization and community participation.²² A rethinking of the primary education system in terms of curricula, teaching materials, management and pedagogy is necessary to provide quality education. Quality improvements in primary education would also require effective teaching techniques which are child-centred and activity-based.

In addition, although Bangladesh is obliged to ensure that primary education is available to all school-age children compulsory and free of charge, this is yet to be fully respected. In terms of contents, transparent and human rights-consistent policies are needed to resolve several issues in the sphere of primary education:

- (i). There is a lack of dependable statistics on the number of children who should be in school but are not. A dysfunctional system of birth registration makes it difficult to ascertain such numbers.²³
- (ii). The existing policies are ambiguous in advocating the right to free primary education. With the prevalence of a diverse stream of primary education, fees are charged for primary schooling (e.g. in private schools) although legal obligation and constitutional provision posit that primary education should be free of charge.
- (iii). The existence of parallel streams in primary education contributes to quality differences and inequity in a number of ways: (a) The mainstream schools use State approved curriculum while private schools (e.g. kindergartens) follow different curricula; (ii) The English-medium primary schools have a different

²² It may be mentioned here that the Conference on Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh in 1996 recommended a 'significantly greater devolution of responsibility and authority to levels close to the learners' See Jalaluddin and Chowdhury 1997. Unfortunately, no action along these lines has yet been taken. Similarly, the people who run the primary education sector have little experience on primary schooling as they are mostly drawn from other areas. See Alam and Haque 2001.

²³ The registration of children at birth, mandated by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), is yet to be put in full practice in Bangladesh. This violates the realization of the first right of the child, namely, the right to be registered at birth.

medium of instruction and follow separate set of textbooks which run contrary to equity and the human rights considerations; (iii) The differences in educational qualification and training of teachers among various educational streams are wide. Most of the teachers in the State-run primary schools hold certificate in education while, in case of private/NGO schools, the teachers usually receive some training of a short duration. The above variations, along with socio-economic differences among the parents of children pursuing different streams of primary education, fail to inculcate a respect for fundamental human rights, civil liberties, and non-discrimination. The divergent streams contribute to widening social divides and contradict the premise of introducing a uniform system of primary education as guaranteed in the country's Constitution and the Dakar Declaration.²⁴

- (iv). The problems of accountability and transparency in the primary education system are widespread due to a lack of effective stakeholder participation and persistence of centralized management. This runs contrary to the democratic principles and the human rights considerations. Even the NGOs, who are involved in provision of non-formal and primary education, mostly remain accountable to the donors rather than the people and the community. The absence of effective mechanisms of interaction, collaboration and coordination among the government, private sector/NGOs, and other stakeholders (e.g. communities) makes the system compartmentalized, inefficient and insensitive to the requirements of the communities and runs contrary to the human rights approach.
- (v). The conceptual differences that exist in the country in defining primary education is an issue which has implications on child labour and human rights. The government's concept of primary education emphasizes the acquisition of an acceptable level of competency in Bangla, Mathematics, and Social, Environment and Religious Studies. The NGOs, on the other hand, emphasize life skills along with cognitive skills and literacy/numeracy. Moreover, the present boundaries between basic education and primary education remain blurred as reflected in the tendency to statistically confine basic education to the 6-10 age group. A realistic definition of basic education including primary and lower secondary schooling (upto grade eight) has not as yet been adopted. As a result, the definition of 'Child' varies for different purposes. The first periodic Country Report to the UN Committee on Child Rights, submitted in 1999, mentions the minimum legal age for completing the compulsory education at 10 years while that for admission to employment between 12 and 21 years. Such a lack of uniformity in defining the child creates anomaly in educational planning.

²⁴ The existence of parallel streams and the issues relating to the medium of instruction are closely related to quality of education. If the government can ensure quality education in the mainstream government primary schools, the quality differentials among various streams will be narrowed down. This will significantly reduce the trade-off between the right to accessibility and the right to quality and enhance the complementarity between public and private provisioning of primary education in a more equitable manner. Keeping the human rights perspective in view, the existence of private or even English-medium schools does not necessarily run contrary to accepted norms since the parents have a right to choose specific types of school and education for children based on their preference ordering. The issue, therefore, is to ensure the co-existence of a demand-driven and appropriate mix of schools such that the availability, accessibility and quality of primary schooling can be maintained without discrimination.

Equity in Education

Equity in education, in terms of contents, has two major dimensions in Bangladesh. *First*, an efficient and equitable education system is crucial to improving Bangladesh's growth prospects and hence poverty reduction. *Second*, rapid poverty reduction can be achieved by facilitating the availability and ensuring good quality of those educational services that the poor demand. Considering the second dimension, the highest priority in the existing situation is to ensure the availability of universal and quality primary education. This, however, also calls for complementary efforts to provide vocational and technical training for the school leavers tailored to the needs of the labour market which will create the necessary steps for their upward mobility.

Along with an equitable education strategy which devotes more public resources to primary education, measures aiming at reduction of educational disparity between urban and rural areas and over poorer areas with less education infrastructure facilities and low enrollment rates can generate significant equitable impact of education in the country. This will increase the participation of the children from poor households in primary education and enhance the market value of their labour.

Moreover, an emphasis on primary education would also contribute to bringing more equity in public education spending in the country. The evidence from the benefit incidence analysis points out that public spending on education has strong redistributive impact in the society. The results indicate that primary education expenditures have a strong pro-poor impact due to the age composition which more than offsets the lower enrollment rates among the poor.²⁵ Although the poor account for 50 per cent of the total population, 35 per cent of the government subsidies on education accrue to the poor (World Bank 2002). Significant variations, however, exist in terms of different levels of education. In the case of primary education, 56 per cent of the government subsidies are derived by the poor compared to 24 per cent for secondary education and 17 per cent for tertiary education. This indicates that providing priority to primary education, along with measures to improve the pro-poor focus of public education spending at all levels, would contribute to bringing more equity in the education sector of the country.

Overall, the broad concerns in the education sector indicate that achieving the commitments of the State needs reinforcing measures for improved quality and wider coverage of primary education which, in view of the limited capacity of the government, requires support through complementary provision of services by the NGOs and the private sector. The desired progress in the above directions can be achieved provided a radically improved system of governance is in place which ensures decentralization and community participation in the primary education system along with appropriate mechanisms for measuring outcomes and impact (e.g. monitoring and evaluation) to ensure progress and accountability. This would require changes in methods, organizational structure, incentives and attitudes in the sector considering that education is a process as well as a system.

Moreover, the existing system provides access to a very insignificant number of children with disability to primary education.²⁶ Similarly, the issue of access to education for

²⁵ In the methodology, the amount of subsidy accruing to the poor depends on the number of potential users, the rate of use among the users, and the level of per-user subsidy. In the case of primary education, the demographic composition is such that 3 out of 5 children in the 6-10 years age group come from poor households while the remaining 2 from non poor households. As a result, although the enrollment rate is lower among the poor, the overall distribution of primary spending turns out to be pro-poor given the roughly comparable per-student subsidies across the income groups.

²⁶ Although precise numbers are not available, the overall prevalence of serious disability among children is high. According to one survey, it is 16 per 1000 among children between two and nine years of age. See ASK 2000.

children of tribal and small minority groups and providing instruction in indigenous/minority languages is a concern that needs to be resolved for ensuring an approach consistent with the human rights.

Despite increased allocations of public resources over the years, public education expenditure is still low in Bangladesh compared with similar expenditure by many developing countries. It appears that the government spends too little on education in relation to the requirements and does not use the resources efficiently. Moreover, there exist imbalances in public education spending over different levels as well as in its nature and composition (Mujeri 2000). With the overriding concern for human resource development as an end in itself as well as the major avenue of poverty reduction and growth, the government needs to target an increase in government expenditure on education as a per cent of GDP (from the current level of 2.2 per cent to around 4-5 per cent within the next decade) along with measures for increasing efficiency and equity.²⁷

4.4 Monitoring and Accountability Procedures

From the human rights perspective, perhaps the weakest link and the major concern is the lack of any systematic approach to monitoring the educational outcomes and ensure the accountability of the State and involved stakeholders. For instance, although the post-Dakar National Plan of Action has been adopted, comprehensive monitoring and accountability procedures are yet to be put in place to help the policy makers to monitor progress and adjust actions accordingly to ensure that the targets set in the Action Plan will be met. Moreover, mechanisms of regular and effective dissemination of available data to relevant stakeholders do not exist which is essential to fuller participation of the civil society in educational processes and decisions. The information need for a wide variety of socially-differentiated, sex-disaggregated and regionally-differenced educational indicators is yet to be fulfilled such that the government can use the information for informed policy and decision-making, re-set priorities, and guide the implementation of the Action Plan. For the people and the civil society, such information is also essential to help in assessing how effective and accountable the government is in promoting the right to education.

4.5 The National Plan of Action

As a follow-up of the Dakar Conference 2000, the State of Bangladesh has prepared the second National Plan of Action (2003-2015). The second National Plan of Action (NPA II) is an extension of the NPA I covering the period 1991-2000 which was adopted as a follow up of the World Conference on EFA in 1990. It may be mentioned here that EFA and EFA plans cover only basic education comprising (i) early childhood care and education (age 3-5 years); (ii) formal primary education (age 6-10 years); (iii) non-formal and second chance primary education (age 6-14 years); (iv) adult education/literacy (age 15-45 years) with a breakdown for young adults (age 15-24 years); and (v) post-literacy and continuing education (all ages particularly neo-literate adults). The Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED), as the lead agency, has been entrusted with the responsibility of addressing the specific goals of the Dakar Framework.

²⁷ It is projected that Bangladesh would experience a declining demographic pressure on primary and secondary education due to significant decline in fertility. The total fertility rate declined from 6.3 in 1975 to 3.3 in 1997-1999 resulting in decline in population growth rate from nearly 3 per cent per year in the mid-1970s to 1.5 per cent in the late 1990s. As a result, the population in the primary schooling age is expected to decline from 16.7 million in 1999 to 14.2 million in 2005 and 13.6 million in 2008. The number of secondary school age children would also decline. However, in order expand coverage and improve quality more resources would be required than spent in the past.

The Dakar Framework of Action provides six goals and twelve strategies to achieve these goals. The goals may be summarized as:

- (i) Expand and improve early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children;
- (ii) Ensure that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;
- (iii) Ensure that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes;
- (iv) Achieve a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and ensure equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;
- (v) Eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005 and achieve gender equality in education by 2015 with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality; and
- (vi) Improve all aspects of the quality of education and ensure excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life-skills.

As one can see, a major concern of the Dakar Framework of Action is the issue of the quality of education. The Framework maintains that ensuring equity of access through addressing socio-cultural, financial and structural impediments to the children's full and equal participation is not enough. If the overall system of education suffers from poor quality, even equitable access will contribute little to the process of empowerment, a vital ingredient of the right to education. The Framework, therefore, seeks to ensure quality education which covers learning from childhood to adulthood and beyond. Moreover, the quality of education is interpreted within a broad vision to cover information on health, nutrition, sanitation, environment, information and communication technologies, basic human rights, and culture of peace. For ensuring quality, several determinants e.g. the curriculum, the learning process, and positive teacher-learner interactions have been emphasized. Following the clearly articulated time-bound operational goals and strategic objectives of the Framework, NPA II has identified five major operational goals to be reached by the year 2015:

- (i) Expanded and improved early childhood care and education for survival, growth, learning and development;
- (ii) Universal and free access to basic education for all children with special emphasis on excluded groups;
- (iii) Universal access to basic learning opportunities and skills programmes for all young people and adults;
- (iv) Achievement by all learners of nationally defined, objectively measured levels in literacy, numeracy and life skills; and

- (v) Elimination of gender disparity in primary and lower level by 2005 and full and equal access to and effective participation in basic education of women and girls.

In addition, the NPA II has set several strategic objectives in support of the goals such as increased educational investments and coordinated support from private, local and international spheres; ensuring enlarged space for the civil society in planning, implementation and monitoring of basic education; integrating basic education with broader social development and anti-poverty programmes; harnessing the new technologies into basic education services in an equitable manner; and developing rights-based, learner-friendly, and inclusive educational environment.

The implementation of the NPA II has been conceived in three phases: Phase I (2003-2005), Phase II (2006-2010) and Phase III (2011-2015). The goal is to establish a knowledge-based and technologically-oriented learning society by enhancing and sustaining the access and retention and providing quality basic education to meet the learning needs of all children, young persons and adults in a competitive world, both in the formal and non-formal sub-sectors of basic education without any discrimination. The strategic framework of achieving Basic Education for All, proposed under the NPA II, is given in Figure 4.1. Similarly, a set of goals for its progressive implementation has been set (Table 4.1).

Figure 4.1
Strategic Framework under NPA II

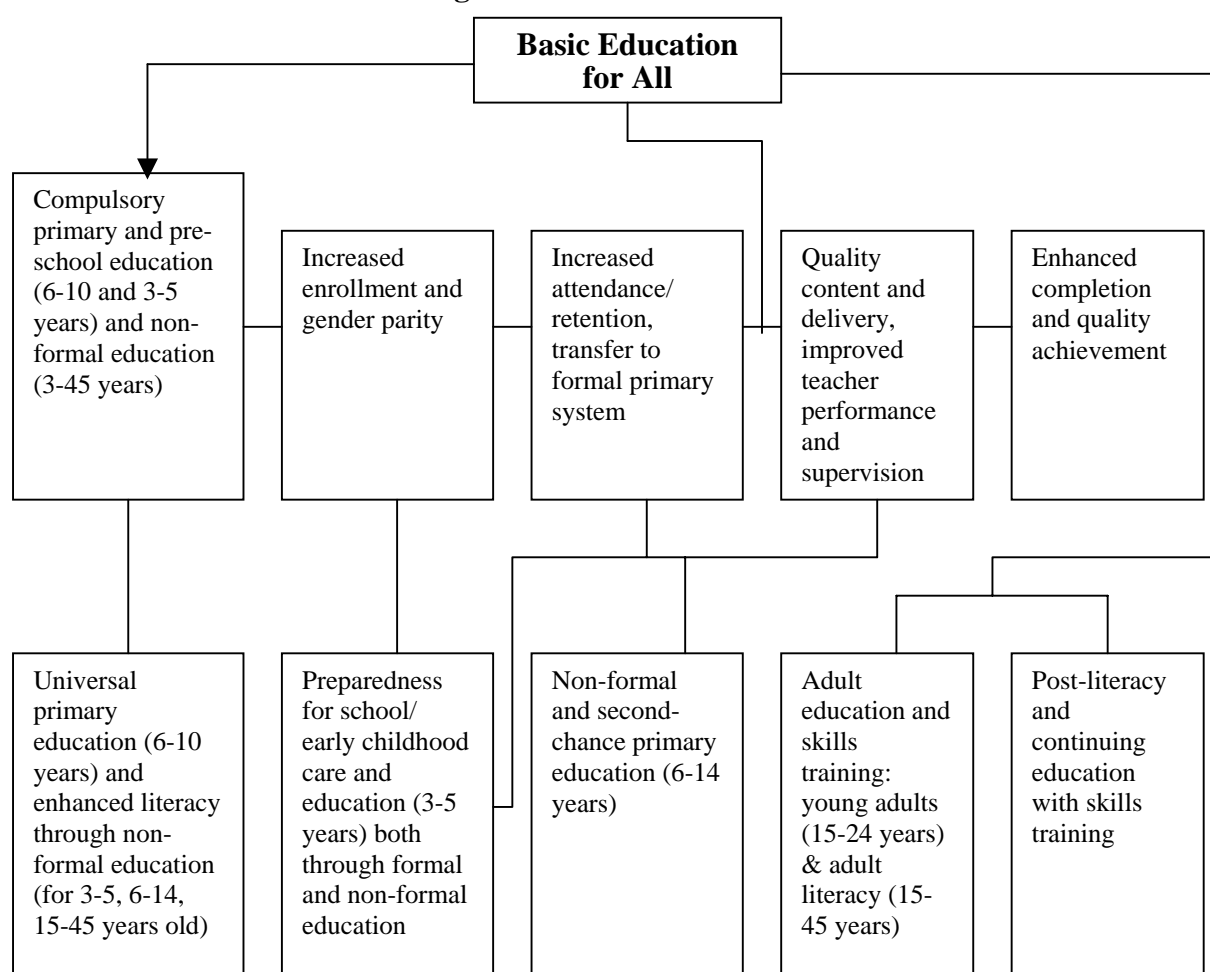


Table 4.1
Targets for Progressive Realization of NPA II Goals

| Targets | (Per cent) | | | |
|---|------------|------|-------|------|
| | Benchmark | | Goals | |
| | 2000 | 2005 | 2010 | 2015 |
| Gross enrollment rate (GER) | 96.5 | 103 | 108 | 105 |
| Net enrollment rate (NER) | 75 | 83 | 92 | 100 |
| Drop-out rate | 35 | 25 | 21 | 10 |
| Completion rate | 65 | 75 | 79 | 90 |
| Preparedness for school learners' achievement | 5 | 30 | 65 | 90 |
| Early childhood care and education (ECCE) access: | | | | |
| Pre-primary | 22 | 15 | 20 | 15 |
| Under non-formal education | 10 | 15 | 20 | 15 |
| Non-formal primary education (NFPE) coverage | 11 | 19 | 48 | 34 |
| Young adult literacy | 66 | 73 | 82 | 95 |
| Adult literacy | 56 | 68 | 79 | 90 |
| All age literacy | 53 | 62 | 70 | 81 |

The NPA II also contains programme proposals for the realization of the targets. For the early childhood care and education (ECCE), the proposed programmes aim to: (i) formalize 'baby classes' in primary schools with appropriately designed classrooms and curriculum, trained teachers, and pre-school learning and play materials; (ii) use the non-formal channel, Department of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) and civil society organizations (particularly NGOs) to meet the needs of the vulnerable and disadvantaged children (including the poor and the disabled children); (iii) ensure meeting the nutrition, health and other development needs of the disadvantaged children focusing on family and community-based services; (iv) provide parental training on care and initiating children into education to prepare them for better participation and achievement when enrolled in primary schools; and (v) create awareness and ensure community participation in the programmes particularly in those targeted to the disadvantaged and for removing gender bias. In order to ensure progress towards universalization of the formal primary education, the NPA II aims to: (i) establish a reliable and verifiable database with Management Information System (MIS) and Geographic Information System (GIS) interfacing with the non-formal sub-systems, both in the public and the NGO streams; (ii) improve and provide adequate physical facilities including separate and well-maintained water and toilet facilities for girls and boys; (iii) revise and update the curriculum in the light of the knowledge and technologically-oriented requirements; (iv) improve the quality and contents of the textbooks and make these available in time and free of cost to all children attending schools regardless of the types; (v) ensure minimum quality and equivalence among different streams of primary education through realignment of curriculum, textbooks and delivery methods; (vi) improve library and computer facilities in schools, expand training facilities of teachers and raise minimum qualification of primary teachers to graduate level, ensure the filling of 60 per cent quota by qualified female teachers, and introduce bachelor/masters education courses for primary school teachers; (vii) strengthen the primary school management through decentralization and involvement of experienced personnel; adequate and active local participation in planning, operation and management of primary level institutions; and increasing the number of female

members in SMCs/PTAs and forming such committees through election by the parents and the communities rather than through a process of selection; and (viii) introduce a public examination system at the end of grade five to ensure comparable minimum competence for entering the secondary education system. For ensuring an effective non-formal and second-chance primary education system, the programmes under the NPA II aim at: (i) developing an expanded vision and policy framework for non-formal education (NFE) to promote learning communities with DNFE as the lead public agency; (ii) expanding the scope of NFE programme to include un-enrolled and drop-outs of primary schools, adults and pre-primary school age children of hard core poor families; (iii) providing quality education through developing a nationally agreed core set of standards and indicators, updating existing curricula and text materials; (iv) developing a system for ensuring involvement, participation, coordination and sharing of responsibility between the government, NGOs and other stakeholders; (v) developing a reliable national database on NFE target population to facilitate planning and coordination; (vi) establishing linkages with other relevant programmes (e.g. skills training, microfinance, employment generation) and organizations to put the newly acquired learning and job skills and knowledge into practice; (vii) covering persons with disabilities, ethnic minorities and other disadvantaged populations in need of learning and skills; and (viii) reviewing the TLM programme and introduce options like (a) a 15-month course of basic/functional literacy and training in market-driven skills for the 15-24 age group; and (b) a one-year course in functional literacy/occupational skills for 25-45 year old adults and skills training/upgrading for selected groups. The programmes for post literacy and continuing education emphasize (i) coordination with other agencies and NGOs to promote literacy and occupational skills with market demand and adequate returns; and (ii) job placement and self-employment generation through linkages with MFIs and other agencies.

From the human rights perspective, the NPA goals are laudable but their successful achievement and the move towards ensuring the right to education would be contingent on addressing several critical issues in the education sector particularly relating to quality and equity in the access to education. The present review highlights several such issues: (i) lack of clarity in vision and aim of education, the absence of a child-centred orientation and contents that can promote the realization of child's other rights; (ii) monolithic control, centralized and bureaucratic process of educational planning and implementation with limited scope of ensuring accountability and local participation²⁸; (iii) heterogeneity among various streams of primary education affecting quality, management standard, and leading to wider social and economic divides; (iv) problems of standardization and quality assurance in curriculum, teacher training and educational outcomes; (v) uneven quality of educational statistics and data gaps in critical aspects of education (e.g. non-availability of gender-disaggregated and local level data on policy and related issues); (vi) ineffective coordination and inadequate interaction between the government and the non-government (e.g. NGOs) suppliers of primary education; (vii) lack of mechanisms to ensure accountability and transparency along with laxity of supervision, absence of effective monitoring and evaluation methods and mechanisms for periodic review of progress; and (viii) inadequacy of resources

²⁸ A few examples may be cited. The rigid centralized nature of the system has so far made all attempts to encourage local participation and decentralization ineffective. These included: establishing local-level education administrative committees, parent-teachers associations, and school management committees. Similarly, the production and distribution of textbooks handled centrally by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board result in inordinate delays, in almost every year, in delivering the books to the students particularly in the rural areas handicapping the children.

to meet priority education needs and sub-optimal prioritization in resource allocations.²⁹ Moreover, the process of formulating the NPA lacks a vital requirement that relates to the participation of all sections of the civil society which is essential to arrive at a social consensus on the NPA goals. The NPA also falls short in specifying a series of detailed implementation dates for each stage of its progressive implementation. This is important since the existing inadequate and adhoc mechanism for measuring progress makes the system inefficient for monitoring, policy making and resource allocation. Several weaknesses of the available primary education statistics may also be noted: (i) the available data are generally not reliable; (ii) the data are often out of date and hence of limited use in making policy decisions; (iii) the data are collected as a matter of routine with little reflection of underlying perspectives and realities and the purpose for which these are collected; (iv) the information that are collected focus more on counting inputs than on assessing achievement and monitoring demand side implications (e.g. labour market outcomes); and (v) the education research system seldom complements the available statistics in monitoring the education system. It is important, therefore, to conceive the NPA within a broader framework such that (i) required political commitment for the stipulated goals can be mobilized; (ii) NPA goals and associated policies can be promoted within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework; (iii) civil society participation in all spheres is ensured; (iv) the system can meet the educational needs of the poor and vulnerable populations; and (v) a responsive, participatory and accountable system of educational governance and management is developed.

Furthermore, the principle of non-discrimination needs to be adhered to in the NPA. In this respect, two observations are relevant to the NPA II. *First*, the programme components proposed under the NPA II would promote segregation and discrimination of the poor and disadvantaged children from the beginning since these groups would be targeted through the non-formal channels of early childhood care and education (ECCE) programmes while the formal channels would cater to the needs of the relatively better-off children. *Second*, the formal primary education system does not provide for flexibility and diversity. As a result, the system will have the capacity to retain only 'standard' children who have the ability to 'fit' and 'survive' within the largely inflexible system while the rest would be placed under the segregated non-formal category. Such exclusionary and discriminating practices would run contrary to the overarching strategy of inclusive education covering all children – irrespective of their socio-economic background, gender, ability, ethnicity or other differences – into a compulsory and free mainstream primary education system. In this respect, an important strategy of the NPA II should be to address the barriers to formal education system in access and practice, that is, the factors that make the mainstream education system inaccessible and inflexible for different groups of learners and factors that lead to irregular attendance, high repetition and drop-out rates, and poor learning achievements. The system must be able to respond to the needs of all children who are diverse and different in their needs and abilities. The present approach of NPA II is likely to leave behind the poor, the marginalized and the disadvantaged children to non-formal and non-mainstream systems which runs contrary to the principles of equity and non-discrimination.

²⁹ The current allocations provide very little resources to improving teacher quality, creating congenial environment and facilities, ensuring essential learning materials, and other critical inputs necessary for improving educational quality and better performance of the students. A non-transparent and highly illogical pattern of expenditure decisions which persists in the education sector needs substantial adjustments to make it priority-based and quality-oriented.

Similarly, the implementation strategies are crucial in achieving the success of the NPA. The mechanisms for monitoring the implementation process of the NPA, along with its component programmes, and periodic evaluation of the successes and failures are important elements that need to be specified in collaboration and coordination with relevant ministries/agencies, NGOs, and other civil society and international organizations. The financing of the NPA is a big challenge: some preliminary estimates indicate that it would require about US \$ 10 billion for implementing the NPA programmes. This calls for collaborative efforts of the government, the civil society and the development partners. In addition, several major concerns remain which need attention within the broader human rights framework.

4.6 Challenges and Concerns

From the human rights perspective, Bangladesh needs to address three major concerns within its National Plan of Action (NPA). These are: (i) availability; (ii) accessibility; and (iii) acceptability and adaptability. Unless these dimensions are explicitly addressed within the NPA, the efforts of the State shall fall short of enforcing human rights to education.

Availability

Since the State is obliged to make schooling available and to sustain such availability to ensure the right to education, it is the obligation of the State to take necessary steps in the NPA following the broad guidelines for ensuring availability. In Bangladesh, in addition to the general guidelines, ensuring such availability needs appropriate policies to address several specific concerns: (i) effective measures to avoid undue closure of educational institutions (e.g. *hartals* due to political reasons) and to provide academic freedom of staff and students; (ii) general principles for the interpretation and application of human rights law in view of the availability of primary schooling through different streams; (iii) equitable policies relating to free primary education (conceptualized at present in terms of access to government schools only) vis-a-vis fee-paying private schools³⁰; and (iv) adequate education budget to support teacher salaries as a part of the schooling process as well as providing for other necessary requisites for ensuring quality of education.³¹

Accessibility

Two major issues are important in Bangladesh for the concerns relating to accessibility. *First*, the prevalent definition for securing compulsory primary education for all confines schooling to the 6-10 age group. A desirable definition of basic education, however, should prolong it beyond the primary to the lower secondary level (e.g. upto grade eight) so that the children remain at school till they reach the minimum age of employment. Although this may not be achievable at one shot due to financial and institutional constraints, a time-bound plan for the purpose needs to be considered for the NPA. *Secondly*, in order to ensure primary education free for all, the State must do more than making it free of charge (tuition-free). For instance, the government needs to eliminate financial obstacles that may constrain any children (e.g. from poor families) to complete primary schooling. The

³⁰ Although such co-existence is generally considered reasonable and based on objective criteria, the issue is much deeper since the system results in segregation and education-divide. The system, in practice, is inherently unequal and goes against the basic principles of the right to education. Some innovative policies are needed to at least reduce the degree of inequality.

³¹ A concern is often voiced in Bangladesh relating to high proportion of the education budget that is allocated for teacher salaries. It needs, however, to be emphasized that teaching is a labour-intensive profession and, for a country like Bangladesh with a relatively large population, the sheer size of teaching profession would necessarily be large. For example, with about 18 million children belonging to the primary school age, a ratio of one teacher to every 50 children would make nearly 0.4 million teachers at the primary level alone.

Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2000 data on activity status of the children show that about 30 per cent of the 10-14 year old children in the poorest income decile neither work nor go to school. This indicates that an extremely high share of the children of the poor families are not attending school even though they are not in the labour force. While understanding the causes of their non-enrollment is an urgent priority, one proximate factor is the high private costs of attending schools. Unless the problem is effectively resolved, compulsory primary education will not become a reality particularly for those children whose parents cannot afford the cost of education (e.g. transportation, school meals, uniforms, writing pads, pens and pencils, and other requisites). For the extreme poor households, the opportunity cost of children's schooling (e.g. in terms of foregone income or assistance in household activities) is an issue which needs to be taken into account in education planning with the human rights in view.³²

Acceptability and Adaptability

Within the NPA, the acceptability of the school discipline to all (especially the women) and its adaptability in forging links between schooling and working are important issues that needs explicit consideration in Bangladesh. At present, the general orientation of education continues to be male-dominant which puts little emphasis on enhancing the women's ability to make informed choices (this, for example, is widely reflected in incidence of forcing girls into early marriages particularly in the rural areas). Although such deep-rooted societal norms are unlikely to change only through adoption of measures to ensure equal rights to education for girls since women have little voice in the existing socio-economic decision making process, complementary support through enactment and enforcement of laws can make a good beginning in realizing the women's educational rights. Three other issues in respect to acceptability and adaptability also need priority attention in the NPA. *First*, the present lack of correspondence between the duration of compulsory primary education and the school-leaving age on the one hand and the minimum age of employment on the other.³³ Similarly, conceiving child's work as access to employment in the formal sector is also not realistic in the country, since most of the child labourers work in the informal sector and live in the rural areas. *Second*, adaptability of the education system is hampered by the present focus of primary education on leading the students to secondary (and to higher) education. The curriculum is inflexible and inadequate with the central aim at preparing the children for the next level of education to which most of the children are unable to proceed. *Third*, practical and innovative approaches are necessary for the children from poor households to enable them to exercise their right to education.³⁴

³² The Food for Education (FFE) programme introduced in the 1990s partially compensates the extreme poor families for the opportunity cost of schooling children and partly redresses their inability to dispense with the children's contribution to survival of the family. But not all extreme poor households in the country are covered under the programme.

³³ This is related to the issue of elimination of child labour which is an important concern of the human right to education in Bangladesh. The ILO Convention No. 182 reinforced the definition of a child as a person up to the age of 18 and re-emphasized the State's obligation to ensure the access to free basic education for all children and mandated vocational training for children removed from labouring. Earlier, the ILO Convention No. 10 in 1921 set the age at 14 for prohibition of employment to ensure the children's school attendance. The ILO Convention No. 138 strengthened the correspondence between the school-leaving age and the minimum age for employment by raising it to 15 years.

³⁴ In addition to strengthening the existing programmes, other programmes should be devised to suit specific contexts. One approach, for example, could be to design a learn-and-earn methodology (in non-hazardous occupations) for those students of appropriate ages to whom full-time education as a basic right is difficult due to extreme poverty. There should, however, be a mandated reduction of daily working hour to accommodate education for the children (at the expense of the employers). Similarly, other approaches may be considered e.g. ensuring work for an adult member of the family in lieu of the child, or provision of minimum income to the family to compensate for the child's income loss and enable the child to attend school.

Mainstreaming Human Rights in Primary Education

At present, the concerns of the human rights do not guide primary education strategies and programmes in the country. The dominant view is that education is a means of creating human capital and is, therefore, considered as a basic service. A fundamental challenge of the human rights approach is, therefore, to affirm education as a human right and a public good for which the State is solely responsible and duty-bound to ensure availability and access in an equitable manner through its own efforts and managing the efforts of other stakeholders (e.g. the NGOs and the private sector).

At the macro-level, an essential pre-requisite for meeting the challenge is to take measures aiming at mainstreaming the human rights and integrating the human rights issues in the educational processes. Unless the human rights principles and obligations are reflected in educational strategies and policies, the present approach guided by human capital formation would emphasize economically relevant knowledge, marketable skills and market-related competence at the expense of human rights values. Such a reductionist approach, which highlights the economic value of schooling and its rate of return, puts priority to a single purpose of education and shall not provide the sound basis for human rights-based education in the country. The increasing importance of remittances through exports of manpower and the overall policy of globalization that Bangladesh has been pursuing actively since the 1980s also has significant impact on promoting human right to education in the country. The unequivocal pursuit of such policies, and associated emphasis on export of skilled manpower, tantamounts to treating education as a commodity to be sold and exported to the global market. In addition, a significant positive step in mainstreaming human rights in education in Bangladesh would be to conform the educational statistics to human rights and re-align the existing jurisprudence relating to education with the requirements of human rights and non-discrimination.

5. Concluding Observations

With Bangladesh's commitment to the right to development, the State is duty-bound to ensure the normative benchmarks of the right to education in the country. As the present study suggests, these benchmarks are required to spell out in concrete terms what the State will achieve in the sphere of primary education based on a time-bound plan of action which is formulated and implemented in a transparent and accountable manner. Bangladesh is still far from achieving these benchmarks as reflected in wide gaps that persist in ensuring universal and free primary education of adequate quality. Moreover, the current approach provides singular emphasis on achieving the outcomes with little concern about the process, e.g. how the outcomes are realized, which is an integral component of the right to education.

The strategy of implementing the rights-based approach which is characterized by the adherence to well-defined principles such as participation, accountability, transparency, equality, non-discrimination, universality and indivisibility can have significant value addition in the primary education sector in Bangladesh. Such an approach, which clearly delineates the claims that individuals have on the conduct of the State and other agents to secure their capabilities and freedom, will not only lead to better and equitable outcomes but also enable the individuals to monitor as to how these outcomes are being realized and whether the State and other duty holders are fulfilling their obligations which are clearly specified in the human rights principles. This would significantly enhance the chances of realizing the targets since, so long as the right to education is recognized as a human right,

the obligation of the State to deliver the right would be absolute requiring priority in allocation of financial, material, and institutional resources. Moreover, primary education as an entitlement could then be legitimately claimed by individuals as the right holders against the State (as the duty holder) along with the accountability and the culpability for not realizing the right leading to adoption of remedial measures through appropriate adjudicating and monitoring mechanisms.

It is true that systematic obstacles such as poverty, socio-cultural constraints arising out of existing social divides and serious flaws in the vision and planning stand in the way of translating the right to education into reality in Bangladesh. However, if poverty has to be reduced and the poor have to be empowered, the capability of the poor needs to be enhanced through ensuring their access to education. Since human rights is about development and poverty is a major impediment to development in the country, poverty reduction has positive human rights components and lack of education has a strong negative impact on the ability of the poor to exercise all dimensions of human rights including the right to education. The State is, therefore, obliged to realize the right to education as a method of designing and implementing the country's overall development programmes. In this respect, the obligation of international cooperation in enabling the State of Bangladesh to fulfill its right to education is evident for which a development compact should be drawn up on the basis of programmes that specify the obligations of both the State and the international community.

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