

Boys lag behind girls in secondary education

WB report calls for reforms in stipend programme

UNB, Dhaka

Stipend programmes at the secondary level need to be reformed immediately as the spectacular growth in female secondary education has put boys at a distinct disadvantage, making the national goal to achieve gender equality a far cry.

A World Bank report titled 'Whispers to Voices: Gender and Social Transformation in Bangladesh' revealed the findings.

The report, released on

Thursday, said the government needs to be cognizant of this new challenge without any further delay and scholarship programmes at the secondary level should be redesigned to make it more equitable.

It found that boys enrollment at all levels is lower than that of girls except when they get to grade 11 and the incentives of the Female Secondary School Stipend Programme (FSSSP), which provides cash support to girls from grades 6-10, no longer applies.

The WB report said one of major issues confronting policymakers and practitioners in Bangladesh today is the "boys left behind" phenomenon.

It said some recent studies have addressed this issue and hypothesised that the causes for this lie in the direct and indirect effects of the FSSSP.

"Adolescent boys are less likely to remain in school and more likely to do wage work following the introduction of the stipend scheme. Thus parents may have

decided to send adolescent girls to school and adolescent boys to work in response to the financial incentives created by the stipend programme," the report said.

It said the relative fall in enrolment of boys in coeducational schools suggest that the FSSSP aided the process of closing gender gap not solely by raising female enrolment, but also in an unintended way by cutting back on the participation of boys in secondary schools.

Quoting some other studies, the WB report said discrimination against women in the labour market may also play a part. Thus if a daughter's job prospects are lower than son's and the FSSSP is providing a monetary incentive to families to keep girls in school, families would choose to keep the daughter in school and send the son to work.

Education researchers described such emerging concerns as strong barriers to the path of achieving balanced development of gender equality.

"In such a situation where boys' attendance to schools is decreasing, the government and other agencies concerned should redesign the development programmes without delay," said Sheikh Shahbaz Riad, who is working for the development of secondary education.

He said there are thousands of boys in the country who are too poor to go to school. "Without ensuring their enrollment, we cannot expect a balanced, sustainable development. The government can arrange stipend programmes for such poor boys too," he added.