

Valuing teachers, improving their status

by KM Enamul Hoque

THE UNESCO director general Irina Bokova, in a speech celebrating the 50th anniversary of World Teachers Day, which was celebrated every October 5 marking the adoption of the ILO/UNESCO Recommendation concerning the Status of Teachers in 1994, said, 'Nothing can substitute a good teacher. Teachers are front-line change-makers, for human rights and dignity, for crafting new ways of living together in societies that are transforming and are increasingly diverse.' The theme for this year's day is 'Valuing Teachers, Improving their Status.'

The recommendation provides a guideline for member-states to facilitate rights and responsibilities of teachers and international standards for their initial preparation and further education, recruitment, employment, teaching and learning conditions. It also contains many recommendations for teachers' participation in educational decisions through consultation and negotiation with educational authorities.

Subsequently, UNESCO general conference in 1997 adopted recommendations concerning the Status of Higher-Education Teaching Personnel. These two sets of recommendations have been considered an important set of guidelines to promote teachers' status in the interest of quality education.

In ensuring a better coordination, UNESCO's institutional partners for World Teachers Day include (i) International Task Force on Teachers for Education for All, (ii) International Labour Organisation, (iii) Education International, (iv) UNDP, and (v) UNICEF. However, irrespective of formal engagement with UNESCO, everyone can help by (i) celebrating the profession, (ii) generating awareness about teacher issues, and (iii) ensuring that teacher respect is part of the values and practices. They can also take the opportunity of the day to discuss, compare, learn, argue, share and improve the teaching learning conditions.

In Bangladesh, the Campaign for Popular Education as the national coalition for education, has been coordinating the major events around World Teachers Day since 2007 involving about 100 teachers' associations and members of civil society organisation where the Dhaka office of UNESCO is the strategic partner, among others.

The SDG4 call for an inclusive and equitable quality education and promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all is critical to

achieving all global development goals and targets. It requires strong societies, well-educated citizens and a well-trained workforce. Valuing teachers in terms of investment in recruiting, supporting, and empowering teachers is essential for achieving these goals.

Quality teachers are increasingly recognised as the most important factors in children's learning that included improving educational attainment levels, increasing the ability of young people to participate in society and today's knowledge economies, boosting productivity and prosperity among others. Quality teaching can change a child's life through capability enhancement and helping children to overcome enormous challenges and to prepare them for better life and brighter futures. Especial attention is required for the people from the marginalised segment of society, developing economy and countries affected by armed conflicts and climate change.

The third means of SDG4 implementation is to ensure that all learners are taught by qualified teachers through a substantial increase in the supply of qualified teachers. To track the country-level progress, seven issues were emphasised that include (i) proportion of teachers in (a) pre-primary education, (b) primary education, (c) lower secondary education, and (d) upper secondary education who have received at least the minimum organised teacher training (eg pedagogical training) pre-service or in-service required for teaching at the relevant level in a given country, by sex; (ii) pupil-trained teacher ratio by education level; (iii) percentage of teachers qualified according to national standards, by level and type of institution; (iv) pupil-qualified teacher ratio by level of education; (v) average teacher salary relative to other professions requiring a comparable level of qualification; (vi) teacher attrition rate by education level; and (vii) percentage of teachers who received in-service training in the past 12 months by type of training.

A large number of teachers are undervalued and disempowered across the world. There is an increasing shortage of quality teachers, unequal distribution of trained teachers, and inadequate or non-existent national standards for the teaching profession. These are all key contributing factors to wide equity gaps in access and learning. The poorest regions, schools and early grade children are often the most affected. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics estimates that to achieve universal primary education by 2020 countries will need to recruit a total of 10.9 million primary teachers.

There are 1,064,703 teachers (41 per cent female) engaged in 162,512 educational institutions, from primary to tertiary, across Bangladesh to teach 36,802,187 students of which 18,448,452 are girls (DPE, 2015 and BANBEIS 2016). The student-teacher ratio varies across level and type of institutions. The enrolment data shows a huge system loss as a large number of student drop out in primary and secondary level. The statistics show that the gross enrolment ratio in primary education in 2015 has reached 109.2 per cent and net enrolment rate 97.7 per cent. But at the secondary level these reduced to 55.84 per cent and 50.27 per cent which would be one of the key concerns about achieving SDG4.

There are only 215 teacher education institutions that included PTIs, TTC, TTTC, VITI, Physical Education College, HSTTI and Bangladesh Madrassah Teacher training Institute, providing services for 34,734 learners (11,766 female) by 2,679 teachers (558 female). This sector has been growing slowly as the total number of institutions was 68 in 1995, 143 in 2003 and 215 in 2015. Among 215 institutions, 38 per cent were government and 62 per cent were privately managed. Among all teachers 20.83 per cent were female. The percentages show variation between types of institutions. Gender parity index for all types of institution was only 26 per cent. Teacher-student ratio was 1:13 in the teacher education subsector. However, there is a lack of both statistics and research on the quality of teacher's education in Bangladesh.

The objectives of World Teachers Day 2016 included (i) celebrating and highlighting the contribution of teachers towards education and students; (ii) discussing issues in and prospects for the development and professionalisation of teachers in line with the global urge for quality education and quality teaching; (iii) discussing vital aspects of education and education and educators involving the parents/ guardians; and (iv) upholding appropriate financing in education through increased revenue collection and ensuring tax justice as appeal to the international community to value, support, and empower teachers of the world.

It flagged up issues related to the quality of learning, teaching-learning environment, teacher's competency, recruitment, deployment, professional development and compensation for decent livelihood related issues among others. The inequality that exists in the national pay scale also has some adverse effects on the process of valuing teacher and improving their status.