

POVERTY AND EDUCATION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO BANGLADESH

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Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

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Corrigenda

- P2, line 9 from top: please read PPPUS\$1 for US\$1
- P2, line 12 from top: please read PPPUS\$1 for US\$1
- P2, line 12 from top: please read PPPUS\$1 for US\$2
- P8, first line under subheading 'Country-Level Analysis':
please read PPPUS\$1 for US\$1
- P9, Table 3, last column heading: please read PPPUS\$1 for US\$1

Note: PPP= Purchasing Power Parity

Preface

'Poverty and Education with Particular Reference to Bangladesh' is in fact a revised version of the Keynote Address presented by Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, President, Bangladesh Economic Association and Chairman, Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad at the seminar on 'Poverty and Education' organized by Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) on 13 July 2005. The objective of the seminar was to identify the links between poverty and education with a view to pinpoint problems and prospects in increasing poor people's access to education and to get pragmatic directions for overcoming those constraints. It is for the richness of facts and figures and insights into the facets of poverty and illiteracy that CAMPE felt inspired to publish the Keynote Address in a booklet form.

The author has taken into account not only the varying definitions of poverty and importance of quality basic education to address it, but also raises aspects of human development, skills and expertise needed for a well-developed learning society. Quality basic education which, according to the author, is 'a prime mover in relation to poverty reduction and economic growth and modernization' can never be overemphasized. Thus the booklet seems worthy of being used as a ready reference particularly by development workers, educators and people involved in poverty reduction initiatives.

We would like to express our gratitude to Dr. Q. K. Ahmad for his valuable contribution to the seminar and also for allowing us to publish this booklet. Last but not the least we would like to thank all those particularly our colleagues at Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) who have been involved in the publication process.

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POVERTY AND EDUCATION WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO BANGLADESH

Poverty Defined

Poverty is multidimensional and can be considered from different perspectives, as follows.

- **Absolute and Relative Poverty.** Commonly used concepts are absolute poverty and relative poverty. Absolute poverty is based on given levels of access to food and other material basic needs, and the relative poverty measures the disparity between the richer and poorer segments of society. Absolute poverty is usually measured with reference to an upper poverty line and a lower poverty line. The lower poverty line defines hardcore poverty.
 - One measurement of **absolute poverty** is conducted on the basis of calorie intake. In Bangladesh, for example, 2122 Kcal per person/day is used to define the upper poverty line and 1805 Kcal the lower poverty line. That is, those who do not have access to at least 2122 Kcal per day are absolutely poor and those who have access only to 1805 Kcal or less per day belong to the hardcore poverty category.
 - **Absolute poverty** is also measured on the basis of cost-of-basic-needs, which allows in Bangladesh, for example, 2122 Kcal per person/day plus an amount of money for other basic needs for absolute poverty line and 2122 Kcal plus a lower amount of money for other basic needs for hardcore poverty.

➤ **Relative poverty** is the disparity between the rich and the poor, which can be seen from the income share of, say, the poorest 20 per cent of the population relative to the income share of the richest 20 per cent. Gini-coefficient is also used to measure the inequality in income distribution. The value of the coefficient may vary from zero (perfectly equal distribution) to one (for complete inequality, i.e. one person has all the income); but neither extreme happens in practice. In the real world, the GINI value lies somewhere between zero and one.

- **Below US\$1 Per Person Per Day Poverty.** Another measure of absolute poverty which is widely used within the international system these days is the proportion of the population of a country below US\$1 a day. An upper poverty line with reference to US\$2 per person/day is also used sometimes.

- **Human Poverty.** So far we have considered income-poverty (inadequacy of income to ensure minimum calorie intake or minimum calorie intake plus other minimum basic material needs). Human poverty takes into health, nutrition, and education along with income. Thus, the UNDP's *Human Development Index* (HDI) for a country is estimated on the basis of average achievements in that country in relation to a long and healthy life, as measured by life expectancy at birth; knowledge, as measured by adult literacy rate and gross enrollment ratio; and a decent standard of living, as measured by per capita GDP.

- **Human Dignity/Human Rights-Based Approach to Poverty.** A complete human being surely has other needs in addition to those taken into account in the context of income poverty and human-poverty measurements, discussed above. The UN-adopted Universal Human Rights should be enjoyed by everybody in order that they can lead a

life of human dignity. Thus, the human dignity approach to poverty measurement requires that the basic material needs are fulfilled but, at the same time, the people also have freedom of choice, their capability is appropriately developed through quality education and health services, and their participation in social transformation processes is ensured, i.e. there are in place social, economic, political, and judicial opportunities and facilitating processes to enable them to take advantage of those opportunities. This can also be considered human rights-based approach to poverty analysis. The poverty ratio under this approach would be much higher than that computed using any other method mentioned above.

- **Poverty and Squared Poverty Gaps.** All the poor people, however measured, are not homogeneous; hence, policy flexibility is needed to address the particular needs of different poverty sub-groups. To capture the details relating to the depth of poverty and disparity among the poor, poverty gap and squared poverty gap indices are respectively computed¹. Higher the values, the larger are the gaps.

- **People's Own Perception-Based Poverty.** People may have their own perception as to whether they are poor or not in so far as their living conditions and their position in the community and in wider society as human beings are concerned. It is possible that a person may be educated, hold a good job, and own enough money and property; but, for reasons of caste or creed, they may not be treated as equals by those who belong to so-called higher castes or superior pedigrees.

¹. Depth of poverty shown by 'poverty gap' is an estimation of how far below the poverty line the poor are on average as a proportion of that line. The 'squared poverty gap' shows not only the depth of poverty but also inequality among the poor.

- **Endemic and Sudden Poverty.** Poverty can also be endemic, meaning that people continue to be in poverty due to persisting lack of access to assets, employment, and facilitates for capability enhancement. In this case, poverty may, in fact, be handed down from one generation to the next. On the other hand, people may be forced to join the ranks of the poor suddenly as a result of natural disasters such as floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and tsunamis and also human-made disasters such as wars and civil strife.

Purpose of Education

Education is necessary to equip a person to raise her/his self as befitting a human being; and manage the hazards faced and take proper advantage of the opportunities available or emerging, on the basis of knowledge and understanding. The dormant faculties of the people are activated and enhanced by education. There can be various specific purposes of education but, broadly, these can be categorized two-ways, which are: imparting of social and human values and raising of human capability.

- **Social and Human Values.** A basic broad purpose of education is to impart social and human values to, or energize the dormant instincts in those respects in, people. These values include righteousness, pursuit of truth, respect for human rights, fellow feeling, secular values, love for the country, respect for timeliness and socially-agreed rules of business, and so on. These are among the values, which differentiate a dignified human being from those who are social deviants. Education is necessary to imbue the people with such

values, but it is certainly not sufficient. Hence, there must be rules, laws, and institutional mechanisms to control human behaviour, which violates the basic social and human values or encroaches upon the human rights of others. It is also the purpose of education to equip the people to contribute to the formulation or modification of those rules/laws/institutions and to inculcate in them the urge to respect those already in place.

- **Human Capability.** The second broad purpose of education is to raise human capability to enable them to pursue their chosen vocations efficiently. It is not practical that everybody will rise to the highest level of training and capability in their respective vocations. The idea is to equip the students at each stage of education with certain skills so that if one decided or obliged to stop at one stage or another one could still be able to pursue a vocation at that level for earning a respectable living.

Linkages between Poverty and Education

Obviously, uneducated people, in general, are liable to be exploited by others because they (uneducated) may not be aware of their rights and also of how redress can be sought when they are subjected to oppression one way or another by others. It is also the case that, given their low levels of capability, the uneducated are often unable to find worthwhile jobs; and even when they find employment, their wages/salaries as well as their productivity are low. They need education and training for skill development to raise their productivity

and income. Education is also necessary if the people are to absorb and employ improved technologies and methods of organization and management to contribute towards accelerating economic growth, while enhancing their own incomes.

We review below some statistics on the linkages between income and education with reference to, first, regional/country-grouping averages and, then, a number of individual countries belonging to different income/human development levels from different regions. We, also, briefly discuss the East Asian experience.

Regional/Country-Group Analysis

Table 1 shows that high-income countries, on average, exhibit much higher adult and youth literacy (89.7% and 96.3% respectively) compared to low-income countries (63.6% adult literacy). Also, if we look at the categories of developing and least developed countries, the adult and youth literacy rates are again much higher (76.7% and 88.1%) in the former compared to the latter (52.5% and 64.3%), on average.

In South Asia, which contains about 40 per cent of the world's poor, the average adult literacy (57.9%) is only about five percentage points higher than that of the least developed countries. The adult literacy in Sub-Saharan Africa (63.8%) is in fact about six percentage points higher than that of South Asia, although poverty in Sub-Saharan Africa is more devastating than in South Asia. This paradox exists because, as will be explained later, some of the African countries face other severe negatives.

The females are significantly disadvantaged in relation to education in the developing countries, the least developed countries, South Asia, and Sub-Saharan Africa, on average (Table 2). The worst literacy differential is in South Asia, with the female literacy rate as per cent of the male rate being 67, followed by the least developed countries (70), Sub-Saharan Africa (79), and all developing countries together (88). The females are also worse sufferers from poverty compared to the males, given that the burden of managing the households including post-harvest chores, rearing the children, and agricultural activities in parts of the world, particularly in Africa, is mostly carried by them, while their participation in household decision-making is often negligible, if not altogether absent.

Table 1

Adult and Youth Literacy by Country-Grouping with Reference to Per Capita Gross National Income (GNI) and Other Criteria, 2002

Country-category	% of the relevant age-group population	
	Adult literacy (Age: 15+ years)	Youth literacy (Age: 20-24 years)
High income countries
Medium income countries	89.7	96.3
Low income countries	63.6	..
Developing countries	76.7	88.1
Least developed countries	52.5	64.3
South Asia	57.6	..
Sub-Saharan Africa	63.2	76.8

Source: UNDP 2004 (Indicator Table 11).

Table 2
Gender Inequality in Education:
Developing and Least Developed Countries, South Asia, and
Sub-Saharan Africa, 2002

	Female literacy rate as % of male rate
Developing countries	88
Least developed countries	70
South Asia	67
Sub-Saharan Africa	79

Source: UNDP 2004 (Indicator Table 26).

Country-Level Analysis

Let us consider the adult literacy and US\$1 per capita/day-based poverty ratios prevailing in some individual countries belonging to different human development levels, picked from various parts of the world (Table 3). It is seen that, in general, higher the literacy rate the lower is the poverty ratio and vice-versa. The three countries in the high human development category included in Table 3 exhibit adult literacy rates of 91 per cent to 97 per cent, with the corresponding poverty ratios varying from 2 per cent to 12 per cent. The countries in the medium human development category have adult literacy rates of 86 per cent or more, except for the three South Asian countries of Bangladesh (41.4%), India (61.3%), and Nepal (44.4%). The poverty ratio in the South Asian countries ranges from 35 per cent to 38 per cent, while it varies between 2 per cent to 17 per cent in the other countries. In the low human development category, in general, the adult literacy rate is much lower and poverty ratio much higher, except for a few countries which have both relatively high literacy rates and

Table 3
Adult Literacy Rate and Poverty in Selected Countries
Belonging to Different Parts of the World and
Human Development Levels

	2002	
	Adult literacy (%) (Age: 15+ years)	Proportion of population below US\$1 per capita per day
<i>High-human development countries</i>		
Costa Rica	95.8	2.0
Mexico	96.9	9.9
Trinidad and Tobago	90.5	12.4
<i>Medium-human development countries</i>		
Malaysia	88.7	<2.0
Brazil	86.4	8.2
Thailand	92.6	<2.0
Philippines	92.6	14.6
China	90.9	16.6
Sri Lanka	92.1	6.6
South Africa	86.0	7.1
India	61.3	34.7
Bangladesh	41.1	36.0
Nepal	44.0	37.7
<i>Low-human development countries</i>		
Pakistan	41.5	13.4
Nigeria	66.8	70.2
Zambia	79.9	63.7
Mali	19.0	72.8
Burkina Faso	12.8	44.9
Niger	17.1	61.4

Source: UNDP 2004 (Indicator Tables 3 and 11).

high poverty ratios. This last mentioned countries exhibit the paradox because they face harsh natural conditions, debilitating HIV/AIDS, and leadership failures.

Clearly, therefore, there is a strong inverse correlation between adult literacy and poverty. A similar conclusion has emerged from the regional/country-group analyses presented in the previous subsection.

The East and South East Asian Experience

A forceful role of basic education in development is illuminated by the success stories of Japan and other East and South East Asian countries, including China. Amartya Sen (Sen 2000) has shown that basic education was a prime mover of change in Japan and other East and South East Asian countries. Education is a crucial and strategic element, but other important complementary measures are needed to generate the momentum. It is to be noted that, simultaneously with education, there were at least two other key features facilitating the economic successes achieved by these countries. One of those was the opportunities and facilities provided to the people through wide dissemination of education and training, drastic land reforms, and availability of credit on a wide scale. The other was a balanced use of state action and market dynamics, deliberately organized on the basis of the realities faced. Although, as noted earlier, there were other complementary features, the burden of this paper is to glean from the experiences of these countries the importance of education, particularly basic education, in their rapid development. Obviously, the opportunities and facilities created in

these countries for the people could not have been effectively utilized unless the people's capabilities were adequately developed through education and training. The same is true with respect to the people's effective participation in the market economy and adequate access to benefit from state action.

In the case of Japan, serious attention to human capability development was initiated in the second half of the 19th century, when Japan had not yet made any headway in terms of industrialization or modernization. To quote Amartya Sen (Sen 2000, p. 11): "...focus on developing human capability was intensified in the early period of Japanese development, in the Meiji era (1868-1911). For example, between 1906 and 1911, education consumed as much as 43 per cent of the budgets of the towns and villages, for Japan as a whole." The key point that emerges is that the progress on education preceded and played a key role in the industrialization and economic modernization of Japan.

Recognizing that education was a key element of human development along with health and other basic social services, the emphasis on education for the poor and disadvantaged was supplemented by emphasis on health and other basic social services. Clearly, therefore, the Japanese experience suggests that the basic education is the most basic element in enabling the poorer segments of society to break out of poverty and social exclusion syndrome and in moving the economy forward for the benefit of all the citizens of the particular country. A similar strategy of emphasis on basic education in conjunction with other appropriate steps has been made use of, perhaps, not as effectively as in Japan, but certainly in a major way,

by other East and South East Asian countries, such as South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand, and mainland China.

There is a myth that the East and South East Asian countries achieved phenomenal economic successes through free markets and globalization. The fact is that they achieved their successes by developing human capability first and creating opportunities for the people to participate in economic and social processes of development and using state action along with market economy, as appropriate, given the prevailing circumstances in particular countries. Education of the masses and capability development at higher levels of political, economic, and social management bound all these processes together, generating the momentum for the miraculous economic development in these countries. Also, because populations were educated and high-level leadership and management skills existed in the East and South East Asian countries, which suffered the economic collapse in 1997, were able to turn their economies around on the path to recovery and take the process forward by adopting and effectively implementing appropriate policies and programmes.

The Bangladesh Case: Status and Prospects

Educational Status

There seems to be a total confusion relating to the literacy rate and related aspects of education in Bangladesh, as the numbers provided by different sources vary widely. I have assembled one set of data on

literacy and related aspects of education in the country, shown in Table 4. Obviously, one may find other available data more acceptable than the ones presented in the Table. But, the data shown do represent illuminating orders of magnitude. It is clear that there has been significant progress in enrollment, literacy rate, and girls' education. The latest year for which the current status data shown in the Table refer to is 2002. Although, there has surely been some improvement since then, the implications derived from the data used here continue to remain valid.

Table 4
Bangladesh: Aspects of Educational Status

	Base year (%)	Current status (%)
Net primary enrollment	56.0	86.7
Secondary enrollment	28.0	52.8
Proportion of pupils starting class 1 who reach class 5	42.5	80.6
Adult (15+years) literacy rate	35.0	49.6
Ratio of girls to boys:		
Primary	55:45	48:52
Secondary	34:66	52:48
Tertiary	25:75	36:64
Literacy rate among females of age 20-24 years	65	71
Literacy rate among males of age 20-24 years	42	55

Source: PRSP 2004, p. 173; MDGs 2005.

Note: Base year is the latest year between 1990-95 depending on data availability. Similarly, current status relates to the latest year between 200-2002 depending on data availability.

The net enrollment at the primary level is 87 per cent, while that of the secondary level is about 53 per cent. The proportion of pupils starting Class-I who reach Class-V has also increased to 81 per cent. The adult literacy rate is just under 50 per cent, while literacy rates among girls and boys of age 20-24 years are respectively 55 per cent and 71 per cent. There are now more girls studying at the secondary level relative to boys, the ratio being 52:48. At the primary level, though, girls are still lagging behind (48:52); and, at the tertiary level, girls are still way behind boys (36:62).

The overall progress has been significant if one looks at the base year data provided in the Table, but only in so far as expansion of education is concerned. Even in the case of expansion, still a long way to go before adult and youth literacy rates are up to 90 per cent or more, if not to 100 per cent. The real problem, however, is in the quality of education at all levels. At the primary level, the quality is extremely low. A study carried out in 2000 found that of those who completed primary education, only 1.6 per cent acquired all the 27 basic directly measurable competencies (out of 53 competencies recognized by a curriculum introduced in 1992) tested, in all the subjects (CAMPE 2001, pp.1-3). Even in Bangla all the competencies were achieved by 36.5 per cent, and the proportion is only 9.4 per cent in English. The tests were conducted by research teams under the supervision of experts, using appropriate tools. A question is: has there been much improvement in this regard since 2000? The answer seems to be: no, considering circumstantial evidence. A similar study has not since been conducted. It is high time that such a study is repeated. The 2003/04 education watch survey found only 15 per cent of the primary schools meet the criteria (related to facilities, management, and scholarship examination results) for grade A. Evaluation of learning performance, as was tested in the 2000 survey, has not been included in this survey. (CAMPE 2005, p. 13).

Even if there has been some improvement in the performance of the primary students since 2000, surely the overwhelming majority still fail to achieve the required standard of education at the primary level. Furthermore, it is the children of the poor people, particularly in rural areas but also in urban slums, who make up the bulk of the poor performers and non-performers. The reasons are not far to seek. The schools and colleges in rural areas and small towns are ill-equipped in terms of teaching aids and quality of teachers and, also, from the point of view of management and supervision. These institutions represent a very unpalatable commentary on the socio-economic-political management of the country.

Given that drop-outs, failures, and poor performance are pervasive among the children of the poor and disadvantaged, it is no wonder that enthusiasm among their parents about their children's education is not great. It has to be remembered, also, that of the 50 per cent adults (15+ years) who are illiterate, the large majority belongs to the poor and disadvantaged segments of society. Obviously, these families are, by and large, severely constrained by the extremely poor capabilities of their present adult members and their future looks equally bleak if their children remain deprived of proper education.

The crucial failure in ensuring quality education to all children of the country lies with those whose responsibility it is to make adequate arrangement for the purpose. Bangladesh has adopted the goal of universal primary education to be achieved by 2015, if not earlier. Moreover, primary education is a basic human right. But, the state has failed to properly promote quality primary education for all in the country. The same is true in the case of secondary education as well. In fact, quality is also, in general, poor at the tertiary level because of poor quality at the earlier stages and problems relating to teaching in and management of campuses in the country. In a

later sub-section, I shall discuss the issue of improvement of quality of education at primary and secondary levels in Bangladesh.

Level and Nature of Poverty

There are various estimates of poverty in Bangladesh available from different sources. The estimates differ as a result of the use of different methodologies and/or different data sets. One should, therefore, be clear as to which estimate or estimates one is using.

On the basis of the cost of basic needs, as estimated by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and World Bank, about 50 per cent of the population of Bangladesh was poor and about 34 per cent extremely poor in 2000, down from about 59 per cent and 43 per cent respectively in 1991/92 (World Bank 2003, p. 4). If one percentage point per annum poverty reduction achieved during the 1990s has continued up to 2005, the poverty and extreme poverty ratios in 2005 will respectively work out at 45 per cent and 29 per cent. Hence, in terms of absolute numbers, 6.2 crore people or more are poor and 4 crore or so are extremely poor in Bangladesh as of 2005. National as well as rural and urban food-intake based poverty ratios are available for 2004 (Table 5). On this basis, nationally, 5.8 crore people (42.1% of the population) are poor in Bangladesh as of 2005. Only on food-intake basis, about 2.6 crore or 26 million (18.7% of the population) people of Bangladesh are extremely poor, who suffer from debilitating food insecurity.

Also, relative income-poverty has been accentuating. Between 1991/92 and 2000, the income-share of the bottom 20 per cent of the population declined from 6.52 per cent to 4.97 per cent while that of the top 20 per cent increased from 44.87 per cent to 55.02 per cent. The Gini coefficient increased during the period for 0.388 to 0.472 (BBS 1998, p.32; MoF 2003, p 132).

Table 5
Food Poverty in Bangladesh, 2004

	Head count (%)
National	42.1
Urban	37.9
Rural	43.3

Source: MoF 2005, p. 165.

Regarding human-poverty, it is to be noted that Bangladesh has progressed to medium human development range in terms of UNDP's HDI. In fact, human-poverty reduction in Bangladesh has been somewhat faster compared to income-poverty, with the human poverty ratio having declined from 61 per cent during 1981-83 to 35 per cent during 1998-2000 or at an annual average rate of 2.5 per cent compared with 1.5 per cent annual decline in calorie-intake-based poverty ratio during the same period and with an annual average rate of 1.7 per cent (i.e. from 59% to 50%) in cost-of-basic-needs-based poverty ratio during 1991/92-2000. (BIDS 2001; MoF 2003, p.136; MoF 2002, p. 7).² This faster reduction in human-poverty in Bangladesh is considered a paradox. But, in the light of East Asian experience, human development may precede and facilitate economic growth and income-poverty reduction. The question, though, is: how are the available resources deployed? If education, training, and health are emphasized through increased allocation and proper utilization of resources, human capabilities will improve so that the people will be able to upgrade their own conditions of living and contribute more effectively to national socio-economic development as well.

² In Bangladesh, the emphasis in terms of allocation and proper utilization of resources on education and health has not been very encouraging. Yet, how could human-poverty reduction have been faster than income-poverty reduction. Probably, there have been transfer payments received in-kind (not taken into account in income-poverty measurement) by the poor from the government and non-governmental sources and/or improved awareness among the people regarding the usefulness and efficacy of education, good health, and improved nutrition and as to how to achieve more in these regards with the available resources and through behavioural changes. But, without increased resources, only so far one can go. In future, substantially more resources will certainly be necessary for accelerated and sustained human-poverty reduction (i.e human development).

Human dignity is a wider concept compared to the concept of human development just considered. If human dignity is taken into account, a much larger proportion of the population is poor in Bangladesh than the proportions found to be poor on the basis of human-poverty or income-poverty considerations. But, as indicated above, even on food-intake basis, the poor constitute a huge number and the extremely poor among them is also very large.

Available poverty gap and squared poverty gap analyses show that both the depth of poverty and the inequality among the poor have remained virtually unchanged since 1999 (MoF 2005, p. 165). Such characteristics of poverty in the country should be properly assessed and the findings built into poverty reduction policies and strategies to make sure that the specific needs and circumstances of different categories of poor people are addressed.

While endemic poverty is widespread in Bangladesh, many non-poor (who are above but close to the poverty line) join the ranks of the poor and many poor people are reduced to extreme poverty and destitution *suddenly* due to, for instance, severe natural disasters such as floods and cyclones. Policy making and strategy development concerning poverty reduction need to recognize the particular needs of both types (endemic and sudden) of the poor and the extremely poor people³.

³ In the wake of a severe natural disaster—e.g. a severe flood—that causes major losses of and damages to the crops, houses, and assets and also induces the collapse of the usual sources of incomes of the poor and of those who suddenly become poor, the immediate need is to ensure necessary relief supplies (food, safe drinking water, medicines etc) to help them survive during the critical period; and then, as flood waters recede, appropriate safety-net programmes may be used to assist them, as they seek to piece together their livelihoods again. A measure that may be put in place with a view to containing sudden poverty caused by, for example, a severe flood is the ‘community approach’ to disaster management aimed at increasing the capacity of the people of the flood-prone areas of the country through awareness building and training relating to pre-flood preparedness and during-flood individual and collective action (including evacuation if need be; ensuring availability of safe drinking water, sanitation, and adequate relief supplies; combating the spread of water and vector-borne diseases, etc) as well as establishing contact with the relevant government and other agencies to try and mobilize timely assistance as may be needed. These steps will help equip the people to work more effectively to reduce flood vulnerability, losses, and damages. Also, rehabilitation of the affected people is a crucial task, immediately following a disaster. (APJED, 2004).

By causing large-scale losses and damages and by necessitating diversion of resources from development and poverty reduction activities to relief and rehabilitation, a severe natural disaster—e.g. a severe flood—adversely affects both national economic growth and poverty reduction prospects, hitting hard the disaster-affected poor people including those who are suddenly rendered poor. Hence, effective efforts on the part of the government and the communities are called for to minimize the adverse impact of a natural disaster. Clearly, if the community members are equipped with basic education, they can do a better job in terms of preparing themselves within the community approach to disaster management and performing well when a disaster hits.

People’s own perceptions-based poverty analysis is not used in Bangladesh to inform policy-making relating to poverty reduction. But such an analysis, by probing why the perceptions expressed are held and how the adversities indicated may be addressed, can be revealing in terms of further (in addition to what is learnt from other types of poverty analysis) assessment of the reasons of deprivation and disaffection and characterization of the ways of addressing them. These findings from the bottom may then be built into the poverty reduction policies and strategies, thereby improving the relevance of those policies and strategies from the people’s point of view and, hence, one would expect, their efficacy. People with at least basic education would surely offer relatively more articulate and, hence, more policy-relevant perceptions compared to the illiterate.

Who Are the Poor and What is Their Educational Status?

The poor of Bangladesh include the landless agricultural labourers, non-agricultural day labourers, people engaged in small rural non-farm

activities, small artisans, small fishermen, rickshaw pullers, petty traders, and urban informal sector workers. Of course, these categories are not all mutually exclusive. These poor people live in rural areas, coastal belts, marginal lands such chars, and urban slums.

Data are available on food-poverty concentration with reference to the vocations of the concerned people (Table 6). The highest concentration of poverty nationally is among agricultural day labourers (71.4%), followed by non-farm day labourers (51.3%), self-employed in small income-generating activities (40.4%), and self-employed in small and marginal farming (38.7%).

Table 6
Poverty with Reference to Main Sources of Income in Bangladesh, 2004

Source	National	Urban	Rural
Wages and salaries	19.9	18.8	20.8
Agriculture (self-employment)	38.7	48.7	38.1
Non-farm activities (self-employment)	40.4	40.6	40.4
Agricultural day labour	71.4	79.1	71.1
Non-farm day labour	51.3	58.6	48.2
Pension	20.2	27.5	17.3
Rents from houses and others	21.3	10.2	28.0
Grants, charity and others	30.4	27.3	30.8
Overall	42.1	37.9	43.3

Source: MoF 2005, p. 167.

These poverty-stricken groups of people, particularly their adult (15+ years of age) members, are overwhelmingly illiterate, i.e. they mostly belong to the 50 per cent of the adults of Bangladesh who are illiterate. Their next generation seems destined, by and large, to remain disadvantaged. Their children either do not go to school, or drop out, or receive extremely poor education given that they go to ill-equipped schools, mostly located in rural areas and small towns, where teachers are largely untrained and do not teach, even do not attend the schools, properly. These schools are not monitored effectively, as neither the management committees nor the parent-teacher committees function properly and the supervision by concerned government officials is known to be superficial, even non-existent. Children of such schools, as indicated earlier, generally belong to the worst performing groups in terms of achieving competencies, even when they complete primary education. Non-enrollment, dropping out, and the extremely poor quality of education together constitute a colossal national loss. This situation must not be allowed to continue.

The basic point is that, for the poor and disadvantaged people, particularly the children, quality basic education (through formal system and, when appropriate, through non-formal arrangements) is the foremost crucial need in order for them to acquire the basic capability, which can be improved upon through further education and on the job training or through formal training, to break out of the poverty syndrome into which they are now trapped.

Improving the Quality of Education

Poor quality education at the primary and secondary levels is an important reason for the low quality running through higher levels of education. While it is important that quality is ensured at higher levels by taking appropriate steps, including control of campus violence and strengthening of monitoring, the focus of this paper is mainly on primary and secondary education. In particular, basic education (that imparts skills to read, write, maintain accounts, carry out useful correspondence, understand basic documents relating to economic and financial transactions, internalize relatively improved technologies, and so on) is of immediate significance in relation to improving the capabilities of the poor and disadvantaged and thereby enabling them to engage themselves in economic and social pursuits more efficiently and productively.

However, quality of education at primary and secondary levels in most schools and colleges located in urban centres, particularly in Dhaka and other large cities, is usually very good, given that immense facilities and well-trained teachers are available in these schools and colleges. These schools and colleges are attended by the children of people belonging to upper echelons of society.

It is the schools and colleges in rural areas and small towns attended by the children of the poor and disadvantaged, which are ill-equipped and ill-served. As a result, the students of these schools and colleges, generally learn precious little and fail public examinations, or get so

low grades when they pass that they cannot pursue further education, nor are they equipped to pursue any vocation with the kind of education received. Hence, serious attention needs to be given to improving the quality of education provided by these schools and colleges. If this done, the capability of the children of the poor and disadvantaged people will generally improve. They will then be able to address their problems and take advantage of the opportunities before them effectively, towards breaking out of poverty and moving on to a path of sustained improvement in their living conditions.

For the drop-outs, who for one reason or another cannot be immediately brought back into the formal system, non-formal education is essential to put them back on track so that they can return to the formal system at a later stage. For those, who cannot at all return to the formal system for some reason or the other, arrangements must be made to provide basic education and training to them in their chosen vocations so that they can participate in economic and other social transformation processes meaningfully. Adult literacy programmes need also to be strengthened or initiated if non-existent in an area to enable the poor adults to address the problems faced and seek to take advantage of the opportunities available, on the basis of an improved understanding as to how better to go about those tasks, and to appreciate the importance of education such that they, to the extent feasible on their part, support and facilitate the education of their children.

The state has the main responsibility to ensure that quality education is imparted by all school and colleges in the country, particularly by

the 'poor people's' schools and colleges, i.e. by those schools and colleges which are located in rural areas and small towns and attended by the children of the poor and disadvantaged. The rich and powerful belonging to upper echelons of society can take care of their own interests and needs.

The poor people's schools and colleges need trained teachers, necessary equipment, and teaching aids, which must be ensured by the state if poverty reduction is meant to be pursued seriously and with determination. And, of course, universal primary education is a human rights issue and has, therefore, to be ensured from human rights consideration as well. The state expenditure on education, as of 2005-2006, is 15 per cent of the total public expenditure or 2.5 per cent of the projected national GDP for the year (MoF 2005b, para 20; MoF 2005, p. 221 for 2004-2005 national GDP and assuming 6% GDP growth rate/annum). About 45 per cent of the total amount allocated to education goes to primary education. The amount allocated to education needs to be increased substantially overall, as well as that to primary education. The poor people's schools and colleges must be given due emphasis in terms of both allocation and effective utilization in response to their critical needs.

Finding significantly more resources for investment in education, as indicated above, is not going to be easy. But, given the importance of quality basic education for poverty alleviation and human development, the state must leave no stone unturned to find resources for the purpose, from domestic and international sources as well as by reorienting the allocation of available resources. It is

also very important that the amount of money allocated is actually spent for the intended purposes, and do not get siphoned off by corrupt officials and others involved in the process of releasing or utilizing the funds. This raises the larger issue of control of corruption. Corruption is pervasive and deep-seated in the country and a serious impediment to progress in any field, including education.

A question also arises as to the efficacy of the present curricula. Obviously, education is a dynamic process and the curricula must be modified, changed or overhauled to suit the prevailing realities and changing circumstances. The need of the time for Bangladesh is quality basic education for all and modern higher education. Indeed, human capability development and technological advancement, as respectively appropriate to the situational contexts, are crucially important for poverty alleviation and socio-economic progress. The developed world has moved into post-industrialization knowledge age. The newly industrializing and other fast growing developing countries are progressing towards that end along with the industrialization and modernization of their economies. A key mechanism for this progression has been the information super-highway, which has revolutionized the ways businesses, financial management, governance, international relations, teaching, and research are conducted. The information technology has, in fact, touched even the poorest of the countries, although noteworthy progress has not occurred in these countries because of low-level of education and absence of infrastructural facilities. In Bangladesh, the richer and better educated small segment of society uses information

technology quite extensively. For the poorer segments, a major emphasis needs to be given to basic vocational training (other than computer); at the same time, spread of access to computer, on a realistic basis, needs also to be promoted. In fact, some basic vocational training (other than computer) should immediately be introduced even at the primary level, *albeit* at later stages, as part of the regular curriculum, which can then be built on at the secondary level. In the case of spread of information technology and computer use, the priorities may be set on the basis of realities in terms of ability to use and availability of infrastructural facilities. Colleges may be targeted first for the introduction/strengthening of computer training facilities. At the same time, computer demonstration/basic training programmes may be introduced at union or upazila levels to sensitize the primary and secondary students regarding the revolutionary information technology, as far as feasible, to start with. Obviously, proper guidelines will need to be worked out to regulate the access to these facilities. Once introduced, such programmes must be properly managed and carefully monitored. These programmes can then be extended, or even school-based programmes introduced, on the basis of feasibility established properly, over time towards the widest possible coverage.

The state alone cannot adequately solve the gigantic problem of extremely poor quality of education in the country. The state may, therefore, appropriately involve the local communities in this task. In the absence of such a move by the state, the local communities may themselves come forward to help address this problem,

particularly in rural areas and small towns. All concerned—teachers, parents, students, management committees, local political and business leaders, local government officials, and others—may come together to contribute their collective best to this cause. In fact, local leaders from various walks of life may organize themselves as people's supervisory committees to oversee the functioning of the schools and colleges with a view to improving the quality of education. The operational area of a committee may be an upazila. The committee may liaise with management committees, teachers, students, and parents to identify problems and find solutions collectively, locally as far as possible; and, if need be, seek assistance from other agencies which may be able to help. The committee can also organize tests prior to public examinations at the conclusion of primary (Class-V), secondary (Class-X) and higher secondary (class xii) levels, using the same set of questions for all the schools and colleges, as appropriate, within the upazila. Teachers may be deployed as invigilators in schools and colleges other than their own. Only those declared eligible by the committee on the basis of the tests organized will take the respective public examinations. This will create a competitive environment and encourage school management committees, teachers, and students to prepare and perform better. This approach was adopted in Rajnagar Upazila in Moulvibazar zila some years ago and the participating schools and colleges have benefited in terms of improved results of their students and a competitive environment has evolved in the upazila, that encourages efforts towards securing better performance.

The committee's tasks can be expanded to include: monitoring of the utilization of funds allocated by the government to the schools and colleges of the particular upazila under its purview; monitor the non-formal educational programmes for the drop-outs and adults being carried out by government agencies or non-governmental and community-based organizations (NGOs and CBOs), if any; and help mobilize financial and other support for both formal and non-formal quality education in the upazila from within the upazila and from other possible sources including the government.

Concluding Remarks

Analyses presented in this article testify to a strong positive correlation between poverty and illiteracy, and support the view that education is a prime mover in relation to poverty reduction and economic growth and modernization. While basic education is crucial for poverty groups to be able to undertake activities to break out of poverty syndrome, high level skills and expertise are also needed for a nation's economic management, both at policy and operational levels.

In the case of Bangladesh, illiteracy and the lack of useful education from functional point of view even when literate and, hence, low levels of human capability are pervasive among the various groups of the poor and disadvantaged. For these people, the best chance of being able to participate meaningfully in, and benefit equitably from, the various processes (economic, social, political) of social transformation lies in their education and training, which are among the key elements in the context of human capability development.

But, education alone is not sufficient. Simultaneously, emphasis on health is needed as good health is another key element of human capability. Then, there must be economic-social-political opportunities created for them and, at the same time, facilitating processes and institutions established to enable them to take advantage of those opportunities. The opportunities and the facilitating mechanisms must be gender-sensitive, given that women are relatively more disadvantaged than men, particularly within the poor and disadvantaged groups.

At the same time, capabilities at higher echelons in both public and private sectors of the country need to be enhanced sufficiently for effective socio-economic management and development administration on the one hand and efficient corporate management on the other, in the light of realities prevailing within the country as well as the external challenges faced and opportunities available.

Quality of education at all stages is poor in Bangladesh. But, primary and secondary education provided by schools and colleges located in rural areas and small towns is disastrously poor. Serious attention is needed to improve the quality of education in the country, particularly of education provided to the poor and disadvantaged children at primary and secondary levels. It is the state's responsibility to ensure that all children of the country receive quality primary education and basic vocational training, and beyond as appropriate. For awareness building among the primary and secondary level

students, union or upazila level computer demonstration/training programmes may also be introduced, to be extended over time.

It is crucial that more and more resources are raised from all possible sources including budgetary reorientation for education and, out of the available resources for education, adequate allocations are made for poor peoples' schools and colleges and for related capability enhancing activities. At the same, it has to be ensured that the allocated resources are properly utilized by controlling corruption, which is pervasive in the education sector as well as in other sectors in the country, and by improving the capability of the officials involved in the implementation activities.

The state may involve local communities in addressing the problems outlined in this paper. But, the local communities may on their own come forward to help address them, particularly in rural areas and small towns. The community efforts in Rajnagar upazila by setting up a citizen's supervisory committee (briefly discussed in this paper) seeking to improve the quality of primary and secondary education in the upazila may offer some clues as to how to proceed. There may be other experiments elsewhere in the country to learn from as well. The proposed committee may also monitor the utilization of funds allocated by the government to the schools and colleges of the particular upazila under its purview as well as the activities of other agencies dedicated to the promotion of basic education and vocational training through formal or non-formal systems.

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