

Education policies and female education

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The most determined effect of the Government regarding women's integration in the development process is pronounced in the education policy which says, "determined efforts are to be made to provide expanded opportunities to women at all levels of education to bring them at par with men."

The Second Five Year Plan clearly indicates the relation between status of women and education and envisages adequate steps to be taken to provide increased educational facilities for women to remove the imbalances in (i) enrolment (ii) dropout rate and (iii) urban rural gap between the sexes which are to be narrowed down.

It was further indicated in the SFYP that in the process of implementation of the programmes, priority would be given to cater to the needs of the women in the rural areas and measures will be taken to recruit more women teachers to ensure retention of girls in schools.

The effort started during the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) to develop a comprehensive and cohesive plan suited to the needs of both men and women for which specific strategies were adopted.

Female education will be given particular attention with the objective of turning out teachers for the primary and secondary schools.

To implement the above policies, general scholarship schemes, reservation of 40% of the scholarship and stipends for girls, reservation of 40% seats for female primary teachers to fulfill the much publicised policy of filling 50% of the vacant posts of primary teachers by females, etc. were undertaken.

At the implementation level the success has been rather meagre compared to the policies adopted for expansion of female education. According to 1974 census, 88.8% females had no schooling compared to 62.8% males.

In other words, only 15.4% (1.01 million) and 25.8% (1.08) million females of 5-9 and 10-14 years respectively attended school. In 1981 this figure rose to 20.2% (1.40 million) and 28.1% (1.22 million) respectively. Consequent to this in 1984 the enrolment of girls at primary level shows a considerable improvement (57.6%) but still remains lower than boys (79.9%).

At the secondary level, however the female enrolment at the same time was only half (13.7%) compared to male (27%).

So we see that on the one hand, primary age group participation rate for girls shows an increasing trend and the increase has been nearly three times. On the other hand, out of school female population remained more than double (43%) compared to male (20%) of the same age group.

Another factor which affected the female participation rate is urban-rural imbalance in enrolment which is significantly lower for rural females.

Though facilities for primary and secondary education has appreciably expanded with provisions of extra inputs like seat reservation, female scholarship schemes, etc, absence of separate schools for girls remained compared to 30.1% decline in male dropouts.

ned a major contributing factor for lower female enrolment.

To bring a balance between male-female enrolment, retention of female students at school seems to be a major problem.

Available statistics show that percentage of female dropouts at primary stage from 1950-65 declined by 20.5 only

Consequential to financial constraints, the poor quality of education offered at primary level is also a major cause of non-retention of students.

The education policy not only neglected the societal needs in attaching priority to the level and type of education but no attention was paid to improve the

Lastly, one must bear in mind that financial and physical facilities alone can never make a dent unless the social aspect of the problem is not considered.

Female participation is severely restricted by negative attitude of the society towards female education. This needs



This is gradually indemnifying the gap between male-female ratio out of school children which was quite close in 1950 (86.47% male and 89.31% female).

All these indicate that female education is less correlative with increased physical facilities and more dependent on material incentives and presence of female teachers in schools which was not realized by the policy makers.

Another important reason for lower participation is that starting from primary to higher education planning, the need of the society in general and women in particular was not considered.

The importance of non-formal education for female population who have so far remained outside the formal education system was totally overlooked as part of the education policy.

During 1973-81 the share of recurrent expenditure on education has declined from 15.5% to 13.10%. There is also inconsistency and imbalance in increasing government support of higher education at the cost of primary education.

Again, the government expenditure in primary education decreased from 17.9% FFYP (1973-78) to 13.22% in Two Year Approach Plan (1978-80).

The SFYP, however, shows a considerable increase in this figure to 41.0%. The reason for wide gap between plan target and actual performances over the years was stated in the SFYP as due to "the pressure from the urban middle class for diversion of funds in favour of higher education, as a result ... educational development could not bring about equality of opportunity as envisaged".

One, however, fails to understand how at the implementation level the national machinery could be yielded to make a major departure from the fundamental commitments.

quality of available education. Annual operating cost incurred per student at the primary level in 1981-82 was Tk. 140 as against Tk. 13,150 for a university student which adequately illustrates the neglect shown toward the quality of basic education.

Another noticeable lapse in our education system is gross neglect of science and technical education, though like all previous plans, the SFYP education policy also indicates "....pronounced bias in favour of science and technology at all levels of education and introduction of professional course at higher levels." 21.

The plan also aimed at developing at least one girls high school in every thana with science and craft course to encourage technical education for girls, but the intent was limited in declaration only.

However, in reality the cause of a near stagnation situation in the field of technical education (only 4% increase from 1980 to 1983) can be attributed to a sharp decline in expenditure on technical education from 7.4% in TYP to a meagre 2.9% in SFYP.

If we now turn our attention to urban education, however, a noticeable change is observed in female participation.

Unlike primary level the enrolment of female students in college level has doubled during the period 1973-80, though they constitute only 10% of the college population, and in the universities female students comprise 18% of the total, significantly enough, women do not have access to higher positioned jobs to that proportion.

It is an unrelenting fact that improved educational standard of women are not matched by the quality of work available to them. This shows that even after having 'equal opportunity' women in Bangladesh do not have equal access to opportunities provided by the state.

mobilization of public opinion and creating an awareness among women about the value of education.

The efforts of women's socio-political groups are very significant in this respect than any government machinery. S.A. Qadir's study conducted in 23 villages of 10 unions also bears out that despite deeprooted poverty, where female education appeared to have entered the norm of the village, even poorer homes were sending their children to school.

Due to policy gaps and poor implementation at field levels, female literacy rate at the lag end of the SFYP still remains half of that to male and our woman are far from the threshold of educational development so as to have an impact felt upon their socio-economic status.