

Unesco: Progress and crisis

QUAZI FARUQUE AHMED

UNESCO celebrated its 69th year amid at least two important events of far reaching international implications. Firstly the loss of voting rights by the United States and Israel on 8th of November because of their non payment of the due arrears of Unesco. Secondly Irina Bokova has been elected Director General of Unesco for a second term at the 37th General Conference on November 12.

"Teachers are the single most influential and powerful force for equity, access and quality in education," says Irina Bokova. The main challenge faced by the teaching profession is both one of numbers and quality. In other words, the world needs more and better teachers. According to the Unesco Institute for Statistics (UIS), at least two million new teaching positions are needed worldwide to ensure universal primary education by 2015. This "teacher deficit" is an obstacle to reaching the internationally-agreed Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDG).

Bangladesh attaches great importance to Unesco. To quote from the statement made by Dr. Kamal Abdul Naser Chowdhury, Secretary Ministry of Education at the General Policy Debate of the 37th Session of Unesco General Conference in Paris on November 8: "For Bangladesh, with limited resources and 153 million people, it is not an easy task to ensure quality education for all. Bangladesh has been making great strides towards achieving the Dakar goals on EFA. We have achieved nearly 100% enrollment at primary level. Bangladesh has already attained gender parity in the net enrolment of boys and girls at primary and secondary levels. Unesco has been assisting Ministry of Education to prepare the Education Act 2013 in coordination with the Non Formal Education Act, through organising national level consultation, sharing study findings etc. It may be mentioned here that Unesco rendered assistance in the documentation of National Education Policy 2010 also. Unesco proclaimed February 21 as International Mother Language Day and Director General Ms Bokova



visited the International Mother Language Institute in Dhaka in May 2012 when she attended the Cultural Diversity Ministerial Forum of the Asia-Pacific Region. It is hoped that in course of time this Institute will get the status of category II Centre under the auspices of Unesco."

Unesco has conducted a series of studies on the status and capacity development for primary and secondary education in 2008, inclusive education in 2009, and capacity development of Non Formal Education (NFE) teachers/facilitators in 2010. The findings of these studies have contributed to the formulation of National Education Policy in 2010 and helped a better understanding on instruments, namely Unesco and ILO recommendation concerning Status of Teachers (1966) and Unesco's recommendation regarding teacher's status in higher education (1997). Unesco Dhaka office has published the translated version of these two Recommendations. Recently, it focussed on shadow education system and private tutoring -- which is a problem in the country in terms of amount of private investment by the parents.

The book *Confronting Shadow Education System* has been translated into Bangla and disseminated to policymakers.

Unesco was thrown into serious financial crisis in October 2011 when Washington, cancelled its grant on the issue of full membership of Palestine. As a consequence, Unesco was forced to cut spending, freeze job hires and reduce number of programmes after the US fund cut, which made up 22% of its budget. The latest development in regard to the loss of voting power by the US is the continuation of the crisis in 2011. I earnestly hope that under the apt handling of Irina Bokova, the first ever woman Director General, Unesco will overcome the crisis. It is worthwhile to mention that the US continues to maintain involvement in UNESCO despite its non-payment of dues. That the US could not disengage itself from the Unesco until now is a diplomatic success of the organisation. The full participation of the super power in Unesco again is a matter of time.

The writer is Chairman, Initiative for Human Development.
 Email: ihdbd@yahoo.com