

Education for all

A new approach called for

We have achieved a decline in dropout rates among school-going children and gender parity between the girl and boy child. The time has come to take stock of where we stand in terms of meeting the Millennium Development Goal (MDG): education for all by 2015.

A quantum leap is not all there is to the challenge, it is the quality of education that is of equal, if not greater importance, given that we have to, beyond fending for ourselves, stay in contention in a highly competitive global context.

The dialogue on "achieving universal primary education with quality and equity" held jointly by the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) at the Brac Centre resonated well with us. But this is just a small beginning by way of flagging off, what we would like to see, a wider and more intensive discourse on the subject such as is designed to nudge all concerned into a fresh bid to achieve education outreach to all by 2015.

Clearly, we have reached a watershed in terms of taking universal primary education forward. Truly, we have reached a saturation point in terms of NGO, and broadly private sector success, with different models and modules having been tried out, let alone the prosaic and none-too-successful governmental efforts. Overall, quality has had a question mark dangling.

A radical improvement will be dependent upon professional management of schools, turning out quality teachers in adequate numbers with better salary prospects, re-equipping schools, and markedly increasing the average school hours for students in which we compare very negatively with the neighbouring countries -- preferably through private-public partnership.

We have to roll back the curse of child marriage, if we are to build on the declining trend in dropout. The local bodies, communities, woman and child welfare activist groups have made a modicum of dent in the situation through their sensitisation programmes. They need to redouble their efforts. As for male child dropout triggered by the need felt among the parents for assistance of their children to make a livelihood, we suggest three commonsensical steps: one, convincing parents about the dividends of primary education and persuading them to spare their wards for a few hours only; two, having exclusive shifts for them; and three, providing them with cash incentive or a meal at school. To enhance access to schooling, the several streams of primary education will have to be reduced to a rational number.