



APPLYING A WORKABLE EDUCATION SWAP IN BANGLADESH

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This policy brief examines the Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II), and the sector wide approach (SWAp) of donors supporting education in Bangladesh. Based on an assessment of PEDP II and other empirical analyses of education performance in Bangladesh, it recommends that the next PEDP should be more flexible, encompassing more types of education providers under a unified national plan and be extended to a greater age range, with significantly increased resources to bring Bangladesh up to parity with comparable countries' primary education expenditure. Although the new PEDP III under preparation appears to be emerging as an extension of PEDP II, this brief indicates the potential if the aims of the new Education Policy 2010 are taken seriously. It is based on the CREATE Pathways to Access Research Monograph No. 57: *The Sector Wide Approach in Bangladesh Primary Education: A Critical View* (Ahmed, M., 2011).

Background

Access to education in Bangladesh has improved considerably over the last decade, but remains far from universal. Only about half of all children access and complete the short primary cycle of 5 grades and even fewer move on to and complete lower secondary school. National assessments indicate considerable cause for concern about achievement levels and the wide variation in quality between schools and districts. The Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II) has fallen short of its aspirations. The development of its sequel (2011-15) provides a unique opportunity to learn from the successes and failures of PEDP II and establish new modalities that may have more effect on sustained levels of educational access to basic education.

Amongst the opportunities that need exploring in depth are needs to adopt a less rigid and more flexible approach to planning over the lifetime of the next development programme, expand the opportunities for stakeholder participation in the

SWAp and its implementation, work to ensure that committed resources are actually disbursed on time, decentralise – or at least pilot on scale - down to *upazila* level to plan and manage the mobilisation of resources to enhance access, and support multiple providers in delivering educational services within an appropriate regulatory framework.

The problem of taking a comprehensive view of educational needs and how external assistance can be made relevant and appropriate in the country context, and can be integrated into the institutional system of the country, has been always a concern in development cooperation. The problem is rooted in the inherent dilemma of development cooperation.

External assistance can contribute effectively to sustained results when the recipient country can demonstrate a certain level of capability to analyse and define its problems and manage resources for results, the very capabilities that are expected to be nurtured through development cooperation. Moreover, external assistance is limited in scope

and purpose by its very nature, compared to total needs in a developing country; thus the pressure has been always there to look for ways of maximising the impact of assistance. This is reflected in the discourse, leading to Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda, which are accords among international assistance providers and recipients to promote effectiveness of development cooperation.

The complexity of the structure and characteristics of a national education system and the range of objectives and clienteles served by it make it impossible to put the whole education “sector” into one confining template of external assistance. Even in a sub-sector approach, it has been difficult to bring all components, for example, of all of primary education under a primary education SWAp, as illustrated by PEDP II of Bangladesh,

The critical questions at this time in Bangladesh, as PEDP II winds down and the next phase of primary education development in the country up to 2015 and beyond is shaped, are: How are the government and the development partners positioned to deal with the problems of implementing a relatively comprehensive sub-sector programme and cooperation between governments and external donors for this purpose? What lessons have been learned in this respect? How ready and willing are the government and the development partners to apply the lessons, especially, in conceptualising and designing a comprehensive, coordinated, pragmatic and practical sub-sector primary education programme for the coming years serving all children?

The Second Primary Education Development Programme (2004-2011)

The accomplishments of PEDP II have been mainly in expanding enrolment and providing certain process inputs, the results of which are yet to be evident in greater efficiency of the system, making the system more inclusive and in demonstrating better learning outcomes. The assessment of the primary education authorities of the challenges and constraints brings up three important issues. These are the need for:

- a) Articulating the scope and objectives of the next phase of primary education development,
- b) Deciding on the government’s own organisational structure and mechanisms for planning and managing the development programme, and

- c) Working out and agreeing on the appropriate modality for external assistance to support the national mechanisms.

Table 1 presents a summary of baseline indicators in 2005, the targets that PEDP II set and the figures for those indicators for the latest year. It is clear from the table that PEDP II was not very ambitious in its targets, but even so, most of them have not been met.

Table 1. PEDP II progress on selected indicators

Indicators	2005 Baseline	2009 Target	Latest Year
<i>Gross Enrolment Rate</i>	93.7	98.0	97.9 (2008)
<i>Net Enrolment Rate</i>	87.2	90.0	90.8 (2008)
<i>Repetition Rates</i>	No significant improvement reported over the 2005 baseline rates.		
<i>Dropout Rates</i>	Target was reduction by 2% every year since 2005 in all grades. No significant improvement reported.		
<i>Student Completion rate to Grade 5 (% of Grade 1 entrants)</i>	52	55	52 (2008)
<i>Expenditure on education as % of GNP</i>	1.93	2.80	2.28 (2007)
<i>Expenditure on primary as % of total education</i>	37.1	45	41.0 (2008)
<i>Pupil-Teacher ratio</i>	54:1	48:1	50:1 (2008)
<i>% of students achieving literacy/numeracy in Grade 5*</i>	44/66 (2006)	65/75	63/69 (208)

Source: DPE 2009. Table prepared by author.

* DPE (2009) cautions that these numbers on achievement may not be fully reliable and “should be handled with care”.

The New Education Policy

The new education policy 2010 (Government of Bangladesh, 2010), adopted by parliament, has provisions that are relevant to the next phase of primary education development. These include:

- Free and compulsory primary education up to Grade 8: Proposed changes include a year of pre-

primary and the extension of free, mandatory primary school education to a total of eight years.

- Pre-Primary education: Preschool education for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children, using both formal and non-formal channels, with emphasis on family and community-based programmes.
- Multiple delivery modes in basic education with common core curriculum and standards: The policy recommends mandatory core subjects for primary-level education: Bangla, English, mathematics, Bangladesh studies, social environment and climate change, science and information technology.
- Establishing a core of equivalency: Between public and NGO and private programmes, formal and non-formal basic education, and between general schools and *madrassa*, to ensure comparable quality standards and transferability.
- Teachers' status, incentives and training to improve quality: Teacher development and performance through recruitment, training, professional support and remuneration are the centrepiece of the strategy for improving quality in education. A Teacher Recruitment and Development Commission will be established to recruit teachers in government assisted institutions and support their professional development.
- Improving the quality of basic education: Achievement of recognised and measurable learning outcomes by all in all types of institutions will be ensured, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.
- Governance and management: A consolidated education law will provide a framework for fulfilling the constitutional obligations and policy objectives in education. Management of primary education will be decentralised with greater involvement of community and parents and greater authority for schools.
- Enhanced education resources: The policy calls for public expenditure for education to increase significantly from the present 2.27 percent of GDP.
- The *madrassa* system: *Madrassas* will be reformed to put emphasis on science and information technology, in addition to introduction of the core common curriculum.
- Inclusive education: Enabling all primary school-age children to complete good quality primary

education. Access will focus on reaching the excluded, especially girls, children with special needs, working children, children in difficult circumstances, and children belonging to ethnic minorities or living in remote areas.

Recommendations

The experience of the PEDP II SWAp and the education policy recommendations point to lessons regarding the modality of mobilising resources, managing the programme and building management capacity. Applying these lessons effectively will help accelerate progress towards the 2015 goals and lay the foundation for further rapid advance towards UPE with quality and equity. These include:

1. **A pragmatic and flexible programme approach.** This approach has to adhere to the principle of a comprehensive programme that includes all forms and modes of primary education, including second chance or non-formal provisions, and all children including those with various kinds of special needs, who have the right of access to primary education. The related components of teachers, curricula, infrastructure, learning materials and assessment of learning which also have to be transformed to achieve the quality-with-equity goal in UPE have to be brought into the programme as projects with their own implementation mechanism within a common programme framework.

A flexible Sector-wide Approach (SWAp), building upon PEDP II experience, may have the following major components:

- Project 1: Govt. Primary School Development (Ensuring all project inputs brought together to serve government schools with the programme framework and based on *upazila*-based primary education plan).
- Project 2: RNGPS Development – with the same objective as Project 1
- Project 3: *Ebtedayee Madrasa* Development - with a similar objective as Project 1
- Project 4: Curriculum, Learning Materials and Learning Assessment
- Project 5: Teacher Development and Support
- Project 6: Basic Education Extension to Grade 8
- Project 7: Basic Education Infrastructure Development

- Project 8: Preschool Development
- Project 9: Educational Information and Statistics Capacity
- Project 10: Second Chance Basic Education (NFPE), primary/basic education for extremely vulnerable, hard-to-reach groups (linked with poverty reduction projects, e.g. BRAC's Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty reduction – CFPR)

2. **Conforming to the new education policy as the guide to strategy and action.** The new programme will take full cognisance of the implications of the new education policy, such as, raising primary education to Grade 8 or linkages with a Secondary Education SWAp, should it emerge. Taking into account sufficient post-primary opportunities becomes crucial as the entire cohort of primary students begin to complete the cycle.

3. **Three conditions for making it work.** There are three conditions for making the programme management and cooperation model work. The modalities of cooperation and management cannot help advance the goals of the programme unless a supportive policy environment can be created. Three critical areas need attention in this respect.

- A participatory mechanism for key decisions and oversight. Necessary steps towards consensus-building for the decision-making process and key decisions, the nature of involvement and contribution of NGOs in achieving UPE, and a number of broad policy issues that required decisions from the political level of the government should be given serious consideration by the government and the development partners. The necessary steps and mechanisms need to be developed, taking into account the contextual backdrop, for developing a workable programme approach that can be made to work.

- A major increase in public resources. Substantially greater public resources should be committed within the framework of the sixth five-year plan (2011-15) and the new education policy in order to assure minimum necessary levels of quality with equity. Equally important is the effective use of resources, through, for example, *upazila*-based capitation formulas, decentralised management of resources, and assessing optimal use of scarce resources, a case in point being the spending on stipends. More resources are needed at the school level along with greater discretion with accountability in their use.

The question of affordability must be turned around to ask: – can we afford not to make the necessary investment in education with quality and equity.

- Development and trial of *upazila*-based universal primary education planning and management. A rigorous trial should be designed as a key feature of the new UPE programme. It should involve local government and all service providers in selected *upazilas* of government educational development strategy in order to rationalise provisions for quality basic education for all children with greater authority and accountability of schools and local authorities. School and community-based actions to support the poor, the silently excluded, and overcoming misperception and resistance to the role of non-governmental and community organisations in education should be a part of the development and trial.

References

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