

Non-Governmental Actors are Coming Forward as Policy Actors in Bangladesh: Example from Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education

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Abstract

Public policy making in developing countries is not simply a technical function of government; rather is a complex interactive process influenced by the diverse nature of socio-political and other internal and external forces. This process happens in a specific policy environment which is consisted with different factors, like as economic political, social, geographical, demographical, cultural, institutional, international etc. This paper intends to examine the role of non-state actors, especially role of NGOs in policy making of Bangladesh within the context of “Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education 2008”. This paper has been prepared by reviewing and analyzing of available secondary literature, including recent publications, journals, books, research reports, and news paper articles. The study revealed that non-governmental organizations have more influence in policy demand rising, agenda settings and policy formulation in the ECD sub-sector of Bangladesh due to their resources and potentiality and because of being the legal authority the GoB gets involve in policy formulation process.

Introduction

Public policy making in developing countries is not simply a technical function of government; rather is a complex interactive process influenced by the diverse nature of socio-political and other internal and external forces (Rahman, 1995 cited in Panday 2001). This process happens in a specific policy environment which is consisted with different factors, like as economic political, social, geographical, demographical, cultural, institutional, international etc (Malone 2005). In this complex interaction both actors and institution play their roles which are shaped by different factors. Some of these are involved in the process due to their formal authority, to formulate the policy, some to provide

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technical, financial and other kinds of support, while others are to advocate their own interest (Rhodes, 1997). In public policy all actors are generally divided into two- parts; as in; state/government actors and societal actors/non-government actors. Elected officials (The Executive and legislature) and appointed officials reside with in the state and interest groups, research organization and mass media reside with in societal actors or non-state actors. (Romesh and Howlett,1995). In every country these two actors play vital role, but both may not present equal influence. Role and influence of actors depend on nature of interest, capability, technical knowledge, power of actors as well as intensity of the importance of the factors and above all on the dynamics of the role of these factors and actors (Verschuere 2009). Like as other developing country public policy making goes trough a complex and ambiguous process. The process is ambiguous and complex because there is no formal, established and visible process and institutional arrangement in public policy making of Bangladesh (Aminuzzaman, 2002) Different studies empirically proved that non-state actors-donors, UN agencies and international organizations were more influential than the sate actors in Bangladesh. At present ‘Non-governmental Organizations (NGOs) are becoming forward as policy actors in Bangladesh’ is the popular observation in the developmental discourse. This paper intends to re-examine the role of non-sate actors, especially role of NGOs in policy making of Bangladesh within the context of “Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education 2008’.

Objectives

The aim of the paper is to give overview about role of non-state actors, especially non-governmental organizations in formulation of pre-primary education frame work of Bangladesh.

The specific objectives are-

- To identify the non-state actors who are involved in providing support in pre-primary education
- To sketch the role of non-state actors in pre-primary education sector, especially non-governmental organizations

Materials and Methods

This paper has been prepared by reviewing and analyzing of available secondary literature, including recent publications, journals, books, research reports, and news paper articles. Relevant literatures have been collected through vigorous and systematic internet browsing. Furthermore the author also communicated with the working group members to collect supporting information.

Theoretical Framework for Analysis

The ‘founding fathers’ of the group approach to politics like Bentley (1967) and Kolb (1978) unanimously agree that the group is the single most powerful explanatory factor in the political process (Cited in, Ovwasa 1997). The group determines the course of social policy because it is the outcome of the group pressure. The group theory argues that to understand politics and the course of social policy social life, the group and only the group should be used as the tool of analysis since the individual has meaning only the extent of his participation in the group. Bentley (1967: 207) mirrored this clearly saying, “when the groups are adequately stated, every thing is stated because the society is nothing other than the complex of the group that compose it” (Cited in, Ovwasa 1997). Based on this groups and interest group has been defined along the line having common interests. In this article, non-governmental actors were treated as interest groups and the writer was concerned to find out the influence of interest group in the formulation of ‘pre-primary education framework’ of Bangladesh.

Conceptual Clarification

Non-State Actors

To know about the non-state actors at first we should learn about state actors. Romesh and Howlett (1995) have mentioned elected official (The executive and Legislature) and appointed official (Bureaucracy) as state actors. Without these actors all are non-state actors. In this paper, non-state actors mean UN agencies, International Non-governmental Organizations and national Non-governmental organizations.

Early Childhood Development

Early Childhood Development - refers to combination of physical, mental and social development in the early years of life. It includes interventions to ensure good health and nutrition, appropriate cognitive development and timely and adequate social interaction of a child in its early years of life (UNICEF, 2007). In other words, Early Childhood Development (ECD) is a comprehensive approach to develop full cognitive, emotional, social and physical potentials of children from birth to five years. Globally it is now an established fact that to become a productive human resource children need proper opportunities, care and stimulation along with adequate and appropriate physical growth and well being. These mental stimulations help a child to acquire maturity, life skills and moral values.

Basically pre-primary idea has come from early childhood development (ECD) concept. In this paper ECD, Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) and pre-primary education are used as synonymous.

Pre-Primary Education

Pre-primary education is “the developmental and educational support provided to the child in the age range of 3 to 5 years in order to ensure the child’s right to protection, care, survival and preparation for school education through play, amusement and introduction to literacy and numeracy, irrespective of the child’s physical, mental and social status (MOPME 2008)”.

According to Banglapedia (The National Encyclopedia of Bangladesh), - Pre-primary education is for children aged below 6 before their primary education starts. Pre-primary education is usually divided in two stages: Kindergarten/Nursery/Playgroup for children of 3-5 years; and Pre-primary or Kindergarten for children aged 5-6 years.

(http://banglapedia.search.com.bd/HT/P_0262.htm, accessed, 24.04.09)

Public Policy

According to Mason et al. (2002), policy “encompasses the choices that a society, segment of society, or organization makes regarding its goals and priorities and the ways it will allocate its resources”.(Cited in, Malone 2005) .

When policy is made by government to attain a specific objective this is called public policy. Some established definition of public policy:

According to Thomas Dye, “any thing a government chooses to do or not to do’. (Cited in, Howlett and Ramesh, 1995)

James Anderson describes, “A pervasive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern.” (Cited in, Howlett and Ramesh, 1995).

In this article public policy means an operational framework to implement the pre-primary education in Bangladesh that is formulated with the influence of a set of actors. From this perspective, the writer has chosen ‘ Operational Framework for Pre-Primary Education 2008’ as public policy.

Public Policy Making

Gary Brewer and Peter De Leon describe the decision-making stage of the public policy process as, ‘the choice among alternatives that have been generated and their like likely effects on the problem estimated.’(Cited in, Howlett and Ramesh, 1995)

In this paper the writer took the following stages-Policy Demand (Importance of the issues among the stakeholders), Agenda Setting

(Recognition of the problem by the government policy maker) and Formulation (Process of policy content making) to find out the role of non-state actors in policy making of Bangladesh (Aminuzzaman, 2002)

Results

In Bangladesh, policy ideas are originated from external actors and various researches indicted those UN agencies, Donors and international NGOs are main players of

The Directory, Progress Reports of ECD Network and available documents of national and international organizations who work in ECD field of Bangladesh. Through these contents it has been found that more than 200 organizations are involved in ECD activities of Bangladesh. And some of these agencies play a vital role to influence the ECD policy in Bangladesh.

The following section will present a brief description on how these actors influences the Policy Demand, Agenda Setting, Policy Formulation and Approval.

Policy Demand

Due to practical need a demand is raised by the stakeholders to formulate a policy. In the demand raising different actors try to persuade the government decision makers about the importance of policy (Romesh and Howlett, 1995; Rhodes, 1997). Some actors introduce the concepts, some actors mobilize the policy community by implementing different programs and others provide evidence by highlighting the importance of the policy.

Dr. J. Ratnaike of UNESCO was the pioneer in establishing the concept of ECD in Bangladesh back in 1981-1982 (Yang, 2005 and Jahan, 2005). To prepare the children to do better in primary schools, he initiated baby class education programs in government primary schools with the help of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB). Since then many other attempts were taken to implementing early childhood concepts in Bangladesh. One of such project was initiated by NCTB with the assistance of United Nation Children Emergency (UNICEF) experimented a Satellite School Project in Bhaluka Upazilla in 1987-88 with introduction of 'Baby Class'. As planned when the community failed to provide the salary of the volunteer teacher the project was closed (Yang, 2005 and Jahan, 2005).

Then again in 1992 the Directorate of Non-Formal Education, Bangladesh with the assistance of NGOs and UNICEF introduced 'Baby Class' education program and that also got closed after completion of the General Education Project (Jahan, 2005). Then 1997 Plan, Bangladesh

started working in ECD sector with the approach of “Child Focused Community Development” and eventually in 1999 Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee BRAC also started their activities in ECD. After highlighting the issue by the non-governmental actors National Plan of Action on Education 2000 - Bangladesh (NPA), has given emphases on pre-primary education

Till late 2000s, ECD sector was being treated as an informal program which mostly gets run by NGOs and private sectors. Majority of these NGOs have their own programs concerning child development; such as Save the Children, having investments in program called SUCCEED - a program for early learning and SISIMPUR – (Bangla version of Sesame Street) (Llewellyn, 2003). Other major international NGOs or donor agencies funding in the ECD area in this country are USAID, Tre-des Home (TDH) Netherlands, Action Aid Bangladesh, and World Vision (Yang, 2005). Researches, program developments and organizational developments undertaken by many of these organizations have been the backbone of the ECD program’s development in Bangladesh. Apart from these the Country Program 2001-2005 (CP) that UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh are working on is a project that aims to empower caregivers to properly instigate ECD ideals on the children (Jensen, 2001, Cited in Yang, 2005).

Information described in table-1 depicted that all actors in the sub-sector of ECD or pre-primary educations have been implementing their program according to their own way and there are diversity in children’s age, materials and implementation methods. This diversity also, creates a demand to formulate a policy which can give guidance to implement unique program for the betterment of young children of Bangladesh. After 2000 different researches were conducted by non-governmental actors that highlighted the need and gaps of preprimary in Bangladesh (Table- 2). This issue was highlighted by the non-government actors in the First National ECD Conference (2006) and then it got a formal shape.

Agenda Setting

Agenda setting is the most basic stage of public policy cycle which is concerned with identification policy issues and placing these issues on the agenda of government. In early 90s the academicians, stakeholders and policy makers of Bangladesh began to focus on ECD policy and intervention. The key findings in brain research on early childhood development, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences and Daniel Goleman’s theory of emotional intelligence, gave the food for thought for the policy makers of Bangladesh to think about early childhood development (Yang, 2005). Still with the limited resources and the pressure of meeting the universal compulsory primary education

implementation, the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) could not make ECD a priority till late 1990s (BEPS, 2004). It made a strong commitment in achieving Education for all (EFA) following the Jomtien conference in 1990. And by the end of 90s, it encouraged widespread piloting of pre-primary classes. Then the international NGOs and NGOs began networking to address the learning needs of younger children, with emphasis on integrated approaches to health, nutrition, and learning activities.

In 2000 the GOB agreed with the six Education for All (EFA) goals articulated in the Dakar Framework for Action 2000 for expanding and improving comprehensive Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) [Jahan 2005 and Ali 2008]. Being influenced by that the stakeholders policy makers started to consider the importance of focusing on early childhood education (ECE). The National Action Plan (NPA)- I give emphasizes for the formalization of Baby Classes in rural primary schools (informal gathering of younger siblings and other neighborhood children on school grounds) and writes a provision of teaching staff, specialized training, teaching materials, and greater engagement in pre-primary education. The GOB developed a Plan of Action in 2000 which got revised and updated in 2002 and theses also emphasized the pre-primary education issues. Again the National Education Policy (NEP) 2000 considered the need for a school preparedness education program for 5+ children. And the National Education Policy 2003 have suggested activities to assist children to get physically and mentally prepared for primary education (Jahan 2005).

From 2002 to 2003 UNICEF conducted national and district-level awareness workshops on the research rationale and importance of ECD action. The two other ECD national workshops also originated from UNICEF and directed to prepare print and electronic journalists to undertake ECD campaigns. Capacity-building efforts with local media involved two workshops in 2002; one provided information on how to use media for young children, the other was a general information-sharing workshop. In 2003, a production workshop was offered on how to produce quality messages/materials for and about children (BEPS 2004). Further more, non-governmental research based and finding also influenced the policy community in Bangladesh (See: Table-2).

Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (2005) also recognized the importance of ECCE. In the same time (2005) UNECO published a research report, titled, "Early Childhood Care and Education Program in Bangladesh: Strengths and Challenges" (Ali, 2008). These two policy guidelines influenced the policy makers to take proper policy on ECD.

The ECD Network, (formally known as Bangladesh ECD Network-BEN) including BRAC, Grameen Bank, Shishu Academy, Institute of Child and Mother Health (ICMH), Save the Children - USA, Plan International, Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) and four other partners, serves as the main public forum for ECD. The Network has developed and piloted a questionnaire to map ECD resources for Bangladesh at the district level for publicly available ECD database in late 2004. The print and web version of this questionnaire will be ready by mid-2004. (BEPS,2004). Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) formally launched at 7 September 2005 and website was also officially launched. The Joint Secretary (then) of the Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA), Mohammad Abul Quasem, was present at the ceremony as the chief guest (BEN Progress report, 2005-2008). Recognizing the importance of policy framework on ECD the secretary of Ministry of Primary and Mass Education MOPE announced to formulate a policy framework and ECE became a policy agenda of GoB.

Policy Formulation

In here policy formulation means process of policy content preparation. Policy content preparation requires information, technical knowledge and expertise and ultimately policy content is the outcome of group politics. In April 2006 a working group was formed by Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) where Joint Secretary (Development) acted as chair (MOPME, 2008) and with representatives of Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA), MOPME, Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB), Early Childhood Development Resource Centre (ECDRC), BRAC University Institute of Educational Development (BU-IED), Institute of Education and Research (IER), the University of Dhaka and UNICEF. (MOPME, 2008)

The Policy Paper was prepared through several consultation meetings and in those meetings the participation and representation of NGO representative was comparatively high than GoB representatives¹. The main content of the policy was formed by Dr. Nazrul Islam (IER, Dhaka University), Dr. Golam Mostofa (UNICEF) and Mahmuda Akhter (ECDRC, BU-IED). Further more, major technical support and information were provided by UNICEF and EDRC, BUIED. The document was approved by Advisor of, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) in caretaker government period (2007-2008) when formal cabinet was non-existed.

¹ Personal communication with four technical committee members (both GO and NGO)

Discussion

In recent years, compared to major government agencies, NGOs have gained prominence in terms of their societal roles, public image, and capacity to command external support. Due to dominance of new public management (NPM), the scope of the public sector is being reduced, government spending is diminished, and state agencies are discredited, NGOs have proliferated, their membership has increased, and the assistance they receive from external agencies has increased (Haque 2002). In the sub-sector of early childhood development, the concept of early childhood development was introduced by the representative by UNESCO. UN agencies and other donor agencies try to develop the capacity of non-governmental actors as policy actors from implementation to evaluation. Same scenario was mentioned by the other evidence in Bangladesh (Sobhan, 2000; World Bank, 1996; Cited in Haque 2002).

With assistance of international partners national NGOs like as BRAC, and Grameen Shikah (Rural Education, affiliated with Grammen Bank) has established a nation wide network. Such nationwide networks of development NGOs and astonishingly large numbers in membership imply that these NGOs have a strong rural support base compared to the government. The non-governmental actors maximize benefit this network to create a demand from the beneficiary side.

Bangladeshi NGOs have become more influential in relation to the government because of their worldwide recognition and network. In case of early childhood development BEN has made different collaboration with international renowned institution.

Furthermore, NGOs are acting as policy advocacy group by arranging regular conferences, by publishing and distribution newsletter, policy paper and research reports. Also, NGOs maintain network, a as linkage group between donor and funding agency. NGOs have more technical knowledge, expertise, and research based experience in ECE sector in Bangladesh (for more information please see: annex-1, 2 and 3). Also, BRAC University is offering a two years professional master degree in early childhood education and care.

Also, the policy making period an interim government was ruling the country where Rasheda K Choudhury was advisor of MOPME who was leading ex-NGO activist in Bangladesh and she had a good relation with different NGOs. From this perspective, NGOs get more access for this relation.

Conclusion

As introducer of the concept, as technical support provider and community mobilize NGOs are playing panner role in early childhood development sub-sector. Also, assistance of international donors and technical expertise, NGOs enthusiasm to expand the ECD activities in Bangladesh and strategic position of NGOs representative played more influential role governmental actors. Above mentioned discussion revealed that non-governmental organizations have more influence in policy demand, agenda settings and policy formulation in the ECD section of Bangladesh and because of being the legal authority the GoB gets involve in policy formulation process.

Table-1: ECD Activities in Bangladesh till 2000:

| Type of Service | Main Provider | No of Institution | Size of Service recipient | Areas of Main Focus |
|---|--|------------------------|---------------------------|---|
| Baby Class | Primary school, govt. and private | 42,000 | 10,50,000 ages 4-5 | 3 Rs [reading, 'riting (writing), and 'rithmetic (arithmetic)] |
| Play group and nursery classes | Kindergarten school (private) | 8,960 | 483,600 ages 3-4 | 3 Rs, rhymes, play, drawing |
| Preparatory class/ Early childhood care center | N G Os | 21 | 33,800 ages 4-5 | 3 Rs, play, rhymes |
| Orphanage/Children's homes: SOS Shishu Palli etc. | Social Welfare Department | 76 | 2,250 ages 0-9 | Health, nutrition, 3 Rs |
| Day care center | Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) | 57 | 2,245 ages 2-5 | Health, nutrition, 3 Rs |
| Preschools of Shishu Academy | Ministry of Women and Children Affairs (MOWCA) | 73 | 3,000 ages 4+-5+ | 3 Rs, rhymes, drawing, painting |
| Maktabs, Mosque, Forkania Madrassa, Baby Classes | Private | 10,000-12,000 | 242,000 ages 4-6 | 3 Rs, reading Arabic |
| Chittagon Hill Tracks Para center | Ministry of Education (MOE), private initiative | 1,875 CHT Para centers | 46,875 ages 4-5 | Mother tongue, 3Rs, stories, rhymes, play, drawing |

BEPS 2004)

Table-2: Research Activities:

| Research Title | Organization |
|--|---|
| Child-to-child approach” under ECD Program of BRAC: Any change in knowledge and practice, 2005 | BRAC Education Program (BEP) |
| Children’s access to pre-school education in Bangladesh, 2005 | BRAC Education Program (BEP) |
| Early Childhood Development: Child-to-child approach Baseline Survey 2003 | BRAC Education Program (BEP) |
| A literacy intervention for preschool children in Bangladesh: the benefits of dialogic reading. | Early Childhood Development Resource Centre (ECDRC) , BRAC University Institute of Educational Development (BU-IED) |
| Playing with mathematics: a pilot intervention to develop basic mathematical skills among preschoolers in Bangladesh | ECDRC, BU-IED |
| Effectiveness of a mathematics program for preschoolers in rural Bangladesh | ECDRC, BU-IED |
| Effectiveness of a mathematics program for 3 to 4 year children in urban Bangladesh | ECDRC, BU-IED |
| Effectiveness of a community-based child stimulation program in rural Bangladesh. | ECDRC, BU-IED |
| A National Case Study on Delivery of Early Childhood Services Bangladesh | UNESCO |
| A Expanding ECCE in Bangladesh : It can be done | UNESCO |
| Baseline Survey of Caregivers KAP on Early Childhood Development in Bangladesh | UNICEF |
| Early Childhood Development Project Formative Evaluation of School Readiness Initiative by Partner Agencies | UNICEF |
| Formative Evaluation Study of School Readiness Programme in Chittagong Hill Tracts Districts | UNICEF |
| Implementing Changes in the Preschool Classroom An Action-based Case-study July – October 2004 | Plan Bangladesh |
| Evaluation of Early Childhood Parenting Programs of Plan Bangladesh | Plan Bangladesh |
| Evaluation of Early Childhood Preschool Programs of PLAN Bangladesh | Plan Bangladesh |
| Follow-up of Children who attended PLAN Preschool Programs in Grade 1 | Plan Bangladesh |
| Responsive complementary feeding in rural Bangladesh | Plan Bangladesh |
| Formative Evaluation to assess outcome of Caregiver’s Education by Trained Front Line Workers (FLW) | Plan Bangladesh |

(Ali, 2008; BEPS 2004; Momtaz 2005 and Yang 2005)

Table-3: Activates of ECD in Bangladesh:

| Time | | Task |
|-------------|--|---|
| 1987 | UNICEF | UNICEF introduced satellite schools and included a pre-primary program; these failed because communities did not support salaries of pre-primary teachers as planned. |
| 1991 | Phulki (A Dhaka based NGO in Bangladesh) | Phulki opened 35 childcare centers in Dhaka for working mothers; two- to fiveyears- old children. |
| | GSS (Gonoshahajjo Sangstha) | Early 1990s. GSS (Gonoshahajjo Sangstha) introduced child-friendly classrooms and teaching methods in play-oriented centers for children four years of age through grade five. |
| 1992. | Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) | DAM began pre-primary classes in its community learning centers and had enrollments grow from 1,350 to 12,898 children by the end of 1994; funding constraints have returned enrollments to their original size. |
| 1994. | Save the Children/USA | Save the Children/USA developed and piloted home-based early learning materials to accompany UNICEF's Facts for Life in Save the Children's impact areas, 35 women's credit groups, and a smaller NGO service area. |
| 1997-2001. | ECD Unit Establish | ECD Unit established, with Plan International, Save the Children/USA, GSS, and Grameen Shikkha support; discontinued in early 2001. |
| 1997 | Plan International | Plan International began implementing preschool programs |
| 1999 | Save the Children/USA | Save the Children/USA began home-based early learning programs for children four- to five-years-old. |
| 2001 | Save the Children/USA | Save the Children/USA began home-based preschool program for children five- to six-years-old. |
| 2002 | BRAC | BRAC introduced a pre-primary program in 514 newly established centers across 30 upazilas covering 16 districts. |
| 2003 | Save the Children/USA | Save the Children/USA began to implement 30 pre-primary programs at some GOB primary schools |
| 2005 | GOB | PRSP gives importance on ECD |
| 2005 | BEN | Formal Inauguration of Bangladesh ECD Network (BEN) |
| 2006 | UNICEF-GOB | Joint ECD program launching |
| 2006 | BEN | First National ECD Conference |
| 2007 | GOB | National Action Plan -2 give special emphasize on ECD |
| 2008 | GOB | Operational Framework for Pre-primary Education |

(Ali, 2008; BEPS 2004; Momtaz 2005 and Yang 2005)

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