



Investment In Education

The current rate of literacy in this country is reported to be around twenty-five per cent. The literates include those who are dropped out at even the primary level. Many of them get de-literated over the years, when they have no occasion to go over the pages of a book or a newspaper and even to write a letter. The effective literacy may thus be far below the recorded percentage, although a substantial number of university graduates are there in the employment market. Even if computed at a rate of ten per cent the gross number of educated and skilled manpower stands at around ten million. And compared to relatively less populated developed countries, Bangladesh has a fairly big educated mass.

And, not all the educated and skilled manpower is engaged in gainful employment. There is a lopsiding of emphasis on the level of education in this country. People tend to line up for admission to universities and colleges in preference to institutions for technical and vocational training. There is also a demonstrated insistance of kindergarten schooling as against that available in primary schools. Urban people have showed their preference for English medium schooling and that at a relatively high cost. As a result, a sort of a countervailing trend in education continues side by side with the one officially espoused.

In the given context the authorities seem to have attached higher priority to setting up universities seemingly in preference to primary schools. While the eighth university is under consideration and is likely to be set up at a tremendously high cost at Khulna, the network of primary schools has yet to cover all the villages in the country. Even in municipal areas, there are not many government-run primary schools. At the secondary and higher secondary level the situation is not any better. In most of the places, local initiative lies at the root of establishing a secondary school or a college.

All these are largely the outcome of the lower priority attached to education. Some estimates put allocation for education to be somewhere below five per cent of the revenue budget. Though the development budget covers the expenditure on physical facilities, not all of the projected facilities are completed in time. Many of them are staggered due to non-availability of the required amount of money in time. Libraries and books remain quite inadequate due to shortage of funds for their acquisition and maintenance. Above all, the teachers and faculty members are either not recruited in time or are sent abroad for training and education for very long periods of time at the cost of the interest of students.

The cumulative result is now quite obvious. There is educated unemployment compounded with a mass illiteracy. The allocation for education is much lower than that of neighbouring countries including India. Unless the education sector is pulled up with added allocation, the literacy rate will not go up to some eighty per cent reached, for example, by Sri Lanka. And the burden of the guardians to get their children educated in privately-run parallel, but costly, institutions will not be reduced. One would only say that the social benefit of investment in education is far greater than that in any other sector. It is time all the issues relating to priority to and funding of education were grappled with. They have to be debated in Parliament and other academic and institutional forums and that with a view to striking a balance between allocation for education and that for other sectors.

One may reiterate that there is no tenable reason for maintaining more than one stream of education at the primary level. The profitability of running kindergartens is open to question relatively to the goal of universal primary education. Likewise madrasah education at the primary level has to be brought into line with the goal of gainful education. What is needed is the adoption of a practical curriculum for all the children of the country in preference to one for different forms of education or the other group. It is needed to lay the rock-bottom foundation of education, if necessary, by augmenting allocation and integrating the existing divergent types and systems of it.

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