

## SUMMARY SECTOR ASSESSMENT: EDUCATION

### A. Sector Performance, Problems, and Opportunities

1. **Overview.** Bangladesh has one of the world's largest education systems, catering to more than 30 million students as shown in the table below. It comprises primary and secondary education (including teacher training), *madrasah* (religious organization school) education, higher education (university), and technical and vocational education and training. The schooling system consists of 1 year of pre-primary education, 5 years of primary education (grades 1–5), 3 years of lower secondary education (grades 6–8), 2 years of secondary education (grades 9–10), 2 years of higher secondary education (grades 11–12), and 4 years of higher or university education.<sup>1</sup> The system is complex and involves a large number of government and nongovernment agencies. Service provision ranges from general formal schooling to religious formal and informal education, and includes 25 types of primary education providers, seven types of secondary institutions, and 10 examination boards at secondary level. The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME) is responsible for pre-primary and primary education, and nonformal education and mass literacy; and the Ministry of Education (MOE) is responsible for secondary education, *madrasah* education, vocational education and training, and tertiary education.

**Magnitude of Education in Bangladesh**

Subsector	Schools	Students	Teachers	Types of Service Providers
Primary education	126,615	18,602,988	548,201	25
Secondary education	27,116	11,623,593	317,267	7
Tertiary education (college)	1,819	3,126,550	76,002	6
Tertiary education (university)	130	823,102	27,734	
<b>Total</b>	<b>155,680</b>	<b>38,733,358</b>	<b>999,321</b>	

Source: Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Education Information Statistics (2017).

2. **Primary education subsector.** In Bangladesh, education is compulsory for children aged 6–10. The 1-year pre-primary education was introduced in 2010 and is offered by nearly all government schools. In 2017, 18.6 million students were enrolled in primary education—about 74% of them in government schools, the others in community, nongovernment organization schools, *madrasahs*, and kindergartens. Six main mandatory courses are taught at the schools. Grades 1 and 2 teach Bangla, mathematics, and English. From grades 3 to 5, Bangladesh and the world, science, and religious studies are added. Nongovernment schools teach some other courses such as Arabic, general knowledge, English grammar, or computer science, in addition to the mandatory courses.

3. **Management structure.** The MOPME is the line ministry responsible for formulating strategies, making policies, monitoring and evaluating implementation and results, and handling financial management and procurement for Bangladesh's primary schools. Major offices under the MOPME are the (i) Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), (ii) National Academy of

<sup>1</sup> Other South Asian countries have similar education systems. India has lower and upper kindergarten, 5-year primary education, 5-year secondary education (composed of 3-year "middle school" and 2-year "high school"), and 2-year higher or senior secondary education. Nepal, as of 2016, extended compulsory basic education from grades 1–5 to grades 1–8, and combined the previous 2-year lower secondary (grades 9–10) and higher secondary (grades 11–12) education into a 4-year secondary education (grades 9–12). It has 1-year pre-primary education, but the participation rate is low. Bhutan has 11 years of basic education, including 1 year of pre-primary schooling, 6 years of primary, 2 years of junior high, and 2 years of high school. These are all offered free by the government. Sri Lanka has 5-year elementary school, 3-year junior secondary school, 2-year higher secondary school, and 2-year collegiate level (pre-university) education.

Primary Education (in charge of developing teacher education and training), (iii) Bureau of Non-Formal Education, and (iv) Compulsory Primary Education Implementation and Monitoring Unit. The DPE administers government primary schools through seven divisional primary education offices (PEOs), 64 district PEOs, and 505 *upazila* (subdistrict, formerly *thana*) PEOs. The DPE is also in charge of the 66 primary teacher training institutes spread across all districts. Development and revision of the curriculum and textbooks as well as other teaching and learning materials are the responsibility of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (primary education wing) under the MOE.

4. **Achievements.** Bangladesh has taken important steps toward improving the quality of education and reducing disparities.<sup>2</sup> In primary education, the gross enrollment rate increased from 107.7% in 2010 to 111.7% in 2017, while net enrollment rates increased from 94.8% in 2010 to 98.0% in 2017. The gender parity index stood at 1.07 for gross enrollments and at 1.01 for net enrollments. Disparity in access across income groups also declined. For example, the primary net attendance rate for the poorest quintile of households rose from 58% in 2005 to 80% in 2014, compared with a rise from 80% to 88% in the same period for the richest quintile.<sup>3</sup> Built on previous achievements and joint experiences between the government and development partners, the Third Primary Education Development Project (FY2012–FY2018) made progress by (i) introducing a competency-based curriculum in 2011; (ii) delivering textbooks in a timely manner; (iii) raising the minimum qualification requirement for teachers at entry; (iv) launching the Diploma in Primary Education program for newly recruited teachers prior to services; (v) expanding in-service training for teachers; (vi) conducting three rounds of standardized national student assessments (NSAs) in 2011, 2013, and 2015;<sup>4</sup> (vii) piloting second-chance education for out-of-school children; (viii) adding nearly 39,000 new classrooms, 24,000 sanitary facilities, and 39,000 safe water sources at schools;<sup>5</sup> (ix) ensuring one primary teacher training institute in each district; and (x) extending the school level improvement plan (SLIP) to all schools. The primary education completion rate increased from 60.2% in 2010 to 80.8% in 2016. Girls showed more advances in enrollment, completion, and learning outcomes than boys.<sup>6</sup>

5. **Problems.** Despite the remarkable progress made, Bangladesh's primary education system still needs to overcome some key hurdles, as described in the following paragraphs.

6. **Education expenditure.** Public expenditure on education increased from \$2.25 billion in FY2011 to \$5.65 billion in FY2017 but has been kept at about 2% of Bangladesh's gross domestic product, one of the lowest percentages in South Asia and among the developing countries. Expenditure on primary education is around 45% of the total education expenditure. Teacher salaries and school infrastructure development account for more than 90% of the expenses. Since introducing a new pay scale (basic pay and allowances) for all teachers in 2016, which almost doubled the previous pay scale, the outlay on teacher salaries has risen further and become the largest expenditure item, surpassing even school infrastructure and equipment expenditure.

7. **Education quality.** The average pupil–teacher ratio improved from 51:1 in 2007 to about 40:1 in 2016 for the government schools (including government primary schools and newly

<sup>2</sup> Bangladesh was among the few countries that had achieved gender parity in enrollment up to secondary education by 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Bangladesh, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. 2014. *Report on Education Household Survey*. Dhaka.

<sup>4</sup> NSAs were also done in 2006 and 2008 but they were not standardized; thus, not comparable.

<sup>5</sup> Most classrooms were constructed in remote and underprivileged areas to reduce overcrowding in schools.

<sup>6</sup> Among other factors, the government's assistance to stipends and school feeding is thought to have contributed to this.

nationalized primary schools), but in urban areas such as Dhaka and Chittagong, the ratio can be as high as 84:1. In 2016, only 35.4% of the government schools achieved the ratio of 40:1. High pupil–teacher ratios dampen the quality of education. According to the NSAs, students’ performance has declined since 2011. In 2015, only 65% and 41% of grade 3 students performed at their levels or above on Bangla and mathematics, down from 68% and 50% in 2011, and 75% and 57% in 2013. The performance is even lower for grade 5. Only 23% and 10% of grade 5 students performed at their levels on Bangla and mathematics in 2015, down from 25% and 32% in 2011, and 25% in 2013. The decline in NSA results is related to the expansion of school samples between the NSA, 2011 and the NSA, 2015 which meant that several factors varied, such as teacher profiles (qualification and training), student’s background (socioeconomic conditions), and physical school facilities (learning environment).

8. **School infrastructure.** A shortage of classrooms is evident, since only one-third of primary schools achieved an average student–classroom ratio of 40:1 or less in 2016. In terms of quality, only 35.3% of classrooms are in good condition, 22.2% are in moderate condition, 30.8% are unusable or in need of repair, and 11% are in bad condition. About 47% of schools lack a separate and functioning toilet for girls, and 26.8% of schools still do not have safe water. Given the shortage of classrooms, about 77.4% of Bangladesh’s primary schools are running double shifts, and the teacher–student contact hours are almost 50% lower than the international standard of 900–1,000 hours per year.<sup>7</sup> The fewer contact hours restrict effective teaching and learning. Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone nations in the world. Natural hazards such as tropical cyclones and tornadoes, floods, riverbank erosion, tsunamis, and landslides often damage the education infrastructure, causing school closures for as long as 5 months during the monsoon season. Schools affected by disasters have reported a 3% increase in dropout rates and lower competency achievement.<sup>8</sup>

9. **Teacher issues.** The filling of teacher vacancies is a recurrent challenge. On average, 27% of the positions of head teacher (primary school principal, who often also teaches) and 7% of assistant teacher positions were vacant throughout 2016. In addition, teacher absenteeism is high. About 42% of the teachers are high school graduates or not even that. Less than 50% of the primary teachers are proficient in teaching. Teachers continue to rely heavily on lecturing and repetition, with little room for interactive learning, independent work, and problem-solving. Lack of support at schools and lack of career progression have resulted in low teacher morale.

10. **Curriculum and textbooks.** The current curriculum in grades 1–5 is the one revised during the competency-based curriculum reform in 2011, and textbooks are the ones revised in 2013. Given the rapid knowledge and technological development and the need to consider the students’ performance, it is imperative to review and revise curriculum and textbooks, as well as the provision of teaching and learning materials (including supplementary reading materials).

11. **Examinations and assessment.** Currently, three types of assessment for primary school students are used: (i) school-based tests, (ii) primary education completion examination, and (iii) NSA. However, no system exists to analyze the assessment results, distill lessons and experiences, and provide feedback that could inform the refinement of curriculum and textbooks, teaching methodologies, and examination methods and questions.

12. **Education inclusiveness.** Children from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to complete primary education. The dropout rate is extremely high in poverty-prone areas, especially

<sup>7</sup> This is also relevant to teacher recruitment and deployment.

<sup>8</sup> Government of Bangladesh, Directorate of Primary Education. 2017. *Annual Sector Performance Report*. Dhaka.

*char* (river islands) and northern region. It is estimated that about 2.5 million school-aged children are out of school, i.e., 11% of all children aged 8–14 or 13.3% of boys and 8.6% of girls.

13. **Sector governance.** Despite the decentralization efforts since 2003, education service delivery in Bangladesh remains highly centralized—fiscal and administrative powers are largely concentrated in Dhaka, discouraging local solutions and weakening efficiency, effectiveness, and accountability. The school level improvement plan (SLIP) and *upazila* primary education plan were designed to boost participation. The SLIP is funded, but funding is the same for all schools regardless of school size, needs, or performance; and enforcement of proper fund usage is lacking. The *upazila* primary education plan was not even funded.

14. **Opportunities.** While there are challenges, opportunities also exist:

15. **Government commitment.** The government recognizes that human capital is a key determinant of economic growth and poverty reduction. It is committed to education for all and to the Sustainable Development Goals, and has integrated them in its Seventh Five-Year Plan (FY2016–FY2020). The plan identifies improving education quality as the most critical challenge and, for primary education, aims to improve the teaching–learning process in school, ensure participation, reduce disparity, promote decentralization, and step up planning and management. The National Education Policy, 2010 considers primary education fundamental, and aims at achieving universal, compulsory, free, and uniform quality primary education. The strategy emphasizes (i) adoption of a uniform curriculum and syllabus across the schools with emphasis on climate change, science, and information technology; (ii) elimination of discrepancies among schools with respect to school infrastructure, facilities, number of teachers, and training opportunities; (iii) reduction in dropouts; (iv) provision of special interventions for marginalized indigenous children, physically challenged students, street children, and other ultra-deprived children; and (v) improvement of the school environment. On 22 May 2018, the government approved the Fourth Primary Education Development Program (FY2019–FY2023) aiming to provide quality education to all children from pre-primary to grade 5 through an efficient, inclusive, and equitable education system.

16. **Demography and technological advances.** The rapid socioeconomic transformation of Bangladesh and its growing young population create strong demand for high-quality education. Progress in information and communication technology is making education more accessible and innovating teaching and learning methods. This gives countries like Bangladesh opportunities to leapfrog barriers to upgrade the education system and build up human capital quickly.

17. **Development partners' support.** Development partners have been extending continuous support to Bangladesh's primary education. The first primary education project of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), approved in 1990, and the subsequent project, approved in 1997, were financed by ADB alone, although other development partners were implementing separate projects in the subsector. The Second Primary Education Development Program, approved in 2003, started with cofinancing by 10 other development partners. The Third Primary Education Development Project was approved in 2011 with cofinancing by eight other development partners; and supplementary financing was approved in 2015 with cofinancing by four other development partners. Major joint financing development partners had been Australia, Canada, Department for International Development of the United Kingdom, European Union, Global Partnership for Education, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Sweden, United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), and the World Bank. The shift to a sector-wide approach (SWAp) since 2003 has enabled the development partners to better coordinate and harmonize their policies, procedures, and requirements for program implementation.

## B. ADB Sector Experience and Assistance

18. Bangladesh's education sector is a major target of ADB assistance. As of 31 May 2017, ADB's lending to the sector amounted to about \$2.11 billion, accounting for about 11% of ADB's total lending to Bangladesh.

19. ADB has been supporting the government's plans and initiatives for education for all, eradication of illiteracy, quality education, and gender parity; and has been a leading development partner in supporting primary education. It has provided five loans on primary education from the Asian Development Fund totaling \$718.3 million since 1990, which since 2003 have leveraged cofinancing from development partners totaling \$1,857.5 million. Initially, ADB (i) used the project-type modality; (ii) divided responsibility with other development partners by geographical area and component; (iii) aimed at increasing equitable access, quality, and the institutional capacity of the DPE and other agencies concerned; and (iv) financed mostly hardware, e.g., construction of new schools and classrooms; upgrades to existing schools and classrooms; provision or improvement of school facilities such as furniture, sewerage, and latrines; construction, upgrade, and expansion of DPE's central, district, and *upazila* offices. Recognizing the slow improvements in primary education quality and institutional capacity under the project-type modality, ADB shifted to the SWAp under the Second Primary Education Development Program and continued to support the same objectives with more emphasis on quality. The Third Primary Education Development Project, approved in 2011, introduced the disbursement-linked indicator approach, prior to ADB's introduction of the financial instrument of results-based lending for programs from 2013.

20. ADB's country partnership strategy, 2016–2020 for Bangladesh identifies improving human capital through better education and skills development as a priority investment area. ADB's assistance will help the government to improve the quality and relevance of the education system. For primary education, ADB will (i) continue with the SWAp in close coordination with other development partners; (ii) strengthen the government's results-based management; (iii) enhance the government's institutional capacity for planning, budgeting, management, and monitoring and evaluation to provide better services; (iv) support the government to expand partnerships with nongovernment entities; (v) focus on improving quality and reducing disparity, including use of information and communication technology to improve teaching and learning processes; and (vi) ensure and mainstream gender equality through various program activities.

21. **Lessons.** According to ADB's Independent Evaluation Department validation report in 2016 on Bangladesh's country partnership strategy (2011–2015) and the experience of the Third Primary Education Development Project, which was completed in June 2018, the SWAp and results-based financing are relevant and effective for achieving results. The shift to the SWAp since 2003 and the start of results-based financing since 2011 have ensured the government's leadership and ownership, enabled the development partners to better coordinate with each other and reduce transaction costs with the government, and opened many priority areas such as inclusive education and decentralization to improve quality, equity, and institutional capacity. Results-based lending is a further step up from the disbursement-linked indicator approach to allow (i) the government to lead and drive the program and integrate its activities into the executing agency's regular operations; and (ii) many development partners to pool resources and harmonize their priorities, policies, procedures, practices, and requirements. Major lessons identified by the Independent Evaluation Department are that (i) many of the achievements in the overall education sector have been the result of the development partners' close engagement with the government through long-term continuity of support; and (ii) the choice of assistance modality should depend on the executing agency's institutional and staff capacity, development partners' availability of staff and resources, context of program activities, and key sector issues.