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POLICY BRIEF
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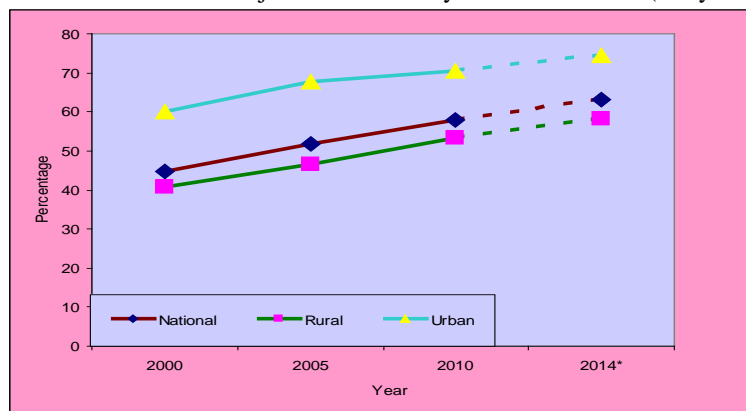
Policy Brief on Primary Education
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Equal primary education is the basic right of every citizen of the country. The affiliation between education and poverty is spherical. School enrolment and literacy rate has increased over the time in this country but the dropout rate (in urban area) is not decreasing. However, inequality has appeared as a major barrier in achieving universally acknowledged primary education in Bangladesh. Inequality in primary education exists by division, locality, gender, sex and poverty status in Bangladesh. Location based decentralized education plan must be adopted instead of public sector centralized management. Recent price hike and failure of timely implementation status of the educational allocation are also the vital cause of unequal primary education. Some structural causes for persisting unequal primary education also exist there.

Literacy Rate (<7 years of age)

Literacy rate for both sexes was 44.9 percent, 40.9 percent and 60.2 percent in 2000 that has been increased to 57.91 percent, 53.37 percent and 70.38 percent in 2010 at national, rural and urban level respectively. The annual increase rate of literacy was 1.30 percent, 1.25 percent and 1.02 percent at national, rural and urban level between 2000 and 2010. If these rates remain the same, there might be a gap of 36.89 percent, 41.64 percent and 25.55 percent of achieving the target (100 percent) of National Education Policy (NEP, 2010) by 2014 at national, rural and urban areas respectively. Furthermore, the annual increase rate of male and female literacy was 1.16 percent and 1.47 percent at national level between 2000 and 2010. Continuations of these rates indicate that, the achievement of the target of universal primary education might not be possible and there might be a gap of 34.23 percent and 39.32 percent for male and female children respectively at national level within the time limit.

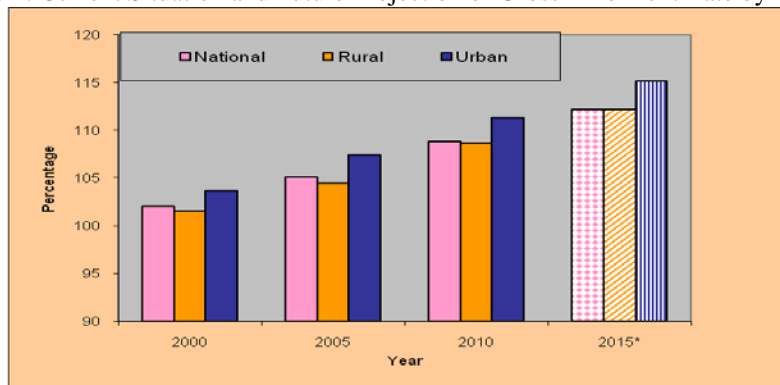
Figure 1: Current Situation and Future Projection of Literacy Rate of Children (< 7 years of age) by Locality



Gross Enrolment Ratio

Gross Enrolment Ratio for both sexes was 102.0 percent, 101.6 percent and 103.7 percent in 2000 that has been increased to 108.81 percent, 108.64 percent and 111.34 percent in 2010 at national, rural and urban level respectively. The target of National Plan for Action (NPA-ii) is to increase the Gross Enrolment Rate to 110 percent by 2015. The rate at which Gross Enrolment ratio has been increased at national level (0.68 percent) indicates the achievement of the target might be possible within the time limit. Same result is also found in case of the rural area; on the other hand, the target (110 percent) has already been achieved by this time at urban area. The Gross Enrolment ratio for female children at national, rural and urban level has already been achieved by this time. However, in the case of male children at urban areas, the target of 110 percent by 2015 might be achieved but it might not be achieved at national (108.81 percent) and rural (107.83 percent) level.

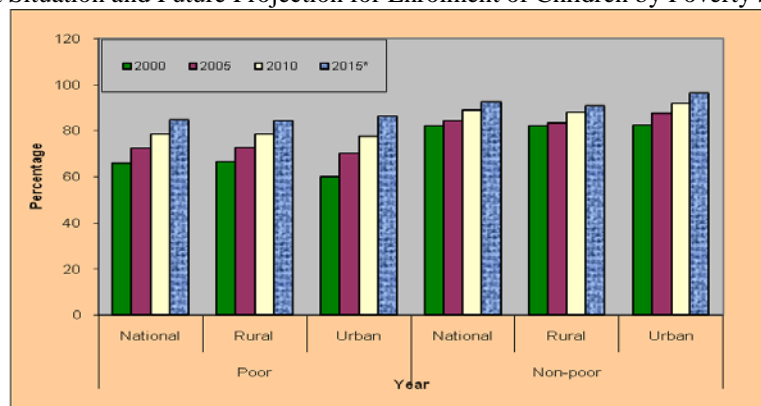
Figure 2: Current Situation and Future Projection of Gross Enrolment Rate by Locality



School Enrolment (aged 6-10 years)

The percentage of children school enrolment (aged between 6-10) for both sexes at national level was 65.7 percent and 82.2 percent in 2000 by poor and non-poor households which has been increased to 78.33 percent and 88.99 percent in 2010. The target of National Plan for Action (NPA-ii) is to increase the net enrolment rate of 95 percent by 2015. With an annual average increase rate of 1.26 percent and 0.67 percent for poor and non-poor household from 2000-2010, school enrolment at national level might be 84.65 percent and 92.39 percent in 2015 respectively.

Figure 3: Current Situation and Future Projection for Enrolment of Children by Poverty Status and Locality

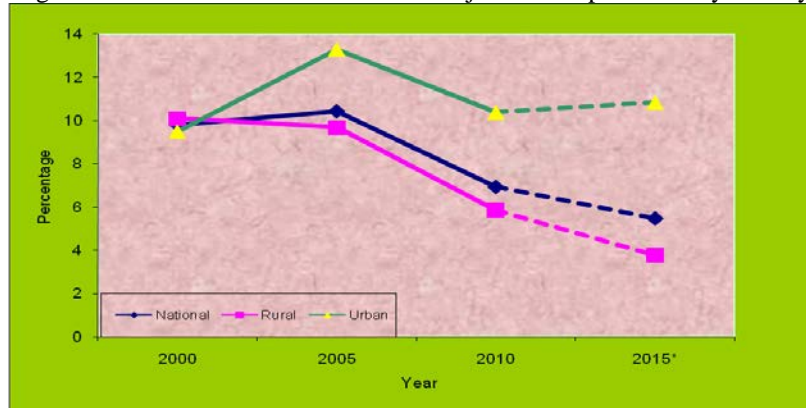


Continuation of this rate indicates the achievement of the target might not possible within the time limit for both (poor and non-poor households) at national level. At the same time, the annual increase rate of school enrolment for male children at national level was 0.94 percent and 0.72 percent for poor and non-poor household respectively. If these rates remain the same, it might be stand at 78.88 percent and 91.7 percent respectively by 2015 at national level. On the other hand, with an annual average increase rate of 1.59 percent and 0.63 percent between 2000 and 2010 for the female children at poor and non-poor household indicates that there would be a gap of 4.47 percent and 1.92 percent respectively by 2015 at national level.

Dropout Rate at Primary to Secondary Schooling

The dropout rate for both sexes was 9.8 percent and 6.93 percent at national level in 2000 and 2010 respectively. With the annual average declining rate of dropout 0.29 percent at national level, for both sex between 2000 and 2010 indicates that the target of achieving 5 percent dropouts by 2015 might be possible. Additionally, the annual average declining rate of dropout was 0.42 percent at rural level between 2000 and 2010. Continuations of these rates indicate that, it might be possible to achieve the target (5 percent) of National Plan for Action (NPA-ii) by 2015. A different scenario was found in case of the urban areas where the dropout rate is increasing. The annual average increase rate of dropout was 0.09 percent between 2000 and 2010. If this rate remains the same, there might be a gap of 5.84 percent from the target by 2015. In case of the female children, the target of 5 percent dropout has already been achieved. Meanwhile, the annual average declining rate of male dropout was 0.44 percent, 0.67 percent and 0.35 percent at national, rural and urban level respectively between 2000 and 2010. Under the business as usual scenario, there might be a gap of 3 percent, 0.41 percent and 11.53 percent from the target of 5 percent dropout by 2015 for national, rural and urban area respectively.

Figure 4: Current Situation and Future Projection Dropout Rate by locality



Student-Teacher Ratio

Every child has a right to have an improved and quality education. Improved education is largely depends on the balanced student-teacher ratio. The target of National Education Policy (NEP, 2010) is to reduce the student-teacher ratio to 30 by 2018. The student-teacher ratio was 57 in 2000 and decreased to 42.6 in 2010 with an average declining rate of 1.45 percent per annum. Under the business as usual scenario, the student- teacher ratio might be 31 in 2018, which is one percent higher than the targeted value of 30.

The Reasons for the Slower Rate of Progress in Primary Education

Although there was a progress in the primary education over the years, but the rate at which it has occurred is slower than what is expected. There might be some reasons as follows:

Structural Causes

Inequality is a part of social structure. Socio-cultural norms, religious matter and lack of parental education and less expectations for girl's education create inequality in primary education. People belonging to the lower class of the society are generally not allowed to be associated with the upper class in any way. No influencing policy is yet to be taken to address the matter of literacy towards the lower castes.

Allocation in Public Expenditure and Implementation Status

The proposed budgetary allocation for education is BDT 20,316 crore for the fiscal year 2011-2012 which is 9.31 percent higher than the revised budget of FY 2010-2011 and 12.13 percent of the national budget of FY 2011-2012. However, there is an increasing trend in educational budget but the overall educational improvement is not satisfactory due to failure of timely implementation status of educational allocation.

Economic Hardship

Still one-third (31.5 percent) of Bangladeshi people are living under poverty line. Recent price hike of essential commodities (especially, food prices) makes it difficult to maintain their livelihood. People (especially poor) spend a large part of their expenditure on food and cut off expenditure from other basic necessities like education to their children.

Geographic Isolation

Primary enrolment rate in Sylhet division is much lower (64.16 percent and 82.08 percent for poor and non-poor) compared to the other divisions. Economic deprivation, social inequalities, geographical isolation, unequal income distribution create unequal primary education. However, the economic condition is better than other division of the country. Shunamgonj's haor area is the most deprived area where students have to suffer much in dry season while the sufferings are double in wet.

Opportunity Cost of Going to School

Opportunity cost of going to school for poor and vulnerable household can be affected by two factors. Firstly, the savings in household expenses per month by not sending a child to the school and secondly, increase in household income per month by withdrawing a child from school and engaging him/her into work (Selim, 2009).

Parental Education and Net Enrolment Ratio

There is a optimistic correlation between net enrolment and parental education. The proportion of never schooled parents decreased over time from 47.7 percent, 45.4 percent, 35.4 percent and 33.3 percent in 1998, 2000, 2005 and 2008 respectively. The net enrolment rate increased for the children of both never and ever schooled parents during 1998-2005 that became stagnant in 2008 for both the groups (Education Watch Report, 2008). If the parents remain unaware, the progress in the child education remains hard to pin down.

Population growth rate and equal access to primary education

Over population is also an imperative barrier for the achievement of the expected progress in primary education. For example, in Barisal division, the average annual growth rate of population was 0.9 percent (1991-2001) which has decreased to 0 percent (2001-2011) which results high school enrolment in 2010 (91.04 percent). On the other hand, in Sylhet division, the average annual growth rate of population has increased to 2.1 percent (2001-2011) from 1.6 percent (1991-2001) (BBS, 2010); where the school enrolment is lower (73.12 percent) in 2010 (the average rate of poor and non-poor children school enrolment).

Unequal economic status and hierarchical social structure is the most considerable for unequal primary education. Location based planning will be more effective than overall general plan to address the divisional inequality in primary education. Moreover, culturally relevant teaching practices and positive relation with teacher student might be more helpful to improve psychological growth of parents, teachers and students. A major part of children is underserved from proper education in urban slum, although some of them start schooling but can not complete because of poverty. Policy should be focused to such underserved urban slum children. However, for ensuring equal primary education, highly centralized public sector management must be prevented which is the main barrier for location based planning.

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