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## **Notes from the Editor**

Teachers' preparation and professional development in the main stream secondary schools in rural areas is the subject of the first article in this issue. Rifat Afroze, Md. Mahbulul Kabir and Arifa Rahman report on BRAC's training activities for secondary schools. They examine the effect on English teachers' classroom practices. The author's conclusion is that most teachers perceived the training as useful, but there was not much difference in actual classroom practices of trained and un-trained teachers. The teachers believed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the focus of the training, could not be effectively applied to the classrooms in rural schools.

The authors suggest that “a set of ingrained beliefs” influenced teachers' attitudes and behaviour in the classroom. Perhaps, but professional development and performance standards of teachers call for a rethinking of human resource policies and practices including the incentives and career ladder of teachers, proposed as one of six priorities regarding education and human resource development recommended from the Harvard Conference on Bangladesh, also included in this issue under Topical Note. Another of the conference recommendations was about the need for promoting a new and effective pedagogy, appropriate for the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The role of civil society and NGOs in educational development is covered in two articles. Mohammad Muntasim Tanvir, on the eve of the once-a-decade International Conference on Adult Education (CONFINTEA VI) to be held in Brazil in May 2009, proposes an agenda for action for the civil society at national, regional and international level. In CONFINTEA V, held in 1997 in Hamburg, Sheikh Hasina, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh then, was the invited keynote speaker.

Mohammad Nazmul Haq, on the other hand, traces the history of government-NGO relationship in the sphere of non-formal education and suggests ways of making it more productive. The impression one cannot escape is that the relationship, characterized by tension and the lack of a common ground, is yet to become a real partnership.

One aspect of the governance issue is highlighted in the article by Saad Andaleeb, reporting on a small sample survey of alumni of selected higher education institutions about their perception of the quality features they expect to see in institutions. The author offers suggestions about how these quality markers could be taken into account in managing institutions. The Harvard conference also underscores the need for making education governance and management in general accountable and effective.

The conclusions of the breakaway session on education and human resources from the wide-ranging Harvard Conference on Bangladesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century held in July, 2008 are presented under Topical Note. The six point recommendations resonate well with the priority for reform and change being voiced in much of the on-going discussion in the country.

**Manzoor Ahmed, Advisory Editor**



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# English Teachers' Classroom Practices in Rural Secondary Schools: An Exploration of the Effect of BRAC Training

Rifat Afroze<sup>1</sup>, Md. Mahbubul Kabir<sup>1</sup>, Arifa Rahman<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

*This study investigated the effect of the BRAC training programme for English language teachers of rural non-government secondary schools. It examined the change in the teachers in terms of their pedagogic skills, language skills development, knowledge about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their attitudes towards this new approach. The findings pointed to a mixed picture. In spite of a general improvement in teachers' knowledge about CLT and the skills involved in its application in the classroom, there was little evidence of much difference in the existing classroom practices of trained and non-trained teachers. More importantly, students were not being affected positively. Although most teachers perceived the training programme as relevant to and useful for their professional development, they did not believe that CLT could be effectively applied to the classroom settings of rural schools, thus implying a set of ingrained beliefs which influenced teachers' attitudes and behaviour in the classroom.*

## I. Introduction

The need for quality education is steadily being recognized as a prerequisite to human development and economic growth. As a result, individual governments, international agencies and non-government organizations are investing increasingly large amounts in the expansion and improvement of educational provisions. In spite of constraints on resources, there are concerted attempts in the developing world also, to provide opportunities for effective education.

Since the eighties, amongst the variables in educational improvement, the teacher has been considered as being of utmost importance and there has been a strong focus on the professional development of the teacher (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992). Thus, the need for an effective provision to initiate, develop and sustain teachers through an appropriate process of intervention and training is gradually being accepted as amongst the highest priorities of educational planning and practice.

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### **Orientations to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

The search for an appropriate method to teach foreign languages has been going on for the last one hundred years (Howatt 1984). These have reflected varied changes in perspectives related to the nature of language and of learning theories. Since the 1970s, the second/foreign language teaching field worldwide has settled for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Its chief proponents were a group of influential educational linguists who drew upon insights from sociolinguistics, educational psychology and second language acquisition studies. CLT has a humanistic orientation, treats learners as individuals with different learning styles and most significantly focuses on *language in use*. It is best considered an approach rather than a method.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) have drawn up a number of principles underlying the CLT approach. These are:

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- The goal of classroom activities should be authentic and meaningful communication.
- Fluency is an important component of communication; therefore learners need to be provided with all kinds of opportunities to facilitate communication.
- Communication involves the integration of all the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing).
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error.

In line with this modern orientation to teaching English and with the worthwhile objective of improving the quality of the teaching and learning of English, the authorities reached out nationally and introduced CLT in Bangladesh at the secondary level. New books *English for Today* (ET) series were written by teams of national and international experts and attempts were made to train secondary school teachers in this new methodology.

Applying this new methodology to the classroom in Bangladesh, we can see the kind of demands the CLT approach creates among the teacher. Once an all-knowing authoritative figure, the teacher now is asked to be a facilitator, a guide and a tolerant supporter of the learning process.

### **The BRAC Programme**

In 1996, National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) introduced the new ELT curriculum, textbooks and a revised teaching methodology for English language teaching at secondary level. Primarily, it brought about more problems than benefits for both students and teachers. School teachers especially in rural areas, who were basically weak in the English language and in teaching skills, were not capable of coping with the demands of the change. Also, apart from training workshops held from time to time, there was not enough initiative for familiarizing teachers with the new curriculum, the textbooks or the teaching methodology.



This programme carried out a needs assessment study and found that most rural teachers were facing difficulties in delivering the new materials in classes this was hampering the quality of education in secondary schools (PACE Report, undated). The adverse impact on rural students affected the rate of failure in public examination it was increasing. Consequently, a BRAC pilot project was started in 2001 to provide subject-based residential training for English, mathematics and science teachers of rural non-governmental high schools in order to enhance their capacity, particularly in the teaching of the new topics introduced in the revised curriculum. This included 22 secondary schools in rural areas.

The programme developed 28 training materials for English (12 for classes 6-8 and 16 for classes 9-10). These deal with teaching methodology/pedagogy, familiarization with the new concepts in the curriculum, textbooks and the four language skills, most importantly, teaching methodology. Till November 2005, a total of 4,832 English teachers (2,357 of classes 6-8 and 2,475 of classes 9-10) participated in a residential training course for six weeks (three weeks for Module one and three weeks for Module two). A one-week refresher follow course-up course was initially planned but was not implemented.

## **II. Research Objective and Methodology**

The main objective of this research was to find out about the existing classroom practices of trained and non-trained teachers and their perceptions of CLT. As a corollary, the existing challenges faced by teachers were also investigated.

This is part of a larger study where both qualitative and quantitative approaches were used. This paper presents only the qualitative findings. The data were collected from March to May 2006 from the observation of secondary school classrooms (of both trained and non-trained teachers), focus group discussions (FGDs) with students of trained and non-trained teachers, and interviews with trained teachers.

To investigate the existing classroom practices, 79 English classes of both trained and non-trained teachers (40 classes of trained and 39 classes of non-trained teachers) were observed. Among the 79 observed English classes, 45 classes dealt with English 1<sup>st</sup> paper and 34 with English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper. 14 FGDs with students (of trained and non-trained teachers) were conducted in seven districts to review their perspectives on the new teaching techniques. Then 26 trained teachers were interviewed to find out about the existing teaching-learning process in the classrooms and the challenges the trained teachers faced in different situations.

## **III. Findings**

This section presents the findings on the comparative performance of the trained and non-trained teachers (through observation), followed by the students' perception on trained and non-trained teachers (through FGDs) and challenges that trained teachers faced in applying the CLT method that they had learned in the training (through interviews and observations).

### Classroom Practices

The observation data showed a general diversity of performance both among the trained and non-trained teachers. Although the trained teachers attempted to make more use of the CLT method, there is little evidence of much difference in the existing classroom practices of trained and non-trained teachers (Table 1).

While the mean age of the teachers was 46 years, the highest teaching experience was found to be 34 years and the lowest was three years. The mean teaching experience was 18 years. The maximum number of student enrolment in class was 102 and the minimum was 21. With regard to student attendance, a maximum of 68 and a minimum of 10 students were present during the survey. On an average, 34 students attended classes regularly, a poor number compared to enrolment. The average planned duration of the English class was 42 minutes but in reality, an average of only 38 minutes was spent in class.

Table 1 sums up some classroom activities of trained and non-trained teachers (related to criteria like classroom behaviour, teaching style, use of English in class, approach towards CLT etc.). Teachers' performance is shown in percentage.

**Table 1: Classroom Performance of Trained and Non-trained Teachers in Percentage**

Criteria	Classes of Trained Teachers (%)	Classes of Non-Trained Teachers (%)
Dealing with mistakes	70	85
Illustrating topic with examples	45	39
Encouraging questions from students	68	51
Making purpose and guidelines of lesson clear to students	63	54
Responding to students' questions sympathetically	80	74
Students responding to teachers' questions enthusiastically	88	46
Meaningful communication taking place in class	33	21
Doing group/pair work appropriately with all students	45	23
Problem faced while doing group/pair work	23	18
Using English most of the time	52	38
Moving around in class	76	67
Using teaching aids productively	95	72

In case of dealing with mistakes, in about 70% of the classes of trained and 85% of the classes of non-trained teachers, teachers dealt with mistakes frequently, which occurred in sentence construction, spelling and grammatical activities.

Regarding teachers' illustrating a topic by using real-life objects, pictures and charts (teaching aids), it was found to take place in 45% of the classes of trained and 39% of the

classes of non-trained teachers. They used appropriate examples in a logical manner by using the blackboard.

Teachers' encouragement of students in asking questions and clarification in classrooms occurred in 68% of the classes of trained and 51% of the classes of non-trained teachers. In 32% of the classes of trained and 49% of the classes of non-trained teachers, the teacher did not encourage students to ask questions in the classroom. In contrast to non-trained teachers, trained teachers appeared to play a reasonably supportive role towards students. In the case of students' response towards teaching, in 88% of the classes of trained and 46% of the classes of non-trained teachers, students (especially front benchers) responded eagerly.

Group/pair work with students was appropriately used in 45% of the classes of trained and 23% of the classes of non-trained teachers. All the students participated in pair/group work and the teacher monitored their activities and time-keeping was done properly. But in large classes the teacher was not able to monitor student's activities. Students thus became disruptive. Sometimes, while a teacher was conducting pair/group work, other teachers (in adjacent rooms) complained about the noise.

Students faced problems in group or pair work in 23% of the classes of trained and 18% of the classes of non-trained teachers. They were not able to complete their activities according to the teacher's instructions. Sometimes, they failed to understand what they had to do. They also faced problems with vocabulary, sentence construction while working in pairs or groups. Teachers of both groups were not able to monitor students' activities properly. That is why students did not perform satisfactorily. Sometimes teachers felt that the poor language ability of students was the cause of their failure to communicate in pair or group tasks.

Usually teachers used English in the classroom for giving instructions, answering/explaining students' questions, presenting new words and asking questions. About 52% of the trained and 38% of the non-trained teachers used English in class most of the time. In comparison with non-trained teachers, trained teachers performed better here.

The most common teaching aid was the blackboard which was used well in 95% of the classes of trained and 72% of the classes of non-trained teachers. From class observation of both groups of teachers, some other findings that emerged were: teacher's pronunciation, behavioural discrimination towards students, time management, the level of professional skills, the approach towards poor-ability students, the manner of using the textbook and so on.

From the non-trained teachers' classes, we found that most of them followed the traditional teaching style in class rather than CLT. They did not have sufficient idea about the application of four skills. Some of them did not give any attention to listening or speaking activities. They only followed the instructions of each lesson but skipped some of the activities given in the book and did not explain or elicit any information. Students often failed to understand the teacher's instructions and resorted to memorizing.

In the case of trained teachers, we found they failed to apply CLT in class appropriately. Both teachers and students were found to be weak in English and that is why they were unable to use English communicatively. Teachers were not comfortable in teaching through the CLT method. Students were not familiar with the new way of teaching. Teachers who attempted to use CLT did not know how to make the class/topic interesting. They tried to use different types of classroom techniques like pair or group work, chain drills but failed to maintain time, monitor performance, complete activities or present the techniques interestingly.

### **Students' Perceptions**

Students perceived that the trained teachers used some new techniques in their classrooms that were not previously used, but this was not benefiting them much. According to the students, the significant change that was seen in teachers' recent behaviour was the way they spoke. Whereas teachers did not try to speak in English in the past, they now spoke frequently in English and also encouraged students to speak in English. Other changes that were noticed by students were the way the teachers used the blackboard to explain things. Students said that their English teacher encouraged them to read newspapers, and converse in English by sharing what they had learnt in the lesson with each other (Box 1).

#### **Box 1: Students' Comparative Perceptions of Trained and Non-trained Teachers**

Although generally students felt more comfortable with Bangla, some of them tried to use English. For example, some students said, "Although very little, we speak now but before we didn't know anything." But the main problem that still existed for most students was their hesitation in communicating in English. Some said, "What will people say...that's why we do not speak in English."

The students of the non-trained teachers, on the contrary, are deprived of the opportunity of developing communicative language skills, as most of the non-trained teachers do not try CLT. For example, some students said, "We don't know anything about group work, pair work. The teacher does not help us in practicing speaking English but he encourages us to practice English. Teachers use some very difficult English sometimes - this is hard to understand."

The students of the trained teachers said that the teachers generally used English more than Bangla whereas the students of the non-trained teachers perceived that the teachers used more Bangla than English, sometimes no English at all. However, except for a very few, the students generally used Bangla while speaking in the class.

According to the students, trained teachers generally and non-trained teachers with an exception conducted pair work and group work and trained teachers did it more frequently than the non-trained teachers. However, students of trained teachers asserted that in many cases teachers went very fast in class which made the lesson difficult to understand. Again, students of non-trained teachers complained that there were English teachers who were not friendly. They used a harsh voice and even the stick for punishment. On the contrary,

students of trained teachers stated that their teachers were sympathetic while correcting mistakes and in some cases encouraged peer-correction.

The students of both trained and non-trained teachers admitted that most of them did not understand English and they felt comfortable if the instruction was in Bangla. Although there were some attempts at using English by the students of trained teachers, non-trained teachers' students did not attempt at using any English.

### **Challenges Faced by Teachers**

Teachers perceived (with some exceptions) the training programme and the materials as both relevant to and useful for their professional development. However, they felt that they found it difficult to apply their training. Following are some of the challenges that the teachers were facing: a) the vocabulary stock was not adequate for both teachers and students; b) they were not proficient in speaking English. Sometimes they have to act out (mime) to make students understand; c) lack of real-life materials; d) lack of teaching aids; e) students do not understand English and they are not regular in attendance; f) students' hesitation and shyness; f) lack of English-learning environment (listening, speaking, writing) in the classroom due to shortage of time; and g) seating arrangements are not conducive to CLT.

Again, some teachers were worried about the non-cooperation of students seating on the back benches. A teacher said, "I found problems in dialogue practice. Back-benchers do not participate." It was not only the lack of physical facilities or students' lack of interest but the attitude of other teachers also was an obstacle (Box 2). They said that other teachers criticized this technique of teaching because it made the classroom noisy which disturbed adjacent classes. The head teacher was not bothered about CLT. He advised them to prepare more students for the examination. The supervision of trained teachers is also not adequate as school supervisors themselves are not technically knowledgeable to give feedback to the teachers in their respective fields.

### **Box 2: Teachers' Doubts about Application of CLT**

One common phenomenon was that although teachers thought that they had been benefited by the training, they doubted the proper application of CLT in the classroom. The following quotations reflect that perception:

"In my class, there are 135-140 students. So it would be too difficult to conduct pair work or chain drill. You know, there is a time constraint that does not let us take proper care of every student. I cannot monitor students in this period. Again, students are too weak to understand English in the classroom. So, teaching in English is not possible in class. Everything that I teach has to be said in Bangla." (*A Trained Teacher from Pabna*)

"Although this method and the textbook both focus on developing the language skills in English, it wouldn't help students do well in public examinations. More and more students are leaning towards coaching centres. As a result, effective application of CLT is not possible in the class." (*A Trained teacher from Pabna*)

### **Teachers' Perceptions**

The understanding of teachers' beliefs was perceived through interviews. We tried to discern teachers' perceptions in an in-depth manner by probing teachers' views on various aspects related to CLT and training through these interviews.

In spite of some attitudinal changes towards a positive stance, teachers were generally found to be sceptical about the effective application of CLT in the classroom setting of rural schools. They believed that the environment was not quite congenial to CLT practice in these schools. They stated that colleagues criticized them when they applied the method. They complained about the students' dependence on coaching centres. They also identified some reasons for their impression: a) students' incompetence in understanding English properly; b) students' tendency to follow traditional methods and memorize the textbook content for the examinations; c) students' lack of willingness to learn more than their syllabus; d) large class size made it difficult to conduct group/pair work and chain drill; e) students' fear of learning English; f) students' lack of class participation; and g) classroom and seating arrangements were not suitable for the new approach. In short, large class size, time constraints, students' language incompetence and non-cooperation were regarded as the main problems in applying CLT in the English class.

### **IV. Conclusion**

The findings point to a mixed picture. Positive signs are apparent in a general improvement on some particular issues but it did not take place at a regular pace. The effects of the training may be summed up in the following manner:

- a. With some exceptions, there has been a general improvement in teachers' knowledge and skills in the application of CLT.
- b. Although trained teachers attempt more use of the CLT approach, there is little evidence of much difference in the existing classroom practices of trained and non-trained teachers.
- c. Students perceive that some trained teachers use new techniques in their classrooms not previously used, but few students are benefited by this. In spite of some attitudinal changes, teachers do not believe that CLT can be effectively applied to classroom settings of the rural schools thus implying a set of ingrained beliefs, which influence teachers' attitudes and behaviour.

### **V. Recommendations**

Based on the study findings and the discussions above, there is obviously a need to broaden the parameters of the current BRAC training programme in order to achieve the objectives of the training framework. We also emphasise the importance of recasting ideas within one's own frame of reference, in order to 'appropriate' ideas to suit the local culture. Within this perspective, a number of recommendations are offered below:

- Focusing on components that engage with trainees' beliefs/attitudes to enable them to change their attitudes towards applying CLT. This may be done through introducing:
  - a. The elements of 'reflection' (group and individual) the strategies introducing reflective practices are found in abundance in the teacher education literature.
  - b. Observation and analysis of actual classroom practices (real-class observation, transcripts of recorded lessons, videos of lessons, teachers' diaries, etc.) and relating them to proposed changes within a participatory ethos rather than a top-down approach.
- Avoiding the narrow “dress-rehearsal approach” (Widdowson 1987) of the BRAC programme because conditions and contexts in classrooms differ from place to place. Instead, the training needs to encourage capacity building in trainees that can enable them to understand the actual on-going purpose of the training and the fundamental principles of the CLT approach.
- The issue of supervised teaching in actual classrooms, mentored teaching and a practicum may be considered in the light of the principles of effective teacher development.
- An element of guidance and counselling may be introduced. This will provide some scope for listening to individual problems as well as problems in classroom teaching.
- The need for a well-informed cadre of trainers with their own belief systems compatible with the assumptions of the programme, e.g. clearly understanding and believing in the outcomes of the training. This obviously points to the necessity of increasing the number of professional full-time trainers with less dependence on part-timers.
- More attention needs to be given to the improvement of the trainees' (and trainers') English language skills.
- Introducing some effective incentive packages so that the trainees are motivated and can concentrate on developing themselves. The innovation literature advocates that it is important for participants to have a stake in the innovation they are expected to adopt. In terms of incentives, teachers should be able to perceive some sort of 'reward' for changing their instructional behaviour.
- Introducing some sort of formative assessment of the trainees individually and in groups.
- Periodic refresher courses need to be seen as a progression to professional development and need to be run by competent trainers in order to link past training, current practices and future developments.
- Similarly, creating a supportive environment for the self-development of the low-achieving teachers (on pre-tests) is an issue that needs to be addressed.

- Ensuring that only English subject teachers attend the BRAC programme so as not to waste valuable time, money and resources on non-English teachers.

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# Beyond Rhetoric: A Recipe for Civil Society Action on Literacy

Mohammad Muntasim Tanvir<sup>1</sup>

*[Editor's Note: This article has been modified from a contribution that appeared in Convergence, the journal of the International Council for Adult Education (ICAE, www.icae.org.uy) published by the National Institute for Adult Continuing Education (NIACE; www.niace.org.uk) in Volume XL, Nos 3-4, 2008, pages 131-142.]*

## Abstract

*Once-a-decade CONFINTEA VI (International Conference on Adult Education) in which UNESCO member states participate, the theme of the world conference is renewing commitment to adult and lifelong learning. Held once in a decade, the next conference will be in Brazil in May 2009. A preparatory conference for Asia is being held on 6-8 October 2008 in Seoul. The another argues then the discourse on literacy often limits itself to the definitional nuances of literacy and falls short of critiquing the global policy-making inertia that violates human rights obligations towards the millions of adults who remain illiterate. This article examines the definitional dilemma of literacy and the magnitude of the challenge of illiteracy. Secondly, it considers how the policy-making process has moved beyond nation states to global alliances, thereby diluting the social contract between the citizen and the state. Thirdly, it delineates how literacy has become a relegated priority within the EFA framework. Fourthly, it tracks the gap between promises and performance since CONFINTEA V. Finally, it proposes an agenda for action for the civil society at national (keeping the context of Bangladesh in mind), regional and international level.*

## I. Origin

This discussion note is a collective output and draws on the stimulating discussions in the virtual seminar organized by ICAE (International Council for Adult Education) in April, 2008. It attempts to capture the contributions about literacy made by the various strata of the civil society participating in the seminar\*. It draws on various documents on the state of literacy and its interface with the rights discourse. It also proposes a probable campaign process, a strategy and advocacy entry points, based on the national, regional, and international advocacy and campaign experience of ASPBAE. The objective of this paper is to stimulate discussion in the thematic seminar on the concrete policy demands that civil society organizations can articulate and the campaigns they can undertake in the process leading to CONFINTEA VI and beyond.

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\*The article draws on a summary of the literacy discussion in the seminar prepared by Cecilia Soriano, National Coordinator, ENet Philippines.

## **II. Literacy: A Definitional Dilemma**

Defining literacy, even determining its scope and boundaries, has been a problematic issue and has led to endless debate. Searching for a definition that will be acknowledged unanimously has proven to be an elusive task. This paper will not venture in that inconclusive direction. However, some of the ideas around literacy articulated in the virtual seminar provide much food for thought.

On the one hand, people thought that the context of adult literacy needed to be redefined and linked to contemporary emerging issues like climate change, migration, knowledge-based society, renovation of ethnic identities and globalization. Given these contexts, there was a suggestion that adult literacy should include such topics as global warming, ecological literacy, ecological pedagogy and others that grapple with the realities of climate change. It was also felt that literacy should have strong forward linkage with employment and food security.

On the other hand, it was noted that there is a tendency to underestimate the value and empowerment implicit in access to literacy and in learning to read, write and calculate (in written form). It is not helpful to include everything that the poor need to learn, as literacy does not eradicate poverty but helps people to cope better with their lives. So, mixing up literacy with other competencies may blur or weaken the advocacy for proper funding of adult literacy as the basis for adult education.

With these two opposing views in mind, we can explore the landscape delineated by the global assessment of literacy.

## **III. Magnitude of the Task in Hand**

For an idea of the staggering extent of illiteracy, it should suffice to look at the following snippets of information from the EFA Global Monitoring Report (GMR) 2008:

- Illiteracy is receiving minimal political attention and remains a global disgrace, keeping one in five adults (one in four women) on the margins of society.
- Worldwide, 774 million adults lack basic literacy skills, as measured by conventional methods (self-reporting). Direct measurement of literacy skills would significantly increase the global estimate of the number of adults denied the right to literacy.
- Of the 101 countries still far from achieving “universal literacy”, 72 will not succeed in halving their adult illiteracy rates by 2015.
- Most countries have made little progress during the past decade in reducing the absolute number of adult illiterates, with the notable exception of China.
- More than three-quarters of the world's illiterates live in only fifteen countries, including eight of the nine high population countries (E-9). In most of the fifteen countries, adult literacy rates have improved since 1985/1994, although continuing population growth translates into increases in absolute numbers of illiterates in several countries.

- Overall, illiteracy rates are highest in the countries with the greatest poverty, a link observed right down to the household level. More generally, for various social, cultural or political reasons, certain populations such as migrants, indigenous groups and people with disabilities suffer reduced access to formal education and literacy programmes.

Even without getting into quibbles about the definition used for literacy and comparability across countries, it can be safely concluded that the scenario looks quite bleak.

#### **IV. Policy-Making at Global Level: Gradual Eclipse of the Rights Discourse**

Ever since the Jomtien Conference in 1990, policy-making at global level has supplanted the traditional state-centred system. A plethora of issues was addressed at global summits in the final decade of the last millennium. However, as Tomasevski (2003) observes, these summits were careful to circumvent the rights discourse, by listing wrongdoing without naming the wrongdoers, writing commitments without defining who was responsible for translating words into action, and ignoring accountability for using means that defied the professed ends. In most cases, outcomes reflected the minimums acceptable to all, and were inoffensive wish lists that quickly descended into bureaucratic oblivion after the signing ceremony. Each conference set a price tag on the funding necessary to achieve the agreed goals, but tended to project a manifold increase in existing allocations. The abyss between assistance needs and actual investment produced a recipe for inertia. A vicious cycle emerged, in which declining funds were taken as the reason for failure to attain the targets set, and funds shrank because the targets envisioned had not been attained.

Perhaps not surprisingly, the '90s also saw the inexorable conversion of education from a human right into a development objective, at a time when the key development goal was to halve the number of people living in absolute poverty. The current EFA goal for literacy closely mirrors that phenomenon, by promising that the literacy rate will be increased by 50%. This has two serious flaws. First and foremost, "a lottery-based determination of those to be left out clashes with the very notion of rights" (Tomasevski 2003, 101). Planning to leave half of all illiterates still in shackles after the target year raises several crucial questions: who is to be left out, by whose criteria, and most importantly why? The second flaw may be considered a rhetorical issue: strictly speaking, a 50% improvement in literacy is impossible for countries that already have literacy rates above 67%. The EFA GMR on literacy solves this by interpreting this goal as implying a 50% reduction in illiteracy rates (UNESCO 2006). But the question of the exclusion of the neglected half still remains. According to Tomasevski (2003), the human rights approach is anchored in holding governments accountable for their pledges. Once a pledge becomes a human rights obligation, failure to attain agreed ends becomes a violation, to be redressed by compensating the victims and ensuring that it is not repeated. However, the current trend of projecting goals into the future takes away the edge from the urgency to act now. The responsibility for today is evaded by projections for tomorrow.

But it would be quite unfair not to attribute some achievements to these global summits. In the best of cases, they provided grand visions, which participating countries could aspire to. For example, the Jomtien conference provided a vision for the education of the future, whereas the Dakar conference tried to take this forward by focusing on a framework for action. But as Packer (2007) points out, while the world has made significant strides in agreeing on basic human rights through legally binding UN conventions and political commitments, the international community has found it very difficult to design politically acceptable and influential structures to help give effect to these norms. However, this can hardly be an argument for not doing better. It is perhaps useful to admit that whilst broad, conference-inspired frameworks are important in themselves, as reference points and platforms for action, they rarely lead to comprehensive plans and initiatives. The literacy agenda needs to be advanced on many fronts within and beyond the EFA policy architecture, both internationally and, more crucially, politically, through recognition that “real action” has to take place at country level.

#### **V. Global Initiatives on Education: Literacy in the Back Seat?**

After the Dakar Framework for Action was drawn up and the Millennium Development Goals were declared (incorporating only two of the six EFA goals), the international community stepped up its diplomatic efforts to come up with globally coherent development initiatives. While UNESCO was the first to propose a global framework for action, the mandate later moved to the World Bank, which convened and hosted a “Fast Track Initiative” (FTI) on education. The FTI openly used the EFA banner at its inception but later focused solely on Universal Primary Education (UPE). With the understandable pressure to extend the cycle of basic education in schools and to expand secondary education, the disparities that exist between schooling and other forms of basic education may well become further accentuated. This situation, compounded by the overriding influence of the MDGs in development discourse, the lack of strong national and international champions and campaigns for literacy, and the absence of a well-articulated economic case for the non-schooling/institutional elements of EFA, means that convincing governments and donors to build an inclusive learning system remains difficult, if not impossible (Packer 2007).

Against this unpromising backdrop, some efforts are being made to widen active interest in a broad-based approach to EFA. UNESCO recognizes nine EFA “Flagship” Initiatives, described as multi-partner collaborative mechanisms in support of EFA goals (literacy among them). The UN Literacy Decade (UNLD) is nearly half way through its mandate. UNESCO has also created a ten-year framework of collaborative action, the Literacy Initiative for Empowerment (LIFE), which is the key operational mechanism for achieving the goals and purposes of UNLD in countries with a literacy rate of less than 50% or an adult population of more than 10 million without literacy competencies. However, to date there is relatively limited evidence or evaluation of the efficacy of these mechanisms.

While talking about global initiatives on education as a part of policy architecture, fueled by the aid mechanism, it is impossible to ignore the effects of the macro-economic policies

prescribed by the IMF, the gatekeeper of aid assigned by the neo-liberal discourse. Until recently, half the countries with an IMF loan agreement were subject to an explicit cap on their public sector wage bill. The largest group paid for out of this public sector wage bill is teachers. Teachers' salaries are frozen when a cap is imposed and new teachers cannot be hired. Paying adult literacy facilitators or adult education tutors becomes unthinkable. In the face of IMF policies it is almost impossible for countries to make significant new investment in education, pushing literacy back still further (ActionAid International 2006).

However, there are some positive shifts in the tide. FTI still remains the only multilateral initiative poised to address the funding needs of EFA (albeit with a myopic focus on UPE). However, two countries (among the 30 or more on the FTI list), Burkina Faso and Benin, have both had education sector plans which include significant adult literacy components endorsed by FTI. This is not common knowledge, and the FTI secretariat has not communicated it to aspirant countries seeking similar endorsement.

#### **VI. Progress since CONFINTEA V: A Chronicle of Despair?**

To place CONFINTEA within the aforementioned assumptions and conclusions on the global scenario, it is not necessary to look any further than the Mid Term Review document of CONFINTEA V. The transition from euphoric optimism to abject disappointment is quite evident there. While it is acknowledged that “CONFINTEA V codified a paradigm shift from adult education to adult learning,” it is also admitted that there were unintentional but insidious side-effects:

“This shift has, on one hand, positive implications in terms of encouraging a wider, more holistic appreciation of education one transcending the merely formal sector, unfolding as a lifelong process, responsive to the different needs and varying contexts of learners themselves. On the other hand, it threatens to transfer, especially in a globalized, market-oriented context, the onus of educational responsibility to learners, who increasingly must pay for services of poor quality, along with civil-society organizations and the market itself. It thus allows for states to abdicate their responsibility for providing citizens with good and relevant educational opportunities. Especially in situations of widespread poverty, however, the withdrawal of state support seems premature. Furthermore, the emphasis on adult learning itself is in danger of losing sight of the needs of the almost one billion adults with little or no literacy. Despite the commitments made in 1997 in The Hamburg Declaration and The Agenda for the Future, adult education and learning has not received the attention which it deserves in major education reforms and in recent international drives to eliminate poverty, achieve gender justice, provide education for all and foster sustainable development” (UNESCO 2003, 16).

What the Review does not conclude overtly, is that the shift from adult education to adult learning (based on the notion of lifelong learning) drives a wedge between the interests and priorities of the North and the South. While the Northern countries can afford to invest in the broader agenda of adult learning, the Southern countries struggle to mobilize resources even

for the bare minimum of literacy programmes. Thus, the shift has served to dilute the agenda and skew the priorities.

Understandably, the alarming effect of dilution is also identified in the document:

“The Mid Term Review of the worldwide situation of adult education and learning...has, in fact, revealed a disturbing regression in the field. For we have seen a decline in public funding for adult education and learning, even as the minimal adult literacy goal set in the Dakar Framework for Action is achievable requiring just US\$ 2.8 billion per year. Furthermore, support by various international agencies and national governments alike has concentrated on formal basic education for children to the detriment and neglect of adult education and learning” (UNESCO 2003, 18).

This dismal revelation is self-explanatory, necessitating deep meditation on what went wrong and how to proceed, without repeating past mistakes and with the benefit of hindsight.

### **VII. Developing the Advocacy and Campaign Agenda: Towards and Beyond CONFINTEA VI**

The above analysis implies critical self-reflection, in order to determine a concerted course of action. It can be assumed that rather than getting bogged down in inconclusive debate about the precise definition of literacy (an oft-travelled path), it may be more useful to look at the route map to CONFINTEA in order to identify key entry points for advocacy and campaigning, and to decide on a concrete action plan with clear processes and expected outcomes. It may also be useful to keep in mind that while CONFINTEA VI is going to provide a critical opportunity to oblige governments and donors to agree to concrete policy commitments with an accountability mechanism, it is not going to mark the end of the need to work towards adult literacy; at best it will be a key reference and rallying point. Decisive action will still have to be planned at the country level.

#### ***A. The Route Map to CONFINTEA: Process Entry Points***

##### ***National Reports***

National reports are to be prepared by all UNESCO Member States for CONFINTEA. While the deadline is over (already postponed once from April), the activity may well prove, from the Asian experience, to be a largely bureaucratic paper exercise behind closed doors, rather than a genuine participatory reflection on the promises and gaps in the commitments made in CONFINTEA VI. Bangladesh submitted a report long after the dead line had passed. This is a reflection of how much (or less) importance adult education is accorded in the national policy.

After the reports in different countries are prepared, there will be the opportunity to critique them constructively before the regional consultations and the main event.

### ***Regional Consultations***

Various regional consultations will take place, in which the voice of CSOs and NGOs needs to be raised. The tactic adopted by development agencies in dealing with NGOs, cynically described as the “3 Is” (Invite them, Inform them and Ignore them!) (Fidler 2000), will need to be challenged strongly at these forums. In case of Asia, the consultation will take place in Seoul, South Korea, from 6th to 8th October.

### ***GRALE (Global Report on Adult Learning and Education)***

Key results from the national reports will lead to the preparation of GRALE. The three functions originally envisioned for it being a reference point, a standard for accountability and an advocacy document should be fulfilled in response to the mounting pressure on it. It should also be the beginning of a continuous global reporting mechanism, complementing the EFA GMR report. An Asia synthesis report is being prepared, with Dr. Manzoor Ahmed from Bangladesh leading the process.

### ***Global Action Week***

While not part of the original CONFINTEA route map, the Global Action Week of 2009, organized by the Global Campaign for Education (GCE), has the theme of 'Youth and Adult Literacy, Education and Lifelong learning'. In Bangladesh, facilitated by CAMPE, the Global Action Week has had spectacular successes over the past few years and hopefully the trend will continue next year. The right to literacy has been betrayed and the immense mobilizing power of calling a betrayed pledge a human rights violation should be evoked on this occasion.

### ***FTI Mid Term Review***

Also not part of the official CONFINTEA process, FTI is up for review in 2007-08. It is vital that the limitations of FTI in addressing the whole spectrum are pointed out and amended through inclusion of adult literacy in the financing mechanism.

During the whole process, the constant need to inform and engage public opinion should not be forgotten. News and ideas about literacy as a right and as a means of making a difference to the lives of individuals and families, communities and nations, should be brought into every household. It is not enough to preach to the converted and make literacy a strictly technical issue within the esoteric domain of the erudite few. Keeping it on everyone's agenda requires attention not only to research and scholarship and to development policy and practice but also to building commitment in media and communication channels to conveying the need for and the benefits of literacy. As Packer (2007) points out, it needs to be portrayed in ways that capture public imagination and garner political will.

### ***B. Content of Advocacy and Campaign Engagement***

While the process entry points are quite clear, the content of advocacy and campaigns needs to be determined both rigorously and cautiously. The lessons learnt from CONFINTEA V

need to be revisited, and opinions from the virtual seminar on maximizing the outcome of CONFINTEA need to be heeded in this regard:

- Identify innovative approaches for mobilization and sensitization;
- Discuss good practices in developing countries with limited funding;
- Demand accountability from countries that have made commitments but have done nothing to address adult literacy (and education);
- Investigate countries in conflict where education has become a last concern;
- Review/call attention to countries that have good adult literacy policies (e.g. in Latin America) but stagnant investment in education programmes.

The cornerstone of advocacy should be a demand for time-bound and accountable policy commitments.

It may be helpful to have tangible, specific benchmarks to ensure accountability and provide a monitoring mechanism. Previously agreed quantitative benchmarks, 0.7% of GNI as ODA and 7% of GDP allocated to education, have been useful in at least measuring the gaps between promises and performance. Similar benchmarks can be incorporated. Significant work has already been done on literacy benchmarks by GCE. There is a growing consensus that governments should spend 6% of their education budgets on adult education and that half of that should go to basic literacy. It is difficult to find objective reference points to substantiate these percentages but most specialists agree that at present most governments are spending under 1% of national education budgets on adults, and often only a small fraction of 1%. We need to popularize something of the kind as a reference point. If the case of Bangladesh is reviewed, it can be seen that the allocation for adult education has been kept very low, a trend consistent with most South Asian countries. The Literacy Campaigns like TLM (Total Literacy Movement), while initiating euphoria at inception phase, have been contrasted by dubious outcomes at later stages. Even the literacy rate has been a bone of contention over the past few years, alternative statistics generated by CSOs (mainly CAMPE through its 'Education Watch' initiative) has consistently come up with figures lower than 'official' statistics. Even though the government has not accepted it, neither has it been able to argue convincingly why its numbers are so different from those from other sources. In a scenario like this, rallying around globally recognized benchmarks can be efficacious to a certain extent.

As preparation for CONFINTEA VI, UNESCO convened a technical committee on adult education benchmarks, where there was a loose consensus on having benchmarks around three areas—outcome, participation and financing. However, these have not been finalized and still hang in limbo. To ensure tangible commitments, this process needs to be expedited.

In the meantime, in order to build momentum around a concrete agenda that addresses the broad components of literacy without diluting the focus, the 12 benchmarks proposed by ActionAid, and supported by GCE (ActionAid International 2005), could be further



explored. A critical examination and review might be undertaken to consider which of these benchmarks should be strongly and persuasively lobbied for by the civil society, so that they are adopted at CONFINTEA and ratified at country level. In particular, the following key quantifiable benchmarks might be seriously considered:

### ***Wages and Training of Facilitators***

In order to retain facilitators it is important that they should be paid at least the equivalent of the minimum wage of a primary school teacher for all the hours worked (including time for training, preparation and follow-up).

Facilitators should be local people who receive substantial initial training and regular refresher training, as well as having ongoing opportunities for exchanges with other facilitators. Governments should put in place a framework for the professional development of the adult literacy sector, including trainers/supervisors, and facilitators throughout the country should have full opportunities to access it (e.g. through distance education).

### ***Ratio of Facilitators to Learners***

There should be a ratio of at least one facilitator to 30 learners and at least one trainer/supervisor to 15 learner groups (1 to 10 in remote areas), ensuring a minimum of one support visit per month. Programmes should have timetables that flexibly respond to the daily lives of learners but also provide for regular and sustained contact (e.g. twice a week for at least two years).

### ***Cost per Learner***

A good quality literacy programme that respects all these benchmarks is likely to cost between US\$ 50 and US\$ 100 per learner per year for at least three years (two years' initial learning + ensuring further learning opportunities are available for all)

### ***Financing Requirement***

Governments should dedicate at least 3% of their national education sector budgets to adult literacy programmes as conceived in these benchmarks. Where governments meet this target, international donors should fill any remaining resource gaps (e.g. by including adult literacy in the Fast Track Initiative).

Apart from this, the global financing deficit needs to be highlighted and resources mobilized around it. On the basis of literacy statistics, which are admittedly inherently problematic, the funding gap in South and West Asia and sub-Saharan Africa is around US\$ 10 billion (Ravens and Aggio 2005). A viable financing plan needs to be drawn up on that basis, keeping in mind the urgency of mobilizing more than a billion dollars every year until 2015. This would at least meet EFA Goal 4, even though not everyone would be covered. It should also be remembered that a campaign for literacy should not be a campaign against illiterate people, thereby dehumanizing the agenda. To meet the overwhelming financing needs, a continuous co-ordination and engagement mechanism will have to be considered and

worked out among FTI, UNESCO (for both its UNLD platform and LIFE framework) and UNGEI.

### VIII. Conclusion

This opportunity needs to be used to best advantage to develop strong and passionate agreement on a core advocacy and campaign agenda. We need to be convinced that we have gone beyond rhetoric and have set our course on definitive and collective action. This action needs to resonate beyond a circle of select practitioners, and to become a rallying call for the people whose rights have been violated arbitrarily. We need to bear in mind that if we are to take such action, “it is not knowledge we lack. What is missing is the courage to understand what we know and to draw conclusions” (Lindqvist 1992, 2).

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# NGOs and Government Partnership in Non-Formal Education

Mohammad Nazmul Haq<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*Both public and private sectors are involved in implementing a large non-formal basic education program in Bangladesh. The NGOs were first involved in implementation of mass literacy programs throughout the country initiated by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) in mid-1990s. At present, more than 300 NGOs are working in partnership with the Bureau of Non-formal Education (BNFE), under MOPME. Most of NGOs working in basic education in collaboration with GoB are small and they operate locally with government and donor support.*

*The another argument that promoting effective cooperation between the government and private sector is essential for the success of the goals set for the education sector. Reorganizing NGOs as critical partners in promoting NFE and life-long learning, operational principles for government support should be adopted, such as, i) government should extend its cooperation to build the capacity and quality of NGOs in the field of training, supervision and monitoring and developing learning materials, ii) as a general principle, government should finance NGO's social and development activities, when this is cost-effective and contributes to the sustainability of the organization, iii) allowing the NGOs to provide education to the disadvantaged people through non-formal or any other acceptable approach provided it maintains equivalency with the nation's formal education system and contributes to equity in participation, iv) NGO's dependency on government and donors should be minimized by allowing them to exercise their own creativity but NGOs must accept the obligation to be accountable to government for their developmental activities.*

## I. Background

Bangladesh has a substantial program of non-formal basic education with a large institutional network. Besides a major effort in the public sector, a large number of local private or voluntary agencies (known as Non-Governmental Organization, NGO) are also involved in this effort. Among these private agencies some are known worldwide for their contribution to fulfilling the EFA (Education for All) goals. One reason for such huge involvement of NGOs in non-formal basic education is the magnitude of illiteracy and poverty that prevails in Bangladesh. The large population and massive illiteracy have prompted the Government of Bangladesh to embark on illiteracy and non-formal education activities.

It is well recognized that the NGOs are more capable than the public sector formal institutions in reaching the unreached children. Special interventions are required to mobilize the marginal populations to send their children to schools. The poor cannot afford the opportunity cost of sending their children to school. Unlike the primary schools, NGOs

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are capable of providing a comprehensive package of education necessary to serve the disadvantaged segments of the population. The integrated approach to development is an important strength of the NGOs. Moreover; their non-formal education model has its own strength of flexibility to adjust to local conditions. NFE is more learner-friendly and pro-poor in its character (Sedere and Sabur, 1999) than the formal programs.

Much has been written about non-formal education and its distinction with formal system (Brembeck 1973, Coombs 1971, Harbison 1973, Sedere 1981). Basic education is one area where formal and non-formal education overlaps. The term has a range of meaning around the globe depending upon the existing provision and policy of the government (Hawes, 1979). In most countries, basic education means the formal primary education, but in Bangladesh the government documents are prone to regard non-formal education activities as basic education and formal school for children as primary education. Unlike formal education NFE is not age specific; children, adolescents and adults all can enroll in an NFE program. NFE does not require a school building; a covered shelter is good enough for a school. It is located close to the doorstep of the poor. The NFE school has community teachers who know the children and live close to the children. No school uniform is needed; the children of the poor can attend school with the dress that they can afford. NGOs provide the necessary learning materials, which include the primers, workbooks, slates, pencils etc. There is, therefore, no private cost. NFE's objectives are simpler and are attainable, aiming to provide basic education in reading, writing and numeracy with a degree of awareness in life skills. The successful children in the NFE schools may continue their education in the formal primary school as regular students, which is described as mainstreaming.

In Bangladesh, over 700 NGOs are actively in basic NFE programs. There are many more NGOs not directly involved in running NFE programs, but they provide various types of social and financial support to schooling and literacy. The support includes financial assistance to NFE activities, preparing curricular materials and organizing training programs for teacher and supervisor. The leader amongst the NGO run NFE program in Bangladesh is BRAC (Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee, recently renamed as Building Resources Across Communities). BRAC introduced a Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) model that has been replicated by many other NGOs in Bangladesh.

Since the EFA goals for the year 2000 were established, GOB has encouraged NGOs and the development partners to support literacy programs for children and adults. Thus with the establishment of Directorate of Non-formal Education (DNFE) in 1995, GOB initially commissioned four large scale projects to offer literacy to children, adolescents and adults through developing partnership with NGOs during the first half of this decade. This too has created different models and modalities in dealing with Non-Formal basic education in Bangladesh. GOB ran NFE for adolescents and adults through two such modalities. These were known as Center Based Approach (CBA) and Total Literacy Movement (TLM). The TLM was discontinued in 2003 and follow-up projects have been initiated known as Post Literacy and Continuing Education (PLCE). This study intends to examine the state of the art in public-private partnership in basic non-formal education in Bangladesh.

### **Meaning of Partnership in NFE**

A spectrum of public-private partnership has been identified ranging from no relationship to

a close relationship of collaboration. Such collaboration may include elements of contractual, complementary, or even parallel arrangement when such a combination is mutually agreed for advancing the shared objectives (Ahmed, 1999). Largely, the national government or its associate agencies (district administration, municipal authority, local government, state university etc.) represent the public sector. The private sector includes the NGO, cooperative society, community based organization, and research and professional organization. DNFE was established with a view to developing a network with the NGOs to implement the NFE program for children and adults. When DNFE was abolished, its responsibilities were passed on to a body of much smaller scale, the Bureau of Non Formal Education (BNFE). Besides this body, some national level larger NGOs also have extended their support to other local and smaller NGOs for providing basic education to children and adults.

Government's first intervention to NFE was through the Mass Education program (MEP) in 1998. In 1991, through the General Education Project, GOB supported 17 NGOs to offer NFE programs. In 1992, GOB decided to give an emphasis on NFE and Mass Education, which led to the establishment of the Directorate of Non Formal Education (DNFE). Since the establishment of DNFE in September, 1995 GOB assumed a direct management role in the NFE sub-sector. At that time, DNFE was the largest provider of non-formal adult education in Bangladesh.

### **Emerging Partnership in Education**

In order to make primary education universal, demand for education had to be created from the community, without which lasting results could not be achieved. Government realized that one way to address this is to involve the partners and the community leaders in the management process. To involve NGOs in a big way as a complement to the government efforts was also an alternative. The international development partners, considering the institutional, managerial, and financial limitations of the government, strongly advocated for increasing involvement of NGOs in development activities. As a result, the government recognized the importance of the involvement of the NGOs in the development process (Jabbar, 1995). It took some steps to facilitate participation of NGOs in the nation's drive against illiteracy. These included (i) creation of NGO affairs bureau for co-ordination of NGO activities and (ii) involvement of more than 700 NGOs in basic education process.

The Ministry (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, MOPME) involved NGOs for implementation of mass literacy program throughout the country and has evolved detailed mechanism for selection of NGOs (Agreement between BNFE and NGO). Some of the projects of BNFE were being implemented almost entirely through NGOs. These projects were funded by multilateral donors. An essential element of the process was open invitation of bids/proposals from NGOs for implementing the program according to pre-designed procedures. The Ministry and its concerned agency (Directorate) rigidly controlled the selection process according to a set of 13 listed criteria. The criteria were mostly related to the legal identity and administrative and managerial capabilities of the organizations.

A large number of NGOs fulfilled the selection criteria but were not well experienced in conducting literacy programs. Working areas for the NGOs were decided by BNFE which caused problems for the organization. Lack of transparency was a major problem in many

NGOs. The tendency for over and under reporting to BNFE by some NGOs was often a source of tension.

### **Legal Framework of the Partnership**

The policy statements on education are often in the form of recommendations to the government by the expert groups and consultants. The education policy statements are particularly nebulous about decentralization and partnership (Ahmed, 1999). The government and its counterparts often cited as the legal framework article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh. It states the right to education of all the citizens of the nation. Regarding the issue of partnership, the education policy statements that exist seem to be aimed at making the non-government institutions similar, if not identical, to government institutions in terms of curricula, teaching materials, teachers' qualifications, and remuneration of their service condition, as well as the method of evaluation and assessment. The advantages of diversity, creativity, competition, responsiveness to varying circumstances and the importance of complementarities and collaboration among diverse actors seem to be ignored, if not actively discouraged (Ahmed, 1999 p. 67).

### **Bureaucracy behind the Partnership**

Bangladesh bureaucracy has a long tradition of control and regulation. This tradition was inherited from the British colonial period and it still persists. The interventionist role of the state has not changed significantly. The degree of influence exercised by the government on NGO is most at the project approval stage. The control continues through the project implementation and monitoring process.

The first ordinance to regulate NGOs was promulgated in 1961 which made mandatory for all NGOs operating in the then East Pakistan to register with the government (Kalimullah, 1992). This ordinance was followed by the 'Foreign Donation Regulation Ordinance' in 1978. The church-related NGOs enjoyed a little more freedom in this regard. During the pre-liberation period NGO activities were further curtailed with the imposition of new regulation regarding externally donated funds and travel formalities. Government officials were barred from serving on NGO boards or councils- including officials of semiautonomous bodies, universities, and government schools. These regulations greatly hampered NGOs' normal operations and project approval was turned into a difficult task. Dissatisfied with continued restrictions and delaying of project approval, the NGOs in order to obtain greater flexibility and autonomy in their operations, sought the help of some donor agencies. The lobbying efforts of NGOs resulted in the establishment of NGO Affairs Bureau to provide a one- step service to NGOs, instead of shuttling between ministries for project approval. The Task Force Report (Prepared during the interim regime 1990-91) on NGO Affairs Bureau commented that the forms and procedures followed by the Bureau were still complex and cumbersome and were not only creating problems for NGOs but were also preventing the Bureau from being more effective (Jamil, 2000).

### **Selection of NGOs**

The selection of NGOs for partnership programs is strictly controlled by the Ministry. Selection criteria are followed through careful scrutiny of submitted document and other

activities of the organizations. Proposals for donor assistance is required to be submitted in a predetermined format developed by the Ministry; therefore, there is no scope of showing any innovative approach or difference in the educational endeavor. The selected NGOs for the partnership program are required to sign a bilateral agreement with government for specific performance. The contract elucidated the obligations of the NGOs toward meeting prescribed methodological, financial, and accounting requirements and complying with agreed budget and work plan. Fund is released quarterly upon receipt of expenditure statement or vouchers of the last quarter.

### **Organizational Arrangements of NGOs**

The non-government organizations in Bangladesh vary in size and reach, from small agencies with fewer than ten members to big NGOs with thousands of members. But unfortunately information about these organizations are inadequately documented and scattered (Jamil, 2000). However, three categories of NGOs are identified as development partners in Bangladesh. These are:

- NGOs which are purely of foreign origin
- NGOs which are local but funded by foreign donors
- NGOs which are small and locally operated with government or bigger NGO donations

Most of the NGOs working in the field of basic education work in collaboration with GOB and belong to the third category. Their capacity and existence are contingent upon the availability of subvention some government. About 60% of the organizations who are registered under the Social Welfare Department have NFE program. According to source (Sedere and Sabur, 1999) over 90% of the NGOs are small in scale and work in a few thanas. There are many smaller NGOs working in a single thana or in a few villages whose institutional framework is very small and inefficient. Their only strength is the head of the organization who is well conversant about development projects and have good connection with the government or donors to draw fund for his/her organization. Other workers in the organization are either local volunteer or work on a minimum wage. Therefore, the obvious result is dropout of staff from the project (the turn-over is high in the bigger NGOs also). The former DNFE provided training to the facilitators and supervisors of partner NGOs whose staff turn-over was reported to be high.

In view of the EFA goals, external donors have come forward to support the NFE programs in Bangladesh to reach the disadvantage and un-reached population. Several funding mechanism are found in practice in Bangladesh. The majority of international donors extend their support to national NGOs through government or BNFE. Donors also finance NFE programs of the NGOs directly. International agency like ADB, UNICEF, IDA, DFID, NORAD, USID, SIDA etc. provide financial assistance to NGOs through BNFE, while some local NGOs like BRAC, PROSHIKA, Centre for Mass Education and Science (CMES) and Underprivileged Children Education Program (UCEP) etc. receive grants directly from international donors. Another mechanism of support is Donor Consortia. BRAC, PROSHIKA, and GSS (its activities are now suspended) have donor consortia and each consortium member finances programs with general agreement with each other and the

concerned NGO. The National NGOs are also financing smaller NGOs in partnership programs. These are also assisted by donor consortia. BRAC, PROSHIKA, and Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) support smaller NGOs, for which funds may come from their own source or the Donor Consortia.

### **Environment within Partnership Program**

The largest amount of NFE activities executed in Bangladesh goes through government NGO partnership. More than a third of NFE program, of BNFE take place with the collaborating partners. Today more than 300 NGOs are working in partnership with BNFE. Though there are large numbers of NGOs involved in partnership with government, yet the environment of such partnership is not always smooth or without problems. Complaints and counter-complaints are often heard from both sides. Among the most pronounced complaints from NGOs are about delay in release of funds, poor quality materials and difficulty in following some instructions from the Directorate (e.g., organizing learning centers at short notice). NGOs have their own catchment area where they are known to people and find it convenient in dealing with a new project. But in most cases BNFE's assignment to NGOs fall beyond these catchment areas which put them in great difficulty. When the organization receives work order (or finally sign the bilateral agreement), they have no choice but to rush to an unknown field for the project. The project unit is a centre, managed by a five member Centre Management Committee (CMC). The committee is headed by a locally respectable person (head teacher of a primary school or so) with centre-teacher as member secretary. The responsibilities of the Committee are:

- i. Ensure regular attendance of selected learners in the centres.
- ii. Establish and maintain contact with the local authorities.
- iii. Hold committee meeting every month and review progress and difficulties faced by the centre and take appropriate action to ensure regular attendance of learners/ teachers/ supervisors and operation of the centre.
- iv. Provide necessary information and co-operation to the program officer and other visitors of BNFE and others.

In fact, the success of a centre largely depends on the initiatives of the teacher. The committee does not have any power or financial strength to propel the centre's progress. Centre activities are largely monitored by the respective supervisor of the organization. There is provision of monitoring by BNFE staff, but these visits are infrequent.

Complaints from the government are about alleged inefficiency of NGOs in running projects, lack of transparency in the financial management of NGOs, frequent change in teacher and supervisor and weak monitoring. A mutual mistrust even in the partnership program is evident in the complaints expressed by both the parties. In general the governance arrangements in partnership program is weak from both sides. BNFE meets with the NGO partners for a day in every month where they discuss the obstacles and constraints in terms of governance and management of both the partners. The meeting is chaired by an NGO representative but that does not help the governance because of the bureaucratic complexities in government. Problems related to financial matters (like quick release of



fund), supply of materials and their quality etc. are discussed at great length, but the problems still persist. Monitoring Associates of BNFE, District Coordinators and visitors from Head Quarter all have policing attitude toward the NGOs. Supportive supervision and quality monitoring of NGOs are virtually absent.

## **II. Problems and Prospects of the NGOs**

Though large number of NGOs are working in Bangladesh and some of them are more than 25 years old, they have not reached a level of self sustainability. The education program is mostly donor supported and donor driven.

Another major problem of NGOs is their floating work force and high turn-over of the project staff. Most of the project people are recruited along with the project and they are terminated at the end of the project. It creates a vacuum of trained personnel in NGOs when starting a new project. Neither government nor donors give any attention to this issue, rather they appear to be satisfied with NGOs own recruitment and are concerned about spending the allotted money within stipulated time. The ultimate result of such a situation is poor quality of the programs and little impact on the people.

A serious obstacle to smooth functioning of the partnership program is the government bureaucracy. Study conducted on GO-NGO administration shows that the present bureaucracy is more concerned with paper work and compliance with rules, rather than results (Jamil, 2000). Such a bureaucratic approach arises from natural mistrust and weakness in management capacities on both sides.

In spite of the difficulties faced by the NGOs they are largely successful in delivering services and reaching the rural poor and hard to reach groups in remote areas (Kvam 1992). There are some areas in the country where people are very conservative, suspicious, and resistant to development. Government officials are often inaccessible to them. Only the local NGOs can communicate with them and their authority can bring them under the same umbrella. These small NGOs are dependent on grants from government or donor sources. Once the fund is exhausted the organization may disappear.

### **NGO Network in Bangladesh**

There are several networks of NGOs in Bangladesh Two of the prominent ones are ADAB (Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh) and CAMPE (Campaign for Popular Education). CAMPE is exclusively a forum of education related NGOs.

ADAB has been the apex NGO network. Over 900 NGOs are members of this network. This includes national and leading NGOs in all fields of development. ADAB has sixteen Chapters across the country and each Chapter has a Chapter Office. Since 2003, because of internal management and leadership problem, several prominent NGOs have formed a Neutral federation of NGOs as a new open organization.

CAMPE is a forum of basic education providing organizations, provides technical support to smaller NGOs in the field of non-formal education, supports its member by offering training in all areas and helps the smaller NGOs in capacity building. CAMPE maintains database on NGOs and disseminate information to member NGOs and represents all members in

important forums of policy discussions. CAMPE is recognized by GOB and the donors and several donors have assisted CAMPE develop its technical capacity to support the education sector NGOs in Bangladesh. It has 414 Member NGOs and this includes all national level and leading NGOs implementing NFE programs.

CAMPE is affiliated with Asian South Pacific Bureau of Adult Education (ASPBAE) and International Council of Adult Education (CAE). It is also recognized by UNESCO as nodal institution for Basic Education in Bangladesh.

### **III. Impact of Partnership in Non-formal Education**

The main objective of partnership in NFE is to impart basic education to the illiterates and disadvantaged population in the modality of NFE. The most significant happening in the NFE sub-sector in Bangladesh was DNFE's entry into NFE as the largest player. It has attracted the larger donors like World Bank, ADB and some bi-lateral donors. These agencies usually finance projects authorized by the government. Through this effort the NGOs were involved in more NFE programs than ever before and became active in non-formal education.

In terms of learning outcomes and achievements of NFE programs implemented through partnership, it is a mixed picture. Official claims derived from DNFE data were that adult literacy level had reached even 60 percent. Other sources disputed these claims. In part, it was a problem of definition applied to literacy achievement and how it was measured or assessed (see Sedere and Sabur 1999 and Education Watch Report 2002).

The greatest impact of NFE program on the learners was awareness about development issues and their own socio economic situation. Without NFE program such awareness could not be achieved. NFE made the parents send their kids to school, made the woman aware about their rights and made people conscious of their health needs. An important result of the partnership program is the development of a systematic approach to non-formal education on the basis of a standard curriculum. Prior to this initiative there was no commonly accepted curriculum for the NGOs engaged in NFE (Haq, 1989). DNFE for the first time commissioned a team of experts drawing from both GO and NGO community as well as academicians to prepare the NFE curriculum for different groups of learners. Though this curriculum has faced criticism regarding its contents and the need for continuing curriculum development has been emphasized, it provided a basis for a common and unified approach for a national effort in adult literacy.

Generally, poor learning outcomes from the literacy program and dissatisfaction about management including aspects of GO-NGO partnership led to closing down DNFE in 2003. NFE in the country fell into doldrums. A kind revival of NFE in the public sector occurred with the formation of the Bureau of Nonformal Education in 2005.

### **IV. Lessons Learned and Future Direction**

The positive aspect of NFE activities in the 1990s, especially after the establishment of DNFE, are that it was successful in putting NFE on the map by turning NFE into a major public sector education enterprise with a major commitment of national budget and international donor support. DNFE developed an approach for NGO participation and

demonstrated that NGOs can be involved in large-scale national projects under the leadership of the government. DNFE also established an information and communication mechanism to support planning, organization, management and administration and monitoring of NFE delivery.

DNFE suffered from a number of weaknesses. DNFE programs were guided by a narrow view of NFE, limited to adult literacy. The NFE sub-sector in Bangladesh lacked a comprehensive vision of non-formal education.

Basic conditions for good management practices were absent in DNFE. DNFE, particularly, at the senior level, was not staffed by professionally qualified personnel, and there was no systematic provision for capacity building in planning, monitoring, evaluation, and material development in the evolving scenario of the NFE sub-sector. The human resource management and development system and practices were incompatible with professionalization of management and professional development of the organization. Staff turnover was a serious obstacle to institution building and making DNFE a professional organization.

In summary, due to systemic deficiencies relating to operational aspects including NGO selection and financial management, DNFE failed to maximize the use of the available resource to the benefit of the program. DNFE was established as a government directorate working directly under MOPME, and hence did not have organizational autonomy defined in terms of the degree of freedom from the supervising Ministry. DNFE lacked effective leadership with the capability to inspire all concerned to understand and commit themselves to the institutions' mission, and guide and motivate all to work towards its fulfillment. DNFE management was weak especially in policy formulation, planning, monitoring, and evaluation. There was no environment for learning, vision or leadership in the organization to take up these challenges. (Ahmed, M. and Lohani, S. "Nonformal Education Proposal, Working Document prepared for the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education," August 2004)

In June 2003, MOPME formed a National Task Force (NTF) headed by the Adviser to the Prime Minister (who was then Minister in charge for MOPME), for the development of a national policy framework for NFE. The proposed policy framework for NFE in Bangladesh, prepared under the auspices of the NTF, presented the vision, mission, goal, objectives and scope of NFE and its potential clientele groups.

The vision and mission formulated in the proposed policy framework attempted to remedy the narrow vision of DNFE and the problems arising from it in defining the NFE tasks and the scope and modality of partnerships among major stakeholders.

The vision and mission of NFE were stated in the following words:

**Vision:** In pursuance of the constitutional commitment to ensure educational opportunities for all citizens and to build a just and equal society, all citizens will have the opportunity to participate in education to fulfil their individual potential, be effective members of their family and community and be productive and responsible citizens, capable of facing the challenges of the 21st century.

**Mission:** To provide access to life-long learning opportunities for improving the quality of life of children, youth and adults including those with special needs and who have missed out formal education; and equip them with adequate knowledge, productive skills and life-skills through relevant and high quality learning opportunities, including literacy, basic education and continuing education programs.

In line with these statements of vision and mission, the overall goal of NFE was seen as:

To contribute to fulfilling EFA goals and alleviating poverty as spelled out in the National Plan of Action II, 2004-2015 and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), by creating a community-based network of learning centres aimed at reducing illiteracy by at least 50% by 2015, extending opportunities for effective skill training and continuing education and creating lifelong learning opportunities. Children, adolescents and youth were foreseen as the priority in identifying learners.

Among the specific objectives of government support for NFPE were the steps to:

Establish a working mechanism of government, NGOs and broader civil society including the private sector for policy co-ordination, planning, implementing, monitoring and evaluation to reduce illiteracy, poverty and promote human resource development;

Develop a system of ensuring involvement, participation, co-ordination and sharing of responsibility between the government, NGOs, broader civil society and private sector in planning, managing and resource mobilization at local, national and international levels for funding NFE programs.

The guiding principles recommended for a public sector organizational mechanism for NFE encapsulated the approach that was needed to overcome the problems encountered in NFE as managed through DNFE. Among other items, it was recommended that the organizational structure for NFE should be developed as:

*A mechanism for partnership building.* The organization would be a working mechanism for building partnership and collaboration between government agencies, providers of education and training, business and trade bodies, employers, and those who can help in entrepreneurship development and marketing of products. GO-NGO relationships based on partnerships with mutual respect and support, rather than NGOs serving as mere contractors or vendors, should be the norm in this mechanism. (Ahmed and Lohani, *Ibid.*)

An NFE Policy Framework has been adopted by the government based to a degree on the recommendations of the national task-force and the Bureau of Non-formal Education has been established in 2005.

The new NFE policy adopted in 2005 represents a considerable improvement compared with the earlier absence of a comprehensive NFE policy. The new policy provides clear and concrete guidelines to all NFE partners. By defining the scope and vision of NFE broadly and ambitiously, the new policy has dramatically expanded the range and complexity of the activities and services to be offered to a wider range of potential NFE clients.

However, where the approved policy framework departed almost totally from the expert recommendations of the Task Force was in the area of the organizational mechanism. The new BNFE can be regarded as a smaller version of the erstwhile DNFE and, therefore, is

bound to be saddled with all the management and organizational problems of DNFE that led its poor performance and ultimately its disbanding.

As pointed out in a recent review of the NFE situation, the current organizational structures at national and district levels “ will face serious difficulties in trying to implement complex aspects of the policy, especially technical components such as planning, skills training, monitoring and technical support. As was the case under the old DNFE, the newly created Bureau of NFE is staffed and managed by civil servants who may not have the knowledge, skills, competences and experience to adequately guide and implement an NFE policy which has grown more complex.” (EFA Global Action Week 2007, “*Education as Human Right*” Thematic Forum Issues Paper, “Literacy, Non-formal Education and Lifelong Learning,” prepared by BRAC University Institute of Educational Development, 2007)

The above mentioned review goes on, “ It appears that the effective implementation of the NFE policy at various levels, is once again hampered (as was the case some years ago under the former DNFE structure) by the fact that BNFE and its current staff do not, as civil servants, possess sufficient understanding, knowledge, professional capacities and experience to fulfill the roles and responsibilities which are theirs under the new policy. The frequent turnover of NFE staff and the absence of staff permanency further compound the problem.”

A semi-autonomous agency, staffed by professionals (from relevant sectors and occupational groups within wider society) who can guide, lead the process, as well as inspire and support others, was recommended by the experts who formulated the draft of the NFE policy, but was ignored by decision-makers. It was pointed out by the technical experts that decentralization and building the capacities of NFE personnel at all levels, starting with the national level, were absolutely necessary, if the mistakes of the erstwhile DNFE were not to be repeated

### **V. Policy Implications**

It is evident the relationship between the government and NGOs in the field of non-formal education is yet unclear and ambivalent. The government is more an authoritarian task master than a friendly and supportive partner. On the other hand, NGOs sometimes demand freedom and support without considering the national perspective of planning and coordination. Such a situation has brought the partners into a relationship of mistrust and tension. It is necessary to have frequent dialogue between the two parties about policy, legal aspects, national strategy, administrative mechanism, financial policy and use of donor contribution.

Based on the diagnosis of problems and lessons from experience noted above, the EFA Global Action Week Forum 2007 recommended a number of action points as noted below:

- Take steps to operationalise and implement the goals, objectives and strategies set in the National Policy for Non-formal Education of 2005 for meeting basic learning needs of youth and adults and expand life-long learning opportunities; an overall NFE/LLL comprehensive plan should be developed as anticipate in the policy statement.

- Establish and strengthen organizational structures at the national and district levels, formulate an operational programme and develop new modalities of partnership between the government and non-governmental organizations which are relevant and appropriate for fulfilling the vision of NFE and lifelong learning envisaged in the National policy for NFE.
- Move towards a decentralized organizational structure with NGOs and community organizations along with concerned research and academic institutions involved prominently both at the national and district levels, staffed with professionally qualified personnel, with incentives and remuneration to attract and retain qualified and committed people ( instead of personnel on temporary deputation ).
- Design and implement adult literacy programmes which lead to functional and relevant skills responding to needs of learners and where appropriate linked with income earning skills and life skills and ensure necessary technical support and resources for maintaining quality in partnership with capable and committed NGOs and academic institutions.
- Develop and promote a network of community-based, community-managed, permanent multi-purpose learning centres, usually supported by an NGO actively engaged in education, as the main institutional mechanism for NFE and LLL; BNFE should undertake research and experiment on the modality of permanent community-based learning centers in collaboration with appropriate research institutions and committed NGOs.
- External and government resources for time-bound projects should be designed and aimed at supporting the development of the community-based network of permanent learning centres.
- A programme and an institutional mechanism for longer term professional development of managers, planners and specialists in NFE/LLL should be developed and implemented in partnership with NGOs and interested research and academic institutions.

(EFA Global Action Week 2007, *ibid.*)

Besides the above action points, the following actions may be taken for promoting effective cooperation between the government and private sectors or NGOs.

- a) Establishing guidelines and regulations regarding decentralization of management specifying roles, functions, authorities and obligations of the government as well as NGOs so that the context for cooperation and collaboration between these two parties are clearly understood.
- b) Frequent dialogue between the two parties in friendly environment with open and transparent communication with each other.
- c) Policy and regulation for innovative projects and experimentation need to be formulated so that experimental activities can be encouraged with at administrative barriers.

Reorganizing NGOs as critical partners in promoting NFE and life-long learning, operational principles for government support should be adopted, such as the following:

- a) Government should extend its cooperation to build the capacity and quality of NGOs in the field of training, supervision and monitoring and developing learning materials.
- b) As a general principle, government should finance NGO's social and development activities, when this is cost-effective and contributes to the sustainability of the organization.
- c) Allowing the NGOs to provide education to the disadvantaged people through non-formal or any other acceptable approach provided it maintains the equivalency and equity with the nation's formal education system.
- d) NGO's dependency on government and donors should be minimized by allowing them to exercise their own creativity but NGOs must accept the obligation to be accountable to government for their developmental activities.

The quality of NGO activities has always been a great concern to the government as well as the donors. Unfortunately, this concern was never addressed with patience and care. In exercising quality control often bureaucratic interference becomes the pattern which produce tension and mistrust. The following actions are suggested for encouraging better quality in programs:

- a) The standard of quality in such areas as of teacher training, teaching-learning materials, classroom environment, learner achievement etc. need to be determined beforehand through joint efforts so that both sides know what these are and can strive to achieve them.
- b) It is not possible for government to take care of all the NGOs in the field individually. Therefore, a group of NGOs (small and large) can be brought under a networking system so that they can look after their own quality of work.
- c) NGOs should be encouraged and supported to develop their own independent monitoring cells to supervise and monitor their activities within their working area. Currently this is the most weak area in the non-governmental organizations. Neither government nor donors support this activity or development of capacity in this respect.
- d) In order to develop the NGO's capacity and quality a core group of people (like trainers, material developers, monitors etc.) has to be developed with the help of the government so that uniformity in this respect can be maintained.

NGOs largely operate with donor's financial and technical support. Such support has been largely responsible for the emergence of the large NGOs in Bangladesh. Government's ambivalence and bureaucratic attitude in funding projects have been a discouragement for donors. The following steps may be taken to encourage funding support for NFE projects:

- a) Donors' money for education project should be accepted when it fits the larger national principle and overall strategy. Attention must be given to the financial support that has the component of capacity building for the concerned organizations.
- b) Donors should be encouraged to support networks of NGOs and work through

networking mechanisms (CAMPE is one example) rather than the individual agencies that will reduce direct donor dependence of the NGOs, increase GO-NGO and NGO-NGO cooperation, and reduce transaction costs for donors.

- c) All parties -donors, government and NGOs- must emphasize the quality of the work rather than the quantity (which is often the case).

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# Stakeholder Insights For Effective Higher Education Management

Syed Saad Andaleeb<sup>1</sup>

## Abstract

*This paper looks at human development in higher education through the lens of its users (the alumni). Tertiary education in Bangladesh has recorded over a five-fold growth since its birth in 1971. Yet, the participation rate of only 7 out of every 1000 persons in higher education in the country has to be considered meager.*

*Higher education in Bangladesh faces many challenges. Efforts have been made to capture the insight of one stakeholder group-the alumni of higher education institutions. In Bangladesh, the higher education system has often failed to deliver value to its beneficiaries, diminishing its value to its stakeholders largely because of its failure to meet expectations. The image of the HEIs has also been seriously compromised and the semblance of quality markedly eroded by political involvement of the teachers and students and the lack of an effective governance mechanism. Consequently, many aspiring students are seeking their education, goals and dreams in universities abroad. The paper attempted to provide insights into various quality dimensions of higher education and their subcomponents, namely, Teacher Quality, Peer Quality, Course Quality, Campus Politics and administrative Support.*

## I. Introduction

The quest for development has remained elusive for many developing countries. The leadership in many of these countries has often failed to understand that without human development, all other goals may be far more difficult to achieve, or even impossible, in the long run. The importance of human development is evident from Harbison (1973):

“Human resources - not capital, nor income, nor material resources - constitute the ultimate basis for wealth of nations. Capital and natural resources are passive factors of production; human beings are the active agents who accumulate capital, exploit natural resources, build social, economic and political organizations, and carry forward national development.”

Unless human resources - their energies, skills, talents and knowledge - are adequately and effectively developed and appropriately utilized, national development in its true sense will remain ephemeral (Andaleeb 2003).

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Development strategies since the 1990's, accumulated international experiences, and the lessons learnt from them have put human development at center stage. Empowering people with certain types of knowledge and skills is vital in shaping a country's development path. Education can therefore become a key element of poverty alleviation. In fact, lack of knowledge about one's choices and opportunities in life and the lack of capacity to assess and exercise these choices fuels poverty. According to Sen (2003) deprivation from education is an onerous factor that sustains poverty, not only of income and wealth, but also of the mind, the spirit, and one's physical well being.

T.W. Schultz (1962) has also broadened our perceptions of the positive effects of education on human productivity. It is through education that a nation's greatest asset is effectively shaped and developed. Both Nobel laureates have emphasized the importance of human development as the basis of national growth and emancipation.

According to the noted British economist, E.F. Schumacher (1973), "Development does not start with goods; it starts with people and their education, organization, and discipline." Referring to the World Wars, he says, "every country, no matter how devastated, which had a high level of education, organization, and discipline, produced an economic miracle." But education cannot make a quantum jump. It must evolve step by step, becoming the property not merely of a tiny minority, but of a whole society.

Unfortunately, the developing countries are generally characterized by widespread underdevelopment of their human resources. A large proportion of the population is illiterate and there are serious shortages of strategic skills, reflecting how education as a key variable for development has been routinely ignored. As a consequence, people's mastery over needed skills is limited and productivity very low.

Underutilization of human resources is another characteristic of developing countries. Persons with scarce skills often waste their time in the wrong kind of activity (e.g., doctors serving as administrators in the national health program in Bangladesh), others perform tasks unsuited to their backgrounds (a college graduate working as a night guard), while the capacities of highly educated persons are wasted in environments offering little incentive or challenge (persons with PhD degrees having little or no opportunities for research in the academic institutions, resulting in the 'brain drain' phenomenon). Clearly, the country's leadership must coordinate the twin functions of developing strategic skills and utilizing them in ways where the opportunities are commensurate with one's abilities.

## **Background**

Education represents the totality of all experiences through which a person comes to know all he knows. It should enable a person, to deal more effectively with others, with his work and also with himself. The role of education is to upgrade the abilities of the people to deal effectively with problems that may stand in their way of progress. It must be able to bring about a change in their level of consciousness and develop a new awareness among them to define realistic and appropriate goals that one is best able to achieve.

Numerous studies have shown the positive relationship of education to human growth and development in all its various aspects such as intellectual and emotional growth, the formation of habits, attitudes and character, and social change as a result of the interaction between education and society. Research has contributed substantially to building awareness of education as an instrument of personal and social development (World Bank 1995). Its value as a means of achieving human and social goals is increasingly well recognized.

Cross country comparisons show that countries with high literacy had high life expectancy and tended to grow faster in the 1960s and 1970s (Chapman 2000). That conclusion remains valid even today. Sustained economic growth depends on a long-term strategy to improve the educational environment, leading to human development by way of improving the levels of consciousness of the people and by making them more intelligent, more ready, and more capable in their evolving nature of work in a globalizing and rapidly changing world.

Within the total education system, higher education is of strategic importance not only as an engine for human development, but also as an incubator and repository of knowledge with untold potential (Andaleeb 2003). Today governmental and societal groups are scrutinizing the performance of higher education institutions (HEIs) and the quality and value they deliver (Kember 1994; Nordvale 1996; Pounder 1997). Demanding greater accountability from the education system, many of these countries are introducing industrial concepts, formulae, and techniques including TQM (total quality management) applications to the management of HEIs. Malaysia is a case in point where quality practices from industry (TQM, six sigma, ISO 9000) are being rapidly introduced (Kanji, Tambi, Wallace 1999). India's rapid economic growth and the country's transition from socialism to free markets has also brought higher education under intense pressure to become more innovative and value-oriented.

Underscoring the poor quality of universities in developing countries, Lim (1999) attributes their underachievement to the fact that the staffs are often burdened by multiple tasks that limit research. In addition, archaic systems in the HEIs do not reward excellence in teaching and research, inhibiting the overall performance of even well qualified staff.

The World Bank (1993) also called for more diversity in the post-secondary institutions, stressing the need to enhance academic quality and to introduce greater accountability, along with greater autonomy for universities and better management and evaluation procedures in the operation of these institutions. Importantly, The World Bank urged post-secondary institutions to examine the relevance of their academic programs and to track student performance among other recommendations.

Ultimately, the HEIs must serve their communities by establishing minimum standards of instruction for universities and using assessment and accreditation procedures to enhance the role and performance of the HEIs. In the area of management education in India, for example, Jagadeep (2000) indicates a significant mismatch between demand and supply.

Consequently, the All India Council of Technical Education under the Ministry of Human Resource Development permitted a large number of institutes to start MBA or equivalent programs. The consequence has been dire. Many of the newly minted institutes are beset by:

- Limited number of core faculty and heavy dependence on visiting/guest faculty.
- Poor quality of faculty on competence, qualification, and experience.
- Poorly structured courses with little or no guidelines for content, coverage, and depth.
- Admission norms greatly relaxed to maximize revenues and profits.
- Poor assessment criteria and emphasis on promoting students and awarding degrees.

Although the concept of human development can be treated from various perspectives such as health, nutrition, environment, employment, etc., this paper looks at human development in higher education through the lens of its users (the alumni) who are well-positioned to offer strategic insights about their experiences with higher education.

## **Higher Education In Bangladesh**

### **Structure of Higher Education**

The major components of the higher education network include the 21 public general and specialized universities, 54 private universities, 1500 colleges of different kinds affiliated with the National University, as well as the Bangladesh Open University (National Education Commission Report 2003; The University Grants Commission (UGC) 2005).

Historically, the University of Dhaka, and the degree colleges in the district centers had earned a reputation for academic excellence and as centers of intellectual pursuit. A massive expansion of the system and demands of the times have altered the character of higher education over the last half century. In numbers of institutions and enrollment, tertiary education has recorded over a five-fold growth since the birth of Bangladesh in 1971. Yet, the participation rate of only 7 out of every 1000 persons in higher education in today's "knowledge economy" and "information society" has to be considered meager. Students and teachers in higher education as reported by UGC in 2005 are shown below:

Enrollment in 21 public universities	1,073,726
Teaching staff in 21 public universities	6,921
Enrollment in private universities	88,669
Teaching staff in private universities	N/A

(Source: University Grants Commission 2005, pp. 107-9).

Bangladesh Open University (BOU), established in 1992, offers a variety of courses in the distance education mode including degree courses in business and education and diplomas and certificates in various fields. The Open University (as well as the Open School under

BOU auspices, that allows students to sit for SSC and HSC examinations) has contributed to broadening access to higher education and meeting both social and market demand for it. BOU has six "schools" under it: Open School; School of Education; School of Social Science, Humanities and Language; School of Science and technology; School of Agriculture and Rural development; and School of Business. It operates from its main campus in Ghazipur through 12 Regional Resource Centers, 80 Local Coordinating Centers and 700 Tutorial Centers. In 2003, registered participants in various BOU courses were reported to be 400,000 (NEC 2003, p.293). Less than a quarter of those who register complete the required courses and take the examination and about half of them receive the diploma.

In response to social as well as market demand, the tertiary education system has grown. An expansionist approach has been followed, particularly in the sphere of degree colleges under the National University and in liberally approving the charters for private universities. Private Universities have also grown rapidly in number and enrollment since the Private Universities Act was adopted in 1992. Between 1998 and 2005, the number of students increased more than ten-fold from 8,700 to 88,669. The number of institutions also increased eight-fold to 54 by 2005. The politics-free environment in contrast to public universities, assurance of completing the courses of studies within the designated time, and programs of studies that are responsive to market demands have attracted a growing number of students to private universities (NEC 2003, pp. 107-9).

### **State of Higher Education**

Research on the performance of HEIs in Bangladesh is limited. Yet, persistent problems are evident from various sources including the print media. What emerges from these sources is that higher education in Bangladesh faces numerous challenges: quality has deteriorated substantially, mismanagement is rampant, standards are poor, lack of qualified teachers is pervasive, course design is archaic, and there is wide variation in student quality. These problems cause serious mediocrity in the HEIs and hamper producing productive and employable graduates (Andaleeb 2003). Yet, with increasing demand, new private universities seem to be coming on-stream everywhere. However, the rapid growth in number and size of private universities and the absence of effective self-regulation or regulation have raised concerns about their quality. Questions are also being raised about whether consumers (students and their families) are receiving adequate protection from unscrupulous "entrepreneurship" (i.e., low caliber universities and their profit-driven founders).

In fact, a large number of the private universities are deficient on quality, rigor, relevance, and value for money. A recent UGC investigation of the private universities revealed that most of the 52 universities did not meet the requirements laid down by the government under the Privacy Act 1992 (Hossain 2005). It is important that both types of HEIs (public and private) should come under greater scrutiny to provide much needed impetus for change so that they can better serve the needs of a dynamic and evolving environment.

The strategic role of the HEIs in human and national development necessitates that it must be carefully planned. In particular, its backward linkages with secondary education and forward linkages with the market for employment must be clearly and creatively articulated at the highest levels and energized with the right measures and incentives. To do so requires that its role and direction be addressed from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders: employers, employees, students, educators, policy makers, and society itself. The needs of each stakeholder must be identified and integrated to nurture, reposition, and rejuvenate higher education and make it more comprehensive, relevant, rigorous, coherent, and socially responsive.

### **Focus of the Study**

To gain better stakeholder insight, we focus here on one stakeholder group: the alumni of one institution of higher education. As users of the higher education system, the alumni are perhaps best positioned to provide such an understanding. Based on their experiences, the strengths and shortcomings of the higher education system can be understood clearly. This paper attempts to assess whether and to what extent higher education in Bangladesh has been able to deliver value to this particular constituency (the alumni) and satisfy it.

## **II. Research Method**

### **Research Design**

The study began with exploration of secondary sources to obtain insight about higher education in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, no “research” was found that dealt with the perspectives of the beneficiaries of higher education and their evaluation of the system. Consequently, information was gathered directly from the actual beneficiaries and users of higher education. In the first step, exploratory in-depth interviews were conducted with a small but representative sample of conveniently chosen graduates of the chosen institute. Participants responded to open-ended questions. The in-depth interviews led to identifying the seven factors teacher quality, course quality, student quality, facilities (direct and indirect), administrative efficacy, and political climate deemed most important in explaining their satisfaction with higher education.

The questionnaire was designed next and pre-tested on a cross-section of university graduates. The pretest was useful in assessing the quality of the measures and in determining whether the questions were easy or difficult to comprehend. After minor modifications, the final version was planned to be administered to a representative sample of 250 respondents.

### **Measurement**

The questionnaire was designed to assess the attitudes and perceptions of the respondents on six-point Likert scale items (see Table 1). Each scale item was anchored at the numeral 1 with the verbal statement “Strongly Disagree” and at the numeral 6 with the verbal statement “Strongly Agree”. This format has been recommended and successfully used in a variety of satisfaction surveys where a positive or negative valence is sought in terms of responses.

## Sampling

The population was defined as those who had graduated from the institution and were gainfully employed. It was felt that deeper insight would be available about the quality of higher education and its relevance, rigor, and coherence from the alumni who were in a position to use the acquired knowledge. Respondents were selected from the public, private, and non-profit (NGO) sectors of the economy.

A combination of cluster and systematic sampling was used to administer the questionnaire (limited to Dhaka largely because of resource constraints). The instrument was designed to be self-administered. A brief explanation of the survey and its general purpose was provided before giving the questionnaire to each respondent. Respondents were also asked not to identify themselves in any way to ensure anonymity. Whenever possible, respondents were asked to complete the questionnaires at the time they were contacted. If they were unable to do so, a suitable time was agreed upon to collect the completed questionnaire. If at this time the questionnaire was still not completed, a second attempt was not made to contact the person due to time and resource constraints. However, they were asked to mail the completed questionnaire to a designated address. No questionnaires were received at the address.

Two hundred and fifty questionnaires were distributed. One hundred and eleven were completed and returned, resulting in a response rate of 44 percent. Three of the questionnaires were eliminated from the analysis due to excessive missing data and response sets, leaving a total of 108 questionnaires for data analysis.

The sample demographics were as follows: They included 68% males and 29% females. The ages of the respondents were distributed as follows: <25 (19%); 26-30 (21%); 31-35 (21%); 36-40 (26%); 40+ (13%). In the education category, 19% of the respondents had a bachelor's degree, 78% had a master's degree, and 3 % had a PhD degree.

## Analysis

Table 1 contains descriptive summary statistics including frequency distribution, mean scores, and standard deviations that form the basis of policy prescriptions in this paper.

**Table 1: Frequency Distribution Means And Standard Deviation**

Variables	Strongly Agree			Strongly Disagree			$\bar{x}$	s
	6	5	4	3	2	1		
<b>TEACHER QUALITY</b>								
1. My teachers have/had high academic qualifications	20 (18.5)	32 (29.6)	25 (23.1)	20 (18.5)	4 (3.7)	7 (6.5)	4.21	1.39
2. My teachers were/are highly experienced	7 (6.5)	34 (31.5)	28 (25.9)	21 (19.6)	12 (11.1)	6 (5.6)	3.86	1.31
3. My teachers have/had good communications skills	7 (6.5)	24 (22.2)	30 (27.8)	16 (14.8)	18 (16.7)	13 (12.0)	3.51	1.47
4. My teachers are/were good researchers	7 (6.5)	17 (15.9)	24 (22.4)	22 (20.6)	18 (16.8)	19 (17.8)	3.22	1.52
5. My teachers pay/paid close attention to my academic needs	6 (5.6)	9 (8.3)	30 (27.8)	28 (25.9)	15 (13.9)	20 (18.5)	3.10	1.41
6. My teachers are/were able to bring new knowledge to class	6 (5.6)	29 (26.9)	30 (27.8)	19 (17.6)	14 (13.0)	10 (9.3)	3.67	1.39
<b>STUDENT QUALITY</b>								
7. My fellow students have/had good academic background	21 (19.4)	30 (27.8)	36 (33.3)	13 (12.0)	7 (6.5)	1 (.9)	4.39	1.18
8. Students in my class are/were intelligent	22 (20.6)	35 (32.7)	41 (38.3)	5 (4.7)	2 (1.9)	2 (1.9)	4.60	1.04
9. Students in my class are/were meritorious	20 (18.9)	35 (33.0)	26 (24.5)	22 (20.8)	3 (2.8)	0 (0.0)	4.44	1.10
<b>COURSE QUALITY</b>								
10. Teaching methods (e.g. course system, lecturing, etc.) are/were effective	7 (6.5)	22 (20.6)	27 (25.2)	24 (22.4)	9 (8.4)	18 (16.8)	3.44	1.50
11. Course contents/curricula are/were appropriate	8 (7.5)	19 (17.8)	30 (28.0)	21 (19.6)	16 (15.0)	13 (12.1)	3.47	1.45
12. Testing procedures (exams) are/were effective in judging students' academic ability	6 (5.7)	14 (13.2)	31 (29.2)	20 (18.7)	13 (12.3)	22 (20.8)	3.19	1.51
13. My course content reflects/reflected good combination of theoretical and practical knowledge	3 (2.8)	13 (12.1)	39 (36.4)	20 (18.7)	13 (12.1)	19 (17.8)	3.21	1.38
<b>FACILITIES - I</b>								
14. Library facilities are/were adequate.	6 (5.6)	17 (15.9)	26 (24.3)	20 (18.7)	25 (23.4)	13 (12.1)	3.25	1.43
15. Laboratory facilities are/were sufficient	-	9 (9.8)	27 (29.3)	22 (23.9)	13 (14.1)	21 (22.8)	2.89	1.32



16. Class room facilities (space, desks, etc.) are/were adequate for learning	3 (2.8)	18 (16.8)	24 (22.4)	27 (25.2)	18 (16.8)	17 (15.9)	3.16	1.40
<b>FACILITIES - II</b>								
17. Hostel facilities are/were satisfactory	-	4 (3.9)	15 (14.7)	23 (22.5)	26 (25.5)	34 (33.3)	2.30	1.19
18. There are/were enough facilities for extracurricular activities	3 (2.8)	3 (2.8)	20 (18.7)	27 (25.2)	29 (27.1)	25 (23.4)	2.59	1.27
19. There are/were enough provisions for scholarship	1 (1.0)	3 (2.9)	12 (11.4)	17 (16.2)	32 (30.5)	40 (38.1)	2.13	1.18
20. Recreation facilities are/were adequate	5 (4.7)	4 (3.8)	15 (14.2)	25 (23.6)	27 (25.5)	30 (28.3)	2.54	1.38
<b>ADMINISTRATIVE EFFICIENCY</b>								
21. The administration was effective in maintaining discipline on campus	1 (.9)	6 (5.6)	8 (7.5)	22 (20.6)	30 (28.0)	40 (37.4)	2.19	1.23
22. Administration of my department was effective in maintaining teaching regularity	7 (6.5)	16 (15.0)	35 (32.7)	18 (16.8)	16 (15.0)	15 (14.0)	3.39	1.45
<b>POLITICAL CLIMATE</b>								
23. Fellow students' involvement in politics adversely affects/affected my academic objectives.	20 (18.9)	22 (20.8)	24 (22.6)	13 (12.3)	7 (6.6)	20 (18.9)	3.76	1.74
24. Campus environment (strike, violence) of the university affects/affected my education adversely	39 (36.8)	29 (27.4)	14 (13.2)	11 (10.4)	5 (4.7)	8 (7.5)	4.58	1.55

### III. Findings

The advanced industrial nations have gained tangible and lasting benefits from their higher education systems. By addressing indigenous problems and concerns, their education systems have enabled them to surge ahead in social, political, economic, technological, and human affairs.

In Bangladesh, the higher education system has often failed to deliver value to its beneficiaries, diminishing its value to its stakeholders largely because of its failure to meet expectations. The image of the HEIs has also been seriously compromised and the semblance of quality markedly eroded by political involvement of the teachers and students and the lack of an effective governance mechanism. Consequently, many aspiring students are seeking their education, goals and dreams in universities abroad. This paper attempts to provide insights into various quality dimensions of higher education and their subcomponents.

### **Teacher Quality**

Teacher quality was measured on six attributes: academic qualifications, teaching experience, communication skills, research productivity, attention to students, and ability to impart new knowledge. The results indicate that teacher quality is perceived as modest at best with the highest rating of 4.21 on academic qualifications and the lowest rating of 3.10 on teachers paying close attention to students' academic needs. It may also be noted that teachers are seen as modestly experienced (mean = 3.86), modestly able to bring new knowledge to class (mean = 3.67), similar communication skills (3.51), and poorer research skills (mean = 3.22).

### **Peer Quality**

Peer quality was measured on three criteria: good academic background, perceived intelligence, and merit. Interestingly, the highest ratings were accorded to these measures and are as follows: 4.39, 4.60 and 4.44. This facet of education is also a very important determinant of the quality of the educational experience. Where there is significant variation in student quality, the academically challenged students will either drag down the quality of knowledge delivery or miss out on their education if academic standards are beyond their capacities. Hence, student selection or some form of gradation is essential to the delivery of quality higher education.

### **Course Quality**

This aspect was measured on four attributes: effective teaching methods, content and curricula, testing procedures, and the use of theory and practice. The mean scores on each of these attributes were 3.44, 3.47, 3.19, and 3.21. On a six-point scale, none of the measures exceed, the mid-point, suggesting an overall negative valence in the quality of courses offered. Clearly, each area needs improvement.

### **Resources**

This variable was assessed at two levels: direct and indirect. Resources used directly in the pursuit of higher education include library facilities, laboratories where applicable, as well as classrooms. The ratings attained on each of these resources were 3.25, 2.89, and 3.16; none of them was seen as adequate for facilitating the learning process. Building vibrant academic centers of excellence require availability of the right resources; otherwise, the quality of education suffers in a comprehensive sense. Students only hear from teachers and read textbooks unembellished by a wider set of experiences based on hands-on learning (laboratories) and up-to-date knowledge gleaned from the most recent theoretical and practical developments in their libraries.

Indirect resources, further facilitating the learning process, include hostel (dormitory) facilities, facilities for co-curricular activities (sports, games, cultural functions, etc.), financial aid as an educational resource, and facilities for recreation (parks, theaters, etc.). On each of these items the mean scores were the lowest of the entire group: 2.3, 2.59, 2.13,

and 2.54 respectively. Ideally, the totality of the educational experience ought to include much more than classrooms and teachers to enrich that experience. Educational planners and administrators ought to work hard to provide these additional experiences. While budgetary constraints are likely to be significant, with the right combination of societal involvement -- where philanthropists, corporate donors, educational foundations etc. are brought into the scene -- such problems may be gradually circumvented to enrich the educational experience.

### **Political Climate**

Fellow students' involvement in politics and the campus environment of strike and violence also seem to affect one's education. The mean scores on the two items of 3.76 and 4.58 suggest that strikes and violence on campus earn a high rating. The question is what should be done about this issue?

### **Administrative Efficacy**

This construct was measured on two items: effectiveness in maintaining campus discipline and effectiveness in maintaining teaching regularity. The mean scores on the two items are 2.19 and 3.39, suggesting a low level of administrative efficacy.

## **IV. Conclusions And Recommendations**

### *Teacher Quality*

The ratings on teacher quality suggest that a clear case can be made for two priorities: teacher selection and teacher development. If the quality of higher education is not to be undermined further, it is imperative that a clear set of criteria be established for teacher selection, possibly by reviewing the criteria used by universities that HEIs in Bangladesh want to emulate. In particular, it is important to root out favoritism, nepotism, political pressure, and related factors that are purported to be largely responsible for recruiting faculty members who are unfit to teach at the HEIs. To accomplish this, it is vital for the selection decision to be widely shared and dispersed among various committees to select the best possible candidate through a well-publicized and documented process.

Teacher development must envision a program of quality improvement that enables faculty to develop themselves over time. Such development requires a multifaceted approach that must be supported by experts and mentors, and guided by administrators in many ways. Among the key ingredients for teacher development, the following are suggested (Andaleeb 2003):

1. Teachers must learn to design and upgrade courses and relevant materials that incorporate current thinking in the field. In this regard, departmental teams may be used to develop course materials and enhance the curriculum.
2. Teachers must be exposed to different approaches of reaching students that go beyond the traditional and oft-used lecture method. Thus they must be trained in the use of alternative pedagogical tools such as case-, situation analysis-, and research-

based learning where appropriate. Guest speakers and experts can also be used occasionally to embellish key topics and issues.

3. Whenever possible, new teachers must be attached to mentors or master teachers to gain teaching experience and skills. Such mentors may also occasionally sit in the classroom to constructively point out the strengths and weaknesses of the teachers being developed.
4. Teachers must also have the minimum tools to teach. Advancements in technology must be incorporated where possible to enable teachers to reach students in creative ways. Technology awareness and training is an important component of introducing new technology to classrooms for creative teaching.
5. Classroom activities and performance of teachers can occasionally be videotaped to allow them to self-evaluate their teaching style and delivery of content.
6. If resources are available, provisions could be made to support the HEIs by creating an independent Instructional Development Program (IDP) staffed by trained professionals for pedagogical improvement and teaching support. The IDP can serve as a resource center to make teaching resources available for teachers to emulate.

Teacher development must be followed by a system of evaluation that provides positive feedback and helps teachers attain goals consistent with a defined level of quality. Since there are two major aspects of quality teacher teaching and research both must be evaluated where appropriate. In the private universities, especially the better ones, student evaluations have become standardized. Public HEIs must also begin to incorporate these practices quickly to enable an important stakeholder group to provide insights into the system's ailments.

A culture of peer evaluation may also be introduced whereby designated teachers are used periodically (at least once every year or two) to evaluate the quality of teaching of their peers. Two additional evaluation procedures that may be adopted include exit surveys (from graduating students) and alumni surveys (to assess the long term impact of teaching).

At the same time, faculty research must also be promoted which requires solid support of this important activity by both teachers and administrators to establish a program of on-going research in areas relevant to Bangladesh.

Where applicable, such research must also be evaluated. What type of research is to be valued must be established as a policy matter after extensive consultation with the faculty as some may value basic research while others prefer applied research. It is important to recognize that if the HEIs wish international recognition, the quality of their research must be assessed against international standards.

Quality teachers must also be rewarded for outstanding performance. While automatic promotions or salary increments rooted in seniority make life simple for administrators who are relieved of making hard decisions, it does not motivate teachers to excel because rewards

are not tied to performance. Many foreign institutions first establish a balance between teaching and research and assign certain weights to each activity depending on the vision of that institution. HEIs in Bangladesh must assign importance weights to each of these major activities depending on what is valued by them. Promotion, tenure, and annual raises must be used to reward teachers who attain proficiency in these areas. Finally, a thorough evaluation is needed in the area of compensation and benefits to promote quality teaching. In an environment where there are three very distinct levels of compensations, public, private, and international, it raises serious questions of equity. If we want the teachers to perform at the international level and be evaluated against international standards, it behooves policy makers to match that performance with commensurate levels of compensation. This would also attract the best minds again to the HEIs and help revitalize the overall educational environment. The long-term payoffs of this stance can be immeasurable.

### *Peer Quality*

On peer quality, a classroom comprised of a mixed bag of students can not only be difficult to teach without lowering standards, there is also the danger that brighter students will lose interest in what is being taught, be unable to attain their full potential, and remain unfulfilled in their academic pursuits.

As in other countries, weaker students should be offered some form of remedial education to bring them up to standards to do university level work. Alternative programs should also be devised for the truly bright students if the higher education system is to energize them and prepare them for significant responsibilities. In fact, the contention of some that HEIs in Bangladesh continue to churn out low caliber students who are ill prepared for significant responsibilities must be consistently examined and higher education appropriately reoriented if Bangladesh is to better place itself in the community of nations. This will also help revive the confidence of the users and beneficiaries (e.g., employers and society) of the products of the higher education system.

While classifying students into categories may seem elitist, when coupled with remedial education, it is likely to provide an equal footing to those who have a weaker educational base, strengthen their capabilities, and be brought at par with the brighter lot. However, it is possible to improve “upstream” education quality to reduce the gap or variation among students entering the HEIs.

### *Course Quality*

Regarding course quality, updated course content and curricula today are vital to knowledge-based societies. Thus, departmental and institutional administrators must ensure that teachers do not use outdated course materials that do not meet the needs of present times. Where such practices exist, teachers must be encouraged and assisted to adapt and update the contents. To facilitate the adoption of current content in teaching materials also requires that the administration make available current materials in the form of books, journals, Internet access, etc. It is also imperative to keep a vigilant eye on course content if the value of

education is to be enhanced. Committees at the department level are best able to ensure this where appropriate. It is important to empower these committees to work with teachers; when teachers resist changing content, punitive action may be contemplated.

Traditional lectures must also be enhanced by introducing alternative pedagogical approaches to deliver content in creative ways. Where class sizes are manageable, and eventually this must be attained, individual and team projects, case analysis, analysis of current events, research presentations, etc. could be included to enhance knowledge, comprehension, analysis, synthesis, and application whenever possible as suggested by Bloom (1956).

The testing procedures in the HEIs are also very traditional and have hardly changed in the bigger scheme of things. Answering essay questions that largely test memory continues to be the norm of testing even to this day at the HEIs. Such testing must be broadened and enhanced to include alternative procedures that evaluate students' overall knowledge, comprehension, and ability to analyze, synthesize, and apply their learning, if comprehensive assessment is to be promoted and creativity nurtured in HEIs in Bangladesh. Rote learning has its place, but it is hardly adequate to developing the skills and the analytical capability needed by future nation-builders.

### *Campus Politics*

About campus politics, some advocate that it must be banned. Others feel it is better not to curb students' freedom of expression because it is students who have often played a vanguard role in various national affairs beginning with the language movement to the liberation of the country from an oppressive regime. Probably, a middle ground must be sought so that freedom of expression is not curbed; at the same time, politics must not be allowed to intrude into higher education institutions in disruptive and unproductive ways. The appropriate path is something that the administration must decide in collaboration with the students to find a healthy middle ground. It is also important to bring in the political parties, guardians, and employers into this discussion as key stakeholders to engage in the discussion and to help chart out a path that fosters self-expression but regulates disruption, chaos, and violence.

Another strategic element that is likely to influence campus politics positively is the role played by the faculty and administration. If the faculty commits itself to delivering quality education by upholding specified standards of excellence, and is able to demonstrate the quality and value of their academic programs, more students will turn their attention to the serious business of education. It is important that faculty and administration provide leadership and act as role models to earn the respect of students. Avenues of earning this respect are through demonstrated scholarship and involvement with the student body. Joint research, seminars, debates, discussions, help sessions, publications, outreach work, etc., are some of the important activities that the faculty must embrace to win back the students and their respect. Students learn vicariously from their teachers and emulate many of their ways: When teachers and the administration demonstrate a commitment to quality and excellence

and redefine the goals of the HEIs in terms of higher standards and creativity, students will follow in their wake.

### *Administrative Support*

Administrators may be urged to make their presence felt by propagating their value to the HEIs via fund raising, establishing scholarships, recruiting excellent scholars, organizing international cultural and intellectual exchange, building new capacity, and introducing new and exciting programs to engage students and faculty in meaningful activities.

It is also important for academic administrators to pursue the vision of the HEIs without bowing to the many undue internal and external pressures. As Bogue (1997, p.1) contends, "An academic administrator with courage, compassion, and integrity may be a more direct contributor to the cause of quality than any system of quality assurance." Administrators with these qualities must be carefully chosen to provide administrative leadership on campuses across the nation.

Building a quality higher education system is a sine-qua-non for national upliftment. It is high time that the issue, highlighted in this paper are methodically addressed.

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# **Education and Human Resource Development**

## **Six Conclusions Reached from the Harvard Conference on Bangladesh**

**Manzoor Ahmed<sup>1</sup>**

[Editor's Note: A Conference on Bangladesh in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century was held in Harvard University on July 13-14, 2008. It was jointly sponsored by Bangladesh Initiative, Democracy and Development in Bangladesh Forum, and the Ash Institute of Democratic Governance and Innovation. The conference brought together scholars, practitioners, students and well-wishers as a community to contemplate the opportunities and challenges facing Bangladesh. A set of recommendations that were proposed by six breakout groups that assembled on the second day of the conference were compiled by Team Leaders. The Discussion and Recommendations of the Group charged with Education and Human Resource Development at Harvard Conference on Bangladesh were compiled by the Team Leader Manzoor Ahmed. The conclusions reached from the Harvard Conference on Education and Human Resource Development in Bangladesh are published in the journal considering their relevance in the Bangladesh context]

Bangladesh, more than any other country, has to turn its abundant population into productive human resources in order to fulfill its vision for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. How education system can be re-directed to help fight poverty, promote human development, create the conditions for life with human dignity for all, and face the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is, therefore, a paramount concern.

A breakaway discussion group, following presentation of papers and deliberations on various aspects of education and human resources in Bangladesh, agreed on the following six recommendations, which were presented to the final plenary session of the two-day conference.

1. Establishing a unified system of primary and secondary education.

Inequality in access and opportunities is the defining feature of the present education system. To overcome the divisions and discrimination in educational provisions, reflected in separate streams of government, non-government, private, and English medium schools and madrasas, at both primary and secondary levels, a unified general education system should be introduced with a common core curriculum, learning objectives and minimum required standards regarding teachers, facilities and learning materials. The unified approach and standards should be applied to all institutions, government and non-government, including quomi and aliya madrasas and English medium schools, and to all students attending any type of educational institutions.

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2. Promoting a new and effective pedagogy.

To equip children with the necessary skills, capabilities, and creativity essential for the information society and the knowledge economy of the 21st century, the didactic and teacher-centred pedagogy must be replaced by a more learner-centred and active teaching learning process. Sound formative and summative assessment tools and techniques should be used to assess the performance of students, teachers, institutions and geographical units; and to diagnose and remedy deficiencies in the system. Pedagogic techniques that recognize different abilities of learners and challenge the gifted learners must be promoted. Appropriate technologies should be used to improve quality of instruction, enrich the learning experience for all, and upgrade and support teachers. ICT tools such as TV, VCD, mobile phone, and computer may be leveraged for “anytime-anywhere” learning, thereby saving time and cost and allowing flexible learner-centered schedules. A dedicated educational BTV channel for interactive educational programs should become a reality without delay.

3. Making education truly inclusive and serving children with special needs.

Different needs and circumstances of learners defined by their economic status, geography, gender, ethnic and language background, parents' educational level, and similar social, economic and family background should be recognized and educational provisions, curricula, and the school program should be appropriately adapted. Educational institutions should ensure full access of children with disabilities and special needs.

4. Enhancing competence, performance, rewards and recognition of teachers.

Skills and performance of teachers hold the key to better outcome from the education system. Human resource policy and practices including the career ladder should facilitate professional development and promote performance standards of teaching personnel. A workable approach to increase remuneration for teaching and linking it with performance is to design remuneration structure to allow for more differentiation in teaching positions (for example, entry-level assistant teachers, teachers, senior/master teachers/team leaders/assistant headmaster and headmaster) with promotion and salary raise tied to clearly established and enforced performance criteria. Special rewards or bonuses can be tied to group performance at the institution. The key role of the head master of the primary and secondary school as an educational leader and manager with enhanced authority at the school level should be recognized and commensurate status and salary granted.

5. Making education governance and management accountable and effective.

Weak accountability in governance and ineffective management are the main obstacles to many initiatives underway for educational reform and development. Four areas demand attention in this respect.

- a) A structure of decentralization of education management should be developed which will assign central authorities such as the Ministry, Directorates and Boards broad policy and regulatory responsibilities, while empowering zilla and upazilla education authorities, training institutions and schools to make decisions regarding activities, operations and personnel within a framework of principles and guidelines.
  - b) A permanent National Commission on Education for pre-tertiary education composed of distinguished and respected representatives of the major stakeholders the civil society, the academic community, and the government education establishment answerable directly to the National Parliament should be established. The Commission should be a statutory body with functions and status specified in a national education law.
  - c) A national Education Law should be enacted as a comprehensive legal framework for implementing the constitutional provision of providing free and compulsory education to all boys and girls. Such a law would spell out rights, responsibilities and obligations of citizens and government agencies at different levels, principles of decentralization and accountability, regulatory framework for different types of education programs and institutions, and principles of defining and protecting public interest in education.
  - d) A consensus has to be built regarding political parties restraining themselves from involving students and teachers and their organizations in partisan politics; educational decision-making including those on appointments, transfers and promotion should be protected from extraneous political influence; appropriate legal provisions and rules for election for the parliament and other people's representative bodies should help protect education institutions from undue political influence. Codes of conduct for teachers and students at the national level and each institution should be developed and enforced.
6. Ensuring adequate resources for quality education.
- A threshold level of resources must be ensured for achieving the quality and equity goals in education. Measures should be taken to double the share of GNP and of government budget for education in the next ten years. Medium term budgetary framework (3 to 5 years) needs to be developed for both development and recurrent expenditures in education in order to achieve the target for ensuring adequate resources for education. Public subvention and incentives to educational institutions should be linked to commitment and fulfillment of agreed performance criteria and targets; greater autonomy and control of resources can be offered to institutions that prove their capability to use resources effectively. Schools should be given incentives to generate local funds.

