

Achieving United Nations Millennium Development Goals by 2015: A Comparative Performance Assessment of Bangladesh and Peru

Saleh Ahmed *
Juan Manuel Pantoja Ypanaque**

Abstract

Education is society's main instrument for reproducing itself and a compelling ingredient for lasting meaningful socio-economic change. Therefore, at the beginning of new millennium, when the United Nations Member States were trying to reach a global consensus on sustainability and development, issues related to universal primary education was a rational choice for them. This paper compares the status quo of this issue between Bangladesh and Peru, where 'development' takes place in reality. The increase of universal primary school enrolment is closely related to the national and international spending on education sector for these countries and in addition to this, issues like population growth and spatial poverty traps also put increased pressure on the resources allocation to education. Mostly based on secondary research (e.g. consultation of literature and analysis of indicators on World Development, United Nations Millennium Development Goals and United Nations Children's Fund Data), this paper highlights the macro level comparative scenario and challenges that these two countries may face in their efforts to achieving universal primary education enrolment targets as part of their UNMDG's commitments by 2015.

Introduction

Primary education has direct and positive impacts on earnings, farm productivity, human fertility, along with immense intergenerational influence on child health, nutrition and education. Considering the impacts of education on economic productivity, a wide number of studies conclude that investments in primary education yield returns that are typically well above the opportunity cost of capital. One study showed that 4 years of education increased small farm productivity by 7% across 13 developing countries and by 10% in countries where new agricultural techniques were being introduced (Lockheed, et al. 1990). The social impacts of education are also positive. It is observed that women with more than four years of basic education usually have 30% fewer children than women with no education, and their children have lower mortality rates. Children of educated parents are also more likely to enroll in school and to complete more years of schooling than the children of uneducated parents (Lockheed, et al. 1990).

Considering all these positive influence of education on human development, almost 10

* Ph.D Candidate, Department of Economic and Social Analysis, 'Sapienza' Università di Roma, Rome, 00185 Italy. Email: Saleh.Ahmed@uniroma1.it

** Ph.D Candidate, Department of Economic and Social Analysis, 'Sapienza' Università di Roma, Rome, 00185 Italy. Email: Manuel.Pantoja@uniroma1.it

years before when the global leaders of the United Nations (UN) member states agreed to set far sighted goals to free a major portion of humanity from the shackles of extreme poverty, hunger, illiteracy and diseases. They perceived the 'Universal Primary Education (UPE)' as one of the major goals of their development achievements. Primary education is conceived now as the basis for economic growth and social development and a principal means of improving the welfare of individuals and societies. Access to UPE opportunity increases the productive capacities of societies as well as plays critical role for developing the political, economic, and scientific institutions. It plays the decisive role in reducing poverty by increasing the value and efficiency of the labour offered by the poor and by mitigating the population, health, and nutritional consequences of poverty. According to Sen, people become poor or get impoverished as they are prevented from initiating change and education is one of the widely accepted important tools that can offer the human beings the capacity to initiate any meaningful change or transformations (Samuels, 2005).

In the recent years, there has been remarkable progress towards achieving the UPE targets. Several countries in the Global South, particularly the countries with transitional economy (e.g. middle and upper middle income countries) have achieved already the 90% enrolment threshold (UNESCO, 2010). UPE enrolment in primary education has increased fastest in Sub-Saharan Africa, from 58% in 2000 to 74% in 2007 (UNESCO, 2010). Simultaneously more than 72 million children of primary school age remain out of school. Dropout rates are still high in many countries particularly in low income developing countries and for them achieving 100% primary school completion rates still is a difficult challenge (UNESCO, 2010).

Apart from the geographical distances, there are some other differences between Bangladesh and Peru. Demographic composition and socioeconomic determinants usually have different impacts on the public spending on UPE in these two countries. At the same time, these two countries have some similarities. Increasing inequality is among the major development challenges for both of the countries. Apart from vulnerability to global crisis, Bangladesh and Peru suffer from their weak political culture. Bangladesh and Peru both have comparatively lower GDP in comparison to their neighbouring countries. Their dependency on foreign aid is also at substantial level, but the progress on foreign direct investments (FDIs) flow is not that much. In the recent years, both countries have demonstrated substantial progress in making meaningful development among their relatively poor unprivileged population.

In the recent years, comparative social research has gained a new momentum. This usually offers us how the similar issues are being dealt or taking place in different social, economic, political or spatial context. In social science, the outcome could be useful for taking different types of policy decisions to make the situation better. Despite the several indicators of UNMDGs Goal 2, this paper only focuses the universal primary education enrolment by both sexes. This paper neither addressed explicitly the decreasing gender gap in UPE enrolment nor the issues like drop outs. Comparing mostly based on secondary literature research and data interpretation and analysis from different sources like World Development Indicators, UNICEF datasets, this paper begins with an analytical overview of these two countries and then examines the recent status and efforts for achieving the UNMDGs goals on UPE by 2015. Afterwards, this paper also

highlights the issue of the disadvantaged communities. Finally, it concludes by summarizing several issues related to UPE with a brief outlook on what can be instrumental for policy planning and decision making.

Country Profile: Bangladesh & Peru

Socioeconomic conditions along with demographic and spatial determinants play decisive role in shaping the *status quo* of progress towards the achievement of UPE targets by 2015 both in Bangladesh and in Peru. Even though of having different geographical locations consisting different land-population ration, these two countries usually receive often global media attentions due to their different development challenges.

Bangladesh is relatively small low-laying flat country in South Asia. The land mass is deltaic comprising mainly with the delta of three famous mighty rivers; the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna. The population is huge, even though it has relatively homogenous ethnic identities. Almost 98% people are Bengalis and the rest 2% comprises the tribal population and non-Bengali Muslims (CIA World Factbook, 2010).

Table 1: Country Profile-Bangladesh and Peru

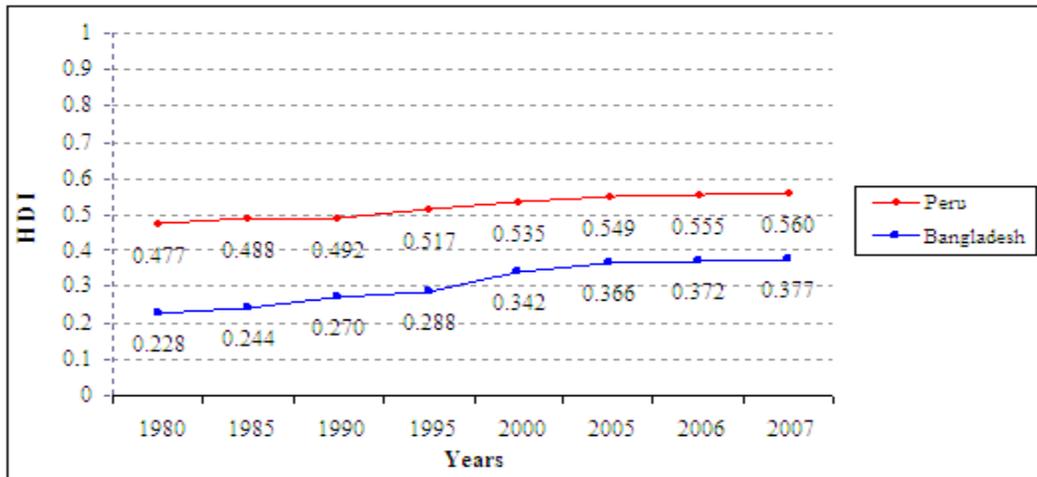
Country	Population	Land Area (sq km)	GDP per capita in USD (PPP) ¹
Bangladesh	156,050,883	143,998	1500
Peru	29,546,963	1,285,216	8500

Source: CIA World Fact Book, 2010

On the contrary, mostly mountainous country Peru maintains relatively better economic status and has less population than Bangladesh. This country, historically, is the home of diverse and heterogeneous ethnicities, which consists almost 45% are Amerindian, 37% are Mestizo (mixed Amerindian and white), 15% are white, black, Japanese and Chinese, and 3% comprises other ethnic origins (CIA World Fact Book, 2010).

Apart from these, in recent years, Bangladesh and Peru have experienced different levels of human development achievements.

¹ Purchasing power parity (PPP) is a theory which states that exchange rates between currencies are in equilibrium when their purchasing power is the same in each of the two countries. This means that the exchange rate between two countries should equal the ratio of the two countries' price level of a fixed basket of goods and services. When a country's domestic price level is increasing (i.e., a country experiences inflation), that country's exchange rate must be depreciated in order to return to PPP.



Source: UNDP, 2010

Fig.1: Trend of Human Development Index (HDI) in Bangladesh and Peru

However, rural-urban development disparities are alarmingly increasing and therefore social exclusion and inequality are more visible than any times before in both of the countries. Promoting rural employments or employments in remote hilly regions were not at the centre of public policy agenda. As a consequence, increasing poverty or inequality has impacted on states' performance on achieving the UPE targets and deep democratic decentralization. Mostly the minority or ethnic population are the major victims of this situation.

Income distribution is relatively better in Bangladesh than the highly unequal country Peru. That also indicates by the Gini coefficient of both countries, which is 31.0 for Bangladesh and 50.5 for Peru (World Bank, 2010).

Public Policy Response

Globally US\$ 16 billion is needed annually for most of the low income countries to reach the goals for providing primary education for all. Low-income countries could themselves make available an additional US\$7 billion a year – or 0.7% of their GDP. Still there are risks of financing gaps. Aid commitments to basic education fell by 22% in 2007 (UNESCO, 2010). Even though the progress is slower than the expected accelerated rate, globally the UPE scenario is optimistic. The global primary net school enrolment ratio (NER) increased from 85% in 1999 to 89% in 2006. That indicates globally more than 10% children of primary school-going-age are out of the schools. In the Global South, enrolment coverage in UPE reached 88% in 2007 in comparison to 83% in 2000 (UNDP, 2009b).

In some countries, the main reason for low educational attainment is that the children do not enroll in school due to different socioeconomic, ethnic or religious reasons. In countries like Bangladesh, more than half of children from the bottom two income quintiles never even enrolled. Elsewhere particularly in Latin America, enrollment is almost universal, but high repetition and drop-out rates lead to low completion rates. In

both cases, poor students are much more likely not to complete school. Demographic trends could be also other decisive factors, since population growth usually puts increased pressure on the resources (e.g. per capita spending on UPE), which are allotted to education spending.

In Bangladesh, public policy has laid emphasis on the education since the country signed the multilateral "Education For All (EFA)" agreement in the early 90s. The Government continues to be the main provider and financier of UPE. About 47% of primary schools are public schools. There are also registered non-government primary schools, which are privately operated but heavily subsidized by the government. Registered non-government primary schools only represent about one fourth of the entire existing schools. There are also some other schools operated by non-government organizations (e.g. BRAC), religious institutions and other non-government formal or informal schools. In addition to direct financing, Government of Bangladesh has also introduced demand side interventions to make UPE accessible in all clusters of society, e.g., stipends and fee waiver programmes, incentives for the private sectors to provide education services and community based programmes for increased provision for out of school children.

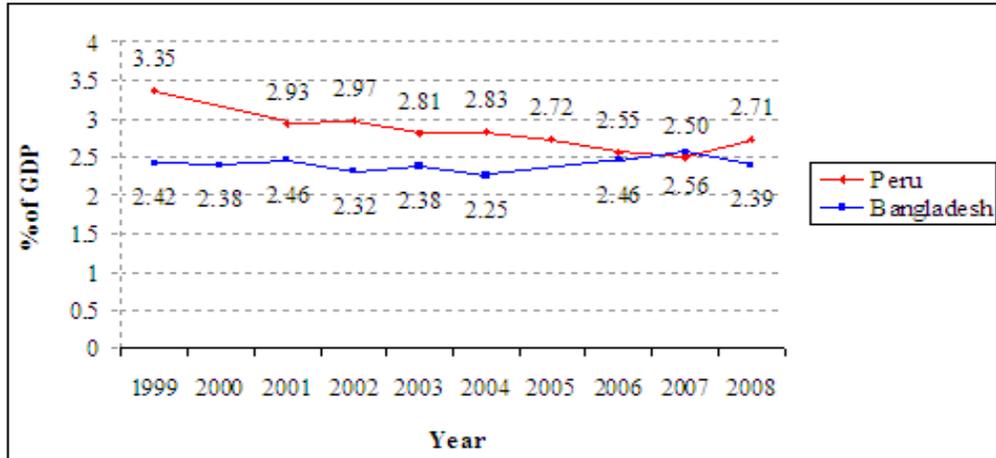
In parallel Peru has been signed an important agreement called Social Pact (Pacto social), which is key policy initiative for the education sector. Subsequently to the Social Pact, the government has enabled the 'Juntos' programme, which will be discussed later. Government of Peru is the main provider and financier of promoting UPE. There are also private schools mostly attended by the children from middle class and richer families. These schools are not subsidized by the state. In addition to this, there are also some schools operated by NGOs. Among others Catholic schools named 'Fe y Alegría' are quite familiar. But for the 'Fe y Alegría' schools considerable levels of state funding are paid by the public sector, particularly for the payments of teachers' salaries. By 2006, the 'Fe y Alegría' catholic schools had 71,500 students, 3,200 teachers, 62 high schools and four rural school networks with 97 additional schools (World Bank, 2007).

Here UNMDGs have been integrated as the key instrument of public governance, such as the Multiannual Macroeconomic Framework (MMF 2009-2011) and the Multiannual Social Framework (MSF 2009-2011), drawn up for the first time at the same year to carry out the provisions of the 'Plan of Social Program Reform'. MSF even includes inequality aspects, previously which were not included in MMF. Finally, in the Budget Law for the Year 2009, the targets for 2011 relating to chronic malnutrition and other prioritized social issues, e.g. maternal and newborn health, learning achievements, access to potable water and sanitary waste and sewage disposal, access to health and education facilities etc., have been ratified (Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros del Perú, 2010). Therefore, this is clearly evident that the level of commitments of Peruvian government has increased significantly at the recent years in order to achieve the goals designed not only to maintain macroeconomic balances but to overcome the social gaps.

Public Expenditure Pattern

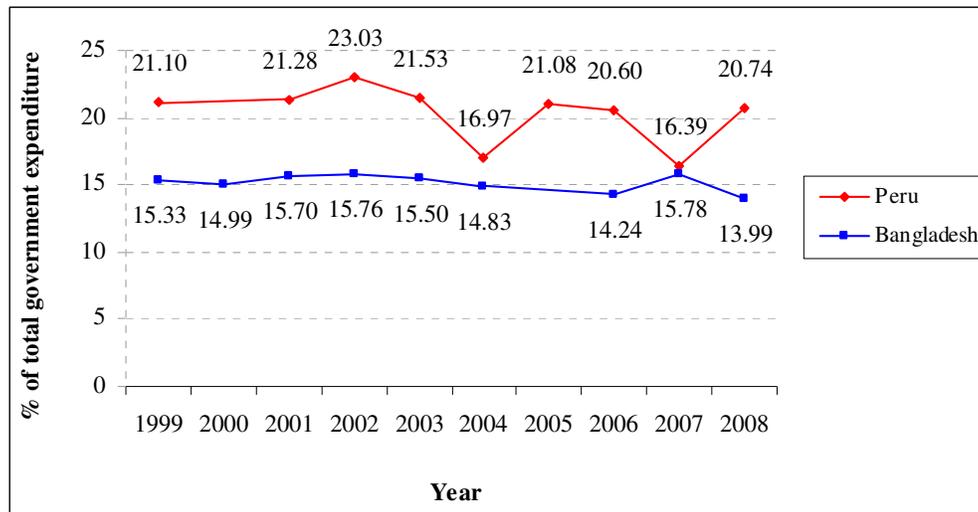
At the recent years, Bangladesh has achieved relatively strong economic performance with GDP growth rate more than 5% during the 1990s and real GDP growing by nearly 52% over the same period (World Bank, 2008). Public spending and attentions have continued to give priority to health and education sectors. Nevertheless, total spending on social sectors is a little under 5% of GDP.

Education expenditures increased significantly from 1.6% of total GDP in 1990 to over 2.4% in 1995-96. Since 1999, the share of education in GDP remained stable at 2.2% (World Bank, 2008). But Bangladesh is spending less money per student in primary education in comparison to other developing countries with similar per capita income.



Source: UNESCO, 2010a

Fig. 2: Public expenditure on education as % of GDP



Source: UNESCO, 2010a

Fig. 3: Public expenditure on education as % of total government expenditure

In Peru, spending on education has declined remarkably from 3.35% of total GDP in 1999 to 2.50% in 2007. In 2008 there was an increase. Interestingly in Peru the reduction of spending on education did not affect the increase of literacy rate.

Peru has also experienced a steady economic progress in the last years: 6.8% in 2005, 7.7%

in 2006, 8.9% in 2007, up to 9.8% in 2008 (World Bank, 2010). Approximately 3% of gross domestic product (GDP) has spent for the education sector, which is equivalent to the 16.5% of the total public expenses. This number indicates around US\$300 is spending for each student per year in the primary school (Ministerio de Educación de Perú, 2004).

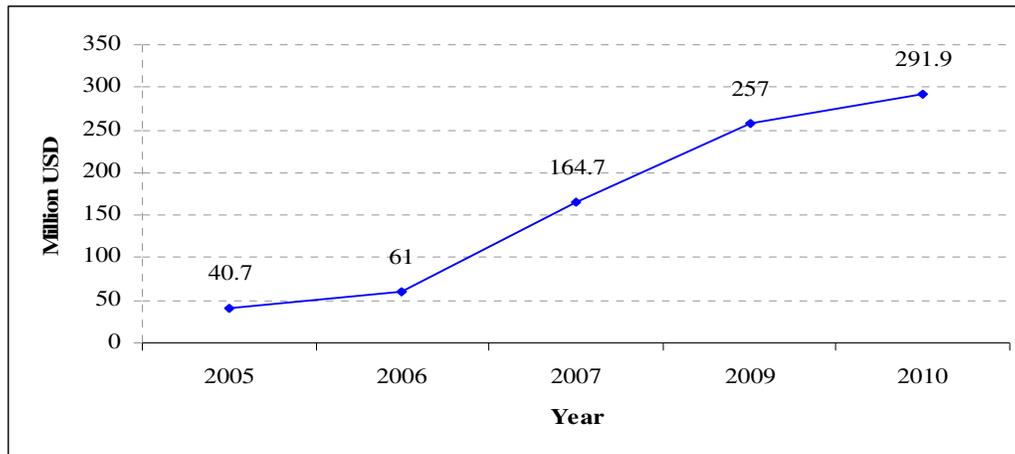
Access to Schooling for the Disadvantaged Groups

Low levels of primary school enrollment and completion are concentrated not only in certain regions (e.g. Sub-Saharan Africa) but also among certain segments of the population (e.g. minority or ethnic groups) in other parts of the world. For countries like Bangladesh and Peru rich in tradition and culture, unequal opportunities resulting from prejudices based on gender, ethnicity, income, language or disabilities are quite visible and those are major obstacles for achieving the UNMDGs Goal 2 within 2015. The global target for UPE still remains in the off-track. The critical challenge is the renewed targeting of the bottom 10% of the population (Rahman and Islam, 2009).

Demographic and Health Surveys in Bangladesh in the 1990s showed that improvements in access to basic education benefited foremost the children from better-off families, while children from poor families saw little or no improvement. In Peru, the access to primary education worsened in the 1990s. But only the poor bore the consequences, and the rich were not affected (Vandermoortele, 2002).

In tackling the situation, Government of Bangladesh has initiated a stipend program in 2002 to reach the 40% of the poorest primary school students. The indigenous people in Bangladesh are often seemed to be among the most disadvantaged groups. Despite the availability of public resources, Government is making all efforts to reach the hilly regions (Chittagong Hill Tracts) for ensuring the accessibility to the UPE facilities. Some records show that 150,000 children from indigenous communities have dropped out of school, and the completion rate of those who do enrol is also very low. The current services provided for indigenous children by various NGOs, aid agencies and the government are not sufficient. Government primary schools cannot operate in remote hilly regions due to high costs (DrikNEWS, 2009). Apart from this, there are also other difficulties in achieving education by the local indigenous communities. Sometimes, academic curriculum is inconsistent with the local culture and social context. Besides, language barriers between teachers and students, recruitment of teachers from outside the community, shortage of schools and remoteness of communities are some of the difficult obstacles to educational access faced by the CHT indigenous groups. Even though this can be debated for better understanding of the circumstances, however, very often the indigenous communities claim that the education system is managed on one fixed model without considering the need for changes in the education rights of the minorities (Tipura, 2008).

In Peru since 2005 'Juntos' is being implemented. The Juntos program is a lump-sum payment (monthly cash transfer of US\$35) and differs across households based on the number of children. To receive this payment, households need to comply with a number of requirements. These "conditionalities" vary depending on the age and gender of the beneficiaries (World Bank, 2009).



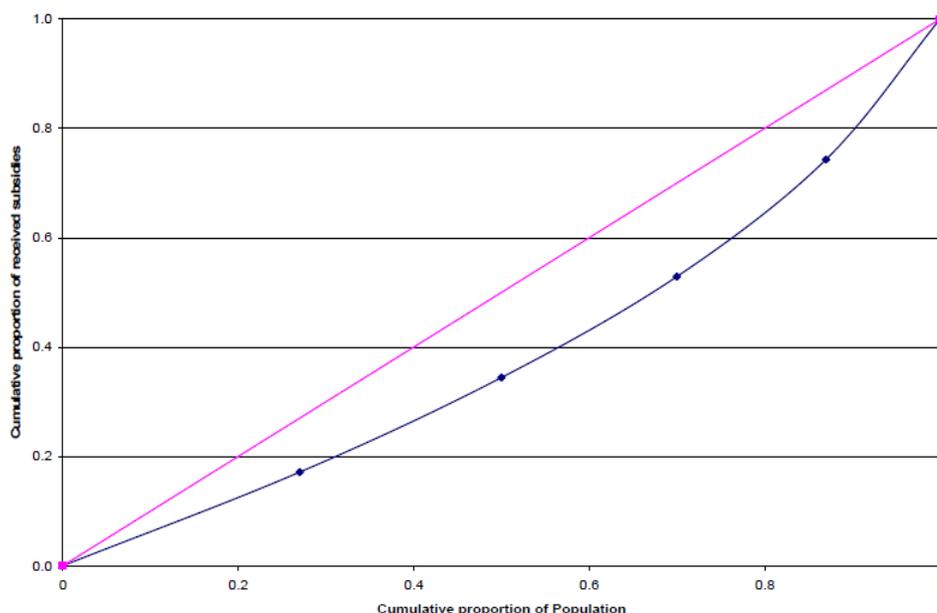
Source: Juntos Program, 2010

Fig. 4: Budget allocation to the 'Juntos' program during 2005-10.

Juntos aimed to serve 110 districts, which covered 37000 households and then that expanded to 638 districts and covered 454000 households. This has been aimed so far to expand to all 880 the poorest districts (World Bank, 2009). Here poverty is pervasive among the minority ethnic groups and have direct impacts on primary schools enrolment from the respective groups. The government of Peru, recognizing the relationship between poverty and education, adopted the following objectives for Juntos: (a) in the short run, to reduce poverty by providing households with cash transfers, and (b) in the long run, to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty through promotion of human capital via improved access to education and health services (World Bank, 2009). Although indigenous people make up at least 40% of Peru's population, their inclusion in higher education has never been an explicit national policy. Peru's indigenous populations can be broadly divided between the highland Quechua and Aymara-speaking peoples and the more than 50 lowland Amazonian linguistic groups. Nevertheless, the intercultural bilingual education did not receive substantial government attentions or supports. Till now, there have been no legislative or financial initiatives to tackle this situation. In 2000, World Bank's initiatives for strengthening indigenous organizations were implemented in neighboring Bolivia, Ecuador, Argentina and Chile, but not in Peru (Dillon, 2008).

Policy Gaps

At this moment in Bangladesh, the benefits incidence of public spending is regressive as the poor are less likely to go to school. Particularly, the poorest quintile benefits comparatively less from the government's primary education subsidy (17%) than the richest quintile who gains 26% of total primary education spending. In other words, it might be plausible that the public spending is less efficiently targeted towards the poorest children and the poor usually receive a smaller share in UPE subsidy than their share in the total population. In Figure 5, this scenario can be depicted using the Lorenz curve (World Bank, 2008).



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 2005

Fig. 5: Lorenz curve showing distribution of public subsidies among students from different expenditure quintiles

In this Lorenz Curve, the cumulative proportion of subsidy received by students is plotted against the cumulative proportion of primary school aged population from different welfare groups. The degree of convexity of the curve suggests that spending on primary education is not well targeted to the poor and therefore the benefit incidence is regressive. Furthermore, the average benefit incidence analysis shows that a significant portion of the stipend subsidy leaks out to children from richer households: about 24% of the stipend recipients belong to the 40% rich quintile. The marginal benefit incidence analysis confirms this result in so far as children from the richest quintile would still receive about 10% of an increase in the size of the stipend program.

The fact is more or less similar to Peru also. In Peru, the level of education is perhaps the factor, which allows distinguishing more clearly the poor from the non-poor. Until 2007, 55.0% of the poor and 71.0% of the extreme poor over 15 years of age were able to study a year of primary education or did not have any level of education (INEL, 2007).

Countries' Performances in Regional Context

In South Asian context, Bangladesh's some of the health and education indicators are significantly better than those found in other South Asian countries. In fact, while India and Pakistan have recorded a gross enrolment rate (GER) of 75.2 and 70.5 respectively in the early 2000s, Bangladesh had achieved a GER of 86.1% (World Bank, 2008). Similarly Bangladesh recorded a net enrolment rate of 62.9% compared to 54.8% and 50.5% respectively for India and Pakistan during the same period. More importantly, Bangladesh has closed the gender gap in both primary and secondary education

enrolments (World Bank. 2008).

In South America, some of the education indicators in Peru are significantly better than its neighboring countries. In the early 2000s while Chile and Bolivia have recorded a gross enrollment rate (GER) of 89.7 and 95.1 respectively, Peru had achieved a GER of 96.5% (PRIE, 2010). In 2008, the net enrolment for the men was 96.4% and for the women it was 97.3% (INEI, 2010).

Conclusion

In Bangladesh, approximately 2.4 million 6-10 years old children are outside of primary school. The MDGs progress report of Bangladesh reveals another alarming scenario: among those enrolled, a large portion of them do not complete the primary education and therefore an increasing trend of dropout is more visible than previously experienced. This fact can be highlighted by mentioning that primary school dropouts increased to 48%, rising by 15% compared to 33% in 2005 (The New Age Reporting, 2007). In other words, this is clearly understandable that only 52 out of every 100 children enrolled in a primary school completed primary education in 2007. Therefore, this is plausible that besides failing to reduce poverty and improve the quality of life for the children, Bangladesh is also unlikely to attain 100% completion of primary education by the MDG deadline of 2015 (Rahman and Islam, 2009).

But for Peru this is a different story, even though Peru is struggling for providing access to basic schooling to all its ethnic groups or remote regions in Andes. The net enrollment rate has, however, been varying between 90.6% and 94.2% since 2000. Peru has achieved a net enrollment rate of children aged between 6 and 11 years of 94.2% by 2008, achieving an increase of 3.3% in comparison with 2004 (Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros del Perú, 2009).

UPE is a complex, multifaceted task involving different types of human, institutional and structural opportunities and also constraints. Many countries have successfully redirected national policies in an effort to fulfill their obligations towards UPE. They might have simultaneously gained the opportunity to incorporate their marginalized populations in the mainstream development. Although UPE is only one building block in order to reach a higher degree of social justice and equality in national or global scale, it should at least be 'more-than-just-a-dream' for the marginalized regions, countries or population groups.

This is now quite clear that Peru will achieve the UPE targets by 2015, but for Bangladesh this might be a daunting task. Due to huge population pressure and yearly damage by natural disasters (e.g., floods, cyclones, river erosions) along with political chaos, public funds and spending are frequently redirected for immediate response. Therefore public spending on UPE usually is very much precarious for the low income developing countries like Bangladesh. On the contrary, Peru might face mountable challenges in promoting UPE among all ethnic groups and in its all remote-hilly geographical locations. There will be always critical trade-offs between economic and social cost.

This is true that in a period, when world is facing serious financial downturn, this could be an impossible task to achieve the UPE targets within 2015 for many least developed countries. Surely financial crisis, oil and commodity price increase will leave a legacy of

poverty and hunger in many parts of the world. At the same time, this is also true that if the countries like Bangladesh and Peru can make concerted efforts with the involvements of all stakeholder groups, then the challenges can be overcome with the demonstrable progress as well as can make further meaningful advancement in human development. Otherwise, the story could end up with frustrations and create further nightmare by threatening the human security among the poor and under-privileged people.

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