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Fertility Target Achievements

Implications For Primary School Population

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FACTORS that slow population growth through reductions in fertility create opportunities at both household and national levels that have positive implications for education, health and labour and capital markets. This article investigates the reduction in fertility and its implications on the size of primary school age population and consequently costs involved in running the programme. Various studies conducted in recent years suggest that average children born per woman has been declining since 1975. The decline was faster since 1985. This information implies that if the decline in fertility is real, the total size of the primary school population should be lower in the 1990s. It would be even lower by the beginning of the next century.

As the Bangladesh population moves toward replacement level fertility (a two child family) the government should improve their capacities to invest in health education and infrastructure development. On the other hand if the decline in fertility is not a real one then a high proportion of school age children (characteristics of high fertility) undoubtedly will put pressure on existing schools and health care facilities. When school enrollments and average educational attainment increase rapidly government can expect upward pressure on national educational budgets. In the light of the above, the purpose of this article is to estimate the effects of fertility reductions on the size of school age population and consequently its effects on the budget.

Education is a corner stone of economic growth and social development and a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals and primary education is its foundation. Many researches demonstrate that children in large families tend to be less nourished over the long term, which can undermine-school performance and hence future earnings potential. Studies also show that on average children from smaller families attain higher levels of schooling. It has been recognized that human resources development through education, better health and family welfare makes important contribution to poverty alleviation. This is because education is considered as the best investment in human resources development. Investments in education particularly female education contribute to decline in infant mortality and maternal mortality, improve maternal and child health by allowing spacing of births. There has been an increasing recognition from the Government of Bangladesh that Universal Primary Schooling is not only a prerequisite to the achievement of alleviating illiteracy but, more importantly an essential aspect of basic human development. Education is also fundamental to reducing both individual and national poverty. School enrollment especially primary schooling for literacy, is a means to achieving the inter linked development goals of health, higher labour productivity and more rapid economic growth. It has been realized that investments in schooling should be top priority for a sustainable human development. Since overall literacy level is still low in Bangladesh, particular emphasis has been given on primary level investment and on investment in girl's education where gender gaps in education in general are large.

Education of the children benefits the parents, other family members and the society at large. Quality primary school education enhances individul capabilities to stay healthy, earn a livelihood, have an effective voice in the community. Parent can be benefited at their old ages from children's schooling through higher family income, economic support and higher social status. Society gains as well, through increase in productivity and income and through reductions in population growth.

Because of greater emphasis, as well as, introduction of specific interventions, the primary school enrollment rate has increased over the last decade. According to the Health and Demographic Survey (HDS) overall enrollment in primary school in 1995 was over 74 per cent. Gender gap still exists although it is narrowing down. The male and female school enrollment rates were 80.7 per cent and 73.4 per cent respectively in 1995. Of those who enrolled in primary schools about 17 per cent dropout during the five years schooling period. The difference in dropout rate between boys and girls students was more than 2 percentage points (15.3 per cent boys dropped from school as against 17.6 per cent girls). Adult literacy rate was about 43 per cent in 1995; 50 per cent for males and 34.2 for females. In the 1980s Bangladesh was considered as a country having one of the lowest literacy rates and one of the lowest school attendance rates. Gender gap in literacy was sharply evident. About 70 per cent of the females aged 15 years and above could not read and write. The net enrollment rate for the 6–11 years old was below 50 per cent. Between 1990-97 social mobilization has made a significant contribution to raising primary school enrollment rates and literacy.

In the light of above our aim is to see the implications of fertility targets on the goal of primary education. Because of the variations in fertility—the size of school age population will also vary. Generally six years old children are eligible for school enrollment. Although censuses can provide the six years old primary school students population but because of age reporting problems eligible school age population can not be easily determined. It has been found that those who enter into primary school is consisted of several ages such as 5, 6, 7 and 8 years. Under different fertility assumptions eligible potential school population can be estimated for different years. If fertility target is achieved by 2005 years the size of grade one will decline from 3.78 million in 1997 to 3.47 million in 2005. There will be a decline of about 8 per cent of the grade one primary students. Similarly total primary school students were also estimated from 1997 to 2005 years. Because of declining fertility and primary school population will also decline. In 1997 the size of school primary population was 14.5 million and this will decline to 11.1 million a reduction of 24 per cent between 1997 and 2005.

Fertility decline has an almost immediate impact on education budgets. Fewer births mean fewer children entering school a few years down the line. If the education budget remains constant, their expenditure per school age child be higher. Alternatively a reduced share of national income can be invested in education without reducing expenditures per child. If the target fertility achieved in time their increasing funds available for education can be used either to improve or expand the schooling system or a combination of both. The cost considerations for primary school and its implications are also considered. The cost per student from 1997 to 2010 is also estimated. The cost per student is estimated on the basis of the assumption of the observed cost. The observed information on cost for three years is averaged as obtained from the statistical year book of Bangladesh, 1995 and this average cost is assumed to continue in the future. It is also assumed that there will be 5 per cent (modest) inflation for each year beginning from 1993. The effect of fertility reduction on the cost is also taken into consideration. For 1992 the per student cost is estimated from the available information (revenue +development education expenditure). The result suggests that in 1997 the cost per student was Tk 1301 and it will increase to Tk 2454 in 2010. If replacement level fertility is reached by 2005 the total cost will be lower by over Tk 8 billion in 2010. On the other hand if 40 per cent fertility target is reached then there will be additional requirement of over Tk 8 billion to continue present enrollment rate. There will be difference in the size of the primary school students also. The difference in the size of primary school students between the two scenarios will be 3.35 million (16.32 million students as opposed to 12.97 million students in 2010). This result presents the impact of past fertility interventions undertaken in the previous five-year plans. It also implies the programmatic intervention should continue otherwise the impact will not sustain. The lower size of the primary school students will imply lower social costs such as less expenditure on health, education, family planning, housing etc. This also suggests demand for employment will be reduced in future. The other positive benefits of the education are that it has direct positive effects on earnings, farm productivity and human fertility as well as intergenerational effects on child health, nutrition and education. The social effects of education are also positive. It increases the women's age at marriage which has indirect effect on fertility. Women with more schooling may develop higher expectations for their own children's schooling.

Available limited information suggests that dropout is still an important factor for the low primary graduation. The economic conditions as well as poverty has been identified as the major reasons for dropout. Local, social economic, cultural factors also affect school enrollments. Social and religion tradition particularly affect the enrollment of girls. Some studies found that absence of toilet facilities for girls separately are closely related to irregular attendance of girls students and consequently they fail in the examinations and dropout from school. Besides, household roles and responsibilities, distance of school and absence of female teachers are also contributing to the low enrollment rate and dropout of the girls students.

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