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Bangladesh: Universal Access to Education by 2030? (2021?)

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INTRODUCTION

Universal access to education means that all people have equal opportunity in education, regardless of their social class, religion, sex, place of birth, ethnicity, ethnic background or physical disabilities. In this context, two fundamental issues are: right to education and the responsibility of the State. The question is: up to what level should education be a universal right (i.e. right of all students) and up to what level it should be the responsibility of the State to ensure universal access to education. I shall come back to these issues a little later. Let us first look at the provisions in these regards in the Constitution of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh National Education Policy 2010.

Article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh provides that “The State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of: (a) establishing a uniform, mass oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children up to such a stage as may be determined by law; (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; and (c) removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law. Article 28 invokes that (a) The State shall not discriminate against any citizen on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth; (b) Women have equal rights with men in all spheres of the State and public life; (c) No citizen shall, on grounds of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth, be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort or admission to any educational institution; and (d) Nothing in this article shall prevent the State from making special provision in favour of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens. Article

29 (a) states that there shall be equality of opportunity for all citizens in respect of employment or office in the service of the public.

Clearly, the Constitution of Bangladesh provides for universal access to education without any discrimination against any child on any ground. It also calls for equal opportunity for access to employment and public service offices, without discrimination on any ground. Clearly, therefore, all citizens, without discrimination, are entitled to all universal human rights and equal opportunities for living a humanly dignified life.

The most crucial element for human progress and human dignity for all, I believe, is education for all. Here, the Constitution of Bangladesh provides that it is the responsibility of the State to ensure education of all children without discrimination up to a level determined by law. As of now, the level that is determined by law is up to completion of Grade 5, which, before the adoption of the Bangladesh National Education Policy (NEP) 2010, was the terminal year of primary education. According to the NEP 2010, primary education is extended up to Grade 8 (henceforth, 'primary education' would mean education up to completion of Grade 8). However, a law to that effect is yet to be enacted.

But while, according to the Constitution of Bangladesh, it is the responsibility of the State to ensure a level of education for each and every child of the country, the Constitution does not provide that education is a right of the children. The process of enacting an Education Act has been in the works for some time and one hopes it will be passed soon. The draft Act includes a clause stating that primary education is a right of the children, while it remains the responsibility of the State to ensure it. Bangladesh is also a signatory to the global compact: "Education for All", which implies that nobody should be left out of education.

In terms of basic thrusts of education in Bangladesh, the objectives of the NEP 2010 may be broadly divided into basic categories: (a) flourishing of nascent abilities and qualities in human beings tempered with quality, human and social values, morality, empathy, inclusiveness, equity, solidarity, and pride in national identity; and (b) development of appropriate level skills among students in their respective chosen fields.

UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION DEFINED FOR BANGLADESH

Coming back to the universality of access to education, it seems appropriate that, in Bangladesh, primary education including childhood or pre-primary education must come under the goal of universal access to education, i.e. every child, without any discrimination on any ground, must be ensured access to pre-primary and primary education.

For secondary and higher education, universality of access may still be a valid proposition, but based on merit and interest. That is, those students who are able and intend to study beyond primary level but are constrained by financial and other difficulties, arrangements should be in place at the behest of the State, the educational institutions, and other facilitating organizations such as government foundations, private foundations, and the corporate sector for them to pursue their intended studies. Also, adult literacy programmes to remove illiteracy from the country may fall within the framework of universality of access to education.

In this paper, we intend to focus on universal access to pre-primary and primary education. To ensure universal access to education essentially requires that all necessary measures are taken such that the children of those segments of the population who cannot access or complete both pre-primary and primary education due to various types of disadvantages: social, economic, political, locational. These disadvantaged groups of population include: poor, ultra poor, women-headed poor families and other disadvantaged groups, comprising in particular: small holders and struggling agricultural workers; tiny and small operators in informal economic sectors; ethnic minorities; *dalits*; street cleaners, people living in *bustees*; people turned homeless due to river erosion and as a result of salinity ingress in coastal belts; people living in disadvantaged areas of the country such as *haors*, hills, and marginal lands; street children and child workers; and physically or otherwise disabled children. The NEP 2010 spells out the policy imperative of ensuring that every one, particularly those belonging to the above mentioned groups, is brought within the fold of education. Strategies for doing so have also been outlined.

The richer and already educated segments of society themselves make sure that their children are educated. Also, there is a growing ambition among rural population, who may not even be educated themselves, that their children receive an education. Therefore, they generally make as best arrangements as they can for their children to go to school. However, these people often need assistance of one kind or another to ensure that their children receive an education, at least up to

the completion of primary education. The NEP 2010 is anchored on the fundamental principles of inclusive and quality education and provides policy directions and implementation guidelines, in that context, for the entire education sector of the country with pre-primary education (PPE) at the base of the system.

Compulsory Subjects for All Study Streams at the Primary Level—General, Madrasha, English Medium. In order to create a common basis for all children of the country, regardless of which stream (General, Madrasha or English Medium) of study they join in, the following subjects along with the approved text books for the subjects are compulsory for all: Bangla, English, Moral Education, Bangladesh Studies, Arithmetic, Introduction to Social Environment and Natural Environment with Climate Change, Information Technology, and Science. Curricula have been developed as appropriate to the levels of study. Introduction of different subjects are appropriately spread across Grades so as not to overburden the youngsters. Except for Quomi Ebtedayee Madrashas, all other streams have been teaching all these compulsory subjects at the primary level, using the approved text books.

For O and A levels, for which examinations are conducted extraneously, Bangla and Bangladesh Studies, exactly the same as in other streams, are also compulsory. Only if these are properly included in the curricula, O and A levels are to be recognized as equivalent to SSC and HSC respectively.

Vocational Education at the Primary Level: All Streams. Pre-vocational and elementary information technology have been included in the studies prescribed for Grades 6 to 8 so that the children completing primary education have some basic idea about these subjects as they move up to the next level and for those who may not continue studies for one reason or another to have some basic skills (*albeit*, elementary, nonetheless useful as a starter) to start a career in self or wage employment. A major emphasis is placed on development of expertise relating to digitization, starting from very early ages. Conscious steps are there not to create a disagreeable level of digital divide.

PRE-PRIMARY EDUCATION

The NEP 2010 recognizes PPE as an integral part of primary education. It prescribes initial introduction of one-year PPE for the children of age 5 to 6 years in all primary schools of the country, which can be extended for children of age 4+ in the course of time as teaching and other facilities are expanded. Pre-primary education should imbibe the youngsters with grounding in creativity, discipline, finer values of life, empathy for others and help them develop an interest in learning in the next stages of education. All these tasks must be performed in a child-friendly but disciplined manner, using pictures, colours, models, rhymes, stories, songs, appropriate types of sports, and other innovative means that may be attractive to the children of that age. The children are to be treated with utmost care, and absolutely no physical punishment or mental pressure is permitted. At this stage of education, due recognition, as appropriate, is given to lessons (including religious education, literacy, morality and other subjects) currently being provided in mosques, temples, churches, pagodas under the watch of the Bangladesh Ministry of Religious Affairs.

Obviously, to implement pre-primary education, as envisaged, requires a large number of properly trained teachers and necessary classrooms in all the primary educational institutions of the country. Both are time and resource-consuming tasks. The NEP 2010 has, therefore, proposed a phase by phase introduction of pre-primary education throughout the country.

Enrollment in PPE

As stated earlier, the official age of children for pre-primary education, as of now, is 5+ to 6 years. However, at this time, children of well over 6 years of age who had not gone to school before and children below 5 years of age also get enrolled at pre-primary level. Enrollment of children of 6+ years in pre-primary education is expected to be a temporary phenomenon, given that efforts are being made to bring the backlog of hitherto non-participants in the educational system in an appropriate manner. Children aged 4+ years should soon be officially recognized as pre-primary students.

A dramatic increase in pre-primary enrollment is observed in the 2008-2013 period for children from 4 years to 6+ years. The increase is 3.7 times in terms of net enrollment rate and 2.7 times in terms of gross enrollment rate (Table 1). Gross rate includes children of other ages along with the prescribed age group, while the net rate relates to the prescribed age group, both with reference to

the total number of children in the prescribed age group in the country. With net pre-primary enrollment rising to about 40% by 2013, 60% still remains unenrolled.

Another piece of information (see MoP&ME 2013, p. 55) indicates an even better performance that 50% of those enrolled in Grade 1 in 2012 have attended pre-primary education, about the same proportion for both girls and boys but 60% in government primary schools (GPSs) and 40% in registered non-governmental primary schools (RNGPSs).

Table 1: Pre-primary Education: Gross and Net Enrollment Rates (2005-2013)

Year	2005	2008	2013
Gross enrollment rate	30.5	28.8	77.9
Net enrollment rate	13.4	10.9	40.4

Source: EW 2013, p. 43.

Reasons of Non-enrollment in PPE

There are various reasons for persisting non-enrollment in PPE, accounting for 60% of the appropriate age group. These include the following. Many children are directly admitted to primary level, i.e. Grade 1, a general practice before NEP 2010 as there was, then, no clear-cut policy relating to pre-primary education, and the practice still tends to persist; unavailability of a pre-primary teaching facility nearby; unwillingness on the part of parents/guardians as they think pre-primary education is not necessary; and parents/guardians are not aware that pre-primary education is now an integral part of the education system in the country. However, availability of pre-primary school facilities has increased significantly over the past few years, as a result of government efforts to expand the facilities.

Available evidence also suggests that, with increasing awareness regarding the PPE policy and expected early education benefits for the children, parental willingness to admit their children to PPE is also increasing. But, obviously, the quality of the PPE offered and the rate of expansion of facilities as required will determine how fast and how solidly the PPE will meaningfully expand.

There are 102,540 primary level educational institutions in the country available for introduction of pre-primary education, including 59,733 GPSs and 42,807 RNGPSs (MoP&ME 2013, pp. 21 and 54). Although pre-primary education has been introduced in a significant proportion of these institutions, quality teachers and adequate facilities are yet to be ensured. The government has

recently created 37,672 pre-primary teaching posts for GPSs, who on recruitment are expected to be properly trained and deployed.

PRIMARY EDUCATION

Primary education is of crucial importance as it is the foundation for pursuing education at subsequent levels and also for starting a career for those who would not pursue studies further for one reason or another. Hence, not only that universal entry to pre-primary and primary education and completion of primary education must be ensured, but also delivery of quality pre-primary and primary education is a must so that (a) the children are adequately equipped to continue their studies at subsequent levels and (b) those who, for one reason or another, cannot or do not pursue studies beyond primary level have the basic ability to start a career in self or wage employment.

For equal opportunity pre-primary and primary schooling for all the country's children of appropriate ages, it is important that all primary schools in the country are properly equipped in terms of trained teachers, teaching aids, physical facilities (classrooms, recreation facilities) etc. for effectively imparting both pre-primary and primary education. But, there is widespread disparity in this regard between schools in different locations catering to various segments of population. For example, schools in rural areas usually are poorly equipped and schools in urban areas, particularly in big cities, are generally well equipped. However, even in a city, schools catering to children of poorer segments of the city dwellers tend to be deficient in different respects.

The NEP 2010 provides that such disparity between schools must be removed by giving preferential attention in terms of policy and institutional support, funding and provision of other facilities to poorly equipped schools, particularly in rural areas with special emphasis on schools in remote and disadvantaged areas such as *haor*, hill and *char* areas and also, as appropriate, in urban areas. Obviously, this is related to quality of education. Indeed, universality of access up to completion of primary education would necessarily imply uniform quality of education for all children of the country.

Enrollment and Retention in Primary Education

In the case of primary education, enrollment has increased steadily from 60.5% in 1990 to 87.2% in 2005 to 96.7% in 2012 on a net basis (Table 2). According to MDG-PR-12, the net enrollment rate already reached 98.7% by 2011. Either way, this surely is a major achievement. It will be seen from Table 2 that girls' enrollment has increased relatively faster than that of boys. As of 2012, the net primary level enrollment rate of girls already reached 98.1% compared to 95.4% for boys. In this context, it may be noted that studies have found that parents in Bangladesh, both in urban and rural areas are, by and large, interested in the education of both their sons and daughters equally. This is reflected also in the lower dropout rate for girls up to completion of Grade 5 (Table 4).

Table 2: Trends in Net Enrollment Ratio, 2000-2012

Year	2000	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Total	85.52	87.2	90.9	91.1	90.8	93.9	94.8	94.9	96.7
Girls	85.83	90.1	94.5	94.7	94.0	99.1	97.6	97.3	98.1
Boys	85.22	84.6	87.6	87.8	87.9	89.1	92.2	92.7	95.4
Gender parity index		1.07	1.08	1.08	1.07	1.11	1.06	1.06	1.04

Source: MoP&ME 2013, p. 44. MDG-PR-12.

There has been a significant improvement in the totals dropout rate across Grades 1-5. It was as high as 47% (from enrollment in Grade 1 up to completion of Grade 5) in 2005 and 49.3% in 2008. Since implementation of the NEP 2010 began, it has declined sharply and was down to 26.2% in 2012 (Table 3). But, dropout is still a major concern.

Table 3. Dropout Rate at Primary Level up to Completion of Grade 5, 2005-2012

Year	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Dropout (%)	47.2	50.5	50.5	49.3	45.1	39.8	29.7	26.2

Source: BANBEIS, Table 2.12.

Table 4 provides further insights in terms of sex and class-wise dropout rates. Both boys and girls tend to drop out noticeably in all Grades, but more so by the time they reach Grade 4. Overall, at completion of Grade 5, the dropout rate is lower for girls compared to boys by a significant 4.7 percentage points.

Table 4. Dropout Rate by Sex and Grade (%), 2012

Sex	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Total
Boys	5.9	4.3	6.4	10.3	2.3	29.2
Girls	6.8	2.7	3.8	9.7	1.5	24.5
Average	6.3	3.5	5.1	10.0	1.9	26.8

Source: BANBEIS, Table 2.11.

Although reliable information is not available, it appears that some 26-27% of those (i.e. 73% of the total number enrolling in Grade 1) who move on to Grade 6 drop out by the time the cohort completes primary education, who make up about 20% of the total number enrolled in Grade 1. So, the dropout rate up to completion of Grade 8 is about 46%. In this context, it may be recalled that the Millennium Development Goals 2 states: ‘Achieve universal primary education’ with the target to ensure that all boys and girls alike complete a full course of primary schooling by 2015. Although Bangladesh has met a significant number of key targets under different MDGs ahead of time and will meet some others by end-2015, this particular target will remain unmet by a substantial margin, even if education up to Grade 5 is considered, much more so when the consideration is extended up to completion of primary education (i.e. up to Grade 8).

The focus, therefore, has to be on retention of all children up to completion of primary education. While particular attention needs to be given to the children of the critically disadvantaged segments of population listed earlier, appropriate attention should also be directed to children of other poorer segments of population so as to stem dropout from among them.

ENROLLMENT AND DROPOUT AT LEVELS ABOVE PRIMARY EDUCATION

At the secondary level, as of 2012, 61.5% of the relevant age group students enroll: girls 67.8% and boys significantly lower at 55.5%. However, 44.7% dropout at this level. The dropout rate is significantly higher for girls at 52% compared to 34.9% for boys at the secondary level, which is just the opposite at the primary level (MoE 2012-13, p. 4). In higher education, female students account for about 40%. That is, female students tend to dropout more or enroll less compared to male students as they move to subsequent levels of education beyond primary education.

As noted earlier, girls appear to be more focused compared to boys and enjoy relatively higher retention rates than boys at lower levels, but as they grow up they cannot maintain that as their security becomes an issue in many places and situations and also due to early marriage which still happens a lot in Bangladesh, particularly in rural areas.

ACHIEVING UNIVERSAL ACCESS TO EDUCATION

As stated earlier, the main focus of this paper in terms of universal access to education is on pre-primary and primary education. Like primary education, pre-primary education, which is now recognized as an integral part of primary education, should principally be the responsibility of the State and a right of the children.

Pre-Primary Education

Regarding pre-primary enrollment, it has been seen that the net enrollment has reached 40% (4+ to 5+ years) by 2013 and that, as of 2012, 50% of the children enrolled in primary Grade 1 have received pre-primary education. Whatever inconsistency or lack of clarity there may be between these two figures, clearly progress, over the past few years, in pre-primary education in terms of coverage is praiseworthy. However, bringing the large number of the children still out of pre-primary education into schools and providing all the enrolled children with quality educational grounding, as envisaged in the NEP 2010, remains a challenging task. The major issues in expanding pre-primary education and ensuring its quality include:

- Construction of classrooms in the remaining primary level educational institutions for pre-primary instructions. Government is focused on this task, but there are financial and implementation issues, which need to be effectively addressed.
- In bringing the still large number of the unenrolled children into the fold of pre-primary education, particular attention should be given to the disadvantaged groups and locations.
- Ensuring adequate supplies of various materials and teaching aids required at pre-primary level in all schools and regularly replenishing the supplies of materials, as these are used up.
- Recruitment and training of adequate numbers of teachers for both GPSs and RNGPSs. Teachers should be properly trained to handle the children with utmost care.
- Child-friendly methods of teaching must be used, which should be further improved as necessary by regularly reviewing the methods being used.

- The management of pre-primary education should be decentralized to local levels. Local governments at Union and Upazila levels may be assigned the responsibility for effective implementation of pre-primary education.
- Adequate mechanisms must be in place for regularly monitoring and evaluating the manner in which pre-primary education is imparted as well as the quality of education delivered.
- It appears that admission fee and monthly tuition fee for pre-primary education are the responsibility of the parents/guardians. Also, even at the pre-primary level, supplementary private tuition is a reality, of course mostly provided by economically and educationally better off parents for their children. These three expenditure heads account for about 60% of the total expenditure per student. (EW 2013, pp. 117-118).
- In order to attract and retain students from the poor and various disadvantage groups, pre-primary education should be free, except for clothes and transport to and back from schools. Also, teaching offered at schools should be adequate and private tuition discouraged. These youngsters should not feel burdened. At home, they should enjoy and play.

Primary Education

At the primary level, two major problems are dropout rates and poor quality of education.

Dropout

It has been seen earlier that about 27% dropout in various grades from Grade 1 up to completion of grades 5; and of the remaining 73%, who move on to Grade 6, about 26% drop out in different grades up to completion of Grade 8. As a result, the proportion of the cohort entering grade 1 dropping out up to completion of Grade 8 is still about 46%. That is, primary education completion rate is 54%, surely unsatisfactory in the context of universal access to education defined in terms of completion of primary education.

The reasons behind dropout include: poverty, social discrimination, nonconductive environment at home and in school, disability and health related problems, and security of girls in schools and on way to and from schools.

A study (EW 2006) has found that costs incurred by parents/guardians for primary education account for, on average, 54% of the total cost per student, somewhat lower in the case of rural schools compared to urban schools. It is really a burden for the poor and various disadvantaged

groups of parents. Due to this reason, combined with a lack of helpful, even discouraging environment at homes on account of poor and inadequate housing and, not infrequently, also because of parental illiteracy or inability to help their children in their studies, unacceptable levels of dropout still persist in primary education (26% up to completion of Grade 5 and 46% up to completion of Grade 8).

Stipends provided, under certain conditions relating to examination results and school attendance, to some 13.4 million students by the government over the past five years and the books distributed by the government to all primary and secondary students of the country free of cost on 1 January every year since 2010 have certainly been of much help. But, clearly other actions are also necessary to stem dropout.

One proven step that helps retain in schools students from poorer and disadvantaged segments of population is a proper mid-day meal. Piloting of this step has shown very good results. But, to introduce it in all schools of the country, even if only for the poorer segments of children, would require huge amounts of money, which the government cannot meet. **A Trust Fund** may be set up for meeting mid-day meal costs out of income from it, into which contributions from people who can afford and stringless contributions from development partners may be received in addition to government allocations. Also, local well-to-do people may be encouraged to assist schools in their localities with contributions towards meeting mid-day meal costs.

The NEP 2010 has proposed elaborate actions in relation to improving school environment; ensuring of security of students, particularly of girls; and removing discrimination against, for example, disabled children, children of street cleaners, and other such groups of children. In this context, School Management Committees (SMCs) have to be formed with committed members and should function properly without political interferences in order for them to effectively help improve the school environment and security of students, particularly girl students. Also, effective parent-teacher committees can contribute to fulfilling these objectives. But little progress has taken place towards ensuring that these committees are purposefully constituted and that they genuinely perform the roles they are expected to. For the disabled children, conducive movement facilities and special books such as Braille are needed, which is duly recognized in the NEP 2010. However, the progress in this regard is still limited and a lot more remains to be done.

Quality

Quality of primary education is widely regarded as poor. This is supported by the latest available official data for 2011 on competencies achieved by children in Bangla and Mathematics, particularly at Grades 5. The percentage of students achieving Grade 3 competencies is, on average, 67% in Bangla and 50% in Mathematics. It is very disquieting that the percentage of students achieving Grade 5 competencies is, on average, 25% in Bangla and 33% in Mathematics. On the other hand, Grade 5 terminal pass rate is, on average, 97.3%. (Table 5).

Table 5: Competencies Achieved by Students of Grade 3 and Grade 5 in Bangla and Mathematics, 2011.

Percentage of students achieving Grade 3 competencies (All; Boys; Girls)	a. Bangla	All: 67% Boys: 66% Girls: 68%
	b. Mathematics	All: 50% Boys: 51% Girls: 49%
Percentage of students achieving Grade 5 competencies (All; Boys; Girls)	a. Bangla	All: 25% Boys: 25% Girls: 26%
	b. Mathematics	All: 33% Boys: 33% Girls: 34%
Grade 5 terminal examination pass rate	a. Total	97.3%
	b. Boys	97.5%
	C Girls	97.1%

Source: MoP&ME, p. 37.

The NEP 2010 has placed a great deal of emphasis on ensuring quality education at all levels, from pre-primary to higher education. It is, indeed, quality education at the primary level that is crucially important, as this is undoubtedly a major contributing factor to quality education at higher levels. A whole lot of steps have been outlined in the NEP 2010 and other documents of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and Ministry of Education towards achieving this objective. These include:

- Recruitment of qualified teachers and their proper training, including foundation training and refresher training from time to time as well as diploma, graduate and post-graduate degrees, as appropriate,
- Agreeable physical environment and improved student-friendly teaching-learning environment in the primary educational institutions,

- Reducing teachers-students ratio in primary education from 1:60 or more at the time the NEP 2010 was formulated to 1:30 in the course of time. There is already an improvement in this regard as the ratio is down to 1:49 by 2012,
- Extending the coverage of stipends to retain students in schools and encourage them to concentrate on studies. There are already a linkage between stipend and performance, which may be further strengthened,
- Increasing contact hours, and
- Strengthening monitoring. Local citizens may be involved in this task within an appropriate framework. They will not undertake any regular motoring activities, but will, from time to time, review the performance of the schools and encourage and facilitate removing the identified deficiencies and improving teaching-learning environment.

The government is aware of the persisting high levels of quality deficiency in primary education and has been taking steps to improve the situation. But, reasons behind the poor quality primary education tend to remain entrenched. Thus, for example, effective training of teachers still remains a major problem. There is also a problem relating to the status and emoluments of the teachers, which is expected to be addressed by the recently set up National Pay Commission (NPC). While the status and emoluments of the teachers should be upgraded, their accountability also needs to be ensured.

The donor-funded Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), aimed at helping improve primary education in the country, is now in its 3rd phase. The earlier two phases ran from 1997 to 2003 and 2004 to 2011 respectively. The 3rd phase, 2011 to 2016, addresses measurement of learning outcomes as well as participation issues; reduction of regional and other disparities; decentralization of educational management; effective use of budget allocations; and programme planning and management.

The primary education quality measurements shown in Table 5 have been generated under this programme. Despite a strong realization about the need to improve quality of education at the primary level as well as various endeavours (relating to, for example, teacher training, improvement of school environment and action under PEDPs) to that effect, the results remain highly unsatisfactory. A major rethinking of how best to design and implement quality improvement activities at the primary level is called for. One of the important aspects would certainly be decentralization of management of pre-primary and primary education to local levels,

involving Upazila and Union Parishads. Local citizens may also be involved, within an appropriate framework, in the monitoring of the activities towards improving quality of primary education including pre-primary education.

CERTAIN KEY STEPS

Certain key steps are needed to be taken to implement the NEP 2010 more effectively and address the persisting barriers to bringing down the dropout rate and improvement of quality of education at various levels faster, which include the following:

- Enact of the **National Education Act** without further delay, of which an advanced draft has already been prepared.
- Set up **Permanent Education Commission (PEC)** soon to oversee the implementation of educational policies and actions and recommend corrective measures, along with responsibilities assigned to it. A draft has already been prepared.
- Constitute the proposed **Non-governmental Teachers Selection Commission** without further delay for selection of teachers for the registered non-governmental schools and colleges, operating at the Division or even Zila level.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This paper has dealt with universal access issues concerning primary education in Bangladesh, the backbone of the whole educational process. However, adult literacy, recognized as an important element in the context of universal access to education as well as ensuring quality education at secondary and higher levels for students who are able and interested to pursue studies at these levels; vocational studies for students, who do not or cannot pursue studies in one of the regular streams beyond primary education, but are able and interested to pursue vocational studies; knowledge creation through research in universities and other institutions of higher learning; quality higher studies in ICT, engineering, agriculture, and medical etc. have all been given due attention in the NEP 2010 as well as in other relevant policy and planning documents, which may be expected to be supported by the forthcoming National Education Act.

It was originally expected that the NEP 2010 would be fully implemented in 8 or 9 years. But, it appears now that, it may take longer. However, given the significant progress achieved in several respects since the adoption of the NEP 2010 and the commitment of the present government to

promoting quality education in the country, universal access to education, as defined in this paper, should hopefully be attained well before 2030. This goal may be set to be achieved by 2021. But, that will depend on committed and effective implementation of purposefully designed actions, many of which have been outlined in this paper and, more often than not, are one way or another included the national educational policy and strategy repertoire.

Two key issues that need to be addressed in the context of achieving inclusive quality education in the country are to ensure availability of adequate funding and thorough reorientation and decentralization of educational administration as appropriate for different levels of education.

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