

Topical Report

The Second Primary Education Development Programmeme (PEDP II) Highlights of a Consultation with Civil Society

[Editor's Note: A consultation with the civil society during mid-term review of the Second Primary Education Development Programmeme (PEDP II) was organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and the Education Watch Group at the LGED Auditorium on 5 November 2007. About 120 participants attended from concerned government agencies such as the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), as well as from civil society groups, researchers, development partners, representatives from the print and electronic media, academics, and national and international NGO personnel. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Director of the Institute of Educational Development, BRAC University, who is also a member of the Education Watch Advisory Board.

The account below is not a verbatim report of the meeting, but a summary of key points made in the course of presentations, comments, questions and responses. The highlights of the consultation are published in the journal because of its topical interest.]

I. Welcome Statement

Ms. Rasheda K. Chowdhury, Director of CAMPE expressed her gratitude to the participants of the consultation including the government representatives and development partners. She noted that the consultation was the result of lobbying for such a sharing with the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education during the mid-term review (MTR). She emphasized the importance of forging partnerships to achieve the goals of PEDP II. Civil society groups including NGOs, CBOs, and research organizations and academic organizations can contribute to the success of PEDP II. Since PEDP II was designed with a focus on quality primary education, the attention in all the efforts must be on quality with access and equity, she added. Ms. Chowdhury also asserted that this programme must address the problems of accessibility for disadvantaged children belonging to poor families, living in remote areas, those with special needs, and ethnic groups.

On behalf of the NGOs working in the education sector and of members of civil society, she promised to offer all support to the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) in any aspect of the realization and implementation of PEDP II. The NGOs have expertise, experience and professionalism which should be fully exploited. She further urged that the involvement of civil society should be not just in sharing information, but also in improving the delivery of primary education.

II. PEDP II Progress

Chowdhury Mufad Ahmed, Joint Programme Director, PEDP II, presented the progress made so far in the Second Primary Education Development Programmeme (PEDP II) with an informative and comprehensive PowerPoint presentation.

Mr. Ahmed noted that despite a delayed start, a very complex financing mechanism, and constraints regarding the understanding and implementation procedure of a programme approach, fund utilization in two and a half years has been satisfactory.

He mentioned that, in a formal sense, it may be said that the PEDP II programme has completed its fourth year since its official starting date, but the real implementation period has been the two and half years since the loans became effective. He also noted that PEDP II was the first sector-wide programme in the education sector of Bangladesh. He reported that a large number of personnel were transferred from the PEDP first phase to revenue budget, that a total of 14,200 new assistant teachers were recruited and 10,578 teachers and employees would be recruited in the primary schools by December 2007. Now PEDP II is at the midpoint. So it was not yet the time to make a judgment about the success or the failure of PEDP II.

As noted, a large number of posts has been brought under regular budget and a large number of teacher appointments have been made. Major accomplishments have been recorded in construction of classrooms. Groundwork has also been laid for quality improvement.

The backlog of untrained teachers has been significantly reduced and subject-based training in URCs carried out. Preparation is underway for redesigning the C-in-Ed; and the inclusive education and gender framework has been prepared. School level improvement plan (SLIP) implementation has started on a pilot basis and guidelines for innovation grants have been prepared.

He concluded by mentioning major challenges, including: the need for more systematic attention to quality in construction and operational matters; classroom teaching and learning; applying the inclusive education and gender framework, effectively introducing school level and upazila level planning; developing a better data base for effective monitoring, encouraging capacity building at field and central levels, and ultimately making a real difference in learning outcome of children.

Mr. Ahmed regretted that there has been mis-information and half-truths in some observations from some civil society organisations, and that there has been mis-leading or incomplete reporting in the media. He urged greater balance and fairness in observations and reporting in order to help achieve the goals of PEDP II.

III. Comments by Designated Discussants

After the presentation, four designated discussants gave their views.

Professor Nazmul Haq, IER, Dhaka University

- So far progress in PEDP II is evident in the quantitative areas, but a much greater qualitative emphasis is needed.
- Quality of education is a multidimensional issue; and different aspects need to be addressed simultaneously. For instance, if buildings are constructed but teachers are not deputed, or the curriculum is changed but textbooks remain the same, the goal will not be achieved.
- Reduction of dropout remains a challenge; there is also “virtual exclusion” and low and in-effective contact hours which neutralize the effect of retention.
- Teachers are being trained through different programmes, but it is uncertain whether

the teachers are using the skills in class. The essential conditions for better teaching and learning in class must be created.

- Textbooks are provided, but teachers' guides and workbooks and supplementary reading for teachers and students are virtually absent.
- PTIs and URCs are critical resources for teacher development, but so far no headway has been made in their reform and development.
- Quality primary education is a national agenda; government alone cannot and need not carry the whole burden without the support of all who can and want to contribute.
- If the government would like to benefit from the voices and judgments of civil society and of non-government stakeholders including the academic and research community, an independent advisory committee can be appointed to advise the government on major issues of primary education development. Such a body can provide an objective assessment of potential contribution of non-government actors to achieving the PEDPII goals.

Dr. Shafiqul Islam, Director, Education, BRAC

- Attendance rates of enrolled students are not at an acceptable level and need serious attention.
- Bangladesh has assets and capabilities in non-governmental organizations/institutions which should be used in PEDP II.
- Though PEDP II follows the programme approach in the education sector, there do not appear to be enough provisions for piloting new interventions. BRAC has significant experience in this, as well as a strong mechanism for testing and piloting interventions.
- PEDP II is focused on quality of education; greater emphasis should be on initiatives directly related to quality improvement.
- BRAC Education Programme, which is now some 30 years old, has a wealth of experience in dealing with critical issues in primary education and testing feasible approaches. BRAC remains ready to offer any assistance needed.
- PEDP II needs to seriously review and re-design important components of the teaching and learning process in the classroom in order to achieve its quality objectives.

M. Habibur Rahman, Director, Education, SC-USA

- Quality of education is a national concern. To achieve the goal of quality education, the coordinated effort of the government and NGOs is a must.
- The improvement of quality is dependent on how the community perceive and understand quality. Civil society bodies can be partners in this community involvement process.
- Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), including preschool, is one important and sure answer to problems of quality. Pre-school has been shown to reduce dropout and to increase attendance and completion rates.
- Essentially through NGO efforts, major steps have been taken to extend standard preschool programme to almost a quarter of the eligible children. The Bangladesh Early Childhood Development Network (BEN) has developed a curricular framework for preschool and operational framework for ECD with the encouragement of MOPME and MOWCA, respectively. Shishu Academy, UNICEF and major NGOs active in ECD have also been involved in this effort. Future expansion of preschool and ECD should be based on these models, rather than re-inventing the wheel.
- NGOs have strong capacities in various areas including: non-formal education, pre-school, ECCE and inclusive education. These experiences and capacities must be used by the Government in PEDP II.

- Government should take the initiative, with community and NGO cooperation, in area-based mapping in each upazila of school-age children and the providers of education services and how they match. This is essential for planning and ensuring quality education for all.
- BRAC, Caritas, Save Alliance and others have demonstrated their commitment and taken initiative in serving children with special needs. The education of the disadvantaged children should be prioritized in PEDP II and the NGOs with a track record must be taken as partners.
- The Paris Declaration on harmonization, to which donors and the government are committed, requires that the contribution of all actors, including non-governmental national actors, are encouraged and promoted in a coordinated way.

Dr. M. Ahmadullah Miah, Director, Research and Advocacy, DAM

- The SLIP guidelines and trials draw on some experience from the IDEAL project supported by UNICEF. Although the concept was sound, the earlier effort was not encouraging, because supportive conditions did not exist. These past lessons must be taken into account for school-based planning and improvement of learning.
- The focus of SLIP must be on classroom-based plans for one or two critical steps that teachers, parents and schools can take to keep children in class and help them perform – not on a very elaborate and time-consuming exercise with many rules and procedures. This would only further cut the already limited time which teachers have for teaching. The required actions may also be different in each class and each school.
- SMCs should be strengthened by enhancing their understanding and skills, and the community should be more closely involved in the affairs of the school.
- NGO experience in primary education must be utilised. A case in point is DAM’s primary school support with Plan’s assistance, which has shown promising outcomes.
- Existing teacher training is not producing the desired results. Just chalking up numbers without improving the effectiveness of PTI training is futile. Reform in PTI training has been under consideration for a long time and is moving very slowly. Models and experiences that exist in the country should be utilized to design and trial more effective practical and efficient approaches.
- For the size of the programme and scale of investment in PEDP II, and considering how critical the stakes are, the state of essential data regarding basic indicators – such as net enrolment and dropout – is deplorable. Data collection, generation, analysis and reporting for PEDP II should be more systematic, objective and up-to-date. There are non-government institutions in the country which can help, if asked.

IV. Comments from the Government and Development Partners

In addition to the presentation from the Joint Programmeme Director, the Secretary of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) and the Director General, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) spoke on behalf of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. On behalf of the donors, Ms Hua Du, the ADB Country Director; Steffan Lock of the European Commission, Chair of the PEDPII Donors Consortium; and Brajesh Panth, ADB Programmeme Manger for PEDP II, also spoke.

Mr. M. Musharraf Hossain Bhuiyan, Secretary, MoPME, welcomed the opportunity to have the consultation with civil society and non-government stakeholders of PEDP II. He said that while there were important accomplishments, major challenges remained ahead. He made the following points:

- A dropout rate of 47% was reported in the 2005 baseline survey of PEDPII. A comparison with earlier data showing 33% dropout is not appropriate because the methodology and the coverage base were not the same. More recent data have been collected, but are yet to be processed.
- He was optimistic that that significant progress in primary education of our country would be achieved with the completion of PEDP II.
- The innovative grants provision under PEDP II allows scope for involving NGOs in this programme. The guideline in English is being translated into Bangla to make these more accessible to small NGOs.
- The government is in control of PEDP II and owns the programmeme.. Eleven development partners are supporting the government to implement the programme successfully.
- Because of the delayed start of implementation, the programmeme's duration is likely to be extended by a year.

He also mentioned that the main areas of collaboration with the non-government actors may be inclusive education, participation in innovation grant, and preschool education. He expressed his support for more frequent consultation and sharing of information with the civil society and non-government actors in education.

Ms Hua Du, Country Director, ADB, was pleased that the consultation had been arranged. She made the following points:

- First round innovative grants have been awarded to 10 NGOs to address mostly access related issues. There is now an understanding that this will have to be expanded in the second round for more NGOs to participate more widely.
- Inclusive education strategies and action plans have been approved and the focus is now on implementation. This will open up opportunities for greater interaction and better involvement with NGOs, some of which are doing excellent work.
- The draft policy for early childhood education (preschool education) was prepared with extensive collaboration of NGOs. This will continue to provide more opportunities at the implementation level.
- For the first time, MOPE/DPE organized an interaction with civil society organizations in July 2007. This type of interaction needs to be regular in order to exchange views and benefit from each other. Another interaction was organized by the NGOs in September 2007, where MOPME and DPE officials as well as DPs participated.
- PEDP II is a programme approach and is in a stage of transition. All of us are learning. MoPME/DPE have begun to respond to some of the concerns of CSOs. There is now more information sharing in different forms. DPE has established its website and also one for PEDP II. The progress report is available on the website. CSOs should continue to provide feedback to help improve it.
- As we move forward with PEDP II, more opportunities would be evolving. The government is trying to scale-up school level improvement plans (SLIPs) and upazila primary education plans (UPEPs). This will also open up opportunities to collaborate and develop partnership in different forms at the field level where it will be possible to jointly address the challenges of providing quality education to all.
- It is important that this interaction is taking place at the time of the MTR. Constructive feedback from civil society will be helpful in enhancing the implementation of PEDP II.

It is also important to learn from each other by appreciating the constraints and challenges of both parties. The open dialogue must therefore continue.

V. Comments/suggestions from the floor

Comments were made and questions were posed by the audience from the floor. The highlights are noted below.

- PEDP II is covering only formal education, but excludes the madrasa and other complementary activities such as youth and adult literacy, or second chance opportunities.
- PEDP II should address the unaddressed issues relating to the EFA national plan of action and relevant elements of the PRSP and MDGs.
- Quality education requires quality teachers, but work on the development of teachers in PEDP II has not been given due urgency. PTIs provide training in two shifts which takes teachers away from schools which are already short of teachers. Could provision be made for substitute teachers when teachers are in training or on long leave?
- Quality teachers are being recruited under PEDP II; and improvement in this area is much appreciated. However, the capable teachers are not continuing in teaching due to poor salary and benefits.
- Currently teachers are getting in-service training after joining, which is a waste of public money. Teachers can be recruited from those who have already completed the PTI training.
- Textbook quality should be enhanced and complemented by other learning aids, such as teacher's guides and supplementary materials.
- Attention must be given to changing the teaching-learning transaction in the classroom. Systematic involvement in PEDP II is essential to those, including NGO education programmes, which can offer practical experience in bringing about such change.
- Teacher-student contact hours should be increased and the classroom environment should be improved, along with manageable class sizes.
- Tangible and substantial progress should be made in inclusive education without further delay. Replication of the wide range of good practices that exist, especially in NGO programmes, must be given priority.
- The gender framework that has been prepared should be put into action without delay. This should be done with the involvement of all who have some experience in this area and can contribute to implementation.
- Community and culture-based education programmes should be developed and should reach every child. Teaching and learning materials in ethnic languages are essential to serve children of these minorities.

VI. More DP and Government Comments

Dr. Stefan Lock, Chair, PEDP II Consortium, noted that the MTR is going on and the implementation process and the framework is under scrutiny. Listening to the voices of Civil Society Organisations (CSO) and understanding the importance of involving CSOs in the implementation of PEDP II in achieving the goal of the programme was a very meaningful experience. All have spoken about the need for joint efforts of the government, NGOs and others. He was hopeful that in the near future this desired collaboration would be stronger.

Mr. Lock saw several areas for working together by government and other actors:

- Reviewing and dialoguing about progress
- Reality check provided from the stakeholders' point of view
- Substantial quality interventions, e.g., implementing SLIP and teaching in ethnic languages
- Technical consultancy through institutional partnership; especially with academic and research institutions
- Collaboration in research and analytical work.

Mr. Brajesh P. Panth, Programme Manager, PEDP II, ADB, said that quality education is an important issue not only for the government but also for development partners. Developing new education materials, classroom learning systems, and other key issues relating to quality enhancement are the priority in providing support. The development partners are optimistic about addressing these issues and bringing about good outcomes.

Mr. Khondoker Md. Asaduzzaman, Director General, DPE, who is also the Programme Director of PEDP II, said that the issue of inclusive education is very important, and that DPE expects to start implementing the framework that has been developed in the coming year. Double shift training in PTIs is also a concern, and training of teachers in single shift will take place very soon. He mentioned that a committee has prepared recommendations regarding changes in the C-in-Ed primary teacher training course in PTIs and this has been presented to MOPME. A decision is expected to be taken and implemented shortly.

The Bangla textbook for Class I, which was subject to criticism, is being revised according to recommendations compiled with the assistance of CAMPE. A new textbook prepared by NCTB will be available for the 2009 academic year.

Benefits to teachers have recently been increased, but the benefits do not cover all teachers to the same degree and this is a big concern. Quality education is not achievable within a day, it needs time. Every one should understand this and have patience.

Mr Asaduzzaman said that it would not be wise or proper to conclude that PEDP is a failed programme. We should wait, he said, until the completion of the programme, because everyone involved in DPE and in the programme are working hard to achieve results; and they are confident about making substantial progress.

The Director General said that any major change in PEDPP II in respect of collaboration with non-government actors or in the implementation mode cannot be expected, because of the limitations of the operational procedures and rules of the government. He added that this type of consultation would definitely help in setting priorities and also changing the wrong ones towards a positive direction.

VII. Concluding Comments by the Chair

Dr. Manzoor Ahmed, Director, BU-IED, and the moderator of the consultation, remarked that the principal stakeholders of PEDP II were the government, the development partners and the civil society bodies including, parents, teachers, communities and education NGOs. They were represented in force in the consultation. To have this consultation taking place during the MTR was a milestone. The remaining challenge is to go beyond consultation and

sharing, which must continue, but actually to begin working together, and allowing all who can, to contribute to achieve the goals. The Mid-Term Review should be an opportunity to consider course correction for the second half of the programme and also to start thinking about longer term needs. He did not expect radical changes immediately, but said that many barriers to change are in the mindset, and the occasion for necessary changes that the MTR provided should not be lost.

In summing up the comments and discussion, the chair went on to underscore the following points:

- A research and development strand should be built within PEDP II for quality improvement interventions, and the implementation framework, including the content and the mechanism of PP, should be modified accordingly. This should be a key outcome of MTR.
- Education NGOs with a strong track record, as well as research institutions and capacities in the county should be utilized in main quality intervention areas including classroom pedagogy, teacher training and support, learning materials, and enhancing the accountability of schools. NGO involvement should not be confined to the marginal innovation grants, which are still to be started in full swing.
- Teacher's guides and workbooks and essential learning materials other than textbooks should be provided to teachers and students. There is no plausible reason for not doing so without any delay. A large number of materials, already developed by NGOs and academic institutions and based on the official curriculum, are available for immediate use.
- Primary teacher training needs to be more practical and effective. The National Academy of Primary Education and the PTIs can work collaboratively with national institutions and NGOs to adapt methods and materials that have been developed and tried.
- Core school provisions and teaching-learning standards anticipated in PEDP II are critical for better student performance. UPEP is an important mechanism for this purpose. Piloting on a small scale in each division should be undertaken for planning, decision-making, and greater local control over resources. Full use should be made of committed and capable NGOs and academic institutions in piloting, research and development.
- Development of URCs as a genuine resource base for supporting teachers and schools is a key quality intervention, but is not easy to implement effectively. URC work should also be in tandem with the support and supervision work of upazila education staff. Building a resource team around the URC and making it work should involve NGOs and research institutions.
- The belated piloting of the School Level Improvement Plan is burdened by elaborate guidelines and procedures. As it is currently designed, it appears to be unworkable because it is too demanding of teachers' scarce time and the requirements are utterly disproportionate to the small amount of funds to be paid to schools. It should be a means for engaging teachers and parents seriously in a simple and specific action focused on a specific result, such as, reducing dropout and improving performance by a certain proportion of those who lag behind. Trials designed properly and undertaken collaboratively with appropriate research institutions could show the way.
- NGOs should be supported and encouraged to expand pre-schools, already begun on a sizeable scale by them -- especially for first-generation learners from disadvantaged families.
- An independent committee composed of people with relevant backgrounds, and active in education, should be considered for advising the government, especially with regard to

working in cooperation with all who can contribute to achieving the primary education goals.

Dr Ahmed said that it was not too early to begin exploring issues that cannot be addressed within the scope of PEDP II, but are critical for primary education development and achieving the EFA 2015 goals. These include:

- Developing, through consultation with stakeholders, minimum standards for school provisions and a common core curriculum for all children and all types of primary schools, including madrasas, in order to establish a unified primary education system, although there may be diversity in the delivery of services.
- Extending universal primary education up to grade eight.
- Rethinking public education resources. For example, substantially increasing these resources; allocating these on the basis of well-considered and transparent criteria including child population in each upazila, and utilizing these to achieve quality and equity objectives based on local, decentralised and school-level planning.
- Exploring and developing new modalities of partnerships among government and non-government actors in the country as well as with external partners, to develop and implement strategies to achieve the educational for all goals and build capacities for this purpose.

The chair thanked everyone for organising and participating in this event. He expressed the confidence that the consultation and sharing of information will continue. He also hoped that this would lead to partnerships in action among all actors in education to achieve the goals in primary education.