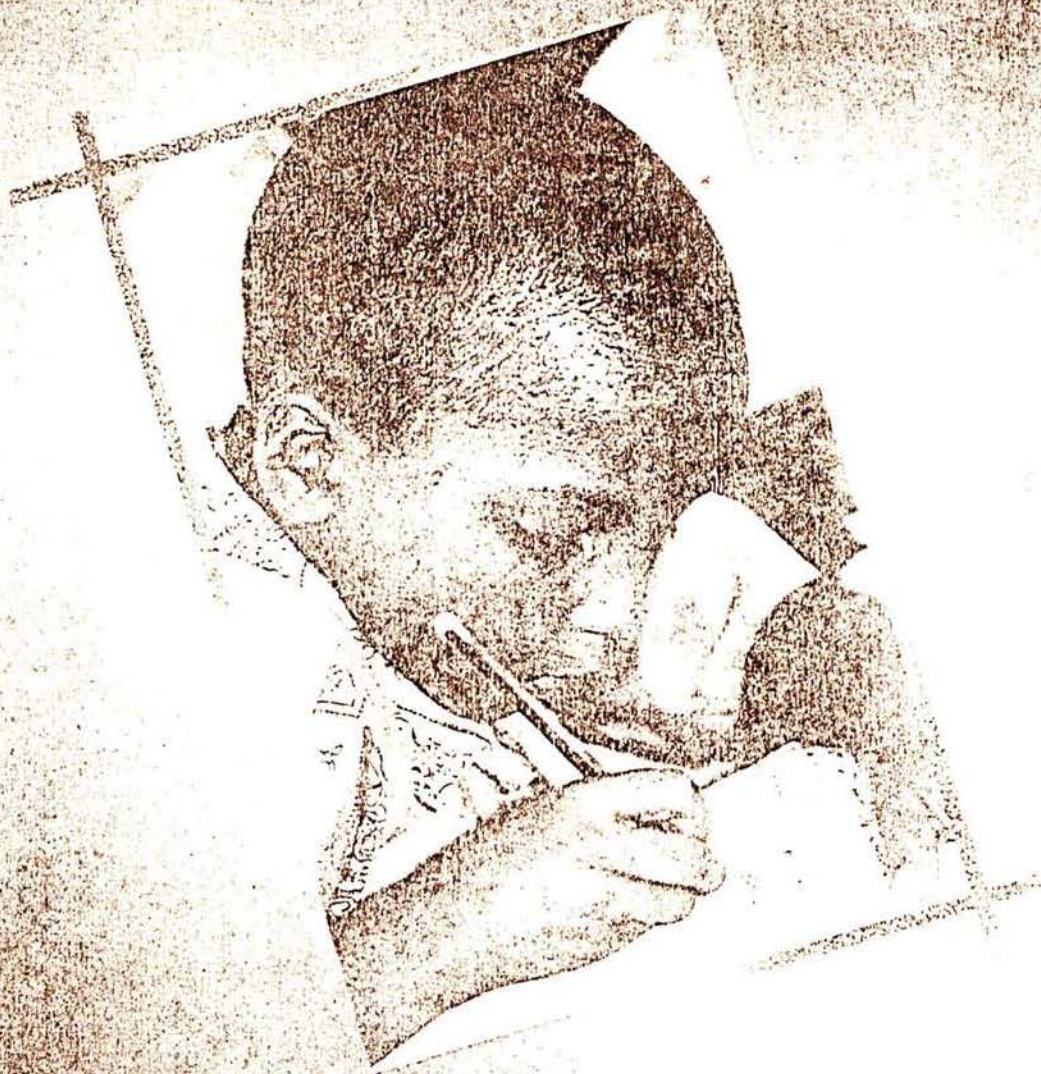


Education Watch 2001

RENEWED HOPE DAUNTING CHALLENGES

State of Primary Education in Bangladesh



Campaign for Popular Education

The University Press Ltd

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Foreword

Monitoring and research are integral and essential components of a development programme. Monitoring helps to track the performance of an intervention and enables to take remedial action when necessary. Research helps understand the new frontiers in development. To some, monitoring, evaluation and research are all synonymous. The World Education Forum, held in Dakar, Senegal, in April 2000, echoed the essence of the need for this when it recommended to 'systematically monitor progress towards Education for All' as a strategy to reach the goal of quality primary education. We, the civil society in Bangladesh, have recognised this need and instituted the *Education Watch* in 1998. I am happy to note that the *Watch* is continuing its vigil uninterrupted. This is the third report of the *Watch* and it is a proof of its critical importance and that of the support it receives from individuals and organizations who are behind this unique initiative. A project like the *Watch* follows the trajectory of a development intervention and documents its successes and failures. But how does one evaluate the *Watch* itself? A short period of, say, two or three years is too early to evaluate an initiative like the *Watch*. However, the attention that it has received from its stakeholders over the past two years, I believe, is a marker of its relevance. It has been well covered by the media. The scientific community has also given it their approval since several highly respected international journals have published articles based on the *Watch* data. But the most significant impact of the *Watch* has been seen in the utterances of national policy makers. That the issue of quality in primary education is a matter of wide public discourse now is to a large extent attributed to the *Watch* reports. I think the project can take pride in this and continue in their mission of projecting an objective assessment of the state of primary education in the country.

But we should not be complacent about our own achievement. The *Watch* has a long road to traverse. It has done reasonably well in disseminating its findings at the national level. But dissemination at regional or local levels has not been done with as much zeal and effectiveness. The people at the frontier of any education programme - the teachers, their supervisors, and the parents - need to be apprised about the real state of affairs in our schools. This is very important for mobilising effective remedial actions. It has been speculated in the present report that there is some sort of complacency among the providers, viz, the teachers and their supervisors, that the schools were doing

fine in the country. Such perceptions need to be corrected through wider dissemination of the findings and public discourse thereon at all levels.

Bangladesh now has an education policy. There may be questions about some of its contents but through this the government has affirmed its commitment to education. The policy states in clear and unambiguous terms that primary education will be 'universal, compulsory and free'. Anyone with a slightest knowledge about primary education in Bangladesh will agree that the reality is far from it. As the present *Watch* report confirms the primary education is yet to be universal. About seven million children of primary school age are never enrolled or dropout before completing the full cycle. Unfortunately, most of these children are from the poorest and neglected sections of the community. The country has done commendably well in removing gender gap in access but the learning gaps between the two groups continue to pervade. The second *Watch* report very convincingly documented the poor quality in our education system. The Compulsory Primary Education Act makes it obligatory for parents to send their children to school, but there is no enforcement of it. Poverty is said to be a barrier but several non-government organizations, through their non-formal education programmes, have proved that this is only a myth. That primary education is free is another myth. As this report has documented, the parents have to pay a significant proportion of their income in paying for the concealed costs, such as subscriptions, private tutoring and stationery. Needless to mention, for parents who are poor, this means much more than just spending a portion of the income.

Monitoring and research in education in Bangladesh are neglected areas. There is little collaboration among the institutions and organizations involved in primary education in Bangladesh on education research. The *Education Watch* is making efforts in building a partnership among all the stakeholders in this area. I am hopeful that the *Watch* will continue its journey and contribute in improving the effectiveness of the primary education system in the country so that 'Education for All' does not just remain a rhetoric.

Dhaka
May 2002

Fazle Hasan Abed
Chair
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Preface

The *Education Watch* came into existence in 1998. The first report of the *Watch* titled *Hope not Complacency: State of Primary Education in Bangladesh* was published in 1999. The main purpose of this report was to look into internal efficiency of primary education sub-system. Although there were some radical revelations, the report was an instant success. The stakeholders, the practitioners, the development partners and the civil society representatives accepted the report with enthusiasm.

Encouraged by the success and acceptance of the first *Watch* we decided to devote the second *Watch* to quality aspects of primary education. As it was not possible to deal with all the quality indicators of primary education we picked up two major issues, assessment of learning achievement of students and teacher education.

The first *Watch* found out that there was considerable expansion of primary education and near gender parity. It can not, however, be said that we achieved similar success so far as quality is concerned. Quality assurance remains a distant goal. For the third *Watch* we have decided to revisit the internal efficiency scenario. Two additional areas included in this *Watch* are private cost of education and income and expenditure of schools, and literacy.

Findings of the internal efficiency indicators showed consistency with the first *Watch*. There was reasonable quantitative expansion. But quality remained illusive. The government, the policy planners and the stakeholders need to be concerned about how to improve quality in tandem with quantitative expansion. The other area of concern is the private cost of schooling. Primary education is the constitutional obligation of the government. It is supposed to be free and universal. Unfortunately there is cost involved which varies with school type. Parents and guardians are to pay about half of the total costs of primary education. This is a cause of concern because it may restrict access to primary education.

As in the past BRAC Research and Evaluation Division under the able leadership of Dr. A. M. R Chowdhury, Director Research BRAC and Mr. Samir Ranjan Nath, Senior Research Statistician were responsible for field investigation and preparation of the report. Both of them deserve appreciation for the commendable work done. Dr. Manzoor Ahmed former Director of UNICEF was also associated with the preparation of this report. I am very thankful to him.

Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed, Chair BRAC and Chair of the Board of Directors, CAMPE and a member, Advisory Board of the *Education Watch* was very generous towards publication of the report. His in depth comments and generous support were invaluable. I thank him from the core of my heart. Ms. Rasheda K Choudhury, Director, CAMPE and Member Secretary, Advisory Board and Working Group of the *Watch* provided logistic support to the research team. She deserves our commendation.

A number of reviewers including Mr. Kazi Fazlur Rahman, Professor Kazi Saleh Ahmed, Ms. Joushan Ara Rahman and Dr. Deborah Llewellyn deserve our thanks for their valuable comments to improve the report.

Education Watch has been possible due to generous financial assistance received from the Department for International Development (DFID), UK and Novib of the Netherlands. We acknowledge their support.

Many staff members of CAMPE and BRAC including Mr. Faruq A Choudhury, Mr. Muhammed Shafiu Alam, Mr. Subal K. Banik, Mr. Ruhul Amin Choudhury, Mr. Gias Uddin, Mr. Mirja Mohammad Shahjamal, Mr. Shahidul Islam, Mr. Shoeb Ahmed, Mr. Jashimul Islam, Mr. Abdur Razzaque, Ms. Hosneara Daisy, Dr. Imran Matin, Mr. Khandaker Ariful Islam, Mr. Monowar Hossain Khandaker were involved in various stages of preparation of the report. Their devotion and hard work is appreciated. We also thank Mr. Mohiuddin Ahmed of University Press Limited for agreeing to publish the report with CAMPE and Mr. Abdur Rahman for his co-operation.

The report in draft form was shared with important stakeholders including practitioners, civil society and NGO representatives and development partners. We benefited from their suggestions. The unsung participants of this report are the thousands of students, parents, guardians and teachers who participated and helped field investigation. Without their support and co-operation the report would not have been possible. I thank them all.

We hope the report will be useful to the stakeholders and will help improve primary education scenario in Bangladesh.

Dhaka
May 2002

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Acronyms

ABC	Assessment of Basic Competencies
AIDS	Acquired Immuno Deficiency Syndrome
AUEO	Assistant Upazila Education Officer
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
BDHS	Bangladesh Demographic and Health Survey
BRAC	A national NGO (formerly Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee)
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
C-in-Ed	Certificate-in-Education
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
FFE	Food For Education
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GER	Gross Enrolment Ratio
GNP	Gross National Product
HIV	Human Immunodeficiency Virus
IALS	International Adult Literacy Survey
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IDEAL	Intensive District Approach to Education for All
KG	Kindergarten
MICS	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
NAPE	National Academy for Primary Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NER	Net Enrolment Rate
NFPE	Non Formal Primary Education
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
PMED	Primary and Mass Education Division (Government of Bangladesh)
PO	Programme Organiser

PPS	Probability Proportional to Sizes
PSPMP	Primary School Performance Monitoring Project
PTA	Parent Teachers Association
PTI	Primary Teachers Training Institute
PVO	Private Voluntary Organisation
RED	Research and Evaluation Division (BRAC)
SD	Standard Deviation
SMC	School Management Committee
TIB	Transparency International Bangladesh
TLM	Total Literacy Movement
UEO	Upazila Education Officer
UNESCO	United Nations Education Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Childrens Fund
UPE	Universal Primary Education
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All

Authors' Note

We feel very pleased to be able to bring out this report of the *Education Watch*. This is the third report of the *Watch*. The first report entitled, "Hope not Complacency: State of Primary Education in Bangladesh", was published in 1999. The second report, brought out in three volumes and titled, "A Question of Quality: State of Primary Education in Bangladesh", was published in 2001. The first report documented the status of primary education in terms of various *internal efficiency* parameters, and the second report, as the title suggests, dealt with the question of quality of learning. The second report also provided an account of the status of teachers' education at primary level. This year's *Watch* covers three aspects. Firstly, it provides an account of the changes that happened over the two-year period since the time the first *Watch* report was done in terms of the *internal efficiency* parameters. Secondly, it provides an account of the private costs that the parents accrue for their children's education, and the incomes and expenditures of schools. Thirdly, an attempt is made to estimate the literacy rate in the country. We also instituted a post-enumeration check that helped us to get an estimate of the likely dimension of the non-sampling error in our estimates for selected parameters. We were pleased to discover that such errors were within acceptable limits.

The results we found in this study have also been compared with those found in other studies, where available. Most of the results were comparable, thus endorsing the reliability of the information provided.

The purpose of the *Watch* is to provide an objective assessment of the state of primary education in Bangladesh based on what is happening on the ground. In today's provision of primary education, the government is the prime actor but it has also allowed others to fill critical gaps. The *Watch* is essentially designed to provide a global view of the overall system of primary education but, since

the system is pluralist, discussion on the contribution of various types of schools sometime becomes necessary and inevitable. It is true that in many ways the various types of schools are not comparable since they follow different approaches and strategies, but the broader goal of all these is the same: provision of basic education to all. There is no intention to criticize some and praise others, and we have tried to be objective in our analysis and interpretation of the data. On the whole we, as representatives of the civil society, have tried to perform citizens' role for instituting transparency and accountability in the management of various school systems in the country.

The study as reported here is the result of painstaking efforts by a large number of individuals. They include interviewers, supervisors, quality controllers, coders, editors, data entry technicians, and word processing assistants. Besides, the members of the Advisory Board, Working Group and Technical Committee of the *Education Watch* and reviewers of the earlier drafts of this report have been extra-ordinarily helpful. Without their hard work and support this report would have remained only a dream. Earlier versions of this report were presented to various stakeholders on two occasions and we are grateful to the participants for their inputs. Last but not least, we acknowledge the spontaneous support and cooperation provided by the various respondent groups including the students, teachers, teachers' supervisors, parents and guardians. However, we remain responsible for the remaining errors and inadequacies.

Dhaka
May 2002

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Overview

This is the third report of *Education Watch*. The previous two reports, which covered internal efficiency and quality of primary education in Bangladesh, received wide attention of various stakeholders including policy makers, NGOs, academics, donors, media and the like. The importance that the government attaches to the initiative is borne out by the presence of Ministers of Education in the launching of the two reports.

Methodology

The *Education Watch 2001* covers two areas critical to primary education: internal efficiency and household cost of schooling. In addition, the *Watch* also collected information on reported 'literacy' of household members. Using questionnaires and checklists, the study collected information from a representative sample of 30,051 households and 952 schools. The sampling technique followed permitted estimates at national and sub-national levels. Assessment of the data has revealed that they are of reasonably good quality.

Major findings

Internal efficiency: Current information on the enrolment status of children of primary school age (6–10 years) in Bangladesh shows a gross enrolment ratio of 108 and the net enrolment rate of 80 percent. This means that a large proportion of children attending primary schools is outside the designated age-span for primary school. Of the many providers of primary education in the country, the government is the most dominant with 61 percent of total enrolment. Others include private (registered and unregistered) (18.4 percent), non-formal (7.1 percent), madrassas (5.3 percent), English-medium (2.1 percent), and satellite/community schools (2.7 percent). Rural Khulna division has the highest net enrolment (91 percent) and Sylhet the lowest (75.7 percent). Enrolment rates in urban areas are significantly higher than those in rural areas. However, equity emerges as an important issue. In enrolment, the socio-economically disadvantaged groups are trailing behind their advantaged counterparts, with most of the non-enrolled coming from the former group. Village level analysis identified disparities between villages as well; there were villages where the net enrolment rate was as low as 20 percent.

The *Watch 2001* report also dealt with some additional dimensions of internal efficiency including promotion, dropout, repetition, attendance, teacher-student ratio, and school management. Using the UNESCO methodology, the completion rate for primary cycle was found to be 75.7 percent, which implied a dropout rate of 24.3 percent. However, the system appeared less efficient than implied by this figure as it took 6.6 years for an average student to complete the 5-year cycle. There were differences between different types of schools with respect to the efficiency indicators. The average attendance rate was found to be 61 percent and varied between gender, residence (urban/rural), and administrative divisions. About 40 percent of the teachers were female, with the percentage higher in urban areas than in rural and in non-formal schools than in formal schools. On average, there are 60 students per teacher but this varied widely between school type with the highest of 70 in government schools and the lowest 28 in madrassas. As reported by the head teachers, the school management committee are active in all schools but it demands further research to determine their effectiveness.

Changes 2001 vs 1999: This year's *Watch* data allowed an appraisal of changes occurring with respect to various indicators of internal efficiency between 1998 and 2000. It found no measurable change in gross enrolment ratio. However, the net enrolment rate increased by nearly three percentage points indicating that the new enrollees came mostly from the primary school age group. It also found that among the new enrollees there were more boys than girls; this eliminated the significant edge that the girls were found to have in 1998. Rural Khulna division has gained most and their net enrolment rate has now exceeded the 90 percent mark. Rural Sylhet division documented deterioration in net rate. The findings also showed that new enrolments increased more in villages where the net rate was already high. For the poorly served villages, there was no improvement. Proportion of children completing the 5-year cycle increased for the government schools and madrassas. However, there was no change in attendance rate, classroom capacity, or proportion of female teachers.

Private expenditure for education: This report also documented the various expenditures that the parents incur for the education of their children's primary education. Although the primary education in Bangladesh

is theoretically free, 90 percent parents have reported incurring expenditures of some sort. The heads of expenditure ranged from tuition and examination fees to subscriptions for various school functions to private tutoring. Most frequently cited head of expenditure was 'stationery' (91 percent). The expenditure pattern changed as the students climbed up to higher classes. On average, the parents spent Tk. 736 over a nine-month period (beginning of school year to the time of survey) or an annual amount of Tk. 1,000 per child in school. This is approximately two percent of average household income in Bangladesh. The survey findings on household spending for the nine-month period varied widely between urban (Tk. 2,181) and rural areas (Tk. 524) and between classes (Tk. 509 in class I to Tk. 1,100 in class V). However, there was no difference between girls and boys in expenditures. There was also wide variation between school type with the students attending the secondary-attached schools spending the highest (Tk. 5,711) and non-formal the lowest (Tk. 290). Over a third of the money was spent in stationery and a quarter in private tutor. As expected, the well-to-do parents spent much more in absolute terms for their children's education than did the poorer groups.

Income and expenditure of schools: Data on income and expenditure of schools were also collected. The schools had a diverse source of income which included government grants, donor funds, tuition and other fees from students, and use of fixed assets. There was variation between different types of schools. The government schools did not charge any tuition but over 90 percent of non-formal schools charged some tuition. The madrassas seemed well endowed with assets (such as land) as 61 percent of madrassas earned an income by selling produces (such as agricultural produces). The average income of madrassas exceeded the income of any other type of school.

Literacy: The *Education Watch 2001* documented the literacy situation of two groups in the surveyed households: those aged 7 years and older and adults (15+ years). It found a literacy rate of 39 percent for the population 7 years or older and 41.6 percent for adults. Females and people living in rural areas were significantly behind in literacy than males and those who live in urban areas. But, people living in urban slums were more disadvantaged than those living in non-slum areas. However, it documented a comparatively higher literacy rate for younger population (60% for the population aged 15–24 years) suggesting an impact of the recent improvement in enrolment rates at the primary level. Sixty one percent households had at least one literate person. This means that 39 percent were 'isolated'. More research is needed in view of the apparent difference between the literacy rate found in this study and that claimed by the government.

Action Recommendations

Drawing on the findings of *Education Watch 2001*, recommendations are made for action.

Bangladesh has endorsed the goals and strategies as set out in the Dakar Framework for Action 2000. There are six goals and twelve strategies laid out in the framework. In preparing the National Plan of Action for Education for All (EFA) up to year 2015, as required by the Dakar Framework, the following need to be given special attention¹:

- a) *Mobilise national political commitment for education for all, develop national action plan and enhance significantly investment in basic education.* The government is now developing a new national action plan and there seems to be a reiteration of national commitment. There is also a National Education Policy now. Unfortunately there is not much public discourse on the former nor any indication of whether there would be an increase in investment in education.
- b) *Promote EFA policies within a sustainable and well-integrated sector framework clearly linked to poverty elimination and development strategies.* Most development programmes in the country are vertical in nature with little horizontal connections. It is important that in EFA plans, an overall view of development priorities and programmes are taken and the links between education and other sectors are considered. All development sectors need to be mobilized for EFA as EFA's contribution to national development goals should be given attention. The Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP), which is the donor-supported umbrella programme of the government on primary education, has 23 plus projects under it. The common impression that there is a lack of coordination between these projects needs to be explored seriously for improving synergy and overall impact.
- c) *Ensure the engagement and participation of civil society in the formulation, implementation and monitoring of strategies for educational development.* There is no strategy on how to involve the civil society. The government has, however, created space for NGOs to operate non-formal education programmes. Unfortunately there is no recognition of their contribution to primary and basic education. The participation of the civil society in the PEDP is hardly encouraged. The *Education Watch* is a civil society initiative for monitoring progress towards

¹ The statements in italic are strategies adopted in Dakar and endorsed by the government of Bangladesh.

- EFA. Although the Ministers and other policy makers participated in the launch of the report, it has not yet received any formal participation or recognition from PMED.
- d) *Develop responsive, participatory and accountable systems of educational governance and management.* There is much to be done on this front. Some of the issues related to governance and management have been discussed in the report (Chapter IX).
- e) *Meet the needs of education systems affected by conflict, natural calamities and instability, and conduct educational programmes in ways that promote mutual understanding, peace and tolerance and that help to prevent violence and conflict.* The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), which saw armed conflicts for about three decades, is relatively peaceful now. However, no special drive has been taken to restore the confidence of the Hill people and no headway has yet been made in increasing access to education in the region. Moreover, the Regional Council, set up in the aftermath of the peace agreement, has so far allowed very limited participation of NGOs.
- f) *Implement integrated strategies for gender equality in education that recognize the need for change in attitudes, values, and practices.* Bangladesh has done quite well in removing gender gap in enrolment, attendance and cycle completion, which was the result of several affirmative actions taken by the government and NGOs. We should not lose sight of this and continue to promote gender equality through such interventions until the gender equality is established on a sustainable basis in all aspects including the learning outcome. It may be mentioned that girls are lagging behind boys in learning achievements
- g) *Implement education programmes and actions to combat the HIV/AIDS pandemic.* Although HIV/AIDS is causing devastation in many developing countries, Bangladesh has fortunately been spared of this so far. However, many conditions that facilitate the spread of HIV/AIDS do exist in the country. The country has been indifferent to the seriousness of the problem and in implementing prevention programmes through educational institutions.
- h) *Create safe, healthy, inclusive and equitably resourced educational environments conducive to excellence in learning, with clearly defined levels of achievement for all.* As we have seen in this report and all previous *Watch* reports, the primary education system in Bangladesh is inequitable. Children belonging to poorer families and ethnic minorities, or those living in slums are particularly disadvantaged. There is hardly any opportunity available for disabled children to attend schools. Moreover, not all types of schools are equally resourced. The non-formal schools, for example are particularly resource-poor as found in the present report.
- i) *Enhance the status, morale and professionalism of teachers.* Quality of education cannot improve without a commitment to quality and effective performance by teachers. Measures to this end will include improving the effectiveness of teachers' professional preparation, creating the necessary conditions for teachers to do their job in the schools, rewards and incentives that recognize teachers' role and responsibility, and enhancing social recognition of teachers in appropriate ways.
- The government has recently started revising the curricula for the Certificate-in-Education (C-in-Ed) course for primary school teachers to make it more relevant vis-à-vis the 53 terminal competencies. While this is a welcome step it, however, has taken too long to happen given the fact that the terminal competency-based education was introduced in the country in 1992. In another move, the government has recently undertaken a revision and updating of the terminal competencies themselves. The C-in-Ed revision should take into consideration the latest revision in the competencies.
- j) *Harness new information and communication technologies to help achieve EFA goals.* Bangladesh is lagging behind in making the best out of information and communication technologies (ICT). Making this available to a vast majority of primary schools will be a formidable challenge. We should also try to make better use of conventional electronic media such as radio and television in teachers' professional preparation and upgrading through distance education. The government should make these channels available for educational programmes at no or subsidized costs.
- k) *Systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies.* A recent project undertaken by the government through a commercial firm and funded by development partners has done some useful work in monitoring specific aspects of the primary education sector; such activities should continue on a regular basis. The government should also support and promote the *Watch* project which has provided useful and relevant information and review on the primary education sector.
- l) *Build on existing mechanism, to accelerate progress towards Education for All.* The previous *Watch* report identified factors responsible for success in the primary education sector in terms of quantitative gains. The major contributing factors have been the increased government, NGO and donor commitment, affirmative actions to reach particular groups (such as girls and poorer children in rural areas), and expansion of non-formal education.

Concluding Remarks

Bangladesh has made steady progress in primary and basic education in the recent past. *Education Watch* has been documenting the status of primary education and its change since 1998 through the publication of annual assessments. A review of these reports and other studies done on the subject re-affirm one conclusion: there is hope but the challenges are daunting. The commendable progress that has been made in most quantitative indicators such as enrolment, attendance in class or completion of primary cycle raises hopes. But there is no reason to be complacent. Even in quantitative terms there is more to be achieved; there still remain wide disparities between different groups in the population with respect to access to schooling. The quantitative gain is blurred by the slow or

little progress made in the quality of learning. Whether the assessment is based on a curriculum independent test (*Watch 1999*) or a curriculum-dependent test (*Watch 2000*), the message is very clear: quality of teaching and learning is unacceptably poor. This is the biggest challenge in our struggle for education. There is hope but challenges are formidable.

Like most other countries in the developing world, Bangladesh is committed to the goals and strategies as formulated in the World Education Forum in Dakar in April 2000. It is essential that we approach the challenges ahead pragmatically and build on our successes. Bangladesh has joined the international community in setting a new goal to achieve education for all by 2015. Let us not postpone its fulfilment again.

INTRODUCTION

“The real wealth of a nation is its people”, wrote Mahbubul Haq, an architect of the UNDP’s Human Development Report, in his first report published in 1990. It is undenyng the fact that the maximum potential of this wealth is realized through education.

Education is the backbone of sustainable development. Education stimulates and empowers people to participate in their own development. Through the previous two World Conferences on Education for All (EFA), the world communities reaffirmed their commitment to basic education. The last conference held in Dakar, Senegal, in 2000 has set a new target to achieve education for all by the year 2015¹. The progress made over the past decade is impressive. Between 1990 and 1997, the adult literacy rose from 64 percent to 76 percent (UNDP 1999). The EFA 2000 Assessment conducted prior to the Dakar conference found that the developing countries as a whole had achieved a net enrolment rate of over 80 percent. The gender gap in enrolment is also being reduced. Nevertheless, challenges remain. In 2000 more than 880 million adults were illiterate, and more than 113 million children were out of school at the primary level, 60 percent of whom are girls (UNESCO 2000). Even in developed countries, over 100 million people were thought to be functionally illiterate (UNDP 1999).

Access to education is a basic human right. The Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC), to which Bangladesh is a signatory, declares the following rights of children to education (UNICEF 2001):

- Right to develop to maximum extent possible (Art. 6)
- States render appropriate assistance to parents and legal guardians in the performance of child-rearing responsibilities and ensure the development of institutions, facilities and services for the care of children (Art. 18.2).

- Right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child’s physical, mental, spiritual, moral and social development (Art. 27).
- Right of the child to education, with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity (Art. 28).

The government of Bangladesh adopted a national education policy in 2000. The features of the policy that relate to basic, pre-primary, primary, and non-formal education are the following (Government of Bangladesh 2000):

- Introduction of a one-year pre-primary for children 5 years and over in phases to be available in all primary schools by 2005.
- Transition from the present 5-year primary education into a 8-year primary education by 2010.
- Promotion of non-formal education as a complimentary strategy for primary education for drop-out and never enrolled children; children and adolescents completing non-formal education would be eligible to enter formal primary schools in appropriate classes.
- Introduction of a uniform curricula for all educational institutions at the primary level for universal and equitable education of same quality using the mother tongue; the existing disparities that exist among primary institutions of various kinds such as government and private primary schools, kindergardens, Ebtedayee Madrassas, and different NGO-run schools would be removed.
- Promotion of adult literacy in order to eradicate illiteracy by 2006.

Bangladesh in recent years has made commendable progress in making primary education accessible to children. The net enrolment has reached nearly 80 percent and about three-quarters complete the full five-year cycle of primary education. Although the investment in education

¹ The goals and strategies of the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 are reproduced in Annex 1.1.

in terms of GNP is low compared to other South Asian countries, primary education receives about half of the education sector budget. Yet, problems remain. Of the 18 million primary school aged-children, nearly four million are out of school, and another four million or more drop out before completing primary education. Although gender gap has almost been eliminated (Chowdhury et al. 2002), the system is still largely inequitable with children of disadvantaged backgrounds being most adversely affected. Then there is the question of quality which is a matter of serious concern. Only a very low proportion of children completing primary education attain the nationally determined competencies (Chowdhury et al. 2001a). Progress has also been reported in literacy although there are wide confusions about real rate (Ahmed 2002).

Bangladesh has a pluralist system of primary education, with the public sector most dominant provider. According to latest statistics provided by the government (DPE 2001), there are 37,677 primary schools run directly by the government. Since the late 1970's, the private sector has been increasing their presence in the sector. At present, there are 21,379 such schools set up with local private initiative, and managed with limited or no government subvention. The Ebtedayee Madrassas, which numbers 3,710, provide education with a religious focus. Several non-governmental organizations (NGO) have, since mid-1980's, set up non-formal schools; most of these are one-teacher schools but cover the full five-year cycle. There are also other types of primary schools set up with government and community partnership including the Community Schools and Satellite Schools; their total number stood at 6,945 in June 2000 (DPE 2001). Then there are English medium schools, collectively known as 'kindergartens'. Lastly, there are primary section in secondary schools which are termed 'secondary-attached'. The share of students for different type of schools is an issue that this report addresses (see Chapter III).

The non-formal education system at primary level is relatively new in Bangladesh. It was started in the mid-1980's spearheaded by some non-governmental organisations (NGOs) including BRAC, Proshika and Dhaka Ahsania Mission. In late 1990's, these schools accounted for 8.5 percent of primary schools enrolments (Chowdhury et al 1999). Most of these provide full primary education. For example, the 34,000 schools run by BRAC provide the five-year cycle of primary education in four years. Although the government endorses this system as an important strategy (Government of Bangladesh 2000), the contribution of non-formal primary education is hardly recognised or acknowledged in government literature. The latest statistics provided by the government acknowledged the existence of 92 "NGO-run Full Primary School" (DPE 2001). The reason why the government is hesitant to recognise this important sub-sector which is found to provide 'good quality' education compared to other sub-sectors (Chowdhury et al 1999; 2001) is not understandable.

The government launched a Total Literacy Movement (TLM) in 1994 to gradually free the country of illiteracy. It was postulated that a six-month campaign would 'eradicate' illiteracy in a district. The programme is financed entirely by the government and is administered by the district administration; however, the NGOs were kept out of this by design. Because of this programme, the government has so far declared six districts free of illiteracy. There are, however, wide speculations and doubts about the authenticity of the claim (Ahmed 2002).

The progress that has been made in the country in recent time is the result of a series of affirmative actions taken by the State, the private sector and NGOs. Notable among these are the following:

- Free and compulsory primary education for all children.
- Free education for girls upto Class VIII (and recently raised upto Class X)
- Stipends for girls at secondary level.
- Food-for-education for children from poorer families (Food recently substituted by cash).
- Creation of space for the private sector (with financial support) and NGOs to function.
- Proliferation of NGO-run non-formal schools for children deprived of formal schooling due to gender, poverty or other reasons.

Most of the above are geared to improving the performance in quantitative terms. Yet, not much has been done that addresses the quality aspect of primary education in the country. Academic supervision and inspection continue to be extremely inadequate.

The Dakar Framework for Action 2000 (UNESCO 2000) adopted six goals and suggested twelve strategies to achieve those goals. The Bangladesh government has endorsed the goals and has committed to undertake action to achieve education for all in line with the Dakar strategies (Daily Star April 22, 2002). The goals and strategies are given in Annex 1.1.

Monitoring and research are important tools for any development programmes. Unfortunately the nation has not invested sufficiently on the measurement of progress in implementing EFA. Data on education are generally insufficient for monitoring, policymaking and resource allocation. The paucity of useful data is not peculiar to Bangladesh. In a review, the World Bank (1995) acknowledged this problem in the following:

- Existing education statistics are generally not reliable.
- Statistics are often out of date and hence of limited use in forming policy decision.
- Statistics are often collected as a matter of routine, with little critical reflection on the underlying theoretical framework, the comparative perspective, and the purpose for which the data are intended.

- The information collected focus more on counting inputs than on assessing achievement and monitoring labour market outcomes.
- Research is usually not undertaken or not used to complement statistics in monitoring education systems.

The Dakar Framework for Action 2000, which the Bangladesh government endorsed, talks in clear terms about the need for monitoring and commit to 'systematically monitor progress towards EFA goals and strategies at the national, regional and international levels' (UNESCO 2000). The *Education Watch* in Bangladesh is trying to fill in this critical gap in educational monitoring and research. Initiated by a group of likeminded organisation and individuals concerned with education in the country, the project is coordinated by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a supra body of about 400 NGOs engaged in the field of education. The outcome of the *Watch* is an annual 'State of Primary Education' report which highlights selected aspects of education based on scientifically collected field level data.

The first report, entitled *Hope not Complacency*, was published in 1999 and the second report, entitled *A Question of Quality*, was published in 2001. The present one is the third in the series. The first report dealt with the 'internal efficiency' of primary education in Bangladesh and presented the status in respect of enrolment, completion and dropout, attendance, community participation in management of primary schools, supervision, and a measure of basic competency (through a test called the Assessment of Basic Competency or ABC). The second report dealt with the 'quality of primary education' and assessed the following two aspects: achievement of nationally determined competencies by pupil, and teachers' education. It may be mentioned that both the reports were formally launched by the Minister of Education of the government of Bangladesh.

The third report, the present one, deals with the question of 'internal efficiency' again. The Advisory Board, the policy making body of the *Watch* project, decided to revisit the various indicators of internal efficiency through *Watch 2001* in order to monitor changes since *Watch 1999*.

At this stage some discussion on the concept of 'internal efficiency' is in order. The term efficiency describes the relationship between inputs and outputs (Tan and Mingat 1992). In education literature, two types of efficiencies are identified: external and internal. When education is seen in the context of broader societal goals such as better health, lower fertility, productive person-power for the labour market, empowerment, better environment, etc., one talks about external efficiency. When outputs refer to objectives which are internal to the education system such as enrolment, dropout, achievement, etc., one talks about internal efficiency. In the present report the following internal efficiency indicators have been addressed which were also covered in *Watch 1999*:

- Enrolment
- Dropout
- Attendance
- Cycle completion
- Teachers qualifications & training
- School management, and
- Student-teacher ratio.

Two new aspects related to primary and basic education in Bangladesh were also included. These were:

- Financing and expenditures for primary education at household and school levels, and
- Literacy.

This report of the Education Watch has nine chapters. Chapter I introduces the theme and contents of the report. Chapter II describes the methodology used in the study. Chapter III and IV present the results on the different internal efficiency indicators. Chapter V discusses the changes that have (or haven't) happened between 1998 and 2000. Chapter VI presents data on the private cost of education by the households and Chapter VII details the income and expenditures of different types of schools (viz., government, private registered and unregistered, madrasa, and non-formal). Literacy levels as found from the household survey are presented in Chapter VIII. The last chapter concludes with a discussion of the results and policy implications.