

### III EDUCATION: SPECTACULAR PROGRESS AND EMERGING ISSUES

#### Summary

- *Bangladesh has surpassed all expectations in education but there are remaining and emerging challenges*
- *Quality of education, vocational education, education for the poorest children and outcomes in certain geographical areas are some of the key issues to be addressed*
- *There is evidence that the Female Secondary School Stipend Program, which enhanced girls' education, has "left boys behind"*
- *Impact of education in several sectors has been tremendous and seems to have altered the social fabric - girls cite having "voice" as the most important achievement.*
- *Almost 75 percent of the sample in the WBGNS 2006 believes that girls should have as much education as boys.*
- *Geographical areas show serious differences in attitudes to education for girls but in areas where women believe most fervently in equality of education, men do not, and vice versa.*
- *Aspirations of the educated generation of men and women are for better jobs, educated spouses and a better life.*
- *Young people have clear ideas of the problems in the educational system and the reform that is needed*

3.1 **Growth of education: What are the patterns?** The growth of education, especially secondary education for girls, is perhaps Bangladesh's most dramatic achievement in the last two decades. Compared to other low income countries, Bangladesh stands out as a shining success story in female secondary education, along with countries such as Nicaragua, Vietnam, and some countries of the erstwhile Soviet Union.

3.2 Bangladesh's success is especially commendable because the growth in female education took place within a democratic regime and started from a very low base. But this was not just happenstance. Specific and deliberate policy levers propelled Bangladesh's success in education. In the 1980s, primary school enrollment rose rapidly after the introduction of a food-for-education program for poor children. Even today primary school is free for all children. Later, following the introduction of a national scholarship program for secondary schools in 1994, female enrollment *exceeded* male enrollment in rural areas, and urban-rural differences diminished. NGOs too have done their part in improving access to education. For instance, BRAC initiated a non-formal education program that grew to 35,000 schools providing education in the first three years of primary school.

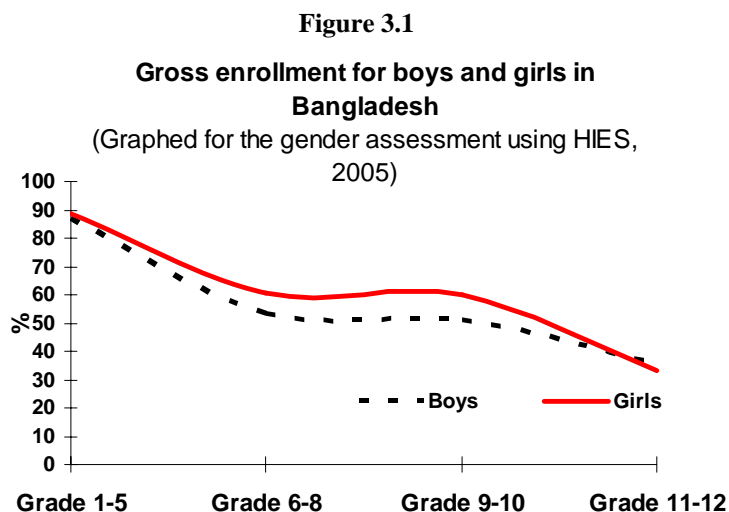
3.3 Changing opportunities for women helped to reinforce parents' willingness to educate daughters. First, the micro credit revolution allowed poor women "loanees" to send children, both boys and girls, to school because it gave them access to incomes and increased their bargaining position in the family. Second, the emergence of the export oriented garment industry since the mid 1980s generated a new and growing demand for female labor with at least primary level education so that returns from girls' education became more concrete and gave poor parents an added incentive to educate girls<sup>75</sup>.

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<sup>75</sup> Currently 1.5 million women are employed in the export garment manufacturing industry. Studies show that garment factory workers have on average more years of schooling compared to other workers and girls from similar socio economic backgrounds who do not participate in the labor market (Kabeer and Mahmud 2004).

3.4 These developments were taking place at a time when mass and universal education received strong state support because education was seen to have an instrumental value in hastening economic growth and development. Government’s visible commitment was evident in media campaigns with slogans like ‘Education for all’ and ‘Send your sons and daughters to school’. State support was complemented by strong popular elite support as well, who viewed education as a means for raising ‘awareness among the masses’ to solve the problem of poverty and turn a ‘burden into a wealth’<sup>76</sup>. Such support strengthened the idea that education was now a necessity to get on in life, and perhaps even that education was an equalizer in a highly stratified society. It also contributed to the belief that education was a universal right whereas in the past it was thought to be the prerogative of the wealthy. Sending daughters to school, sometimes even at the cost of withdrawing sons, was quite accepted and even justified on the grounds that schooling helped to secure a better marriage for them. The homogeneity and density of the Bangladesh population and a shared belief that upward social mobility was possible through education (because of the absence of deeply entrenched ethnic

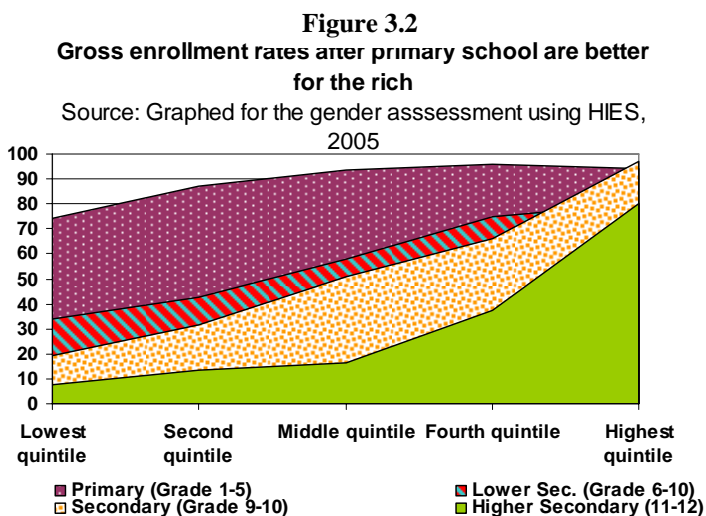
and other social distinctions), together with new patterns of behavior by poorer women with respect to labor market participation, income earning and household decision making could explain the ‘swiftness with which educational aspirations took root’<sup>77</sup>.



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3.5 **Remaining challenges and emerging issues:** Despite this almost incredible progress, there are challenges in Bangladesh, as in every country that has done well in education. For one, the spectacular growth in female secondary education has *placed boys at a disadvantage*, or what we term in this chapter the “**boys left behind**” phenomenon. Potentially a source other negative spillover effects, the GoB is cognizant of this challenge and is in the process of redesigning the scholarship program to make it more equitable. Other challenges include low enrolment rates for all children with rising grades. Thus, gross enrollment at the secondary level is much lower compared to the primary level. It stands at 57 percent in grades 6-8, 55 percent in grades 9-10, and about 38 percent in grades 11-12 in 2005 (HIES, 2005). Moreover, boys’ enrollment at all levels is lower than that of girls, except when they get to grade 11 and the incentive of the Female Secondary School Stipend Program (FSSSP), which provides cash transfers to girls from grades 6-

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<sup>76</sup> Hossain and Kabeer 2004, cited in Mahmud, 2006

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10, no longer applies. The demand among girls for higher education is extremely high as evidenced by the focus group discussions with adolescent girls. For all students, school quality, vocational skills and access to employment after school completion are important bottlenecks in their transition to adulthood.

3.6 Yet another challenge is the rich-poor gap in education. The difference between the rich and poor children begins to manifest itself right from primary school onwards despite the fact the primary education is free for all students. The difference between rich and poor grows with rising grades. Thus, less than 20 percent children from the poorest households enroll in Grade 9, but close to 100 percent from the richest families do. This is even starker at the higher secondary level, where less than 10 percent children from the poorest two quintiles enroll, compared to about 70 percent from the richest. This gap in enrollment by poverty status at the lower secondary levels will be important to bridge for reasons of equity, but also for reasons of productivity.

3.7 Finally, there are serious spatial disparities in Bangladesh. One of the emerging concerns is the fact that educational outcomes in metropolitan areas may be lagging, perhaps also as a result of the FSSSP which does not cover these areas. Moreover, divisions like Khulna, Barisal and Rajshahi are doing extremely well, but Sylhet and to a smaller extent Dhaka and Chittagong are lagging behind. Later in this chapter we discuss these spatial variations, with a special focus on Sylhet.

## **A Impact of Education on Development Outcomes and the Social Fabric**

*“Earlier fathers used to say ‘what is the use of educating girls....they will go to another house’. But now, fathers send both daughters and sons to school and college.” School going adolescent girl in Mymensingh during focus groups discussions*

*“ Mothers of the previous generation used to advise their daughters to learn house-work and get education up to primary; now mothers are telling their daughters to get at least secondary school certificate”. School going adolescent boy in Satkhira during focus*

### **Box 3.1: The Female Secondary School Stipend Program (FSSSP)**

The FSSSP scheme is a conditional cash transfer intervention launched by the GoB in 1994 for girls with assistance from the World Bank and other donor agencies. Girls completing primary school and enrolling in grade 6 in a junior/high school are automatically eligible for the stipend. The program spans all rural and non-metropolitan secondary schools that are recognized by the government. But instead of restricting participation of beneficiaries to government schools girls are allowed to go to school of their choice (secular or religious).

All eligible female students are awarded stipends under the following conditions: (i) they must attend at least 75 percent of classes in an academic year; (ii) they must obtain passing grades in the annual examination; (iii) they must remain unmarried until passing the SSC (Secondary School Certificate) examination. The stipend is directly deposited directly into the commercial bank savings account of the student in two annual installments. Other components included female education awareness, teacher training, water supply and sanitation, and institutional development. However, the amount of the stipend is very small and not enough for the poorest girls to cover expense like shoes or uniforms.

*groups discussions*

3.8 Recent scholarly and policy related work has tried to understand the determinants of education and disparities in education. This report focuses on the value of education as an explanatory variable for important development outcomes. Therefore, one of the common themes across this report has been to address the impact of education on a number of outcomes, including labor markets, marriage markets, maternal health care, and within the household on decision making, experience of violence and attitudes to violence. We find that Bangladesh stands out among South Asian countries such as India and Pakistan

in having positive and high returns to education for women in the form of both entry into the labor market and in wages<sup>78</sup>. In the case of marriage, we find that the younger and more educated sample in the WBGNS 2006 is more likely to have a say in the choice of spouse and education is also positively correlated with higher age at marriage. Our analysis of access to maternal care finds that women’s education and access to information are the most important variables predicting women’s use of maternal health services. Educated women are consulted more frequently on household purchases as well. The only area where the effect of education is muted is on attitudes to and experience of domestic violence.

<b>Table 3.1: Achievements in Girls Secondary Schooling</b>		
<b>Indicator</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2005/6</b>
No. of girls enrolled	1.1 million	4 million
Girls as % of total enrollment*	33%	56%
% of girls from the poorest two quintiles	20%	35%
% of girls passing standardized grade 10 examination	35%	58%

Source: BANBEIS

3.9 Apart of the more easily measurable impacts of education that we have described, there are also impacts on the social fabric that we tried to capture through focus group discussions. Our results indicate that when a diverse group of people are asked about changes in their communities, across the nation, they regard women’s education to be one of the most important changes and drivers of further change.

3.10 The visual image of the new Bangladeshi countryside where girls walk and cycle to school is an evocative one and a huge change from their mother’s generation when women were seldom visible outside in public spaces. When girls were asked how education has made their lives different from their mothers’, they typically replied that it had helped them “find a voice,” allowed them to “have a say,” to “speak,” and “to be listened to.” Education also appears to be changing relations between girls, their families, and their elders. While earlier the value was placed very much on girls’ silence and acceptance – a “pliable” obedient girl had a high value in the marriage market – now girls seem to “speak” more. The acceptance of and demand for equal education for boys and girls has pervaded regions and generations. Almost 75 percent of those surveyed believe that girls should have as much education as boys.<sup>79</sup>

3.11 These indications of confidence and esteem of an entire generation are illustrated in these quotes:  
*“We are educated girls....we can talk any man on different issues.....we do not know you well but we are talking freely with you. It is because we have education” Young girl out of school Sunamgonj speaking to a male focus group facilitator.*

*“Girls of the present generation girls do not hesitate to share their views with family members. In our mothers’ generation girls could not think of sharing their views with parents and family members, they obeyed all decisions of their elders” Elite women Dinajpur during focus group discussions*

*“Earlier girls kept a distance while talking to their parents. But girls of our generation can talk frankly with parents and older brothers.....We can express our likes and dislikes to our parents.” Schoolgirls in Mymensingh during focus group discussions*

<sup>78</sup> As the chapter on labor markets points out, India and Pakistan both show lower labor force participation of women with increasing levels of education. In Bangladesh it is the opposite.

<sup>79</sup> WBGNS 2006

*“Girls are reluctant to simply accept parents’ decisions. When parents are being unreasonable, girls ask why? Daughters of earlier generation would be silent. ....Girls of this generation feel that if they act like previous generation there will be no development in their lives.” Mothers of young girls in Sunamgonj during focus group discussions*

3.12 The same question on the changes in the educated generation of girls compared to their mothers, however, also brought out some of the tensions in the male-female relations at the community level. For instance, another attribute girls are supposed to have is “*lojja*” – a term that denotes modesty but also shame. *Lojja* is manifested in girls’ “shy” behavior in not talking to strangers or to men outside the home and displaying their overall dependence. Young men indicated that they were confused and somewhat disapproving of their female peers’ behavior. Young men in a focus group in Dinajpur said educated girls were “not paying proper respect to elders . . . [and were] forgetting their traditions.” In a Mymensingh focus group, young men complained that educated girls did less housework and “watch[ed] more television” than women of their mothers’ generation. These responses suggest that girls’ education has wrought social changes so sweeping that members of the community are seeing significant departures from traditional norms.

3.13 **“Boys left behind” and the evidence of reverse gender inequality:** One of the major issues confronting policy makers and practitioners in Bangladesh today is the “boys left behind” phenomenon. Some recent studies have addressed this issue and have hypothesized that the causes for this lie in the direct and indirect effects of the FSSSP. For instance, some recent studies have found that adolescent boys are less likely to remain in school and more likely to do wage work following the introduction of the stipend scheme. Thus, parents may have decided to send adolescent girls to school and adolescent boys to work in response to the financial incentives created by the stipend program.

3.14 The relative fall in enrolment of boys in coeducational schools suggest that the FSSSP aided the process of closing gender gap not solely by raising female enrolment, but also in an unintended way: by cutting back on the participation of boys in secondary school<sup>80</sup>. Discrimination against women in the labor market may also play a part. Thus, if a daughter’s job prospects are lower than a son’s, and the FSSSP is providing a monetary incentive to families to keep girls in school, families would choose to keep the daughter in school and send the son to work<sup>81</sup>.

3.15 Of course, there could be other ways in which education policies could have contributed to this effect of “boys left behind” but whatever the reasons, the impacts on gender equality are likely to be deleterious and also have unintended consequences in intra household relations, the marriage market and gender relations more generally. None of these has yet been adequately researched, because there is a lag before these effects can start to be felt. However, since the GoB is cognizant of these issues and is contemplating incentives to send poor boys to secondary school as well, we may never see these adverse effects really play out.

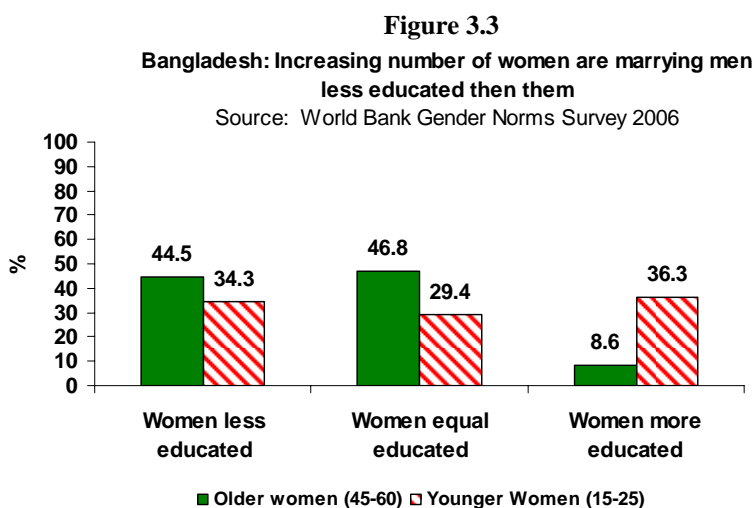
Name of the City	Primary (Grade 1-5)		Lower Sec. (Grade 6-8)		Secondary (Grade 9-10)		Higher Secondary (11-12)	
	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
Barisal	93.9	93.6	55.4	58.9	45.8	58.1	44.7	35.0
Chittagong	83.5	84.5	48.1	58.2	37.2	49.9	34.6	32.8
Dhaka	86.1	84.5	52.7	58.4	62.2	66.6	32.3	33.3
Khulna	96.1	99.5	60.7	66.9	58.3	71.5	39.3	36.2

<sup>80</sup> Arends-Kuenning and Amin, 2004 cited in Asadullah et al, 2006

<sup>81</sup> Asadullah et al, 2006

Rajshahi	85.5	91.5	53.5	70.3	50.3	57.5	38.2	33.4
Sylhet	83.2	85.7	57.1	36.3	39.7	58.0	29.1	28.5

3.16 **“Educational hypogamy?” An increasing proportion of wives are more educated than their husbands.** Figure 3.3 indicates that one of the major impacts of increasing female education on the marriage market is that more women have begun to marry men less educated than them. Traditionally marriages in India and Bangladesh are *hypergamous* – or women marrying men higher in status or “marrying up”. Status is usually defined in terms of the family’s socioeconomic level and not the bride’s attainment. This is clearly beginning to change. In the older cohort of women, over 91 percent had either lower or equal education, but in the younger cohort only 64 percent have equal or lower education than their husbands. Over one-third of the younger women are more educated than their husbands.



3.17 What the impact of this changed pattern of educational equality and **“educational hypogamy”** (or women “marrying down” in terms of educational attainment) will be in the medium term on marriage markets and on women’s status within marriage is too early to determine. It is possible that women’s higher attainment and the conflict between ideal and reality may manifest itself in a number of ways. While it is still too early to determine the impact of this change on Bangladeshi marriage and society, it opens the prospect of educated

women losing heart if their education does not result in greater earning power, more leadership roles, and a higher value in the marriage market. These are “second generation” problems, of which the Government is generally aware and has designed far-reaching educational reforms to address. For instance, it is revising its scholarship program to make subsidies more equitable to both girls and boys.

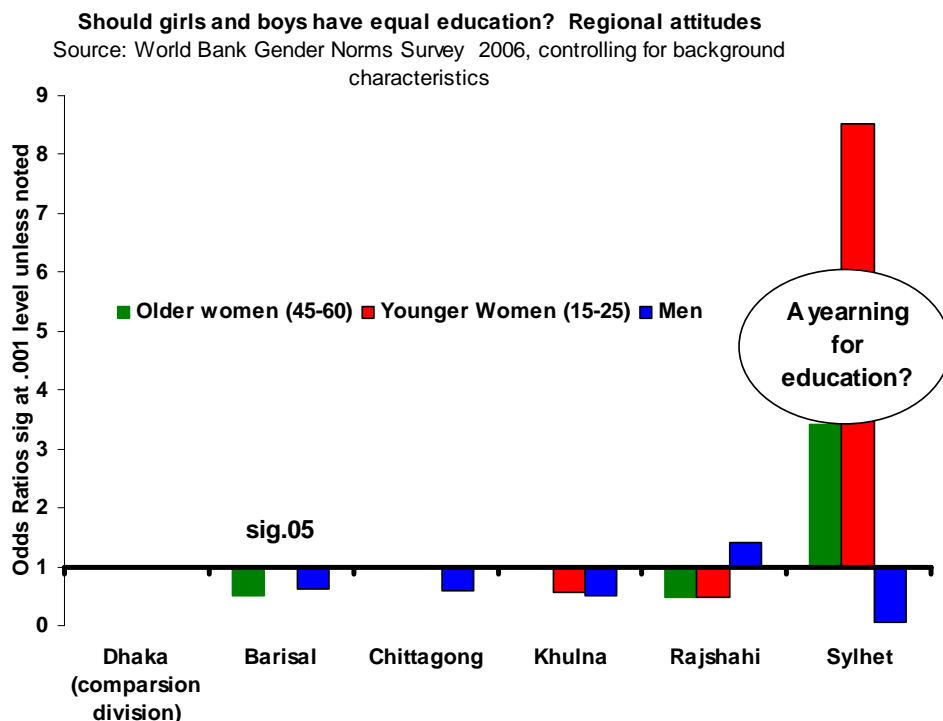
3.18 **Spatial variations and a focus on Sylhet:** Another long-standing issue in education is the differential achievements along geographical lines. These variations across administrative divisions start at the primary level. Thus, Khulna and Barisal have close to 95 percent gross enrollment, but the other four divisions still have more than 15 percent children that never enroll in school. Moreover, gender gap that favors girls is most prominent in Rajshahi at the primary level but it disadvantages them in Dhaka (Table 3.2).

3.19 Children who complete primary and move to the lower secondary (grade 6-8) level have the chance as well of moving to higher levels. However, while about 57 percent of all students move to grade 6, the regional differences and gender gaps begin to manifest more strongly at this level, with the “boys left behind” phenomenon beginning to really take effect. Rajshahi, Khulna and Barisal are forging ahead in secondary schooling overall, but also in exacerbated inequalities against boys.

3.20 Sylhet emerges as the major exception to the “boys left behind” pattern at the lower secondary level. While every other division has a larger proportion of girls than boys enrolled, in Sylhet, only a little over one-third the girls but over half the boys are enrolled at the Grade 6-8 level. This disparity reverses

itself at the grade 9-10 level, when the incentive of the FSSSP comes into play, but the girls who dropped out after primary and never enrolled in grade 6 will always remain out of the educational system. It is for this reason that regional attitudes to educational equality for boys and girls are so interesting. However, we have to be cautious while drawing this conclusion, since the sample size for Sylhet is extremely small.

**Figure 3.4**



3.21 **Should girls and boys have equal education? Exploring regional attitudes:** The WBGNS 2006 asked the question – should girls and boys have equal education? Almost 75 percent of the total sample in the WBGNS 2006 believes that girls should have as much education as boys (if not more). These attitudes to equal education for girls and boys vary by region and sample (younger and older women and men) and seem to indicate demand for education among different groups of society.

3.22 We find that in Sylhet such demand for education is inordinately high among women but not among men. Since men are the primary decision-makers of whether to send girls to school, and until what grade, this indicates that Sylhet’s relatively poor educational outcomes for girls are determined to a large extent by men’s attitudes. For women and girls there seems to be a “yearning for education” that they do not receive ordinarily. Other regions also display differences in attitudes among men and women regarding educational equality. However, we do not know enough about either the cultural norms or external factors like labor market and other opportunities to draw firm conclusions.

**B Aspirations of Educated Young People in Bangladesh - “To Stand On Our Own Feet”**

3.23 The question that springs to mind when we discuss the amazing progress that Bangladesh has made in education – what are the aspirations of educated young people? What are their apprehensions in their transition to the next phase of their lives? We conducted sixteen of the 32 focus groups mentioned earlier with adolescents and those in their early twenties, separately with those in school and out-of-

school. Participants discussed their aspirations, goals and their vision of a better educational system. This is important because this generation of young people (of whom the girls have availed of the female stipend program) is radically different from their parents' generation and their experiences can positively inform policy and reform of the educational system.

*"My mother was married off when she was studying in class eight. May be I will get married after a BA degree." School going adolescent girl in Mymensingh during focus group discussion*

3.24 The common themes in young people's aspirations relate to their transition from school to work and marriage. As would be expected, young women and men have very different aspirations. For young women, higher education, financial independence and a good marriage are the top three priorities. "*Nijer paaye daanraano*" or "standing on one's own feet" is almost a universal theme that denotes young women's aspirations to be financially independent. Marriage to educated men and having a source of income for themselves are simultaneous aspirations of this new generation of young women. Almost all schoolgirls in focus groups talked about higher education and being able to complete higher degrees. However, they do not take it for granted that they would be allowed to complete their studies, since their parents would start looking for grooms for them as soon as they complete high school.

3.25 The following quotes from young women in Satkhira (out of school) during focus group discussions are illustrative of the aspirations:

*"I will take care of my own family after marriage."*

*"I want a job after the completing my MA. And get married to a good educated boy."*

*"I want to learn handicraft and sewing work. Then I will get married."*

*"I have studied upto class five and now I am going to take training in tailoring. And then I will get married to a SSC pass boy."*

3.26 Schoolgirls in Dinajpur – in an area with relatively better educational outcomes had the following to say about their aspirations primarily for getting higher education:

*"My dream is to complete an honors (Bachelors) degree and if possible I will do my Masters."*

*"I want to be teacher after passing BA. About my marriage – I will leave it to my parents but I will have an opinion."*

*"My dream is to complete my BA and then I will get married to the groom of my father's choice. If I do not get a good result in HSC (Higher Secondary Certificate) my father will not let me do my BA. So I need to study hard and get good marks."*

3.27 Young women also expressed their apprehensions about being able to realize their aspirations. For instance, in Satkhira, while all young girls would like financial independence, they were also apprehensive about securing jobs. One participant expressed her frustration, because her uncle who has a BA could not get a job since he did not have enough money for the bribe of Tk 7000. Similarly, in Dinajpur, young women were apprehensive about the type of groom they would get. This anxiety about marriage partners, their behavior and status were common themes. For instance, a young woman in Dinajpur, who had a slight disability in one leg said: "I know sewing. I want to apply it. I have problem in one of my legs, so it is creating a problem for my marriage. Sometimes I think I will not get married."

3.28 In Sylhet, schoolgirls were nervous that their families had already started looking for a groom for them and this would prevent them from studying further as they aspired to do. This gap between aspirations and reality is likely to be an important social issue in the years. The labor markets chapter shows that in spite of the increase in women's (and especially young women's) employment in the last decade, the participations rates are still very low. Part of this is explained by the fact that women drop out of market work after marriage. If indeed norms and opportunities for women's work have changed with

the increase in education, we can expect even more growth, but whether jobs will keep pace with this new cohort of young women is something we will have to wait and observe.

3.29 For young men, higher education (beyond Bachelors for schoolboys) and formal sector jobs (either in the government or in the private sector) are the major preoccupations. Most young men also want to be married to attractive and *educated* young women. Some would like their spouses to be working in traditional occupations such as teaching and the NGO service sector. There is greater diversity in young men's responses by region than there is among young women's. Thus, in some areas like Khulna young men want to be able to take advantage of the economic boom caused by shrimp cultivation and set up their own businesses. In Sylhet, the major sending area for educated Bangladeshi emigrants, the overwhelming aspiration is to go abroad, whether through marriage or through jobs.

3.30 In Dinajpur, schoolboys were focused on getting government jobs, while out of school men were focused on self-employment and starting their own businesses. Below are their voices.

*"My dream is to be independent. So I completed a six month course from the Technical College. I want to take more courses and get more training so that I can get a good job somewhere."*

*"Like everybody else I also dream of my own house, car, and a wife. But to fulfill these expectations, I want to go abroad as a driver. When I have enough money I will return home."*

*"I want to be a leading businessman. And for that, I want to invest in my agricultural land and increase production. I will save the money in the bank and someday start my own business"*

*"I want to get a Govt. job after completing my studies. And I want to marry an attractive girl who is at least SSC pass."*

*"After passing my Masters, I want to serve in a government institution; if I fail to do so, I will start my own business. If I fail even in this then I will do farming. And I intend to marry an educated attractive girl."*

3.31 Both young men and women also have a strong sense of what they need to give back to their families and this fits seamlessly into their aspirations and goals. Many of the young men for instance, talked about their sister's marriages (the responsibility of which is equally shared by older brothers and other older men in the family) and of renovating the family house. Some were concerned about where the dowry for their sisters' marriages would come from. One of the common sources is through their own dowries – and they cite the dowry that they will receive as a strategy to pay for their sisters' dowry. Young women similarly cite their responsibilities as good daughters who would abide by their parents' decisions in their marriage. For young women "looking after my family" is a common theme.

*"Right at this moment, my dream is to renovate my house. And that's why I want a dowry when I get married."*

*"My main dream is to arrange a good marriage for my younger sister. May be in the process my savings will be used up. But the money that I get from renting my lands....I will save that to start my own business."*

## **C Recommendations for Educational Reform-Voices of Youth and Government Response**

3.32 This chapter presented the dramatic growth of education in Bangladesh. In particular, it showed how female secondary school education is changing not only key outcomes in Bangladesh but also the texture of the social fabric and the aspirations of young men and women. This section presents recommendations for educational reform based on focus group discussions and civil society data.

3.33 Most focus group discussions with young people veered into a discussion of the educational system and what the major drawbacks are or what they would like to see changed. The themes that emerged were common to both young men and women. Those in school tended to be more vocal in their views about the reform of the educational system. Those out of school focused almost exclusively on “job-oriented education” or vocational skills. In addition, Bangladesh has a thriving NGO community that focus on monitoring the quality of education. Large NGOs like BRAC and Grameen have their own research and advocacy units on education. CAMPE is the foremost network comprising eminent educationists, who independently monitor educational outcomes and have formed Education Watch. The network brings out regular reports and data, engages with government and other NGOs in the field and has developed a very vocal watchdog role. This section draws on the recent CAMPE report “State of Secondary Education: Progress and Challenges”, 2005<sup>82</sup>. Interestingly, almost all the issues raised in the CAMPE report are also echoed in the voices of young men and women.

- *Teacher quality*: Almost every focus group lamented the quality of their teachers. Substantiating this, in a survey in 2005, CAMPE found that less than a fifth of the secondary teachers (17.9 percent) were women, which affects the learning achievements and ability of girls to enroll in higher education. Moreover, while 84 percent of secondary teachers had a bachelors or higher degrees; of those, 57 percent of who claimed to have Bachelors degrees were placed in the third division or some even did not take the degree examination. The same was the situation with 78 percent of those who claimed Masters’ qualifications. The capacity of teachers to teach science subjects was also limited by the fact that nearly half the graduate teachers studied humanities; 20 percent studied science and 23 percent were madrasa graduates. More than half of the secondary teachers had no professional pedagogic training. Finally, while the nominal student-teacher ratio was 29, but when shortage of teachers in key subjects and absences of (10 percent on an average day), were accounted for, the effective student teacher ratio was substantially higher.
- *Physical infrastructure and facilities*: While there has been a huge expansion of educational infrastructure, mainly school buildings, there is still a gap in the type and quality of facilities within the schools. The focus groups saw a common theme of young people wanting more schools, colleges and libraries in their areas in addition to computers and other “modernizing” equipment. The CAMPE survey has detailed information on the state of secondary school facilities. For instance, science learning is seriously compromised by the fact that only about half of the schools had science laboratories and that too of varying quality; 30 percent of the non-government schools had adequate laboratories; 87 percent of the madrasas did not have any. Regarding library facilities too, the survey found that only 15 percent of the institutions had a library with a collection of books that could be regarded as adequate judged by modest standards.
- Computer education and literacy comes out in focus group discussions in different ways – in the context of jobs, skills to enable young people to migrate and overall to catch up with modernization. The CAMPE survey found that 37 percent of the schools claimed to have computer *education* facility, but a fifth of them had only one computer and another fifth had 2-15 computers; the rest had none.
- Finally, as pointed out earlier, Bangladesh made a big push to increase physical infrastructure for its schools. The CAMPE survey found that half of the secondary education institutions were found to have physical facilities (roofs, walls, floors, doors, and windows) in good or largely good condition, one third were in poor condition and 18 percent were in damaged or seriously dilapidated condition. Nearly 60 percent institutions had electricity connections, but two-thirds of

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<sup>82</sup> [http://www.campebd.org/content/EW\\_2005.htm](http://www.campebd.org/content/EW_2005.htm)

classrooms and half of teachers' rooms had no electricity. Most schools have clean water supply and toilets; three quarters with separate facilities for boys and girls; but a quarter of the toilets were in seriously unhygienic condition.

- *Access to vocational and other marketable skills:* Participants in the focus group discussions emphasized the importance of having “job-oriented” education at the secondary level. English education is also widely regarded to be the stepping stone to better jobs. Young men in Sunamgonj, who are mostly focused on migrating to England, for instance said: “Emphasis should be laid on English and computer learning so that one does not fail after going abroad.” Focus groups with young women aspiring for jobs found that they wanted to B.Ed and training in nursing so that they could tap the burgeoning demand for female teachers and health care providers. However, the opportunities for such training is limited in rural areas.
- *General quality of education:* Educational quality is an issue that the GoB is grappling with as *one of the next generation issues in educational reform. Almost every focus group in our study* talked of better quality education and linked this to quality of teachers. In fact, they spoke of the two almost as a single issue. But some focus groups did make a distinction. For instance, schoolboys in Mymensingh who came out of the rural primary education said: “Presently the primary schools in the village are of very bad quality, in comparison to schools at district level.” Similarly, young men in Sunamgonj (Sylhet) said they wanted “international quality education...so that no one would need to go abroad for further studies”.
- *Politics on school and college campuses:* Several focus groups discussed the issue of aggressive politics in educational institutions and the deleterious impact this has on the learning environment. While politics in institutions of higher learning have been historically important in South Asia as a whole, these activities often disrupt learning for the majority of students, as a small group of student political leaders can hold an entire institution to ransom. This came out quite sharply in the voices of the youth. However, this is one more area where we have to distinguish between the areas where policy can make a difference and where it cannot. Student politics is a training ground for democracy and as such has many positive effects. However, when politics veers on to extortion or blackmail or harassment, it becomes a law and order issue which must be tackled effectively.
- *“Unfair means” in education:* The term “unfair means” is used to describe corrupt practices of many kinds – in grading, leaking examination questions, nepotism and access by a few to information that others do not have. A common theme in the focus group was the frustration of students with what they regarded a non-transparent and corrupt grading system, system for admission into institutions of higher education and hiring practices.
- *Segregated colleges, libraries and hostels for girls in more conservative areas:* Several young women, particularly those in school and aspiring for higher education outlined the need for gender segregated facilities. For instance, schoolgirls in Satkhira said: “There is no college in our area. So we want a college be established here.” Schoolgirls in Sunamgonj aspiring to get higher education, said: “We would like a separate library for girls and more girls’ hostels.” Clearly, the demand for higher education among young women is high and if appropriate facilities and opportunities are provided, the gap between girls and boys favoring boys, at the higher secondary level and above can be bridged.
- *Three additional areas for attention:* Finally, we would like to reiterate the conclusions of this analysis which show that three areas in particular need policy solutions – first, access to education

for the poorest groups of children; second, attention to regional disparities particularly in Sylhet and third, attention to educational attainment of boys at the secondary and post secondary level.

**Box 3.2: Schoolgirls in Dinajpur conducted their own ranking exercise of the type of education they needed most in their area**

- Education free from unfair means
- Politics-free educational institution
- Availability of competent teachers in every tier of education
- More practical education system
- Free education for all children
- At least one primary school in each village

3.34 **GOVERNMENT RESPONSE:** The GoB is aware of most of the drawbacks in the educational system and sector reform is time consuming and politically difficult. That being so, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is in the process of implementing a medium-term reform agenda aimed at addressing systemic governance issues in order to raise the quality and cost-effectiveness of service delivery, and improve equity of access to secondary education. The reform agenda focuses on:

- *Accountability.* Reforms in these areas include rigorously enforcing the criteria governing the establishment of institutions, and setting up institutional mechanisms to link school subventions to objective measures of school performance. School management committees are being strengthened to give them greater responsibility regarding school supervision.
- *Equity.* Demand-side interventions to encourage rural girls to attend secondary school are continuing. Means-testing mechanisms are being piloted to better target these subsidies to the poor. Incentives are also being provided to set up institutions in underserved areas.
- *Administration/Capacity Building.* MoE's planning and policy making capacity is being strengthened and greater implementation responsibility will be devolved to lower levels.
- *Monitoring, Evaluation and Dissemination.* MoE is placing significantly greater emphasis on program evaluation and monitoring to guide policy and planning. Capacity of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational and Information Statistics (BANBEIS) to provide good quality data is being enhanced. Public expenditure tracking surveys and impact evaluation of programs are being undertaken. Information on standardized examination outcomes, school performance, and program effectiveness is being disseminated widely.
- *Teacher Quality.* An autonomous Non-Government Teacher Registration and Certification Authority has been established, which will have the responsibility to develop a roster of pre-qualified and certified individuals eligible to be hired as teachers. An apex institution is being set up to be responsible for the management of teacher training and regulate training institutions. Teacher training is being undertaken in a phased manner.
- *Textbook Production and Curriculum Development.* Textbook production is being opened up to competition, which will over time result in a reduction in the role of the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) in publishing textbooks. NCTB's role is being focused on a transparent process of textbook evaluation and approval. The curriculum wing of NCTB is being strengthened to enable it to perform its functions more effectively.