

CHAPTER 4

FAIR SHARE AND EQUAL ACCESS TO PRIMARY EDUCATION: FRAMEWORK FOR ADDRESSING EXCLUSION

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One of the important findings of the EFA 2000 Assessment that preceded the World Conference on Education for All, held in Dakar in April 2000, was that the performance of primary education fell below the desired level. In Bangladesh achievements in primary education are being diminished due to inadequate and ineffective policies and programmes, and situations of extreme poverty. Added to these problems, the education system itself has faced persistent challenges: classes continue to be too large, constant lack of educational materials; teachers are not appropriately trained, poor motivation and commitment amongst the teachers. The primary level teachers in particular belong to a low status. Teaching methods are unimaginative and outmoded, relying heavily on rote learning; curriculum is felt often to be irrelevant to the children's needs and circumstances by themselves, the non-formal education is often unrecognised and poorly integrated, and the limited resources available for basic education are poorly managed. Schools are poorly supervised and many children are still relegated to environments that discourage lifelong learning. The problems hit hardest the most vulnerable groups and those in poor and remote areas. All these factors together have resulted in primary education performance falling below the expectations.

Recognising the fact that an inescapable reality of socio-economic and political instability cannot be removed overnight, education system needs to be consciously plan need for its own improvements. Essentially, it needs to place emphasis on creating opportunities for all children to achieve in their learning environment, whatever the situation is at stake. Education must strive to attain the best results if it is to become the true engine for social transformation, enabling each individual to realise his or her full potential and live with dignity.

Education takes different forms in different places. There is no single 'unique' system in the world. One errs in talking about the contribution of education to the national development without specifying what kind of education, for whom, at what stage of development and where. Some kinds of education for certain kinds of people under one set of circumstances may be very helpful, and the same kind for different people under other circumstances may be equally harmful. Western models of imparting education and training do not work equally well unless planned in a context specific manner. Education is multiform, not uniform in phenomenon. Accordingly, the persistent problem of education system in Bangladesh in general and primary education in particular must be viewed not as an isolated issue of concern but putting everything in a broader perspective. The idea essentially relates to a comprehensive evaluation of present educational policies, plans, strategies, and programmes. In this context, the issue of 'exclusion' in primary education should be viewed as a complex issue with multidimensional causes and faces which require addressing the issue from the broader context of national education policy.

Towards a Framework for Addressing Exclusion

From an Elitist Model to a Right Based Approach

Historically, south Asian region inherited the British system of education characterised by its elitist nature. The system was elitist one as it served a very small segment of the society, privileged by virtue of their cast and class. These elite may be defined by birth or by demonstrated talent or by some combination of both. Along with other south Asian countries, the education system in Bangladesh systematically excluded many significant groups of people notably girl children and rural people in general. The history of education disparities has also been used to consolidate social inequalities based on class and gender. The privileged social groups have much better educational opportunities, and this further consolidates their privileges. As literacy and education become more important tools of self-reliance, the link between educational disparities and social inequality is gaining strength day after day and the powerlessness associated with being illiterate in modern society comes through loud and clear.

The non-uniform standards of resource availability, allocation and utilisation, facilities, teachers' commitment and capacity, and community support perpetuate dysfunctional disparity. These are structural in nature and are a product of social relations, rooted in a whole array of institutions, interests, power structures, conflicts, alliances, cultures, etc. that characterise these relations.

Despite a constitutional directive of unified people-centred secular educational system, there are diverse streams of English medium, vernacular secular education and religion

centred madrasa education in Bangladesh, reflecting and perpetuating income, hereditary, spatial and gender based disparities, all products of unequal social order. The system has been in full force in maintaining many societies within a nation built around unequal access to human and knowledge capital like education through systematic disparities. Such a system ensures that those privileged to receive an expensive private education will perpetuate themselves as a ruling class whilst those who depend on public education and who are deprived of it will always remain an underclass.

The allocation rules that underlie the observed pattern of revenue and development expenditures on education in Bangladesh appear to be rather ad-hoc and there is little evidence of planning either in the revenue or development budget for education. Revenue expenditures appear to be set by precedent rather than rational planning and tend to follow the previous year's pattern as can be evinced from the allocation of shares of different sub-sectors in the education revenue budget. More than 90 percent of the revenue expenditure is spent in meeting teachers' salaries and benefits leaving very little for quality enhancing activities. Under the current system, Ministry of Finance in the end is the real policy makers, particularly in times of contraction. This has given birth to system devoid of political mandate, in which members of Parliament or people's representatives remain onlookers, and the people on whose behalf they are supposed to plan are disenfranchised due to continuations of arbitrary decisions by bureaucracy. To aggravate the situation more, the education department remains on top in terms of wastage and plundering of public money. This has become a way of life and a system of governance devoid of policy-based politics has been accepted with resigned fatalism.

In Bangladesh, the top-down system tends to divorce the people and policy makers without extended and real consultation. Strengthening educational planning and budgeting requires a structure of planning and budgeting which involve all relevant players in the process. There has hardly been any attempt of factoring in of 'voice' of the poor in the planning and implementation process save and except window dressing by the donors in its new invention of 'participatory planning'. The agenda of conditional lending by multilateral donors has seriously eroded the capacity of state to assume ownership of the national development agenda. It is argued that the donor driven policy formulation has undermined the possibilities of genuine public debate and consensus on the nation's priorities for an effective and efficient education system. This PEDP, the biggest education development program consisting of 23 discordant and fragmented projects has completed its first phase with much speculation of its less than spectacular success and the second phase has been initiated surreptitiously without the broad based consultation with the stakeholders. Furthermore, World Bank

is enforcing the entrenchment of an esoteric PRSP and insular National Plan of Action (NPA) by enticing the government with apparently easy financial assistance from fast track initiative in education.

While there is rhetoric about partnership and greater role of non-government actors, a statist approach and action dominate. Involvement of NGOs in the literacy programme (e.g. Total Literacy Movement) has been actively discouraged. On the other side of the coin, however, there is massive overlap and wastage of valuable resources as NGOs resort to confrontational rather than collaborative methods by vying with each other (sometimes government) to develop and implement alternative sets of curricula, teaching learning method and education infrastructure.

Critical to the sustainability of the country's development is the need to correct the structural injustices, which are accentuating social divisions. These divisions are being accentuated through differentiated opportunities. The symptoms of such social division are to be found in the growing disparities in access to education as well as in the life styles of citizens. A narrow elite is now educating its children in private institutions at home or sending them abroad. Private schools and universities, using English as their medium of instruction, are targeting their facilities to those who can afford to pay high fees. In recent years expensive private education has become a growth industry whereas the general populace remains dependent on public education whose quality of service deteriorates. Current education policy encourages the growth of more private institutions in rural areas which cater to the needs of the less affluent. This has led to a significant increase in enrolment and the emergence of gender parity in our primary schools. But the quality of education in rural schools, both private and public, is so poor that less than 2% had achieved competency in all the disciplines. Most of these facilities for public education remain insufficiently resourced and poorly governed.

The move to correct the growing injustices in Bangladesh society in general and education sector in particular will need to address the issue of democratising access to opportunities for the deprived segments of the population. If Bangladesh is to put in place the credible agenda for change to realise its unfulfilled promise, this agenda must be domestically owned, not only the indigenisation of the policy making process but also the involvement of the stakeholders in the design and benefits of public policy.

In the above context, the education system of Bangladesh demands a right-based approach that is much more open to all and provide equitable access and ensure equal achievements. Yet merely to identify this host of factors that contribute to a poor quality system is not enough, rather there has to be pointers to change the issue of

exclusion from the perspectives of fair share and equal access of primary education. Therefore primary education system in Bangladesh should be discussed on an ideal standpoint that essentially requires a conceptual framework for the process of human development that is normatively based on international human rights standards and operationally directed to promoting and protecting rights.

Addressing Exclusion through Rights based Approach

Guiding Principles

A rights-based approach is a new way of thinking. The question is no longer whether children's rights can or should be achieved, but *how* they are to be achieved. A rights-based approach puts the children at the centre, recognising them as rights-holders and social actors who should be actively involved - or even take the lead - in the work towards the progressive realization of their rights. This means that children's views must be respected and that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes that affect them. Programmes should be participatory in design and empowering in process.

Rights-based approach includes measures of protection organically incorporated in development plans, policies and projects from the very outset. Rights-based approach adds legal and moral obligations and accountability. Moreover in such approach, the right holders are encouraged and empowered to claim their rights. This sharply contrasts with that of need based approach, where it is seen as charity. Some identified differences are shown below.

Need Based Approach	Rights Based Approach
Children deserves help	Children are entitled to support as holder of rights
Governments "ought to", but there is no clear obligation	Government have binding legal and moral obligations
Children can participate in order to improve service delivery	Children are active participants by right
Given scarce resources, some children may have to be left out	All children have the same right to fulfil their potential
Each piece of work has its own goal but there is not necessarily a unifying overall purpose	There is an overarching vision to which all work contributes
Certain groups have technical expertise to meet children's needs	An adult can play a role in achieving children's rights
It may look only at outcome	Attention to both outcome and process is required
Focus on general coverage	Focus on disadvantaged who have not had their rights met

Source: UNICEF 2001

Human rights are universal and must be equally applied for all people – regardless of culture or traditions. While the well-being of all children is important, a rights-based approach also means that priority must be given to the most disadvantaged children. It encourages us to seek inclusive solutions which truly involve the disadvantaged and hard to reach. A rights-based approach is different from other development frameworks as it challenges the basic and underlying causes that prevent children and women from enjoying their rights. Desegregation of data by age, ethnic group, gender and geographic area is essential for identifying and target these discriminated groups.

All rights are interrelated, indivisible and have equal status. One group of rights is not more important than another and all rights - whether civil, political, economic, social or cultural - must be equally respected. A rights-based approach implies that programmes of cooperation should be holistic, and multi-sectoral covering a wide range of rights. However, strategic choices must be made and specific actions undertaken.

Applying a rights-based approach also implies that the "best interest of the child" should be given primary consideration. This means, for example, that basic services for children must be protected at all times particularly in times of fiscal restraint and that governments and public bodies should be encouraged to ascertain the impact on children of their activities and decisions. Essential for the realization of children's and women's rights through a rights-based approach is effective public and private partnerships. Those in authority and in leadership positions are responsible for action (and for the consequences of inaction), for combating impunity and for resource allocation in the best interest of the child. It also requires to find effective ways of influencing outcomes for children at the family and community level, to empower parents and care-givers with knowledge, skills, behaviours and awareness about their obligations.

Special arrangements and special attention to protect, promote and fulfil human rights of children are justified on the grounds of:

- children have *equal status with adults* as members of the human race - they are neither possessions of parents nor people-in-the making;
- children's survival, development and active participation are crucial to the progress *of any society*: and it makes good sense to invest in the growth and development of the child.
- children are initially *totally dependent* - they can grow towards independence only with the help of adults;
- childhood is the *most formative period in life*. The developmental state of children makes them particularly susceptible to the conditions under which

they may live - whether it be poor food, environmental pollution, violence or a supportive, loving and stimulating environment;

- adolescence is a *critical period* in a child's life - positive and negative behaviour-adopted during this period will have impact on the adult life;
- children play *no part in the formal political process* and it is difficult for them to use the legal system - therefore, special arrangements are required to ensure children's rights and their interests are to be properly represented in all decision-making process which affects them (UNICEF 2001).

The principle characteristics of rights based approach, thus, should aim at:

- Putting children in the centre, recognising them as right holders and social actors;
- Identifying and addressing the needs of children, especially those who are disadvantaged through inequity, either because of location, poverty, gender, ethnicity or disability, and therefore deprived of a quality primary education;
- Recognising government as primary actor, accountable both to its citizens, including children and other stakeholders;
- Recognising parents and families as primary care givers, protectors, guides—and supporting them in these roles;
- Giving priority to children and to creating a child friendly environment in teaching method and curricula;
- Being gender sensitive and seeking inclusive solutions that involves a focus on those boys and girls who are discriminated against;
- Determining and addressing the issue which limit or encumber teachers in meeting their professional responsibilities: capacity, motivation, training and supervision, accountability to the community and the students;
- Continuing the revision of the primary curriculum and system;
- Increasing investment in education in general and primary education in particular;
- Formulating policies on a clear understanding of what are good for the children;
- Providing additional and improved schools and teacher training facilities;
- Strengthening the formal education management monitoring and supervisory structure to better meet the needs of an evolving system of quality primary education (UNICEF 2001).

Dimensions for Sustainable System of Quality Education

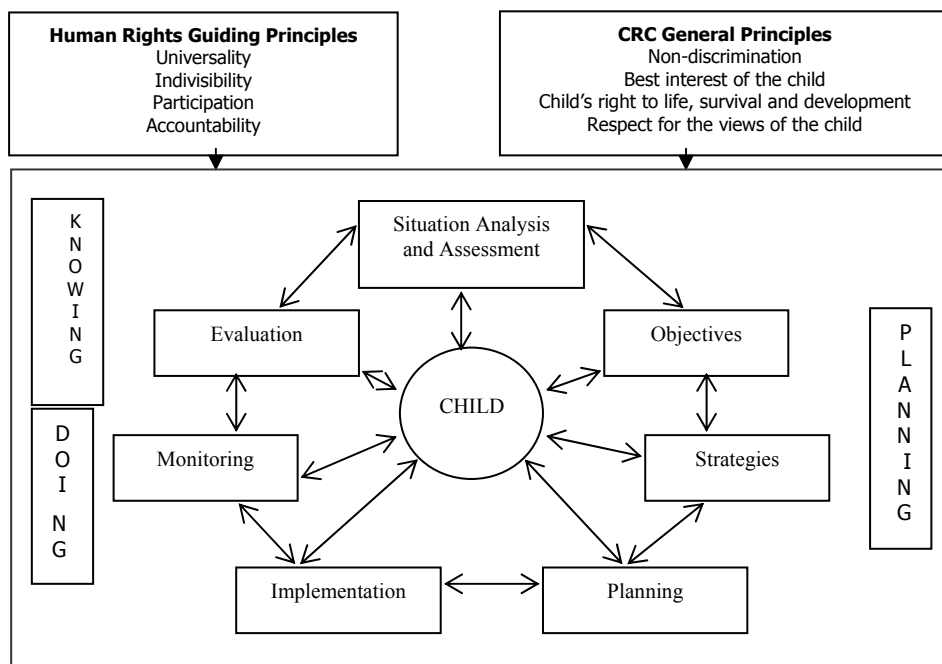
According to right-based approach, there are at least five key elements that affect quality education: what learners bring, environments, content, processes, and outcomes. Quality education begins with an adequate number of schools, books, pencils and trained teachers. It looks at the number of children who finish school. It moves beyond this to consider what goes on inside and outside of school, noting that good programmes, whether in education or any other sectors, is gender sensitive. UNICEF has developed a framework for defining quality in education. It answers questions within five dimensions that allow us to think about effective programming for education and provide a baseline for monitoring quality.

- *What students bring to learning?*
Does the child have a positive, gender-sensitive early childhood experience within the family, the community and pre-schooling institution? How different is the language of the home from the language of the school? Has the child been affected by emergencies, abuse, or daily labour? Has the child been sufficiently oriented to the rhythm of schooling? What experiences do girl learners bring to school and what particular challenges do they face?
- *Environments*
Are they healthy, safe, protective and gender-sensitive? What is required to create healthy, safe, protective and stimulating learning environments that enable girls to achieve?
- *Contents of education*
Are the curricula and materials relevant? Do children acquire basic skills, especially in literacy, numeracy, life-skills and knowledge in such areas as gender, health, nutrition, HIV/AIDS prevention, peace, or other national and local priorities? How does the content of curriculum and learning materials include or exclude girls?
- *Processes*
Do trained teachers use child-centred teaching approaches in well-managed classrooms and schools? Do teachers make skilful assessments that facilitate learning and reduce disparities? What processes of teaching and learning and support for learning achievement – from the communities, parents, supervisors, and teachers – enhance or undermine girls' learning achievement?
- *Outcomes*
Do they encompass knowledge, skills and attitudes, and are they linked to national goals for education and positive participation in society? What outcomes of basic education do we expect for girls? How can we document how well children's are learning, and what pathways are opened up for further learning and fulfilment of their potentials.

Along these lines, essentially, a rights-based approach integrates the norms, standards and principles of the international human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development. Right-based approach advocates encouraging girls to participate in education and that it should reach the poor, disadvantaged and handicapped. It contains clear statement that Bangladesh will provide primary education that would be relevant to learner and societal needs and that school would be inspected and held accountable for their performance. Rather than evaluating the performance solely based on enrolment indicator, as is common in traditional education research, a human rights focussed analysis reveals additional concerns of the poor themselves, including the phenomena of social exclusion.

Applying Rights Based Approach in Policies and Programme Interventions

The exclusion in primary education is caused and reinforced by a number of factors: economic, political, historical, institutional, social, cultural, internal and external. Education is a matter of a development agenda set in motion with people in the centre.



Source : Adapted from UNICEF (2001)

Thus, in order to achieve a sustainable system of quality primary education, a comprehensive and flexible development agenda is required which can be adjusted to varied spatial, gender and income groups of the country, devoid of mal-governance

and involving the participation of all streams of society in the design and benefit of such an agenda and disposed to provide a stable, equitable, and sustainable development process. There is, thus, a need for conceptualising and developing a holistic policy framework to strategically formulate policies, sequence intervention-instruments and implement projects and reforms to realise specific goals for inclusive quality education.

The overarching and crosscutting principles of human rights including universality, indivisibility, participation and accountability have to be applied to all policies and programmes. Human rights principles are reinforced and expanded by the general principles underlying the CRC particularly that of non-discrimination, best interests of the child, child's right to life, survival and development, and respect for the views of the child. All assessment and analysis, prioritisation, setting of goals and objectives, development of strategies and planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation have to be seen through the lenses of these principles. A right based approach should be guided by values, principles and standards of human rights.

Analysing Current State of Affairs

In view of the guiding principles set above, there is a need to make broad assessments of current state of affairs of primary education and problem analysis of children's situations through a participatory process involving all stakeholders including children. Children's situation assessment should include (a) all rights of children applying the four CRC Foundation Principles built on data that expose disparities; (b) legislation, policies, and government structures and mechanisms to implement children's rights; (c) social sector policies and programmes; (d) children's and women's capabilities to exercise their rights; (e) civil society and other social forces to promote children's rights; and (f) the overall social, cultural, political and economic context and its effect on children.

Analysis of main violations of rights should take into account of causality, social and gender, obligation and role and resource availability and control. These include (a) causality analysis: immediate, underlying and basic causes of the situations; (b) social and gender analysis: attitudes and practices in society impact on the realisation of rights; (c) obligation and role analysis: the hierarchy and pattern of duty-bearers e.g. government ministries, departments, and their actual potential for fulfilling their obligations; (d) resource analysis: availability and control of human, financial and organisational resources to address the situation. In the process leading to agreements on priority actions, there is an urgent need to involve all stakeholders, including children.

Prioritising and Setting Objectives

In order to set programme goals and objectives, respect, protection, promotion and fulfilment of children's rights both in outcome and in process need to be emphasized. Since children, women and their families are key actors, their participation are explicit objectives, Thus, there is a need to give priority to the children who are most exploited, deprived and discriminated against as well as other vulnerable groups of children whose rights are violated or ignored. When setting priorities, it is important to consider the concluding observations and recommendations by CRC and CEDAW Committees, other relevant UN HR bodies, action plans from UN World Conferences as well as other appropriate declarations, and make best use of available resources. Priorities have to be sensitive to what is feasible in the country context, thus, expressing goals and objectives in terms of progressive realisation of children's rights is required. This will give legitimacy and useful basis for social mobilisation and measurement. Another important objective should focus on strengthening government to fulfil their obligations and in building capacity of civil society to promote and protect the rights of children.

Programme Strategies

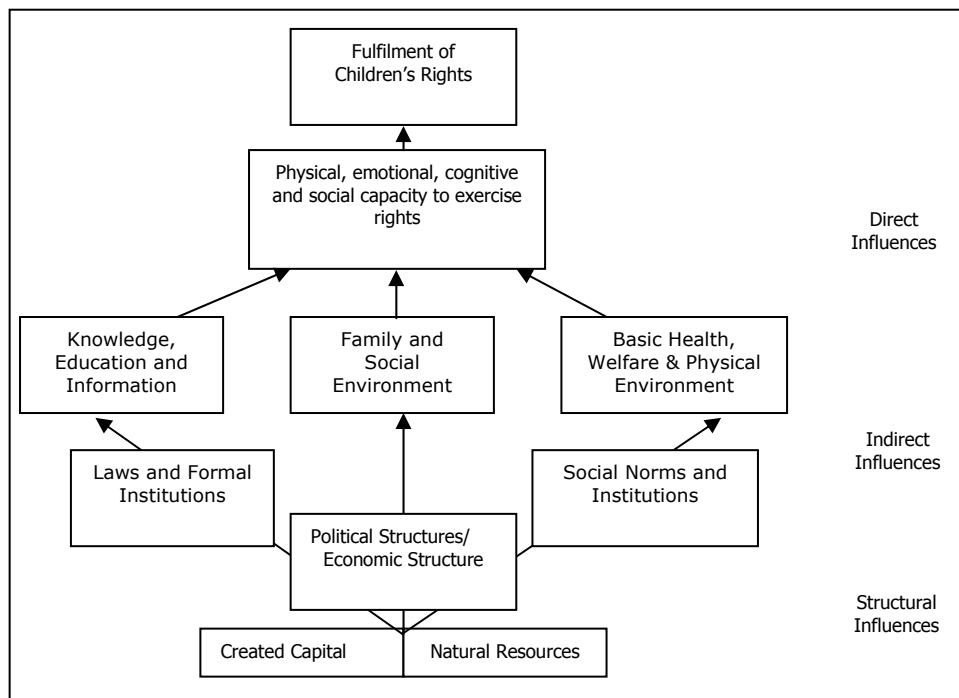
The overall programme strategies should focus on enhancing motivation and capacity among people and institutions for realisation of the rights of children, and thus, built on an optimal mix of implementation strategies and activities targeted at different levels of society - from family to central government. The optimal mix can be derived by:

- addressing the immediate, underlying or basic causes of identified gaps and problems;
- Finding the balance appropriate to circumstances that respond both to urgent survival and protection needs and to the needs for social and economic transformations of society;
- Looking for overriding long term programme strategies to address structural causes;
- Ensuring inter-linkages upwards and downwards between different programme levels in society; legal and sector policy at national level, district level of co- ordination and resource distribution, and local level of implementation;
- Enhancing inter-sectoral linkages, especially at national and district level, and convergence of interventions at community and family level;

- Considering legal frameworks and institutional capacities that may be strategic to protect and promote the rights of children and women. Building on social and cultural context to ensure effectiveness and sustainability;
- empowering the rights-holders (children, families and women) to claim their rights, and assisting the duty bearers (government bodies and service providers) to meet their obligations; and
- Building partnerships with public and private organisations as well as with civil society organisations being crucial for the realization of the rights of children.

Implementation Modalities

The implementation process should build in continuous reflection mechanisms with stakeholders. Realisation of plans requires constant assessment and analysis for adjustment of action. Learning from experiences should thus be the basis for improving programme performance. Systematic learning and knowledge building is required about how to have an impact on the realization of the rights of children.



Source : Adapted from UNICEF (2001)

In accordance with the rights based framework, the implementation strategies should also measure immediate delivery outputs, medium term outcomes and longer-term impact. The results should focus both in terms of quantity and quality as well as outcome and process. The measurement of progress should base on rights-sensitive indicators to measure the implementation of rights and also progress in terms of respect, protection, promotion and fulfilment of rights. The progress should measure the progressive realisation of rights over time and support systematic government monitoring of children's rights, especially at district and local level.

Rigorous monitoring is central to a rights-based approach. It includes measuring progress against a set plan for a programme intervention, changes in policies strategies and institutional capacity to respect, protect and fulfil children's and women's rights, as well as changes in the situation of children in the broader context. Thus, there is a need to ensure monitoring of performance and accountability of the chain of identified duty bearers in relation to plans. Duty bearers are accountable both to their institutions and to the target group of rights-holders. The monitoring must also be informed by views of children, families and communities.

Pointers for Addressing Exclusion

The government's intervention supported many improvements but the overall picture is one of lost opportunity. The government of Bangladesh intends to provide all primary school-age children with access to quality primary education and to provide a conducive environment for them to attend and complete the full five-year cycle. All of the qualitative and quantitative gains that might have been expected have not materialised. For example PEDP-I envisaged 19.2 million children enrolled in primary schools in 2001 while the actual enrolment was 17.7 million. More children are completing primary education but their quality of learning is much below to be desired. The government should direct its attention to the following areas as far as the primary education is concerned.

Ensuring Equitable Access and Opportunity

The provision of universal primary education has been recognised by the Bangladesh constitution as a state responsibility and compulsory primary education enacted into law. It is, therefore, extremely important to find ways and means of not only bringing all school age children to primary school, but keeping them there and offering a level of education relevant to the needs of the country. The net enrolment at primary level in Bangladesh was nearly 80% in 2000 and about three quarters have completed the full five year cycle. Of the 18 million primary school age children, nearly four million

are out of school. The system is still largely inequitable with children of disadvantaged groups. The first task of education policy must, therefore, be to make it fully inclusive.

The following strategy should be adopted in order to ensure equitable access and opportunity:

School Facilities for All

The strategy to ensure equitable access and opportunity for all children calls for programmes not only for economically disadvantaged children but also for children who are geographically, physically, ethnically and intellectually disadvantaged. These include:

- Establish new Primary schools within the two Km radius in order to provide for easy access for remote rural areas student, particularly for girls;
- Free text and stipend programmes will attract many poor children to school and draw the attention of rural families towards education. But too many families are not yet aware of these support programme or benefits of education. Therefore information on educational incentives have to be disseminated widely in order to enable the excluded groups to avail themselves of the opportunities;
- The teaching language will have to be in their own language especially among the remoter areas' tribal inhabitants- that make easy their initial difficulties for entering school.

Teachers' Facilities for All Children

It is noticed that teachers often live in urban areas and travel to rural school, but do not want to go to the remoter areas, leading to much absenteeism. It is suggested that locally hired female teachers will be preferred by the community. There are many complaints about teaching quality, lack of professional discipline, sub-contracting and private tuition, and unfilled position. Male teachers dominate- around 80% of the total staff. Therefore it is essential to add new teachers, so that the teacher student ratio remains at least 1:50. This reality would however, demand a much higher status of the primary school teachers. While there is a need to meet professional standard by providing plenty of opportunities for continuous professional development, the teachers must also receive a living wage. In turn teachers must be accountable for their performance, which should be subjected to professional and public assessment.

Materials/Resource for All Children

It is evident that insufficient importance has been given to supplementary teaching and learning materials in primary schools. It is suggested that all government primary

schools, registered primary school and satellite school should have a basic package of teaching aid and supplementary reading and learning materials. All teachers should be provided text, relevant curriculum documents, teacher guides /aids and equipment necessary for each class and subjects taught. Moreover, it is important to ensure that students continue to receive free textbooks available from the very first day of school year.

Effectuating Quality Education

At present there is no mechanism at hand, at the official level, for assessing the learning achievement at the primary level. A nation- wide survey conducted by Education Watch showed that in 2000 only 36.5% in Bangla, 19.2% in English, 17.3% in general science, 11.6% in mathematics, 9.4 in English and only 1.6% achieved all 27 competencies. The achievement in all competencies was highest in non-formal schools (6%) followed by government (1%) and private (0.9%) schools. In terms of gender, 1.8% of girls and 1.5% of boys achieved all 27 competencies. An analysis by area of residence shows that 1.2 % of rural and 3.2% of urban students attained all the competencies. It is non-formal schools where more rural students achieved all the competencies than the urban students. Whereas, none of the students of rural private schools mastered all the competencies. Urban students of government and private schools did much better than their rural counterparts. In view of such low achievements in competencies, enhancement of the quality education of both public and private schools particularly for the most deprived segment of population remains a major priority in public policy that may include:

Upgrading Curriculum and Learning Materials

Although a competency based and life skill oriented curriculum has been developed in the 1996, the primary education curriculum is developed centrally. It is said that it ranges from full development at the central level to a core curriculum that is modified at other levels of the administration. At the primary level, most curricula cover similar areas, principally because the fundamental concepts on which further learning is built are generally the same. However, it has become increasingly evident that the curriculum must respond to the needs of the learners, and so has to be adapted accordingly to a standard level. This indicates that primary education curriculum needs a reform and accordingly be revised to include:

- Meaningful aims and contents for education that matches the real learning needs of children in various situations and locations. These should be integrated into the life of communities with respect for local traditions and cognitive styles, and essentially include the non-academic dimension of

education (values, attitudes, security in school, counselling), thus ensuring an environment in which children can realise their full potentials;

- Designing and implementing systematic, continuous, and outcome-oriented monitoring of performance through assessment and feedback on learning;
- Competency-based assessment carried out by both teachers and learners.

Enabling-Learning Environment

An appropriate level of inputs, in other words, personnel, materials and facilities, must accompany the learning process. Hardly any resources remain to provide learning materials once teachers' salaries have been paid. Although the problem has been acknowledged, little has been done to address it and so children's performance has continuously been hampered because of the very paucity of the learning environment. This situation has its greatest negative effects on children who are above or below the average of the class or who need special attention. The solution to this problem depends to a great extent on teachers, head teachers and their working relationships with their communities. At the level of the overall system, supporting child-friendly schools will encourage the use of the environment as a source of teaching and learning aids. Technological advances also open up new avenues for improving the learning environment. Another quality indicator is the excellence of teachers, and it is considered critical that no untrained teacher should be allowed to teach children in primary schools.

Accelerating Girls' Education

While high-quality basic education is important for everyone, supporting girls' education is the single highest-yielding investment that the country can make. Studies show that girls who are educated have higher self-esteem and participate more in society. They marry later, have fewer children, and are better able to care for their families. Girls' education is also a pointer to their raising level of status in not only within their families but also in other societal activities. To promote and familiarise girl's education, a number of areas of intervention would include:

- Improving physical facilities including separate toilet for girl students in the schools;
- Ensure free and timely supply of textbooks to increase enrolment in primary schools;
- Eliminate gender discriminatory concepts from the textbooks;
- Sixty percent of new posts have to be reserved for female teachers,
- Training on gender issues and training of female teachers to gender equity; and
- Social mobilisation programmes in gender issues in order to create gender sensitivity for girls education among the parents and communities.

Continuous Exercise of School Mapping

In order to get reliable and dependable data on various activities on primary education, a management information database should be established at Upazillas, district and divisional level. Both human skills such as training to map information on primary schools and also physical facilities such as computers, printers and other software have to be installed for continuous exercise of school mapping.

Strengthening Training, Supervision, Management and Monitoring

Teachers are at the heart of any strategy to improve the performance of primary education. Their commitment, competence, and creativity continue to be central to the success of children and, thus, their conditions of service, their preparation and continuing support are fundamental to the achievement of EFA goals. This brings to the fore the issue of teachers' training. Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) offer a one-year course for teachers of primary schools, but this is not based on the new curriculum of primary education, textbook and learning materials. Therefore the curriculum of PTIs should be revised in keeping with new curriculum of primary education. PTIs run two shifts to accommodate a huge load of untrained teachers of registered non-government primary schools. It is pointed that additional PTIs both in Government and private sector should be established for imparting quality training to primary school teachers of all primary schools.

Upazilla education officers (UEOs) and assistant Upazilla education officers (AUEOs) perform routine inspection of primary schools. In addition to this, officers of the ministry, directorate, divisional and district offices also carry out sample inspection of schools that do not in many instances bring any meaningful output. The current piecemeal approach in monitoring and supervision calls for a systematic exercise of monitoring and supervision process involving teachers, students, parents and the community. Every school may submit quarterly performance report jointly prepared by the head teacher and chairperson of the school management committee about systematic inspection, monitoring and supervision of performance of schools.

Encouragement of Social Mobilisation and Community Involvement

In order to create awareness among the people regarding primary education and removal of illiteracy, mass communication and publicity media, like radio television, are being used. In addition, programs have been taken up for awareness creation through poster, billboards, TV spots, short films, dramas and musical session. Celebratory events such as the primary education week and international literacy day are also observed every year when numerous awareness activities receive special emphasis.

In order to increase awareness the whole nation has to be aroused. Why a poor farmer will keep his children in school instead of engaging him elsewhere to supplement family income, or why the community should support the schools in the community - these are the vital issues that depend on the awareness or involvement of all concerned. Social mobilisation therefore is essential to fulfil the dream of EFA program in Bangladesh.

Mother's rallies and courtyard meetings and student bridges may be organised for social mobilisation purposes. The community involvement may improve the performance and accountability of teachers. It will also help increase enrolment of school age children and their regular attendance in school. There is a tradition that community donates land for establishing educational institutions. Unless community's involvement are encouraged, and teachers, students and parents spontaneously participate in bringing about the positive change in primary education, the dream of quality primary education for all will only remain in the fold of the potential and possible rather than being real.

Exploring the Gap: Free Primary Education in Real Sense

Government primary school is nominally free. In practice, however, students are charged for examination fees, admission, sports and cultural events, transfer to other school, pencil and writing books. Proper school dress also demands an extra cost. At the primary level, the annual cost per student is estimated at TK. 736. There are wide variations across schools and across different types of schools. When asked whether the students needed to pay any money to receive the textbook, nearly 50% reported affirmative. All these fees and cost amount hundred taka per year which is too much for a poor or marginal poor family. The cost of education adds up and pushes the underprivileged students eventually out of the system.

The state must do more than making primary education free of charge in order to insure primary education free for all, particularly to make it a reality for those whose parents cannot afford the cost of primary education. Therefore priorities need to be given to the extreme poor, making provision for attractive incentives, working opportunities, reducing education expenditure and making primary education free in real sense, not in word only.

Prioritising Government Policies for the Greater Interest of Children

Many educational activists in Bangladesh have raised questions on the Government education policies, and the role of foreign funding for primary education. Following are some of those concerns:

- The concept of Compulsory Education is being questioned, as the Govt. has not yet achieved the minimum essential norms for primary education.
- Introducing primary education programmes free and compulsory on a large scale is partly realised and making education consistent with the basic principle of the constitution is not addressed adequately. Poor quality is offered to the marginalised groups (lack of quality teachers, support materials and so on) and thereby inequality or discrimination among different social classes is institutionalised.
- The provision of non-inclusion of age group up to 6 years in the primary education system is a gross violation of fundamental right of those excluded. It is argued that by excluding up to 6 years age group the Government intends to shun away the responsibility of early childhood care and education.
- In order to remove illiteracy adult literacy program is regarded as an important component of the whole package. Unfortunately, the issue of adult literacy that has implications on the choice of sending their children to schools was partly addressed and partly realised.
- Standard textbook and curricula quality are poor.
- The provision of non-formal education should be integrated with the formal system rather than recognising it as an isolated program. As a 'cheaper package', non-formal education program has high potential for reaching out those groups (such as 'drop outs' 'children at work', 'disabled' and like) who are excluded for various reasons. However, this has been termed in many instances as second rated education.
- The issue of restructuring educational hierarchy is not addressed in the policy.
- Opinions and concerns from different corners regarding present educational system in Bangladesh are highly important as those are premised on an appropriate right-based approach. But these do not essentially suggest any workable solutions to take care of the immediate problems. We should opt for policies that could bring the out-of-school children back to the school as a first step towards achieving the goal of EFA. Therefore we should really insist on 100% enrolment and retention of children in formal schools.

An effective policy to ameliorate the present situation must be based on the understanding of the nature of the child and of his needs. Primary focus should be given on the least privileged children including illiterate and dropouts, and disabled. Policy and planning for basic education should be developed through proper consultation of all parties concerned. Approaches must build on people's own culture, needs, priorities and strengths. Organisational hierarchy should be reformed and restructured immediately.

Giving Importance to Financing in Primary Education

Bangladesh has one of the largest education systems in the world. Total spending on education is skewed toward the relatively better off. A number of questions arise: (a) what are the benchmarks against which to judge the performance in reaching the poor in education? and (b) what are the priorities of allocation of public resources across activities in public education sub-sectors? At present, allocation to different sub-sectors in the revenue budget is based on historic trends that are not linked to education quality and performance. The system is highly centralised and the opportunity of leakage is very high. Government expenditure on education is only 2.2% of GDP.

In the context of the allocation of funds to education, despite claims of highest allocation, it is well below the desired level. At the same time, if meaningful quality primary education is to be provided over full five years for all pupils, it is necessary to urge the Government to take steps in the following areas:

- The government should continue to give the greatest share of the total education budget to primary education.
- Targeted total outlay in education must reach at 10% of GDP.
- Priorities in expenditures need to be laid on increasing the quality of the schools.
- Financing should be directed at improving teachers' quality and school development.
- Allocation should be increased for training, development, production, distribution of support materials, monitoring, supervision and research.

Tackling Management Inefficiency: Need for Decentralisation

There is a serious need for decentralisation within the education sector. Primary education in Bangladesh with nearly 18 million of student, one of the largest system of the world, is highly centralised in its operation. In spite of success in increasing enrolment in primary education, there are many obstacles to providing high quality primary education in a system with 78000 primary level institutions and more than 2000 supervisors. School system need to be much more responsive to local realities, changing time and children's expectation. Decentralisation will create an environment for efficiency allowing people to work together.

There is a desperate need for national debate on how to free the educational sectors from politics. The government has recognised the need for transferring more power and authority to the local level in an effort to make school more responsible to local conditions. But the politicisation of education sector is the cause of many problems.

For improving the management of educational institutions at all levels, there is a need for enhancement of quality and management capability of the head of the institutions. Organisational structure of primary education system has to be revised in order to:

- Specify academic and professional qualification and experience for each post of primary education system and to provide long term career structure for primary school teachers;
- Provide incentive based salary structure for primary education teachers;
- Specify reward and disciplinary action relating to each post; and
- Establish a quality improvement cell, within the primary education wing, containing educational expert staff, together with national and international technical assistance.

Strengthening Government-Citizenery Links

The government can improve the effectiveness of primary education by increasing its collaboration with such voluntary organisations that extend education facilities to underprivileged children and strive for innovations in improving the quality of primary education. The government might support the efforts of community initiatives to bring out-of-school children into schools through timely supply of teachers, classroom space, and other resources. Targeted action is needed to reach different types of out-of-school children—those who work, those who live in slums, those on the street, those who are members of tribes or of migrant families, and those who live in places without schools. Improving the quality of education requires working closely with key agents of change, such as teachers, school heads, school management committees, and community members. The government in association with the relevant stakeholders may collaborate in developing appropriate and flexible learning assessment tools, in line with innovative teaching and learning methods.

The government in its continuous dialogue with the people must reach a common vision on how to achieve universal primary education. There should be credible partnership with the people in shaping policies for primary education. This also entails collaboration rather than parallel initiatives by NGOs. To stay at the cutting edge in education, the government through people centred approach should continually evaluate and refine their models.

Education must respond to the different learning needs of the children and promote a balanced and holistic development of personalities. The well being of children should always be at the core of any educational effort. The challenge is to provide the future generation with the awareness, abilities and mental strength they need to take responsibility for their own lives, and to make their contribution to society. This is a

real challenge for development. Within this framework, in order to promote quality universal primary education as a human right, the proposal is to involve all stakeholders to review the current challenges and to define the strategies. The said approach also views the quality primary education goals as not an end itself rather as a process towards a sustainable system of primary education. The process has to evolve from a very participatory approach whereby all stakeholders can raise their voices and record their concerns and accordingly policies are designed and programmes implemented.

Roles of the State and Citizenry towards Sustainable System of Education

Role of the State

In view of the bleak picture of the schooling system in Bangladesh and associated endless problems such as dilapidated infrastructure, demotivated teachers, paralysing curriculum, irresponsible management- it might be tempting to conclude that government schools are terminally ill, and thus required to look for alternatives. This will indeed lead us to misleading conclusion, if we do not view such problems from the historical and comparative perspectives. It is indeed true that even for all its flaws it is the government schooling system that has brought elementary education within the reach of the masses. For the first time, schooling is no longer the privilege of a small minority, and the goal of universal elementary education is not a distant dream. The report sees the current education system is a '*vicious circle of injustice*', whereby different flaws of the schooling system feed on each other. School facilities are minimal – classrooms are overcrowded, school buildings are falling apart, teaching aids are a rare sight. Teachers feel trapped in a hopeless work environment, lack respect for the local community, and yearn for better prospects. Inspectors don't want to know. Parents, themselves illiterate in many cases, are powerless. Hence, nothing improves. Lacking faith in the system, parents are half-hearted in their efforts to send their children to school. This further demotivates the teachers. Everyone's hopelessness feeds on everyone else's. The children are the victims.

At the other end of the spectrum, however, are villages where the spread of education has become a self-sustained process. The vicious circle of injustice reflects the complementary role of different actors (parents, teachers, pupils, inspectors, the government, and so on). When some fail their duty, others tend to disown responsibility and to do the same. But the same complementarities can also take a positive rather than a negative form. This can be observed, to various extents, in the more developed villages with better schooling facilities. There, parents often have a modicum of education, and they have high expectations of the schooling system. Also being better off, they are not as powerless as the parents in more deprived villages:

they are able to establish a rapport with the teachers, even to put some pressure on them, if needed, through local leaders or the school administration. This helps to keep the teachers on their toes. The teachers, for their part, find their work facilitated by the keen interest of the parents, and face a less demotivating environment than in more deprived villages. Their work, in turn, helps to sustain the hopes and expectations of the parents.

The schooling transition indicates the possibility of achieving a real breakthrough in the field of elementary education. But realising this possibility depends crucially on public initiative. These initiatives should take the form of (a) raising the amount of public resources devoted to basic education; (b) continuing to improve access and equity; (c) establishing better partnerships with relevant stakeholders (parents, communities non-government institutions, etc.) to improve quality of education services; (d) providing adequate teacher training and other needed pedagogical inputs, as well as (e) undertaking better assessments of learning and outcomes.

Further to these, there is a need to improve management and accountability, reduce corruption and waste, and de-politicise the education system. While community involvement in education has increased somewhat in recent years no significant power has yet been devolved to communities or local governments at the primary and secondary level. There is a need to move toward greater decentralised decision making to (a) match expenditures to local needs; and (b) improve local level accountability through establishing more transparent processes and guidelines, better measures of performance and better alignment of institutional and individual incentives with performance indicators. Improving quality across the country is a difficult task, but should involve five cost-effective elements: (1) better measurement of learning outcome, (2) better accountability and supervision through local control, (3) more intensive training of school directors, (4) better textbooks, and (4) continuous in-service teacher training. Several home-grown non-government organisation models have been highly effective using these five key inputs. Elements of a strategy for quality improvement already have been incorporated in the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP). Top priority should be accorded to its implementation, but it will take additional investments to overcome the problems fully.

Strategies for closing the gap in coverage need not entail major new expenditures, but should focus on reducing the direct and opportunity costs of school attendance. Early childhood programmes hold special promise for enrolling the economically hard-to-reach. However, early childhood education is expensive and should be targeted to low-income families. Review of results elsewhere and experimentation should precede expansion of early childhood programmes. Improvements in primary school quality are also an effective strategy to attract and retain more students in the system.

Non-formal education has made a start in addressing the educational needs of adults bypassed by the formal system. Four investment projects currently under implementation target 34 million learners. More than three hundred non-government institutions currently deliver non-formal programmes on behalf of the government with public financing. However, the rapid expansion of non-formal programmes has stretched the capacity of both the government and private providers and the current lack of evaluation results makes it difficult to ascertain the learning outcomes of each programme. Actions to ensure broader coverage and quality of nonformal education in the future include: development of better information and evaluation systems; staff training programmes of the DNFE partner institutions; and the development of post-literacy, continuing education and equivalency programmes. The success of primary and non-formal education programmes will cause the focus to shift to new areas in the medium to long term, such as skills for income generation. Efforts should, therefore, be made to develop a long-term vision and strategy to chart the future course for non-formal education.

Role of Citizenry

Even though the civic activism in Bangladesh has increased in recent years, however, it is far from clear whether the sense of outrage has reached a point where issue-focussed activists are willing to expose themselves to a more intensive involvement in advocacy by joining a political party and challenging the authority of its power brokers. Indeed, it remains a critical issue whether civic activism can contribute to empowering the deprived to challenge the social dominance of the elite. Under the circumstances feasible politics suggests a strategy of incremental mobilisation. Improving the access to quality primary education is such an issue of urgent public concern. Such civic mobilisation will need to be reinforced by a capacity of citizens to taking over the management of schools. Such local initiatives can also be escalated to wider mobilisations at the union, district and national level. This has to be supplemented by active policy advocacy to persuade political society and to institutionalise such interventions.

An accessible, relevant and efficiently driven system of education that advances a nation towards sustainable development should be the focus of advocacy of the civic activism. It necessitates attainment of a viable, self-reliant system that perpetuates and improves healthy outcomes. The sustainability criterion surely depends on key variables such as relevance, equity and efficiency and must dwell on the likelihood of continuance of the flow of benefits to the groups excluded by the system, and to the society at large. Pro-poor governance and participation play the pivotal role in ensuring access to opportunity of equitable standards.