

## **Prioritizing ‘Universal Primary Education’ without Post Basic Education in Eradicating Extreme Poverty – A Public Policy Perspective in Bangladesh**

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### **Introduction and Background**

Bangladesh has made significant progress in ‘achieving universal primary education’, since its inception.<sup>1</sup> MDG 2 is based on the UN Millennium Declaration 2000 goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms.’<sup>2</sup> It is argued that primary education can transform the lives of a large section of the population in developing countries living under the poverty line into effective human resources who can be worthy citizens.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, 100% enrollment in primary level is one of the means of achieving the goal of ‘eradicating extreme poverty in all forms.’<sup>4</sup> Thus MDG 2 implementation receives significant importance in eliminating poverty in developing countries

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank. *Education sector strategy update. Broadening our Perspective, Maximizing our Effectiveness*. The World Bank: Washington DC., 2005.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations. *The Millennium Development Goals Report 2009*. UN: Geneva, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2008). *A situation analysis report on education (MDG 2) Bangladesh- A baseline for needs assessment and costing*. UNDP: Dhaka, Bangladesh.

<sup>4</sup> World Bank. *Attaining the millennium development goals in Bangladesh*. Report No. 31846-BD. Human Development Unit, South Asia Region, WB: Washington D.C., 2006.

like Bangladesh.<sup>5</sup> In strengthening implementation of MDG 2 the GOB transformed the Primary and Mass Education Division of the Ministry of Education (MOE) into the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) in 2003. UN agencies such as the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), multi lateral and international organizations such as the World Bank (WB), bilateral donors or development partners such as the Department for International Development (DFID) of the United Kingdom have also participated in implementing MDG2. In addition, national and international nongovernmental organizations (NGO) are active in implementing MDG 2 in Bangladesh.

Although primary education is vital in building the basic structure of education, it is difficult to achieve the goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’ in a developing country like Bangladesh only by prioritizing MDG 2 implementation

In analyzing whether the current policy of prioritizing MDG 2 implementation is effective in relation to the Millennium Declaration 2000 goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’ this paper examines the following questions. First, have the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and its development partners, in reality, prioritized MDG 2 implementation over post basic education, especially secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh? Second, if so, does prioritizing MDG 2 implementation policy create any direct or indirect policy consequences in effective management of post basic education in Bangladesh? And third, in the current context of Bangladesh, whether only prioritizing MDG 2 implementation without proper emphasis of post basic education can be an effective policy in achieving the ultimate goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’ on which the whole premise of MDG 2 is based? The terms “priority” and “effective” are emphasized in the current analysis. ‘Priority’ is defined in terms of higher allocations in public budgets in different education levels in MDG 2 implementing years. “Effective” (in terms of policy) is defined as how successful a

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<sup>5</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2009). Millennium development goals needs assessment & costing 2009-2015 Bangladesh. Dhaka: Bangladesh.

policy is in achieving its desired goals, which in the current context is to achieve the UN Millennium Declaration 2000 goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’.

This paper mainly discusses the general or secular education system of Bangladesh as it includes 80.58% of total students of the country’s education system<sup>6</sup> The remainder of the students belong to religious or Madrasa and English medium streams.<sup>7</sup> To limit scope and length this paper discusses only secondary and tertiary education of post basic education in Bangladesh. It is important to note that this paper does not set out to criticise the GOB and its development partner’s current policy regarding MDG 2 implementation in Bangladesh. Its focus is rather to examine effectiveness of the current policy in relation to the Millennium Declaration 2000 goal of ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’.

### **Prioritizing MDG 2 implementation and Post basic education**

In analyzing the GOB priority of MDG 2 implementation this paper discusses a comparative picture of government budgetary allocations of public revenues and development expenditures in both actual amount and in percentage of primary, secondary and tertiary education of MDG 2 implementation years of 2000-2010 in Bangladesh. These are common yardsticks to measure government priorities in any policy area.<sup>8</sup> Public expenditure as a percentage of GDP and GNP are also used in measuring government policy priority in this regard. The current paper excludes GDP and GNP measures in this discussion. Bangladesh’s education expenditures as percentage of these two measures are much lower than average expenditures of developing countries and other neighboring South

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<sup>6</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) “Bangladesh National Educational Survey.” Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2005.

<sup>7</sup> Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), “Policy Brief on ‘Education Policy.’” CPD Taskforce Report, Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2001.

<sup>8</sup> A. Rahman, M. Kabir, & AKM M. Alam, “Public Expenditure in Primary Education in Bangladesh,” Working Paper No. 01/2005, Shamunnay, Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2005.

Asian countries.<sup>9</sup> Bangladesh's public expenditure on the education sector as a percentage of GNP in 2005, 2006, 2007 and 2008 was 1.93%, 2.19%, 2.28% and 2.14% respectively.<sup>10</sup> Similarly, public expenditure on education as a percentage of GDP was 2.4% in 2000—the beginning year of the MDG 2 implementation and in 2006, 2007 and 2008 this allocation was 2.5%, 2.6% and 2.4% respectively.<sup>11</sup> In 2000, the share of GDP allocations to the education of developing countries and South and West Asian countries was 4.5% and 3.8% respectively.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, further bifurcation of Bangladesh public expenditures in education sub sectors on the basis of GDP and GNP measures will not add anything significant in the current discussion.

Figure 1 reveals that in the period of 1999/2000 -2005/06 primary education received the highest allocations for every year in the revenue budget and secondary and tertiary education received the second and third highest allocations in the revenue budget. In 1999/2000, the primary education sector received 43.59% of total allocations of education in the revenue budget of Bangladesh while secondary and tertiary education received 28.58% and 23.28% respectively. In the period 2000/01- 2005/06 allocations for primary education were: 42.14%, 42.0%, 40.60%, 39.76%, 38.26%, and 36.59 % of total allocations of education in the revenue budget. In the same period, secondary education received allocations of 29.76%, 30.29%, 29.66%, 29.32%, 29.79%, and 31.26 % of total education costs in the revenue budget. In the same period, allocation for tertiary education was: 24.11%, 23.33%, 23.71%, 23.68%, 24.23%, and 24.09%, respectively. Figure 1 reveals that although allocations of

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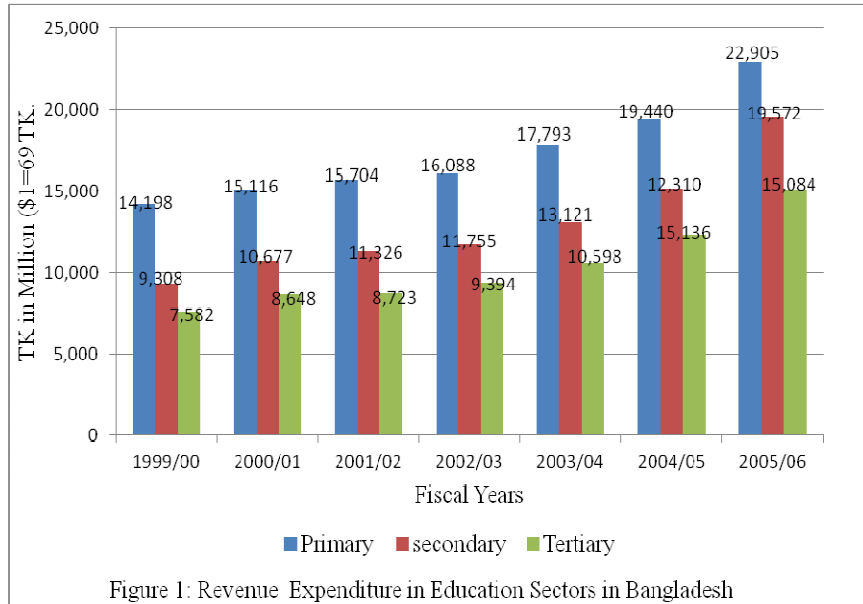
<sup>9</sup> World Bank. *Education for all in Bangladesh-Where does Bangladesh Stand in Achieving the EFA Goals by 2015?* Bangladesh development series. Paper No. 24. World Bank: Washington D.C., 2008.

<sup>10</sup> Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), "Bangladesh Primary Education Annual Sector Performance Report 2009 (Final version)." Government of Bangladesh: Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2009.

<sup>11</sup> "International Human Development Indicators," 2010, <http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/indicators/38006.html>.

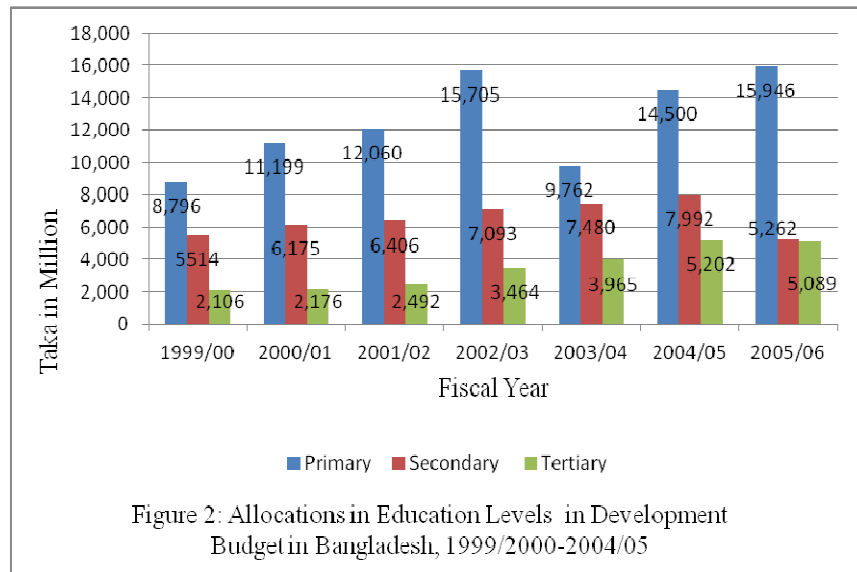
<sup>12</sup> World Bank, *Education for all in Bangladesh-Where does Bangladesh Stand in Achieving the EFA Goals by 2015?*, 2008.

the revenue budget in secondary and tertiary education have increased over the years a significant gap between allocations of these three education levels are visible since the inception of MDG 2.



Source: Modified from Al-Samarrai (2007). BANBEIS (2009), 1\$= 68 Taka (Bangladeshi currency unit, henceforth Tk.)

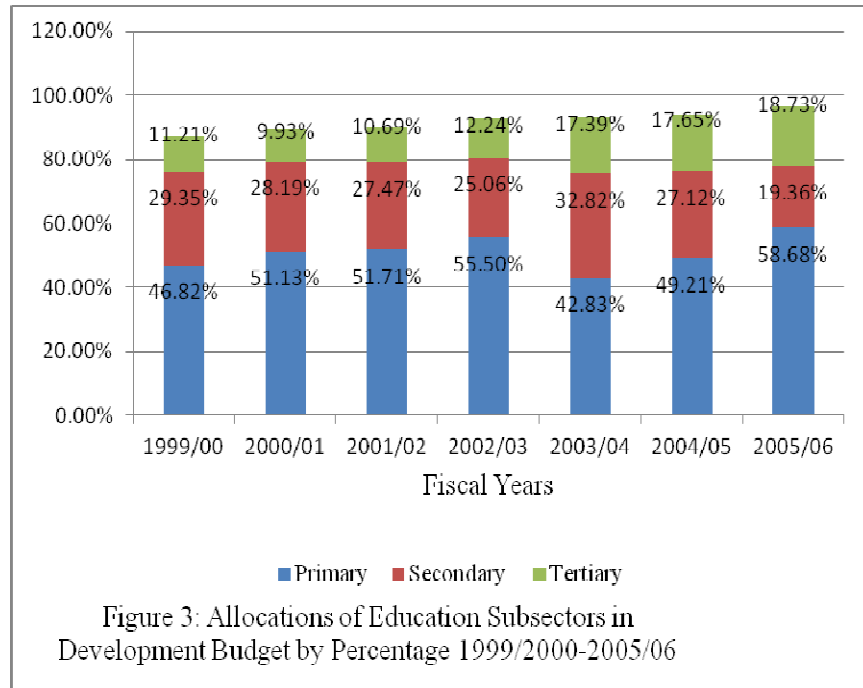
The Development budget of Bangladesh includes foreign aid, grants, and loans alongside government allocations. Development projects under the development budget are financed with the agreement of the GOB and development partners. In many cases, project finance depends on development partners' priority. Thus, development project implementation in Bangladesh does not represent the priorities of the GOB only but also the priorities of its development partners. Figure 2 shows allocations of primary, secondary, and tertiary education in the development budget of Bangladesh



Source: Modified from Al-Samarrai (2007), BANBEIS (2009)

from 1999/2000- 2005/06. Similar to the revenue budget, allocations of development budget also show a consistent trend of higher financing in primary education in MDG 2 implementing years. In this period, primary education received double or nearly double allocations that of secondary education and it was almost three to four times higher than that of tertiary education.

Figure 3 reveals that in 1999/2000, the primary education sector received 46.82% of total allocations of education in the development budget of Bangladesh while secondary and tertiary education received 29.35% and 11.21% allocations respectively. In 2000/01, 2001/02, 2002/03, 2003/04, 2004/05, and 2005/06 primary education received 51.13%, 51.71%, 55.50%, 42.83%, 49.21% and 58.68% respectively of total allocations for education in the development budget. In the same period, secondary education received allocations of 28.19%, 27.47%, 25.06%, 38.82%, 27.12%, and 19.36% of the total education expenditures of the development budget and allocation for tertiary education was 9.93%, 10.69%, 12.24%, 17.39%, 17.65%, and 18.73%,



Source: BANBEIS (2009)

respectively. Allocations for primary education in the development budget consistently increased from 46.82% in 1999/2000 to 58.68% in 2005/06. Although in 2003/04 - 2004/05, primary education received lower than 50% allocations of total development expenditures of education, still it was much higher compared to secondary and tertiary education expenditures. Within the same period, the percentage of allocations of the development budget of secondary education consistently decreased from 1999/2000 to 2005/06 except 2003.04. In 2003/04, it increased more than 7.5% than previous year but decreased almost 6% and 13% in 2004/05 and 2005/06 respectively. In 2005/06, compared to 58.68% allocation of primary education, secondary education received only 19.36% allocations in development budget, which was almost a 10% decrease of its allocation in 1999/00. In the same period, tertiary education consistently received the lowest percentage of allocations ranging from 11.21% to 18.73% in the development budget.

In addition to the allocations of public budgets, a joint report of the GOB and UNDP (2009) can also be discussed in this regard. A report of ‘Needs assessment and costs of MDG2 implementation within 2009-2015 by GOB and UNDP (2009)<sup>13</sup> proposes to continue the current policy of higher financing in primary education in Bangladesh. It assessed the total costs of education as \$15,906 million for the period of 2009-2015 where government financial intervention costs of \$12,568.06 million or 79.0%, \$883.64 million or 5.56%, and \$2425.57 million or 15.56% are assessed for primary, secondary, and other education (including tertiary) respectively. Table 1 shows a breakdown of resource needs estimated for various education.

Table 1: Resource Needs Estimated for Education Intervention (in million \$)

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Total Education Costs	1,272.22	1,496.76	1,767.42	2,099.99	2,519.47	3,066.91	3,683.50
Primary education	1,125.55 (88.47)	1,299.12 (86.8)	1,499.69 (84.85)	1,732.28 (82.49)	2,003.10 (79.5)	2,319.89 (75.64)	2,588.43 (70.27)
Secondary education	48.85 (3.84)	64.95 (4.34)	54.71 (3.09)	70.15 (3.34)	89.13 (3.54)	193.53 (3.53)	229.76 (6.24)

Source: GOB & UNDP (2008).

levels and the percentages and total estimated costs for year 2009-2015. It shows a consistent projection of higher financing in primary education compared to secondary education within the period of

<sup>13</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2009), “Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment & Costing 2009-2015”



2009-2015. In terms of percentage of total costs for 2009 primary education received \$1,125.55 million or 88.47% of total education costs while secondary received \$48.85 million or 3.84% of education costs as government intervention. Similarly, for the years 2010-2015 the percentage of total costs for primary education is estimated as 86.8%, 84.85%, 82.49%, 79.5%, 75.64%, and 70.27% respectively. On the other hand, for the same period of 2010-2015 total cost for secondary education is estimated as 4.34%, 3.09%, 3.34%, 3.54%, 3.53% and 6.24%, respectively. These estimates are important because they include all costs regarding development of these two education levels.

Table 2: Resource Needs Estimated for Education Intervention (in million \$)

<b>Fiscal Year</b>	<b>2009</b>	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>
Total Education Costs	1,272.22	1,496.76	1,767.42	2,099.99	2,519.47	3,066.91	3,683.50
<b>Primary education</b>							
Recurrent costs	782.42 (61.50)	887.13 (59.27)	1,003.88 (56.80)	1,134.07 (54.0)	1,250.78 (50.79)	1,441.22 (46.99)	1,621.89 (44.03)
Capital costs	342.13 (26.89)	411.99 (27.53)	495.81 (28.05)	598.21 (28.49)	723.83 (28.73)	878.67 (28.65)	966.54 (26.24)
<b>Secondary education</b>							
Recurrent costs	32.25 (2.53)	42.24 (2.82)	54.71 (3.1)	70.15 (3.34)	89.13 (3.54)	112.30 (3.66)	140.40 (3.81)
Capital costs	16.60 (1.3)	22.71 (1.52)	31.11 (1.76)	42.69 (2.03)	58.76 (2.33)	81.24 (2.65)	89.36 (2.43)

Source: GOB & UNDP (2008)

Table 2 shows a breakdown of costs estimated of some crucial heads of primary and secondary education for the years 2009-2015. It shows that total recurrent costs, which include teacher's salaries, training costs, and rental costs (costs for all day to day activities) are estimated at \$8,149.88 million or 51.24% and \$541.18 million or 3.40% for primary and secondary education of a total education budget of \$ 15,906.27 million for the 2009-2015 period in Bangladesh. For the same period 2009-2015, recurrent costs of each

year of primary education have been estimated at 61.50%, 59.27%, 56.80%, 54.0%, 50.79%, 46.99%, and 44.03% respectively while for secondary education recurrent costs are estimated at 2.53%, 2.82%, 3.1%, 3.34%, 3.66%, and 3.81%, respectively. Similarly, primary education has been estimated at \$4,417.18 million or 92.8% and secondary education \$342.47 million or 7.20% of total capital costs of \$4759.65. Minimal allocations of recurrent costs limit quality education in secondary level in many ways as it limits training and costs of other necessary day-to-day activities. Capital costs include: construction of new class rooms, laboratories, rooms for staff and other facilities such as rest rooms, buying equipment to aid in teaching, and so on.<sup>14</sup> Data reveals that while the capital cost of primary education is estimated at 27.78% of total education costs for the period 2009-2015, it is estimated at only 2.15% for secondary education in that same period. For the years 2009-2015, capital costs for primary education have been estimated at 26.89%, 27.53%, 28.05%, 28.49%, 28.73%, 28.65%, and 26.24% while capital costs for secondary education have been estimated at 1.3%, 1.52%, 1.76%, 2.03%, 2.33%, 2.65%, and 2.43% for the same years. From a policy perspective it is unusual that while higher capital costs are estimated for the development of primary education at the same time minimum capital costs are estimated for secondary and tertiary education despite existing development issues. Higher capital cost is needed in both secondary and tertiary education because these education levels are heavily dependent on government financial assistance like primary education for various socio-economic reasons.

The needs assessment and cost projection by the GOB and UNDP (2009)<sup>15</sup> estimated only structural costs of existing schools for secondary education, which includes construction of new classrooms, laboratories, rooms for staff, and other facilities. It excludes cost of establishment of new schools in the secondary level within 2009-2015 periods. It is not only important to improve facilities in existing schools but also establish new schools to expedite secondary

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<sup>14</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2008), "A Situation Analysis Report on Education

<sup>15</sup> "Millennium Development Goals Needs Assessment & Costing 2009-2015"

education. Several studies found dislocation of secondary schools to be one major cause of absenteeism in secondary education, especially for girls in rural areas.<sup>16</sup> Long distances of schools from home prohibit many parents sending their children, especially girls, to schools.<sup>17</sup> Also, a higher ratio of students per school makes the school crowded, which is also identified as a reason for higher absenteeism.<sup>18</sup>

Prior discussion revealed a consistent trend of higher allocations of public expenditure in primary education in both revenue and development budgets in MDG 2 implementing years. While the GOB and UNDP (2009) have assessed a need of 79.1% of total education costs for primary education they estimate only 5.56% and 15.56% of costs for secondary and other education (including tertiary) for the MDG 2 implementing periods of 2009-2015. Allocations of two government budgets and the needs assessment and cost report by the GOB and UNDP, as the major advocate of MDG 2, (2009) reflect a favorable attitude of the GOB and development partners to primary education. Thus it also shows that the GOB and international development partners have prioritized MDG 2 implementation or in other words primary education over secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh by higher financing. While higher financing in primary education is necessary in a developing country like Bangladesh, the question is whether this policy will be effective in achieving the goal of 'eradication of extreme poverty in all forms' only by prioritizing MDG 2 implementation?

The Following section discusses if the current policy of prioritizing primary education creates any policy consequences in managing secondary and tertiary education effectively in Bangladesh.

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<sup>16</sup> M. Ahmed et al., *Access to Education in Bangladesh-Country Analysis Review of Primary and Secondary Education* (BRACK University: Bangladesh, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> M. Ahmed et al., *Access*

<sup>18</sup> M. Ahmed et al., *Access*

### **Prioritizing MDG 2 Implementation and Effective Management of Secondary and Tertiary Education in Bangladesh**

The Previous discussion reveals a consistent policy of higher financing and thus prioritizing primary education over post basic education in Bangladesh by the GOB and its development partners. This section analyzes whether the current policy creates any policy consequences in managing secondary and tertiary education effectively in Bangladesh. In doing so this section analyzes some major yardsticks of MDG 2 such as enrollment rate, retention and dropout, and completion rate,<sup>19</sup> which are also called “managerial determinants” of success for primary education in Bangladesh by Jain (1997).<sup>20</sup> These are almost basic criteria of evaluating success of any education system and thus vital for the success of secondary and tertiary education. With appropriate policy interventions government can play a critical role in enhancing these yardsticks in the development of secondary and tertiary education and thus contribute heavily in achieving the UN Millennium Declaration goal 2000 ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’ in a developing country like Bangladesh.

#### **Enrollment in Secondary and Tertiary Education**

Bangladesh has been running one of the largest primary education systems in the world.<sup>21</sup> Success in enrolling students in primary education is the result of effective GOB policies and support of development partners. In contrast, enrollment of secondary and tertiary levels is always low in Bangladesh compared to enrollment in primary education. Table 3 shows that the primary enrollment rate in Bangladesh was 96.6%, 97.5%, 97.3%, 104.1%, 101.6% in 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003, and 2004 respectively. While Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in primary education enrollment levels

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<sup>19</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2008) and World Bank, *Education for All*

<sup>20</sup> Jain, P.S., “Program Success and Management of Integrated Primary Education in Developing Countries, *World Development* 25(3) (1997): 349-358.

<sup>21</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008) and World Bank, *Education for All*

are significantly lower in secondary and tertiary education over the same period of time. Gross enrollment in secondary education was 43.06%, 44.69%, 45.19%, 43.75%, and 42.66%, respectively in the 2000-2005 periods. It reveals that within the MDG 2 implementation period of 2001-2005, enrollment at secondary level was almost one fifteenth compare to primary education and within the period of 2001-2007 enrollment in tertiary education decreased continuously for three years and increased over the next three years by only 1.3%, in 2005, 2.4% in 2006 and 0.23% in 2007.

Table 3: Enrollment of Students in Various Education Levels

Year	Primary		Secondary		Tertiary	
	School Enrollment	Gross Enrollment Rate	School Enrollment	Gross Enrollment Rate	Institution Enrollment	Gross Enrollment Rate
2000	15766173	96.6	-	-	-	-
2001	15784416	97.5	7887010	43.06	-	-
2002	15570360	97.3	8162134	44.69	1468795	-
2003	15450013	104.1	8126362	45.19	1381315	-
2004	15245114	101.6	7503247	43.75	1274174	-
2005	16225658	-	7398552	42.66	1440244	-
2006	16385847	-	-	-	1474856	-
2007	-	-	-	-	1509576	-

Source: BANBEIS (2009), Ministry of Finncce (2009)

The Gross enrollment ratio is a much wider measure compared to the net enrollment ratio, which includes the enrollment of primary and secondary students regardless of their ages. The net enrollment ratio includes only students within a specific age group for these education levels.

Unfortunately, even the wider account of gross enrollment shows a poor enrollment of secondary students compared to enrollment for primary students in MDG 2 implementing years. Ahmed et. al (2007) estimate that the gap between eligible secondary level students and actual enrollment will be wider in future if the present trend persists. Appropriate government policies such as infrastructural building and financial interventions for both primary students and teachers have contributed to higher enrollment in primary levels. In contrast, commitment of both the GOB and development partners for secondary and tertiary education has seemed insufficient. Although available data shows an increase in enrollment in secondary education, it is mostly due to the population growth of Bangladesh, not any government policy intervention.<sup>22</sup>

Poverty, child labor, location of schools are identified as major reasons for the poor enrollment rate at secondary and tertiary levels.<sup>23</sup> One of the reasons is that a large percentage of secondary schools are located in rural areas and students of these schools are predominantly from low-income families. In addition to tuition, high additional costs such as books, clothes, and transportation appear to be the restraint to enrollment in secondary and tertiary education.<sup>24</sup> Low-income parents prefer their children to engage in wage earning jobs.<sup>25</sup> A base line survey estimated that 22% of absenteeism in

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<sup>22</sup> Ahmed et al., *Access*

<sup>23</sup> Ahmed et al., *Access*

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Finance, "Bangladesh economic survey 2008," *Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2008.

<sup>25</sup> Government of Bangladesh (GOB) & United Nations Development Program (UNDP) (2009), "Millennium Development Goals"

primary school is due to poverty.<sup>26</sup> It is unlikely that this ratio is any lower in secondary education as almost 81.63% of secondary schools in 2006 were located in the same rural areas, which have relatively high numbers of poor families.<sup>27</sup>

In this context, it is not surprising that the GOB intervenes with policies such as providing school dresses, lunches, tuition waivers in enhancing enrollment in primary education. It is interesting that in the same context only limited policy measures are directed towards secondary education. Moreover, the GOB policies that are initiated in addressing the issue of enrollment in secondary level mainly benefit a portion of the total students. For example, a tuition waiver of girls has increased their enrollment at the secondary level, but problems remain for male students as there are no provisions introduced for them. ADB (2010) recommended introducing an immediate financial incentives policy for both male and female students as gender equality has been achieved in secondary education. In tertiary education female students are also receiving 'attractive incentives as encouragement to get enrolled.'<sup>28</sup> The GOB and UNDP (2009) joint report on Millennium Development Goals Need Assessment and Costing 2009-2015 has proposed a pro poor subsidy policy of 150 Taka or \$2 per student per month as a demand side intervention to offset opportunity costs of child labor. It is arguable whether a \$2 proposed subsidy per student per month is enough to offset opportunity costs of child labor in enhancing enrollment at the secondary level.

Distant location of schools is a severe deterrent to secondary education as parents are reluctant to send their children, especially

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<sup>26</sup> Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), *Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2009

<sup>27</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Governance risk assessment and risk management plan for the education sector*. (A report conducted under the ADB funded TA 4983 (BAN) 'Supporting the Good Governance Program' being executed by the Government of Bangladesh). ADB: Dhaka, Bangladesh, 2010.

<sup>28</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Governance risk assessment and risk management plan for the education sector*.

girls, to schools distant from the house due to various social and security reasons.<sup>29</sup> Unfortunately, neither the GOB nor its development partners have addressed the issue with appropriate policies. Secondary education also faces several problems due to lack of appropriate government policy. For example, in 2011, 1,075,886 students passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC) exam after completion of the tenth grade.<sup>30</sup> This exam is considered the gateway of tertiary level education in Bangladesh. It is reported, according to BANBEIS, that the country has a total of 1,137,569 seats at the tertiary level. Mahi (2011) has also reported that even though tertiary colleges have available seats for all students albeit nearly 100,000 seats at college level will be unfilled in 2011. Most of these seats will be vacant in colleges located in rural areas due to dislocation and poor quality of education. Similarly, it is reported that almost 200,000 students out of 450,254 who passed the Higher School Certificate (HSC) exam will not get a chance to be admitted to university level education because of limited places.<sup>31</sup>

Colleges in metropolitan areas face different problems. In the SSC exam of 2011, a total of 76,749 students received a 5.0 GPA (Grade Point Average), which is also called a 'Golden GPA' on a 5.0 scale. Half of the students with a 'Golden GPA' will not be admitted to the top ranked colleges because of insufficient places. For example, a total of 21,142 students of Dhaka division, one of eight academic divisions of the country, received a 'Golden GPA' but the top ranked colleges of the division have only 10,000-12,000 places for both male and female students (76 thousands GPA 5.0 students have passed exam with admission anxiety, 2011). Thus even after receiving the highest possible GPA in the exam, in reality, half of the students will fail to achieve admission in top ranked colleges.

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<sup>29</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008)

<sup>30</sup> M. Mahi, "Almost Half of GPA 5.0 Students will not Get Chance in Admitting Preferred Colleges," *The Daily Amader Shomoy*, May 16, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.amadershomoy1.com/content/2011/05/16/news0022.htm>

<sup>31</sup> A. Sagar, "Even Meritorious Students will not get Admitted in Preferred Universities and Colleges: Three Hundred Thousands Students will not be Able to get Chance of Higher Education," *Daily Amardesh*, July 29, 2011, retrieved from [www.amardeshonline.com /pages/details/2011/07/28/95631](http://www.amardeshonline.com/pages/details/2011/07/28/95631)



Government policies appear inappropriate for university education in Bangladesh. Bangladesh university level education is historically dominated by public universities. Before 1995, Bangladesh had fifteen public universities along with several honors and master level colleges and there was no private university. Between 1995-2010 the number increased to 82 with 52 private universities. Almost 85% of these universities are located in Dhaka, more especially, in the capital city of Dhaka.<sup>32</sup> The Concentration of universities in Dhaka city disadvantages rural students due to both costs and locational reasons.

### **Retention and Dropout**

Retention and dropout rate of students is a major issue in secondary education. Ahmed et al (2007) estimated that only 39.8% of students admitted in grade six reach the final screening exam in tenth grade and the rest 60.2% have dropped out. One of the major causes of poor retention is poverty at both primary and secondary levels.<sup>33</sup> Poverty forces poor parents to take their children out of school and engage them wage earning jobs due to higher opportunity costs. The GOB has intervened with various successful financial policies, which bolstered enrollment and retention in primary level as these policies effectively compensate the opportunity costs of attending school.<sup>34</sup> In secondary education the GOB has not implemented any of these policies. For example, the GOB has currently introduced three types of financial policies for higher enrollment and retention of primary education such as cash incentives, school meals, and school uniforms.<sup>35</sup> In contrast, only one financial intervention of cash incentives for girls has been introduced in this regard to secondary education. Moreover, an ADB (2010) report has mentioned that risks

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<sup>32</sup> University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (2011). Universities. Retrieved from <http://www.ugc.gov.bd/university/?action=private>

<sup>33</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008).

<sup>34</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008).

<sup>35</sup> GOB& UNDP (2009).

occurred in ‘embezzlement of government, non-government and development fund’ in managing institutions especially in secondary and tertiary education.

Similarly, the GOB & UNDP (2008) report has not suggested any more financial intervention policies to overcome the retention and drop out problems in secondary education with the exception of broadening the existing subsidies for the female students of poor households. Currently, only 2% of girls receive these subsidies and it is proposed to increase the coverage of the pro-poor stipend for 10% of total students, specifically girls, by 2015.<sup>36</sup> Poverty as a major factor of poor retention and higher dropout needs appropriate policies for subsidies and stipends for both male and female students in secondary and tertiary levels. An ADB (2010) report also recommended immediate reevaluation of GOB financial incentives policy for female students as accepted gender parity has been achieved at the secondary education level. Government financial intervention plays crucial role in managing secondary and tertiary education effectively. A MOE (2004) report stated that salaries and wages, development of physical infrastructures, education supplies and equipment of 90% of all post primary education institutions that are managed by the private sector (approximately 98% of all post primary institutions in the country) are provided by the government. But “Regarding distribution of educational resources at regional or local levels, the higher echelons of administration remain unconcerned or indifferent.”<sup>37</sup>

### **Completion Rate in Secondary and Tertiary Education**

Successful completion or pass rate of terminal exams is important in any education systems because it confirms not only a formal degree but also confirms skills and education needed for future jobs. SSC and HSC exams, two national terminal exams at secondary and college levels which are also gateways for two years of college and

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<sup>36</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008).

<sup>37</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Governance risk assessment and risk management plan for the education sector*, 54.

university education respectively, have resulted in a very poor completion rate over the years. Failing in SSC and HSC exams virtually closes every door to higher education and thus better job options in both public and private sectors. The High fail rate in these two exams also prompts questions as to the quality of secondary and tertiary education. ADB (2010) linked the high fail rate to quality issues of respective education levels and thus policy failure of the GOB and stated “ Many of the degrees churned out from the universities and the so called ‘university colleges’ do not meet even the nation’s set standard, let alone the international yardstick. Students come out with poor efficiency. Pragmatic decisions have to be taken in this regard.”<sup>38</sup>

In 2010, the pass rate of the fifth grade exam, conducted nationally by respective education boards, was about 95%, which is very high compared to the pass rates of SSC and HSC exams. Table 4 shows a comparative picture of pass rates in fifth grade, SSC and HSC exams, two national exams that are the gateways of college and university education in Bangladesh over the years. The Pass rate of SSC and HSC shows the dire situation of secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh. For the 2001-2004 periods in both SSC and HSC exams, the majority of students was unsuccessful in passing the SSC and HSC exams and thus lost the chance of tertiary and higher education. Although the pass rate of both SSC and HSC exams have increased in recent years a large portion

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<sup>38</sup> Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Governance risk assessment and risk management plan for the education sector*, 13.

Table 4: Results of fifth grade final exam, SSC, and HSC Examination

Year	Fifth Grade	SSC	HSC
	% of pass	% of Pass	% of Pass
2001	-	35.22	28.41
2002	88.5	40.66	27.10
2003	90.7	35.91	38.43
2004	91.9	48.03	47.74
2005	-	52.57	59.16
2006	-	59.47	63.92
2007	-	57.37	64.27
2008	-	70.81	74.85
2009	95.0	67.40	70.43

Source: BANBEIS (2009), Ahmed et al (2007)

of students remain unsuccessful. The total number of unsuccessful students in HSC exam has increased every year between 2007-2011. For example, in 2007, 183,000 students failed the HSC exam and thus lost the chance for higher education and better jobs as well. The Number of unsuccessful students in 2008, 2009, 2010 and 2011 was 145811, 165473, 184715 and 201315 respectively.<sup>39</sup> Although in recent years the pass rate of both SSC and HSC exams has improved dramatically scholars criticized the surge as a result of 'liberalism' in

<sup>39</sup> S. Tushar, "Almost 200,000 Students Fail Every Year in HSC Exam," *Daily Manabzamin*, August 11, 2011, retrieved from [www.mzamin.com](http://www.mzamin.com).

exam evaluation<sup>40</sup> and a change in methods of examination rather than improvement of quality of education.<sup>41</sup>

In addition to quality and passing issues the rural urban gap in education has also become more visible in recent years. In 2011, although a record breaking 82.31% students passed the SSC exam, the pass rate in the Capital city Dhaka was 93.35% while the pass rate in Mymensingh, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and Faridpur, four districts under Dhaka division, was 77.28%, 77.42%, 77.84% and 79.92% respectively.<sup>42</sup> In addition, around 231,000 students who failed the SSC exam mostly came from rural areas.<sup>43</sup>

It is true that regardless of investment in secondary and tertiary education a core of students will never apply themselves sufficiently to pass exams. Yet, government policy failure in responding to issues such as poverty and appropriate finance of secondary and tertiary institutions, which are critical in the development of and enhancement of quality of education in two levels as mentioned by ADB (2010) and other organizations, cannot be ignored. Inadequate numbers of schools, a lack of trained teachers, and inappropriate finances at secondary and tertiary levels are mentioned as major causes of the failure of a large number of students in both the SSC and HSC exam<sup>44</sup>. The Majority of students cannot start secondary education for various reasons and only a fraction of students who continue secondary education reach the final screening level exam in tenth grade and the majority of students

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<sup>40</sup> M. Rahman, “‘Highest Liberalism’ for HSC Exam Evaluation to Increase Pass Rate and GPA,” *Daily Manab Zamin*, August 6, 2011, retrieved from [www.mzamin.com](http://www.mzamin.com).

<sup>41</sup> M. Ahmed, “Quantity Increases but Academics Question Quality,” *Daily Prothom-Alo*, May 29, 2011, retrieved from [www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-07-29/news/173861](http://www.prothom-alo.com/detail/date/2011-07-29/news/173861)

<sup>42</sup> W.B. Habib, “SSC Results 2011: Gap Between Urban, Rural Students Widens,” *The Daily Star*, May 14, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=185596>

<sup>43</sup> W.B. Habib, “SSC Results 2011: Gap Between Urban, Rural Students Widens.”

<sup>44</sup> Ahmed et al., *Access*

drop out even before sitting the terminal exams as mentioned by Ahmed et al. (2007). Many of these issues of secondary and tertiary education are related to inappropriate financial policies. The GOB and its development partners have dealt with similar problems successfully in primary education with appropriate policies and financial incentives. Unfortunately, the finance policy of the GOB and its development partners has made it difficult to overcome issues of enrollment, retention and drop out and quality in secondary and tertiary education. The GOB must provide necessary financial support to these two education levels with appropriate policies.

### **Discussions**

Prior discussion reveals that prioritizing MDG 2 implementation policy by higher financing has had a significant impact on effective management of secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh in recent years. The higher financing policy in primary education has been strengthening from the beginning of the MDG 2 implementation years. Prior discussion also reveals that neither government nor development partners have advocated financial intervention policy for development of secondary and tertiary education. Thus the existing policy of higher financing in primary education has been counterproductive of secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh. For example, international bi and multi lateral donors and development partners such as the Department For International and Development (DFID) allocate about 80% of aid for basic and primary education levels (cited in Palmer, 2005) and thus become one of the largest funding agencies in primary education.<sup>45</sup> USAID allocated 72.2% of total education funding to basic education between the periods of 2001-2002.<sup>46</sup> In 2009, 84% of

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<sup>45</sup> Cited in Robert Palmer, Beyond the basics : Post basic education, training and poverty reduction in Ghana. Working Paper Series# 4, Centre for African Studies, University of Edinburgh, UK. Retrieved from [www.cas.ed.ac.uk/research\\_projects/beyond\\_basics](http://www.cas.ed.ac.uk/research_projects/beyond_basics), 2005

<sup>46</sup> UNESCO. Education for all: The quality imperative. Education for all global monitoring report, UNESCO: Paris, 2004, p. 191.

education aid of US including USAID of total \$1 billion was committed to primary education in developing countries.<sup>47</sup>

While primary education is vital the real question remains whether prioritizing MDG 2 implementation without proper emphasis on post primary education can be effective in achieving the UN Millennium Declaration goal 2000 ‘eradication of extreme poverty in all forms’ in the current context of Bangladesh. ‘Human Capital Theory’ advocates that education creates skills and thus helps higher levels of productivity of those people who possess education compared to those who do not possess it. It also advocates that “the earnings by age of the more educated not only start at a higher level, but increase more rapidly to a peak - which happens later in life - than is the case with the earnings profiles of the less educated.”<sup>48</sup> Secondary and tertiary education help students to transform their knowledge into job related skills for employment. In Bangladesh, secondary schooling currently offers students little in relation to prospects for gainful employment, entrepreneurship or practical skills—none of which, of course, need be a disqualification for further education (Asian Development Bank, 1998). It is also true for tertiary education in Bangladesh in terms of providing job skills.<sup>49</sup>

Policy of higher financing only in primary education has limited government efforts in providing financial support and in initiating appropriate and effective policies for enhancing quality of secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh. As Colclough et. al. (2003) observed “Increased expenditures can help to improve school availability and quality; they can, by substituting for fees and other

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<sup>47</sup> USAID, FY 2009 Foreign operations performance report & FY 2011 performance plan. The Congressional Budget Justification for Foreign Operations, Voll II.

<sup>48</sup> Z. Oxaal. *Education and Poverty: A Gender Analysis*. Report prepared for the Gender Equality Unit, Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida). Report No. 53. Institute of Development Studies, University of Sussex: Brighton, UK, 1997.

<sup>49</sup> N. Karmakar, “Education Correlates Human Development: Bangladesh perspective,” *Social Science Research Network* (2006): retrieved from [http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=913927](http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=913927)

charges, reduce the level and incidence of direct private costs; and under some circumstances, they can more directly alleviate the income constraints of poorer households”. It is crucial in the context of development of secondary and tertiary education because as discussed earlier lower financing policy in secondary and tertiary education has prohibited the GOB from implementing necessary intervention strategies to strengthen secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh.

Consistent trends of lower financing in both the revenue and development budgets has caused poor allocations in recurring and capital costs for secondary and tertiary education compared to primary education. Lower allocations for capital and recurring costs directly impact upon enrollment and completion of students in secondary and tertiary education. It prohibits the GOB from enhancing infrastructures such as secondary schools and higher education institutions. In 2006, Bangladesh had 82,020 primary schools and thus managed one of the largest primary education systems in the world.<sup>50</sup> In contrast, in the same year Bangladesh had only 14,532 secondary schools and 1,738 higher institutions.<sup>51</sup> In 2005, the number of enrolled students in primary education was more than sixteen million and in the same year the numbers of enrolled students in secondary schools were less than seven and half million, or in other words, less than half of primary students. Primary education had almost 11 times higher enrollment than tertiary education in 2005.<sup>52</sup> A Virtually the same trend has continued in the other MDG 2 implementation years as table 3 has revealed. In contrast, consistent lower allocations of capital costs in the development budget for secondary and tertiary education have

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<sup>50</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008).

<sup>51</sup> Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), Bangladesh Educational Statistics Database. Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2009 and Ministry of Finance, “Bangladesh economic survey 2008,” *Government of Peoples Republic of Bangladesh*, Dhaka: Bangladesh, 2009.

<sup>52</sup> BANBEIS, Bangladesh Educational Statistics Database, 2009 and Ministry of Finance, “Bangladesh economic survey 2008,” 2009.



widened the gap between eligibility and actual enrollment in secondary and higher education. Thus Ahmed et al. (2007) estimated that the current policy choice will not be able to fulfill the gap between demand and supply in the near future.

A majority of secondary schools are located in the rural areas where poverty is one of the major causes for failure to enroll children in schools. Karmakar (2006) mentioned that in tertiary education the female to male ratio is 36:64 compared to 52: 48 in primary education. One of the reasons for lower female enrollment in secondary and tertiary education is early marriage due to parents' financial hardship. Adequate financial interventions for female students in tertiary education can help overcome this problem as we witnessed in primary education. Therefore, the GOB role and intervention with adequate financial policies are crucial in ensuring higher enrollment in secondary and tertiary education. Unfortunately, the GOB policy of lower finance and thus inadequate budgetary allocation make it difficult to enhance enrollment in secondary and tertiary education.

Lower allocations of recurring cost limit scopes of providing adequate training of teachers in secondary education, which ultimately affect the quality of education. 46.9%, 48.7%, 48.6%, 50.5%, and 53.6% of teachers in secondary education had training related to their profession in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, and 2005 respectively.<sup>53</sup> The Majority of teachers in 2001-2003 had no formal training related to their profession. Inadequate training contributes to lower academic achievements of teachers and thus widespread problems in secondary education.<sup>54</sup> Unfortunately, the GOB has no plans for any more policy intervention in this regard. UNDP supports only limited government interventions regarding costs reallocations for secondary and tertiary education in the near future.<sup>55</sup> Thus, higher financing in implementing MDG 2 has created a huge impact on effective management in secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh.

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<sup>53</sup> BANBEIS, Bangladesh Educational Statistics Database, 2009

<sup>54</sup> Ahmed et al., *Access*

<sup>55</sup> GOB & UNDP (2008).

In the current context of Bangladesh, secondary and tertiary education need appropriate budgetary allocations for development as unit costs of traditional education at these two levels are considerably higher than for primary education.<sup>56</sup> Use of higher technology, for example, Bangladesh's expanded distance education as an alternative to face to face teaching in tertiary education has increased its costs.<sup>57</sup> In addition, operating costs of vocational education (part of higher secondary and college education) is higher than unit costs of primary education. A MOE (2004) report estimated operating costs of vocational training at \$300 per student per year, which was twenty four times that of the cost of a student in primary education. As most rural schools have very limited opportunities to become self-sufficient due to poverty<sup>58</sup> lower finance creates severe problems in developing secondary education in rural areas of Bangladesh. Unfortunately, government assistance to secondary and tertiary education in 2009-2015 is very small compared to primary education. Both the secondary and tertiary level have neither received appropriate priority in GOB revenue and development budgets, nor in the resource needs assessment and costing for education interventions prepared by the GOB and UNDP.

Unfortunately, nowhere in the MDGs is mention made of post-basic education and training or secondary and tertiary education. Secondary education has been mentioned only in relation to the issue of gender parity (Palmer, 2005). These tendencies are reflected in MDG 2 implementation, which leads to a policy of diverting financial assistance towards basic education and away from secondary and tertiary education. This attitude of the donors and the GOB is also reflected by higher allocation of the development budget to primary

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<sup>56</sup> M. Bray, "The Costs and Financing of Education: Trends and Policy Implications," *Education in Developing Asia*, Vol. 3. Asian Development Bank: Hong Kong, 2002 and M. Bray, "Investing in Higher Education" *Editorial in International Institute of Education Planning (IIEP) Newsletter*. Vol.XXV(1), 2002.

<sup>57</sup> M. Bray, "The Costs and Financing of Education: Trends and Policy Implications" and "Investing in Higher Education."

<sup>58</sup> W.B. Habib, "SSC Results 2011: Gap Between Urban, Rural Students Widens."

education over the years including MDG implementation periods in Bangladesh. Thus the policy emphasis can be counterproductive and decrease the effectiveness of spending in basic education (Palmer, 2005).

In achieving the Millennium Declaration 2000 goal of 'eradication of extreme poverty in all forms' the GOB and its development partner's policy of prioritizing only MDG 2 or primary education cannot be an effective policy option. Poverty is mainly related to one's economic condition and people need job related skills to get out of it. Primary education mostly provides social skills.<sup>59</sup> Secondary and tertiary education provides job related skills, which primary education cannot ensure (Barro, 1999; Tilak, 2007).<sup>60</sup> Additionally, higher financing in primary education over secondary and tertiary education is not new. Bangladesh has experienced similar policy priorities as a signatory of the UN Summit of Education for All (EFA) since 1990. Table 5 shows public expenditures of the GOB in revenue and development budget in primary, secondary, and tertiary education during the period 1990-2000. Unfortunately, this strategy did not help in the eradication of poverty in Bangladesh rather it hampers development of secondary and tertiary education in many ways. Thus the policy of emphasizing only primary

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<sup>59</sup> G.M. Alam & M.T.B. Khalifa, "The Impact of Introducing a Business Marketing Approach to Education: A Study on Private HE in Bangladesh," *African Journal of Business Management* 3(9) (2009): 463-474.

<sup>60</sup> R. Barro, "Human Capital and Growth in a Cross Country Regressions," *Swedish Economic Policy Review* 6(2) (1999): 237-277 and J.B.G. Tilak, "Post Elementary Education, Poverty and Development in India," *International Journal of Educational Development*. 27 (2007): 435-445.

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Public Revenue and Development Expenditures

Fiscal Years	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
	<b>Revenue Budget</b>			<b>Development Budget</b>		
91/92	48.2	36.8	15.0	40.1	23.5	36.4
92/93	44.6	40.6	14.8	66.0	20.5	12.3
93/94	45.4	42.3	12.3	68.2	18.9	12.0
94/95	-	-	-	52.6	41.0	3.7
95/96	43.8	42.6	13.7	45.6	43.6	6.8
96/97	43.5	42.9	13.6	24.2	57.4	13.7
97/98	43.0	46.5	10.5	26.8	45.2	18.8
98/99	41.6	48.4	10.0	47.3	32.4	11.8

Source: CPD (2001)

education failed to create impact on eradicating extreme poverty in Bangladesh within both EFA and MDG implementing years. Higher financing in primary education without significant increase in enrollment of secondary and tertiary education reveals the reality that government and development partners need to play a catalytic role in the development of secondary and tertiary education in Bangladesh.

### Conclusion

Different types of education have different effects on socio-economic processes such as poverty and so on. The relationship between post primary education and economic growth is established by various researchers. Barro (1999) specifically reported that growth was not related to primary education by his cross-country regression

of 100 sample countries. Tilak (2003) found a strong effect of higher education on development based on a cross national analysis of 49 Asian countries. Alam et al. (2009) in a study on Bangladesh reported that “primary education mainly associated with social development, while secondary education contributed in social and economic development and higher education is related to economic development.” A MOE (2005) report revealed that secondary education has served merely as a screening process for entering higher education in Bangladesh, which only a fraction of total primary and secondary students can achieve. The vast majority who drop are not receiving relevant preparations in skills that they need for their lives. Thus it implies that the GOB should ensure higher skills and knowledge to secondary and tertiary students with appropriate policy interventions.

Developing countries must provide suitable education and skills that create opportunity for its citizens to become globally competitive. As the World Bank (2005) stated developing countries need more skilled workers to ‘meet changing demands and competitiveness’. In the current knowledge economy higher education is essential for poverty reduction. Higher education provides critical knowledge to all sectors of the society and thus must be integrated into any pragmatic poverty eradication strategy.<sup>61</sup> This realization is also expressed in a recent report published by the United Nations Millennium Project Task Force, which states that without being a part of knowledge creation, its dissemination and its utilization to promote innovation there is no way that the developing world can succeed in the eradication of poverty (Khan and Williams, 2006).<sup>62</sup>

In eradicating poverty appropriate and balanced linkages among all education levels should and must be established.<sup>63</sup> Despite

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<sup>61</sup> H. Khan & J.B. Williams, “Poverty Alleviation Through Access to Education: Can E-learning deliver?” in *Poverty, Poverty Alleviation, and Social Disadvantage: Analysis, Case Studies and Policies*, C. A. Tisdell (ed.). Serials Publications: New Delhi, 2007.

<sup>62</sup> H. Khan & J.B. Williams, “Poverty Alleviation Through Access to Education: Can E-learning deliver?”

<sup>63</sup> M. Bray, “The Costs and Financing of Education: Trends and Policy Implications” and “Investing in Higher Education.”

the necessity of primary education, the importance of secondary and higher education cannot be ignored in a developing country like Bangladesh. Bangladesh needs not only to emphasize MDG 2 implementation but also needs effective management of secondary and tertiary education to combat poverty. Prioritizing primary education without managing other education levels properly will not bring any significant change in efforts to eliminate poverty. Thus, the government should and must ensure appropriate interventions at every level of education to counter poverty. Unfortunately, in the context of Bangladesh, government policy on education has failed to build any bridge among these three stages of education and thus becomes ineffective in addressing poverty alleviation appropriately through the current policy.

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