

ALLOCATION FOR EDUCATION

Still lagging behind

The allocation for education, about 2.4 per cent of the gross domestic product, as proposed in the national budget for the 2016–17 financial year is not sufficient even for the implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 and the National Skills Development Policy. The allocation is still less than what it is in other developing and SAARC countries, writes Md Mostafizur Rahaman

IT FEELS nice to see that after a long time, the budgetary allocation for education has increased at a time in amount and in percentage of the national budget proposed for the 2016–17 financial year. Since 2011, the budgetary allocation for education had increased only in amount but the allocation in effect had declined in percentage of the total outlay, hovering around 10 to 11 per cent of the total budget outlay. This year, the government has broken with the tradition and increased the allocation by 32 per cent.

The finance minister on June 2 proposed budget for the 2016–17 financial year in the parliament where he allocated Tk 49,009 crore for education (Tk 26,847 crore for the education ministry and Tk 22,162 crore for the primary and mass education ministry) which is 2.4 per cent of the gross domestic product and 14.38 per cent of the total outlay. In general, the allocation for education increased by about 32 per cent on the last budget figure.

The education sector employs a huge number of employees. In 2015, the government introduced the 8th pay-scale for all employees, which come down to almost double the 7th pay scale. The education ministry has 4,77,221 teachers-employees of 26,070 non-government educational institutions under the monthly pay order scheme. To pay for their additional salaries, as laid down by the 8th pay scale, the government will need to shell out around Tk 7,195 crore more a year (other government employees working in the education sector including teachers of government primary schools, high schools, colleges and other institutions are not calculate taken into account).

In addition to this, in 2013, the government nationalised 26,192 registered non-government primary schools with 104,000 teachers which account for 69 per cent more of the previous schools and 48 per cent more of teachers as well. The government did not allocate proportionate money for the salary of the newly nationalised teachers and the maintenance and construction of schools but the government paid the money. So, it is a general perception that the money for the salary and the maintenance of newly nationalised primary schools was spent from money meant for other subheads such as teacher training, research and materials, among other. As a result, the quality suffered.

From 2009, the government had taken a number of innovative initiatives which proved effective. As a result, progress could be made in access



— ADB/Abir Abdullah

and gender equity. More children now go to primary schools. The primary enrolment rate (net) increased from 87.2 per cent in 2005 to 97.7 per cent in 2014. The overall dropout rate also reduced to 20.9 per cent in 2014 whereas it was 47.2 per cent in 2005. Data indicate an increase in the number of students in classrooms. But the question is: does this allocation increase proportionately taking into consideration the increase in the number of students? We did not see any such reflection in our previous budgets. It tends to show that the per capita allocation for student has decreased over these years.

Many may think that the education sector is getting adequate attention as the budgetary allocation for education has increased by 32 per cent in comparison with the past financial year. It is also, however, necessary to take away the effects of inflation to deduce how much the education budget has increased in effect. If the salary of the employees, which has increased by way of the 8th pay scale, is calculated, the present allocation appears to have increased not more than 10–12 per cent, as opposed to 32 per cent.

The allocation is, however, not sufficient even for the implementation of the National Education Policy 2010 and the National Skills Development Policy. The proposed budgetary allocation for education in the 2016–17 financial year is about 2.4 per cent of the gross domestic product, which is less than what it is in other develop-

ing and SAARC countries. Countries such as India (3.8 per cent), Vietnam (6.6 per cent), Malaysia (5.9 per cent), Thailand (7.6 per cent) and Nepal (more than 4.7 per cent) spend more on education in ratio of the gross domestic product than Bangladesh does. It is still also less than half of the UNESCO recommendation for 6 per cent of the gross domestic product. As a signatory to education-related international treaties, Bangladesh expressed commitment to allocate 20 per cent of the total budget outlay or 6 per cent of the gross domestic product for education. But the allocation for education is still far from the committed target. The present allocation is almost a half of the minimum standard of the Muscat agreement recommendation (a minimum of 4–6 per cent of the gross national product of the total government spending). So, we still lag behind the global standard in investment in education.

In the present situation, it is not be possible to spend 6 per cent of the gross domestic product on education overnight. But it should be at least 4 per cent of the gross domestic product laid down in the national education policy. In the current practice, a major portion of the allocation is spent on salary, infrastructure development, management purposes, etc. Very little of the allocation is left for the development of education quality, including effective education materials, teacher training, library and research, etc. If the affairs continue to be in such a

state, the country will not be able to fulfil its international commitment. At the same time, the country will not achieve the national target of quality education and, finally, the nation will be suffering for long.

It is very important to allocate adequate resources for education and to ensure effective development of the quality of education. Education is a vital component of human development. It has a significant role in reducing poverty in various ways. The allocation for this sector should, therefore, be increased proportionately and the allocation used efficiently. Research has shown that higher investment in education can have a positive effect on the growth of economy. It is important for Bangladesh to increase its education expenditure. As the benefits of education can accompany a time lag, it is essential to increase investments in education immediately.

The proposed budget for education is hopeful but the government needs to keep at it so that the trend moves towards the international practice of allocating 4–6 per cent of the gross domestic product and 20 per cent of the total budget outlay. But it has to do this within the next three years, by 2018. At the same time, the government should pay attention to ensuring an optimum use of the allocated money.