Citizen's Platform

Brief
July 2017 No 5

Aligning SDG 4 and 7th Five Year Plan in Bangladesh: Prospects and Challenges

4 QUALITY EDUCATION

Bangladesh has integrated many of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in its national development plan – the 7th Five Year Plan (7FYP) (2016-2020), even before the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the United Nations (UN) that has kept Bangladesh "ahead of the curve.[1]" Hence, Bangladesh is expected to emerge as a leader in implementing the SDGs, repeating its success of attaining the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). However, the way to achieve the SDG 4 may not be very smooth.

SDGs and the Education Agenda

SDGs provide an opportunity to address various challenges in the education system of Bangladesh. The education goal – SDG 4 (*Ensure inclusive and equitable education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all*) has seven targets and three means of implementation. It covers primary to tertiary education, technical and vocational education, skills development of youth and adults, literacy and numeracy of the population, inclusiveness and equity in education, quality of education and of teachers, as well as provisions, scope and character of education services. Despite the considerable progress attained in education sector in Bangladesh in the preceding years, both UNESCO's (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) Education for All (EFA) movement and UN's MDGs have certainly left us with some unfinished agenda, that will need to be addressed in the SDG era, in addition to the new priorities.

7th Five Year Plan (7FYP) of Bangladesh

The 7FYP, titled "Accelerating Growth, Empowering Every Citizen" for year 2016-2020, was prepared by the General Economics Division (GED) of the Planning Commission of Bangladesh, as the blueprint for the early critical phase of SDG implementation. Thus, it has become essential to look critically into the existing alignment between SDGs and the 7FYP in order to develop the framework for implementation of both SDGs and 7FYP in a mutually complementary way.

As part of interventions for the SDGs, GED has developed a handbook titled "Mapping of Ministries by Targets in the Implementation of SDGs Aligning with 7th Five Year Plan

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[1] http://www.thedailystar.net/business/bangladesh-lead-charge-towards-sdgs-1271344

(2016-20).[2]" In this handbook, lead, co-lead and associate ministries have been mapped out against each of the targets for all SDGs. According to the mapping, lead and co-lead responsibility of SDG 4 implementation has largely been accorded to the Ministry of Education, and Ministry of Primary and Mass Education. Other associated responsible ministries and divisions include Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs, Ministry of Cultural Affairs, Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Housing and Public Works, Ministry of Industries, Ministry of Information, Ministry of Labour and Employment, Ministry of Public Administration, Ministry of Religious Affairs, Ministry of Science and Technology, Ministry of Social Welfare, Ministry of Textiles and Jute, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Youth and Sports, Bangladesh Industrial and Technical Assistance Center, Statistics and Informatics Division, Finance Division, Law and Justice Division, Local Government Division, Information and Communication Technology Division, Economic Relations Division, and Bangladesh Bank of Financial Institutions Division. This mapping exercise is expected to reduce duplication of efforts, enhance synergy and help formulate action plans.

The SDG 4 urges to ensure quality education for all. An exercise was undertaken to examine the degree of alignment between 7FYP and SDG targets. Apart from the 7FYP, other major sectorial policies were also consulted for this exercise. Both SDG 4 and 7FYP's education agenda have quantitative and qualitative or subjective elements in their targets. A judgment about commonality or overlap between the two can only be tentative and indicative, and subject to further elaboration and clarification.

The government is preparing an action plan for implementation of the SDGs in Bangladesh in alignment with the 7FYP. The lead ministries are also working towards translating the respective targets into actionable programmes/projects/activities. The GED has also estimated the financing needs for SDG implementation with a view to mobilising internal and external resources.

Observations on Alignment

The alignment, or the lack of it, between SDG 4 targets and 7FYP has been drawn from the mapping exercise undertaken by the Planning Commission. It signals the importance given to examining and clarifying the links between the global targets and national objectives and plans, and how these may be adapted and refined being informed by the global discourse and national priorities. A number of observations may be highlighted from the mapping exercise with respect to achieving the common global commitments and national objectives.[3]

1. The 7FYP is prepared as a 5-year action plan keeping the mid-term objectives and targets in perspective. Although the plan is prepared based on the Vision 2021 and the overarching aspiration of transforming Bangladesh into a middle-income country, the programme objectives and targets for activities are set on what may be achieved within a 5-year period. In contrast, the implementation period for SDG Agenda is spanned over 15 years; and thus present the challenges and opportunities to bring about a much-needed transformation of the education system in a sustainable manner.

2. The rather short-term perspective of 7FYP is evident in the objectives and activities included in the plan. It can be seen that these are essentially developed within the framework and structure of the existing education system. For example, ideas about major departures towards establishing a unified general education system with common quality standards for all children as established in the Education Policy 2010, substantial changes in financing criteria and mechanism to ensure quality with equity, or new thinking about ways of attracting talented young people to the teaching profession and retaining them in the profession are lacking. There is no plan either for bringing significant changes in the governance structure with a view to promote stronger accountability and decentralisation, although there is a rhetorical recognition of these needs.

3. Reconciling a 5-year plan and a 15-year vision requires a close examination of the dialectic of shorter and longer perspectives, and how they strategise to mutually support and complement each other. Thus, the shorter plan with more specificity and details can help build the foundation for the longer view, which for now, may lack details, but still can reflect a clear sense of the destination and direction. The least that is expected is that the 5-year plan help move the

[2] Planning Commission. (2016) *A Handbook – Mapping of Ministries by Targets in the Implementation of SDGs Aligning with 7th Five Year Plan (2016-20)*. Dhaka: Planning Commission, Government of Bangladesh.

[3] CAMPE and Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh. (2016) *Framework for Action Education 2030 in Bangladesh: A Civil Society Perspective*. Available at: http://www.campebd.org/page/Generic/0/30/47

system in the direction to be pursued in the future, and not stand in the way of desired progress in that direction.

4. The observations show that the objectives and targets for both SDG 4 and 7FYP contain measurable targets as well as those that are more qualitative in nature. The qualitative indicators may be difficult to measure, but important for realising the overall development agenda. It is important to refine the indicators for the qualitative targets and devise ways of bringing these into a workable monitoring and evaluation process.

5. The global targets and the national priorities do not, and are not, expected to match and be aligned perfectly or mechanically. The SDG Agenda though described as universal, will need to be adjusted and adapted to national contexts and circumstances, and must be responsive to national capacities, resources and the stage of development. The priorities, phasing of activities and implementation approaches, including monitoring and assessment need to balance the ideal and the pragmatic – with judgment based on a good faith adherence to the global goals and targets.

The importance of national adaptation and formulation of targets and indicators are illustrated by the fact that there are several other targets that were mentioned in the 7FYP and the National Education Policy 2010 which do not directly correspond to the SDG 4 targets. These targets relate to certain national priorities for Bangladesh. There is no doubt that attainment of SDG 4 will require a significant additional resources, although, it needs to be noted that the 7FYP or its sectorial chapter for education does not mention resource constraints and a declining trend in resource allocation as a share of gross domestic product (GDP). Indeed, less than required allocations for education sector made in the national budget has emerged as a major challenge towards achieving SDG 4, as well as the 7FYP targets.

The projection under the Medium Term Budget Framework (MTBF) shows a continual proportionate decline of resource allocation for public education in the near future. Besides, Bangladesh seems not to be ready yet to bring about the revolutionary changes in administration, management and society which is critical to attain the SDG 4 and its associated targets. Hence, the aforesaid concerns need to be dealt with as part of our commitment to implementing SDG 4 and 7FYP.

About the Event

Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh jointly organised a dialogue on "Reaching Education 2030: 7th Five Year Plan and Beyond," on 28 December 2016, at the CICC Auditorium of the CIRDAP in Dhaka. Mr M A Mannan, MP, Hon'ble State Minister for Finance and Planning, Government of Bangladesh attended the dialogue as the Chief Guest. Dr Hossain Zillur Rahman, Executive Chairman, Power and Participation Research Centre (PPRC) and former Advisor to the Caretaker Government; and Dr Shamsul Alam, Member (Senior Secretary), General Economics Division, Planning Commission were present as the Guests of Honour. Emeritus Professor Dr Manzoor Ahmed of BRAC University made the keynote presentation at the session. Mr Md. Gias Uddin Ahmed and Mr Chowdhury Mufad Ahmed, both Additional Secretary and Focal Points of SDGs in the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education and Ministry of Education respectively also spoke on the occasion. Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Convenor, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh set the context of the dialogue in his introductory remarks, and Ms Rasheda K Choudhury, Executive Director, CAMPE and Core Group Member, Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh chaired the programme.

This Brief has been prepared by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a Partner Organisation of the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh.

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টেকসই উন্নয়ন অভীষ্ট অর্জনে সুশাসন ও গণতন্ত্র মূল চাবিকাঠি

Citizen's Platform Brief 2

টেকসই উন্নয়নে বেসরকারি খাতের অংশগ্রহণ জরুরি

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SDG Priorities for Bangladesh

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CSOs in SDG Implementation in Bangladesh

About the Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh

The **Citizen's Platform for SDGs, Bangladesh** is a civil society initiative, taken at the national front, to contribute to the implementation of globally adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Platform was formally launched in June 2016, at the initiative of a group of individuals; the objective has been to track the delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh and enhance accountability in its implementation process. The concept of the Platform was inspired by the participatory and multi-stakeholder approach promoted as a vital element for success in the attainment of all the SDGs. The Platform currently includes 63 Partner Organisations working on SDG issues across the country.

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