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Bangladesh government must increase spending on education

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A DECLINE in spending on education — from 14.4 per cent of the total government expenditure in the 2017 financial year to 12.59 per cent in the 2018 financial year — belies the government claim of having improvement in the quality of education as a priority. Bangladesh spends, as New Age reported on Sunday quoting from the 2017–18 Global Education Monitoring Report that UNESCO, 1.9 per cent of the gross domestic product, which accounts for about 13 per cent of the total government expenditure while it should range, as the report suggests, between 4 per cent and 6 per cent of the gross domestic product or 15 per cent and 20 per cent of the total government expenditure. The figures for Bangladesh, as the report says, remain less than what other South Asian neighbours have in spending on education. The war-torn Afghanistan is reported to have spent 3.3 per cent of the gross domestic product on education, Bhutan 7.4 per cent, India, 3.8 per cent, the Maldives 5.2 per cent, Nepal 3.7 per cent, Pakistan 2.6 per cent and Sri Lanka 2.2 per cent. In 2015, the median global public expenditure on education was 4.7 per cent of the gross domestic product and even the median South Asian expenditure was 3.3 per cent and Bangladesh's spending is nowhere near the South Asian median. The allocation for education in the budget decreased from 15 per cent in the 2011 financial year to 11–12 per cent in the 2018 financial year, having telling effects on national education. Education is the door to a sound nation and quality education often calls for additional resources, higher pay for teachers, reduced class size and improved facilities. With the government coming to spend less on education, it will be highly difficult, or almost impossible, to improve the quality of national education. This seems more so as while the spending on education thins away, the number of students keeps increasing, leaving managers of education grappling with the situation that may ultimately make a mess of it. The decline in spending on education also forces the government to largely ignore educational institutions in rural areas, or spend a bit more on institutions in urban areas, contributing to the widening disparity between urban and rural students. This calls out the government on spending more on education. But all education stages may not need the same amount of money and the government should, therefore, ensure that the money is allocated where it will have the greatest impact.

In a situation like this, the government must increase spending on education to improve the quality and the reach of education. While doing so, it must attend to issues such as the misuse and wastage of money; the increased spending would, otherwise, will have no meaning in the end. The government must also not solely focus on equity, which has so far not been achieved, but also on adequacy as far as education spending is concerned.



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