

# Looking Beyond EFA and MDG 2015

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## Abstract:

*With the approaching 2015 deadline for achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of the United Nations and the Education for All (EFA) goals adopted in Dakar World Education Forum in 2000, the discourse has been intensifying at national and international levels on what should happen after 2015. Will there be, or not, new and different targets both for development in general and for education in particular? In either case, who will be the principal stakeholders in the negotiation to arrive at convergence and coalescence of views? How will the global agenda and country priorities, as these are articulated, be reconciled or be complementary to each other?*

*The present paper attempts to capture the views of the parts of civil society in Bangladesh, which are committed to educational progress, regarding the education agenda within the overall post-2015 development agenda (MDGII?) as well as a broader range of post-2015 education goals. It is seen as work in progress that will be elaborated and refined until 2015. This paper is a slightly modified version of a paper prepared for the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) as its contribution to the Bangladesh People's Forum for MDG discussion on the post-2015 development agenda.*

**Key Words:** Post-2015 Education Agenda, Post-2015 Development Agenda, Post-2015 Discourse in Bangladesh.

## 1. The Millennium Development and EFA Goals

The last decade of the past century saw many state level summits for stock taking of various development agenda and future planning. The Millennium Summit was the culmination of the series of global agenda-setting events. In September 2000, 189 members of the United Nations adopted the eight Millennium Development Goals or MDGs to be reached in 15 years by 2015. The second of the eight goals were to achieve universal primary education; the third goal was to promote gender equality in education and empower women.

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Earlier in March 2000 in Dakar, having reviewed progress with Education for All (EFA) goals set in 1990 by the international community, an EFA framework for action was adopted. It contained six education goals with the target date of 2015 (Box 1).

### **Box 1. The Education MDG and EFA Goals**

#### **MDG 2: Achieve Universal Primary Education**

##### ***Target 2A:***

By 2015, all children, girls and boys, can complete a full course of primary schooling,

#### **MDG 3: Promote gender equality and empower women**

##### ***Target 3A:***

Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005, and at all levels by 2015.

#### **Six EFA Goals**

- 1 Expanding and improving comprehensive early childhood care and education, especially for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged children.
- 2 Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to, and complete, free and compulsory primary education of good quality.
- 3 Ensuring that the learning needs of all young people and adults are met through equitable access to appropriate learning and life-skills programmes.
- 4 Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults.
- 5 Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.
- 6 Improving all aspects of the quality of education and ensuring excellence of all so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all, especially in literacy, numeracy and essential life skills.

#### ***Source:***

<http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml>; UNESCO. EFA Framework for Action adopted in Dakar, April 2000; World Bank, Millennium Development Goals, 2002).

It can be seen that EFA goals 1 and 5 related to universal primary education and gender equality in education were incorporated into MDG. MDGs in education are important but modest objectives, which could not be the totality of educational progress that Bangladesh and other developing countries could pursue. Nor could these objectives capture the multiple ways education must contribute to fighting poverty and achieving other national development priorities and MDGs. EFA goals embraced a broader range of goals, but are still limited to basic education. The education MDGs and EFA goals in education had to be regarded as proxies or minimal conditions for educational development in a country.

The achievement of the modest and minimal education MDGs and EFA goals for 2015 are likely to fall short globally and in Bangladesh. The EFA Global Monitoring Report of 2005 predicted bluntly that at the current trend and rate of progress, the goals of primary education for all children and elimination of gender disparities in education (beyond parity in initial access) will not be achieved in Bangladesh by 2015. It cannot be a consolation that our South Asian neighbors, India, Nepal and Pakistan, were also projected to be in the same predicament (UNESCO 2004).

There are open questions still to be resolved regarding the on-going international post-2015 development discourse. Will the debates on post-2015, EFA and MDG, lead to a continuation or a revision of the existing goals? In other words, will there be, or not, new and different targets both for development in general and for education in particular? In either case, who will be the principal stakeholders globally and from the country level and how will they be involved in the discourse? What will be the negotiation process, taking into account these questions, to arrive at convergence and coalescence of views? How will the global agenda and country priorities, as these are articulated, be reconciled or be complementary to each other?

A critical analysis of three components that the above questions suggest - stakeholders, content of debates and the processes both at the global as well as regional and national levels - is necessary to assess the value, significance, feasibility and sustainability of the conclusions expected to emerge by 2015.

The present paper attempts to capture the views of the parts of civil society in Bangladesh, that are committed to educational progress, regarding the post-2015 education agenda within the overall development agenda (MDGII?) as well as a broader range of post-2015 EFA agenda. It is seen as work in progress that will be elaborated and refined until 2015.

## **2. Progress and Achievements**

It is now evident that Bangladesh will come close to achieving universal initial enrolment in primary education by 2015, but will fall short considerably of universal completion of primary education, thus failing to achieve the MDG and EFA primary education goal. Current trends also indicate that there will be a substantial deficiency in achievement of essential skills and competencies by primary education completers, and deficits in expanding adult literacy and lifelong learning opportunities. Both dropout from

programmes and poor learning achievement are intimately linked with equity in participation (Table 1). This will clearly be one of the unfinished tasks that will have to be addressed beyond 2015.

**Table 1: Summary of EFA progress**

<p><b>1: ECCE</b></p>	<p>There was no quantitative target for early childhood care and education. Starting from a low base, by 2012, less than half of the world's children received some form of pre-primary education. Progress has been the slowest in low income countries.</p> <p>In Bangladesh, under Primary Education Development Program II – PEDP II (2006-11) and PEDP III (2011-16), pre-primary education of one year before primary school entry at age 6 has been supported. About 70%t pre-school children are estimated to be receiving some form of pre-primary education of varying quality. An operational framework and GO-NGO collaboration guidelines have been adopted by the Government to promote pre-primary education with common quality standards. ECD preceding pre-primary is available to a small number of children mainly through NGOs.</p>
<p><b>2: UPE</b></p>	<p>On current trends the target of universal primary education will be missed globally. The rate of progress was rapid between 1999 and 2004, but then started slowing and progress has stalled since 2008. The number of countries with a primary net enrolment ratio of over 97% increased from 37 to 55 out of 124 countries between 1999 and 2010. Dropout remains a problem in low income countries, where on average 59% of those starting school reached the last grade in 2009. The problem is particularly acute with children who start school later than at designated age.</p> <p>Bangladesh has made good progress with initial entry reaching close to 100 percent by official data, but the actual is likely to be 5 to 10 percent below this level. Progress has been made in reducing dropout and improving completion, but non-completers of the five year primary cycle is estimated to be between 30 and 40 percent. Bangladesh mirrors the global trends in low income countries of continuing high dropout and poor performance of late entrants.</p>
<p><b>3: Youth and adult learning needs</b></p>	<p>There was no specific EFA target for goal 3. Despite a global increase in the number of children enrolling in secondary school, the lower secondary gross enrolment ratio was just 52% in low income countries in 2010.</p> <p>With high non-completion of the primary stage in Bangladesh, less than half of the 11-15 years are enrolled in school on a net basis. High dropout at secondary level results in less than a quarter of the age group completing 10 years of schooling up to secondary school certificate. Only around 11 percent of out-of-school youth participate in formal or</p>

	<p>non- formal work-related training, with informal apprenticeship counting for more than half.</p> <p>Education Policy 2010 has proposed raising compulsory education up to grade 8 by 2018 and major expansion of vocational/technical skills development.</p>
<p><b>4: Adult literacy</b></p>	<p>Most developing countries will miss goal 4 of reducing illiteracy by half from the 2000 level, some by a large margin. There were still 775 million adults who could not read or write in 2010, about two-thirds of whom were women. Over the past two decades, adult literacy has increased from 76% in 1985–1994 to 84% in 2005–2010 but, partly because the world’s population has grown, the number of illiterate adults has fallen modestly from 881 million to 775 million.</p> <p>In Bangladesh, Literacy Assessment Survey (BBS 2013) indicates adult literacy rate (15-45 years) in the country as 51.%; female - 48%, male - 55% in 2011. The literacy rate in rural area is 48% and in urban areas 61%. There has been no significant literacy programme in the public sector since 2003. Debate about goal, concept and strategy (a simplistic “eradication” of illiteracy through a campaign or a program of lifelong learning with basic literacy as the foundation through a permanent network of community learning centers) and appropriate assessment of competency and professional support has stymied action and mobilization of resources.</p>
<p><b>5: Gender parity and equality in education</b></p>	<p>Convergence in enrolment rates between boys and girls has been one of the successes of the EFA movement since 2000, but more need to be done to ensure that education opportunities and outcomes are equitable. There are still sixty-eight countries that have not achieved gender parity in primary education, and girls are disadvantaged in sixty of them.</p> <p>Bangladesh has overcome gender disparity in access to primary and secondary education over the last two decades. At present, in fact, girls are ahead of boys in enrollment and completion, raising a concern about disadvantage of adolescent boys who are drawn into child labour to support their families. The gender gap in adult literacy, as noted, still persists.</p>
<p><b>6: The quality of education</b></p>	<p>There was no direct quantitative target for this goal; retention at least up to grade 4 was seen as the proxy for quality. Out of around 650 million children of primary school age, as many as 250 million either do not reach grade 4 or, if they do, fail to attain minimum learning standards. Another indicator, pupil/teacher ratio at primary level, improved globally between 1999 and 2010, especially in East Asia and Latin America, but worsened in sub-Saharan Africa and South and West Asia.</p> <p>This is a major concern in Bangladesh. The deficit in completion of five years of primary education has been noted above. Average pupil-teacher</p>

	ratio is around 50:1, which means a large proportion of classes in primary school are pedagogically unmanageable. Moreover, about 90 percent of the schools are run on double shift with learning time in a school year is much less than half of international average of a thousand hours. The large class size and learning time combine to drastically limit effective contact hours. Competency-based assessment of learning is not in place. Sample surveys indicate up to one-third of the children completing five years do not acquire functional and sustainable level of literacy and numeracy.
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**Constructed from:** UNESCO-UNICEF, Discussion paper: synthesis of debates and key questions for consideration in discussing education goals, (Draft for discussion and further development, February 2013); <http://www.un.org/en/globalissues/briefingpapers/efa/vitalstats.shtml>; UNESCO EFA GMR Reports; GOB, EFA Progress Report of Bangladesh, 13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators (26-27 February 2013, Bangkok, Thailand); CAMPE, Education Watch Reports.

It is clear that EFA and MDG education goals narrowed the educational canvas severely by focusing on universal primary education and gender parity at least in terms of targets and indicators. Other areas, such as early childhood education and development, skills and learning for youth and adults and quality of education did not find a place in MDG. These were mentioned in EFA, but without necessary elaboration of targets and strategies, thus signaling a lower priority to these goals. The paradox is that even the minimal goals are not likely to be achieved; so what would have been the point of adding to goals and targets? More importantly, what do the experience and record of progress so far suggest for the goals and agenda beyond 2015? A critical look at EFA and education MDG may suggest the approach to squaring the circle.

### 3. Squaring the Circle: Quality with Equity

#### Early childhood development

Progress on ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education) has been too slow, in part because it was not accorded the priority with specific objectives and strategies. More recent attention has been on pre-primary preparation for school, rather than a more comprehensive and coordinated approach to early childhood development from birth to transition into schooling. Such an emphasis could have led to a connected and coordinated approach linking health, nutrition, socialization of the child and intellectual growth taking advantage of efforts and initiatives in health, nutrition, child protection and care through a comprehensive view. Scientific evidence regarding brain and neurological development in fetus and the first thousand days of life points to the need for looking at early childhood development as a continuum. The label of ECCE itself suggests a sectoral territoriality that needs to be overcome, which is especially important for disadvantaged population groups deprived of essential services.

**Access and quality**

The underlying premise of EFA and MDG education goals appears to have been that the first task is to bring all children into school; the question of quality could be tackled later. Hindsight shows that such a dichotomy was untenable. A plateauing of progress in recent years in access and retention suggests that deficits in quality in respect of acceptable learning outcomes and essential lack of quality-enhancing inputs are constraints to meaningful participation in education. The phenomenon of “silent exclusion,” children nominally present in classroom but not engaged in learning, far too common, points to the same problem. Access cannot be sustained and cannot be meaningful for learners and society if essential quality inputs and processes are not in place as minimum conditions for achieving the learning results. These include sufficient numbers of teachers with appropriate professional and personal attributes, formative and summative assessment of and for learning as part of good pedagogy, adequate curricular design and learning materials, and necessary physical infrastructure and environment for learning.

**Equity with quality:**

Equity has to be a cross-cutting theme for both the MDG development agenda premised on the overall goal of combating poverty and EFA aimed at human capability enhancement. The notion of quality can be only an abstraction without bringing in equity into the equation. Equity, a more nuanced concept than of equality in a mathematical sense encompassing fairness and justice, has to be spoken of in the same breath with quality in education. Yet, global targets and the regional statistics used in the UN’s progress reports on MDGs do not bring to attention sufficiently the reality of disparity among countries within a region and among populations within countries. This of course is no excuse for countries not to recognize the reality of disparity and discrimination and plan, manage and monitor programmes to reduce the disparities.

Effort has been made by countries in varying degree to address equity with quality at varying levels of success. In the effort to expand access to basic education and eliminate gender disparity, Bangladesh has taken pro-active steps in the form of conditional cash transfer to children from poor families, stipends for girls, and free textbooks. The move to “nationalize” non-government primary schools and supporting teachers’ salary in non-government secondary school are policy measures justified on equity grounds. However, the consequences have not necessarily been equitable participation.

The incentive payments in the name of equity has starved out essential quality inputs in schools, such as enough capable teachers or even basic infrastructure and learning materials, thus undermining the objective of equity. The quality deficiencies have led to the emergence of a “shadow education system” with better-off students relying on private tutoring outside the school, aggravating inequity. Strategies that simultaneously consider quality-with-equity in programme planning and management as well as resource mobilization and use have to be developed. Poverty remains the major factor in disadvantage and inequity.

Population groups that have been marginalized include growing urban slum dwellers, street children, migrants and nomads, children with special needs, indigenous populations and remote rural groups, and linguistic and cultural minorities. A gender dimension still persists despite progress.

### **Linking education, learning, skills and employability**

EFA goal 3 (promoting learning and life skills for youth and adults) did not receive due attention in specifying objectives, targets and strategies, in part due to the complexity of this area in respect of providers, potential participants and activities. The qualitative deficiencies in provisions for basic foundational skills of literacy, numeracy, communication, and reasoning (provided through primary and secondary education), and general transferrable skills and knowledge in math, science, language, IT and social interaction necessary for further training and in work (provided through secondary education and general vocational/technical education) have become the principal obstacle to job-related specific skills development. The participants in such job-specific skills development through training, apprenticeship or on-the job opportunities can do well if they come into these programs with the basic competencies. Otherwise, ways have to be found to compensate for the prior deficiencies within job-specific training. (UNESCO, GMR 2012).

A comprehensive view of skills development through multiple public and private, formal and non-formal channels, with an equivalency framework and application of standards of quality, has been lacking. It is also necessary to design skills development with attention to the labour market dynamics in the formal and informal economy, the demands and needs of employers, and social protection and rights of workers leading to “decent jobs.” (CAMPE, Education Watch 2011-12).

### **Adult Literacy and lifelong learning**

It is not surprising that adult literacy remains an elusive goal. EFA Goal 4 (increase literacy rate by 50 percent) and target were set in a mechanistic and meaninglessly reductionist way, accepting a symbolic literacy definition of bare recognition of alphabet and signing one’s name, and this too without a credible verification in many instances. This approach and the underlying reductionist concept of literacy, with the imprimatur of UNESCO and the EFA community, have led to adoption of literacy programmes and targets in many countries which have not evoked great enthusiasm among the intended beneficiaries.

A case in point is the goal of “eradicating illiteracy” by 2014 in Bangladesh. Similar examples can be found in other developing countries with major literacy deficits. This approach disregards the continuum of literacy skills, its multiple dimensions and contextual character, and the need to bring the skills and capability to a self-sustaining level at learners’ own pace and time. Consequently what the statistics of the numbers of illiterates and literates and the literacy rates and quantitative progress reported globally really mean is any body’s guess. Direct measurements of literacy skills, rather than a self-reporting method often used,



reveal large percentages of illiterates among those who have completed primary education. Even in richer countries, application of credible assessment has shown as many as one in five to be lacking functional literacy skills in their own contexts.

Interestingly, the EFA literacy goal ignored the plea of the adult education and lifelong learning community, also supported by UNESCO, to place literacy within the programme and strategy framework for lifelong learning, recognising literacy skill as a continuum and as the foundation of lifelong learning. (UNESCO. COFINTEA VI Outcome, 2009). With at least a quarter of the world's population functionally illiterate and lifelong learning opportunity for all needed more than ever in the era of the knowledge economy, adaptability of skills and communications technology, lifelong learning with functional literacy skills as the base has to be a core element of the basic education agenda. Admittedly, the goal, targets and indicators have to be defined in a way that makes sense in relation to an overarching human capability agenda.

### **Education Governance**

The EFA and MDG goals were formulated as critical outcomes to be attained within a time frame. The assumption appears to be that once the goals are adopted and commitments to achieve them are announced, the wherewithal of reaching the goals in respect of organizational structures, decision-making, capacity building and mobilization of financial and human resources will happen. Obviously this has not been the case. The question then is whether governance and resource related goals and indicators in EFA and MDG agenda would have helped. And how such goals should be articulated in the post-2015 agenda?

Policies and objectives too often falter in implementation, to which the EFA and MDG experience amply testify. It is, however, problematic to specify in effect process goals and indicators in addition to the ones in terms of outcomes at a global level. The processes related to governance and management are by their nature contextual and specific to a country's organizational and public administration structures, culture, history and norms which cannot be articulated in general terms as global goals. Moreover, bringing these into the list of global goals may undermine the sharpness and focus of a limited number of high priority goals, which has been a strength of MDG and EFA. Nonetheless, given the critical role of governance in achieving the goals, there is a case for finding a way to indicate governance objectives and criteria. These can be stated as principles and broad objectives which then could be elaborated with specific objectives and indicators at the country level. Development experience across countries in recent decades have brought to the fore widely accepted governance criteria in terms of accountability, transparency, participation of beneficiaries and stakeholders, decentralization, rights and entitlements of people, and democratic norms which can be articulated as goals, targets and indicators in the context of country circumstances and priorities.

In Bangladesh, civil society concerns have been expressed, among others, on two governance issues related to effective decentralization and developing a Government-NGO

partnership mode that can make use of comparative advantages and strengths of the vibrant NGO sector. Both issues are linked with the perception and interpretation given among political leadership and bureaucracy about how the role and responsibility of the state for delivering public services can be exercised. A unitary and “statist” approach prevails which require central government to control and manage the services throughout the country. The culture and practice of a strong local government and community role under government auspices have not developed. A case in point is the recent decision to ‘nationalise’ registered non-government primary schools which make over 100,000 primary teachers central government employees, answerable to the centralized education bureaucracy. An alternative to this centralizing tendency could be improvement of teacher’s status and remuneration linking this with accountability to local government and community.

Similarly, a genuine partnership approach with NGOs, in spite of the record and demonstrated capacity of NGOs in pioneering and scaling up innovative approaches has not developed, despite the rhetoric to the contrary (see the next section). The common, not particularly effective pattern of Government-NGO collaboration is of “contract for services” with government selecting the contractor, specifying the job, supervising the work and assessing performance. The approach seems to combine the weaknesses of both the public sector and the NGOs, (often the weak, unscrupulous and dishonest among NGOs landing the contracts.)

A major “second chance” primary education project proposal illustrates the problem. It is being proposed under PEDPIII by creating a new government administrative structure in the Bureau of Non-formal Education, despite over two decades of existence of a successful model of non-formal primary education of NGOs serving over a million children at a time. An alternative that would serve children better would be a partnership with NGOs with proven track record. A well-established forum of education NGOs, CAMPE, which has a record of research, policy dialogue and capacity building, could facilitate such a partnership building. The mindset among policymakers and decision-makers appears to be an obstacle to making full use of the social and human capital that exists in the country.

### **Resources**

Adequate resources are obviously essential for implementing the goals serving equity with quality. MDG 8 urged international collaboration and cooperation to help poor countries carry out their MDG programmes. Although not stated as a goal, the Dakar Framework for Action included a pledge that no country should be left behind in achieving EFA goals due to lack of resources. Most of the rich countries have failed to take this as a priority commitment and act accordingly.

EFA and MDG have not specifically suggested national level resource targets and utilization criteria. Developing countries generally have shown increased spending on education since 2000. However, there are signs that economic downturn is affecting adversely education

budgets of low and middle income countries. It has had an impact on the aid budgets of richer countries, many of them reducing education allocations in their aid portfolio (World Bank, 2010)

In Bangladesh, public education allocations have actually come down as proportion of GDP and total budget since the education policy was announced in 2010 from around 13 percent to 11 percent. Implementing the policy and keeping the momentum for EFA and MDG going require, in addition to enhancing resources, financing criteria and principles established and applied to support the objectives of quality-with-equity. These could include an Upazila-wise capitation formula for education allocations, and greater institutional control of resources with accountability. Substantial new resources should be directed to teacher incentives and raising status of teaching as a profession and other quality improvement inputs. The government needs to make a commitment to increase education resources and move towards use of public resources based on a coordinated and comprehensive plan for equity with quality for each upazila; making budget planning and implementation genuinely bottom up. These strategies need to find a place in national post-2015 EFA/MDG agenda in the form of appropriate objectives and indicators. They also need to be reflected in generic terms in global agenda.

#### **4. Political Commitment and Education Policy 2010**

Vision 2021 was presented as an election pledge by the leading party, Awami League, in the coalition of political parties that won the parliamentary election at the end of 2008. The political commitment of the government regarding education and enhancement of skills and capabilities of people are expressed in Vision 2021. The Outline Perspective Plan 2010-21 has been prepared by the Planning Commission based on Vision 2021. Subsequently, the National Education Policy was adopted in 2010 and the Sixth Five Year Development Plan was approved in 2011. A National Skills Development Policy also has been adopted in 2011.

##### **Vision 2021**

It proclaims a vision of where Bangladesh wants to be at year 50 of its nationhood. It is yet to be fully elaborated, but the headline items related to education and human resource development include:

- Achievement of universal primary education, extending this stage to grade 8; elimination of illiteracy; creating a new generation skilled in and equipped with technical and scientific knowledge; better remunerations for teachers; and overall improvement of quality and equity in education. It also promised the formulation of an education policy fit for the contemporary age. There are other Vision 2021 goals pertinent to educational development – building the Digital Bangladesh through extensive use and capacity development in digital technology; creating gainful employment opportunities for at least 90 million skilled workers; and ensuring equal status for women in all spheres of society and the state.

- A key item relevant for educational development is the goal in governance and public administration, particularly, the idea that local government bodies would be at the centre of planning and management of development activities. With this end, local government authorities at the district and upazila (sub-district) levels would be empowered to become self-reliant and autonomous. This goal also happens to reflect a constitutional requirement (under Articles 59 and 60 of the constitution) that elected representatives at each level of administration take responsibility for public services and development activities.

**As stated in the Perspective Plan document:**

The implementation of the Perspective Plan envisages the full commitment of will, skill, and resources from all stakeholders to developing the nation into a middle income country by 2021. The government is required to make long-term thinking a central element of the decision making process and service culture. The government cannot achieve the Vision alone. It is a collective effort in which the private sector, civil society, and all other stakeholders will share responsibility to reshape the nation's future. The consultative process in formulating the Plan must continue throughout the implementation since Vision 2021 is not a destination in itself but a journey ( GOB, Planning Commission. Outline Perspective Plan of Bangladesh, 2010-21, Making Vision 2021 a Reality, p. 11)

**The Education Policy**

The National Education Policy, approved by the National Parliament in 2010, provides a framework for fulfilling the role of the educational system in the nation's human resource development. The key relevant features include:

***Universal education up to grade 8***

One-year of pre-primary education and primary education (of five years at present), extended to grade 8 should become universal by 2018. The historically evolved reality of the diversity of provisions in primary and secondary education – government, government-assisted, NGO and private sector schools, and the madrasa – is recognized. It is agreed that this diversity may continue, but all institutions will have to follow a common core curriculum and adopt minimum common standards regarding learning provisions.

***Multiple delivery modes with common core curriculum and standards***

The common core curriculum for all types of secondary level institutions (including madrasa) will include Bangla, English, mathematics, science, Bangladesh studies, and IT, and will be complemented by additional subjects pertinent for each major stream – general, vocational, and madrasa. In addition to the vocational stream in schools, there would be various forms of skill training activities according to graded national skill standards designed to meet skill needs in domestic and overseas employment markets. Instruction in science and IT would be given special attention.

***Literacy and non-formal education***

A literacy programme to eliminate adult illiteracy by 2014 is proposed. Non-formal education is seen as a means of providing a second chance to those who drop out of formal schools, complementing the “literacy campaign.”

***Quality improvement in tertiary education***

Tertiary education institutions, both public and private, would be encouraged to take responsibility to establish and maintain quality standards within agreed framework. A four-year degree program should be acceptable higher education qualification for most professional level occupations except for those aiming for teaching, research and other jobs that call for specialized expertise. A three credit English course should be compulsory for all degree students. Various quality enhancing investments in facilities and teacher upgrading are proposed. Pedagogic technology such as internet and education television channels should be supported.

***Student assessment to discourage rote learning***

Assessment of learners’ achievement should be based on public examinations and continuous evaluation by teachers, which should aim at assessing cognitive, affective and reasoning domains.

***Teachers’ status, incentives and training***

Teachers’ recruitment, training, professional support and remuneration should be key elements of the strategy for improving quality in education. A Teacher Recruitment and Development Commission should be established to recruit teachers and support their professional development.

***Governance and management measures***

A consolidated education law should be enacted providing a legal framework for educational governance and management in line with the purposes of the new policy.

It can be seen that the policy recommendations are in the form of normative goals or preferences expressed in some cases in general terms. Implementation of the policy will require establishment of mechanisms and processes, preparation of phased operational plans, a plan for mobilizing adequate resources, and reconciliation of differing views and making choices among options on certain issues.

***The Sixth Five-Year Plan***

The Sixth Five Year National Development Plan (2011- 15) is expected to be an important mechanism for implementing the plan and programme of the government with provision for adequate resources, appropriate coordination and necessary monitoring and adjustments of plans as needed (GOB Planning Commission 2011)

The implementation of Vision 2021 is expected to happen through two medium term plans, the first being the sixth plan. How effectively the challenges identified regarding education

and skills development will be met through the Sixth Plan mechanism? It is said in the plan document that “ in a market economy like Bangladesh where the bulk of the economy is privately owned and managed, the role of planning is essentially indicative in nature.... focus of the plans [being] on strategies, policies and institutions to help guide the private sector in helping Bangladesh achieve the goals set in Vision 2021” (GOB, Planning Commission 2011, p.8).

It is recognised that without proper government regulations and public spending in core areas, the social and economic results can be “devastating and unsustainable.” A “proper” balance between incentives to private sector and instituting regulatory policies for safeguarding public interest is seen as “a major guiding principle of the policy and institutional framework of the Sixth and the Seventh plans.” But the “indicative” character of the plan - rather than being an operational document that is the basis for guiding and monitoring annual budgets, fiscal decisions and economic policies of the government - casts doubt about the plan’s efficacy in guiding actions to achieve the Vision 2021 Goals (GOB, Planning Commission, 2011, p.8).

The normative goals and preferences stated in the education policy beg two related questions:

- a. How can the broad statements of purpose and hints of strategy given in the education policy be analyzed, elaborated, possible points of controversy resolved and priorities in phasing and sequential steps transformed into an operational plan and programme?
- b. What should be the organizational and institutional mechanism for implementing the operational plan and programme with provision for adequate resources, appropriate coordination and necessary monitoring and adjustments of plans as needed? This is where past education commission policy recommendations faltered.

A plan document is only as good as it becomes a guide for effective action, rather than another document. How the revived medium-term development planning process (after almost a decade of no-plan interregnum) will be reflected in annual budgets, medium term budgetary frameworks, and annual development plans need to be indicated. How will the plan guide externally assisted development projects (such as PEDP III) also need to be specified. How recurrent budgets of line Ministries reflect the plan priorities, strategies and targets also need to be considered.

In an appropriately ambitious medium-term plan, there should be a mixture of incremental changes and some bold innovations. The document as it stands is dominated by incrementalism with few bold initiatives. Key priorities in the Education Policy and Vision 2021 call for “out-of-the-box” experimental and developmental approach, rather than only incremental reforms. The experiments must be initiated during the sixth plan so that these can lay the ground for a qualitative transformation in the education system by 2021.

The political commitment of the government expressed in the documents cited, as well as the unfinished tasks related to EFA and MDG and the recent history of progress made and challenges encountered can be seen as the backdrop for post-2015 MDG and EFA discourse.

## 5. Way Forward

### Key areas for post-2015 EFA and MDG agenda

Various constraints and possibilities regarding likely progress and shortfalls up to 2015 have been noted above. These also suggest goals, priorities and strategies to complete the unfinished EFA tasks and to look beyond 2015. Vision 2021 and the perspective development plan of the country for the next decade also provide an indication of the possible agenda. However, the discussion on the post 2015 agenda is still to be formally begun involving the government and other stakeholders. In the civil society forums facilitated by the People's Forum for MDG (PFM) and Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), ideas regarding post 2015 EFA and post 2015 education MDG have been put forward as described below.

1. A rights-based approach to educational development up to the age of legal prohibition of child labour (age 14 or roughly completion of grade 8) with specific standards to be met should receive prime attention. Quality standards for teachers and schools attempted to be implemented under PEDP III need to be assessed and examined to consider if the standards need to be modified so that these can be accepted, applied and implemented for all children nationwide. The aim must be to prevent any young learner from being subjected to sub-standard schools and teachers. At the same time, mechanisms for assessing standards, accrediting schools and teachers who meet standards, and remedial plans and steps that schools and teachers must undergo to meet standards should be established. Under national level expertise and professional guidance, these mechanisms should be decentralised to district and Upazila level. The assessment should be public and transparent and involve parents, community and the public.
2. Early childhood care, education and development, from birth to smooth transition into primary education, up to age 8, should be incorporated in post-2015 agenda. This is justified by the proven strong influence of ECD on later learning, juvenile behaviour and adult life as well as the scientific evidence about the critical importance of the early years in human cognitive development. All Children should participate in quality preschool education, but this itself does not ensure adequate preparedness for entry into schooling, especially of children from deprived background. For effective school preparedness and smooth transition from home to school, all children from birth to school entry should participate in organised ECD programmes in family, community and work places, through services such as parenting, nurseries and playgroups and day-care (especially for children of working parents). Health, nutrition and psycho-social stimulation, especially in first 1,000 days of life must be given special attention in a coordinated way. (A Comprehensive

Child Development Policy in final draft, prepared with the lead of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, awaiting government approval, will facilitate policy support for ECD implementation.)

3. Post-primary compulsory education up to age 14 or up to age of legal prohibition of child labour should have specific milestones related to achievement of basic competencies and preparation for the world of work by adolescents and youth.
4. The “shadow education system” of private tutoring outside school to compensate for the shortcomings of schools must be addressed because of its role in fostering inequality. Quality improvement in teaching-learning need to incorporate within school special support for children coming from disadvantaged background and falling behind in class.
5. Decentralization of educational administration should be in place with greater authority and responsibility for planning education services and management of budgets to Upazila and institution levels. A systematic trial of decentralization with enlarged school and Upazila level authority with accountability should be undertaken in selected districts before this is widely replicated. Research and academic institutions should be involved in the trial.
6. Present education budget is grossly insufficient for the stated quality with equity objectives in education. Public expenditure for education and skills development should be increased in stages within a specified time frame up to the internationally advocated level - 6% of GDP or at least 20% of total national budget. There is scope to be innovative in mobilising education resources, such as education cess or surcharge on all taxes, as in India and Pakistan; public, private, community, local government partnership; better management and accountability in current financing provisions in education; alternative use of substantial transfer payment in education for quality enhancing inputs, all of which should be fully exploited.
7. Ensuring adequate supply of teachers for manageable class size and adequate learning time and attracting and retaining the best and the brightest of the young graduates into teaching at the primary and secondary level are crucial for quality enhancement. The numbers of teachers need to be increased by at least 50 percent to achieve acceptable quality standards for teaching-learning in primary education in Bangladesh. A National Teaching Service Corps with effective pre-service education programmes within the general degree programme and special incentives and remuneration should be considered.
8. The literacy goal should be redefined, moving away from reductionist “alphabetisation” to make literacy the first step in a lifelong learning process, allowing each learner to achieve self-sustaining literacy and continue to engage in learning related to work, citizenship and personal fulfilment. A nationwide network of permanent community learning centres should be built up as the institutional base of lifelong learning. Some 3,000 NGO-run learning centres exist which can be the starting point for the programme. The network of learning centres, spaces,



programmes, and IT kiosks should be expanded in partnership with, communities, local government, communications media, NGOs and the private sector.

### **Suggested post-MDG education goals**

Along with the discourse about post-2015 EFA, a related discussion is going on about post-MDG global agenda and the education agenda within the larger development agenda. As in the current EFA goals and MDG, the latter can include only one or two education-related goals which have to serve as the proxy for the global education priorities. From this perspective, two education goals have been suggested in the civil society consultation in education.

These goals and related indicators are:

#### **Global Education Goal 1 in post-2015 MDG**

Compulsory education up to age of work eligibility: All children must begin primary education at right age and complete compulsory education up to age 14 or the age of work eligibility, whichever is later.

#### ***Proposed indicators for Goal 1***

1. Participation in organised ECD programmes and preschool,
2. Adequacy of provisions in ECD,
3. Age-grade congruence in primary school. Starting with entry in grade 1,
4. Adequacy of provisions for primary and post-primary education,
5. Successful completion of primary and post-primary education,
6. Achievement and assessment of defined competencies.

#### **Global Education Goal 2 in post-2015 MDG**

Building the learning society. Provisions must be made to enable all youth and adults to participate in lifelong learning programs related to work, citizenship and personal fulfilment.

#### ***Proposed Indicators for Goal 2***

1. Assessed functional literacy achievement;
2. Availability of learning centers, spaces, programmes, and learning technology networks;
3. Participation rates of youths and adults in lifelong learning.

The proposed targets and indicators related to these two goals above are shown in Table 2.

**Table2. Proposed Education goals, targets and indicators as part of post-2015 Global Development Agenda**

Goals	Targets	Indicators
1. All children up to age of prohibition of child labour (age 14) will complete compulsory education of acceptable quality	1.1 All children from birth to transition into primary school participate in organised ECD programmes including preschool; 1.2 Ensuring acceptable quality with adequate provisions for primary and post-primary education including teaching personnel; 1.3 Completion of primary and post-primary education by all eligible children; 1.4 Major expansion of secondary education.	1a Proportion of children with birth registration with urban-rural and gender breakdown; 1b Proportion of parents/care givers of young children from birth to 8 years participating in organised parenting skills and knowledge programmes with income quintile and urban-rural breakdown; 1c Proportion of children 3-5 years participating in ECD programmes with income quintile and urban-rural breakdown. 1d Proportion of children 5-6 years participating in preschool programmes with income quintile and urban-rural breakdown. 1e Proportion of primary and secondary schools meeting essential quality standards for physical facilities, learning equipment and environment and teaching personnel standards. 1f Proportions of students entering and completing primary school at designated age with gender, urban-rural breakdown; 1g Gross and net enrolment in primary and secondary education; 1h Assessed achievement by students of competency standards in languages (First language and English), mathematics, and science at primary and secondary levels with gender and urban-rural breakdown.

Goals	Targets	Indicators
2. All youth and adults will have opportunity to participate in lifelong learning related to livelihood, work, citizenship and personal fulfilment.	2.1 Universal availability of learning centres, spaces, programmes, and learning technology networks; 2.2 Eighty percent of youth and adults participate in lifelong learning; 2.3 Assessed basic literacy competency achieved by all youth and adults and self-sustaining functional competency achieved by 80 percent of youth and adults.	2a Proportions of youth and adults making regular use of learning centres, spaces, programmes, and learning technology networks, with gender, income quintile and urban-urban slum-rural breakdown; 2b Proportion of youth and adults participating in literacy and post-literacy, work and livelihood skills training and personal fulfilment in community learning centres and other education programmes with gender, age and urban-urban slum-rural breakdown. 2c Assessed competency achievement of youth and adults in literacy at basic and functional or self-sustaining levels.

**Source:** PFM 2013. "Post-2015 Development Agenda-A synthesis of position papers prepared for Bangladesh People's Forum for MDG (PFM)." Draft for Discussion (May 18, 2013). Dhaka: People's Forum for MDG

### Additional National Indicators Related to Both Goals

For the purpose of adapting and adjusting the goals and targets to the national circumstance, additional indicators may be chosen and applied in a country. In the context of Bangladesh, the following may be considered.

1. Selected achievement of competencies, at specified grade or age level for participants in compulsory education - assessed results;
2. Assessment of governance measures –decentralisation, accountability, transparency;
3. Resources – adequacy and use;
4. Disparities in participation, provisions, and outcome;
5. Teachers – numbers and quality attributes.

As noted above, these are proposals under discussion in civil society forums. We expect that these ideas and suggestions will be the subject of dialogue involving government and major stakeholders in formulating a national position on post 2015 goals in education in the context of new EFA and MDG agenda.

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