



Education Financing in Bangladesh

The Undialogue

Institute of Informatics and Development (IID) and ActionAid Bangladesh jointly organised the Undialogue titled Education Financing in Bangladesh on 5 September 2012 at the Brac Centre Inn. The Undialogue was preceded by consultation with experts in the field and a policy brief (Undialogue Agenda) that analysed existing financing issues in the education sector. With the agenda set by the policy brief, discussion in the Undialogue attempted to identify options to address various financing priorities and issues in the education sector of Bangladesh. The occasion received wide participation by relevant stakeholders including education sector experts, professionals in the field, civil society representatives and others. This note highlights the suggestions came forward from the solution centric discussion.

Need for improving teacher's salary

There is an acute need for enhancing salary of teachers, particularly the primary school teachers. Even if compared against many informal employments, salary of a school teacher is lower. To make teachers really committed to teaching, which is essential to ensure quality education, teacher's salary needs to be improved, which is linked to education finance. Unless the teachers are not paid enough to live a decent life, quality of education will be compromised.

More emphasis needed on teachers training

The current practice in Bangladesh is to 'recruit, place and train' for teachers. But what should be done is 'recruit, train and place'. This is due to insufficient budgetary allocation for teachers training. Training for



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the teachers is not enough and is often urban centric. For example, the introduction of “creative education system (srijonshil shikkha poddhuti)” has not been accompanied with teachers training of the system. If the teachers are not trained with the new system, it is unlikely that they will be able to properly deliver on it.

Investment is also needed to improve the training itself. Training for the primary teachers in the Primary Teachers Training Institute (PTI) even now follows the old curriculum which has been abandoned for years. At the same time, PTI still has the same training curriculum that was there in the early 1990s. Therefore, more investment is required for modernisation of the training as well as the training institutes.

In view of the financing constraints, selected teachers could be trained who will then be able to train other teachers.

Need for comprehensive financial planning addressing crosscutting issues

Child health and women welfare, particularly that of the mothers, are closely linked to effective child education and hence need to be planned together. Blue print of a child's characteristics is developed in the early phases. A child brain is developed by 90% between 16 weeks of conception and age 3. Therefore, nutrition of the potential and early mothers as well as early childhood development should receive the highest priority and

needs to be linked to education planning. Budgetary allocation should address these crosscutting issues of early childhood development, poverty eradication, nutrition and women welfare in a coordinated manner.

This coordinated financial plan should also focus on social disparity and inequality between rural and urban areas. It is to be kept in mind that although the poor have good participation in the primary level of education, their presence is reduced significantly in the secondary level. Therefore, financing non-formal education would be the other linked priority.

Decentralisation and ensuring participation

Education sector and its planning need to be more participatory and decentralised. Voices from educational institutes all over Bangladesh need to be incorporated in both education development and its financial planning. Although in the current format schools prepare some development plans that sometimes reach the government, the process is too long and cumbersome. Often, by the time it gets to the notice of the policy makers, if they do at all, it is too late for implementation

Promoting balanced education through the budget

At present there is imbalanced focus in education. Science students are secularly declining. This can be linked to infrastructure budget and financing as rural

schools do not have laboratories and other facilities supporting science studies. The national budget should be geared towards addressing this issue through building capacities of schools, particularly focusing on the rural ones.

Enhancing classroom facilities

There is acute need for enhancing classroom facilities including aid equipment and books. Although free books are provided, quality of these text books is often questioned. For example, many dead words, which are not in usual use anymore, are used in the text books which are difficult for the students to absorb. Therefore, investment in text book development needs to be enhanced so that they are child friendly and age appropriate.

Prioritising education research

There is no budgetary allocation towards building capacity of researchers in the education sector which needs to be addressed. One highlighted area of recent time in the education sector is the technical training for post primary education. However, the country has no research and investment towards need assessment in this regard.

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Data unavailability is a big issue for education research in Bangladesh. Whatever information is available is also outdated. Budget should address information gathering needs to facilitate research.

Research also needs to be financed to explore relationships between education, poverty and culture. For example, in Sylhet rate of stunting is high and education rate is low. Paradoxically average income of the region is higher than most of the other regions of the country. Therefore, it can be assumed that complex social dynamics affect people's perception towards the need for education. Research support should be provided to explore these connections.

Mapping of education vulnerability needs to be done and budgetary allocations should support and follow such mapping.

Only 0.03 per cent of the education budget is spent on research. Due to lack of background research support, policies or policy suggestions are often not reality checked and national capacity falls short of the requirement for effective implementation. Indeed, rather than enhancing allocation in the education sector in an

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ad hoc basis, research should be funded to identify where exactly more investment is needed.

Addressing dropouts

Mother's education should receive focus in order to address dropouts, making them aware of the educational needs of children to develop their future.

At the same time, more needs to be invested in creating a school environment which will be attractive for the children through playgrounds and other facilities.

Resource mobilisation for education finance

In order to mobilise resources to meet financing need of the education sector, participation is important. At present the government and the private sector appear to be acting independently in context of budget, engagement and ownership. However, private sector is gradually moving into investments in the education sector. More and more private schools reflect the willingness towards greater participation. But, at the same time, education supportive industry is not there yet, which requires more private sector engagement. Some portion of the government education budget should be directed to stimulate this private industry.

However, while private investment is necessary, it also needs to be checked through a regulatory framework. Very recent case regarding medical college admission is perhaps a reflection of unchecked private businesses in the sector.

Avoid misuse and wastage of resources

Resource limitation is a reality in Bangladesh and hence emphasis needs to be given on avoiding wastages. All forms of leakages need to be addressed. For an example,

a portion of the public resources is spent on training by the school management committees. It is a usual phenomenon in Bangladesh that these committees change with the change in government. As a result, the

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money is misused and the training is wasted. Therefore, a political consensus is needed in sustaining these committees to avoid such unfortunate wastage of resources.

At the same time, while allocating resources, capacity to absorb is to be considered. Given the current infrastructure including teachers, classrooms and others, providing computers or multimedia class rooms to primary educational institutes may not be a priority at the moment.

Linking policy and financing

As it appears, policies and programmes are planned in an ad hoc basis in Bangladesh. Mismatch between budgetary allocations and financing requirement for the



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policies to be implemented is evident. An example of this is the PEDP-3 programme which is not coherent with the education policy, particularly in its budgetary aspects. Sixth Five Year Plan (SFYP) is also an example of uncoordinated finance and policy planning.

For example, the country has the plan to include grade 8 in primary education by 2018. But operational and

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- A long term vision for maneuvering the education sector needs to be simultaneously owned by all political parties for the sake of its continuation.
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financing planning is absent in this regard. There is also a growing demand for pre-school education but no planning regarding the modality of its introduction and assessment of the associated financing requirement. Financing planning needs to be prioritised while formulating sector plans.

Ensuring accountability and the need for legal reform

Enhancing transparency and accountability is a demand of the current time for the teachers in particular and for the sector in general. Unavailability of information is a bottleneck in this regard which needs to be financed.

At the same time, a regulatory commission is needed and formulating and activating Education Act should be at the top of the agenda. In the absence of this, at the moment one does not have the right to writ in the court regarding quality of education his/her children are provided with. Budgetary allocations should be made to formulate and activate the act at the earliest. This law or act should be an integrated one incorporating all existing ones starting with the right to primary education.

Need for a long term vision

A long term vision for the education sector needs to be formulated based on which programme and financial planning will be made. Current education sector planning is largely dependent on donor commitments. This long term vision needs to be simultaneously owned by all political parties for the sake of its continuation.

Resource allocation towards formulation of the long term strategic vision should follow a bottom up approach, starting from upazilla level and moving upward. It is to be noted that the current government is committed towards decentralisation of the social sector.



Coordinated budgeting and planning

At present ministries are preparing their budgets in an isolated fashion. But a coordinated and consolidated budget is missing, which is to be reflective of the programmes taken by different ministries but concerns the same sector. For example, a complete picture regarding which are the ministries spending on child development and how much is being spent is not available in a consolidated manner. Therefore, along with ministry budgets, consolidated sectoral allocations should be documented.

Coordination between government agencies also needs to be improved. For example, “Compulsory Primary Education Implementation Monitoring Unit” within Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and the DPE itself lack coordination in their activities.

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Improving implementation and its monitoring

Implementation needs to be evaluated against real achievements, not just from the money spent which is the current practice. At present performance yardsticks are mentioned in the planning documents. But these are not used in monitoring and evaluation of programme implementation.

Major weakness is present in supervision of education programmes and education quality. However, national budget does not reflect this need and no allocation is seen in recent years in improving supervisory role of the authorities. For example one education officer is responsible for overseeing too many schools which is beyond a person's capacity. Providing supervisory authorities with adequate manpower and supporting them with sufficient training should be a budgetary priority.

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Notes



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1 an IID approach towards informed and participatory policy actions that takes over where traditional dialogues leave.

2 Undialogue starts with research and consultation process that leads to the publication of “Undialogue Agenda” which sets the memo for roundtable discussion. Solutions prescribed in the roundtable are published as “Undialogue Notes”, which is then used as a policy advocacy tool.