

PREFACE

Our education system has operated with minor changes for over hundred years according to policies and framework laid down by colonial administration. Even the ideas of universal free primary education for all were advocated in early years of the twentieth century. Time has changed not because independence was attained but because of the felt need for accelerated human development as demonstrated by development indicators so as to be fit for constructing a knowledge society even in an embedded social divide based on differential access to social, economic, institutional and environmental resources so as to harness some dividends of development with a human face.

We ideally needed to inject a new vitality into the education and development system which is sensitive to the demands for change in a proactive society for creative change that synthesises value addition through education with value based education for an equitable system that widens and deepens capacities for creating choices and opportunities and make optimal use of them. It is not merely an issue of reducing exclusion and raising standards but also of extending creative customised choice and freedom to reduce conventional dropouts and to expand the meaning of education which is responsive to external changes globally as well as to internal needs of individuals which reflect the cultural context and aspirations not merely for catching up but also to take off in a trajectory of self-actualisation.

The issue is not merely harmonisation with an explosive knowledge horizon through curricular change without destruction of indigenous knowledge base and identity but also of provisioning space for individualised inculcation of capacity for discovery of self, environment and a whole new world of unknown at a pace that from internalisation of the newly discovered experience but which also creates an impulse to stand aside and look at the discovery for invoking innovation in the space in the mind of the learner so that such educational opportunity is creative and joyful.

So far all policy changes have created programmes for horizontal expansion of increasing access, and for changing curricula for catching up in knowledge space without an understanding that the system change has created concentration of power and responsibilities and disinherited the family and community from the partnership in the teaching learning experience which creates conditions for exclusion itself. This shift in the power relation is a reflection of reconstituted social and political order which has shown scant respect for individual rights and choices. In addition, the deepening social divide due to

market-oriented developmental policy has also shown little concern for equitable opportunity and social justice.

As a result, the accountability of institutions remained with the bureaucracy for the bureaucracy and thus became less transparent while the social accountability became negated because of increased dependence on public budgetary resources. The donor dominance in financing educational programme even denied space for civil society debate on policies and advocacy. The discourses that can be seen are more reactions to donor financed government sponsored programmes and less of a pro-action for creating a context for home-grown experience for social policy development.

We have experienced increase in the state control under development for the lower end of the social divide under development dispensation while the market forces has created options of a national institutions for the upper end of the social divide. There is by no means a clear vision about education at any level as a result contradictions between outward looking consumerist option and donor-state paddled centralised provisions of education have heightened tensions between nationally imposed curricula and externally dictated learning contents. The report presented hereafter deliberates on the state-controlled system of primary education with special reference to the issue of exclusion.

In the primary education today particularly those influenced by colonial policies and programmes can discern three distinct traditions i.e., elementary, preparatory and developmental. Our primary school curricula and educational practices show an amalgam of these traditions without any conscious cognition of children's world i.e., immediate context of family, habitat and peer culture and the forces that push the child into the wider world. This push is likely to be dysfunctional causing lack of interest, reduced fellowship, disenchantment, lack of performance and ultimate dropout. Our primary schools have rarely integrated in an effective fashion the knowledge base of the immediate context and a functional transition to the wider environment of learning. This possibly explains the differences in learning achievements in rural and urban schools, besides the explanation provided by differentials in academic and physical resources.

The primary schools in Bangladesh have failed to become social institutions in true sense of the term. The government primary schools remain an external institutions located in a place without any meaningful social interface. The private but government aided schools have increasingly lost their social character due to dependence on subvention and pressure of external control. The NGO schools have either accepted externally developed agenda or developed a monopoly stance over methodology and material. None of these have augmented social integration of primary schools and social function of these schools are at a discount as only instruction received primacy in these institutions, and socialisation, interaction and corporate welfare are generally neglected as a result social cohesion and control never emerged as a basis for social progress of the pupil and the populace. The emphasis on maintenance of norms and rules through mechanised supervision and control

generally fail to create development in individuals of the commitments and capacities, which are pre-requisites of current and future role performance of the pupil. The explanation of failure of demographic explosion in primary school to create a responsive and responsible social evolution not only lies in politicised control of schools by vested interest groups but also in the failure of society to put the primary schools at the centre of the cluster of institutions that promote positivist social change through internal innovation and development.

Bangladesh has suffered much from exclusion even though gross enrolment rate in primary schools has increased overtime and gender parity has been achieved due to incentives and social pressure at that level. The exclusion is largely a product of the social divide created by econo-political forces. But exclusion persists largely because of the failure to understand the phenomena and absence of action research to understand the phenomena in this respect. The excluded are generally perceived to be one without the financial and complementary resources to continue in the system providing educational opportunities. The experience and experimentation by Clodomir Santos des Morais provide a varied ways of combining work, enjoyment, income living and learning. The basic precept of Morais for creating future for the excluded is to act to eradicate barriers that makes them excluded and also to create impulses that would create conditions for their inclusion. The right to exclusion are not offered on a platter, it is earned through a process of initiated self-sustained and respectful co-activities that sharpens skills, cognition, application and widens horizon for expanded knowledge articulation. This autonomous capacity building process to be owned by the poor and the excluded are not acceptable to the organizations that talk of their rights but carry on a hidden clientelist idea. The organisations like BRAC and similar ones fall in that category and thus they stop at a modified version of Freire. In Bangladesh, we have statistical information on the excluded but we lack the capacity of proper research, systematisation and conceptualisation with respect to capacitation and organisational consciousness for educational and advancement of the poor and the excluded. The social engineering needed to establish the rights of the excluded is not even in infancy. Paulo Freire has remained committed to a method of community participation based on objective reality and to the use of dialogical principles while he questioned the utility of use of the extensionism in education for eradication of exclusion. Paulo Freire rejected idea of transmission, delivery, provision, messianism, mechanism and cultural invasion as inimical to self assuring capacity creation through education. On the other hand Clodomir Santos des Morais developed the theory and the concepts of organisational and entrepreneurial literacy for the excluded, primarily in the workplace in diverse social settings.

Bangladesh stopped with ordinary literacy ideas to expand the literacy net but failed even to attempt an expanded literacy effort for the marginalized and the excluded. Those who would like to advocate rights based approach to education for all would do well to move beyond traditional and basic literacy to educational approach to empower the socially excluded strata in economic and organisational terms as that holds out the prospect of becoming a factor in the struggle against poverty. The failure of NFE and TLM program may be traced to the

extensionism which Freire negated and to the absence of collective actualisation which Santos pleaded for.

Primary education in the urban centres, particularly those in the slum areas, face challenges as they are located in areas with high poverty, fewer resources and unfriendly environment including health hazards, violence, drugs and crime. GO-NGO education structure treat education for urban poor as another extension of their existing system. The risk of non-completion for those attending these schools are high and the perception of prospective value addition is low. GO-NGO urban schools for the poor are in a state of crisis which is also true for developed countries which has been aptly described as savage inequalities by Jonathon Kozol. This stark reality if put against the backdrop of well-endowed schools for the rich make bleak perceptions more bleak though some put it against the backdrop of absence of access educational opportunity and colour such enterprises as "dream-keepers". However, it is recognised that contemporary scenario of primary education in urban poverty centres are marked by tensions, contradictions and complexities.

The urban structure has been changing not only for demographic factors, settlement patterns, concentration of facilities and resources in the hands of the few, large presence of 'underclass' and existence of many destructing and disturbing elements. In the absence of zoning, the metropolitan centres offer choices about schools. But given the inequalities of income increasing cost of accessing "better schools" even at primary level, equity debate has sharpened while the market forces have created more inequalities in the choices for accessing primary education. The failure of public schools to respond to quality and quantity pressures in general, as well as limited response of private initiatives pre se, have created a qualitative divide which seem to be unbridgeable. With limited resources, non-investment for improvement of quality of many and curricular rigidity have led to a wasteful wastage which has lowered returns from education.

But experiences in developed countries do not indicate that placing responsibility of education and welfare on the individuals and families and defining role of civil society increasingly in market terms have responded to the issues of equitable choices and opportunities in a manner that is optimising in terms of outcome of resource use or in terms of improvement of quality of life collectively or individually. The resurgence or reconstitution of civil society in Bangladesh has had very imperceptible effect on education policy in general and performing watchdog functions with respect to primary education in urban and rural areas in particular. Thus, maintenance of strengthened centralised function of the state with respect to education in general and primary education in particular has made policy watch in the social sector a necessity so as to make an endeavour to minimise marginalisation and wastage in the system.

The report on the policy watch and exclusion is a factual description of researched findings and the suggested shifts in allocation of resources and policy stance for equitable access to address exclusion are exploratory in nature. The sociology of educational choice, realities of

educational opportunities and political economy of decision making at the government and donor levels lack a coherent, effective and culturally sensitive approach that is flexible enough to reverse the marginalisation and exclusion syndrome in a generally stagnant economic structure and not so democratic political institutional system where feudal attitudes still play a role and rational choice is mostly circumscribed. Thus, the methodology for policy watch need to contain grand narratives, be circumspect about value free positivism, and be aware of revolutionary critical rhetoric as well as constructivist solipsism that assume inherent superiority of the paradigmatic explanatory narratives. Experiences show that it is better to be clear about the objectives and pragmatic about policies that work. Bangladesh unfortunately is subject to imported ideas from donor or international NGOs that permeates through GO-NGO initiatives and thus the home-grown wisdom remain unnoticed in the discourses on education, educational processes, teaching-learning methods and related subjects.

The Innovators have collated some of the discourses in the context of exclusion in primary education. It is necessary to go beyond the narratives to activism for a result-oriented experimentation. Thus, a beginning is made with respect to stock taking of issues and approaches, and the unanswered question is what is next and who shall carry the logical steps forward.

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