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**POLICY BRIEF ON “EDUCATION POLICY”  
CPD TASK FORCE REPORT**



**Centre for Policy Dialogue**

**House 40/C, Road 11, Dhanmondi R/A, GPO Box 2129, Dhaka 1209**

**Tel: (880 2) 8124770; Fax: (880 2) 8130951**

**E-mail: [cpd@bdonline.com](mailto:cpd@bdonline.com); Website: [www.cpd-bangladesh.org](http://www.cpd-bangladesh.org)**

***Policy Brief Task Force on  
Education Sector Policy  
Members of the Task Force***

**Chair**

*Professor Muzaffer Ahmad*  
Institute of Business Administration, Dhaka University

**Co-Chair**

*Dr A.N.M. Eusuf*  
Former Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister

**Member-Secretary**

*Dr. Md. Masum*  
Professor, Department of Economics, Jahangirnagar University

**Members**

*Dr. Muhammed Ibrahim*  
Executive Director, Centre for Mass Education in Science

*Nurul Islam Nahid, MP*  
Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Education

*Dr. Iqbal Mahmud*  
Professor, Department of Chemical Engineering and  
Former Vice Chancellor, BUET, Dhaka

*Ms. Rasheda Chowdhury*  
Director, CAMPE and Member Secretary, CAMPE Council

*Dr. Siddiqur Rahman*  
Professor, Institute of Education Research

*Dr. Md. Hedayet Hossain*  
Institute of Education and Research, Dhaka University

*Dr. Ajay Kumar Roy*  
Department of Physics, Dhaka University

*Kazi Rafiqul Alam*  
Executive Director, Dhaka Ahsania Mission

*Md. Imtiaz Hossain*  
Professor, Department of Mechanical Engineering, BUET, Dhaka

*Ms. Roushan Jahan*  
Member, Women for Women

*Dr. Manzoor Ahmed*  
Former Advisor, UNICEF Dhaka Office

# 1.0 Introduction

In Bangladesh, the key to achieving high rates of economic growth and at the same time ensuring that the fruits of economic growth are equitably shared by her population lies in development and utilisation of her human resources, the only resource Bangladesh has in abundance. Education therefore has been recognised as a priority sector by all governments since her independence. What follows is a brief review of the education sector in Bangladesh as at present with a view to identifying key issues that need to be addressed, presented in Section 2. Section 3 highlights the key issues as identified by the Task Force. Section 4 presents a set of policy recommendations put forward by the Task Force for implementation during the five year term of the next elected Government.

## 2.0 Education Sector in Bangladesh: A Review

The review has been organised as follows. After introducing the overall structure of the education system in Bangladesh profiles of the individual components of the education sector have been drawn focusing on their respective size, overall performance, and the constraints faced with a view to finding ways and means for relaxing the same. In drawing the above profiles official data sources have primarily been used, supplemented where necessary by other sources.

### 2.1 The Education Sector of Bangladesh: Structure, Management and Budgeting.

#### 2.1.1 Structure:

The education system in Bangladesh is characterised by co-existence of three separate streams. The mainstream happens to be a vernacular based secular education system carried over from the colonial past. There also exists a separate religious system of education. Finally, based on use of English as the medium of instruction, another stream of education, modelled after the British education system, using the same curriculum, has rapidly grown in the metropolitan cities of Bangladesh.

However diverse the above streams may apparently look, they have certain common elements, and there exists scope for re-integration of graduates of one stream with the other at different levels.

The mainstream education system in Bangladesh is structured as follows: -

- a. One or two year pre-primary education imparted in private schools/kindergartens, and informally in government primary schools for six months.
- b. Five-year compulsory primary education for the 6-10 year age group, imparted mainly in government and non-government primary schools. In metropolitan cities, however, government and non-government primary schools cater to the educational needs only of the poorer sections of the people, as the better-off families usually send their children to Private English Medium schools/ secondary schools that run primary sections as well. There, however, exist a substantial

number of NGO run non-formal schools catering mainly for the drop-outs of the government and non-government primary schools. Very few NGOs however impart education for the full 5-year primary education cycle. Because of that, on completion of their 2-3 year non-formal primary education in NGO run schools, students normally re-enter into government/ non-government primary schools at higher classes. NGO run schools differ from other non-government private schools. While the private schools operate like private enterprises often guided by commercial interests, NGO schools operate mainly in areas not served either by the government or private schools essentially to meet the educational needs of vulnerable groups in the society. They usually follow an informal approach to suit the special needs of children from the vulnerable groups.

- c. On completion of primary education, students (11+) enrol for junior secondary education that spans over 3 years. At the end of this phase of education, some students branch out to join the vocational stream, offered at Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) and Technical Training Centres (TTC) run by the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Labour and Employment respectively, while students in the mainstream continue in government and non-government secondary schools for a 2 year secondary education in their respective areas of specialisation i.e. humanities, science, commerce, etc. At the end of their secondary education, the students sit for their first public examination (S.S.C.) under the supervision of six education boards.

The students of religious education and English medium streams also sit for their respective public examinations, Dakhil, and O level, conducted by the Madrasah Education Board, and London/Cambridge University respectively, facilitated by the British Council in case of the latter.

- d. After 10 years of schooling at primary and secondary level, students (16+) who succeed in passing the Secondary School Certificate (S.S.C.) examination have the option of joining a college for a 2 year higher secondary education in their respective areas of specialisation, or enrol in technical/ poly technical institutes for technical education. After 2-year higher secondary education, one has to sit for another public examination called Higher Secondary Certificate (H.S.C.) Examination conducted by the Education Boards to qualify for further education.

Students of Religious and English Medium streams also sit for their respective public examinations, Alim, and 'A' level, conducted by the Madrasah Education Board and London/Cambridge University respectively to qualify for further education.

- e. Under-graduate education of various duration (2 to 4 years) are offered to 18+ students at a number of public and private universities / degree colleges/technical colleges/ specialised institutions. Successful completion of a degree course is a pre-requisite for appointment to a white-collar civilian job.

- f. Post-graduate education normally of 1-2 year duration is provided at universities and selected degree colleges and institutions.

### **2.1.2 Management:**

Pre-primary education, generally recognised as a useful stage of education to smoothen the transition from home to an institutional environment and thereby contributing to reduced drop out rates at primary level has so long remained outside the purview of official education policy of Bangladesh. Its management therefore lies at present exclusively in the hands of the schools imparting such education and some NGOs running such schools. The Education Policy 2000 did however recognise the need for pre-primary education and recommended its gradual introduction to 5+ children in primary schools with a view to universalising one-year pre-primary education by the year 2005.

As provision of universal compulsory primary education has been recognised by the Constitution of Bangladesh as a state responsibility, the government has assumed direct responsibility of the management of primary education in Bangladesh, particularly in the wake of enactment of Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990.

The overall responsibility of management of primary education lies with the Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) set up as a separate Division with the status of a Ministry in 1992. While the PMED is involved in formulation of policies, the responsibility of implementation of the same rests with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) headed by a Director General. The different tiers of administration such as Divisions, Districts and Upazilas are manned by Deputy Directors, District Primary Education Officers (DPEO) and Upazila Education Officers (UEO) respectively. UEOs are assisted by a number of AUEOs each in charge of a cluster of primary schools. At the school level, there exist School Management Committees (SMC) formed as per government directives with certain well defined functions, and Parent Teachers Associations (PTA) playing a supportive role in building favourable teaching-learning environment in schools.

The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) and its subordinate offices in the district and upazila are solely responsible for management and supervision of primary education. Their responsibilities include recruitment, posting, and transfer of teachers and other staff; arranging in-service training of teachers; and distribution of free text books, and supervision of schools.

The responsibility of school construction, repair and supply of school furniture lies with the Facilities Department (FD) and Local Government Engineering Department (LGED).

The National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) is responsible for the development of curriculum and production of textbooks.

While the Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for formulation of policies, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE) under the Ministry of Education is responsible for implementing the same at secondary and higher education level.

The NCTB is responsible for developing curriculum, and publishing standard textbooks.

Six region based Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE) are responsible for conducting the two public examinations, S.S.C. and H.S.C., in addition to granting recognition to non-government secondary schools.

DSHE is divided into eight zones, each in charge of a Deputy Director assisted by two Inspectors, and two Assistant Inspectors. District Offices are headed by District Education Officers (DEO).

There exist three different levels of supervision. BISEs are responsible for accreditation of non-government secondary schools. However, because of lack of inspection capacity, the work is delegated to Zonal Inspectors and DEOs. The Directorate of Inspection and Audit of MOE with a small manpower of 24 Inspectors is responsible for periodic qualitative and quantitative evaluation of non-government schools. Each zone has two Inspectors and two Assistant Inspectors to inspect all schools covered by the zones.

At the school level, in case of non-government secondary schools, School Management Committees (SMC), and at the intermediate college level in case of non-government colleges, Governing Bodies (GB), formed as per government directives, are responsible for mobilising resources, approving budgets, controlling expenditures; and appointing and disciplining staff.

In government secondary schools there does not exist any SMC. The Head Master is solely responsible for running the school and is supervised by the Deputy Director of the respective zone. PTAs however exist essentially for ensuring a better teaching learning environment.

In NGO run schools also there does not exist any SMC. The style of management differs depending upon differences in policies pursued by different NGOs. Some are centrally managed within a highly bureaucratic set up while others enjoy considerable autonomy.

While teachers of non-government secondary schools are recruited by concerned SMCs observing relevant government rules, teachers of government secondary schools are recruited centrally by the DSHE through a competitive examination. Different NGOs pursue different policies regarding recruitment of teachers. Some NGOs prepare a panel of prospective teachers on the basis of a rigorous test, and recruit teachers from the above panel, while some NGOs recruit teachers from the locally available interested persons, rather informally.

The Directorate of Technical Education (DTE) is responsible for planning, development and implementation of technical and vocational education in the country.

Universities in Bangladesh are autonomous bodies administered by statutory bodies such as Syndicate, Senate, Academic Council etc. in accordance with provisions laid down in their respective Acts.

### **2.1.3 Budgeting**

Education in Bangladesh is basically state financed. Government allocations to the education sector out of its revenue and development budgets primarily finance educational expenditures. Given the low revenue / GDP ratio, the government however is heavily dependent on external sources for financing its development budget. External aid finances more than 50 percent of government development expenditures on education.

The full costs of government primary schools are borne by the government. The government also pays 90 percent of base teacher salaries of non-government registered primary schools. Besides, the non-government schools also receive grants from the government for repair of school building. The Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) decides which school to receive grant and disburses the money. Students in both government and non-government registered schools receive free textbooks.

Virtually, the full costs of government secondary schools are borne by the government as the students pay only a nominal fee. The non-government secondary schools also receive substantial support from the government. The government pays 90 percent of basic salaries, house rent and medical allowances to teachers appointed against sanctioned posts of all recognised non-government secondary schools. In addition, the government provides occasional grants for construction and maintenance, teacher training at training institutes, and also stipend to female students of classes VI to X of schools located in non-municipal areas. Student fees and income from other sources meet the remaining resource needs.

Although the government virtually bears the full costs of government primary and secondary schools, and also provides free text books to primary school students, there still remain other costs such as uniforms, educational supplies, transportation, etc. Those still have to be borne by the parents. Moreover, in a country like Bangladesh, where nearly half the population lives below poverty line, the opportunity cost of education in terms of foregone income that could be derived from child labour is not insignificant. The government therefore had to intervene with programmes like Food for Education, Primary Education Stipend Project, and Stipend for Girl Students at secondary schools.

Public universities, which charge nominal tuition fees from the students, are almost entirely state financed.. Private universities on the other hand receive no financial support from the government, and run their academic programmes charging high tuition fees from their students. Table 1 presents the level of central government expenditure on education while Table 2 presents the distribution of revenue and development expenditures on education by sub-sectors.

**Table: 1****Trends in the Level of Central Government Expenditure on Education  
(Percentage of GDP\*)**

Fiscal Year	Revenue Expenditure	Development Expenditure	Total Expenditure
1973-1980 average	0.63	0.27	0.9
1981-1985 average	0.73	0.23	1.0
1986-1990 average	1.03	0.30	1.3
1991	1.06	0.16	1.2
1992	1.14	0.21	1.4
1993	1.34	0.47	1.8
1994	1.36	0.66	2.0
1995	1.30	1.06	2.4
1996	1.30	0.83	2.1
1997	1.30	0.90	2.2
1998	1.39	0.77	2.2

Source: BBS and various budget documents, quoted in World Bank,(1999)

\* Based on the revised national accounts series.

**Table: 2****Percentage Distribution of Public Revenue and Development Expenditures on  
Education by Sub-Sectors**

Fiscal Years	Primary	Secondary	Technical	University	NFE	Others	Total
Revenue Expenditures							
91/92	48.2	36.8	2.4	8.5	-	4.1	100
92/93	44.6	40.6	2.3	7.9	-	4.6	100
93/94	45.4	42.3	2.3	8.2	-	1.8	100
95/96	43.8	42.6	2.1	8.0	-	3.6	100
96/97	43.5	42.9	2.1	7.9	-	3.6	100
97/98	43.0	46.5	1.5	7.4	-	1.6	100
98/99 (B)	41.6	48.4	1.4	7.1	-	1.5	100
Development Expenditures							
91/92	40.1	23.5	7.3	22.3	-	6.8	100
92/93	66.0	20.5	2.1	7.1	1.2	3.1	100
93/94	68.2	18.9	1.9	9.3	0.9	0.8	100
94/95	52.6	41.0	0.4	0.8	2.7	2.5	100
95/96	45.6	43.6	0.6	3.7	2.9	3.6	100
96/97	24.2	57.4	1.7	10.9	4.7	1.1	100
97/98	26.8	45.2	2.2	13.3	9.2	3.3	100
98/99 (B)	47.3	32.4	3.3	5.3	8.6	3.1	100

Source: Revised budget estimates from Demands for Grants and Appropriations (Non-Development) 1991-99 and ADP 1991-99, as quoted in World Bank,(1999)

B= Budget estimates

Development expenditure on education consistently increased up to 1995 to 1.06 percent of GDP from the 1973-1980 average of 0.27 percent, raising total expenditure to a peak of 2.4 percent of GDP in 1995 which since then slid down to 2.2 percent in 1998 primarily due to a fall in development expenditure in education. Revenue expenditure increased from 1973-1980 average of 0.63 percent of GDP to 1.39 percent in 1998. Education sector's share in total government expenditures increased from 11.8 percent in FY 1990 to 18.6 percent in FY 1996. From FY 1997 through FY 1999, education sector's share remained stable, around 16 percent of total government expenditures. [World Bank, 1999]

Primary and secondary education together accounted for 90 and 80 percent of total revenue and development expenditures respectively of the education sector in 1998-99, registering an increase over their combined shares of 85 percent and 63.6 percent of revenue and development expenditures respectively in 1991-92. The share of primary education in revenue budget however consistently declined from 48.2 percent in 1991-92 to 41.6 percent in 1998-99 while secondary education sector's share increased from 36.8 percent in 1991-92 to 48.4 percent in 1998-99. Real public spending per student per annum declined in primary education while the opposite trend may be observed in case of secondary education.

A look into the composition of public current expenditures on primary education reveals that teacher salaries in government primary schools and grants for salary subvention for non-government primary schools together accounted for 96.7 percent of total current spending on primary education in 1998, operation and maintenance accounting for only 3.3 percent. Its share, earlier, was even lower, 1.1 percent in 1992. As O & M expenditure also include expenditure on a fairly large educational bureaucracy, very little is actually left for spending on pedagogical inputs other than textbooks.

Development expenditures in primary education are spent largely on building physical facilities including renovation of damaged schools and improving physical facilities.

Staff compensation dominates current expenditures, also in case of secondary education as 79 percent of revenue expenditure for secondary education go towards teacher subvention payments to non-government secondary schools. Grants from the development budget are primarily for construction.

Reflected by the stable shares of different sub-sectors in the education budget (Table 2.2) revenue expenditures appear to be set by precedent rather than rational planning and tend to follow the previous year's pattern. Development expenditures however, show large variations in sub-sectoral shares, primarily due to varying commitments of donor and lending agencies (World Bank, 1999).

Budgetary allocations towards O & M for primary schools are a fixed small amount and bear no relationship to actual needs.

There exist well-defined guidelines for allocation of teacher subvention payments to non-government schools. Entitlement of a school for subvention payment is subject to

satisfying certain conditions e.g. receipt of government recognition; recruitment of teachers as per specified rules; enrolment of a minimum number of students; use of government approved curriculum; acceptance of government approved accounts and audit system; satisfactory student performance in examinations; and the presence of a properly constituted School Management Committees. Every month all teachers of a school jointly submit a bill for their salary duly approved by the Chairman and Member-Secretary (the headmaster) and the salaries are paid directly to teachers' accounts in a designated nationalised commercial bank.

In case of government schools, DSHE places funds directly to the schools. The Head Master serves as the drawing and disbursing officer. The schools charge tuition fees at a nominal rate fixed by the government, which are deposited with the Government Treasury. For meeting other expenditures, the schools charge an annual fee, and a tiffin fee for supplying tiffin to students. The school authorities enjoy some degree of autonomy in charging the above fees.

Technical education received a small share in the revenue budget hovering around 2 percent of total revenue expenditure on education during the nineties. Its share in the development budget fluctuated widely, from 7.3 percent in 1991/92 to 0.4 percent in 1994/95. In recent years an increasing trend reflecting higher priority attached to the sector is being observed.

The share of universities in the revenue budget for education hovered around 7-8 percent during the nineties. In terms of allocation of development expenditures to this sector, wide fluctuations may be observed, ranging from 0.8 percent in 1994/95 to 22.3 percent in 1991/92.

## **2.2 Profiles of Different Components of the Education Sector in Bangladesh**

### **2.2.1 Primary Education**

Table 3 presents data on number of primary schools, enrolment and number of teachers, with gender breakdown for the period, 1991-2000.

**Table 3**  
**No. of Schools, Enrolment, and no. of Teachers in Primary Schools 1991-2000**  
**(in thousands)**

	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
<b>1. No. of primary schools</b>										
a. Total	50	50	53	56	60	63	63	64	63*	62*
b. Government	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	38	23*
c. Non-government	12	12	15	18	22	25	25	25	38	22*
i) Registered	9	9	9	15	17	21*	21*	23*	25	2
ii) Unregistered	3	3	6	3	5	4	4	2	24	2
<b>2. Enrolment in Primary Schools</b>										
a. Total	12635	13017	14067	15181	17284	17580	18032	18361 **	17622 **	17668 **
b. Boys	6910	7048	7525	8048	9094	9219	9365	9577	9065	9059
c. Girls	5725	5969	6542	7133	8190	8361	8667	8784	8557	8609
<b>3. No. of teachers in government primary schools</b>										
a. Total	160	157	158	159	159	161	158	153	158	158
b. Males	126	123	120	119	116	116	114	105	105	104
c. Females	34	34	38	40	43	45	44	48	53	54

Source: *GOB (2000), GOB (2001)*

\* *with community schools*

\*\* *estimated*

From the table, one can notice that substantial progress has been made in improving the access of children to primary education. Enrolment increased from 12.6 million in 1991 to 18.4 million in 1998. While the number of government primary schools remained unchanged at 38,000, no. of non-government primary schools increased from 12,000 to 26,000 over this period with 23,000 already receiving government recognition. The sharp increase in non-government schools has been primarily in response to meeting unmet needs for primary education, in the wake of enactment of Compulsory Primary Education Act in 1990 as local communities organised their own schools. NGOs also played an active role in promoting education in poor villages without schools.

The Fifth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) that accorded highest priority to primary education set a target of achieving gross enrolment rate of 110 percent, and net enrolment rate of 95 percent by the year 2002 ( Planning Commission, 1998). A nation wide survey conducted by CAMPE in 1998 revealed that although high level of gross enrolment rate had already been achieved (107 percent for both sexes-109 percent for girls and 104 percent for

boys), net enrolment rate stood much behind, at 77 percent only (78.6 percent for girls and 75.5 percent for boys). Thus, in 1998, 23 percent of children, 6-10 years of age, did not have access to primary education. Marked regional variation in net enrolment rate was observed. With 82.6 percent net enrolment rate Khulna led while Chittagong lagged far behind with 74 percent. (CAMPE-UPL, 1999). Net enrolment rate for slum children of Dhaka city was found to be only around 60 percent-considerably lower compared even to their rural counterparts (UNICEF,1998).

Enrolment rates significantly varied by socio-economic groups as well. A sizeable number of children from very poor households were never enrolled in primary schools, and many of those enrolled dropped out before completing the full five year cycle as their families depended on child labour for survival. Although there has been some reduction in drop out rate from 38 percent in 1995 to 35 percent in 1998, ( Planning Commission, 2000) it still remains considerably high, and needless to mention that drop out rate is significantly higher amongst children from poorer households.

In order to improve the access of children of poorer households to primary education, and also for reducing the drop out rate amongst them, in 1993-94, an innovative scheme called the Food for Education Programme that provides up to 15 kilograms of wheat to land less very poor households for sending their children regularly to schools was introduced in 460 economically and educationally backward Unions . By 1999-2000, its coverage expanded to 17403 schools in 1247 Unions benefiting 2.3 million students belonging to 2.2 million households (GOB, 2001). In the remaining 3208 Unions a stipend programme for students from the poorer households was introduced in April, 2000. Under this programme, the poorest 40 percent students are provided with a stipend valued at Tk.. 25 per month. In FY 2000-2001, the programme benefited 3.2 million students at a cost of Tk. 1420 million.

The drop out rate came down to 35% in 1999. Repeater rate however remained quite high, at 38 percent. That means, on the average, a child needed 6.6 years to complete the 5-year primary education cycle. Attendance rate at 62 percent could hardly be called satisfactory.

Significant improvement in 'quantity' as indicated by increased enrolment rate, and reduced drop out rate were not however matched by improvement in 'quality'. The objective of primary education being development of basic competencies i.e. learning (language and numeracy) and life skills (including values and attitude) amongst children so as to enable them effectively pursue further education/active and productive life in society, in order to throw light on quality of education received by children passing through the primary education they were assessed for basic competencies. The CAMPE Survey found that in 1998 only 29 percent of children could satisfy the minimum levels in all four competency areas, viz. reading, writing, numeracy, and life skills/knowledge. Compared to 27 percent in 1993, the above finding no doubt indicates to some improvement in the quality of primary education, but it still remained at a deplorably low level.

The CAMPE Survey found considerable regional variation in learning achievement, and also by gender, rural-urban residence, and type of schools. Boys performed better than girls. Children from urban areas did better than their rural counterparts. The level of basic education was the highest in Khulna, and lowest in Chittagong.. Students studying in the primary section of secondary schools showed the best performance. It was also observed that with increase in the level of education, and economic status of parents that allowed access to private coaching and different types of communication, students' performance directly varied.

The CAMPE Survey also found that although there has been some improvement in learning achievement of primary students over the period 1993-98, such improvement was confined to rural areas only as a declining trend was observed in the urban areas.

Limited number of contact hours-daily school time of 120 minutes for classes I- II, and 240 minutes for classes III-V; high student-teacher ratios increasing over time due to surge in enrolment; over crowding of class rooms; and poor motivation of teachers burdened with many non-academic and non school responsibilities assigned to them encroaching upon their limited school hours are some of the recognised causes of poor quality of primary education in Bangladesh.

## 2.2.2 Secondary and Higher Secondary Education

Table 4 presents the number of institutions, students, and teachers, at junior secondary, secondary and higher secondary levels.

**Table 4: Number of Institutions, Students and Teachers**

Year	No.of Institutions			Enrolment			No.of Teachers		
	Junior Secondary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Junior Secondary	Secondary	Higher Secondary	Junior Secondary	Secondary	Higher Secondary
1990	2311	8137		245380	2748350		18669	104227	
1991	2000	8715		212646	2943473		16989	112627	
1992	1962	9038		284806	3463236		12819	113399	
1993	1905	9190		341975	3809515		12435	114259	
1994	2136	9352		574343	3960459		18417	116760	
1995	2349	9663	603	494692	4620759	193796	15109	124950	10638
1996	2554	9901	733	594510	5021390	226947	18118	136560	12932
1997	3070	10776	901	632211	5492114	253846	19309	137768	15913
1998	3517	10776	1130	740668	5503114	255817	21884	138293	19963
1999	3024	12269	1316	698504	6681212	327414	19885	155712	23819
2000	2846	12614	1422	616094	6620845	347986	17803	156094	2463
2001	2846	12614	1422	620254	6704857	350676	18042	157722	24699

Source: GOB, (2000), and GOB, (2001)

The marked increase enrolment and completion rates at primary level during the nineties significantly increased the enrolment rates at the secondary level. Enrolment in secondary schools (including junior secondary schools) increased from 5.59 million in 1996 to 7.38 million in 1999 i.e. by 32 percent. Over the same period the number of schools also increased from 12455 to 15293. Gross enrolment rate increased from 34.85 percent (33.33 percent for girls) in 1996 to 41.26 percent (44.57 percent for girls) in 1999, which clearly indicates to an improvement in access to secondary education particularly for girls, thanks to introduction of a Stipend Programme for Girls studying at secondary

schools located outside the municipal areas. In 1999, Gross enrolment rate at junior secondary level was 55.7 percent (57.6 percent for girls). At secondary level it dropped down to 40.6 percent (40.2 percent for girls), and at higher secondary level, gross enrolment rate sharply dropped down to 19.9 percent (15.0 percent for girls).

One may notice significant regional variation in gross enrolment rate at secondary level - ranging from 57.40 percent in Barisal Division to only 28.69 percent in Sylhet Division. (BANBEIS, 2001).

The improvement in access to secondary education has however been shared inequitably as UNDP Human Development Report points out, " the bottom 20 percent (of families ) receive only 6 percent of the benefits of secondary education; the top 20 percent receive 35 percent of the benefits." This has been because, non school costs for uniform, transportation, especially private coaching on top of tuition fees, raising cost of schooling significantly serve as effective barriers to access of children from poorer families to secondary education.

Another reason for relatively poorer access to secondary education by children from poor families is that the secondary schools mostly belonging to the private sector had not been set up on the basis of any school mapping exercise. Backward and poorer regions might not be served by any secondary school at all whereas in prosperous regions there might have been a proliferation of non-viable sub-standard schools.

In 1999, drop out rates at Junior Secondary, and Secondary levels were 21.3 percent (18.4 percent for girls), and 52.1 percent (57.9 percent for girls) respectively. Repetition rates were 10.5 percent at junior secondary (8.0 percent for girls), and 15.1 percent at secondary ( 14.3 percent) levels respectively.

Quality of secondary education defined as learning achievements during the secondary level may be ascertained at the exit point on the basis of results of the S.S.C. examination. Unfortunately however, for a variety of reasons e.g. (i) subvention payment to non-government schools depending on school's performance in the S.S.C. examination, quite often a sizeable number of students are not sent up lest they fare badly; (ii) for the same reason many teachers serving as Invigilators at different examination centres often facilitate and encourage copying by the examinees; (iii) the examination itself is fraught with problems -emphasises memorisation of factual information rather than testing analytical capability; (iv) heavy reliance on private coaching prior to S.S.C. examination, the S.S.C. results hardly reflect the learning achievements of students.

Even if S.S.C. results are accepted as an indicator of quality of secondary education , the high rates of failures in S.S.C. examinations reflect poor quality of education imparted at the secondary level. In 2001, the percentage of pass was 35 only. Relatively higher failure rates in English and Mathematics indicate to gross deficiency in teaching of these subjects at secondary schools.

Introduction of a second shift in many government and non-government secondary schools, particularly in cities, led to reduction in contact hours to only four and a half per school day. Increasing student-teacher ratios in many schools due to fast growth of secondary enrolment; stringent government regulations relating to sanctioning of teaching posts (one post is sanctioned to a class of 60 students, and a second position is not sanctioned unless the class size reaches 120); inadequate physical infra-structural facilities; faulty recruitment (recruitment of teachers with expertise having little relevance to teaching at school level); too few inspections; and above all, generally poor academic qualifications, training and motivation of teachers are some of the recognised causes of poor quality of education at secondary level. The National Education Survey (Post-Primary) 1999 conducted by BANBEIS revealed that 61.24% of all teachers of secondary schools attained their highest academic certificate/degree in 3<sup>rd</sup> Division/Class, and only 2.51% attained their highest academic certificate/degree in first Division/Class. Only 37.3% of all teachers of secondary schools were trained.

Two-year higher secondary education is imparted in intermediate colleges and intermediate sections of degree colleges. In 1998-99, students enrolled for higher secondary education numbered 9,75,670 (2,68,584 in 1130 intermediate colleges, and 7,77,086 in 816 degree colleges). Only 284 colleges (including 255 degree colleges) belonged to the public sector while the rest were non-government colleges. Female enrolment in intermediate colleges increased from 42.37 percent in 1997 to 47.49 percent in 1999 indicating an improvement in the access of girls to higher secondary education.

The quality of education as reflected by the results of H.S.C. examinations seem rather ambiguous and raises serious doubts about the examination system. In 1996, the pass percentage was 24.77 only, whereas in 1999, it more than doubled reaching 53.45 percent for reasons not known.

### **2.2.3 Madrasah Education**

In 1999, there operated 7122 Madrasahs offering post primary education in Bangladesh. Total enrolment was 15,87,373 (accounting for 14.90% of total post primary enrolment) of which 6,38,531 (40.2%) were girls. Rural areas accounted for 91.49% of total Madrasah enrolment. 73,676 teachers taught at Madrasahs, of which 3.2% were females. Compared to secondary schools, the Madrasahs seemed to have a relatively better qualified teaching staff. Of all teachers, majority, 50.58% attained their highest academic certificate/degree in second Division/Class. Majority teachers (61.24%) of secondary schools, it may be recalled, attained their highest academic qualification in 3<sup>rd</sup> Division/Class. Only 7.3% of Madrasah teachers were however trained, compared to 37.3% in case of secondary school teachers. There existed only 3 Madrasahs in the public sector offering education upto "kamil" i.e. Masters level. All other Madrasahs belonged to the private sector, of which 692 (9.72%) were exclusively for girls.

Over the period 1983-1999, at secondary level Madrasah education registered high rate of growth. Number of Dakhil Madrasahs registered an annual growth rate of 7.04% compared to 2%, and 3.95% in case of junior secondary and secondary schools respectively. Over the same period, annual growth rate of enrolment had been 14.1%,

5.25%, and 7.34% in case of Dakhil Madrasah, Junior Secondary, and Secondary schools respectively.

Education imparted in the above Madrasah education sector is a blend of both secular education taught at the general stream, and religious education.

Madrasah Education Board is responsible for conducting all public examinations-Dakhil, Alim, Fazil, and Kamil Examinations, and the pass percentage at the above examinations in 1998 were 64.88, 52.94, 78.56, and 85.79 respectively. The same year the pass percentage at S.S.C. examination was 47.96.

Although equivalence of different levels of Madrasah and general education have already been established that allows movement of students from one stream to another, as Madrasah graduates are yet to be allowed to sit for the B.C.S Examination, the nation does not benefit from the services of the Madrasah graduates at certain levels, and there occurs a sharp drop in enrolment, particularly from Fazil to Kamil level. Enrolment at different levels of Madrasah education in 1998 were, 9,40,055 in Ebtedayee Madrasahs i.e at primary level, 11,98,500 in Dakhil Madrasahs i.e. at Junior and Secondary level, 3, 34,250 in Alim Madrasahs i.e at Higher Secondary level, 2,94,900 in Fazil Madrasahs i.e at under-graduate level, and 46,000 at Kamil Madrasahs i.e at graduate level.

In addition to the above government recognized and state supported Madrasah education stream there also exists a separate stream known as Qawmi/Kharezi Madrasah stream which imparts only religious education, essentially in a non formal manner. About the size of this sector i.e. number of institutions and enrolment, and also about their activities and sources of finance very little however is known.

#### **2.2.4 Education at Degree Colleges**

In 1998-99, students enrolled at degree level in degree colleges numbered 4,56,267. Out of 2,32,709 students who appeared at degree (pass) examination in 1998, 37.08 percent passed. Percentage of pass was much higher at degree (honours) examination. Out of 21,452 examinees 83.31 percent passed.

Colleges suffer from inadequate infra-structural facilities (libraries and laboratories), and lack of qualified teachers.

#### **2.2.5 University Education**

In 1999, Bangladesh had 13 public and 16 private universities with a total enrolment of 76,535 of which 20 percent were females.

Because of limited number of seats in public universities, and high tuition fees charged by the private universities, access to university education is rather limited in Bangladesh.

Private universities with a limited number of full time faculty members depend heavily on part-time teachers drawn primarily from public universities, which adversely affect quality of education in those universities. With a few notable exceptions, most private

universities impart education of uncertain quality, and mentioned earlier, because of high tuition fees charged by such institutions, they cater to only the affluent sections in the society. Public universities, primarily dependent on limited government funding shrinking in real terms, unable to generate additional resources by raising tuition fees due to political constraints, are hardly in a position to improve their quality of education through greater investment in libraries and laboratories. Moreover, many democratic provisions of the University Acts such as those related to electing Deans, Vice Chancellors, Syndicate and Senate members, by keeping a large number of teachers always busy in active politics, and in election related activities, not only encroach upon the limited teaching time of the faculty members but also fail to ensure accountability of the teachers as those responsible for ensuring discipline have to depend on votes of the delinquent teachers for maintaining their positions, that contributes to lengthening of session jams - a unique feature of public universities in Bangladesh. Moreover, as it happens quite often, 'voters', not 'teachers' are recruited that adversely affect the quality of university education.

Another serious problem confronted in university education of Bangladesh is the tradition of active participation of students in national politics as members of student fronts of the major political parties. Inter and intra party feuds leading to violent clashes not only vitiate the academic environment in the campus, but also quite often result in significant loss of academic time that contributes to lengthening of session jams.

As there hardly exists any linkage between public universities on the one hand, and employers and the job market on the other, many university graduates, produced at considerable cost to the society, (public universities being almost entirely state financed with little sharing of costs by the beneficiaries), have to remain unemployed for a considerable period of time before they find employment often in areas outside their fields of study. Private universities on the other hand remain confined only to a few disciplines that have high market demand.

### **2.2.6 Technical Education**

The need for technical and vocational education in enhancing productivity of labour through skill formation can hardly be over emphasised. Until mid nineties, vocational education in Bangladesh was imparted in 51 Vocational Training Institutes (VTI) operated by the Ministry of Education, and 11 Technical Training Centres (TTC) run by the Ministry of Labour and Employment. As indicated by different studies, vocational education imparted in these institutions could hardly play an effective role in producing adequate number of skilled workers for our industries. In addition to the above government institutions, several NGOs and private institutions are also engaged in producing skilled workers. Given the total needs of skilled manpower in the country however the capacity of the above institutions seems much too inadequate.

The main problem with technical education in Bangladesh is lack of linkages to employers and the job market. Employers complain that the training institutions do not produce skills they require. The rigid and highly centralised training system limits the possibilities of capitalising on local responsibilities and initiatives. Technical education

being quite expensive, as the government has to shoulder the entire financial burden, the beneficiaries-students and enterprises sharing no cost at all, equipment and consumable supplies remain chronically under financed adversely affecting the quality of technical education in the country.

Since mid nineties, in order to promote vocational education alongside general education, at secondary level, S.S.C. (Vocational) Course has been introduced in a number of non government secondary schools, funded entirely by government's own resources in the absence of necessary donor support. Different studies indicate that the programme enjoyed considerable support at local level, as people think that exposure to vocational education would contribute to generating interest in manual work besides acquisition of higher levels of skill. There however exists serious reservation about whether the above programme would at all be able to contribute to producing skills employable in industries particularly in the absence of adequately skilled instructors at the school level and curriculum acceptable to employers, and lack of necessary training materials.

### **3.0 Key Issues that need to be addressed**

Based on the above discussion, for improved functioning of the education sector with a view to enhancing its role in promoting growth with equity in Bangladesh, the CPD Task Force on Education Policy has identified the following as key issues that need to be addressed during the next term of the government. The issues of access, equity and quality however being intertwined have to be looked at in totality in an integrated manner, and the strategies to address them must also look at the key areas simultaneously, not in a piecemeal fashion.

### **3.1 Primary Education**

#### **3.1.1 Access**

Since provision of universal primary education has been recognised by the Bangladesh Constitution as a state responsibility, and Compulsory primary Education Law has already been enacted towards that end, it is extremely important to find ways and means to bring all school age children to primary schools.

CAMPE Survey conducted in 1998 found that the net enrolment at primary education in Bangladesh was 77 percent. That means, in 1998, 23 percent of all children of Bangladesh aged 6-10 did not have access to primary education. The corresponding figure for Chittagong region was 26 percent, and in the urban slums of Dhaka the extent of deprivation turned out to be as high as 40 percent.

### **3.1.2 Equity**

Those left out included the working children from extremely poor households, physically and mentally handicapped, urban slum dwellers, residents of inaccessible rural areas, tribals, adivasis etc.

### **3.1.3 Quality**

There exists at present no mechanism for assessing learning achievement at primary level. A nation wide survey conducted by CAMPE found that in 1998, only 29 percent of primary students achieved certain basic competencies. Although it was slightly higher compared to 27 percent achieved in 1993, it can hardly be called satisfactory. Even this slight improvement was confined only to rural areas, as quality of primary education registered a marked decline in urban areas. Children from poorer families obviously suffered most from the above declining standard of education in urban primary schools.

### **3.1.4 Relevance**

Although by effecting necessary reforms in the curriculum of primary education, it was possible to widen the scope for primary education to play an increasingly important role in the national economy, failure to significantly improve its quality has contributed little to enhance its relevance.

### **3.1.5 Efficiency**

Although the drop out rate came down to 35 percent in 1999, it still remains quite high. The CAMPE Survey revealed that the average attendance at schools was 62 percent only. 38 percent students repeated their courses. As a result it took 6.6 years to complete the five year course. All these indicate to poor efficiency of the system.

## **3.2 Secondary Education**

### **3.2.1 Access**

In a world of global market competition, the secondary level has become part of basic education that should be universally available. In Bangladesh, however, as most secondary schools belong to the private sector operating generally on commercial considerations, while prosperous regions experience a proliferation of such schools, many poor regions remain totally un-served by any secondary school that acts as an effective barrier to access of children to secondary education. Net enrolment ratios at 48.6 percent, 30.2 percent, and 16.2 percent at junior secondary, secondary, and higher secondary levels respectively can hardly be called satisfactory. Although gender disparity has significantly been removed up to secondary level, thanks to the stipend programme for girls, girls' enrolment at higher secondary level is considerably lower compared to boys'. At junior secondary level on the other hand boys' enrolment rate is lower compared to

girls'. The key issue therefore is how to significantly improve access of children to secondary education, and at the same time remove all existing gender disparities at different levels of secondary education.

### **3.2.2 Equity**

The problem of equity is worse compared to primary education. Tuition fees and other costs (for school uniform, text books, transport, private coaching etc) of secondary education including considerable opportunity costs serve as effective barriers to access for children from poorer households. Moreover, at this level of education, the social divide also gets prominently displayed. An elite mostly English medium system that functions with a degree of efficiency, and a mass system (bifurcated into a secular stream and a religious stream) considered largely dysfunctional are observed to coexist.

### **3.2.3 Quality**

Quality of education as reflected by performance of students at public examinations can hardly be called satisfactory. In 2001, nearly two thirds of all students who sat for the S.S.C. Examination failed.

### **3.2.4 Relevance**

Both in adequately preparing the students for higher education, and for meeting the manpower needs of the economy, secondary education in Bangladesh could hardly play an effective role.

### **3.2.5 Efficiency**

With drop out rates at 21.3 percent, and 52.1 percent at junior secondary, and secondary levels respectively in 1999, and failure rate at 65 percent at S.S.C. Examination in 2001, one can definitely raise questions about efficiency of our secondary education system.

## **3.3 Tertiary Education**

### **3.3.1 Access**

Access cannot be universal at this level, but it has to expand substantially to meet the challenges of today's knowledge economy and information society. In 1999, compared to total enrolment of 12,47,674 at higher Secondary level, enrolment at degree and masters levels were 6,50,277, and 74,979 respectively. Girls seem to have much lower access to tertiary education. At degree and masters level, they accounted for 32.6, and 26.3 percent of total enrolment at corresponding levels respectively.

### **3.3.2 Equity**

Equity is a major concern. Inequities at the previous levels are magnified by highly subsidized public education at tertiary level. Access to private universities being restricted only to those who can pay extremely high tuition fees, only the children from affluent families can get themselves enrolled in such universities.

### **3.3.3 Quality**

Quality is a serious problem in tertiary education even at universities, both public and private. The University Grants Commission (UGC) has miserably failed in discharging its role as a guardian of public universities, and as a promoter of quality. It has also failed to institute a self-regulatory accreditation system for private universities.

### **3.3.4 Relevance**

In the absence of any linkage between public universities (with the exception of a few Departments like Business Administration, Pharmacy etc.) and the job market, education imparted at public universities had little relevance to the needs of the economy. Private universities on the other hand responded only to market signals, relevant to the economy in the short run, and neglected long term interests of the economy.

### **3.3.5 Efficiency**

Long session jams, a characteristic feature of public universities, is a clear indicator of inefficient management of public universities of Bangladesh.

## **3.4 Vocational and Technical Education**

Scope and access to vocational and technical education need to be much wider. Most critical vocational preparation in today's globalized economy is a grounding in science, mathematics, and language skills offered through sound general secondary education. Those who do not go for secondary education or drop out-a large number- need to have access to flexible and market responsive skill development opportunities. Public-private partnerships are especially important for this purpose. For older adolescents without basic education-again a large number- a second chance that combines general education and skill formation need to be provided.

## **3.5 Non-formal and Continuing Education**

With large non-participation and drop-out in primary and secondary education and an overall low literacy level of the people, there is a huge need for non-formal and continuing education. Supported by large external funding, a vigorous movement has already been launched by the government in this particular area of literacy and post literacy education in the form of Total Literacy Movement (TLM) and other Non Formal Education (EFE) programmes. Unfortunately, however, a total neglect of effective

performance standards, quality criteria, inept management and large scale corruption combined with official declarations of increase in literacy every other month have turned these efforts into a meaningless farce and a source of huge waste of public resources.

A proper literacy and continuing education programme-the foundation of life-long learning-with enforceable quality criteria and performance standards is very much needed.

#### **4.0 Priority Action Points**

On the basis of experience in countries which have registered rapid progress in education and national development as well as independent studies and analyses, the Task Force recommends the following key measures to address the nexus of access, equity, and quality at different levels of education, and also for enhancing the relevance of education, and efficiency of the delivery mechanism.

##### **4.1. Mobilization of additional resources and ensuring their efficient utilization:**

The education sector in Bangladesh, at present, is seriously under-resourced lacking the threshold of per capita expenditure needed at different levels to maintain a minimum acceptable standard of performance, resulting in wastage of most of what is spent now. At the same time systemic measures are needed (suggested below) that would create conditions for cost-effective use of resources.

The Task Force, therefore, strongly recommends enhancement of allocation of public resources to education sector by reducing /capping at current level (in absolute terms) expenditure on unproductive sectors, such that its share gets gradually raised to 5 percent of GDP from its current level around 2 percent, by the end of the five year term.

Regarding the source of additional resources needed for the education sector, it may be mentioned that there already exist a number of avenues. With increasing market orientation of the economy where private sector is expected to play the leading role in the economic arena, there has developed a scope for dismantling/restructuring of a number of unnecessary public institutions such as TCB, the State Trading Organization, and many sector corporations. Revenue thus saved, and additional revenue mobilized through imposition of a new tax called Education Tax; and enhancement of tuition fees at all public educational institutions, with generous provision of scholarships for meritorious needy students, would surely contribute to mobilization of additional resources for the education sector.

Given the current low level, and declining trend in per student expenditure at primary level, adversely affecting the quality of education, and also for making provision for raising the duration of primary education to eight years i.e. upto class VIII, the share of primary education in total education budget has to be enhanced.

Share of secondary education in total education budget increased over the last few years but most of it went to pay salary to the teachers. Increased allocation to secondary

education must go for improving library and laboratory facilities, teacher training, and teaching aids to improve the quality of education.

## **4.2 Decentralization**

Although Bangladesh has in the recent past experienced considerable administrative decentralization in the arena of primary education ( many important decisions are now taken at the Upazila level), the school authorities who are primarily responsible for delivery of the education services at the school level enjoy very limited power and authority. It is extremely important that the school authorities, particularly the Head Teacher, is given adequate power and authority commensurate with his/her responsibility. Also important is adoption of appropriate measures that would help transforming the educational administrators from playing the role of a Regulator as they are doing at present in a bureaucratic set up, to that of a Facilitator.

Management of secondary education in the public sector is highly centralized at present. Instead of implementing measures of administrative decentralization, similar to those in primary education, if the head masters of government secondary schools are given necessary power and authority so as to enable them discharge their responsibilities more effectively, educational outcomes in government secondary schools will significantly improve.

In Bangladesh, non- government secondary schools are currently being managed by their respective School Management Committees (SMC). Although the responsibility of running the school is shouldered primarily by the head master he/ she enjoys little power and authority. This anomaly needs to be removed, and the role of SMCs should ideally be transformed from that of a Regulator to a Facilitator. At present there exists no educational qualification requirement for membership of SMCs that has allowed capturing of SMCs by vested quarters in many places. The membership rules need to be amended so that only those genuinely interested in promoting education become members of SMCs. The current practice of local MP becoming Chairman of SMCs of all schools in his/her constituency should be discontinued, and none should be allowed to chair more than one SMC.

The responsibility of primary and secondary education should be vested with the local government. Towards that end , alongside setting up of local government bodies, educational authorities should also be established at an appropriate local level. The functions of these education authorities would be , mobilization of necessary resources, provision of technical assistance, and administering academic supervision. A beginning should be made towards this goal by initiating in the next five years the trial of District Education Authorities in several districts and developing a plan for its nation wide implementation.

## **4.3 Partnerships**

Although it is government that is ultimately responsible for provision of basic education for all, involvement and active participation of all stake holders including parents,

communities, private sector, businesses, NGOs, religious bodies will surely contribute to effective functioning of a nation wide learning network, besides generating additional resources for the education sector. A comprehensive approach towards building partnerships, recognizing all potentials for contribution and participation, therefore need to be properly articulated. Towards that end, the Task Force recommends reintroduction of exemptions for educational expenditures from personal income tax liability, and also for donations, personal and institutional, to education sector.

#### **4.4 Improving Management Capacity**

The huge and complex education enterprise in Bangladesh is currently being managed rather amateurishly without recognizing the need for professional and specialized skills in educational management and planning. This would in fact turn out to be a greater handicap as and when measures of decentralization would be implemented.. The Task Force recommends establishment of a system of professional development of management, planning, administration , and supervision in education along with needed reforms in recruitment, incentives, human resources management, and organizational structures to make use of professional skills in educational management and planning.

#### **4.5 A Unified-not necessarily uniform- System of Basic and Secondary Education**

The three- way division of general schools, makhtabs and madrassahs, and elite English medium schools need to be unified into a common system. This common system comprising different types of schools under different sponsorships has to ensure that a set of core knowledge and competencies are acquired by all learners in primary and secondary education. This would require a core curriculum and common core of standards regarding teaching and learning, and assessment of learner achievement- not the elimination of diversity in provisions for schooling, or control of all schools by the government.

There is also a need for increasing contact hours particularly at primary level.

The Task Force also recommends introduction of a unified science based education at secondary level in place of early specialization practised at present.

As many English medium schools and the entire Qawmi/ Kharezi Madrasah system are currently operating outside the state regulatory framework, one does not really know what exactly is happening in these institutions. The Task Force strongly feels that no educational institution whether they receive public resources or not, should be allowed to operate in Bangladesh without government recognition.

#### **4.6 Curriculum and Learning Materials**

In line with the principles of decentralization and partnership, the current centralized, "statist", control oriented, system in respect of curricula and text books must change. The task of the curriculum authorities should be to define core curricula, allowing schools and

local authorities to supplement the core. The curriculum bodies should also work with teacher training institutions and other parts of the education system to improve skills for implementing curricula in class rooms and assessing student achievements. In order to avoid the recurring fiasco and associated corruption in providing text books and learning materials, the private sector should be allowed to prepare and produce text books and other materials- with curriculum bodies remaining responsible for general approval of text books and watching compliance with the objectives of the core curricula.

#### **4.7 Teachers**

Teachers are at the core of quality improvement in education. They need to meet professional standards, have ample opportunities for continuous professional development, and must receive a living wage. In turn, teachers must be accountable for their performance, which should be subjected to professional and public assessment, and which is eventually reflected in their pupil's achievement.

Recruitment of teachers in government primary and secondary schools through competitive examinations conducted by respective Directorates ensures reasonable standards in quality of teachers. Imposition of a quota for recruitment of female teachers, 60 percent at present, has improved the participation of women ( 33.9 percent in 2000) in teaching at primary level. Most of the primary teachers have already received training. Close supervision by officers stationed at the Upazila level has contributed to significant improvement in attendance of teachers in schools. The extremely poor performance of students at government primary schools in urban areas however point to the need for specialized training, as most of the students in such schools happen to be child workers, coming from very poor households.

At the secondary level about 97 percent of secondary schools and 93 percent of teachers belong to the private sector. Although there exist well defined rules relating to recruitment of teachers in non government secondary schools, quite often under political and other influences incompetent teachers get recruited. This happens to be a major weakness of the secondary education system in Bangladesh. In the absence of an appropriate quota for recruitment of female teachers at secondary level, their participation has been rather limited, only about 17 percent in 1999. Only about 37 percent of secondary school teachers, and 7 percent of Madrasah teachers received training that points to lack of adequate training facilities at present. Adequate teacher training facilities need to be developed for training on a continuous basis both secondary school and Madrasah teachers, for raising their level of competence in view of their poor academic background. There exists a serious shortage of English, and Science ( Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry) teachers.

At the university level also, quite often , due to group politics, now linked to national politics, less qualified candidates are recruited as teachers in preference to more deserving ones. As there exists at present no institutional mechanism for ensuring accountability of teachers, quite often it is noticed that classes are not held regularly,

examinations do not take place in time, and there is inordinate delay in publication of results, all contributing to development, and lengthening of session jams.

On the basis of the above findings, the Task Force recommends setting up of a Service Commission for recruitment of secondary school teachers; imposition of an appropriate quota for recruitment of female teachers; special incentives for teachers with major in English/ Mathematics, Physics and Chemistry ; recruitment of only those who did major in Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics as Science teachers; expansion of training facilities for secondary school and Madrasah teachers; appropriate amendment of University Acts; improved facilities for research ; and academic supervision of universities, both public and private, by the UGC.

#### **4.8 Assessment of Learning**

The circus that goes on in the name of public examinations has made Bangladesh a laughing stock of the world. The infiltration of the worst forms of self-seeking and corrupt politics into education is the main cause of failure to control this rot in the educational system. Teachers and their professional organizations imbued with a sense of professional and moral responsibility, the local civil administration, and the parents need to work together to restore the integrity of examinations.

There is also a need for improving technical and professional competence and skills in the examination bodies such as the Education Boards and the National University.

Considering the sharp increase in the number of examinees there is a need for setting up a few more education boards, and decentralization of the national university.

Finally, the Task Force recommends development of an institutional mechanism for learning assessment similar to SAT.

#### **4.9 De- Politicization of Education**

The education system is in a vicious strangle hold of corrupt and partisan politics. All reform and development efforts, however sensible and well intentioned are thwarted by politics. The influence of corrupt politics is manifested in pervasive corruption in all aspects of education and in the most cynical use of students and teachers by political parties in their political struggle.

No part of education is exempt from the corrupting influence of politics--recruitment and management of personnel, production and supply of text books, public examinations, subventions to non-government institutions, construction and maintenance of schools, distribution of food-for-education, and stipends for poor students-are all fraught with all forms of corruption imaginable including bribery, stealing, influence-peddling, falsifying records, rampant cheating in examinations, appointing and promoting unqualified personnel, phantom schools and teachers in government budget and so on.

The use of students and teachers directly in partisan power struggle including raising of armed cadres, and their involvement in violence including murders, terrorism, extortion,

robbery, and other crimes worthy of any notorious crime syndicate has become the norm practised by all major political parties.

Theoretical and philosophical arguments about students' democratic rights to participate in politics and the political parties' right to organize student supporters are irrelevant in the face of the national crisis that has arisen. It is the height of irony if not hypocrisy to condone the current brand of political activism of students in the name of their democratic rights. Extraordinary situations demand extraordinary measures. The most important education reform measure would be to institute a moratorium on students' active involvement in national politics. This would require persuading political parties to agree on a moratorium on sponsorship of party-backed student fronts and to cease by common agreement the involvement of students and teachers in partisan politics for a decade. This single step would help create the condition for effective of other reforms in education.

#### **4.10 Education Policy-making**

The recent education policy statement announced by the government, both in respect of the process of its formulation and its content, is an example of how an education policy is not to be made. It has largely been a closed and non-transparent process involving mostly officials. It has been presented and adopted in the parliament without much of a debate and without making the report public. Its content has failed to address burning educational issues seriously. Specific action proposals focus on organization and duration of programmes and physical expansion rather than the difficult issues of quality assurance, relevance and outcome of education, or indicating effective measure for fulfilling the rights and entitlements of citizens in education.

The Task Force however does not recommend another policy exercise. It suggests a pragmatic approach to solving problems based on experience and relevant international lessons without the fanfare of a new policy, with ample dialogue and participation.

#### **4.11 Linkage between Education and Society**

Finally, with a view to grooming up the students as socially conscious, responsible citizens of the country, the Task Force recommends compulsory participation of all students as Volunteers in certain national development programmes for a specific period of time during their student life.

The Task Force also recommends promotion of lifelong education for all citizens of the country by non-formal means under an appropriate institutional arrangement.

Finally, the Task Force recommends spread of computer education through out the country, up to village level, using both formal and informal education systems.

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