

Executive Summary of the Review Report on

Goal 4: Quality Education

Anchor

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Co-Anchor

Plan International

Associate Organisations

British Council

Dhaka Ahsania Mission

Gonoshasthaya Kendra

JAAGO Foundation

Save the Children in Bangladesh

SERAC-Bangladesh

Turning Point Foundation

In September 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development was adopted by world leaders at the United Nations, with a pledge to ‘transform our world’. Earlier in May 2015, the World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 in Incheon, Korea, had set the ambitious Education 2030 agenda, replacing the Education For All (EFA) 2015, to ensure “inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN, 2015).¹ The Education 2030 agenda is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) stipulated for education (SDG 4), one of the 17 SDGs. The SDG 4 reflects the important role of education by encapsulating targets in a stand, highlighting that the success of other SDGs (such as health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change) is also driven by the education goal. For making SDG 4 a reality, a key concern for Bangladesh will be to address a number of challenges that are pertinent to different dimensions of education sector in the country, which relate to policy development, policy ownership, building consensus on key objectives and strategies and their effective implementation.

The report was prepared based on both primary and secondary data. Field-level data was collected through a structured questionnaire from non-government organisations (NGOs) working in the area of education. Various government reports, frameworks, guidelines, and non-state data (i.e. research reports, annual reports, project progress reports, fact sheets, policy briefs, spotlight reports, etc.) were also collected and reviewed in preparing the report.

Progress So Far

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) began the task of implementing the SDGs from early on. In this regard, the government has partially aligned the SDG targets with the 7th Five Year Plan (7FYP), where all 17 goals are integrated. Fourteen (82 per cent) out of these 17 goals are fully aligned thematically, while three (SDGs 14, 16 and 17) (18 per cent) are aligned partially. Recognising the challenge of coordination among various ministries, the Honourable Prime Minister has established an Inter-Ministerial Committee on SDGs Implementation and Review, demonstrating the commitment of the government. The Principal Coordinator (SDGs Affairs), a newly created high-level position in the Prime Minister’s Office, heads the Committee. The government has also assigned ministry-wise SDG focal persons, including for the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). The General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission has conducted and published a mapping of ministries by targets, in implementation of SDGs, aligning with the 7FYP, SDGs Financing Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework, etc. Besides, a Strategic Framework and Action Plan on SDG 4 is almost ready under the leadership of MoPME and MoE, where UNESCO, Bangladesh National Commission for UNESCO (BNCU) and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) are jointly involved as associate partners.

As a result of all these initiatives, a significant progress has been made in SDG 4 and other goals over the years (2016-18). According to the *Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report*, published by

¹UN. (2015). *Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York: United Nations (UN).

the GED in December 2018, the Gender Parity Index (GPI) exceeded 1 at primary and secondary levels of education, and has remained above 1 for more than a decade. GPI at tertiary education reached its peak at 0.737 in 2014, and then declined to 0.701 in 2016 and 0.71 in 2017, respectively.

The non-state actors, particularly NGOs, are playing a significant role in implementing SDGs at the grassroots level by operating in the remote areas, and helping people to combat the adverse effects of climate change and achieving the Human Development Index (HDI)-related targets. In addition to microfinance services, NGOs are largely concentrating on human development issues, i.e. health, nutrition and population; education; water, sanitation and hygiene; skills development; disaster, environment and climate change; rural development; urban development; agriculture and food security; migration; gender justice; and poverty eradication—to name a few. The spirit of SDGs is to ‘leave no one behind’. The NGOs are working mostly to address the left-behind groups like those living in geographically hard-to-reach areas, deprived and underprivileged communities and physically-challenged people. Approximately a thousand NGOs in Bangladesh have different types of education and skill training programmes, and they are actively involved in attaining the targets of SDG 4. NGO programmes are focused on both service delivery and advocacy. With a service delivery approach, NGOs are carrying out programmes/projects to address the issues of dropout and left-out children; inclusive education; early childhood development (ECD) and care; girls’ education; education services for geographically hard-to-reach areas; technical and vocational education; lifelong learning; adult education; multi-lingual education; tertiary and vocational education; etc. According to the field data compiled by BRAC, since the launching of Education for All (EAF) in 2001, NGOs have been providing the following supports:

- Deliver education services to 2.9 million learners (61.71 per cent girls/female) through 79,573 learning centres/schools, and still continuing;
- Operating 37,000 formal and non-formal centres/schools with 1.7 million learners (56.56 per cent girls);
- Providing pre-primary education support including ECD through 25,000 centres covering 700,000 learners;
- Providing lifelong learning facilities through 20,000 community learning centres for 700,000 learners.

Gaps and Challenges

Despite various efforts and progress achieved in SDG 4 in different dimensions, significant challenges remain, which include inclusive and equitable education, quality of education at all levels, quality of teaching, adult literacy and lifelong learning. Number of vulnerable and disadvantaged children are still out of the education system. Some of them had opportunities, but could not continue. Even though the net enrolment rate is 97.97 per cent, the dropout rate is still very high (18.8 per cent); the repetition rate is 5.6 per cent; and survival rate to grade five is 83.3 per cent. The average pupil-teacher ratio remains very high (46:1), and about 80 per cent of the schools are run on double shifts, with learning time in a school-year less than half of the international average of a thousand hours. The large student size in a class and small learning time combine

to limit effective contact hours. The percentage of teachers with professional qualification has fallen. Very few teachers have received leadership training (only 26 per cent), and the percentage of teachers who undergo regular professional trainings has fallen substantially. The student performance is also fallen. According to the National Student Assessment (NSA), students' performance has declined since 2011. In 2015, only 65 per cent and 41 per cent of grade three students performed at their levels or above on Bangla and mathematics, down from 68 per cent and 50 per cent in 2011, and 75 per cent and 57 per cent in 2013. The performance is even lower for grade five. Only 23 per cent and 10 per cent of grade five students performed at their levels on Bangla and mathematics, respectively, in 2015, down from 25 per cent and 32 per cent in 2011, and 25 per cent and 34 per cent in 2013.

The high dropout rate is a major challenge in secondary education. Less than half of students complete the 5-year cycle of secondary education, reflecting a huge waste of financial resources and an inefficient education system. A gender gap shows 51 per cent of boys completing the 5-year cycle, but only 43 per cent of girls. The participation in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and tertiary education is also unsatisfactory. Science and technology is aligning the development plan of Bangladesh along with the objective to meet SDGs; this is a challenge as well as opportunity for Bangladesh. UNESCO in its 2015 report², stresses the role of science and technology in leading to innovation.

There are four ministries involved with the delivery of education, training and technology services. These are: MoPME, MoE, Ministry of Science and Technology, and the ICT Division of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology. The Ministries of Women and Children Affairs, Expatriate Welfare and Employment, Youth, Social Welfare, Health and Family Planning, and others also, have specific and significant involvements. From the output and results perspective, it is obvious that, there are issues of inter-ministerial linkages, which is a challenge for coordinated policy-making. The service delivery is heavily centralised, with most policy decisions and implementation managed from Dhaka. It is near impossible to manage adequate teacher attendance, quality of school infrastructure and quality of learning—without a decentralised service delivery. Recruitment of teachers and procurement of infrastructure and supplies are also heavily centralised, which often tend to suffer from lags and delays.

The public expenditure on education increased from USD 2.25 billion in FY2010-11 to USD 5.65 billion in FY2016-17, but has been kept at about 2 per cent of Bangladesh's gross domestic product (GDP)—one of the lowest percentages in South Asia and among the developing countries. Expenditure on primary education is around 45 per cent of the total education expenditure. Teacher salaries and school infrastructure development account for more than 90 per cent of the expenses. The government is the signatory of Muscat agreement, which recommended allocation of 4–6 per cent of the gross national product, and 15–20 per cent of the total government spending for education; thus, the current investment in education is much lower than the global standards in Bangladesh.

²UNESCO. (2015). *UNESCO Science Report: Towards 2030*. Paris: United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

Way Forward

Based on the discussion above, the following measures may be given priority to achieve the SDG 4 targets and other national and global agendas:

- Within a medium-term timetable, the proportion of GDP for public education budget should be raised to at least 4 per cent, and eventually to 6 per cent and/or 20 per cent of national budget. As interim steps, two pragmatic measures can be taken—an education cess (taking the positive and negative lessons from India and other countries into account), and tax incentives for individual and corporate contribution to education.
- The existing national objectives and targets in education as well as the targets of SDG 4 should be articulated in 8th Five Year Plan and the longer-term Perspective Plan.
- The highly centralised structure of education governance and management needs to be transformed to devolve authority and responsibility with accountability and transparency to the local level and to individual institutions.
- Finance and budget measures have to provide for sufficient number of teachers and ensure effective teaching-learning. Apart from improving current in-service training of teachers, measures have to be taken to make teaching one of the first career choices for talented young people, rather than the last one.
- A second-chance programme must be a part of the main strategy for universal primary education in order to serve the out-of-school children.
- To make lifelong learning a reality and expand functional literacy for youth and adults, a network of community learning centres offering relevant learning activities and supported by essential resources, complementing formal education, must be built up.