

The Roles of the World Bank and UNESCO in Primary Education in Bangladesh: A Gender Based Analysis

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Abstract

This paper is an initiative to explore the roles of World Bank and UNESCO in primary education in Bangladesh with the observation of gender. The study reveals that both organizations have been contributed to a large extent to improve the status of female education whole over the country especially in poverty-stricken as well as rural areas with their assistances and advices for sound development of female education. It is also revealed that quality and equity based education ensured by their policies and implications through the building collaborative efforts with bilateral donors and other multilateral agencies. It has confirmed through the findings in this research that World Bank emphasizes on poverty reduction strategy for accelerating education whereas UNESCO reflects on professional skill development strategies and sustainable educational policies and planning in order to ensure universal education. Finally, the outcomes of this paper promote for better persuasions of gender based education in Bangladesh.

Key Words: Gender, World Bank, UNESCO, Primary Education, Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Now a day's gender discrimination is a predominant social phenomenon all over the world, including Bangladesh. As a country with a great reputation of moderate Muslim state, gender discrepancy is omnipresent in education. It is significant to study this inequality and also to explore possible resolutions. As Bangladesh is a developing country and women constitute half of the total population, accordingly, enhancement on primary education of Bangladeshi girls will play significant contribution

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in improving the value of human capital in long future. Even it will support greater contribution in context of accomplishing the questions of equality and sustainable development. In order to that an overview of the status of Bangladeshi girls' in primary education is presented in this paper. The first part gives a theoretical analysis of the related topic with regard to main theme and objective of the study. The second part of the paper discusses policy implications and directions for better educational facilities equally for boys and girls in primary education of Bangladesh on gender based perspectives. In this respect, contributions of the World Bank as well as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in developing primary education in the country will also be discussed in this part. And we will also explore some possible approaches to alleviate existing gender disparities in elementary education of the country. In addition, the paper seeks to understand the reasons for the persistence of gender disparities in Universal Primary Education (UPE). Note that the paper also centers on the state of primary education in Bangladesh. Although, there are several agencies such as UNESCO, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, the World Bank, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) like BRAC, who are operating their roles in primary sectors of education in Bangladesh but we want to specifically emphasize on the roles of the World Bank and UNESCO because of their greater and much effective contribution in promoting primary education in Bangladesh for long time.

The main purpose of this paper, therefore, is to focus on how the realm of primary education is influenced with the impacts of the World Bank and UNESCO's pathways in response to the view of gender aspect in developing countries like Bangladesh. The questions what we will try to pursue are that what are their policies, how do they implement these ones, what are the similarities and dissimilarities both of these agencies and finally how primary education has been influenced by their policies.

1.1. Methodology of the Study

This study is basically based on the review of information collected from the secondary sources *i.e.* published books, reports, research works, journals and newspapers. Some information is also collected through internet browsing and for the fulfillment of the nature of this research; it is also emphasized on case study method.

2. Theorizing Gender Based Education

The question of 'gender' refers to men and women identities in a society. It does not mention both male and female as same, but regards their values equal. On the other hand, gender equality mentions that men and women should be treated equally. There are various approaches of gender equality in education. For example, in terms of resources, it indicates

parity, whereas equity in terms of redistribution of power. On the contrary, gender equality in terms of human rights emphasizes equality of rights and capabilities. It perceives development as freedom and education as a basic capability (Unterhalter, 2005a, pp. 15-35). In educational aspect, gender equality includes entitlements to school attendance, participation, safety, security, and meaningful educational outcomes (Aikman & Unterhalter, 2005, pp. 1-12.). Gender equality, therefore, implies equality of capabilities of children to enjoy educational rights and entitlements. It encompasses their equal access to an education that enables them to surpass the threshold level of capabilities stipulated by Nussbaum (2000). However, the presence of gender inequalities at all levels of education has been a topic of concern for educationalists, sociologists, psychologists, and policy makers and implementers all over the world. Therefore, gender equality is a social order in which girls and boys, females and males share equal access to opportunity and work together to remove existing obstacles on full participation in both the economic and the social arena.

3. State of Gender in Primary Education in Bangladesh

Right to education is a broader agendum to achieve gender equality so that everyone can enjoy the same learning opportunities in different ways which has been preserved in the 2015 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). According to the article no 26 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR, 1948), ‘everyone has the right to education’ and ‘elementary education shall be compulsory’ and it also ‘be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages’. In order to ensure that objective, all countries promised to eliminate gender disparities especially in primary level of education by 2005 at the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar in 2000. In consistence with that agreement, the status of gender in primary education in Bangladesh can be discussed in two approaches:

I. Pre Independence Gender Status in Primary School:

Formal education for girls in Bangladesh began before the colonial period in Indian sub-continent when the girls from noble families only received conservative private tutoring for being a truthful wife and a virtuous mother to their children where girls from poor and middle class families were always deprived from right to education. Previously, females were prohibited from participating in public schooling as well. During the colonial era, launching for female education started gradually but the curricula were predominantly impacted by the male based discrimination. ‘The historical pattern of governance from a distance continues in present-day Bangladesh with external donor assistance playing an important role in formulating and implementing education policy (Sajeda,

2007, p. 38). After the partition of India in 1947, the provincial government of East Pakistan (presently Bangladesh) appointed an education commission that recommended some important changes to the curriculum (Ibid, p.42)’.

II. Post-Independence Gender Status in Primary School

Current education system in Bangladesh is strongly influenced by the recommendations of the first education commissions of 1974. In 1971, less than one in five children had completed primary school in Bangladesh. After independence, the number of schools was increased and primary education was nationalized with a specific framework of the government (Ibid, p.42)’. According to the constitution of Bangladesh, article no 17 (a) ‘the State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of- establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law’. ‘After independence, Bangladesh had to largely depend on foreign aid as the country faced long time war ravaged economic experience (Ibid, p. 37). Presently, there is a primary school in every village in Bangladesh and schooling is nearly universal with almost all children beginning primary school (Ibid, p.38). The emergence of modern liberal democratic ideas brought many changes in education in 1990s. Since 1991 when the first democratic government was formed, dramatic changes in primary education happened, especially in urban areas. More specifically, female primary education was given more priority for ensuring gender balance in higher education. The implementation of the Universal Primary Education (UPE) Act 1993 throughout the country was first formal regulation to address the problem of gender inequalities and disparities. The UPE is the provision of basic education to all primary school going children. This program was implemented to increase educational access to and fulfill of other national economic, social, and political objectives. After implementing the UPE in 1993, net enrollment and primary education completion rates have increased from 73.7% in 1992 to 87% in 2005 and 42.5% in 1992 to 83.3% in 2004 respectively (Titumir, 2005, p. 120). But these statistics are not same both in urban and rural areas of the country. Therefore, gender inequality in primary education is still prevailing throughout the country. However, major reforms (Sajeda, 2007 p. 49) in primary education are given below:

1973	Nationalization of all primary schools
1974	Qudrat-e-Khuda education Commission
1990	Compulsory primary education Act Tuition-free primary education for girls
1994	Food for Education Program (FEP)

4. Roles of the World Bank and UNESCO in Primary Education

The World Bank and UNESCO as multilateral agencies have largely contributed in educational development in Bangladesh after independence. From these two international multilateral agencies, UNESCO's main focus is on education from its birth, whereas the World Bank concentrated on education since 1960s.

a. Educational Policies and Methods of Implementation: The World Bank

The World Bank is a borrowing and lending financial international institution. It is not only a bank but rather a United Nations' specialized agency. It has 187 member states. All the members are responsible about the financing and spending money in the Bank. As regulations of the Bank, its President always becomes from a USA national. Along with the rest of the development community, the Bank centers to its efforts on reaching the MDGs. Poverty reduction is the main objective of the Bank. For that purpose, it provides both financial and technical assistance among the member states in various projects. The Bank launched, at first, in educational projects in 1961 sharply focusing on technical and vocational education. Hence the Bank seems as UN specialized agency, therefore, it attempts to involve in educational policy making process among its members. Meanwhile, the Bank has confirmed its position as the strongest agent in multicultural education (Jones, 2005, p. 135). Nevertheless, education has become a minor concern of the Bank with an annual disbursement on education of 5-10%, but for the UN education, that percent elevates the Bank to a primary position (Ibid, p. 94). However, educational policies of the Bank varied time to time under different presidencies. In fact, the Bank plays dual role as financial and intellectual organizations from point of economic and political aspects. Moreover, infrastructural development such as school buildings and educational equipment also get more attention by the agenda of the Bank. Apart from financial involvement, the Bank also provides technical assistance for expanding education and expertise to ensure quality of education among the members. However, the Bank always thinks cost benefit analysis whenever it is involved in any project. In a word, the Bank's fundamental policies and strategies related to the field of education are given below.

No	Different Fields of Education
1	Repayable loans and freely given technical assistance
2	Participation in education policy making
3	Promoting privatization of education
4	Decentralization of decision making
5	Education as an integrated system
6	Application of knowledge management
7	New interest in higher education

b. Educational Policies and Methods of Implementation: UNESCO

UNESCO is the linchpin organization of educational development in the world. It was established in 1945 as a forum of inter-governmental discussion and planning of the future of education. According to India Current Affairs, the agency has 195 member states including Palestine. Its headquarters is in Paris. UNESCO works as a leading agency of the 'Education for All' (EFA) movement. Even it is so far one of the most leading agency in multilateral education. Since its establishment in 1945, UNESCO works accompanied with governments of different countries, multilateral agencies, and non-governmental organizations, civil societies and even with different local communities to ensure equal universal education particularly from the grassroots levels of the societies. However, UNESCO works according to its purpose of the Constitution which includes contribution

“to peace and security by promoting collaboration among the nations through education, science and culture in order to further universal respect for justice, for the rule of law and for the human rights and fundamental freedoms which are affirmed for the peoples of the world, without distinction of race, sex, language or religion, by the Charter of the United Nations” (Constitution of the UNESCO, Article 1).

The Constitution explicitly indicates free flows of thoughts about education, equality of educational opportunity, preservation of world cultural heritage and promotion of cultural and educational diversity. Although UNESCO is combination of education, science and cultural affairs but it highly emphasizes on education. Therefore, both 'fundamental education' (1947); and 'compulsory education' (1950s) are significant areas of the agency (Singh, 2011). Indeed, UNESCO is a state-centric agency in both its own operations and in its view of social organization, governance and change.

At the ministerial level, the agency has assisted governments in their policy making and operations. Right to education was included as a question of human rights in 1948 to UNESCO. Initially, concept of fundamental education in UNESCO program eased to ensure universal literacy (Jones, 2005, p. 57). Accordingly, universal schooling and universal literacy both were important elements as right to education to the agency. However, UNESCO simultaneously focuses on equal educational opportunities within and between nations. In this way, educational phenomena of third world countries get more importance in light of UNESCO's role. Torres (1946b) had entitled campaign against 'illiteracy' as a strategy of the new commitment of UNESCO to ensure equalization of educational opportunity across and within member states.

In essence, UNESCO's major policies and pathways of implications are given below:

1. UNESCO underlines on achieving universal primary schooling and gender equity.
2. A UNESCO program gives importance on improving rate of literacy in adults and youth
3. The agency emphasizes on Early Child Care Education (ECCE)
4. Non Formal Education (NFE) and community learning centers both are important components of UNESCO's educational policy implementation.
5. UNESCO conducts a series of professional development of teachers concerning their roles, qualifications, training and their salary packages to provide support to the government in ensuring the quality of Education for All (EFA).
6. It assists to provide expertise and foster partnerships to strengthen national educational leadership to offer quality of education for all.
7. UNESCO works as an intellectual leader, an honest broker, and clearing house of ideas.
8. Lifelong learning is a technique of UNESCO's long term educational policy.

In fact, the mission of UNESCO in education sector is to provide international leadership for creating learning societies through educational facilities for all population.

UNESCO's Audio Visual Program and its Impact on Girls' Education

One of the most effective initiatives of UNESCO for promoting primary education in Bangladesh is considered audio visual program. In this program, 'Mina Cartoon' has become a popular method for its effective role to growth awareness among common people regarding equal access to education. This program has actively encouraged general people to give equal opportunity for girls' education along with their sons. One of its series mentions that Mina's father was not interested for his daughter education. He believed that girls will no longer live with them. After getting her marriage, she will go to her husband's home and will work there as a housewife. One day, when Mina's brother Raju went school, then some small birds appeared in their house premises where rice were drying in the sun. Then her father told her to pass away the birds and also asked her about the numbers of these birds. Mina responded her father on the basis of mathematical assumption. In response of her father asking about her learning these numbers, Mina promptly responded that she has learnt these numbers from her brother. Whenever Raju reads to his father,

then she follows him. In this way, her father could understand that his daughter also needs education coupled with his son.

5. Similarities and Dissimilarities between the World Bank and UNESCO

I. Similarities between the World Bank and UNESCO

The World Bank and UNESCO both are UN specialized agencies. To prevent the dropout rates in primary educational institutions, both the agencies jointly work with collaborative and partnership efforts with NGOs and community based organizations. Both of the agencies' educational policies and their applications more or less emphasize on the question of equity in term of ensuring quality of education. To successively implement their policies, both of these agencies also make collaborative efforts with bilateral donors and other multilateral agencies.

II. Dissimilarities between the World Bank and UNESCO

The World Bank is generally a bank and investment of private capital is recognized as its own asset. As a result, it always does not follow the regulations of the United Nations (UN) but UNESCO always maintains the regulations of the UN because it is a centralized UN agency. In order to become a member of the World Bank, a country has to be a member of International Monetary Fund (IMF) but it is not mandatory to become a member of the UN in order to get membership in UNESCO. UNESCO focuses on global level of education whereas the World Bank focuses on country level. The Bank emphasizes on structural adjustment programs including educational reforms with its own technical expertise whereas UNESCO just assists the national and international policy makers with positive approaches. UNESCO lacks the World Bank more systematic approach to global research and policy making. The Bank considers poverty as one of the reason behind inequality of education. For that reason, it emphasizes on poverty reduction strategy. In contrast, UNESCO reflects on professional skill development strategies and sustainable educational policies and planning in order to ensure universal education but all these are neglected by the Bank. The World Bank is largely United States (US) dominated agency. This is why; all members are not equally treated with the policies of the Bank, while members of UNESCO can easily practice equal rights in term of their necessities. While the Bank stresses on vocational education. In contrast, UNESCO emphasizes on formal as well as basic education. More specifically, the Bank tends to prepare market oriented and technical based curricula, whereas UNESCO assists to prepare a need based national curricula consulting and advising with the policy makers. The Bank usually trains up manpower towards its economic development whereas UNESCO trains up teachers for promoting quality of education. The World Bank

continuously emphasizes on higher education whereas UNESCO gives priorities on fundamental education. Accordingly, issue of literature is a central concern of UNESCO. Privatization of education is increasingly attracting question inside the Bank. To accomplish this one, the Bank concentrates on decentralization of policy making. In this respect, UNESCO focuses on improving the quality based education form grassroots level of schooling. For this purpose, UNESCO assists the national governments to prepare their national education policies and accordingly it financially help it members to implement the policies universally.

6. Observation of Gender in Primary Education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has gradually reduced gender inconsistency among the South Asian countries. Although the country has already achieved approximately equal ratio of male and female students at primary education (Budget 2010-2011. p. 39) but it is obviously true that the country still cannot ensure 100 percent enrollment of all children at primary school. In order to ensure such enrollment, some undertaken projects like school feeding program in the poverty-stricken areas, stipend measures to confirm UPE for all were introduced. In this perspective, the roles of UNESCO and World Bank of the cause and effect of the gap have been important steps in alleviating gender disparity and accomplishing the goal of a full realization of equal rights for women in every aspect of life. Prior to the implementation of UPE, there were obvious gender inequalities in enrolment, attendance, performance, and dropout rates. In order to alleviate these worst situations in educational realm, both the World Bank and UNESCO are increasingly financing and advising for long-term educational development in Bangladesh. More specifically, posture of primary education has been given more emphasis based on gender equality. According to the recommendation of these agencies, the government has allocated Tk. 8957 crore only for Ministry of Primary and Mass Education for 2011-2012 (Budget for fiscal year 2011-12). In addition, recently adopted national education policy 2010, which has helped to fuel the growing demand for education, has created some new issues for education. For the fulfillment of the target of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), Bangladesh has already achieved greater progress in human development.

According to United Nations Development Program (UNDP, 2011) report on Human Development Index (HDI), 'Bangladesh improved its point from 0.497 to 0.5 at the index with a significant improvement in gender inequality issue'. On the other hand, the World Bank recent report indicates that Bangladesh has met the MDGs in term of gender parity in

education and universal primary school enrollment well ahead of time. It also mentions that nearly 80% of teenage girls today have completed primary education, compared to a similar ratio of only 20% for women in their fifties today. The report further points out that rate of enrollment in primary school were 85.5% in 2008. Since independence, the Bank has provided \$ 15 billion support to the Government of Bangladesh to reduce poverty and to improve the lives of the people where unilaterally 15% was given in educational development (Bangladesh Country Overview 2010). In this way, the World Bank works in close partnership with the Government of Bangladesh and always aligns its programs and projects with Government priorities. The World Bank also works closely with other development partners, non-government organizations, civil society, academia, and other stakeholders. The World Bank provides both financing and technical assistance that have helped the country to be on track on achieving the MDGs (Ibid).

However, the World Bank has already contributed a lot to increase the access to education especially in primary level of institutions. On the basis of comparative analysis of the Bank report, it is apparent that education in primary school has been so facilitated by the role of the Bank. For instance, 'the gross enrollment rate for primary school increased from 76 percent in 1991 to 98 percent in 2008 (with net enrollment at 91 percent). Primary school enrollment net percentage was 60.5% in 1990 and it increased 91.1% in 2008. Ratio of girls to boys in primary education was 0.83 in 1990 and 1.08 in 2008 (World Bank Indicators, 2010). Since poverty is one of the major factors for excluding children from taking enrolment in primary education, for that reason, the country accepted Poverty Reduction Strategic Paper (PRSP) according to the advice of the World Bank for eradicating poverty and ensuring gender equality as well as women empowerment in the country with a time framework. Due to poverty, large numbers of children leave schools before completion their primary level of education. Research shows that 25 percent of the women-headed families are in hard-core poverty and that each of these families has one primary school age child, the number of primary school age children from poor female-headed families would be 1.45 million (Manzoor, 2007, p. 100). To prevent the dropout rates in primary level, the World Bank and UNESCO jointly work with collaborative and partnership efforts with NGOs and community based organizations.

According to the World Bank, if the cost of increasing enrollment ratios rises as a country approaches universal enrollment, then it may be more cost-effective to spend the additional resources on girls who have lower enrollment rates than on boys (World Bank Report, 1991a, p. 55). In a word, the role of World Bank to alleviate gender inequality in

primary education sector emphasizes on PRSP as an instrument of poverty reduction of strategy whether poverty is considered as one of the main concerning reason of dropout in primary level in schools. Even the Bank also works as a bureaucrat for educational policy making in Bangladesh. In this perspective, whenever the Bank involves in policy making, then it gives emphasizes on some important issues like gender education, quality of education, women empowerment in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh nearly school enrollment children reached 95 percent in 1995 with boys and girls equally to attend school. All primary schools are mixed gender with the exception of *madrashas* that are usually single-sex institutions. Some NGO schools are offering preference to girls. In 1994, the government of Bangladesh started a new program to provide financial incentives to poor families to motivate them to send children to school. This program was initially introduced in 25 percent of the rural areas of the country and later extended to the entire country (Sajeda, 2007, p. 43). In 2004, this program was changed to substitute the wheat with cash handouts as incentives. As a result of the Food for Education Program and other efforts to boost enrollment, current demand for schooling has led to considerable overcrowding in schools. According to a UNICEF report, approximately one in three primary school teachers is a women, but women overwhelmingly out-number men in the non-government schools (Ibid, p. 44). However, to successfully materialize these programs in different periods, Bangladesh government had to largely dependent on financial, technical, advisory and intellectual assistance of the World Bank and UNESCO as well.

Although many positive changes have been occurred during last past some decades, Bangladeshi girls especially those in the poor rural areas, still experience gender inequality because of the historical and traditional cultural influence of the region. In order to remove these predicaments to gender development, UNESCO's long-standing commitments to human rights education, peace education, environmental education, population education, education and women's empowerment, education for sustainable development and education for international understanding are also helping to change the mindset of patriarchal traditional societies in Bangladeshi. For these purposes, the agency occasionally organizes development oriented programs and celebrates special days accompanied with local communities, civil societies, NGOs and general people. In essence, these commemorative strategies are largely a matter of symbolism which attempts to raise public awareness. For instance, UNESCO is celebrating world literacy day, world teacher's day. Celebrations of these days obviously are raising positive changes about female education among the common people of Bangladesh. UNESCO

sometimes provides teacher training in Bangladesh relating to gender sensitiveness issues, gender educative, equal rights, and equity based priority in educational sector. Therefore, curriculum development always gets most priority in UNESCO's policy in Bangladesh. On the basis of comparative analysis between UNESCO and the World Bank, it is clear that the roles of UNESCO is more public oriented than the roles of the Bank in promoting gender education in Bangladesh.

7. Conclusion

In our discussion above, we have briefly mentioned the persistence of gender inequalities in primary education focusing on the roles of the World Bank and UNESCO. We have also discussed on how the roles of these two agencies have contributed to improve the situation of primary education in Bangladesh with their investment of time, supporting money and also implicating their educational policies and advices especially for female education. However, despite the substantial achievements in gender equality in primary education, it is apparent that Bangladesh is still facing significant challenges to acquire hundred percent enrollments of children in primary education. Although the country has already achieved a considerable position in the primary level, but there are few gender disparity in primary institutions. However, the differences in the education of girls and boys are evident, especially in the remote rural areas of Bangladesh. Disproportionate rates of illiteracy and uneven levels of education between boys and girls contain them from working with partnership efforts with each other at all levels and structures of society. Assurance for equal access to quality education for all children is still a subject of question. As the question of gender in primary education has received much attention for last few decades from national and different international organizations, accordingly, the World Bank and UNESCO both have contributed too much to improve the status of female education whole over the country especially in poverty-stricken areas. As a matter of fact, they have emphasized on the quality and equity based education. Teachers are the central resource for educational teaching, in this respect, their education is certainly essential to cover the whole section of gender equity in the curriculum. In order to that, many dedicated teachers could be appointed especially in underprivileged areas for ensuring better education. Proper strategies of educational development can help to overcome socio-cultural and religious barriers to improve the educational status of women and also to ensure gender equality in education. In addition to that voice of young generation can prevent gender discrimination in formal education in the society. In fact, there are no alternative to work except working together. Finally, a joint venture approach is needed to get rid of the embedded traditional gender discriminatory customs in the society and to bring a positive social image about women through ensuring proper equal rights in education.

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Short Notes

Madrasah and Ibtedayee Madrasah- It is Arabic word which means school. *Madrasah*, in English, usually refers to the specifically Islamic institutions. Major services of madrasah education include to serve orphans and poor children for providing them religious education and teaching for a certain time. On the other hand, *Ibtedayee Madrasah* means religious primary school. In Bangladesh *ibtedayee madrasah* includes classes from I to VIII which are evaluated as like as general education in the country.

Mina Cartoon- It is an innovative program of UNESCO. The main purpose of this program is to raise consciousness among the people of the communities about their daughters' education. However, the program is consisted with many series. So many people especially girls have been benefited with this audio-visual program.

NGOs- Non-Governmental Organizations are legally constituted organization founded by the members of civil society. NGOs are different from any public institution but can run its operation independently with the permission of the government. NGOs get funds from various donor agencies. The main activities of NGOs include human rights, the environmental issues, socio-economic activities, cultural programs, action for women rights and stand against violence and so on.