

CHAPTER 1

PRIMARY EDUCATION AND EXCLUSION

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Introduction

Education is crucial for building human capabilities and for opening opportunities – the true essence of human development not just as a means to an end rather as an end in itself. Education is a basic human right. It is the key to building human capital, which in itself is the vital ingredient in building a nation. Investment in human capital, through schooling, increases the productivity of labour. Higher wages in the labour market are, a reward for the higher productivity of workers with a greater stock of human capital. This is the most widely accepted economic explanation for educated workers receiving higher rewards in the labour market (Becker 1993, Schultz 1988). Empirical evidence has provided strong support for this hypothesis (Knight and Sabot 1990). The human capital hypothesis also suggests that investment in education is conceptually identical to an investment in physical capital. Rate of return studies convincingly show that social returns to investment in education are among the highest in society (World Bank 1993, World Bank 1995, Jamison and Lau 1982, Rosegrant and Evenson 1993). Education is not merely a means for better income and employment opportunities for individuals or for higher economic growth potential for the nation. The social benefits of education leads to many directions like better health care, greater community and political participation, less income inequality, and a greater reduction of absolute poverty. The key results of various such studies cited in Human Development in South Asia also indicate that the primary education has highest social return followed by secondary education.

The importance of education for development is not a new discovery. It was recognised not only by many recent writers such as Schultz, Becker and Sen but also by classical economists such as Adam Smith, John Stuart Mills, Karl Marx and Alfred Marshall. The quest for the establishment of human dignity and educational right indeed has a long history. Through the long evolutionary process of human history,

education has become the 'right' instead of 'privilege'. Chronologically, it is found that there have been three lines of educational evolution – from the classes to masses, from the private to public, and from ornamental to useful. Now we are in the last phase where the door of education is open for all and it has become the fundamental right of the masses.

Education through the Prism of Political Economics

'A man's education at the expense of much labour and any of those employment, which required extra-ordinary dexterity and skill, may be compared to one of those expensive machines. The work which he learns to perform, it must be expected, over and above the usual wages of common labour, will replace to him the whole expense of his education, with at least the ordinary profits of any equally valuable capital ... the difference between the wages of skilled labour and those of common labour is founded upon this principle'.

Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776)

'The wisdom of expending public and private funds on education is not to be measurable by its direct fruits alone. It will be profitable as a mere investment, to give the masses of the people much greater opportunities, than they can generally avail themselves of. For by this means many, who would have died unknown, are able to get the start needed for bringing out their latent abilities. 'The most valuable of all capital is that investment in human beings'.

Alfred Marshall in *The Principles of Economics* (1980)

'The first [measure] would be the general education of all children without exception at the expense of the state—an education which is equal for all and continues until the individual is capable of emerging as an independent member of society. Every man has the right to the full development of his abilities and society wrongs individuals twice over when it makes ignorance a necessary consequence of poverty. It is obvious that society gains more from educated than from ignorant, uncultured members'.

Frederick Engels in *Speeches in Elberfeld* (1845)

'Since human capital is embodied knowledge and skills, and economic development depends on advances in technical and scientific knowledge, development presumably depends on the accumulation of human capital'.

Gary Becker in *Human Capital* (1993)

'The elimination of ignorance, of illiteracy ... and of needless inequalities in opportunities [is] to be seen as objectives that are valued for their own sake. They expand our freedom to lead the lives we have reason to value, and these elementary capabilities are important on their own, ..

Amartya Sen et al in *India: Economic Development and Social Opportunity* (1995)

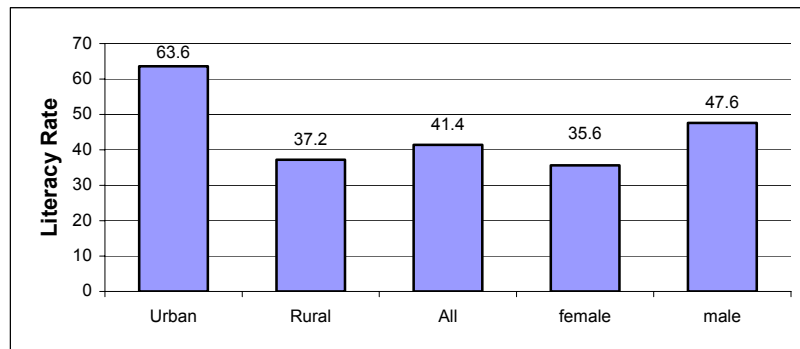
Source: HDC, 1998.

Right to education has been recognised in various ways over time. Primary education lays the foundation of education, and also receives special attention by all governments in the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1968 spread a

global vision for peace and prosperity that included the right to education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1989 – the most widely ratified human rights treaty in history- enshrines the right to primary education for all children that will give them the skills they need to continue learning throughout life. However, nearly a billion of people entered the twenty first century unable to read a book or sign their names— much less can operate a computer or fill-in a simple application form. They will live as now in more desperate poverty and poorer health than most of those who can. They are the world’s functional illiterates and their numbers are growing.

With the chief motto ‘Literacy is freedom’, the UN has declared the current decade as the United Nations Literacy Decade (2003-2012). More than 800 million people of the world and almost sixty percent of the people of Bangladesh do not know what this ‘freedom’ is. The current national literacy rate of Bangladesh is 41.6 percent (Figure 1.1). At the same time, over 130 million school - age children in the developing world are growing up without access to basic education, while millions of others are becoming languished in sub-standard environment where little learning takes place. Girls crowd these ranks disproportionately, representing nearly two of every three children in the developing world, who do not receive primary education (UNICEF: 1999:7).

Figure 1.1 National Literacy Rate of Bangladesh



Source: Education Watch, 2002

State of Primary Education in Bangladesh

‘Education for All’ still remains a slogan not a reality a large number of people are out of the educational institution to date. In a global context, there were more than 113 million children out of school, of whom 60 percent were girls (UNESCO: 2000). Major portion of the world illiterate live in the developing countries among which almost 400 millions in the South Asian region (Haq and Haq 1998). The UNICEF (1999) report entitled *The State of the World’s Children* has shown that the figure of primary school

age children who did not attend school in the developing countries was 130 million (21 percent of the total school aged). Nearly two girls of every three children in the developing countries did not receive primary education that was approximately 73 million of the 130 million out of school children. In the developing countries, over 150 million children started school but failed to complete grade five (UNICEF, 1999). However, there is a great disparity in the net primary enrolment around the world. Whilst the net primary enrolment in the South Asia is 68 percent, it is 98 percent for the industrialised countries. With consideration of the achievement for completion of grade-five, when the figure of completion of grade-five in the industrialised countries is 99 percent, it is 59 percent for the South Asian countries. Bangladesh, being a member of the South Asian nations, it represents the similar picture on the state of primary education.

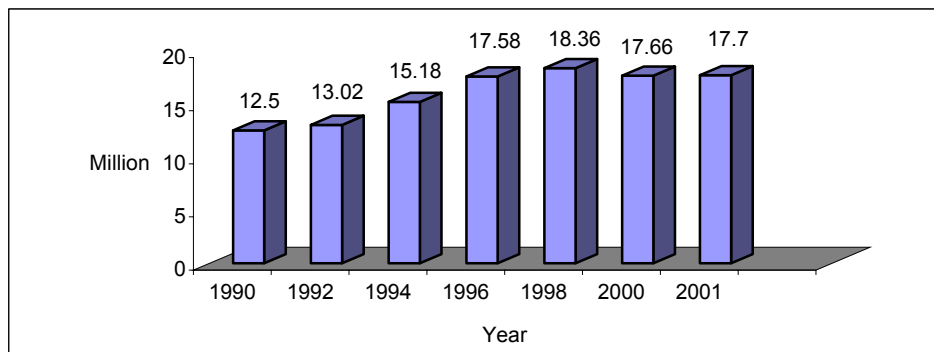
Bangladesh has a strong commitment to education for all and has one of the largest primary education programmes in the world. Past two decades are marked with rapid growth in regard to participation and completion in the field of education as a whole. But the story is not always just one of success. In fact, the very success of the government's endeavours to ensure universal primary education and education for all has created pressure at many levels that are themselves barriers to further improvement, especially on the quality aspect.

The 2001 school year data as indicated by the Education Watch 2002 show that 17.7 million students were enrolled in more than 78,000 primary level institutions. This level represented a 30.8 percent increase over the enrolment level in 1991. As of 2001, it seemed that total primary enrolment had become stable after the rapid growth of 1980s and 1990s, but preliminary data of 2002 cited in Education Watch 2002 suggests that the enrolment has declined by 1.5 percent as compared to 2001. The gross enrolment rate rose steadily to 97.5 percent in 2001 and slightly improved in the level for girls. Official data suggest that the net enrolment rate is about 81 percent, but possibly closer to 75 percent in the formal sector. While overall enrolment in the country has increased, the progress was rather minimal in the context of gender parity at primary level education (Figure 1.2). The overall student-teacher ratio is about 55:1, even taking into account the double shift operation system in 90 percent primary schools. The high rate of drop out, on an average 33 percent, results partly from the dire poverty experienced by many families and partly from the perception of many parents and children that schooling is of a little value (PEDPII, Final Plan, 2002:10).

Bangladesh is the world's most densely populated and also one of the poorest country, with almost half of its population below the poverty line. Out of a population of 137 million, 19.6 million are of primary school going age and almost 1.5 million girls are out of school. There is, however, an overall positive trend since Bangladesh has increased

funds for basic social services (Box 1). There are around 18 million primary school-age children out of school and another four million or more drop out before completing primary education (Education Watch 2001:2). On the other hand, the net enrolment rate has reached 79.8 percent¹, with the girls going to school as much as the boys. Over 70 percent of the students now complete the five-year primary circle and 60 percent attend school on an average day. Whilst the net enrolment rate for Khulna division is 90.9 percent, the figure is 75.7 percent and 77.9 percent for Sylhet and Dhaka division respectively (Education Watch 2001:16). Subsequently, the slogan 'Education for All' is not achieved fully rather a good number of children are out of school.

Figure 1.2 Enrolment at Primary Level of Education in Bangladesh



Source: Education Watch, 2002

Primary Educational Scenario in Bangladesh

- Adult literacy rate is 35.6 percent for female and 47.6 percent for male.
- The Government of Bangladesh spends 2.2 percent of GNP on education. This is the lowest percentage in the region: Both India and Nepal spend 3.2 percent of GNP on education and Pakistan spends 2.7 percent.
- On average there are 63 students per teacher. Taking into account the double shift operation system in 90 percent primary schools, the ratio is 55:1. The student-teacher ratio is highest in the region.
- Bangladesh has the lowest student-teacher contact time in the world, officially 2.5 hours per day. However actual contact time may be 2 hours or less per day.

¹ The statistical figure varies in different reports. Bangladesh Education Sector Review, 2000, Vol. I, mentioned that the net primary enrolment rate was 85 percent of the age group in regular school whilst proceedings of the PEDP Annual Review 2002, gave a different statistical picture of net primary enrolment rate which was 82 percent and the rate of completion of primary circle was 68 percent. Another survey conducted by PMED in 1999 said that the figure was 81.4 percent (cited in Proposal on Communication Strategy for Girl's Education Initiative, Asiatic Social, December 2001).

- Primary school enrolments are estimated to be about 80 percent, with some villages having enrolments as low as 20 percent.
- Most of the non-enrolled children belong to socio-economically disadvantaged households and illiterate parents.
- The primary school dropout rate is on average 33 percent.
- The average attendance rate is 61 percent.
- On average students take 6.6 years to complete the five-year primary school program
- Parents often end up paying more for their children to attend government schools than private or non-formal schools.

Understanding the Issue of Exclusion

The concept of social exclusion has multifarious meanings that imply different things to different people. The term exclusion was added in the development discourse in France during 1960s when the poor of the France was considered as the excluded and became widespread in 1980s to encompass vast social disadvantages due to the eruption of social and political crisis in France. Since then, the idea of exclusion is being rethought, redesigned and expanded in various ways. Nevertheless, the term social exclusion is so evocative, ambiguous, multidimensional and expansive that it can be viewed in different ways.

The efforts undertaken till date have shown that the term is connected with numerous economic, social, political and cultural connotations and dimensions. The clamorous debate about an unambiguous definition of exclusion is still going on, and as such a universally accepted definition of the term is yet elusive².

Though social exclusion was seen in connection with poverty or unemployment in Europe, it is just a concept that has an everyday meaning and underlying sense. It is the role of relational features in deprivation (Sen, 1997). There are three types of paradigms to analyse the concept of exclusion namely solidarity, specialisation and monopoly. The solidarity paradigm mainly sways in France and implies that exclusion is the rupture of a social bond (*lien social*) between the individual and society, which is cultural and moral rather than interested in orientation. Basically, cultural boundaries originate the poor, unemployed and ethnic minorities as excluded. The specialisation paradigm elaborated by the Anglo-American liberalism refers exclusion as the discrimination such as social differentiation, economic division of labour and the separation of spheres. The monopoly paradigm indicates that exclusion is a

² Commission of the European Communities (CEC) in *Towards a Europe of Solidarity: Intensifying the Fight Against Social Exclusion, Fostering Integration* (Brussels, 12 December 1993:10) said that it was difficult to come up with a simple definition of social exclusion. Weinberg, and Ruano-Borbalan in "Comprendret exclusion", in *Sciences Humaines*, Vol. No. 28, 1993 argued that observers in fact agreed on a single point that was the impossibility to define the status of 'the excluded' by a single and unique criterion.

consequence of the formation of group authority. Powerful group has distinctive cultural identities and institutions that can restrict the access of outsiders, and make the outsider as the excluded.

These paradigms are interested in the situation analysis to understand who is excluded from what. But exclusion not only explains just a situation but also focuses attention on a process, which gives a broad understanding about why and how exclusion takes place. However, it refers to the norms and process which prevent certain groups from equal and effective participation in the social, economic, cultural and political life of societies (Narayan, 1999 cited in Narayan, 2000:229). It is both a situation and a process, which replace similar outcome to the people. It is an assessment tool for describing and expressing an evolution of a situation and process from which someone is excluded.

In this context, the present study is an attempt to explore the issues of fair share and equal access to primary level institutions and to draw a strategic framework for addressing the issue of exclusion in primary education of Bangladesh.