

BANGLADESH FEMALE SECONDARY SCHOOL ASSISTANCE PROJECT I AND II

Project Status: Open

Project Approval Date: 03/11/1993

Project description: In 1991, girls constituted only about 33 percent of enrollment at the secondary-school level, and, of those, only a relatively small percentage passed the Secondary School Certificate (SSC). The Bangladesh Female Secondary School Assistance Program financed by IDA (FSSAP I and FSSAP II, covering 119 out of 480 upazilas, or sub-districts), started in 1993 and was designed to assist GoB implement its policy of improving the quality of, and girls' access to, secondary education in rural areas of Bangladesh. The key components of the program are:

- provision of stipends and tuition for girls;
- improving quality through teacher training, provision of performance incentives to schools and students, and water and sanitation facilities; and
- strengthening the management capacity of the Ministry of Education both at central and field levels.

Impact: Access to secondary education has increased substantially for girls (from 1.1 million in 1991 to 3.9 million in 2005), to the point where it now exceeds that of boys, with an increasing number of girls from disadvantaged or remote areas enrolling (between 2000 and 2005 the proportion of beneficiaries from the poorest two quintiles has increased from 30 to 35 percent), which has enabled Bangladesh to achieve one of its MDG goals ahead of schedule – gender parity in education.

Some highlights:

- Female enrollment as a percentage of total enrollment increased from 33 percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 1997, and to about 56 percent in 2005. In comparison, between 1989 and 1991, this proportion increased marginally from about 32 to 33 percent.
- Increase in Secondary School Certificate pass rates for FSSAPII girls from 39 percent in 2001 to 58 percent in 2006.
- Indirect benefits included delays in the age of marriage, more females employed with higher incomes, and more confident, aware females who are involved in their children's education.
- Simplified procedures for disbursement of stipend and tuition have allowed for a faster distribution of stipends to eligible girls and institutions (from 60 steps previously to 28 steps, with disbursements within less than one month from the scheduled date as opposed to an average of six months previously).
- Provision and maintenance of water and sanitation facilities in schools (about 5,000 latrines and tubewells) has been major factor in attracting and retaining girls.
- Under a pro-poor self-targeting pilot initiated in 2005, 16,000 poor girls and nearly 6,000 poor boys are receiving enhanced stipends.
- 66,000 members of the School Management Committees (consisting of elected members from the community, including two female members) have been trained in school management accountability, with focus on education quality and a conducive

learning school environment

- 6,666 schools (over 100% of target) are currently participating in the program, through a Cooperation Agreement with the Ministry of Education
- Capacity has been strengthened at the field level through the establishment of about 400 Upazila Education Officers in program areas
- The Ministry's capacity to manage and oversee its stipend programs has substantially increased with the establishment of a Program Management Unit within the Department of Secondary and Higher Education

Total Financing: The total project financing amounted: (a) for FSSAPI to US\$88 million, consisting of IDA financing of US\$64 million, and the rest from the Government; and (b) for FSSAPII, to US\$144.6 million, consisting of IDA financing of \$120.9 million, US\$23.5 million from the Government, and in-kind contribution by local communities estimated at around US\$0.2 million.

IDA Contribution: In the early 1990s, the Government of Bangladesh had formulated its policy for enhancing girls' access to secondary education, but was unable to establish the modalities and sufficient broad-based support for its implementation. IDA helped catalyze efforts to establish effective implementation arrangements and to take forward the Government's policy initiative on a major scale. The program has proven groundbreaking in addressing girls' access to education, and it is recognized worldwide as a pioneering undertaking. A key innovation, in which IDA played a major role, was the direct funding mechanism featuring the transfer of stipends directly from banks to individual girls' bank accounts. The Government decided to expand FSSAP I nationwide, using it as a framework for its own funding as well as other donor support (Asian Development Bank, the Government of Norway). The spillover impact of the FSSAP experience is evident in a number of countries which have implemented stipend/conditional cash transfer programs, supported by IDA.

Linkages: Along with the female stipend programs, the Ministry of Education is undertaking broad-based reforms aimed at improving education quality through better governance and accountability. This is being supported by IDA through a series of programmatic Education Sector Development Support Credits (ESDSC). In addition, IDA's assistance has also reinforced the support provided by the Asian Development Bank, the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the EU and the Norwegian Agency for International Development (NORAD) at the secondary levels in areas such as teacher development and training, curriculum development, and stipends. Additionally, the female stipend programs have indirectly contributed to reduced fertility rates through delays in marriage, better nutrition, and enhanced the capabilities of women to participate more fully in the social and economic development of Bangladesh.

Next Steps: One of the key successes of this project has been that of promoting sustainability, evident in the building and strengthening of a Program Monitoring Unit (PMU) within the Ministry of Education. This has ensured that the Ministry provides direct leadership and management to the project and takes full accountability for its performance. Further evidence of sustainability is GOB's increasing allocation of own

resources for the program, as well as the gradual but steady conversion of the over 400 field-based education officers, recruited, under the project, to regular positions in the Ministry. In addition, a clear sign of the government's commitment is that successive governments over the past 13 years have fully supported the stipend program. Having made significant progress towards its objectives relating to girls' access to secondary education, the Government is focusing more and more on how to reach economically and geographically disadvantaged girls, as well as poor boys. Similarly, based on results of evaluations of the current pilot, the Government is increasingly focusing on serious issues of quality, most notably under the IDA supported ESDSCs.