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The Analytical Review On Primary School Drop-Outs

A report was recently launched at the BRAC Centre auditorium entitled "Access to education in Bangladesh: Country analytic review of primary and secondary education." Described as an inception phase output of the International Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE), of which BRAC University-Institute of Educational Development (BU-IED) is a partner, it says that, without a reliable bench mark for an important indicator like drop out or completion rate, any kind of planning or setting targets for Millennium Development Goals (MDG) or Education for All (EFA) would be faulty.

That is but to state the obvious, as the report tells us because the "virtual or silent exclusion from engagement in learning of those who continue to be enrolled nominally is as serious a problem as open exclusion." Yet as the report says, this phenomenon remains largely un-investigated and un-qualified. Elizabeth Carriere, acting head of DFID while addressing the launching ceremony of the report said, "poverty has to be addressed to achieve educational goals (as) poverty is the most serious barrier to achieving the educational goals." Stressing the need for poverty eradication she said the DFID would however, continue its co-operation in the education sector of Bangladesh.

A release of an assessment on primary education gave us an insight into the state of education because it said only 2 percent of pupils in primary schools meet the criterion expected of them after a continuous five years. The high number of dropouts and the slide back into total illiteracy troubled the report's authors. The report entitled "Education Watch" said, 40 percent of children aged between six to ten years in the country did not get the full benefit from primary education. Moreover 20 percent of children do not take admission in schools at all, and one-fourth of those who do get admitted, drop out at a later date. The rest spend six to seven years completing the five-year course but even then, at the end of this period, most do not meet the criterion of the national curriculum on primary education in respect of mathematics, English and general knowledge.

Three years ago the government gave the go-ahead for a six-year project to improve the standard of education in the primary sector and to broaden the educational service. Although this implied a massive overhaul of the sector, judging from the new report, very little, if anything, has been achieved. But Bangladesh, as a signatory to the Dakar declaration of "Education for All by 2015" is committed to providing education to all children. What emerges from these reports is that the most essential question is how to keep children in school up to class five and beyond because if we fail, we fail the secondary sector too. But if education is the foundation of sustainable development and reduction of poverty it must be clearly "up to the mark." If we are to reach our goal, measures must be taken to restore excellence in this sector, which can only be achieved when the general level of primary schooling is of an accepted standard. Although the targets for the Millennium Development Goals sound impressive, eradicating poverty and achieving universal primary education are unfortunately, two sides of the same coin and one cannot be achieved without the other. Surely the proverbial chicken and egg story of which comes first?

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