

# Financing Primary Education

—Dr. Hafez Ahmed

It has long been felt by almost all that Primary Education (Basic Education) be given the national priority. Besides, in many countries of the world including Bangladesh it has been a constitutional obligation to give the minimum package of learning to all citizens of the country. Though it is quite difficult for the developing countries to fulfil this obligation overnight efforts must be made honestly to achieve this objective within a reasonable time span. The educational planners should come forward to change their attitude of traditional educational planning and instead think of changes conducive to the fulfilment of the national obligation and achievement of national objectives in the field of Primary Education.

The minimum package of learning varies from country to country. For a developing country like Bangladesh this minimum package may for the time being be limited to A.S.K.—attitude skill and knowledge. By attitude we mean 'positive attitude' i.e. a citizen must be imbued with the ideal that the country is his and the sovereignty of the country comes first and his 'self' comes second. He must be given the idea that he should involve himself in the over-all deve-

lopment of the country and work for the benefit of others and ensure that his activities may not harm others. Professional skill required at the particular level must be given to all so that one can efficiently discharge his professional duties. One should be given knowledge to the minimum extent that he could read, write and comprehend simple calculations. He may be able to read newspapers in his own national language so that he knows his own environment and the various events taking place in the country.

This minimum package of learning may be given to a person in two ways: the formal way and the non-formal way. In a developing country like ours, giving this package in non-formal way is rather difficult. So, the formal way of giving this package is the best one at present. In the circumstances now obtaining in the country formal education from Class I-V or schooling for the children of 6+ to 10+ years is the minimum standard by which this basic learning package may be given provided that the curriculum is developed in such a way that a dropout at the end of this course may be regarded as an investment to the society. The Financing of Primary

Education in Bangladesh raises a series of questions before us. The fundamental questions are as follows: (a) Economics of Education (b) Democratization of Education and (c) Financial Analysis.

a) While considering the economics of education it is to be kept in view that we have to achieve maximum objectives with available resources such as money, men, machines, managerial and technical skill and capacities. We shall have to consider the limitation of resources and compete for allocation with other sectors of development such as agriculture, industry, health etc. and within education itself primary education is to compete with secondary, special and higher education. The efficient and effective use of allocation in this sector only can establish the claim for its enhancement.

In order to compete with other sectors the educational planner is to establish that education is not only consumption but investment it is an agent of national development and education uses its resources with maximum efficiency and imagination. Soviet economist Strumilin has established that after four years of primary education a worker's output and wages were 79 per cent higher than those of a

first category worker who has had no schooling. This has been proved in many other cases also and as such it is established that education not only competes favourably with but gets priority over other objectives of the government. In the domain of education again the primary education gets the top-priority because the rate of return studies conducted in several countries has shown that primary education gives a higher rate of return than secondary or higher education. Of course, for this we cannot undermine secondary or higher education, those may be given second preference considering the limited resources of the country.

b) Many of the newly independent Asian nations adopted the classical liberal philosophy placing their faith in education as 'the great equaliser'. This policy was adopted with belief that education would help them to remove the vestiges of their oppressed, disunited and unjust colonial past. For this, the educational plans sought to achieve the goal of universal primary education within the shortest possible time span. Bangladesh is no exception to this policy. The equalizing effect may be felt in three different realms, economic, social

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structure and political unity. In the economic realm majority of the poor and underprivileged may be financed from the taxes levied on the middle and upper strata of the income pyramid. This may bring a considerable redistribution of wealth. In the social realm the universal primary education being open and free may give brighter children from poorer sections a chance to be in the social hierarchy. In the political realm, equal educational opportunity for all will reduce the religious, regional, linguistic or ethnic allegiance and bring about political unity, the most needed thing in a developing country. Education does change the mind, creeds and values of the people, providing equal educational opportunities is rather a problem area. This is because our established system of statistics and data collection fails to provide information on economic and social origin of students, rural-urban education differential and status of different racial or religious groups or ethnic minorities.

Gross inequalities in educational provision still exist between social and economic classes. This is not because government efforts are lacking for creating equal opportunities in the field of education. In many Asian countries, especially in Bangladesh, the government, despite many difficulties, is trying in a sustained way to spread education in rural areas backward and inaccessible remote places, tribal and different ethnic groups. However, the soaring educational expenditure especially in the primary sector is or meant only for 'elitist urban education' but for the extensive and expensive network of educational facilities for the entire rural areas.

Another important aspect of the existence of inequalities in educational opportunities is that the educational planners tend to underestimate the difference that equal access to education does not mean equal access or equal opportunity does not ensure equal results. The basic question of redistribution of allocation for different levels of education must be given importance. At present per capita expenditure for primary education is about even U.S. dollars per annum whereas the per capita expenditure for university education is about 237 U.S. dollars and university education certainly distributes wealth in favour of the high-income groups. This inverted pyramid has to be rebuilt.

of Education. The analysis of student flow, logically starts at the point where students enter an educational cycle. Considering an ideal cohort of student flow from Class I-V where there is no possibility of dropouts or repeaters 100% students enrolled at Class I are the completers at Class-V. Of course this ideal situation does never exist in developing countries especially in Bangladesh.

If the condition presently existing in Bangladesh is taken to be ideal then we are to cater for about 12.00 million students from Class I-V in 1984. This projection has been made from 1974 census and on the basis of 6+ to 10+ years age group population and also on the assumption that all are retained in the primary schools. Of course, in actuality about 25-30% (completers of Class-V) is the usual figure in Bangladesh.

If financing of primary education is to be based on the ideal figure then we are to create facilities for imparting primary education to 12.00 million children in 1984 and allocation of funds is to be made accordingly for this purpose. Ideally, we require about 45,000 primary schools on the basis of one school per 2000 population and about 2,40,000 teachers (ratio 1:50). Besides, we need the required administrative machinery to manage the system.

Reckoning on the basis of the above figures for 1984 we need approximately Tk. 201.00 crore for teachers' pay alone (@ Tk 700/- for each teacher per month). For provision of other facilities such as repair or renovation of existing schools, construction of new schools and for providing necessary educational equipment we need Tk. 50,000/- per school. The total expenditure for 45,000 schools come to Tk. 225.00 crore grand total comes to about Tk. 426.00 crore annually. The actual allocation for the financial year 1983-84 is about Tk. 157.00 crore under the revenue head and Tk. 66.00 crore in the development budget. It would appear that compared with the need shown

above, the budget allocation for primary education is far too inadequate.

In connection with financing primary education in Bangladesh it is necessary to have an idea about various educational resources. To forecast educational resources availability for education, a planner needs more reliable data on (i) the total public educational expenditure of the country, (ii) the total government budget of the country, (iii) the gross domestic product or national income, (iv) the total private investment in education and (v) the total amount of foreign aid the education sector receives.

It is essential to examine the sources of previous expenditure on education and also to think of other potential sources yet relatively untapped. In most countries sources of financing education have become almost prototype so much so that efforts towards tapping newer sources for financing education are almost forgotten. But a broad and unprejudiced outlook may open up a variety of ways in which to find new resources for education. The following may be the probable sources for financing primary education in Bangladesh:—A) General Revenue 1) General taxes (a) on income and wealth (b) business taxes, 2) Customs duties; 3) Fees licenses, etc. B) Earmarked Revenue 1) Earmarked taxes, 2) Loans 3) State Lotteries 4) Commandeered labour C) School fees 1) Donations (Private corporate or from abroad) 2) Loans a) from the private sector b) from the public sector D) Voluntary labour.

Before we conclude, it seems essential to lay emphasis on the fact that primary education, being an investment rather than mere consumption and giving much higher return than any other level of education deserves to receive adequate financial attention from public as well as private sources. Besides, it is also imperative to tap unconventional sources in order to meet our financial needs in primary education which is responsible for acceleration of development in all other sectors.

Considering the different constraints in providing equal educational opportunities and in ensuring equal success we may consider three options: (a) concentration on expansion of facilities for primary education, (b) introduction of 'positive discrimination' in the field of primary education, (c) democratization of education.

Expansion of facilities especially in the field of primary education includes more school buildings more softwares for resources availability for education, a planner needs more training of teachers and administrators. This will ensure more access to primary education and also retention of the students in the system. The gross ratio must be taken that this national income, (iv) the total private investment in education and (v) the total amount of foreign aid the education sector receives.

'Positive discrimination' is needed to provide broader facilities to the poor and backward groups to compete on equal footing with others, more fortunate children. For this compensatory education as it is sometimes called, takes care of special programmes arrangements for having special remedial classes, waiving of entrance requirements and also providing economic assistance. These are to be done for strengthening the ability of the weaker parts of the population.

Democratization of education may be achieved through long access, diversified contributions and participation of masses in educational decision-making. This process would ensure, in the case of primary education all legal or social discriminations, treatment by accepting the differentiation in learning opportunities, methods and contents and allowing active participation of learners in the decision-making processes at all levels of educational activities.

Before entering in-depth financial analysis, we have some idea about 'Flow Into The System'

The Ship