

Bangladesh's Progress in Primary Education: Enrollment and Gender Parity

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In a developing country like Bangladesh, which is one of the most promising emerging economies, it is absolutely crucial that investments be made in order to groom the labour force of tomorrow. Accordingly, achieving universal primary education is the second United Nations Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

The country spends less than three percent of its GDP for the education sector. In the national budget for the year 2013, the education sector got the third largest allocation amounting to Tk.25, 114 crore.



There are nearly 16 million girls in Bangladesh, which accounts for 10% of the total population. It is highly important to bring up young girls in Bangladesh as educated women. If a cost-benefit analysis is done, the benefits will certainly outweigh the costs.

Educating women will not only lead to increased household incomes and contribute towards building a more skilled labour force, but will also make these individuals more socially mobile.

However, it is common practice for rural households not to send their young daughters to school as they believe females are born solely to run households. But this idea is changing gradually in rural areas along with the socio-economic progress in Bangladesh.



Bangladesh has certainly made remarkable progress in expanding the primary education, especially in raising the enrollment rate for students and bringing about gender parity, achieving the literacy rate of 70% as of 2016.

UNDP statistics show that Bangladesh achieved Human Development Index (HDI) ranking of 142th among 188 countries in 2015 whereas it ranked 137th among 177 countries in 2006.

The enrollment rate was 57.46 percent for males and 42.54 percent for females in 1999. But the rate for males has decreased to 51.52 percent, while for females it increased to 48.48 percent in 2003. The gender gap in enrollment rate has been gradually reducing. This is because each female student from sixth to tenth grades gets stipend from the government and other donor agencies. The government also provides tuition fees to the schools for each female student.

The gender gap was even much wider two decades ago. Such progress in female participation in secondary education is mainly attributed to the female stipend programs in rural areas of Bangladesh. The implementation of these programs would therefore result in the elimination of gender disparities in the primary and secondary education as called for in the UN Millennium Development Goals. The facilities must be accessible to the poor and females.

But it has been found that many parents give priority to an arranged marriage for their daughters instead of completing the secondary level education, and this is reckoned as one of the main causes of dropout of female students.

A research conducted by Asadullah, M, N. and Chaudhury, N (2006) has revealed that the gender disparity in education in Bangladesh has different dimensions along with career paths for females which, to a certain extent, are linked with social, religious and economic values of Bangladesh.

In the metropolitan area, there was an increasing trend in enrollment per school, while a declining trend was registered in semi-urban and rural areas from 2001 to 2003.

Dr. Bjorn Lomborg, President of the Copenhagen Consensus Center, says in an article that the great progress in primary education in Bangladesh over recent years is the reason why the country has met the two Millennium Development Goals related to primary schooling: universal enrollment and gender equality.

There are 63,601 government primary schools in Bangladesh, where the number of students is 21,932,638, whereas that of teachers is 322,766.

Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) published a survey report in 2014, which indicates that 68% girls and 57% boys have enrolled in secondary schools. But 47% girls have dropped out of school, whereas boys' dropout rate is 35%.

The UNDP Human Development Report 2015 put Bangladesh in the medium human development category with 142nd position out of 188 countries. The Human Development Index (HDI) measures a country's average achievements in basic aspects of human development. It is a summary measure for assessing long-term progress in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, access to knowledge and a decent standard of living.

Between 1980 and 2014, Bangladesh's mean years of schooling increased by 3.1 years and expected years of schooling increased by 5.1 years. Bangladesh improved one step in HDI to rank 142 globally, up from 143 as per the UNDP Human Development Report 2014.