Review Report on
Goal 4: Quality Education

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(Draft)
SDG4 in Bangladesh: Where Are We?
A Civil Society Perspective

In September 2015, the Sustainable Development Goals for 2030 with a pledge to "*transform our world*" was adopted by world leaders at the United Nations. Earlier in May 2015, the World Education Forum (WEF) 2015 in Incheon, Korea, set the ambitious Education 2030 agenda, replacing 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 SDGs for education (SDG4), one of the 17 SDGs.

The SDG4 reflects the important role of education by encapsulating targets in a stand, highlighting that the success of other SDGs is also driven by the education goal such as in health, growth and employment, sustainable consumption and production, and climate change.[2] For making SDG4 a reality, a key concern for Bangladesh is to ensure effective resolution of challenges relating to a number of educational dimensions, such as policy development, policy ownership, building consensus on key objectives and strategies and their effective implementation.[3] Further, the country needs to adopt credible roadmaps to deliver quality, inclusive, free and public education and lifelong learning – which are at the heart of SDG4.

Bangladesh had been an active participant in the global process leading to the preparation of the post-2015 Development Agenda. Bangladesh proposals to the UN were strikingly similar to the proposals made by the Open Working Group (OWG) of the United Nations where 9 out of 11 goals were similar and other goals proposed by OWG were also in Bangladesh proposal but as targets of different goals. Bangladesh well-articulated the sustainable development challenges that the world would have to grapple with in the next 15 years for achieving the 2030 Agendas.

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[1] The Education 2030 agenda and the Incheon Declaration in 2015 aim to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. The Incheon Declaration is the logical continuation of the Education for All (EFA) movement on education. The Education 2030 Framework for Action recognises lifelong learning for all as one of the underpinning principles of the new vision, stating that 'all age groups, including adults, should have opportunities to learn and continue learning'. It also calls on countries to develop policies and programmes for the provision of quality distance learning in tertiary education, with appropriate financing and use of technology, including the Internet, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and other modalities that meet accepted quality standards to improve access. All these concerns are also reflected in MDG4.

[2] The SDG4 has been elaborated with seven targets and three means of implementation. The SDG4 targets cover primary to tertiary education, technical and vocational education, skills development of youth and adults, literacy and numeracy of population, inclusiveness and equity in education, quality of education and teachers as well as provisions, scope and character of education services that address the targets.

[3] See, for example, CAMPE (2016), *Education Watch Report-Literacy, Skills, Lifelong Learning: SDG4 in Bangladesh—Where Are We,* Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), Dhaka.

Bangladesh has shown a huge achievement to MDGs implementation. It made outstanding progress in the most of the targets in MDG; especially in the areas of primary school enrolment, and gender parity in primary and secondary level education. Quantitatively Bangladesh's achievements are really praiseworthy but the main concern to achieve SDG-4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning for all. Ensuring inclusive, equitable and inclusive education is really a challenge for any country in the world, for Bangladesh it would be more challenge due to lack of quality teachers, large classroom, less knowledge on ICT and skill based education. But, we are optimistic to retain the successive flow regarding to achieving Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030). Because, the Government has continued to implement policies and programmes to increase access to education and training, improve quality and relevance of education, reduce inequality in education and leverage on knowledge and skills in science, technology and innovation. Despite various government efforts and progress achieved in the education sector in different dimensions significant challenges remain.

SDG4 has seven targets about what is to be done and three means of achieving the targets. The first target requires that all children complete free, inclusive, quality primary and secondary education by 2030. Target 2 is about providing early childhood development services and pre-primary education for all children.

Targets 3, 4, 5 and 6 are about skills for work, eliminating illiteracy and expanding lifelong learning. Cross-cutting issues of gender, inequality and inclusion are built into the targets. Target 7 is about the purposes of education.

Completion of primary education with attaining minimum terminal competencies and then the admission to secondary level; only 30% students can complete 12 grade education and 70% of the students' dropout from education; question is – what do they (the dropout learners) do? Actually, students and parents have the fascination to the mainstream and academy based education but very few of them having choice of skilled manpower for the country by being skills for works; very few have the choice of enrolling in TVET. The target 3, 4, 5 and 6 are not in good condition in Bangladesh. Government initiatives regarding this appreciable but the marketing and branding for these areas of education is not adequate; government can't attract mass-population to this education.

It is now well-known to all that early childhood development and education is very much important for the children to becoming good citizen for the country in future; it is very important to develop children in physically, intellectually, socially and emotionally. But, this area is not still in focus in Bangladesh. In our country pre-primary education has been implementing for aged 5 years' children adjacent to primary schools and also having policy to increase 1 years of pre-primary education for the children aged 4-5 years; but it is laying in the papers of policy still. So, still under aged (under 5) children are not getting developmental support from the government of Bangladesh; and this is one of the main reason of not achieving quality education primary education in Bangladesh; many research showed that if children get opportunity to be nourished well and developmentally in track they are achieving good results and earning competencies well that the others children. A comprehensive early childhood development policy has been adopted

in 2013 by the government which tasks the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) to guide and coordinate action in this area. But it seems that they are not well prepared for giving support to all children.

It is mentioned earlier that the profile of jobs and skills required for them will be very different by 2030; that there is huge unemployment and underemployment among the youth; and that technical and vocational education and training (TVET) must be strengthened needs to be figured in the discussion. But the strategy seems to be expanding TVET, and raising the proportion of secondary students, including madrasa students, in TVET.

It's interesting that we educating children and they are becoming appropriate manpower for the country; they are not achieving skills rather than scoring good results in the examination. So, Bangladesh is far behind to achieving inclusive, quality and equitable education and far behind from SDG4.

It's needed a comprehensive and rigorous plan of action to achieve these targets; and efforts from government is not actually enough to achieve the targets; need joint actions from civil society organizations as well as corporate sector.

Methodology
The aim of the paper is to explore the status of SDG4 goal and targets in Bangladesh and the contribution of both state and non-state actors. With this notion, relevant data has been collected both from primary and secondary sources. For primary source, a structured questionnaire was developed and circulated among the NGOs, INGOs and those member organizations of CPSB, who those have education programs. A review of the current and relevant literature has been carried out before the development of the questionnaire. To collect secondary data, a number of government reports, frameworks, guidelines and non state (NGOs, INGOs, DPs and UN bodies) data i.e. research reports, annual reports, project progress reports, fact sheets, policy brief, spotlight report etc. were collected and reviewed.

Achievement So Far
State Initiatives and Achievement
The starting time of the Sustainable Development Goals (2016-2030) and the 7th Five Year Plan (2016-20) of Bangladesh kind of a coincidence but it provided the country a good opportunity to integrate SDGs in the 7th FYP and Bangladesh became an early starter of implementation of SDGs. All the 17 goals were integrated into the plan - 14 goals (82%) are thematically fully aligned while 3 while goals (SDG14, SDG16 and SDG17) of the SDGs (18%) are partially aligned with the 7th FYP. Thus achievement of Plan objectives and targets has been expected to expected to contribute towards achievement of many SDG targets. Bangladesh's achievement in implementing the 7th FYP will be rewarding internationally for fulfilling the global commitments.

Bangladesh prepared its own post-2015 Development Agenda and contributed to the international discourse through UN. With the lead of the General Economics Division (GED), Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) have taken measurable initiatives to achieve the targets of SDG4 and other goals in Bangladesh. The non-

state actors including NGOs have also designed number of programs focusing on the targets of SDG4 and other goals.

Recognizing the challenge of coordination of various Ministries and agencies responsible for implementing projects/programmes contributing toward attainment of SDGs and providing data and information for monitoring and evaluation of progress at the national level the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh established an Inter-Ministerial Committee on SDGs Implementation and Review demonstrating the commitment of the government. The committee comprising Secretaries from 20 Ministries/Divisions coordinates SDGs monitoring and implementation. The Principal Coordinator (SDGs Affairs), a newly created high level position in the Prime Minister's office, heads the Committee. GED is the Secretariat for the committee to coordinate implementation at the policy level along with monitoring and reporting status of SDGs. Government has also assigned ministry-wise SDG focal persons including the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). The General Economic Division (GED) has conducted and published a Mapping of ministries by targets in implementation of SDGs aligning with 7th Five Year Plan (2016-20), SDGs Financing Strategy, Monitoring and Evaluation Framework of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) etc. Besides, a Strategic Framework and Action Plan on SDG4 is almost ready under the leadership of MoPME and MoE where UNESCO, BNCU and CAMPE are jointly involved as associate partners. Government has partially addressed the goals and targets in 7th FYP where 56 targets from 14 goals are fully aligned, 37 targets from 13 SDGs are partially aligned and another 65 targets from 12 SDGs are not aligned. Other 11 targets of 7 goals are perceived as not relevant for Bangladesh. However, it should be noted that the goals which are mostly relevant with the human development related indicators i.e. SDG2 (Zero Hunger), SDG3 (Good Health), SDG4 (Quality Education) and SDG16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) are mostly not aligned with the 7th FYP. Among them, all of the 10 targets of Quality Education are not aligned.

Government has also prepared a *National Action Plan for SDGs Implementation*. Besides, an *SDGs Working Team*, hosted by the Governance Innovation Unit, Prime Minister's Office, *SDGs Implementation Sub-committee* by the NGO Affairs Bureau and the National Data Coordination Committee-NDDC' to deal with data gap under the Statistics and Informatics Division (SID) have been constituted. Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) is preparing a National Indicator Framework (NIF) for measuring the SDG4 progress in Bangladesh where they identified additional 19 indicators which is under review, in addition to the globally agreed 43 indicators. This is expected to focus on context specific areas and issues for Bangladesh.

As a result of all these initiatives, a significant progress has been made in SDG4 and other goals over the years (2016-18). According to the *Sustainable Development Goals: Bangladesh Progress Report,* published by General Economic Division (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. Concerted efforts are needed to reverse the direction of change in tertiary GPI. The proportion of primary school teachers with DPAD/C-in-Ed degree has been rising reaching more than 80 per cent of total teachers in 2015. However,

the Gross Enrolment Ratio in Pre-Primary education has been increasing at a slow pace of 1.45 percentage points per annum since 2013.

Government has continued to implement policies and programmes to increase access to education and training, improve quality and relevance of education, reduce inequality in education and leverage on knowledge and skills in science, technology and innovation. Despite various government efforts and progress achieved in the education sector in different dimensions significant challenges including inclusive and equitable education, quality of education at all levels, quality of teaching, adult literacy and lifelong learning. Future policies and programmes in education sector will focus on sustaining past achievements and dealing with the emerging issues.

Non-State Initiatives and achievement
Non-state actors particularly NGOs are playing a significant role in implementing SDGs at the grass root levels by operating in the remote areas and helping people to combat the adverse effects of climate change and achieving the HDI related targets. In addition to microfinance services, NGOs are largely concentrating an human development i.e. health, nutrition and population; education; water, sanitation and hygiene; skill development; disaster, environment and climate change; rural development; urban development; agriculture and food security; migration; gender justice and poverty eradication.

The spirit of SDGs is *Leaving no one behind (LNOB).* The UN Member States pledged to ensure "no one will be left behind" and to "endeavour to reach the furthest behind first". In the document there are five factors proposed as key to understanding who is being left behind and why: discrimination; place of residence; socio-economic status; governance; and vulnerability to shocks. As SDG4 related high profile body, Education 2030 Steering committee of UNICEF has so eloquently emphasised going Beyond…

- Beyond averages: leave no one behind;
- Beyond access: relevant learning outcomes;
- Beyond basics: content of education;
- Beyond schooling: lifelong learning;
- Beyond education: multi-sectorial planning;
- Beyond countries: peer learning mechanisms.

In Bangladesh the NGOs are working mostly to address the left behind groups like those living in geographically hard to reach areas, deprived and under-prevailed community and physically challenged population. Approximately a thousand NGOs in Bangladesh have different types of education and skill training programs and they are actively involved in achieving the targets of SDG4. NGO programs are focused on both service delivery and advocacy. With a service delivery approach NGOs are carrying out programs/projects to address the issues of drop out and left out children; inclusive education; early childhood development 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 NGOs have already provided the following scenario

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

Most of the cases, mainstream children get access the mainstream education system like government primary school. But the NGOs are providing education support to those who do not attended or drop out from mainstream schools. Drop out children, children with disability, children of ethnic minority communities, children living in hard to reach areas, among others are being covered by the NGOs. It may be seen in the following case study:

Case Study: Community Driven Inclusive Education

Very few educational initiatives in Bangladesh have targeted to address the whole needs of the learners, for this reason the initiatives haven't achieve the aspired goals. Education is such a prime rights that should be resolved in a holistic manner. Plan's Inclusive Education Project titled-"Developing a Model of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh Project" is such a comprehensive and holistic model that creates an opportunity for achieving quality primary education. It's a right-based and social model of inclusion targeting zero exclusion and address the diverse needs of each learner. This model considered school as entry point and school catchment area as unit, the project is aiming to universalize quality primary education for all children irrespective of ability, religion, gender, socio-economic condition and geographic location. Some of the major components of this project are:

- Strong community outreach by parents' groups
- Community based early learning opportunity for all 3-5 years aged children
- Linking school with community resources
- Planting inclusion for quality education at school, professional capacity building of monitors and supervisors.

Targeted Schools (5 locations):
- Dhaka urban 10 GPS (Dhaka)
- Barguna Sadar 10 GPS (Barishal)
- Jaldhaka 10 GPS (Nilphamari)
- Hatibandha 10 GPS (Lalmonirhat)
- Kulaura 10 GPS (Moulvibazar)
- Total 50 GPS

Following social model of inclusion, the project is building on existing policies, structure and facilities for government schools and working in collaboration with Directorate of Primary Education. The project is currently working with 50 government primary schools in five locations by involving all credible stakeholders to develop demonstrative model of inclusive education. *(See the annexure of IE Model, Plan Int. Bangladesh)*

Plan International Bangladesh's Inclusive Education Project has been appreciated and recognized nationally and globally. The project has heavily influenced at five levels; Organization, Local/community, Country, Region and across the Globe.

- Locally the project has created a huge momentum at school catchment areas, sub-district and district level. School teachers and management committee members are more concerned about schooling of ALL children in the school catchment area. Community especially local elites are contributing more at school (both cash and kind). Some of the project supported schools are awarded at sub-district level for their good works. Student's enrolment rate increased significantly in project supported schools. Operational research study under this project initiative reported increased attendance rate and almost zero dropout rate in last one and a half years.

- Kulaura, one sub-district under this project is replicating this IE model in others GPS; in other areas Jaldhaka, Hatibandha, Barguna and Dhaka urban are following the interventions of IE Model of Plan International Bangladesh, especially the school are getting coloured by multi-colour approach; the school authority said, 'the attendance of learners have been significantly increased after the school renovated in child

Upazila wise total schools:
- Kulaura total GPS 193
- Hatibandha total GPS 178
- Jaldhaka total GPS 249
- Barguna Sadar total GPS 228
- Dhaka urban total GPS 298

friendly way. And they are also following the Plan's Pedagogical Training Manual of IE model in their trainings and teachers are also practicing IE pedagogy in class conduction.

So, Plan is working with 50 govt. primary schools but the influence of this model is spreading in all schools in the working areas. So, IE project's reached towards all schools of 5 Upazila.

- IE project influence at country level is enormous. Access and Inclusive Education Cell (AIEC) of Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) is continuously referring Plan's IE Project in relevant areas. Two in-depth studies carried out under this project and overall project design had been referred at "UNICEF ROSA: Meeting the Educational Needs of Children with Disabilities in South Asia – Bangladesh Needs Assessment" by Ian Kaplan, 2014. It is recognized as one of the successful cases in EFA 2015 National Review Bangladesh by Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). IE module of Diploma in Education and PPE training manual is also influenced by the project. The project model has been

presented in various national conferences and symposiums and gathered appreciation. Inspired by the project initiatives, some development partners and NGOs like WFP Bangladesh, Save the Children, Action Aid Bangladesh, Stromme Foundation, and Centre for Rehabilitation of the Paralyzed (CRP), Asian Centre for Inclusive Education (ACIE) are replicating similar project interventions in their working areas.

- Inclusive Education project of Plan International Bangladesh is recognized globally. IE project has been presented at a number of international conferences such as International Conference on IE 2015 at Dhaka, International Conference on IE 2016 at Pune, CIES Conference at Washington, TIES conference at Melbourne, Zero Project Conference 2016 at Vienna. This model has been awarded as one of the innovative practices across the globe through Zero Project Conference 2016 at UNO at Vienna, Austria. IE project approach as one of the Best practices in education is placed in Plan's Global Education Website. This IE model is referred by Dr. Umesh Sharma, Monash University, Australia in the website design for EU.

- Plan's IE Model is very much aligned with SDG 4 – 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'. It has been already stated that IE Model is a social model of inclusion and it has created an equal and equitable environment for all types' learners. The children who are covered by this project are developmentally on track, because it intervened from 0 (zero) years of children and covered up to 5 years. For 0-3 years aged children are getting parenting support; 3-5 years aged children are getting support from SBK; after completing SBK cycle (2years) they enrol into pre-primary class for 5 years aged children. Actually this project is very much similar with SDG 4.2 targets. Plan is operating a shift pre-primary education class adjacent to govt. primary school.

  Achieving good quality primary education Plan's IE Model supported GPS in 3 aspects – (i) creating equal access to ALL learners, (ii) supporting teachers to increase their capacity to conduct classes according to IE pedagogies and (iii) working support system to create enabling and friendly environment for the children within and outside schools.

  As stated above, Plan IE model best fit with SDG, developing children from early age and generating opportunity to continue education for lifelong.

Considering the project's above influence, evidence based designing, replicability; as this is following existing policies, structure and facilities of government and working in collaboration with Directorate of Primary Education; it can be said that the project has created a high value of scaling up through mainstreaming.

Target-wise Summary Findings of SDG4 Strategic Framework (SF) for Bangladesh
Under the leadership of Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), UNESCO, BNCU and CAMPE have developed a Strategic Framework of SDG4 for Bangladesh. The findings have come out from a consultative process including 35 KIIs with

relevant field experts (both government and CSO), 8 sub-national level FGDs, 4 sub-national level consultations, feedbacks of the draft report by the Steering and Technical Committees on SDG4 SF of the government and a national level consultation/final draft sharing. Target-wise summery findings are:

Goal	Target	Summary Findings
Ensure Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Promote Lifelong Learning Opportunities for All	4.1: Universal primary and secondary education	- Assessment (Public exams in primary, secondary, grade 3 assessment): assessment need to be competency based - Educational provision: equal facilities for all types of schools, all government schools should progressively become single shift in the long run, minimum learning conditions for running schools need to be ensured - Quality of non-state schools need to be ensured with government support and supervision - Subject-based teachers are needed - Secondary completion rate needed to be increased, especially for girls - Non-MPO secondary schools need get more support from government and improve their quality
	4.2: Early childhood development and universal pre-primary education	- Ensure better nutrition such as balanced calories and micro-nutrient to pre-primary and primary - Increase pre-primary to 2 years - Better collaboration among various providers is needed - More parenting education is needed - Undertake educational reform to ensure relevance of learning outcomes for indigenous children
	4.3: Equal access to technical/vocational and higher education	- Vocational education needs to become flexible and market driven - Gender gap need to be reduced - Ensure equal access of indigenous children and youth, and in particular indigenous girl, to all levels of education. - Vocational education should progressively create access to rural population - A well designed system of Accreditation and recognition of acquired skills is needed
	4.4: Relevant skills for decent work	- TVET delivery institutions ought to be modernized through developing capacity to conduct market skills demand assessment, developing vocational skills and through providing job placement along with post training support - TVET needed to be environment friendly - Skills need to be upgraded - Increasing on the job training and involve more private sector - Optimum coverage VS maximum coverage: increase cost effectiveness of training

		- tertiary education: need more policy support and set up more center of excellence
	4.5: Gender equality and inclusion	- Girls at secondary and tertiary education need more support, especially in STEM - Ethnic groups need more support, e.g. mother language - Economic and geographic marginalized need more support with GO-NGO collaboration - Physical and mental challenged need more support
	4.6: Universal youth literacy and	- Link literacy with socio-economic skills with employment - Strengthen informal rural based economy through literacy and skills training as well as link with formal economy based on the principles of lifelong learning through 55 CLCs
	4.7: Education for sustainable development and global citizenship	- Value education (Global Citizenship Education) need to in-cooperated in teaching and learning - Promotion of democratic and secular principles - Integration of indigenous peoples' knowledge, culture and languages in formal curricula, including for non-indigenous sectors of society.

Gaps and Challenges

Pre-primary and Primary education: Primary and pre-primary education are the first major targets (SDG 4.1 and 4.2) of quality education. Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to achieve different national and international goals and visible progress has been made in this regard. A good number of the vulnerable and disadvantaged children i.e. children with disabilities, street children, children from hard to reach areas and ethnic communities including children with extreme poor socio-economic condition are still out of the education system. Some of them got the opportunities, but could not continue. e.g. indigenous children are still deprived of education in their mother tongues. In January 2017, the government developed textbooks for indigenous children in five languages (Chakma, Garo, Marma, Sadri and Tripura) at the pre-primary level. About 50,000 textbooks were printed and distributed among approximately 25,000 indigenous students. However, many indigenous children have not received mother-tongue textbooks as yet. Moreover, new teachers with expertise on alphabets of five indigenous languages have not been appointed, and existing teachers have not been provided with any training.

Though primary education has achieved almost universal enrolment, it still has a long way to go in dealing with other concerns. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) report has shown that the overall repetition rate is 5.6% and survival rate to grade five is 83.3%. Efficiency remains at the level of 81.9% and the average number of years' input per graduate is 6.1. In the baseline survey (2005), the overall repetition rate was 10.5%, the rate of survival to grade five was only 53.9% and efficiency was 60.6%. "The fact that almost a quarter of the children, who began their

journey to the primary school, could not reach their destination is clearly a major hurdle to achieving the Goal two (MDGs) of universal primary completion (EFA 2015)."[4]

The Primary School Quality Level (PSQL) indicators are defined in numerical terms and are about inputs; as such, they do not indicate what results are achieved in learning outcomes form these inputs. Nevertheless, they are important inputs to achieve schooling quality improvements. Deficiencies are particularly large in terms of some key indicators of quality. For example, the average pupil-teacher ratio remains short of the PEDP3 target of 46:1. Moreover, 80 percent of the schools are run on double shift with learning time in a school year less than half of the international average of a thousand hours. The large class size 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% in 2014) and the percentage of teachers who undergo regular professional training has fallen substantially. More efforts are needed to instil competency-based assessment of learning.

Secondary Education: Universal secondary education is first target (SDG 4.1) of quality education goal. Though it is difficult to fully comply with 12 class free and compulsory secondary education but the government has given importance in secondary education. As a result, the enrolment has increased more than tripled compeering with 1980s as the number of secondary education institutions, with girls accounting for 54% of secondary enrolment, a major accomplishment in combating gender disparity, but perhaps creating a new issue of male disadvantage (BANBEIS, 2014). 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% of boys completing the 5-year cycle but only 43% of girls. Multiple challenges related to gender and poverty cause the high dropout rate for girls. One factor is traditional values that favour early marriage for girls. Enrolment in science in grade 10 fell from 48% in 1980 to 20% in 2011. This is caused by (i) a shortage of qualified teachers, (ii) teaching that emphasizes theory, (iii) a lack of science laboratories and equipment, and (iv) business studies attracting more students. English is seen as an essential skill but is poorly taught in secondary school (GPE, ibid.)

The capacity of the Ministry of Education and the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) to supervise and monitor the secondary education sector has not kept pace with the rapid increase in the number of secondary schools and madrasahs. A number of organizations, including teacher training colleges, higher secondary teacher training institutes, and the Bangladesh Madrasah Teacher Training Institute, provide teacher training in secondary education in different aspects. Coordination and institutional linkages among them need to be further improved. In addition, the rapid growth of nongovernment teacher training colleges, which operate commercially without the government's proper quality control, has further undermined the quality of training.

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[4] EFA 2015 National Review – Bangladesh, Prepared under the auspices of Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Government of Bangladesh on 26 October, 2014, p – 2 (introduction chapter).

98% of all secondary schools are nongovernment, their administration overseen by school management committees. These nongovernment schools and madrasah receive substantial government subsidies to pay the salaries of teachers of selected subjects (through a system of enrolling teachers in a "monthly pay-order" (MPO) roll, as well as block grants for construction and maintenance of school buildings. Given the enormous growth in nongovernment schools, it has been difficult to apply and enforce their performance and accountability requirements. Teachers in nongovernment schools are recruited directly by schools in accordance with the government's set regulations and procedures. However, instances of corruption and nepotism have clouded the transparency of the system, especially regarding teacher recruitment and salaries in nongovernment secondary schools funded by the government. Working out a transitional process and strategy with the two concerned Ministries (the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and the Ministry of Education) collaborating closely through a taskforce could be a sensible approach to deal with the challenge.

Technical and Vocational Education: *target number* 4.3 and 4.4. are relevant with the technical and vocational education and decent work. The participation in TVET and tertiary education is also unsatisfactory and below the MDG target of full equality. Gender-based discrimination remains as one of the most difficult hurdles to realizing the right to education. Inclusive, gender responsive framework, second chance and non-formal education have to be recognized and implemented dynamically to end various forms of disparity and inequity in education. The challenge is to turn education into a rights-based tool for building a just and equitable society for breaking the cycle of trans-generational disadvantages.

Science and technology is aligning the development plan of Bangladesh along with the objective to meet sustainable development goals is a challenge as well as opportunity for Bangladesh. In a recent report, UNESCO (2016) stresses the role of Science and Technology leading to innovation. It has been reported that significant investments in science, technology. In order to build solid knowledge base in Science, Technology, and Innovation to address sustainable development goals, Bangladesh needs to increase capacity in higher education. According to the UNESCO (2016), Bangladesh's budgetary allocation for higher education is less than 0.5 percent of GDP, which is far lower than many LDCs.

Gender and Equity in **Education:** the SDG 4.5 target is gender and equality education. Though girls are doing better than the boys in primary level, the frustration is that the percentage of girls completed primary education is not equally seen in the secondary level education. Poverty, early marriage, unawareness of guardians, misapprehension of religion, lack of communication, eve teasing and violence against girls are among the reasons of their lagging behind. Different studies confirm the prevailing views about the main reasons for dropout as being poverty and poverty-related factors. There is also unanimity about higher dropout among girl students in rural areas, confirming prevailing views about early marriage of girls, household role of girls in life and lack of recognition of the need for their education.

Equity Challenges Ensuring equality is fundamental to human capital development for poverty reduction. A pro-poor strategy will help to achieve the desired objectives. In terms of educational attainment, gender parity has been achieved in primary and secondary education, Female

enrolment in primary and secondary education has surpassed male enrolment. However, females continue to lag behind in secondary completion. There have been improvements in equity in primary enrolment between the poor and non-poor.

Inter-ministerial Coordination: At the public sector level, there are 4 Ministries involved with the delivery of education, training and technology services. These are: Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME), Ministry of Education (MOE); Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST); and ICT Division of the Ministry of Posts, Telecommunications and Information Technology (MPTIT). The Ministries of Women and Children Affairs, Expatriate Welfare and Employment, Youth and Social Welfare, Heath and Family Planning and others also have specific and significant involvement. From the output and results perspective, it is obvious that there are issues of inter-ministerial linkages. Thus, for example, the quality and quantity of what gets produced at the earliest stages of the education and training cycle (primary schooling managed by MOPME) has a determining influence at the next stages of the cycle (secondary and tertiary education managed by MOE; science and technology research managed by MOST; and ICT managed by MTICT). Yet, in practice inter-ministerial coordination and joint policy making is a challenge. Besides, the service delivery is heavily centralized with most policy decision and implementation managed from Dhaka. Centralized management of quality in remote districts of Bangladesh is heavily challenged. It is near impossible to manage adequately teacher attendance, quality of school infrastructure and quality of learning without a decentralized service delivery. Recruitment of teachers and procurement of infrastructure and supplies are also heavily centralized, which often tend to suffer from lags and delays resulting from centralized decision making.

Inadequate Financing: The *EFA 2015 National Review,* that the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in Bangladesh prepared, indicated inadequate budget allocation in education as one of the reasons behind the above gapes.

As signatory to education-related international treaty, Bangladesh expressed commitment to ensuring adequate allocation (20 per cent of the national budget or 6 per cent of the gross domestic product) in education. But the allocation for primary and secondary education in Bangladesh is less compared with the figures for other developing countries. Even it is less among the SAARC countries. While the size of national budget of Bangladesh is getting fattened every year, education budget is going down compared with the national budget and has maintained the downward trend in recent years. The GDP share in education is stagnant at around 2% over the last 18 years while the Muscat agreement recommended 4–6 per cent of the gross national product, and 15–20 per cent of the total government spending; we are, therefore, much lower than the global standard in investment in education. This budget amount is not alone for education. It has another shareholder, which is technology. Although the education budget is increasing in amount, it is inadequate to cover all of its necessities to ensure quality education for all. The lion's share of the allocation is spent on the salary, infrastructural development, management purposes, etc. Very little of the budget is left for quality development of education, including effective education materials, teacher training, library and research, etc. It is important to allocate adequate resources for education and to ensure its effective use for quality development of education.

Moreover, with the concentration of focus on increasing quantity by decision makers and practitioners, many aspects of quality remain neglected. Evidence over the recent decades has shown that efforts to expand enrolment should be accompanied by attempts to enhance educational quality, if children are to be attracted to school, kept there and enabled to achieve meaningful learning outcomes. Attention should be ensured for professional development of Primary School teachers and School Managing Committee (SMC) members to improve their skills and capabilities as key elements of quality improvement.

The complexities of balancing priorities, diverse interests, capacities and resources in order to develop a workable and coherent subsector plan that also contributes to national SDG implementation cannot be underestimated. The issues and challenges have been discussed. The peculiarity of the education sector is that the main work of the sector is divided between two Ministries without a strong rationale for dividing school education between two Ministries (or a rationale that has outlived its usefulness). It would be appropriate to form a high level joint taskforce of the two Ministries and other stakeholders including concerned NGOs, academic and research institutions, civil society and the private sector to examine and formulate the objectives, targets, strategies and indicators for education that would constitute the common SFYP and SDG4 targets and indicators for education.

The Way Forward
An action agenda needs to identify structural and operational constraints for education and human capability development and indicate what should be done to overcome these obstacles. The structural weaknesses will require a sustained and longer term effort, yet must be pursued with a sense of urgency. More immediate steps need to be taken on operational issues, but still designed within a framework of structural reforms.

Structural Issues
Major structural issues which, on the basis of sub-national consultation as well as recent studies and policy advocacy of education researchers and stakeholders, have come to the fore, include:

- **Resource adequacy**. Very low level of public resources for education by international comparison, lack of criteria and benchmarks for resource allocation (and proportional reduction of education allocations as share of GDP and total government budget) in recent years;
- **Decentralised and effective governance.** Extremely centralised governance and management structures for the large educational system of the country; decentralization with accountability in educational management at all level need priority attention;
- **New thinking about teachers.** Insufficient numbers of teachers of required quality standards and inability of the system to attract and retain capable people in the teaching profession;
- **Effective skills development.** Supply-driven skills development with low quality and relevance, and minimal attention to apprenticeship and needs of the informal economy (though it accounts for over 80% of employment);
- **Quality in higher education including degree colleges**. Unacceptably low quality of degree colleges under the National University (with three quarters of tertiary enrolment

in these colleges, which also are the suppliers of primary and secondary teachers -- creating a vicious cycle in education);

- **One Ministerial jurisdiction for school education**. School education divided under two ministries (unlike anywhere else in the world), creating problems of curriculum continuity, student assessment, teacher preparation and supervision, and developing, guiding and implementing an overall quality-with-equity strategy in the national education system.
- **Partnership building**. Government, non-state actors, civil society, private sector need to work together for optimal policy development, governance, resource mobilisation and assessment of progress; greater voice of stakeholders at all levels to be encouraged.

Operational issues

The operational issues arise mainly from the governance, management and decision-making process in the national education system. Several of these raised in the sub-national consultations and gleaned from recent research reports as well as media coverage of educational issues include:

- **Student learning assessment**. Dysfunctional learning assessment with too many public examinations which do not measure competency and distort teaching-learning; the issue has been brought up repeatedly in education discourse, without swaying the decision-makers;
- **Harmful political interference.** Criminalisation of political party-affiliated student bodies, particularly in tertiary education; parliament members exercising undue control and influence in local institutions, all of which vitiate the academic atmosphere;
- **Curriculum reform**. Curriculum burden and weak continuity and articulation through grades; rather than integrated and unified curricula for all school education;
- **Disadvantaged groups**. Geographical, ethnic, and language-based access deficits; seriously inadequate opportunities for children with disabilities, depreciation of cultural diversity and cultural contribution to sustainable development.;
- **School facilities**. School building, premises and play grounds – which should be built and maintained as a symbol of commitment to education and community pride.
- **Quality enforcement in tertiary education**. Proliferation of private universities without essential quality control; quality enforcement in National university institutions.
- **Education policy implementation.** Slow and fragmented approach to Education Policy 2010 implementation.
- **Digital technology**. Use of digital technology for teacher upgrading, enriching student learning resources, efficient management information system, and ensuring wide and affordable access to the Internet for all educational institutions.
- **School meal**. School meal for all children, especially at pre-primary and primary level, making longer school day possible for children.
- **Corruption.** Controlling corruption, waste, mismanagement and moving away from a culture of tolerance of these destructive practices; though difficult to document, bribery education personnel recruitment is regarded to be a common problem.

- **Remoteness.** Many indigenous communities in the remote areas of the CHT and parts of Indo-Bangla borderlands of the plains do not have primary or high school within several miles' radius. The distance from these communities to the nearest school can be as far as 20/30 miles in some instances. Young indigenous children have to cross miles on foot or take a tiring country boat ride for miles to make it to the class every day.

Critical Areas of Action

Considerable groundwork has already been done. The job now would be to refine, elaborate, and ensure consistency and alignment with national priorities, especially giving attention to issues which have not been addressed adequately. Based on the discussion above, the issues that the proposed task force would need to give particular attention are recapitulated below.

First, the stagnation in public funds allocation for education, as share of GDP and the national budget in recent years, is inconsistent with the government's own proclaimed goals. One of the lowest positions globally in this respect is not acceptable and must be reversed. Within a medium term time-table the proportion of GDP for public education budget should be raised to at least 4% and eventually to 6% and/or 20% of national budget. A significant increase in the revenue share of GDP and enhancing revenue-raising capacity of local government bodies should provide for necessary increase in education budgets. As interim steps, two pragmatic steps 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.

Second, the existing national objectives and targets in education as these are articulated for the 8th Five Year Plan and the longer term perspective plan need to be aligned with the framework of the targets and indicators of SDG4/Education 2030 and overall SDGs. No specific universalization plan exists yet for education beyond grade 5. Steps have to be taken to reconcile global target of universal full secondary education by 2030 with national targets for grade 8, 10 and 12. The exercise to enact a new education law is a good opportunity to improve the legal framework for the targets, including resource provision and governance criteria, provided that the law reflects the education priorities and facilitates their implementation.

Third, the highly centralized 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. Upazila and district based-planning and management of basic and school education must be strengthened to make education services adapted and responsive to local needs and conditions. This could be incorporated in the education law foreseen in the Education Policy. A permanent statutory National Education Commission, also foreseen in the Policy, can be a mechanism for guiding, exercising oversight and assessing progress and impact of reforms in education governance and management.

Fourth, new thinking about teachers is needed. By far the largest expenditure item in education is the teaching personnel. Finance and budget measures have to provide for sufficient numbers 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 ten-year plan has to be taken to bring about this transformation – learning from both developed OECD countries and those in East Asia including China.

Four key elements in this plan would be: (a) the creation of a National Teaching Service Corps (NTSC) with high remuneration and prestige, (b) attracting bright young people with stipend and lure of NTSC job into a four-year teacher preparation track after higher secondary, (c) introducing in the four-year general degree program (BA or BSc) education as a subject, and (c) ensuring high quality of this degree program by enforcing quality standards in at least 100 government degree colleges in the country. A nucleus of quality teaching personnel in thousands of primary and secondary schools could be created in ten years by placing 2 or 3 NTSC teachers in each school.

Fifth, the unacceptably low quality of degree colleges (with three quarters of tertiary enrolment in these colleges, which also are the suppliers of primary and secondary teachers – creates a vicious cycle in education, which must be addressed with urgency. Higher education quality improvement efforts at present are confined mostly to regular universities, leaving out National and Open Universities. While the former is important, the relative neglect of the degree colleges under the National University and widening tertiary education opportunities through the Open University without reasonable quality assurance are not consistent with SDG4 and the national education agenda.

Sixth, non-formal alternatives for out-of-school children have to be effectively funded. About four million children of primary school age are still out of school, either because they have never enrolled in school or have dropped out early. Bangladesh NGOs, led by BRAC, pioneered the non-formal second chance primary education program in the 1980s which has been successfully scaled up. A second chance program must be a part of the main strategy for universal primary education in order to serve out-of-school children of all kinds – dropouts, working children, those in remote areas and those in other special circumstances. But this can work only if a partnership is built with the NGOs which have proven their commitment and capacity. The NFPE option will also be needed for universalizing grades 6-8 and secondary grades.

Seventh, expansion of pre-primary education with acceptable quality has to be supported. A good start has been made in expanding a year of pre-primary education now serving more than half of those entering primary school. Expansion of preschools with quality was foreseen to be undertaken through GO-NO collaboration by coordinated planning in each upazila. A GO-NGO collaboration guideline was prepared by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, but was not implemented for lack of public funding for NGO contribution. Early childhood development for younger children also needs to be expanded, for which the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs is the focal point. No specific target for early childhood development below pre-primary has been set; only scattered activities for young child development mostly by NGOs are in existence. Quality deficits in pre-primary are serious problems. A program without acceptable quality for young children can do more harm than good.

Eighth, lifelong learning has to be supported with literacy as the first step for those adults who remain without literacy. The principles and practice of lifelong learning have come to the fore again in the context of SDG2030/SDG4. To make lifelong learning a reality and expand functional literacy for youth and adults, a network of community learning centres (CLCs) offering relevant learning activities and supported by essential resources, complementing formal education, must be built up. NGOs have shown their commitment in this area with some 5,000 *gonokendros* (people's centers) run by different organisations. Core resources have to be provided by the government and partnership modalities have to be developed among government, NGOs and communities to build a nationwide network of CLCs. A viable program for literacy as the foundation for lifelong learning through networks of community learning centres (CLCs) and wide and equitable access to ICT has to be developed.

Ninth, supply-driven skills development with low quality and market relevance, and minimal attention to apprenticeship and needs of the informal economy (though it accounts for over 80% of employment) need to change, as anticipated in National Skills Development Policy. Overall TVET participation is low for the secondary education age-group—even lower for females; low outreach and high gender disparity can be seen in non-formal/flexible shorter courses; no major program at present for skill training for informal economy jobs and limited formal/informal apprenticeship. Expansion of TVET within the present structure, without major reform, will not help reaching the SDG or national target.

Tenth, government must increase efforts to overcome barriers to equitable and inclusive education including adaptation and implementation of stronger policies. Investment in quality education should be increased progressively, adhering to the benchmarks of at least 4-6% of GDP and 15-20% of total expenditure to education. Instruction and study of one's own language including signed language must be emphasized and promoted to preserve peoples' culture, to ensure inclusivity and to utilize a more effective medium of instruction. Otherwise, meaningful participation of indigenous representatives with Government for sustainable development, including education for sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality would enhance.

Eleventh, all school education should be brought under one national administrative jurisdiction. School education divided under two ministries (unlike anywhere else in the world), creates problems of curriculum continuity, student assessment, teacher preparation and supervision, and developing, guiding and implementing an overall quality-with-equity strategy in the national education system. A separate agency for primary education up to grade 5, introduced with the adoption of the compulsory primary education law, which later transformed into a full Ministry, has lost its value and has become an impediment to school education development, especially in the context of SDG4 target of universal education that embraces secondary education.

This is not necessarily an exhaustive enumeration of the issues which should be considered for Bangladesh's education agenda. These are highlighted because these are critical but not given due consideration so far.

Finally, SDG4 as a *catalytic force* across all the SDGs, with connections to all the other global goals that need to be emphasized. So, government, non-state actors and development partners and

other stakeholders, who share responsibility for the implementation of the SDG4/Education 2030 Agenda must strengthen their efforts and work together to address the major identified challenges presented in the paper, whether they are directly involved in policy-making or resource allocation or implementation or monitoring or doing more or less of everything.

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