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UN Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC)
Annual Ministerial Review Meeting 2011



Bangladesh

National Voluntary Presentation on
'Implementing the internationally agreed goals
and commitments in regard to education'

Nurul Islam Nahid M.P.

Honorable Minister

Ministry of Education

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Geneva, 05 July 2011

4.00 pm – 6.00 pm

Mr. President

Distinguished Ministers, Heads of delegations and other delegates

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

Assalamu alaikum & Good afternoon to you all

On behalf of the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, it is my immense pleasure to make the second National Voluntary Presentation in this august Annual Ministerial Review Meeting of the ECOSOC. As an Education Minister, I am very much delighted to convey our sincere thanks to ECOSOC for selecting education as the theme for this year's Annual Ministerial Review Meeting. The scope of reporting on 'Implementing the internationally agreed goals and commitments in regard to education' enabled us to share the remarkable achievements that Bangladesh made. Changes in the education governance and quality improvement measures are visible in the education sector as results of strategic initiatives in our new education policy.

The Bangladesh government is committed to achieve all MDGs including the one on Education. In line with the constitutional directives and the vision of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, education is considered as the principal means to attain our national development.

In 2008 General elections, the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina received an overwhelming mandate in favour of her Vision 2021 which seeks to establish digital Bangladesh through a transparent, affordable, knowledge-based, ICT oriented system of good governance by transforming it as a middle income country by 2021 where our new generation would be the driving force and leading Bangladesh towards prosperity and development in future. Hence, it is imperative for us to provide quality education to our new generation and make them competent enough to cope up with the upcoming challenges of the modern world.

Against this backdrop, I am happy to inform you that we drafted the first ever National Education Policy through a comprehensive and inclusive consultative process covering all sections of people including all political and social forces, and it was adopted by the

Parliament in 2010. The New Education Policy has reflected the aspirations of our people and the commitment of the government to ensure not only access to education but also to address the issues of equity and quality. It covers all the goals of EFA and goes even beyond towards demonstrating our government's commitment to develop our huge human resource as a collective force which will be fully equipped to deal with modern day demands in the era of globalization as well as emerging challenges like environmental degradation, trade and aid concerns, food insecurity, energy crisis and inequality at all levels.

Bangladesh has undertaken a comprehensive approach to achieve the millennium development goals. In many areas, we did well. For example, as it reduced child mortality by 69%, we received MDG-4 Award in 2010.

The government has set some priorities in attaining the milestones towards improving quality of life of the people and is undertaking measures to attain those in a phased manner. Elimination of poverty and inequity, achieving 100% school enrolment by 2011, 100% literacy rate by 2014 and establishment of good governance are priority issues before the government. The main strategy of poverty reduction is centering on bringing vibrancy in agriculture and rural life. In order to increase agricultural production, special emphasis is placed on agricultural modernization, technological innovation and expansion of facilities for research in agriculture, where the roles of education and skills are significant and specially recognized.

Despite resource constraints, Bangladesh demonstrated significant achievement in reduction of child and maternal mortality rates, enhancing people's sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation, and in developing approaches of community managed disaster risk reduction and adaptation to climate change. The significant achievement towards gender equity is manifested through increased female participation in education and in workplace. In all sectors of development, education is playing indispensable roles. Our new education policy has created enabling conditions to institutionalize these roles thereby contributing to sustainable development of the country.

To fulfill our commitments for achieving EFA, a number of initiatives have been continuing in Bangladesh both at the state level and by the non-state providers of education. I would now like to mention some strategic measures which our government has taken in the education sector and which are now producing positive results.

The government had introduced a food for education programme which was later modified to a stipend programme. Under the programme, the government is providing stipends and safety net support to increase participation of students from the poor segments in the society. Every year a sum of US\$ 115 million is spent by the government for this innovative programme. Beneficiaries under this programme is still limited to 5.5 million owing to resource constraint. We need global support to increase coverage.

Another important step is the introduction of competency-based curriculum and modification of text books in line with the set competencies. The curriculum and textbooks are updated to meet the contemporary needs and upholding values and history of the country and its war of liberation.

Improvement of physical facilities in the education sector is also an initiative which is worth mentioning. It includes construction of new buildings, science labs, libraries, separate toilets for girls, disabled friendly/accessible buildings, provision of laptops in all model primary and secondary schools etc. There is, however, a growing need for additional infrastructure.

As measure of establishing national standard and qualitative assessment, the government took a revolutionary step introducing public examination at the end of class V and class VIII. To attract more students to school and education and in consideration of the affordability issue, for the first time the government has made free distribution of 190 million text books in 2010. In 2011, the number has increased to 230.2 million, which required nearly US\$ 76 million.

Besides this, we have developed a dynamic website for the National Curriculum and Text Book Board where all textbooks of primary and secondary education plus educational materials have been uploaded. This would facilitate interactive learning by the students though use of IT facilities at the school and at home, and will enrich teachers as well. Some 20,500 educational institutions have been brought under the coverage of ICT teaching programme. To remove the disparity between urban and rural educational institutions, the government is developing one school as a model in each of 306 upazilas.

To ensure quality education, besides infrastructure improvement and enhancement of physical facilities, extensive training of teachers and education officials has been arranged. National Academy for Primary Education, Primary Training Institutes and Upazila Resource Centres arrange various professional training courses for quality primary education. In secondary education, Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education project (TQI-

SEP) is a special initiative by the government to extend support to the non-government secondary school teachers in enhancement of their capability and effective teaching skills. We are also considering the performance excellence of teachers while making decisions for their placement.

With a view to develop human resources, the government has planned to introduce vocational and ICT education from the primary education stage. It has been targeted that all students in primary education level must complete 8-year cycle with pre-vocational and ICT courses as included in the curricula of classes VI – VIII.

Steps have also been undertaken for the modernization of madrasa education (that is Islamic religion-based education system) through improvement of curriculum, introduction of vocational training, science and computer education.

In order to improve the quality of higher education, post-graduate government colleges are being transformed as resource institutions for professional development of teachers. Under the Higher Education Quality Enhancement project, an enabling environment is created in the universities for research and academic management.

All these initiatives that I have mentioned have brought positive results in respect of both boys and girls. Total number of students at the primary level educational institutions has increased significantly over time – from 5.3 million in 1970 to 20 million in 2011. The rates of access and retention in both primary and secondary education have increased, including attainment of gender parity in both levels of education. In the primary education 99.3% enrollment of children is ensured, which would be reached at 100% by the end of 2011. We have achieved gender equality in both primary and secondary education in 2005 and it has been maintained ever since. The gender parity index is 1.03 and 1.17 in primary education and secondary education respectively. A 60% quota is fixed for female teachers of which 53 percent is already achieved.

The qualitative improvement in the performance of the students is also visible from the results in the public examinations at various levels. These achievements at the national level contributed substantially in attainment of MDG and EFA goals.

Owing to continuous efforts in school enrolment, levels of education and literacy status of the population have increased over time in Bangladesh and this has encouraged the government

to embark on a nationwide movement to create awareness for combating illiteracy and achieving literacy for all by 2014.

We are proud of our achievements in increasing access for all particularly in achieving gender parity but the continuing dropout rates, inequity in provisions and the shortcomings of quality in education are still major concerns. These are the challenges that we are now trying to overcome and we believe we shall be successful if we have the right strategies, appropriate interventions and adequate resources.

We strongly feel that cooperation among the Development Partners, NGOs and private sector agencies function as synergic forces in improving both quality of education and its expansion. To sustain and furtherance of these achievement and the domain of cooperation we would like to stress upon continuous strategic cooperation among these actors nationally, regionally and globally. There is need for mobilizing sufficient, harmonized and focused support from the international community.

The government is fully committed towards gradually enhancing our budget allocation for education to 6% of GDP or at least 20% of national budget and is working in that direction in partnership with all concerned.

We the national governments, particularly from the South, have been trying our best to allocate enough resources, utilize these resources judiciously and work on achieving EFA. But the donor countries also have to do their share. While thanking them for their continued support, I would also like to request them to fulfill their own commitment (made in Dakar Declaration) that "no countries seriously committed to education for all will be thwarted in their achievement of this goal by a lack of resources."

We stand ready to work together to address the outstanding challenges. Reaching the unreached children, ensuring quality education, imparting relevant skills and knowledge, capacity building are challenges that we face. We expect that with the experience gained so far and in close partnership with all stakeholders including development partners and others who consider education as a sustainable tool for human development, we shall be able to face and overcome these challenges..

I thank you all.