

SCALING UP
Gender Equality in
Primary Education
in Bangladesh



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Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir
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UNDERSTANDING GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: NEED FOR PARADIGMATIC SHIFT

Gender equality has received widespread attention in recent development discourse, but lacks conceptual clarity and comprehensiveness in understanding. The gender equality has often been reduced to numerical parity at the behest of projecting donor's aid effectiveness and successes of government's political expediency. With increasing internal and external pressures to show results, developing countries have unabashedly advocated to attain parity in access by any means, whereas the development in advanced industrial countries illustrates a different story on the so-called complacency shared by numerous governments and international organisations about gender equality achieved through numerical parity¹.

While parity in terms of educational access is important for achieving gender equality in education, such understanding in effect has limited value in capturing more complex and demanding concept of gender equality. There is a need for a paradigmatic shift in understanding gender equality in education. In our view, the following three perspectives contain the basic element of such emerging paradigm.

From an issue of women to gender relations

It is now recognised that most dimensions of economic and social life are characterised by a pattern of inequalities between women and men which routinely values what is perceived as 'male' over that which is 'female'. The gender divisions shape the lives of both women and men in fundamental ways. As individuals with particular identities and as actors in a variety of social contexts, their lives are shaped and reshaped by cultural femaleness or their maleness. Both women and men are constrained by their association with a particular gender group relating to how they are perceived and expected to think and act, as women and men.

These variations represent more than just difference. In most societies they are also used to justify the maintaining of inequalities, with those in the category of female having less access than those in the category of male to a wide variety of economic and social resources. Unless these divisions are taken seriously, policies designed to improve the situation for women and men are likely to offer only limited and often short-term solutions². In an attempt to fill this gap, the focus has to shift from women themselves to the social divisions between the sexes - in other words gender relations - implying fairness and justice in the distribution of benefits and responsibilities between women and men and absence of discrimination on the basis of a person's sex in opportunities and the allocation of resources or benefits or in access to services.

Gender equality has often been reduced to numerical parity at the behest of projecting donor's aid effectiveness and successes of government's political expediency.

Parity in terms of educational access, though, important for achieving gender equality in education, such understanding in effect has limited value in capturing more complex and demanding concept of gender equality.

Unless divisions based on gender relations are taken seriously, policies designed to improve the situation for women and men are likely to offer only limited and often short-term solutions.

The restricted and purposeful objectives of education to build a body of capital to maintain the economic system operational has been seen as business, setting a 'Business Plan' for education to produce labour power for capitalist enterprises and a 'Business plan' in education directed towards profit making from education.

Promoting gender equality in education requires the shifts towards an understanding of value of education that rests on policies that not only ensure basic needs of girls and boys, but that they have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and realise their human rights.

Mere gender parity in terms of educational access does not necessarily resolve gender disparities. Even when women have access to education and literacy, the access fails to equalize the balance of power between genders.

From education as human capital to unleash human potential

The consistent thread running through education planning has rest on the argument that both private and social rates of return of primary education are high. It arises from the restricted and purposeful objectives of education that is to build a body of capital to maintain the economic system operational. Such understanding narrows the objectives of education to simply the supply of qualified people over a long period of time to make it more in line with economic demands. As a result, education has been seen as business, setting a Business Plan for education to produce labour power for capitalist enterprises and a Business plan in education directed towards profit making from education. The education provision is therefore neither available nor affordable to all. No proper steps are taken to ensure acceptability of mass people towards education system, nor sufficient steps are taken to ensure their participation.

The human capital approach, due to its ideological orientation, deliberately regard issues of political power and patriarchal domination in gender relations as exogenous in its theoretical framework in order to continue the subjugation of womenfolk. Accordingly, most of the policy making for gender equality in education, nationally and internationally, has been formulated in terms of access for girls and women, of closing the gender gap in enrolment, and of investment for purposes of economic production³ (USAID 1998⁴ ; World Bank 1995⁵). Thus, the process of conquest goes on unabated through social property relations in the society and through hidden curriculum in the schools. Increasing educational access without challenging the structural mechanisms of gender inequality will not improve women's status. Promoting gender equality in education thus require the shifts towards an understanding of value of education that rests on policies that not only ensure basic needs of girls and boys, but that they have the opportunity to achieve their full potential and realise their human rights.

From equality of access to equality of outcome

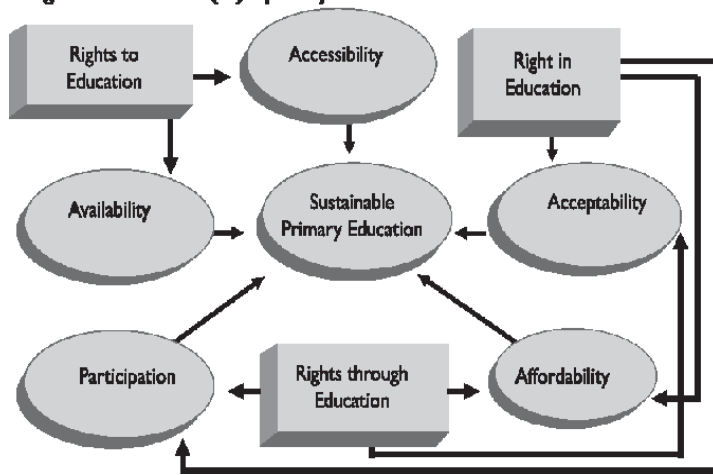
Mere gender parity in terms of educational access does not necessarily resolve gender disparities. Even when women have access to education and literacy, the access fails to equalize the balance of power between genders. The concerns with issues of access, participation and productivity in the labour market at the expense of the root of the problem... patriarchal ideologies and institutions devalue women's status and work while keeping power out of their reach⁶. Ensuring gender equality for girls and boys means that girls and boys have equal opportunities to enter school, as well as to participate in and benefit from the range of subjects or other learning experiences that are offered in classrooms and schools. Through gender-sensitive curricula, learning materials, and teaching-learning processes, girls and boys become equally equipped with the life skills and attitudes that they need to achieve their fullest potential

within and outside of the educational system regardless of their sex. Achieving gender equality in education embraces parity (in the sense of equality in enrolment rates), but also includes the indicators of outcomes that are manifested in learning achievement and performance of students in school and in public arena. The questions of balance in enrolment in different subjects, stereotyping of fields of studies appropriate for boys and girls, balanced reflection of gender concepts in the curricular content, and equality in opportunities for further learning or job opportunities related to academic qualifications are also elements of gender equality. Classroom practices, school environment, and teacher behaviour and attitudes are also important factors in influencing equal educational outcomes. The notion of equality is clearly related to components of educational quality, including learning content, the pedagogic process and educational system inputs which would contribute to the equality outcomes.

An Assessment Framework

The present study on Gender Equality in Primary Education in Bangladesh is an attempt to understand the gender inequality in the context of primary education of Bangladesh. The focus is to unearth the state of gender equality in education system and make a reality check between the gender equality promises and state of primary education in Bangladesh. A normative framework is used to understand the issues around gender (in)equalities in education. The identification framework, borrowing from recent developments in rights literature, is divided into five areas- availability, accessibility, acceptability, affordability and participation (Figure 1). Each of which has different indicators or proxy variables to capture the continuum of gender (in)equality.

Figure 1 : Gender (in)equality in education assessment framework



Achieving gender equality in education embraces parity but also includes the indicators of outcomes that are manifested in learning achievement and performance of students in school and in public arena.

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GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: COMMITMENTS AND PROVISIONS

Gender Equality Commitments

Bangladesh's commitment to universal primary education has been reflected through signing and ratification of various UN and international declarations and conventions. Bangladesh, being a signatory to numerous international conventions and declaration related to gender also calls for action for gender equality in primary education.

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) acknowledged the right to education as a basic human right for all and recognised that elementary education should be free and compulsory. The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) adopted in 1979 established the principle of non-discrimination as a binding agreement and provided the basis for realising equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life -- including the right to vote and to stand for election -- as well as education, health and employment. The 1990 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) affirmed the right of all children to access education.

The world leaders at the World Conference on Education for All recognised that poor quality of education needed to be improved and recommended that education should be made both universally available and more relevant, identifying quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity. A deadline was set: universal access to, and completion of primary education should be achieved by the year 2000. Bangladesh enthusiastically adopted the Education for All (EFA) agenda of the World Conference on Education for All.

By the year 2000, this urgent priority had not been realized. In the World Education Forum, held that year in Dakar, new deadlines were fixed: all children should complete compulsory primary education of good quality by 2015, and participants once again expressed specific concern about gender disparities in education, pledging to eliminate them by 2005. The six Education For All (EFA) goals and the EFA Framework for Education emerged following the Jomtien in 1990 and subsequent international meeting in Dakar in 2000 (World Education Forum). At Dakar all parties agreed to EFA goal specifically related to gender (Goal 5)⁷ : *eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving 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* .

During the decade from Jomtien to Dakar, there has been a refinement in thinking and clarification of concepts regarding gender in education. The expanded vision for education of Jomtien was made more specific and operational in Dakar with time-bound targets, identification of strategies, recognition of the connectedness among the components of EFA, a sharper focus on the quality of education, and an affirmation of the rights perspective.

The commitments affirmed at the UN's Millennium Summit through a set of Millennium Development Goals, two of which have a direct bearing on gender and education: to achieve universal primary

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women established the principle of non-discrimination as a binding agreement and provided the basis for realising equality between women and men through ensuring women's equal access to, and equal opportunities in, political and public life, as well as education, health and employment.

The World Conference on Education for All, identifying quality as a prerequisite for achieving the fundamental goal of equity, recognised that poor quality of education needed to be improved and recommended that education should be made both universally available and more relevant.

Education for All goals call for eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving 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.

education⁸ ; and to promote gender equality and empower women⁹ are however cautiously phrased. The targets do not mention free and compulsory primary education and restricts themselves to aiming for elimination of gender disparities rather than the more demanding and time-bound gender equality goal of the Dakar Framework. The MDGs are less fully reflective of the international human rights commitments, such as the commitment to provide fundamental education for those who have not completed primary education in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural rights (Article 13.2). This narrow view of the gender goal and strategy undermines real progress towards achieving equality of outcome from education provisions. Parity is seen as a quantitative equality in respect of enrolment. It does not include any aspect of quality of education and learning outcomes. The parity target also does not require that all girls have access to education, but only that girls have access in the same proportion as boys, thus, presumably could be achieved even if the majority of the girls in a country did not participate in education.

Provisions for Education Access and Gender Equality

The Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh recognises the need for basic education as a right for making education available to all its citizens as one of the responsibilities of the state. The responsibility includes establishing a uniform system of education, extending free and compulsory education to all children upto a stage to be determined by law and removing illiteracy within a determined time (Article 15 and 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh). Article 28(1) of the Constitution declares that the State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth.

Accordingly, the various provisions of the Acts and Ordinances to make primary education available for the children of Bangladesh included a number of legal initiatives in terms of administrative and financial measures, improvement in the production and distribution of textbooks, nationalisation of service of the primary school teachers, formulation and implementation of primary school education policy by the government, constitution of School Management Committee (SMC), and provision of compulsory primary education. However, gender aspect in terms of emphasis on gender equity/equality has not been attached in any of the provisions of the Acts and Ordinances relating to primary education in Bangladesh.

A compulsory education law was promulgated and the government proceeded to implement a compulsory primary education programme since 1991 with increased resource allocation. Bangladesh prepared its National Plan for Action (NPA) for achieving basic Education for All by the year 2000. Education for All in Bangladesh connotes exactly the same as in most other countries i.e., provision of basic education for all children, youth and adults. As a follow up of the Dakar Conference 2000, the Second National Plan of Action (NPA II: 2002-2015) has been prepared to lay the foundation of knowledge based and technologically-oriented learning by enhancing and sustaining access, retention and provision of quality basic education to meet the learning needs of children, young persons and adults in a competitive world, both in the formal and non-formal sub- sectors.

Millennium Development Goals, two of which have a direct bearing on gender and education, do not mention free and compulsory primary education and restricts themselves to aiming for elimination of gender disparities rather than the more demanding and time-bound gender equality goal of the Dakar Framework.

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The Report of the National Education Commission 2003 includes several unfavourable recommendations regarding primary schooling in general and women's education in particular. The aim of education has been linked with religious belief, which is inconsistent with the objectives of previous education commissions.

The Education Commission did not recommend for a uniform system of education at primary level. The Commission has asserted to extend all possible administrative and policy supports to strengthen women education, while co-education from class VI to onward in madrassa system has been suggested to be prohibited.

Already limited scope for PRSP to generate country-led poverty reduction policies has further narrowed down the scope of development policy making through adoption of the MDGs as the overriding targets.

However, the Report of the National Education Commission 2003 includes several unfavourable and contradictory recommendations regarding primary schooling in general and women's education in particular. Firstly, the aim of education has been linked with religious belief, which is inconsistent with the objectives of previous education commissions. It also contradicts the Article 28(1) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth). The second objective of primary education according to commission is earning morality and code of conduct of life by practising of their own religions of the children instead of natural/normal socialisation process. The Commission has suggested to introduce two courses such as Religious Studies and Computer Literacy for six to eight grades and to distribute marks 100 and 50 for these two courses respectively. This is indicative of preferring religious education instead of enhancing scientific and technical knowledge, which is detrimental for building non-communal, modern and scientific outlook among the children.

The Education Commission did not recommend for a uniform system of education at primary level. The Commission has asserted to extend all possible administrative and policy supports to strengthen women education, while co-education from class VI to onward in madrassa system has been suggested to be prohibited. Such contradictory statements and gender discriminatory policy directives create confusions, and hinder the process of gender equality in primary education.

Bangladesh is in the process of completing its first full PRSP as the blueprint for its development plans, priorities, and policies, and as the basis for donor support. The PRSP calls to (a) ensure one primary school for every 1500 persons; (b) develop and fund programs to extend the coverage, in cooperation with NGOs; (c) support modernisation and quality improvement of Ebtidayee Madrassas; (d) apply quality standards like physical facilities, learning aids, formation of the managing committee, student-teacher ratio, and involvement of the community in all primary education institutions; (e) review the teaching-learning model recognising that a large proportion of the pupil, especially the poor, will not go beyond primary education, and meanwhile the foundation of literacy and numeracy skills and basic knowledge has to be built; (f) introduce English language teaching from class one; (g) harmonise regular and Madrassa education curriculum by 90 percent; and (h) effectively implement PEDP II to particularly ensure quality improvement in primary education.

The already limited scope for PRSP to generate country-led poverty reduction policies has further narrowed down the scope of development policy making through adoption of the MDGs as the overriding targets. For example, sustainable quality primary education may be a key demand of the population, yet the MDG's third target simplifies this to ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling. Furthermore, by concentrating on the MDGs, the PRSP automatically limits policy choices and focuses on measuring progress towards achieving the numerical parity of MDGs rather than provide an accurate picture of the effectiveness of different and innovative policy interventions and their micro distributional effects.

GENDER EQUALITY IN PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: A REALITY CHECK

The following section of the study makes a check on the promises and realities of gender equality according to five indicators: availability, accessibility, acceptability, affordability and participation.

AVAILABILITY

Availability embodies two different governmental obligations: the right to education as a civil and political right and right to education as a social and economic right. The right to education as a social and economic right requires the government to ensure education availability by establishing, funding or using a combination of these and other means so as to ensure that education is available. The right to education as a civil and political right requires the government to permit the establishment of educational institutions by non-state actors.

Availability of Education Institutions

In terms of making primary education available, the public sector is the largest provider, there are 37,677 primary schools run directly by the government contributing to 61 percent of enrolment. Around 21,379 schools have been set up with local private (registered and unregistered) initiatives, which are managed with limited government subvention. Such schools have around 18.4 (registered 16.6 and unregistered 1.8) percent of shares in total enrolment. About 3,710 Madrassas with a 7.0 percent of enrolment share provide education with a religious focus. A good number of NGOs have been involved in the early childhood development pre-school and primary education. The total numbers of full primary schools of the NGOs are only 368 (as of 2001). Several NGOs have also set up one classroom -one teacher non-formal schools, covering full five year cycle. This share of non-formal schools is 7.1 percent of total primary school enrolment. There are also other types of primary schools set up with government and community partnership including Community Schools and Satellite Schools; their total number are around 6,945 representing a share of 2.7 percent in enrolment. There are also English medium schools popularly known as kindergartens has 2.1 percent share of primary school enrolment. In addition to these provisions, there are also primary section in secondary schools which are known as secondary attached representing 1.6 percent of enrolment¹⁰.

The number of schools available is insufficient to cover up the demand for schooling of the primary school aged children. The serious insufficiency of provision has created a deficit of the order of 50 to 60 percent in terms of schools, classrooms and teachers, if criteria for acceptable quality of provision are applied¹¹. The Second Primary Education Development Program (PEDP-II)¹², a macro plan for the sector for the period 2003-2009, has been initiated in 2004 to overcome the impediments to progress in access and quality, but does not address the issue of availability of primary education provisions. The recently initiated Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC), a complementary programme of the PEDP II also seeks to attain desired level of enrolment in primary education without building any new infrastructure and required facilities.

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The recently initiated Reaching Out of School Children program (ROSC), also seeks to attain desired level of enrolment in primary education without building any new infrastructure and required facilities.

Though primary education has been made compulsory, no significant step has been taken to ensure the availability of schools for all school aged boys and girls. The report on different dailies testifies to this end (see Box 1). The fifty one thousand villages lack the provision of any Government Primary School, where thirty lac children have not been enrolled to school; half of them are girls. Another newspaper report claims that, the 884 villages in Barisal district do not have any primary school, either government or non-government¹³. It has been reported that, there are 56000 school going children in 160 tea gardens of the country, of them only 26000 children enrolled themselves in 210 primary school leaving the majority out of the primary schooling system¹⁴.

Box 1

Not enough schools for all

Over three lakh children in the northern districts do not go to primary schools mainly because of of educational institution near to the their homes. The children of the poor families in the char areas of Bogra, Rangpur, Gaibanda, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Pabna, and Sirajgonj districts are mainly deprived of primary education. Many of the primary schools in the low lying areas of these districts have either been washed away by river erosion or shifting to other places under the threat of erosion. At least 10,000 villages in these districts were lost in the rivers over the years. About 350 government and non- government primary schools in these villages also vanished in the deluge. Besides, nearly 300 primary schools in the flood prone areas of these districts were shifted to safer places under the threat of erosion. The shifting of the primary schools to other places and vanishing of others in the rivers shut the opportunity of primary education to thousands of children of the poor families of these districts.

(Based on reports of the Daily Star, December 4, 2004 and the New Age December 15, 2004).

Though primary education has been made compulsory, no significant step has been taken to ensure the availability of schools for all school aged boys and girls.

Lack of physical facilities prevail in most of the Government or NGO run primary schools.

The non-availability of quality infrastructure makes schools even less accessible. In rural areas, schools hardly have all the physical facilities. Most of the schools do not have enough provision of classrooms.

Availability of Physical Facilities

While the number of schools constructed has been insufficient to cover demand, there is insufficient space within existing buildings to accommodate all school-age children. The non-availability of quality infrastructure of the schools makes schools even less accessible. In rural areas, it is evident that schools hardly have all the physical facilities. Most of the schools do not have enough provision of classrooms. The evidence from field study (see Box 2) also supports the fact. In Moulvibazar district, there is only one school in eight villages, which also lacks the adequate provision of classrooms and education materials. Only 6 classrooms are available for some 547 students in this school¹⁵. A study on *Status of Public and Private Schools in Bangladesh* reveals that out of 96 schools under study, 62.6 percent do not have adequate number of furniture, 18.7 percent do not have separate latrines for female, 41.7 percent do not have arrangement to provide access to safe drinking water, 38.5 percent do not have playground and 64.6 percent do not have boundary wall around the schools¹⁶.

The studies relating to the situation of physical facilities reveal that 15 percent and 58 percent of urban and rural schools do not have any latrine. However, it is significant to note that as the non-formal

schools are in resource constraints, they cannot afford to provide the facilities that are usually available in the formal schools. Besides, the condition of madrassas is much poor in this regard. The unavailability of physical facilities like separate latrine for female students in more than 50 percent primary schools hinders the accessibility and acceptability of primary education to girls in Bangladesh.

Box: 2

Inconvenience created by lack of physical facilities lead to dropout for girls

The Osshodia Nurul Ulm Farukia Madrassa has six rooms with bamboo made wall and roof with tin. There are no chairs and tables in class one, two and three but the upper classes have some chairs and tables. Students usually sit on the floor covered by a mat. There are only two toilets for 350 students and those are far from the school building. Although there is a small playground in front of the madrassa, during the rainy season the field remains flooded by rainwater. The female students are not satisfied with the facilities they have in the madrassa. Most of the female students said that they never used the school toilet, they have to use toilet at home before they come to the classes. For this inconvenience, girls often do not continue their study in madrassa.

Availability of Education Material

Availability of education materials in primary schools is one of the important determinants of parents to send their children to primary schools. The government provides textbooks free of cost to all students in formal schools. Students and parents however complained that they rarely got the textbooks in time i.e. at the start of session. While, the textbooks are provided free of cost, the exercise books and stationeries needed to be procured by the parents themselves. This is the case in most government schools, while in most of the NGO schools, all these are provided free of cost by the NGOs themselves.

The Education Watch 2000¹⁷ shows that above 90 percent of the students of primary classes spend money for buying stationery such as copybook, paper, pencil, eraser etc. and, although textbooks at primary level are provided free of cost, more than one third of the students have to pay certain amount for this purpose and 37 percent have to spend for buying/collecting supplementary books. It is evident from different studies that majority of the families, particularly the poor, can not afford at a time to send several school-age children to the primary schools and the poor parents prefer boys for education than girls.

Availability of Teaching Staff and Gender Balance

At the national level, average number of teachers is 4.5 per school. Urban—rural variations in availability of teachers in primary schools is much prominent with urban schools having 6.4 teachers per schools and for rural schools 3.8 teachers. The government and the private schools have mostly equal number of teachers (around 5) per school, while madrassa has around 6.7 teachers per school. As regard to gender aspect, male-female ratio of teacher along with its variation in terms of area and type of school is also a significant

Cost of education force parents to choose boys over girls to send to school

Lack of skilled women in the community as well as due to restriction posed to women by family to work outside creates gender imbalance in teaching staff recruitment

factor of primary education. Whilst the number of female teacher in the urban areas is revealed 58.1 percent, the figure is 28.8 percent in the rural areas, which is two times less than the urban areas, on average about 40 percent of the primary school teachers are female. Within the schools, nearly 93 percent of female teachers are engaged in NGO schools, and 47.8 percent, 39.3 percent, and 7.6 percent belong to government, private schools and Madrassas respectively¹⁸. The field study shows that there remains adverse gender balance in Madrassas due to lack of skilled women in the community as well as due to restriction posed to women by family to work outside (see Box 3).

Box-3

No female teachers are appointed in madrasa

There is no female teacher in the Osshodia Nurul Alam madrasa. When asked, Assistant Superintendent, Asharaful Islam acknowledged that recruiting female teacher was a serious problem in the community. He says that the problem is two-folded: one is the lack of Madrasa educated women and the other is the family values which restrict women to work outside, even in the madrasa.

This imbalance also follows a division wise variation. In recent time, a rule has been passed for all non-government school to employ 30 percent female teacher among total teacher employed, but it has been relaxed within two months of the implementation. The thirty percent quotas no longer remain as a necessary condition for getting Govt. MPO. The authority argues that due to unavailability of female teachers, the rule has been relaxed¹⁹.

School Management Committee (SMC) and Gender Balance

The gender imbalance is evident in all school management committees. There has been a male-domination in the management of primary schools, which hinders smooth operation of primary education programmes. The Education Watch School Survey 2000 reports that almost each of the school (98.7 percent) has a school management committee (SMC) where only 14.3 percent of SMC members are female. Of them, non-formal schools recruited highest proportion of female in SMCs and madrasa least.

ACCESSIBILITY

The government is obliged to secure access to education for all children in the primary education age-range. The government of Bangladesh claims that the MDG 2 targets are on track, showing impressive achievements in terms of net enrolment rate in primary education (73.7 percent in 1992 to 82.7 percent in 2002), primary education completion rate (42.5 percent in 1992 to 80.6 percent in 2002). However, a recent World Bank study asserts that even with intervention mechanisms like reduction of student teacher ratio and increased coverage of the primary education stipend programme, net primary enrolment would not be able to cross the 90 percent benchmark and completion rate would stay below 85 percent by 2015²⁰.

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While almost each school has a SMC, the majority members are male. The gender balance is better in Non-formal Schools and worst in Madrasa.

The statistics on educational enrolment for 6-10 years old children is a matter of serious debate: a number of sources providing conflicting number. There has been some progress in enrolment, but the official claim of 82.7 percent (GoB and UN 2005)²¹ has been marred by challenges from the BBS/ UNICEF (2003)²² estimate (80.9 percent) and nation-wide survey conducted by CAMPE²³ put it at 80 percent. And according to various data sources, the range of enrolment have been slightly higher for females (83-84%) compared to males (81-82%). This improvement was due to several income assistance programmes like government's budgetary allocation for girls education, free primary education, massive stipend programmes at the primary level, and Food for Education programme. But still 3.5 million 6-10 year old children are not enrolled in primary education²⁴, of them three lakh is from Northern districts²⁵.

In absolute number, in the last 20 years primary school enrolment has become more than double from 8.2 million to 17.7 million. The rate of drop out in primary school has gone down from 60 percent in 1990 to around 35 percent in 2000. However, government progress rate in enrolling student in primary education does not even permit achieving the MDG target unless progress rate is accelerated. The progress rate in enrolling students at primary level requires at least 1.33 percent growth per year (see Figures below) in order to achieve the enrolment target of the MDG.

Figure-2 Primary School Net Enrolment

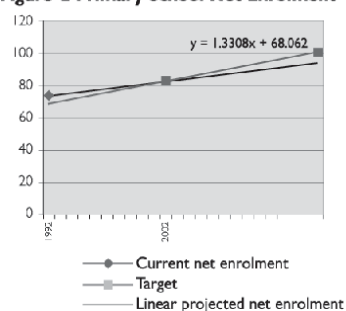
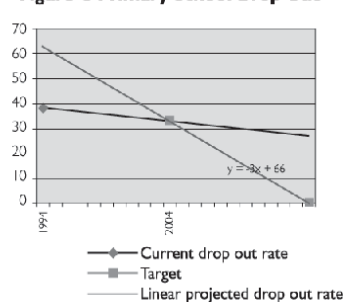


Figure-3 Primary School Drop Out



The Education Watch Household Survey 2000 indicates that of the children aged 6-10 years, four in five have access to primary education. The remaining 20 percent children may never have access to primary education at all or dropped out before crossing their school age. While the boys and girls of the poor family enrol in the primary school by 82.0 percent and 87.5 percent respectively, the figure are presented by 100.3 percent and 100.8 percent respectively for the children of non-poor family. The children of the poor and non-poor family enrol in the primary school at the percentage of 84.9 and 101.1 respectively in the urban areas while the figure is stumbled on 84.6 percent and 100.4 percent respectively in the rural areas. Accordingly, the children who born and grow up in the poor family are more excluded from the primary school in both urban and rural areas. It is interestingly evident that girls are being enrolled in

Still 3.5 million 6-10 year old boys and girls are not enrolled in primary education.

The progress rate in enrolling student in primary education does not even permit achieving the MDG target unless progress rate is accelerated to at least 1.33 percent growth per year.

20 percent children may never have access to primary education at all or dropped out before crossing their school age. Children who born and grow up in the poor family are more excluded from the primary school in both urban and rural areas.

higher number than that of boys in poor families, in particular which has been possible due to taking some necessary measures by the government and different NGOs in favour of girls' education like stipend, provision of free books and other support services.

As regards promoting gender equality and empowering women (MDG 3), the official statement suggests that country is on track reducing gender disparity. It is claimed that the gender gap in enrolment at primary and secondary level has been virtually eliminated. The official record suggests the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary schools has already been achieved.

In primary level the target ratio of female to male is to achieve at 48:52 by 2015. By 2002 the target ratio had already been achieved, which was 45:54 in 1992, though the ratio is reported 55:45 in 1992 in the GoB's progress report 2005 on MDG. However, confusing dissimilarities are found in the target and current status of primary school cited in the GoB's progress report 2004 and progress report 2005 on MDG, when target and current status of female to male ratio was 49:51 in the progress report of 2004. Despite the increasing trend of females enrolment in primary education sector, it will not be possible to achieve equal ratio of female to male, if the target ratio is kept at 48:52. According to the MDG Progress report 2005, estimated share of female and male in primary education will be 47.52:52.47 (Table-1).

Table-1: Gender Share in Primary Education

Year	1992	1995	1998	2001	2004	2007	2010	2013	2015
Male	58.73	56.53	53.09	51.87	51.24	54.5	52.11	52.33	52.47
Female	41.26	43.46	46.9	48.12	48.75	48.49	47.88	47.66	47.52

Source: GoB and UN 2005

However, increasing females enrolment will not ensure gender equality unless the quality education, infrastructure variables are maintained. Table-2 shows that there are various reasons still discourage the enrolment of the children especially the girls. The number of primary schools is very few in terms of distance. According to the Education Watch National Literacy Survey (2002), 48 percent of villages had state owned primary school, 36.4 percent had non-government primary school and 31.4 percent villages had

Table-2: Percentage distribution of unschooled children (6-10 years) by cause of non-enrolment, residence and gender

Causes	Rural			Urban			All Bangladesh		
	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both	Girls	Boys	Both
School is away from home	9.4	10.8	10.1	1.3	1.4	1.4	6.5	9.8	9.1
Scarcity of money	20.7	20.7	20.7	33.0	23.5	28.4	22.1	21.0	21.5
School authority refused	5.1	3.7	4.4	6.1	7.4	6.7	5.2	4.1	4.7
No use of education	0.8	0.7	0.7	0.7	1.0	0.8	0.8	0.7	0.7
Has to work at home or outside	4.4	3.6	4.0	5.8	1.6	3.7	4.6	3.4	4.0
The child does not like	8.6	11.3	10.0	8.0	8.8	8.4	8.5	11.0	9.8
Too young to go to school	41.0	39.9	40.5	39.5	47.6	43.4	40.9	40.8	40.8
Insecure road transportation	4.8	3.1	4.0	1.5	1.6	1.5	4.4	3.0	3.7
Disability	1.9	2.1	2.0	1.5	4.2	2.8	1.8	2.3	2.1
Others	3.2	4.2	3.7	2.8	3.0	2.9	3.2	4.0	3.6

Source: Education Watch Household Survey 2000

The official MDG progress report suggests that country is 'on track' reducing gender disparity. It is claimed that the gender gap in enrolment at primary and secondary level has been virtually eliminated. The official record suggests the ratio of girls to boys in primary and secondary schools has already been achieved.

Increasing female's enrolment will not ensure gender equality unless the quality education, infrastructure variables are maintained.

non-formal primary education. There was no primary school in one-fifth of the villages/mahallahs — 21.4 percent in rural and 13.1 percent in urban areas. Still the tendency of attending school for the poor and distance children is lower and the tendency is skewed to the girls. The enrolment of children with disability and from minority community is limited and the rate is severe for girls. Child labour is still a barrier especially for the girls attending school.

To compensate for the opportunity cost of poor parents for sending their children to school, the Food for Education Program (FEP) was first introduced in 1993 in selected economically and educationally backward rural areas of the country. An evaluation concluded that the FEP program had been successful in increasing primary school enrolment, particularly for girls and reducing dropouts. However, it is found that quality of education in the school covered by FEP could not keep pace with increased enrolment (Ahmed et. al. 2001)²⁶.

As regard to government provisioned stipend programme, it has been reported that most of the girls cannot fulfill the criteria of female education stipends, so they cannot avail themselves with the facility. The eligibility condition for the stipend requires 75 percent class attendance, 45 percent marks in annual exams and remaining unmarried until 18 years, where the female students cannot attend classes regularly, perform dis-satisfactorily in annual exams and most of them are forced to get married in early age. Education ministry reports that the school dropout rate of stipend recipient girls almost doubles in one year, from 2003 to 2004²⁷. The Education Watch 2003/04 reported that, forty percent of the recipients of the stipend programme were paid less than Tk 300 as a quarterly payment, among which the rich household received on average Tk 260 where poor household were paid only Tk 225²⁸.

The stipend programs sometimes create trouble due to improper distribution of benefits, along with wrong and overstated policy campaigns. The stipend program and its complications have been highlighted in a case study of Poschim Nurpur Registered Primary School (see Box 4).

Box 4

People send their children to school only for stipend, where money is spent in different purposes except educational expenses

According to the teachers of Poschim Nurpur Registered Primary School, the villagers are not interested in education. Only thing that interested them is the stipend given from the school. The news of stipend programmes in various media seemingly inform general public that government is giving stipend to all students in primary level. The terms and conditions behind this stipend are not stretched out to the general people and that creates the problem. Although the students attracted by the education, it is his/her parents who would decide whether his son or daughter continue school or not. So the goal of the stipend programme became motivated towards satisfying the parent, rather than benefiting the students. Most of the money taken from the school as educational expenses is used in various sector rather buying educational materials. A good number of students of the school including Rina, Moyna and Rubel say that they give their money to their parents and do not know what happens to this stipend amounts.

Food for education Program increased enrolment in targeted schools but could not keep pace with quality.

The eligibility condition for receiving stipend requires 75 percent class attendance, 45 percent marks in annual exams and remaining unmarried until 18 years, where the female students cannot attend classes regularly, perform dis-satisfactorily in annual exams and many of them are forced to get married in early age.

The goal of the stipend programme became motivated towards satisfying the parent, rather than benefiting the school going boys and girls. Most of the money taken from the school as educational expenses is rarely used to buy educational materials.

To complement access to primary education goals of the PEDP II, the Government of Bangladesh has launched a new program titled Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC) Project in end 2004 for the never enrolled, dropped-out, working and migrating (from rural to urban) children of the country. The project documents and consultations with different stakeholders reveals that the program has no specific criteria in selecting Upazilas, and thus there will be possibility of biasness, which may create discrimination among the deserving children. The different stakeholders consulted are of the view that there is a possibility that students, especially male, may shift from formal schools to ROSC learning centres for having education allowance. More importantly, the project does not reflect any of the Government's commitments towards gender equality in primary education.

The claim of NGOs in reaching un-reached marginal population has been questioned by Sedere²⁹. According to him, there were 34 Upazilas classified as Very high in food insecurity by the World Food Program (WFP) where no NGO had education program. The NGO schools shut their door once their limit of 33 students is enrolled, the single group of students continue up to final grade- IV and further enrolment remains closed until they complete the full course. Hence the other eligible children of the locality cannot enrol in the NGO schools. In reality the NGOs have significant limitations as regards to education access revealed during the field study carried out for the current study (Box 5).

The programme for never enrolled, dropped-out, working and migrating children shows sign of selection bias and male students may switch to ROSC schools to grasp education allowances.

The NGO schools have significant limitations in ensuring education access, they shut their door once their limit of 33 students is enrolled, the single group of students continues up to final grade- IV and further enrolment remains closed until they complete the full course. Hence the other eligible children of the locality cannot enrol in the NGO schools.

Access is denied to girls by non-secular primary education institutions.

Box: 5

Innovation in quality education: Is the practice in place?

Ananda Niketon Primary School is run by the Gonoshahajjo Sangtha (GSS). GSS do not permit the number of a student exceed 30 in a single class. It was found out that the teachers used to beat the students very often. It was quite surprising for a GSS school, as GSS believes in natural ways of learning. They argue that children naturally want to talk, enjoy being with other children, curious and want to find out things, like playing with things. During the field visit in the school, it was found that the boys are provided with more facilities in terms of sports and games materials, musical instruments, participation in cultural functions etc. Field visits in other schools nearby also found out that in most of the schools, play-grounds/open spaces are used by the boys only. These discriminations in the participation in co-curricular activities result in gender inequality in meaningful outcome of primary education.

Moreover, there is no scope of access of girls in non-secular primary education institutions e.g. Kawmi Madrassas. In respect of enrolment of the girls, a contrasting picture is visible between the non-formal schools and the madrassas (see Box 6). The gross enrolment varies between boys and girls in two types of school.

Box: 6

The Gender aspect of education: Comparative scenario of Madrassa and Non-formal schools

The number of the females in Osshodia Nurul Alam Madrassa is much lower than that of males. The guardians of the madrassa students were of the view that every Muslim should learn Arabic and which can be attained within the home environment. They think that it is important for the girls to have religious knowledge. Most of them do not expect their daughter to work outside. In comparison, the field study on BRAC Satellite School finds that at present there are 78 students enrolled in the school. Among them, 27 are male and rest of them are female.

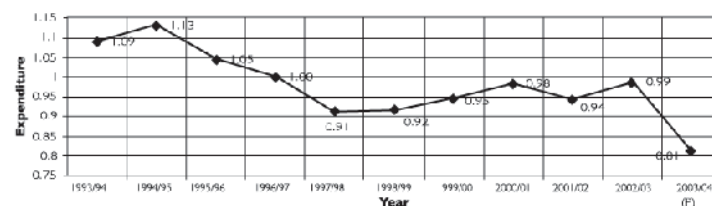
AFFORDABILITY

Affordability encompasses two major aspects: (a) supply function of affordability of the service providers i.e. government, NGOs, communities, and (b) demand function of affordability of the target group beneficiaries. In the context of the present study, affordability in regard to primary education is analysed on the basis of budget allocation for the service providers i.e. government education sector programs and income of the educational institutions, and expenditure of primary education.

Public Expenditure in Primary Education

In terms of affordability of primary education, one of the concerns is the downward trend of public expenditure in primary education. Total public expenditure in primary education as percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) fell steadily from 1.09 percent in 1993-94 to approximately 0.81 percent in 2003-04. In 1993-94 total expenditure in primary education and GDP was 27608.40 and 1354123 million taka respectively. It was highest in the FY 1994-95, 17237.50 million taka for education with GDP at 30729 million taka at current market price. In 2003-04 total expenditure in primary education is 27020 million taka (Figure-4).

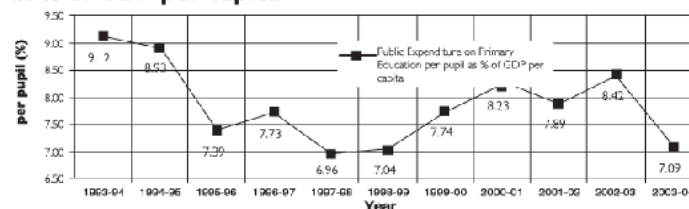
Figure 4: Total Public Expenditure in Primary Education as % of GDP



Source: BBS, various years

Public expenditure in primary education per pupil expressed as percentage of GDP per capita fell from 9.12% in 1993-94 to 7.09% in 2003-04. In 1993-94 per capita GDP was 11504.87 taka and expenditure per pupil was 1049.60 taka. Per capita GDP and expenditure per pupil was 19281.1 taka and 1586.22 taka respectively in 2000-01. In 2003-04 per capita GDP is 24598.15 taka and expenditure per pupil is 1742.79 Taka (Figure-5).

Figure 5: Public Expenditure in primary education per pupil as % of GDP per capita



Source: BBS, various years

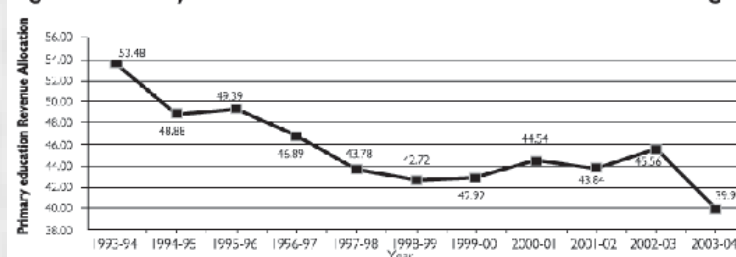
Total spending in primary education, though over the years increased in absolute term, as a percentage of the total education allocation has fallen from 53.48% in 1993-94 to 39.99% in 2003-04.

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In recent years government support a significant portion of the education expenses. Total spending in primary education, though over the years increased in absolute term, as a percentage of the total education allocation has fallen from 53.48% in 1993-94 to 39.99% in 2003-04. In 1993-94 total allocation in primary education was 14764.70 million taka and in 2003-04, it was 27020 million taka (Figure-6). ADP allocation in primary education, though increased in absolute term, as a percentage of the total ADP in education has also fallen from 65.81% in 1993-94 to 46.96% in 2003-04. In 1993-94 total ADP allocation in primary education was 6285.90 million taka and in 2003-04 it was 10720 million taka.

Figure 6: Primary Education Allocation as % of Total Education Budget



Source: BBS, various years

Despite the claim that budget allocation to education has been increasing over time, in reality it is decreasing, which is indicative of decrease in affordability of government in allocation of fund for education sector:

Public investment in education in Bangladesh as a share of GDP is one of the lowest in South Asia.

Much of the government contribution to different schools are spent on teacher salaries and management of school infrastructure and assets, thus very little proportion is spent on educational materials and activities.

Although it has been claimed that budget allocation to education has been increasing over time, but in reality it is decreasing, which is indicative of decrease in affordability of government in allocation of fund for education sector. During the Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002), despite increased allocation in education, public investment in education in Bangladesh as a share of GDP is one of the lowest in South Asia. As service provider, the education affordability opportunities of the Government of Bangladesh is disappointing compared to the increasing demand for the primary education of the country.

Income of the Educational Institutions

The income sources of different types of school include monthly tuition fees, other fees, grant from the government, donation from private sources, renting out of school assets, selling of products (mostly agricultural) and other sources. All government primary schools receive grants from the government; 97.7 percent of the schools have income from students (other fees), one third of them receive donation from private sources and parents and 16 percent have income from other sources.

Almost all the non-formal schools operated by NGOs receive donation from private sources and a very negligible portion i.e. 0.2 percent receive government grants. 92 percent NGO schools charge money against education materials and 92 percent collect tuition fees from the students. For large NGOs like BRAC, PROSHIKA and others, private sources of fund means the international donors, and for small NGOs the sources are the national NGOs. The percentages of total income distribution by source and type of school indicate that the state

contributes 96.3 percent of total income of the government schools, 73.2 percent of Madrassas and only 54.1 percent of private schools. Much of the government contribution to different schools are spent on teacher salaries and management of school infrastructure and assets, thus very little proportion is spent on educational materials and activities.

Box-7

**Jaitorbala Uttorpara Primary School:
Lacks support from Government**

The teachers of Jaitorbala Primary School state that although they know that Government claiming the free primary education for all, they are not having any kind of facility from the government. Although in some areas, the one or two schools are enough to meet up the requirement, while there are more than 4 to 5 schools in those areas and each having various kinds of facilities directly or indirectly from Government and NGOs. On the contrary this school, whose existence, in their opinion, is more important for the children of the catchment area, got no or very few facilities compared to the requirement. The school, due to the shortage of fund yet could not establish much of the infrastructure needed for the school. So, the equal distribution of schools and facilities according to their requirement is essential prerequisite to move forward, the teachers of the school opined.

Household Expenditure for Primary Education

Although primary education is theoretically free in Bangladesh, according to Education Watch Private Expenditure for Education Survey 2000, 90 percent parents are incurring some sort of expenditure for their children enrolled in primary educational institutions (See also Box 8). More than 90 percent of the primary students spend money for buying stationeries and 75.7 percent pay for examination fees. Although the textbooks are provided free of costs, a little more than one third of the students have to pay some amount of money in this head and 37 percent have to spend money for buying/collecting supplementary books. More than one third of the students pay money in the name of various fees, 30.8 percent pay admission/readmission fees and 21 percent pay for private tutors. The students also pay for school dress (15 percent), monthly fees (7.8 percent) and transportation (5 percent). And, about 60 percent of the students pay money for the heads apart from the above.

Box: 8

The cost of so-called free education is much higher in the school — A case study on Police KG school

Government of Bangladesh made the primary education free and compulsory, but it has not been realized in all types of schools. Police Kindergarten school in Maijdi, Noakhali is the evidence of this, where the cost of so-called free primary education is Taka 700/800 per month. Most of the guardians who participated in the focus group discussion claimed that they bring their children to the school and take them back and no one of them use the school van. Therefore, they used to spend Taka 15/20 for the school conveyance every day. In addition to this amount of money, one has to spend Taka 100-120 as different school fees, and other expenses for school dress, tiffin, exercise books remains.

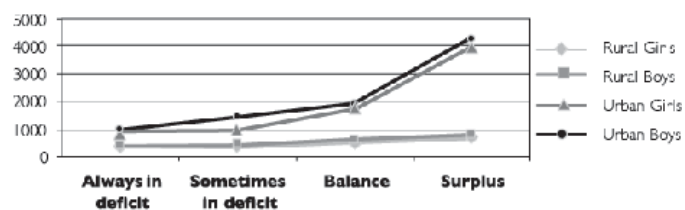
Primary education is expensive, parents has to pay substantial amount for providing education.

Although the textbooks are provided free of costs, a little more than one third of the students have to pay some amount of money in this head and 37 percent have to spend money for buying/collecting supplementary books. More than one third of the students pay money in the name of various fees.

The mean expenditure for boys and girls separately for the urban and rural areas is presented in Figure 7. It is observed that (i) irrespective of food security status of households, expenditure for the students of rural schools is much lower than that of the urban students; (ii) families spend less for girls than boys in the both areas; and (iii) gender variation is wider among urban students than that of rural. The above situation indicates of gender inequality in the primary education sector.

It is important to note that while almost equal amount of money is spent for the girls and boys of always in deficit group, in the surplus households on an average, the boys spend Tk. 164 more than the girl students spending.

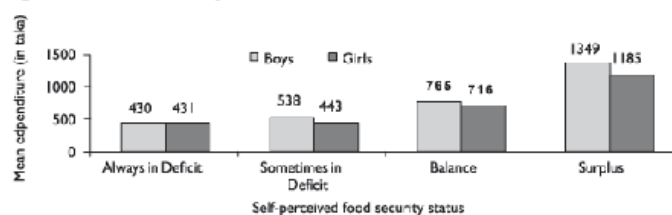
Figure: 7 Mean Private Expenditure for Education



Source: Education Watch Private Expenditure for Education Survey (2000).

Over the years, government and NGOs have been providing various incentives in terms of stipend and family-supporting activities for raising affordability of girl children in Bangladesh. Generally the parents, guardians and communities preference for education goes mostly to the boys because they think that they will be dependent on the boys in their old age, while the girls will have to leave them through marriage. Moreover, whatever affordability a poor or lower-middle class family possesses, they utilise for the male children considering them as the source of future bread earner which ultimately hinders the process of gender equality in primary education in Bangladesh.

Figure: 8 Private Expenditure for Education



Source: Education Watch Private Expenditure for Education Survey (2000)

More money is spent for boys than girls for primary education.

Affordability of parents force them to choose between boys and girls whom to send to school first and for how long.

ACCEPTABILITY

Whether the primary education is acceptable or not, it largely depends on utility in terms of perception and use of education for the life of the beneficiaries as well as different stakeholders. Acceptability of any primary schooling system to parents and community members depends on the perceived benefit of schooling

to children, family and on the community. The quality and performance of the schooling and its outcome relies heavily on teachers-students ratio, completion, dropout and survival and learning achievement.

Perceived Value of Primary Education

Perception on utility of education varies from one group of people to another and urban to rural as well. In this connection, it would be worthwhile to mention the relevant findings of a study on utility of primary education in Bangladesh³⁰. A number of such utilities are: (a) most of villagers consider that primary education creates opportunities for a better living; (b) among many, only primary education is less important, they feel that further education should also be available; (c) villagers listed the followings as outcome of having primary education: skill of reading letters, capability of managing documents, receiving others respects, skill of maintaining accounts, and becoming a perfect human being. Another study³¹ observed that perception in terms of utility (or expectation) about children's education, in accordance with importance, are (i) getting employment/job, (ii) awareness raising, (iii) promotion of social status, (iv) family income generation, (v) elimination of illiteracy, (vi) old-age security and (vii) reading and writing of letter.

The social and religious traditions affect accessibility option for girls. If a poor family can afford to send a child to school, it would most likely be a son. Since resources are limited, and parents are still expected to cover school fees and other costs, boys tend to receive preferential treatment for schooling. In some cases, both girls and boys may be enrolled in school, but their chances of continuing their education, especially if they come from a poor, large family, are different. There is a perceived notion that the rate of return for a son's education is greater for parents, as sons have more opportunities to access better paying jobs and will therefore be better able to take care of their parents in later life. Because girls most valued contribution is to the home, they are often withdrawn from school either to save money or so that they can take care of siblings or elderly relatives while their parents work outside the home to earn income.

The vast majority of primary school teachers are male and this further discourages parents to enrol their girl child in school. The issue of girl's education is clearly neglected irrespective of groups (literate- illiterate), communities (majority-minority-indigenous) and areas (urban-rural). This arises from the male dominant culture in our society where girls have a lower social status, and their options in life are limited to motherhood and domestic roles, there may seem little point in sending them to school. In such societies there will be few job options for women, so school cannot be realistically seen as preparing them to earn a living.

Education Quality and Performance

Quality and performance are the important indicators of acceptability of primary education. The major factors relating to quality and performance of teachers, completion, dropout, repetition and survival, and achievement of the learners in primary schools. The

The vast majority of primary school teachers are male and which discourages parents to enrol their girl child. The issue of girl's education is clearly neglected irrespective of groups, communities and areas arising from the male dominant culture in our society where girls have a lower social status, and their options in life are limited to motherhood and domestic roles, there may seem little point in sending them to school.

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academic qualification of primary school teachers varies from school to school and area to area as well. When the teachers in government schools on average possess 12.1 years of schooling, the figures are found 12.2, 10.5 and 13.8 years of schooling for the private and non-formal schools and Madrassas respectively. The teachers in the government and private schools are found to have completed a long course of ten months training, while NGO school teachers have short course of 2/3 weeks foundation training and monthly refreshing courses. Over 92 percent teachers of the government and non-formal schools have basic professional training, which is found in only 15.2 percent of the Madrassa teachers. Gender difference in teachers qualification is visible in most schools, where female teachers are less qualified in terms of academic qualifications than that of male teachers.

The study found that on average, 80.6 percent of the learners can survive to continue their lesson of whom 39.9 percent repeat in various classes. The highest completion rate (76.2 percent) is found for the girls whilst the figure is 73.5 percent for the boys. With regard to the dropout rate, the girls belong to the lower figure (23.8 percent) than that of the boys (26.5 percent). When the dropout rate is found 26.2 percent in the rural areas, the same is observed 21.2 percent in the urban areas. The field study shows that dropout in rural areas is relatively high, caused by mainly poor economic condition (see Box 9).

Box: 9

Poverty is the main reason of dropout

Ananda Niketon Primary School faces some experiences of school drop out. The teachers of the school informed that there are several reasons of dropout in their school. The first reason, according to them is obviously the poverty. Most of the students leave the school because they have to employ themselves in different job to support their families. They also say that, female students of class five do not complete the school most of the times, because in that age they are taken out of school to join in the garments factory.

Excessive punishment in the school leads to drop out for early marriage

The rate of drop out from the Oshodia Nurul Ulm Farukia Madrassa is quite significant. The teachers of the madrassa claim that the economic condition of this village is not good at all. According to them, this is the major reason behind the school dropout. The second major reason is the prevalence of child marriage. Tania is one of the dropped out children of this madrassa. She started her education in the govt. primary school. After severe beating by the school teacher she got into the madrassa but ended up with the same story. Now she stays at home and helps her mother in her work. Tania's mother tells that it is often very difficult for them to manage food three times a day. In this situation, it is not possible for them to spend extra money for the children's education, she expects to get Tania married soon.

At the national level, around 80.6 percent of the learners survive upto ending the five-years cycle. The girls belong to the higher surviving rate (81.05) than that of the boys (78.5 percent). Moreover, the duration varies from girls to boys and from rural to urban areas. Whilst on an average, the girls complete their primary education by 6.5 years, the figure is found 6.7 years for the boys. Between the rural and urban areas, the higher duration is found 6.7 years in the rural areas when it is 6.2 years for urban ones.

Female teachers are less qualified in terms of academic qualifications than that of male teachers.

Apart from the reasons of poverty, prevalence of child marriage and the need to support family by earning before primary school completion force children to drop out.

Learning Achievement and Course Contents

In regard to learning achievement, the Education Watch 2000 reports that less than two percent of the students achieve control over all 27 competencies inquired as the determinants of competencies in the report. Whilst the learners achieve all competencies by the score of 1.6, the scores for the girls and boys are 1.8 and 1.5 respectively. Among primary school completers, only 64 percent of boys and 57 percent of girls had achieved literacy; only 50 percent of girls in rural areas had achieved literacy. Children from well-to-do households did better than children from poorer households. However, difference in competency achievement between girls and boys in terms of subjects is also evident, where girls learning are comparatively lower than that of boys.

During the discussion with the primary education specialists, gender experts and primary school teachers at different focus group discussions, it was found that lack of gender balance in the course contents is mostly held responsible for inequality in learning achievement. For example, women character in terms of positive role(s) hardly portrayed in the primary textbooks. In most cases of stories selected/included in the textbooks, women characters are portrayed as inferior than male ones.

PARTICIPATION

In development discourse participation means real and meaningful involvement of person(s) or groups(s) in different stages of development initiatives including decision-making, planning, implementation, benefit sharing and evaluation of the program activities. The following paragraphs illustrate the participation of the primary school students, parents, teachers, SMC and community people in encouraging enrolment and ensuring gender equality in primary education.

Participation of Teachers

A favourable teacher-student ratio is important for any kind of educational program. The government primary schools have the highest ratio with 70 students per teacher and the Madrassas have the lowest with 28 students per teacher. This ratio is found 1:47 for private and 1:31 for non-formal schools. On an average, there are around 4.5 teachers per school in Bangladesh. 6.4 and 3.8 teachers are found for the urban and rural areas respectively. There is a large variation between rural and urban areas that is, whilst the government, private and non-formal schools and the Madrassas in the rural areas reveal the number of teachers by 4.0, 4.0, 1.0 and 6.3 respectively per school and 7.9, 8.5, 1.2 and 8.2 respectively per school in the urban areas.

It has been reported that the school dropout rate in eight northern districts was 33 percent in 2004, which was 27 percent in 2003. This increase in dropout is the result of limited number of teacher, their negligence in duty, and the lack of monitoring by the authority³². The poor pay scale for the primary school teachers fails to ensure the proper participation of the teachers. The primary school teacher receives salary at a scale of 1875-3605 taka, where an eight-pass driver also receives salary in the same scale³³. It has been reported

Women character in terms of positive role(s) hardly portrayed in the primary textbooks, often portrayed as inferior than male ones.

Gender balance in the course contents is mostly held responsible for inequality in learning achievement, e.g. women character in terms of positive role(s) hardly portrayed in the primary textbooks. In most cases of stories selected/included in the textbooks, women characters are portrayed as inferior than male ones.

Unfavourable teacher-student ratio, poor pay, workload other than teaching hinders teachers' effective participation in teaching and learning process.

that some six thousand primary school teachers hired in the Primary Education Development Project have not received their monthly wages over a year³⁴. Thus many of these teachers have to find alternative sources of earning which in effect lose motivation to contribute in the learning process in their full strength. Moreover, it was found that many of the government school teachers had to involve themselves in duties other than teaching such as survey in local areas taking away a substantial amount of time from the already limited school contract hours.

Participation of School Management Committee

The school management committees (SMCs) are constituted for mustering support and enlisting participation of people in the management of primary education and to facilitate good governance of primary schools. Each SMC of GPSs consists of 11 members and the role, mandate, duties and responsibilities of the committees are determined.

It is mentioned earlier that almost each of the school (98.7 percent) has a SMC for its smooth operation (Education Watch 2000). The non-formal schools had the smaller committee with about seven members. However, a number of reports confirm that the SMCs in most schools are ineffective or not functioning. The Education Watch 2003/04 reports 'SMCs have been given a broad and sweeping role in primary school management, but with little real authority. Political control now institutionalised by giving the local MP a role, and cronyism of head teachers in the case of GPS and of the founding

'SMCs have been given a broad and sweeping role in primary school management, but with little real authority. Political control now institutionalised by giving the local MP a role, and cronyism of head teachers in the case of GPS and of the founding group in the case of RNGPS, have led to formation of SMCs with mostly the wrong people for such a committee.'

Box 10

Little role for parents and community members in school management committees

Most of the SMC members are police, so general parents face lack of access in committee. A case of Police KG. School

The field visit reveals the fact that there is no role of the parents in SMC in police KG school. The meeting of school management committee (SMC) is unknown to them. The police members mostly occupy the guardian's position in the school management committee. They are selected on this ground that their children are also studying in this school. So, the other parents except police members along with community people do not have any participation in decision-making.

Conflicts between two groups results dysfunctional SMC : Evident from Osshodia Nurul Alam Farukia Madrassa

The School Management Committee- SMC of the madrassa has been in a dysfunctional state due to the conflict between two groups. It was found out that few months before the field visit, the madrassa caught fire and almost all the rooms of the building burnt into ashes. The present building is a newly constructed one. Most of the people think that the incident was the result of the contradiction of two groups of SMC. After that incidence, some influential people dismissed the school committee. Now the school is running through an ad-hoc committee.

Interested participants are prohibited to join in the committee, where the current members stays inactive :A case of Poschim Nurpur Registered Primary School

Nurpur School could not make itself as a public property. The people of this locality always maintain distance from the school and its activities though there are few devoted persons who are aware about this school. SMC members are not interested in school activities. Although, there are some people who are interested to be in the school committee but they cannot participate as some influential people already occupied the positions.

group in the case of RNGPS, have led to formation of SMCs with mostly the wrong people for such a committee³⁵. Field study also evinces the fact shown in Box 10.

It is disappointing that participation of the female members in SMC is only 14.3 percent. The participation of female members in non-formal schools belongs to the highest and the Madrassas belong to the least amongst all types of schools. The above situation is indicative of male-domination in the management of primary schools, which hinders the gender equality in primary education.

Participation of Parents

Parents-Teacher Associations (PTA) are organised to enlist support of local community for the improvement of educational environment in primary schools. The Esteem Study-4 reported that 35 percent schools have PTAs and the participation of the parents and the teachers are not effective mainly because of local politics, internal conflicts and personality clash among the local leaders. Besides, lack of adequate coordination, responsibilities and accountability are principally held responsible for ineffective performance of the PTA³⁶. The field study also reports the same, (see Box 11).

Box 11
Teacher-Parents cooperation is absent, no meeting has been participated by the guardians : Evident from Ananda Niketon Primary School.

One of the senior teachers of the GSS school Mr. Kader says that the lack of support from the GSS made the school situation worse. Teachers have to work as a volunteer for a long time and they are getting an amount of only 2,660 to 3,970 taka. According to Mr. Kader, the guardians do not understand the problems of the school because they never come to parents-teachers meetings. On the contrary, parents of several students say that they never attended in teachers-parents meeting because teachers never call them. They inform that the teachers never come to the students house or even in the area.

Students Participation

In addition to not being able to pay for the education of all children, poor households often rely upon the additional earnings of children to survive. The growing number of children needs to work outside the home to supplement family earnings. Girls are usually hardest hit. In times of great economic need, girls, like their mothers, play the dual role of care-giver and wage earner, putting in long hours. In order to fulfill these dual roles, girls from poor households are the first to drop out of school and miss out on the education and training that could enable them to lead better lives. Even when girls from poor families do go to school, they continue to be burdened with having to expend large amounts of time and energy on taking care of the home and siblings. This leaves them little time to do school work, let alone participating other co-curricular activities within and outside schools. They rarely get chances to participate in school meetings.

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Community Participation

It is observed that currently government officers and teachers become co-owners of the schools, the ownership is further shared by the local influentials such as politicians, the rich and wealthy people, religious leaders etc. Thus the underprivileged community people, who are the majority, lose their zeal to sacrifice for education because that does not belong to them (ActionAid, 2002)³⁷. The field study also reports that except very few, in most of the schools community people do not have any significant participation in school activities. (see Box 12). A study found that all the respondents expressed their enthusiasm and readiness to sacrifice anything to make sure their children get proper education. At the time of investigation, 77.3 percent people affirmed that they are willing to contribute to the development of the educational institutions in their localities. Of them, 31.3 percent expressed their intent to contribute in whatever way required, 24.9 percent for physical labour, 5.6 percent want to observe the contribution of others before contributing themselves, about 3 percent wish to donate teaching/learning materials, 2.4 percent want to donate as per the need of the institution, and 6.2 percent through any other possible means (ActionAid 2002).

Although the community participation is very important for making significant contribution to enhance enrolment and attendance, the problems of the schools are not shared by the masses of the community and hardly any action is being taken in this regard. In one of the JICA Study on education³⁸, community participation in terms of involvement of guardians, SMCs and community as a whole is examined on the basis of 31 school related activities. But it is most amazing that of these 31 activities, gender participation was totally neglected, and confined on only one indicator i.e., teachers and SMC discussion on the value of girls education.

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Box 12 Collaboration and cooperation in schools

The High community Participation is ensured with a high public—private collaboration

Shibram Primary School is a good example of public-private collaboration with high community participation. This collaboration is not automatically constructed; it is the result of some collective initiatives. The parent's participation raised their interest about school and its activities and it ensured the high attendance rate of the students.

Participation of the villagers: evidence from Jaitorbala Uttarpara Primary School

One influential member takes most of the decision, where others have little or no participation except obeying his decision

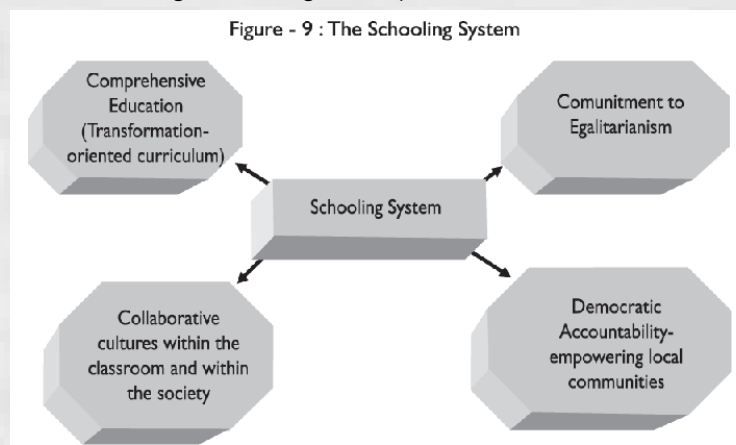
As this school, it is a major concern of the villagers that they should have some participation in the school activities. But in reality they do not have enough participation in the decision-making. Most of the decision comes from the management committee. Mr. Abdul Mannan is one of the members of the committee, who took major role in decision-making. The inhabitants have only to follow the decision they have taken so far.

TOWARDS A GENDER RESPONSIVE EDUCATION SYSTEM

The work on gender equality and processes in primary education is uneven. A little work has been done to grasp the complex wave of issues, from a comprehensive perspective, apart from the issue of access, which though has been reduced to numerical parity. The proposal of gender equality is not coherently assimilated neither by the current theoretical trends in education nor by the practices of the formal and informal systems.

Education by definition is a natural ally of equality, if its sole purpose is assumed that the realm of education is enriched the more knowledge is shared and does not exclude others from its possession. But there is a relational aspect to equity, which is shaped in each context by its history, resources, power and ideology. Gender equality in education incorporates in itself not only the notions of numerical parity in access and participation but also equality in terms of outcomes. Viewing that gender discrimination is an expression of a larger system of social injustice and is manifested in subtle ways with consequences that are not all quantifiable or tangible, the present volume, contends that any intervention must relate to men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities to realise their self potential while recognizing that men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities depend on access to resources, entitlements, accountability and equality of opportunities. Thus any programmatic intervention should entail right to just and favourable conditions underwritten by at least three dimensions : commutative justice³⁹, distributive justice⁴⁰ and social rights.

A gender responsive education must encompass a schooling system, the aim of which is the flourishing of the collective society, the community, as well as the flourishing of the individuals. The system thus must be based on overarching principles of (a) comprehensive education through transformation-oriented curriculum; (b) increased equality of outcome from the attainment of such provisions (i.e. commitment to egalitarianism); (c) democratic community control; and (d) fostering democratic, egalitarian and collaborative cultures within the classroom and the society to achieve a socially just anti-discriminatory society. The system must entail proactive approaches to overcome the social, cultural and historical ingredients of gender injustice in education.



The proposal of gender equality is not coherently assimilated neither by the current theoretical trends in education nor by the practices of the formal and informal systems.

Gender equality in education incorporates in itself not only the notions of numerical parity in access and participation but also equality in terms of outcomes.

GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION: AN AGENDA FOR REFORM

Making schools available for all

As obligated through the Constitutional provisions and numerous international conventions, the Government of Bangladesh is responsible for making schools available for all school aged children irrespective of class, ethnicity and gender. However, yet, there are simply not enough schools to meet the demand all school aged boys and girls. This holds true for both rural and urban areas.

Availability of education materials in primary schools is also one of the important determinants of parents to send their children to primary schools. Its responsibility is not only to cover school fees but also cover other direct costs and costs of basic inputs, such as an adequate number of learning and teaching materials for all primary school students to make education accessible to all children. .

The State is the primary provider of primary education. However, diverse system of primary education continues in Bangladesh entrenching inequalities based on social class and gender. A large and growing private education sector means that politically powerful middle class turn their backs on public education and are less prepared to lobby for key improvements in public schools, including gender equality. The presence of diverse stream of education is also goes against the spirit of the Constitution, which calls for introducing a uniform system of education. As such, government obligation is not only to make uniform system of education available to all boys and girls, at the same time to encourage a range of education provision by other providers and also develop clear pathways and linkages with the formal system so that the non-formal sector does not become a ghetto for girls and poor students.

Enforcing compulsory primary education

Primary education is compulsory by law, but it is rarely enforced. Therefore, parents are free to decide whether or not to send their children to school or choose between boys and girls whom to send to school. The compulsory education laws obligates the governments to provide a functioning countrywide education system; to make education free and to provide social assistance to parents who cannot otherwise afford the indirect costs (transport, meals, etc.) of fulfilling their legal obligation to send children to school.

Investing in teachers

The primary education in Bangladesh is plagued with inadequate numbers of teachers. A high teacher—student ratio results in poor quality of education. Teachers do not have the time to use interactive, child-friendly and gender-sensitive practices in the classroom with large class sizes. The result of non-availability of teachers and also due to lack of motivation of many teachers due mainly o poor pay structure has far been a lower quality of education, thereby contributing to widening the gender gap in schooling.

The gap has been further widened due to the non-availability of female teachers whose presence tends to make schools more girl and boy-friendly and provide role models for girls. The government established a quota of 60 per cent for women teachers in all primary

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schools in 1991 and relaxed teacher qualification requirements. However, the proportion of women teachers in primary government schools increased by only 10 percent during the 1990s. Despite, having long-standing quotas for the recruitment of women teachers, yet these quotas have not been filled. There is a need to develop effective incentives to encourage female teachers to work in primary schools. The priority should be to improve the status, pay and support of teachers, especially those teachers posted to rural or difficult areas. The quotas for gender parity among rural teachers should be backed up with efforts to extend and improve teacher training facilities in the rural as well as the urban areas, and additional incentives and career development opportunities for female teachers willing to take up posts in the rural areas.

Increase in government expenditure on education

Although it has been claimed that budget allocation to education has been increasing over time, but in reality it is decreasing, indicating decrease in affordability of government in allocation of fund for education sector. The current level of spending on education is also remains too low. These low levels of investment have resulted in unequal access, low quality and shifting costs on to parents. These shortcomings have had a detrimental impact on girls' education, and girls from poor families in particular. In order to even meet the education enrolment targets and gender parity set out in the MDGs to be achieved by 2015, let alone more encompassing goals of gender equality, public expenditure levels in education will need to increase substantially.

Reducing parental cost to schooling

Cost is by far the most important deterrent to education, especially for girls. Although considerable efforts have been made to eliminate school fees and provide incentives to send school aged boys and girls to school, other costs continue to be asked of parents in the form of admission, registration and examination fees, contribution to Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), purchase of uniforms, textbooks and learning materials, the construction and maintenance of schools and mid-day meals and transportation. Many children dropped out of school because parents were still expected to cover many of the other indirect costs. For a family, particularly a poor household, with several children of school-going age, the cost of sending all of them to school are easily is unaffordable. Other opportunity costs also remain, namely the loss of an additional wage earner or care-giver. Overall, however, if schools are more accessible (both in terms of distance and facilities, such as separate toilets for girls and boys) and the quality of education is high, parents would be more inclined to part with scarce resources to educate all children, particularly girls.

Improving Quality

Improving access is heavily intertwined with the quality of education. If quality, relevant education is provided, parents are more likely to opt to send all their children to school. It is increasingly recognized that for quality education to be achieved, there needs to be a well-resourced, safe and healthy environment that respects the rights of all children. The school environment and experience itself needs to be transformed to combat discrimination against girls and to promote gender equality and inter-cultural relations. A focus on active learning and the greater participation of pupils will contribute

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Any intervention in education sector must relate to men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities to realise their self potential while recognising that men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities depend on access to resources, entitlements, accountability and equality of opportunities.

Drastic changes in the curricula, and in teacher training and classroom practices must take place for children to acquire reading, writing and cognitive skills appropriate for primary level of education; these learning materials and practices must also be free of all bias, including gender bias and discrimination.

to a quality, useful education for girls as well as boys. Quality education must focus to be: relevant to both children's present and future needs, appropriate developmentally, culturally and linguistically, participatory — children, families and wider communities play a full role in the process of learning and the organisation of the school, protective — from exploitation, abuse, violence and conflict, flexible and responsive — to the differences between children, and to social, economic and technological changes in the world, inclusive — see diversity as a resource to support learning and play, and challenging to open up intellectual and cultural opportunities for children. Thus, any intervention in education sector must relate to men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities to realise their self potential while recognising that men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities depend on access to resources, entitlements, accountability and equality of opportunities.

Reforming education processes and contents

The acceptability variables of the primary education in Bangladesh calls for a reform of education system which must seek to understand its formal and informal character; and in either form, the relationship between its content and process, its text and context. In order to achieve the high level of quality and thereby acceptability of the system to members of the community, several changes need to take place.

Curriculum: It is now recognized that the discriminatory learning materials perpetuate gender inequities. Curricula are often gender biased reinforcing traditional gender roles, transmitting negative messages to girls and boys and offering little space to imagine a different future. Hidden messages in teaching materials and the attitudes of teachers convey that girls are inferior to boys and that they should have lower ambitions. Drastic changes in the curricula, and in teacher training and classroom practices must take place for children to acquire reading, writing and cognitive skills appropriate for primary level of education; these learning materials and practices must also be free of all bias, including gender bias and discrimination. However, there is very little work on how or whether concerns with gender equality come to feature in the curriculum and in what ways these are interpreted in the curriculum in use. The syllabus, based on the statement of educational goals, identifies the subjects, and levels of abilities that are to be acquired as part of a learning continuum. If constructed on a conscious epistemology and clear conceptualization of educational goals, it can serve as an effective guideline for developing the textbooks.

Text Books: A little work has been done on assessing school textbooks and the ways in which girls and women are represented. When it comes to gender equality, what is perceptible is a conscious effort in the books to portray women character in positive roles, without inculcating the nature and the state of affairs; the women live in to make a survival.

Teacher Training: Problems have also beset the effort to train teachers in a way that makes them sensitive to the issues of gender roles and sensitivity. Modules of gender sensitivity are drawn up. Teachers trained on them in a session or so. However, experience has shown that this way, the text remains dormant, supplementary materials do not get used; cultural bias continues to inflect classroom behavior. Teachers, including women teachers were found to teach the most interesting stories built around gender equality in a matter-of-fact manner, as just another lesson on language, to teach so many words and so many spellings, with no attempt to generate discussion on the social meanings inherent in it.

Pedagogy: The gendered dimensions of pedagogy have received very little attention, as have accounts of the work of teachers and their understandings of their profession. It does not tend to examine the assumptions that underpin the development of test items and how these might link with gendered pedagogic processes.

Excessive emphasis on scholastic aptitudes has led to the dichotomization between the curricular and co-curricular. The curricular activities implies a set of information and abilities related to scholastic aptitudes, and co-curricular to activities desirable but not mandatory for a school. These include subjects like art, craft, music, cultural activities, and sport. The lessons have opted mainly for creating meanings as functional abilities organized under separate subjects. The emphasis has been on operational skills for what are deemed basic units formulating information. This is largely an emphasis on the instrumental aspect of education. The effort should be to use the content in a way that develops functional skills while helping create critical consciousness.

Changing attitudes toward intrinsic value of education

Gender inequality in education is not a natural result of biological differences between women and men. The identities and roles that keep girls out of school form part of the overall social relations in society that are defined mostly by men. Thus, eliminating gender inequality in education rest on a much broader nationwide mobilisation that has ambitious goals to ensure that women fully and equally participate in all aspects of economic, social and political development. As such, the attitudes and behaviours that cause inequality and exacerbate poverty can only be changed with effective advocacy from both men and women. Since, inequalities in education and poverty of parents are part of an inter-generational cycle, to break the cycle, both young people and adults — men and women - will need to be involved. There is also a strong correlation between mothers' literacy skills and higher levels of schooling, especially for girls. A greater appreciation of the value of education has to be perceived by the parents in order to themselves making choices whether to send children to school or for how long.

Amplify voices of the unheard

Since no single factor yields meaning by itself, issues of access, curriculum, gender equality have to be seen as part of a complex weave that creates the school and determines how it functions. The text has to be seen within the context, the curriculum with the processes that transact it, the identity of the school within its locus. The participation of students, parents, teachers and communities in the policy-making process is crucial to developing appropriate, well-informed responses to local complexities, and generating the broad-based support needed to implement gender sensitive education programmes successfully. The reality is that those denied their right to education usually have little political voice, while people in power have little personal stake in the government schooling system. On both counts, it has been easy until now for decision-makers to ignore the educational needs of girls and poor people. Without sustained political commitment backed up by voices of the unheard e.g. children, parents, teachers and community as a whole, the gender equality targets will remain to be seen as equality of access rather than equality of outcome.

Empowering local communities

The schooling system should ensure local community involvement in the schools and increasing local community democratic accountability in schooling (e.g. formation of LEA with powers) and decreasing those of 'business' and private enterprise. This may entail supporting the redistributive and quality control functions of democratically accountable Local Education Authorities with increased political and financial power, engaging, *inter alia*, in the development and dissemination of policies for equality.

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Without sustained political commitment backed up by voices of the unheard e.g. children, parents, teachers and community as a whole, the gender equality targets will remain to be seen as equality of access rather than equality of outcome.

The schooling system need to support the redistributive and quality control functions of democratically accountable Local Education Authorities with increased political and financial power, engaging, in the development and dissemination of policies for equality.

NOTES

1. Studies by Sadker M and Sadker D (1989, Gender Equity and Educational Reform, *Educational Leadership*, 46/6, 44-47) and by the American Association of University Women Educational Foundation (1999, Where Schools still Fail our Children, and 1995, How Schools Shortchange Girls, New York: Marlowe and Company) have found gender-bias against girls both in US classrooms and in school policies despite the fact that boys and girls have equal access to schooling.
2. In recognition of this reality, a growing number of developmental agencies and other organizations have adopted the 'gender and development' or GAD approach as a more appropriate methodology for tackling the massive inequalities that continue to limit the potential of women around the world (Moser 1993, Gender Planning and Development: Theory, Practice and Training, London: Routledge).
3. This perspective is encapsulated in the "women in development" (WID) approach, which has been used as gender friendly framework in the mainstream, with different variations in names, but with little change of core i.e. human capital and economic growth.
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7. The other five goals are also relevant to the gender goal; Goal 1: Expanding early childhood and care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children; Goal 2: Ensuring 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; Goal 3: Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life skills programmes; Goal 4: Achieving a 50 percent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults; and Goal 6: Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
8. MDG target 2 - to ensure that all boys and girls complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015.
9. MDG target 3 - eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.
10. Education Watch Household Survey (2000:15) cited in Education Watch 2001, Renewed Hope, daunting Challenges, State of Primary Education in Bangladesh, Dhaka: CAMPE.
11. Education Watch 2003/04, Quality with Equity, The Primary Education Agenda, Dhaka: CAMPE and University Press Ltd.
12. Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) is a continuation of the activities commenced under general education project to achieve EFA goals. An assessment of the PEDP-I was completed in December 2001.
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37. ActionAid Bangladesh 2002, Understanding Exclusion from Education, Dhaka: ActionAid Bangladesh
38. Japan Bank for International Cooperation, (2002), "Bangladesh Education Sector Review", JBIC, Sector Study, Tokyo.
39. Commutative justice: fairness in all agreements and exchanges; distributive: allocation of income, wealth and power; and social justice: obligations to be active/productive participants in society.
40. This is contrary to the conservative economic thinking (neo-liberal economics) about the libertarian conception of distributive justice. In this framework the state plays a night watchman role of simply protecting a narrowly defined set of (mostly property) and corporate rights. Other conservatives within this tradition may appeal to a utilitarian notion of distributive justice that relies totally on the free market to maximize utility, allocate resources and distributes rewards.

Gender equality has received widespread attention in recent development discourse. The gender equality has often been reduced to numerical parity at the behest of projecting donor's aid effectiveness and successes of government's political expediency. The present report contends that view, argues that gender equality is not coherently assimilated neither by the current theoretical trends in education nor by the practices of the formal and informal systems, and provides conceptual clarity.

Education by definition is a natural ally of equality, if its sole purpose is assumed that the realm of education is enriched the more knowledge is shared and does not exclude others from its possession. But there is a relational aspect to equity, which is shaped in each context by its history, resources, power and ideology. Gender equality in education incorporates in itself not only the notions of numerical parity in access and participation but also equality in terms of outcomes. Viewing that gender discrimination is an expression of a larger system of social injustice, the present volume, contends that any intervention must relate to men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities to realise their self potential while recognising that men's and women's abilities to utilise their capabilities depend on access to resources, entitlements, accountability and equality of opportunities.

A gender responsive education, according to the report, must encompass a schooling system, the aim of which is the flourishing of the collective society, the community, as well as the flourishing of the individuals. The report in similar vein outlines an agenda for reform to scale up equality in education.

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