

The status of un-served children in education  
**Girl children in Bangladesh**

A Situation Analysis

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## Preface

The status of un-served children in education: Girl children in Bangladesh put effort to analyze the status and situation of girl children in formal education at the primary and secondary level. In order to use the report for policy advocacy the report focuses on (i) some salient statistics on gender-disparities, (ii) major policies, programs and affirmative actions taken by GoB (iii) identify key constraints, and (iv) recommend strategies and actions to overcome the constraints at the local and national level.

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in preparing this report. Relevant data and statistics were gathered from secondary sources (BBS, BANBEIS, studies/reports done by experts in the field). The views and opinions of diverse stakeholders were sought through sharing meetings, focus group discussions and workshops to reflect the stakeholder perception of the factors obstructing equal participation of girls and the strategies and actions recommended. In addition, members of teacher's associations, Education Watch and human rights and women rights activists who are education practitioners and researchers were also consulted on various issues.

The study put effort to identify both demand and supply side constraints to girls' equal access to and participation in education. The demand side constraints covered the Socio-cultural constraints and financial constraints while the supply side the study looked into inadequacies in Provision of Education and Teaching Learning Process. Educational planning and management found to be a special concern in gender perspective. The study identified some short term and long-term steps to be taken at both community level and national level. Major conclusion of the study includes achievement of gender-equality in EFA process is a tremendous challenge. Yet it is vital for the development, indeed for the survival of the nation that the goal is achieved soon. While GoB as the lead actor should continue to demonstrate strong political will and commitment to achieve gender equality within quality education, all the stakeholders, including NGOs, women's organizations, local bodies, parents, teachers and learners would have to whole-heartedly support and actively contribute to the effort.

We express our gratitude to Ms. Roushan Jahan for carrying out the study and preparing the report. Ms. Jowshan Ara Rahman deserves our special thanks for the valuable comments on the draft. Our sincere gratitude to all those who participated in various sharing sessions on the draft report, provided valuable

suggestions. Their contribution in preparing the key messages and policy recommendations of this report is highly appreciated.

Our appreciation will remain incomplete if we do not acknowledge the contribution and wholehearted cooperation of the authorities of the sampled educational institutions, their teachers, students, parents and local and national education administration who provided the required support and pertinent information for this study.

The status of un-served children in education serried reports have been possible due to the generous support received from the Civil Society Education Fund (CSEF) through Global Campaign for Education (GCE), Asian South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) and Education International (EI). We acknowledge their assistance and express our deep appreciation.

Finally, we would ask the readers, users and well wishers of CAMPE to send us if they have any suggestion regarding issue selection, improvement of quality of research, presentation style and any other issue related to this. Our efforts will be worthwhile if this report could serve as a useful input in the key decision making process for improving the quality of primary education in Bangladesh. Let us all work for building a better future, a Beautiful Bangladesh.

Dhaka  
November 2011

Rasheda K. Choudhury  
Executive Director, CAMPE

## Acronyms

ASPBAE	:	Asian South Pacific Association for Basic and Adult Education
BANBEIS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CAMPE	:	Campaign for Popular Education, A national Coalition of NGOs
CBO	:	Community Based Organization
CEDAW	:	Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
CSEF	:	Civil Society Education Fund
EFA	:	Education For All
EI	:	Education International
GCE	:	Global Campaign for Education
GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	:	Government of Bangladesh
MDGs	:	Millennium Development Goals
MoF	:	Ministry of Finance
MPO	:	Monthly payment Order
NCTB	:	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NFLS	:	Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies
NGO	:	Non-Government (voluntary development) Organisation
PEDP	:	Primary Education Development Program
PMED	:	Primary and Mass Education Division
RCGP	:	Recurrent, Capital, Gender and Poverty Model
SESIP	:	Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project
SMC	:	School Management Committee
SSC	:	Secondary School Certificate Examination
TQI	:	Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education
UN	:	United Nations
WID	:	Women in Development

## Executive Summary

The 'Status of Un-served Children in Education: Girl Children in Bangladesh' attempts to analyze the status and situation of girl children in formal education at the primary and secondary levels and to identify both demand and supply side constraints to girls' equal access to and participation in education with support from CSEF through GCE and ASPBAE.

National, regional and international evaluations and statistics shows that rapid progress has been made by Bangladesh in closing the gender gap in enrollment in both primary and secondary education. However, analysis of the same shows that the gender-disparities still remain.

This report analyzes the status and situation of girl children in formal education at the primary and secondary level, drawing attention to those deprived of such opportunities currently, with a view to strengthen the advocacy efforts (including influencing policy decisions) undertaken by CAMPE and others. Specific objectives of the study are to (i) present a brief overall picture of the status of girl children in formal education (Primary and Secondary level) through analyzing some salient statistics which draw attention to gender-disparities still remaining; (ii) review the major policies, programs and affirmative actions taken by GoB from a gender-perspective to gauge the incorporation of gender-concerns, gender-sensitivity and gender responsiveness; (iii) identify the constraints to girl's equal access to and participation in education in consultation with different stakeholders; and (iv) recommend strategies and actions to overcome the constraints at the local and national level, incorporating relevant suggestions made by the stakeholders.

### Methodology

Both quantitative and qualitative methods have been used in preparing this report. Relevant data and statistics were gathered from secondary sources (BBS, BANBEIS, studies/reports done by experts in the field). The views and opinions of diverse stakeholders were sought through sharing meetings, focus group discussions and workshops held in the following seven places namely Narshingdi, Mymensingh, Rangamati, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Khulna, Barishal and Sunamganj. The aim was to reflect the stakeholder perception of the factors obstructing equal participation of girls and the strategies and actions recommended. In addition, members of teacher's associations, Education Watch

and human rights and women rights activists who are education practitioners and researchers were also consulted on various issues.

## Situation Analysis

The system of provision of basic education at present is a maze of divergent streams: the mainstream vernacular based system, the religion based system and English medium schools. The mainstream vernacular schools are classified by management into government primary schools, government supported registered non-government primary schools, non-registered non-government primary schools and primary sections of both government and private high schools. These are augmented by the religion based madrasahs which enjoy government subvention and the private English medium schools.

The structure of basic education provided by these institutions has a broad similarity: one or two years of pre-primary education and five years of primary education designed to cover children in the 6-11 years age group. The institutions offering secondary education are also classified according to management, curriculum and medium of instruction. The program is designed to cover children in the 11-16 years age group. At this stage, a number of selected institutions are augmented by those offering technical and vocational training.

The rates of enrollment of girls in the primary and secondary institutions are certainly gender-equitable. At the primary level it is at par (50.5%) and at the secondary level the girl's enrollment shows a higher percentage point compared to that of the boys (53.31%). However, the technical and vocational stream show a significant gender-disparity where less than one-fourth (22.9%) girls were enrolled. The completion rate (as shown by the results of the final examinations of the cycles) held in 2010 shows that, of the children who appeared in the examinations, the percentage of girls who passed was comparatively lower than that of the boys. 91.98% of the girls and 92.75% of boys passed in the primary completion examination 2010. Similarly out of those who sat for the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) held in 2011, 80.84% girls and 83.62% boys were successful.

One of the clearly visible consequences of the gender-disparity among learners is noticed in the conspicuous gender-disparity among the teachers. Despite the quota and easy terms of recruitment proclaimed by the government to increase the number of women teachers, statistics shows that much needs to be done yet. Less than half (45.66%) of the primary school teacher and less than one-fourth

of the secondary school teacher were women. The situation is much worse in case of TVET and madrasahs where the proportion of women teacher stands at about one-fifth and one-tenth respectively.

A host of factors obstruct the majority of Bangladeshi girls (rural poor) in their participation in education and overall development process. These factors may be clustered in three major groups: i) socio-cultural or attitudinal, ii) financial and iii) process and structure related. The first group arises from discriminatory attitudes stemming from patriarchal ideology impacting negatively on family's decision about sending their daughters to school. The second group arises from family poverty, limiting their ability to bear the cost of education. These familial factors may be termed demand-side constraints. The third group arises from various inadequacies and flaws in the provision of education and teaching learning process which adversely affects the quality of education. These may be termed supply side constraints. It should be noted that all these interact with and reinforce one another in deepening family's reluctance to send their girl's to schools. For instance, the supply side constraints may cause dissatisfaction in the parents and decrease the perceived value of the education provided.

## Steps taken by Government of Bangladesh to promote basic education for girls

Education policy 2010 is certainly the major step taken by GoB in recent times. In addition, national action plans, PEDP I, II and III, SESIP, TQI and other steps and measures have been taken by GoB to achieve the goals of EFA and MDGs. Special proactive measures for removing gender disparity such as stipend for rural poor girls at the primary and secondary level, tuition free education for girls at those levels, quota and priority on recruiting women teachers at the primary level have also been taken. Improvement in physical facilities, recruitment of additional teachers to reduce the skewed teacher student ratio, inclusion of gender training in the basic teacher training course were steps designed to improve the quality and gender-sensitivity of the education process and output. The increase in girl's enrollment is claimed to be one of the positive impacts of all these efforts. Yet, the brief situation analysis of this report shows that these have not been effective enough to remove the barriers to girl's equal participation in education due to inadequate gender-sensitivity in policies and measures. Consequently, current practices in education will not lead to a woman's empowerment, the most desirable outcome of education from a rights based approach and gender perspective. Inadequacies/limitations in the over-all management of education system include (i) inadequate reflection of gender sensitivity, gender responsiveness

and the concept of gender-equality/gender mainstreaming in overall plans and management, (ii) Marginalization of stakeholders (especially women) and centralization of planning and administration, (iii) Limited accountability and transparency giving rise to irregularities, (iv) Problem of standardization, (v) Inadequate reliable statistics and policy research, (vi) Inadequate allocation and dubious utilization, and (vii) Coordination between Government and NGOs among others.

## Challenges and strategies to overcome

Achievement of gender-equality in EFA process is a tremendous challenge. Government of Bangladesh, as the lead actor, should continue to demonstrate strong political will and commitment to achieve gender equality with quality and involving stakeholders. The major constraints in Bangladesh to girl's equal access to and participation in education are mainly socio-economic on the demand side and provision and process-related on the supply-side. These interact with and reinforce each other. So far, the measures undertaken by GoB have mainly focused on removing supply-side constraints and poverty related economic constraints. Though such measures resulted in a very encouraging trend of girls increased enrollment, a considerable number of girl children remain outside the scope of formal education which points to the limitations of the steps undertaken so far. From gender-perspective, the major challenge ahead is effective removal of all the identified constraints and ensure all girls (Boys also) access to and participation in basic quality education which is accessible, affordable, inclusive and above all gender sensitive. Macro-planning and resource allocation are major instruments used by GoB to bring planned change in development process. Therefore, for bringing the above-mentioned change in the education sector, two major strategies worth serious consideration are: i) making gender equality a central concern in education planning, resource allocation and management and ii) Building on interventions which have proved to be effective already.

Short term and long-term steps to be taken at the national level include (i) Expedite implementation of National Education Policy 2010 with clear and adequate focus on gender-equality in tune with UNCEDAW and the National Women's Advancement Policy in the guidelines; (ii) Enact as soon as possible a Right to Basic Education Act.; (iii) ensure increased presence and participation of women at all levels of education, especially at the decision-making and plan formulation levels; (iv) reduce variation in quality of education, to respond to the differential needs of the male and female students and facilitate standardization and gender-sensitization in the divergent streams, expedite introduction of gender-sensitive,

common 'core' curriculum in all the streams, include reproductive health and rights at the secondary curriculum and ensure inclusion of gender-equality in all sphere as a 'core' value; and (v) gradual increase of budgetary allocation to 6% of GDP targeting two-thirds of that to ensure quality basic education along with gender budgeting and gender audit among other steps.

Steps to be taken at the local level, in particular, by the school authorities, teachers, parents-guardians, community include (i) Develop a gender strategy to be implemented by all the schools so that there is a common understanding of all the teachers/administrators/ SMCs about gender issues; (ii) Launch a Campaign for awareness raising and creating favorable public opinion to remove existing gender discriminatory attitudes, norms, traditions and practices within the family and the community; (iii) Campaign/social mobilization to combat and eradicate customs and practices which negatively impact girl's rights to education, health and safety such as sexual harassment, violence against women, early marriage and early pregnancy, dowry etc.; and (iv) Instituting regular re-orientation programs on gender-sensitization, innovative participatory teaching-learning methods and upgrading management skills of all teachers along with increased participation of women in SMCs, parent-teacher associations and other forums.

## 1. Introduction

In Bangladesh, education has traditionally been regarded as a valuable resource, access to which was limited mainly to men belonging to affluent upper class (upper caste as well in the case of Hindus) families in the pre-British colonial period. Echoing Abraham Lincoln's famous phrases, one may say that the formal education process was "participated and planned by men for the benefit of men and subject matters concerned men". Though literary evidence (and history) shows that some women from privileged families were also educated, they were exceptions to the rules governing a patriarchal society. The demand for women's access to formal education was articulated during the British Colonial period and Rokeya Sakhawat Hussain (1880-1932), the first and foremost Muslim women's rights activist and advocate engaged in a relentless life-long struggle for ensuring that right (Jahan, 1988) but progress was slow. Despite sporadic steps, commitment to prioritize education as a development goal was not noticeable in pre-Bangladesh period.

Indeed, when Bangladesh emerged as a sovereign nation in 1971, primary education was neither universal nor compulsory. However, the constitution recognized education as a **basic need** and obligated the Government (GoB) to provide uniform, mass-oriented, universal education and to extend free, compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law (Art 17). The priority on provision of basic education received a boost after GoB signed the Jomtein Declaration (1990).

During the seventies and eighties, the need for provision of literacy, basic education and skill training to women was perceived as important for achieving other priority development goals such as reduction of fertility rate, successful implementation of family planning program and survival of families hit by sudden disasters. The constitution had, of course, guaranteed equal rights to all citizens in the **public sphere** (Art 28). It further provided for special measures to be adopted to promote the equal rights of women and other disadvantaged groups. The constitutional obligation was underscored by pressure from national women's movement who demanded access to and control over all social resources and services.

The demands of national women's movement were strengthened by certain actions of international bodies. Government's ratification of documents such as UN CEDAW (1979), Nairobi Forward Looking Strategies (NFLS 1985),

Beijing Platform for Action (1995) which is reflected in the National Women's Advancement Policy 2010, has obligated the GoB to formulate and implement proactive policies and affirmative actions for achieving gender equality in all sectors of national development, including education.

The Dakar Framework of Action and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) included removal of gender-disparity as one of the goals. The various national action plans and other measures taken during the last decade reflect this recognition. However, successful implementation of Education for all (EFA) is a tremendous challenge for the government of a resource –poor and populous countries like Bangladesh.

The difficulties become clearer when one recognizes that in Bangladesh, as in other stratified societies, a person's access to and control over social resources, services and space for participation in the national development process, is largely determined by social divides which act as identity markers. Of these, the major ones are class (socio-economic), gender and geographical location which are manifested in the clear rich-poor, male-female, urban-rural differences in national statistics. For instance, the table 01 presented below shows clear gender and rural-urban disparity in the level of completion rate of basic education in 1998.

**Table 01: Percentage of population completed primary education**

Area & gender	Year			
	1998	2000	2005	2008
Females	32.9	36.6	46.5	49.5
Males	42.2	44.8	52.6	53.1
Rural	33.6	37	46.2	48.1
Urban	57.1	59.3	67.1	68.4

Source: BANBEIS, 2010

However, a comparison of figures for earlier years with the figures for 2008 shows the progress made over time. This was possible because Bangladeshi people recognized that GoB alone cannot face the challenge of achieving the goals of EFA. Concerned citizens in the form of NGOs, CBOs and experts joined the implementation process. Evaluations (international, regional, national) and statistics indeed show that rapid progress has been made in closing the gender gap in enrollment in both primary and secondary education (ASPBAE, 2010). However, the high drop-out and low completion rates for girls still remain a matter of concern.

## 2. Objectives and methodology

This report analyzes the status and situation of girl children in formal education at the primary and secondary level, drawing attention to those deprived of such opportunities currently, with a view to strengthen the advocacy efforts (including influencing policy decisions) undertaken by CAMPE and others to bring these deprived girls within the purview of formal education. In order to be used as a policy and advocacy brief by concerned bodies and persons at the local, national and regional levels, the report focuses on the following specific objectives:

- i. To present a brief overall picture of the status of girl children in formal education (Primary and secondary level) through analyzing some salient statistics which draw attention to gender-disparities still remaining;
- ii. To review the major policies, programs and affirmative actions taken by GoB from a gender-perspective to gauge the incorporation of gender-concerns, gender-sensitivity and gender responsiveness;
- iii. To identify the constraints to girl's equal access to and participation in education in consultation with different stakeholders; and
- iv. To recommend strategies and actions to overcome the constraints at the local and national level, incorporating relevant suggestions made by the stakeholders.

Both **quantitative and qualitative methods** have been used in preparing this report. Relevant data and statistics were gathered from secondary sources (BBS, BANBEIS, studies/reports done by experts in the field). The views and opinions of diverse stakeholders were sought through sharing meetings, focus group discussions and workshops held in the following seven places: Narshingdi, Mymensingh, Rangamati, Rajshahi, Dinajpur, Khulna, Barishal and Sunamganj. The aim was to reflect the stakeholder perception of the factors obstructing equal participation of girls and the strategies and actions recommended. In addition, members of teacher's associations, Education Watch and human rights and women rights activists who are education practitioners and researchers were also consulted on various issues.

### 3. Status of Girl children in formal education: some salient statistics

The system at present is a maze of divergent streams: the mainstream vernacular based system, the religion based system and English medium schools. The mainstream vernacular schools are classified by management into government primary schools, government supported registered non-government primary schools, non-registered non-government primary schools and primary sections of both government and private high schools. These are augmented by the religion based madrasahs which enjoy government subvention and the private English Medium schools.



The structure of basic education provided by these institutions has a broad similarity: one or two years of pre-primary education and five years of primary education designed to cover children in the 6-11 years age group.

The institutions offering **secondary education** are also classified according to management, curriculum and medium of instruction. The program is designed to cover children in the 11-16 years age group. At this stage, a number of selected institutions are augmented by those offering **technical and vocational training**.

#### 3.1 Enrollment

The rates of enrollment of girls in the primary and secondary institutions are certainly **gender-equitable**. In fact, at the secondary level, the girl's enrollment shows a higher percentage point compared to that of the boys.

Table 02: Girls Enrollment in 2010

Type of Education	Student		
	Total	Girl	%
Primary School Education	16,904,546	8,536,586	50.5
Secondary School Education	7,465,774	3,979,676	53.31
Madrasah Education	2,200,927	1,167,658	53.05
Technical & Vocational Education	447,927	102,581	22.90

Source: BANBEIS, 2011

Table 02 shows that in 2010, of the total 1,694,546 children enrolled in primary schools (Both public and private included), 8,536,586 were girls which means that the proportion of enrolled girls was 50.5 percent. Simply put, there was no gender-inequality in enrollment. At the secondary level, of the total 7,465,774 students, the number of girls was 3,979,676 which means that the proportion of girls was 53.31 percent which is appreciably higher than that of the boys. In madrasahs also a similar higher proportion (53.05%) for girls is seen.

In contrast, in the technical and vocational stream **even enrollment** shows a significant gender-disparity. In 2010, of the total 447,927 students enrolled, less than one-fourth (22.9%) were girls.

However, enrollment is only half the story. Any sense of satisfaction should be moderated by some important considerations. Experts caution us that the rate of successful completion of the cycle, regularity of attendance, the quality of knowledge absorbed should compare favorably with enrollment figures for assessing the true significance of access to and participation in the educational process (Ahmed 2011).

#### 3.2 Completion

The Completion rate (as shown by the results of the final examinations of the cycles) held in 2010 shows that, of the children who appeared in the examinations, the percentage of girls who passed was **comparatively lower** than that of the boys. Of the



total children appearing in the first nationally held primary final examination in 2010, though the number of girls was higher, the proportion of those who passed the examination was 91.98 percent which is lower than the comparable rate 92.75% for boys (Table -03).

**Table 03: Rate of boys and girls who appeared and passed in the Primary Completion Examination 2010**

Learners by Sex	Primary Final Exam		
	Appeared	Passed	Passing Rate
Boys	894,369	829,531	92.75
Girls	1,045,962	962,120	91.98

Source: Prothom-Alo, 28 December 2010

The result of the Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSC) held in 2011 presented in Table 04 below shows that at this level, the rate of successful girls (80.84%) is much lower than the boys (83.62%) who sat for the examination.

**Table 04: Rate of boys and girls who appeared and passed in Secondary School Certificate (SSC) Examination 2011**

Learners by Sex	SSC Exam		
	Appeared	Passed	Passing Rate
Boys	491,040	410,601	83.62%
Girls	495,610	40,065	80.84%

Source: The Daily Prothom-Alo, 13 May 2011

### 3.3 Gender gap among teachers

One of the clearly visible consequences of the gender-disparity among learners is noticed in the **conspicuous gender-disparity among the teachers**. Despite the quota and easy terms of recruitment proclaimed by the government to increase the number of women teachers, statistics shows that much needs to be done yet. Table 05 below shows that at the **primary level**, of the total 380,957 teachers only 173,559 teachers were women which shows that proportionately speaking, **less than half** (45.66%) of the total were women. At the **Secondary level**, of the total 218,000 teachers, there were 50,334 women teachers which

means **less than one-fourth** of the teachers were women. In the same year, of the total 22,455 teachers working in technical and vocational institutions, 4,611 were women which means about **one-fifth** of the teachers were women. In the madrasas, out of the total 107,847 teachers, 10,911 were women which means only one-tenth of teachers were women.

**Table 05: Number of Teachers in 2010**

SI No	Type of School	Teacher		
		Total	Female	Proportion
1	Primary	380,957	173,559	45.56%
2	Secondary	218,011	50,334	23.09%
3	Madrasah	107,847	10,911	10.12%
4	Technical and Vocational	22,455	4,611	20.53%

Source: BANBEIS, 2011

## 4. Constraints to girls' equal access to and participation in education

A host of factors obstruct the majority of Bangladeshi girls (rural poor) in their participation in education and overall development process. These factors may be clustered in three major groups: i) socio-cultural or attitudinal, ii) financial and iii) process and structure related. **The first group** arises from **discriminatory attitudes** stemming from patriarchal ideology impacting negatively on family's decision about sending their daughters to school. **The second group** arises from family poverty, limiting their ability to bear the cost of education. These familial factors may be termed **demand-side constraints**. **The third group** arises from various inadequacies and flaws in the provision of education and teaching learning process which adversely affects the quality of education. These may be termed **supply side constraints**. It should



be noted that all these interact with and reinforce one another in deepening family's reluctance to send their girl's to schools. For instance, the supply side constraints may cause dissatisfaction in the parents and decrease the perceived value of the education provided.

## 4.1 Demand side constraints

### 4.1.1 Socio-cultural constraints

#### A. Attitudinal:

In Bangladesh, the socio-cultural values, norms and traditions of a patriarchal, patrilineal and patrilocal society “impose gender based division of labor and foster a systematic bias of male superiority” (Jahan, 1994). Male domination and female subordination are the basic tenets of the patriarchal ideology which pervades all social institutions – from family to the state.

**Gender discrimination within the family** is maintained by customary unequal gender allocation of resources and services, including lower nutritional intake, lack of attention to health care needs, devaluation of women's role and work within the family (a substantial one in family maintenance and even income earning in poor agricultural households), and unequal rights granted by family laws in inheritance, marriage, divorce, custodianship and guardianship of children. As women's biological role of reproduction is primarily recognized by family (and society) the pressure on parents to find a ‘symbolic shelter’ for a daughter through early marriage is considerable. Dowry, a custom which was not prevalent among Bangladeshi Muslims even in the nineteen fifties (Ahmed, R & M.S. Nahar, 1987), is becoming widely acceptable, despite the Dowry Prohibition Act 1980. Consequently, poor rural parents often want to save money for dowry rather than spend it on a daughter's education. This is reflected in the opinions of stakeholders in most of the workshops through statements such as, “Formal education is not really necessary for girls”, “since we need to marry our daughters, early marriage is desirable”, “why invest so much money in sending her to school? Isn't it more sensible to save for dowry?” Surprisingly, even some officials in administration echoed similar thoughts and said, “Early marriage is the best option for poor parents.” These seem acceptable excuses for never sending girls to school or for quickly withdrawing them from schools.

The most objectionable (from human rights and women's rights perspective) manifestation of the tendency of regarding women as less than equal is **objectification of women** i.e. women are objects (to be used/abused) by

men for meeting male needs and urges (including sexual ones). This attitude motivates men to commit various acts violating women's basic right to bodily integrity and safety. The increasing trend in sexual offences - **beginning with sexual harassment (eve-teasing), criminal assault, molestation and finally rape** - in public places, especially on the way to and from schools has created considerable **anxiety** among parents about the lack of **safety and security** of their daughters. The anxiety deepens as many instances (reported in newspapers) show that legal recourse and social protest have proved ineffective in redressing the wrong. Recent reports show that offenders have assaulted, sometimes with fatal consequences, the relatives, neighbors even teachers, who tried to protect victims or protest sexual violence (Prothom-Alo, September 26, 2011). Village shalish often shifts the blame on to the hapless victims “for tempting the poor man to commit sexual violence”, thus forcing a considerable number of them to kill themselves in despair and loss of self esteem. Such incidents contribute to the vulnerability of girls and indirectly encourage the male offenders. “The lack of effective redress and social action combating sexual violence doubles parental anxiety and motivates many parents to withdraw girls, especially after puberty and settle for early marriage”, said many of the stakeholders in the workshops.

#### B. Low level of Literacy among parents

Low level of education and literacy among parents acts as further disincentive for sending girls to and retaining them in school. Indeed, mother's level of literacy and education has been found to be positively related to girls schooling (Education Watch, 2008). It is encouraging that literacy level among parents has gone up over time and is reflected in the increase of girls' enrollment in schools.

### 4.1.2 Financial Constraints

**Poverty** at the familial level is a considerable obstacle to a child's access to and participation in education, but a poor girl child is more disadvantaged because of her gender-position. The norm of gender-based division of work dictates that she devotes a considerable amount of time to **help** out her mother in **household chores**.

In rural poor families, especially agriculture dependent families, women's work load is pretty heavy. The inability to employ paid help obliges the mothers to rely heavily on their daughters to get daily household chores (cooking, cleaning, looking after babies, post-harvest activities in season) done on time. In the poorest families, the children (boys and girls) have to engage in **paid work** which conflicts with school hours. Girls, in such a situation, even if enrolled, find

it very hard to attend classes regularly and/or pay proper attention to studies. This phenomenon has been termed as ‘silent exclusion’ by experts (Ahmed, 2011). The process frequently leads to withdrawal from school. Though tuition waiver and stipend motivates poor parents to enroll their daughters in school, studies have found that **hidden cost** (coaching, exercise books, examination fees, other materials, dresses etc) of education is pretty high (Education Watch, 2006). These keep climbing as the girls progress to higher classes. For many families, retaining their daughters in school becomes too costly and eventually they are withdrawn, observed many of the stakeholders (parents, teachers, girl students) participating in the workshops.

## 4.2 Supply side constraints

The major supply side constraints includes in adequacies in (i) Provision of Education, and (ii) Teaching Learning Process as summarized below:

### 4.2.1 In adequacies in provision of education

- i. Inadequate number of schools is directly related to the issue of access. This coupled with distance from the household becomes an obstacle for girls, particularly in areas where the terrain is difficult to access e.g. hilly areas in Chittagong, Sylhet, wet lands and swamps (haor, baor) etc. Participants in the workshops held in Sunamganj, Mymensingh, Rangamati, Bandarban emphasized this point.
- ii. This obstacle becomes a harder one because of unsatisfactory roads and transports particularly in the areas mentioned above. Parents feel that these increase the threat to the safety and security of their daughters and consequently tend to withdraw them from schools.
- iii. In many cases absence of congenial environment in school and class-rooms (inadequate seating facilities), lack of adequate facilities such as libraries, materials, laboratories etc, particularly insufficient women-friendly environment (separate toilet, common-room, hostels etc) act as disincentive for girls to continue. Fortunately, there has been an improvement of provision in recent times. However, necessary infrastructure for use of modern electronic equipments (power-supply) is still unsatisfactory in the rural areas, thus handicapping the rural children.

- iv. Many schools lack adequate provision for sports and recreation. Girl students mentioned that boys tend to monopolize the sports facilities. In rural areas, people, especially the conservative groups discourage girl’s participation in sports.

### 4.2.2 In adequacies in teaching learning process

Inadequate number of teachers contributes to skewed teacher-student ratio which makes it difficult for teachers to pay proper attention to individual student. The girls suffer more from this because gender-stereotypical upbringing at home encourages the boys to be more articulate in classroom participation. Girls frequently remain passive and fail to draw teacher’s attention. The problem deepens because of teacher absenteeism and late attendance which decreases the contact hours (Education Watch, 2008). However, the teachers have pointed out that in addition to the already heavy work-load, they are assigned many extra-curricular duties, e.g. election monitoring, census, immunization drives etc. Inadequate salary, benefits and lack of positive response to other demands made by the teachers lead to dissatisfaction and adversely affect the quality of performance, claimed the teachers (informal talks, discussion at meeting of teachers association, workshops). In addition, inadequate number of women teachers act as disincentive for conservative parents. Parents find the presence of female teachers reassuring in co-educational schools. Moreover, they act as role models for many of the girl children, said participants of the workshop.

- i. Though the basic teacher training course includes special session on gender, it was not very effective as their lack of adequate attention to girls in the classroom shows. The lack of gender sensitivity discourages the girls from participation and leads to eventual loss of interest in studies.
- ii. Gender-bias and sex-role stereotypical representation of women in textbooks continue, despite revision by NCTB. In text, as well as illustration, often in a gender neutral situation, boys are depicted more than girls. Even in information on folk art, handicrafts and agriculture, women’s significant role is often not given adequate weight. Such stereotype only reinforces the patriarchal attitudes which impede women’s equal participation in formal education.
- iii. Inadequate attention to the special needs of the children affected with special disadvantages – dwellers of difficult to access areas; ethnic minorities (suffering from linguistic difference), physically and mentally challenged; street children, working children, children of sex-workers – affect the girls

more adversely because of their gender position (Jahan and Choudhury, 2005). For instance, girls who are physically or mentally challenged suffer more social stigma than boys with similar disadvantage. Even teachers and guardians of other classmates frequently display insensitivity in their manners and attitudes.

- iv. The curriculum of the technical and vocational stream continues to be traditional. It does not reflect the demands of present day market. As this narrows the job- opportunities in post-educational life, the reluctance of the families to enroll their daughters in this stream is understandable. In addition, the number of teachers with upgraded skills-training is inadequate.

## 5. Education planning and management viewed from gender perspective: special concerns

Education policy 2010 is certainly the major step taken by GoB in recent times. In addition, national action plans, PEDP I and II, SESIP, TQI and other steps and measures have been taken by GoB to achieve the goals of EFA and MDGs. Special proactive measures for removing gender disparity such as stipend for rural poor girls at the primary and secondary level, tuition free education for girls at those levels, quota and priority on recruiting women teachers at the primary level have also been taken. The increase in girl's enrollment is claimed to be one of the positive impacts of all these efforts. Yet, the brief situation analysis of this report shows that these have not been effective enough to remove the barriers to girl's equal participation in education. An important reason is the inadequate reflection of gender-sensitivity in these policies and measures (CEDAW Alternative report 2010). This is an issue of special concern for those eager to and working towards ensuring gender-equality in education. From a gender perspective, ensuring girls equal participation through removal of the constraints mentioned above is not enough and meaningful in itself. If the quality of the education provided is not satisfactory and if it is not gender-sensitive/responsive (reflecting the ideal of gender-equality), access to and participation in the process will not lead to the full development of a girl's human potentials. It will neither prepare her to participate as an active and effective agent at any institution or level in society nor will it be the proper medium to ensure her attaining a happy, healthy, secure, independent life with dignity. In short, this sort of education will not lead to a woman's empowerment, the most desirable outcome of education from a rights based approach and gender perspective (Subrahmanian, 2007).

Viewed from this perspective, there are several inadequacies/limitations in the over-all management of education system. Some of the significant ones are:

### 5.1 Inadequate reflection of gender sensitivity, gender responsiveness and the concept of gender-equality/gender mainstreaming in overall plans and management

One of the most important inputs in the content and process of education and ultimately its quality is the vision of a preferred future for the nation. Education policy 2010 does refer to the vision of the war of liberation - building a society characterized by democratic and participatory governance, equitable and non-discriminatory distribution of resources and opportunity and free expression of a pluralistic religio-cultural heritage - but the ideal of gender equality has not been specifically stressed and clearly articulated. The plans, programs and curricula reflect a similar limitation.

### 5.2 Marginalization of stakeholders (especially women) and centralization of planning and administration

In Bangladesh, Planning is regarded as an expert job. National planning is accomplished by the bureaucrats of different line ministries and finalized by the Planning Commission (GoB). The class, gender and location bias among the planners, predominantly upper-middle, middle class urban educated men, is apparent in the plans. In the education sector, especially in primary education, this has given rise to a set of problems: lack of opportunity for effective local level participation in planning and administration, monolithic control over provision of education materials, difficulty in ensuring accountability (detailed later); weak local level supervision, monitoring and assessment. There is over-centralization of recruitment of teachers and supervisors; training of teachers, setting up the curriculum and syllabus, production and distribution of textbooks and evaluation of administration personnel. The purported values of centralization include 'administrative rationality, control, hierarchical accountability, system-wide efficiency and expert management'. However, this trend is not compatible with values such as decentralization and participatory governance which are necessary for achievement of the goals of EFA and gender-equality. Quality has certainly suffered in consequence. For instance, the production and distribution of text books handled centrally by NCTB has frequently led to inordinate delay in receipt of textbooks in the outlying areas, thus constraining the children.

Above all, such centralization effectively limits the scope for women's participation in various stages of education management and precludes their needs being addressed. The marginal presence of women in the decision-making level and upper echelons of service as secretaries, joint secretaries, directors, Heads of NCTB and various committees and commissions underscore this. "in such a system, women may have access to the process as teachers and students but gaining a measure of control or having a sense of ownership will remain a distant dream" (Jahan 1998).

### 5.3 Limited accountability and transparency giving rise to irregularities

Like all other sectors, the education sector is also riddled by various irregularities mainly due to limited accountability and transparency. The various steps taken to decentralize and expand the scope for stakeholder participation at the local level e.g. local level education administrative committees, parent-teachers associations, inclusion of parents in each of the school management committees, were not very effective in counter balancing the over-drive for central control. According to a number of workshop participants, women's representation is still insignificant. They also referred to irregularity of supervision and monitoring by officials who in their turn mentioned that over-load and skewed distribution of responsibilities contributed to this phenomenon. Instances of exerting undesirable influence and flouting of rules by SMC chairmen and even teachers in distribution of stipend money, enrollment of students, recruitment and promotion of teachers are plenty and often reported in newspapers. Even members of Parliament are not above committing such irregularities (The Daily Star, September 26, 2011). Women teachers, because of their gender position, often feel insecure and helpless to voice any protest (personal interview).

### 5.4 Problem of standardization

The existence of several parallel streams offering basic education created some problems affecting the quality of education and the standard of management. Though mainstream schools use the GoB approved curriculum and textbooks produced by the NCTB, the Madrasah and the English medium schools do not do so. This creates **confusion** about **equivalency of competence**. As the curriculum of an education system determines to a considerable extent the end product, such variation is a matter of grave concern. For instance, the curriculum of religion-based schools does not articulate the major thrust of the national curriculum and the values of civil liberties and gender-equality. The curricula of

the English medium schools also expose the students to a way of life removed from the local setting. It has been argued that such systems may alienate the students from the mainstream of national culture and development thereby accentuating social divides and possible identity crisis, which would affect girls more seriously than boys. This divergence also makes transfer from one stream to another and admission to the next level difficult. Fortunately, education policy 2010 reflects recognition of the potential threats to national solidarity and social harmony posed by such divergence.

A related problem is the **difference in the level of teacher-training and education qualification** of teachers in the various streams. In 2008, more than 85% of teachers in the government, non-government and non-formal schools had professional training but the proportion was 11% only in Madrasahs (Education Watch 2008). The same survey found all teachers to have completed secondary education though the level of the female teachers was lower than that of the male teachers. In this connection, it should be noted that the performance of these teachers should be rigorously monitored/evaluated vis-à-vis others and specially designed training courses should be held for them to prevent possible lowering of the quality of education.

### 5.5 Inadequate reliable statistics and policy research

The quality of educational statistics is **uneven**. Difference in methodology produces different data and it is difficult to resolve the ensuing problem. Even basic data such as the current drop out rate is open to debate. **Gender-disaggregated data** on many critical aspects is **not available** readily. The process of **updating** is **slow**. This is a matter of concern because reliable, up-to-date statistics and data is a must for appropriate policy formulation, meaningful policy research and suggestions to planners. In addition, **policy analysis** from **gender perspective** is still inadequate. The WID Focal Points in the ministries of Education, Planning and Finance need further training to strengthen their capacity to play their role effectively particularly in preparing/facilitating engendered planning and engendered budgeting for education programs/projects.

### 5.6 Inadequate allocation and dubious utilization

Though priority on EFA has been pronounced the allocation to education sector in the GDP is still very low. The commitment and political will of GoB is yet to be translated in budgetary allocation. For instance, the budget (2011-12) proposes to allocate only 2.27% of the GDP to education sector. Of the total allocation, the share of PMED is less than half (45%) which is still inadequate to meet

the requirement for increasing access and ensuring gender parity with quality. Related to the problem of inadequacy of funds is that of decisions on expenditure. Generally, the major share of the revenue budget is spent on teacher's salary and that of the development budget goes to building physical facilities. Yet, the end result is still far from satisfactory. Since the quality of teaching needs to be improved urgently, one wonders at the meagre amount spent on teacher training. Above all, there is no satisfactory break down to show how much of the allocation benefits the girls and in what way. However, it is encouraging to note that the Ministry of Finance (MOF) developed the RCGP model (Recurrent, Capital, Gender and Poverty Model) in August 2003. During the FY 2010-2011 MOF made an effort to analyze the gender disaggregated data. This emphasized on generating reliable and meaningful gender disaggregated public expenditure in 33 ministries/Divisions (GOB, 2011). The same exercise is being conducted during FY 2011-2012 for the rest of the 17 ministries /Divisions (in total 50).

### 5.7 Coordination between GO-NGOs

Though recent GoB documents have reflected appreciation of NGO efforts, especially in women development, provision of education/literacy and basic health services, co-ordination is still not as effective as needed for collective effort. Regular meetings, prompt cooperation and support are still needed for effective public private partnership in achieving EFA goals.

## 6 Conclusion and recommendations

Achievement of gender-equality in EFA process is a tremendous challenge. Yet it is vital for the development, indeed for the survival of the nation that the goal is achieved soon. While GoB as the lead actor should continue to demonstrate **strong political will and commitment** to achieve gender equality within quality education, all the stakeholders, including NGOs, women's organizations, local bodies, parents, teachers and learners would have to whole-heartedly support and actively contribute to the effort. The major constraints in Bangladesh to girl's equal access to and participation in education are mainly socio-economic on the demand side and provision and process-related on the supply-side. These interact with and reinforce each other. No effort to ensure girl's equal access to and participation in education can succeed unless these constraints are removed. The brief situation analysis presented here shows that so far, the measures undertaken by GoB have mainly focused on removing supply-side constraints and poverty related economic constraints. The resulting increase in

girls' enrollment rate showing gender-equality in this area is very encouraging. Improvement in physical facilities, recruitment of additional teachers to reduce the skewed teacher student ratio, inclusion of gender training in the basic teacher training course were steps designed to improve the quality and gender-sensitivity of the education process and output.

However, the analysis also shows that a considerable number of girl children remain outside the scope of formal education which points to the limitations of the steps undertaken so far. From gender-perspective, the major challenge ahead is effective removal of all the identified constraints and ensure all girls (Boys also) access to and participation in basic quality education which is accessible, affordable, inclusive and above all gender sensitive. In other words, the challenge is to identify appropriate strategies for changing education from a key medium of transmitting gender-hierarchical ideology, tradition and values into a key medium for instilling in students the ideal of gender-equality and non-discrimination, essential for achievement of a gender equitable society. Macro-planning and resource allocation are major instruments used by GoB to bring planned change in development process. Therefore, for bringing the above-mentioned change in the education sector, two major strategies worth serious consideration are: i) making gender equality a central concern in education planning, resource allocation and management and ii) Building on interventions which have proved to be effective already. Some specific steps (both short term and long term) to be taken at the national and local level are recommended below:

### 6.1 Short-term and long-term steps to be taken at the national level

1. Expedite implementation of National Education Policy 2010. Clear and adequate focus on gender-equality in tune with UNCEDAW and the National Women's Advancement Policy in the guidelines for all the areas is essential. Support and help create favorable climate of opinion through awareness-raising campaigns and social movement.
2. Enact as soon as possible a Right to Basic Education Act. A necessary preparatory step will be giving constitutional recognition to basic education as a right not a basic need only.
3. To remove gender bias, ensure increased presence and participation of women at all levels of education, especially at the decision-making and plan formulation levels. Lateral entry of qualified women may be encouraged.

4. Effective mechanism for decentralization of engendered education planning, management and gender responsive budgeting is essential for stakeholder participation. Facilitate woman's increased participation so that it is not confined to tokenism. At the same time transparency and accountability to stakeholders need to be ensured; and measures to deter irregularities, especially use of undue influence by the politically powerful people or local elite should be put in place.
5. To reduce variation in quality of education, to respond to the differential needs of the male and female students; and facilitate standardization and gender-sensitization in the divergent streams, expedite introduction of gender-sensitive, common 'core' curriculum in all the streams, include reproductive health and rights at the secondary curriculum and ensure inclusion of gender-equality in all sphere as a 'core' value.
6. To meet the requirements of the proposed extension of primary education upto grade 8, the budgetary allocation to education should be raised gradually to 6% of GDP and two-thirds of that should be targeted to ensure quality basic education. As a first step, at least 20% of the annual budget should be allocated to education. Additional allocation to education sector can be made through mutual discussion among ministries and diverting resources from non-productive sectors to this vital one. The rationale behind decisions on expenditure should be made transparent and logical. Regular monitoring system and assessment of both quantitative and qualitative impacts should be instituted to prevent irregularities.
7. The gender implication of allocation and expenditure should be assessed through regular gender budgeting and gender audit. To facilitate this, the macro-planning model should incorporate gender as a variable in the social accounting matrix, as well as in project designs. WID Focal Points and Budget/planning related officials' capacity need to be strengthened through theoretical and practical training in gender budgeting and gender auditing.
8. Gender-disaggregated data, essential for equitable planning should be updated and readily available. Gender-analysis of policy, plans and programs should be encouraged and supported. To facilitate data collection on age-group participation, birth registration should be mandatory and monitored regularly.

9. To change patriarchal discriminatory attitudes and customs, a vigorous media campaign, projecting positive image of women, should be launched. Important messages and information related to gender-equality should be transmitted through all media (Electronic, printed). Theatre groups, film-makers, folk artists (theatre/ songs) should be encouraged to contribute to the campaign. Human rights and women's organizations should be supported in advocacy, lobbying, consciousness raising, research and dissemination for strengthening this campaign. Gender-bias and stereotypical representation of women in text books should be removed through constant and regular revision. NCTB efforts should be strengthened by utilizing services of gender experts.
10. To increase access and ensure congenial environment especially in the under-served areas, the number of schools should be increased proportionate to the demand. The physical facilities must be adequate, complete with libraries, laboratory, sufficient teaching-learning materials and equipments, needed for quality science and vocational training. Girl's equal access to such materials and facilities should be ensured. Ensure safe roads and transports in difficult terrains, especially during monsoon.
11. Ensure woman-friendly environment (separate toilet, common-room, and hostel) in all schools.
12. Ensure safety and security of girls on the way to and from schools as well as within school. Take vigorous and deterrent measures against perpetrators of sexual harassment, molestation, assault and rape. To ensure this, set up committees to investigate sexual harassment/ violence in all schools with adequate and proportionate representation of women (students, teachers and community members). Provide necessary training to the committee members to sensitize them with basic concepts on gender issues.
13. Enhance the opportunities of accessing modern information technology by providing electronic audio-visual learning material including computers to all schools. Adequate power supply must be ensured for proper utilization of such equipments. Special attention should be given to ensure equal participation of girls (gender-equal allocation of time).
14. Revise and strengthen technical and vocational training curriculum and teaching learning methods based on job market information. Special

incentive program may be taken to encourage increased participation of girls in this stream.

15. To bring girl children of marginalized groups affected with special disadvantages – difficult terrain, ethnic minorities, physically and mentally challenged, street children, working children, children of sex-workers - into the mainstream of education, take up new programs and strengthen and expand the scope of programs already taken. Ensure equal attention and sensitivity in classroom interaction by giving special training to teachers.
16. Provide adequate facilities and equipments for participation of girls in sports, physical education and recreation. Set this as a compulsory requirement for MPO.
17. Regular and systematic monitoring and evaluation of the stipend program, especially assessment of impact is necessary before expanding the scope. Care should be taken to ascertain area-wise need before allocation of resources in this mode. Provision of school meal should be expanded.
18. To increase the number of women teachers, priority in recruiting them should be continued. The present policy of relaxed qualification may be continued for a fixed-time period but improved and repeated in-service training should be given to these teachers to ensure quality performance. In teacher training, special emphasis should be given to gender-sensitization, learner-centered orientation and innovative and participative teaching-learning methods. Conscious efforts to meet the longstanding demands of teachers for raised salary and benefits, provision of convenient and safe housing and congenial working condition should be taken. Care should be taken to avoid over-loading teachers with extra-curricular duties. Teachers associations should ensure increased presence of women in top leadership positions. They should contribute actively in monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teacher performance.
19. Expedite implementation of poverty reduction programs and re-building and repairing schools in areas hit by natural disasters.
20. Ensure effective co-ordination and support to public-private partnership efforts for making basic quality education gender equitable, accessible, affordable and inclusive.

## **6.2 Steps to be taken at the local level (school authorities, teachers, parents-guardians, community)**

1. Develop a gender strategy to be implemented by all the schools so that there is a common understanding of all the teachers/administrators/ SMCs about gender issues.
2. Launch a Campaign for awareness raising and creating favorable public opinion to remove existing gender discriminatory attitudes, norms, traditions and practices within the family and the community.
3. Campaign/social mobilization to combat and eradicate customs and practices which negatively impact girl's rights to education, health and safety such as sexual harassment, violence against women, early marriage and early pregnancy, dowry etc. Stern measures including legal redress where necessary should be taken.
4. Instituting regular re-orientation programs on gender-sensitization, innovative participatory teaching –learning methods and upgrading management skills of all teachers (male and female). Support service and expertise from non-government sources should be sought whenever necessary.
5. Ensure increased participation of women in SMCs, parent-teacher associations. Care should be taken to selection on the basis of qualifications and relevant experience. Institute regular gender sensitization training for all SMC members.
6. To ensure effective and increased participation of women for reflecting gender concerns and establishing gender-accountability in management and decisions on expenditure of allocations, special programs for upgrading relevant skill and knowledge of the community women should be taken up. Support services and training courses should be conducted through public-private partnership efforts.
7. Teachers should pay special attention to protect the children of marginalized and specially disadvantaged groups from discriminatory behavior in class-room and school precincts.
8. Hold regular parent teachers meetings. Motivate parents to send girls to school and retain them. Flexible school hours, according to the season and 'felt' need of the students' families, should be arranged.

9. Teachers should try to visit homes of children in case of irregular attendance. Local Government representatives may be requested to assist in such informal monitoring and interaction.

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