



**Consortium for Research on
Educational Access,
Transitions and Equity**

**Debating Diversity in Provision of Universal
Primary Education in Bangladesh**

**Zia-Us-Sabur
Manzoor Ahmed**

**CREATE PATHWAYS TO ACCESS
Research Monograph No. 34**

May 2010



**Institute of Education and Development,
BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh**



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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AED	Academy for Educational Development
AKF	Aga Khan Foundation
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (Renamed Building Resources Across Communities)
BEP	BRAC Education Programme
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CAR	Country Analytic Review
CFPR	Challenging the Frontiers of Poverty Reduction
CREATE	Consortium for Research on Educational Access Transitions and Equity
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
DPs	Development Partners
EFA	Education for All
GPS	Government Primary School
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MOPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NFPE	Non-Formal Primary Education
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NSP	Non-State Provider
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
PPS	Partnership with Primary School
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper/Programme
PTA	Pathways to Access
PTI	Primary Teacher Training Institute
RNGPS	Registered Non-Government Primary School
ROSC	Reaching Out-of-school Children
SMC	School Managing Committee
SSA	sub-Saharan Africa
SWAP	Sector-Wide Approach
UIS	UNESCO Institute of Statistics
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
WB	World Bank

Acknowledgements

The importance of multiple providers for achieving universal primary education has come to the fore in Bangladesh in the context of designing a new phase of a national primary education development programme and the debate about a new national education policy. The inspiration for this monograph came from an on-going national discourse on diversity in provisions. The writers enriched their understanding of the significance and various dimensions of the issue by participating in the national discourse, especially in the consultations organized by the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a national forum of NGOs active in basic education; and in preparing briefs for the government on behalf of CAMPE.

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Preface

This research monograph explores how providers other than the State can contribute to universalising access to basic education. In Bangladesh as elsewhere non state providers of educational services provide complementary and alternative forms of education. They reach those who chose to opt out of government schools because of concerns for quality, those with a preference for some other type of provision, and those in places where government service is difficult or impossible to access. Achieving the goals of Education for All is widely seen to be a state responsibility with a core of public provision financed from the public purse. Other providers clearly have a role to play in addressing gaps in public provision, providing complementary educational services where public provision is inadequate, and promoting more effective methods of learning and teaching.

This paper gives a clear oversight of how provision of educational services has developed in Bangladesh and reminds readers of the importance of understanding the historical context and legislative frameworks that surround multiple providers. Non state providers in Bangladesh have flourished on the margins of the core public system. They have taken a disproportionate share of the burden for extending the reach of schooling to the last 20% many of whom now enrol, and have become specialised in supporting access of the most marginalised through many different and innovative approaches. They have also complemented the resources provided by the state through mobilising domestic and international finance.

The paper argues that it is now time to adopt a more systematic approach to the inclusion of non state providers in forward planning and Sector Wide Approaches to planning provision where the role of multiple providers should be explicitly recognised. Suspicion between state and non state partners must be replaced by a supportive reciprocity which recognises that both bring different qualities and capabilities to the issues that surround universalising access to basic education. Better regulatory frameworks are needed that facilitate higher quality provision with an inclusive reach. And, if ambitions to extend basic education up to grade 8 with greater curricula relevance and diversity and sustainable financing are to be realised then a coordinated approach will be needed that makes best use of all the resources and infrastructure available. These issues are important well beyond the borders of Bangladesh and this paper is therefore of importance in contributing to new modalities in service delivery in the run up to 2015.

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Summary

Bangladesh faces enormous challenges in ensuring completion of primary education, even though most children are enrolled in school and in enabling acceptable learning achievement by those who are in school. Multiple providers (including state, quasi-state and non-state ones) have contributed to raising initial enrolment and improving gender balance. The critical question is how multiplicity and diversity of provision can contribute to achieving truly universal primary education with high completion rates and acceptable levels of learning. There are a range of sub-questions related to this critical question, including: What is meant by multiple provisions? and how can diversity of provision be shaped into components of a system that serves the goal of effective and equitable access?

In this paper, these questions are addressed in the context of the history and circumstances of educational development in Bangladesh. The main conclusion reached is that a regulatory framework for universal primary education has to reconcile the state's obligation to guarantee basic education of acceptable quality for all children with the reality of multiple providers, who can serve effectively various disadvantaged populations. Such a framework needs to:

- Articulate the principles of multiple providers, recognizing the reality of state, quasi-state and non-state providers; their strengths and potentials;
- Envision criteria and principles for determining the relative size and role of different providers within a common national primary education system;
- Establish common core standards regarding physical facilities, teachers, class-size, financing and management with accountability in all types of primary education institutions;
- Develop and introduce common curricular standards with core and flexible supplementary curriculum, textbooks and learning materials for all types of institutions;
- Provide for assessment of learning achievement and outcomes by all students based on grade-appropriate standards of competencies achieved by students in all types of institutions;
- Introduce area-based (for each upazila) mechanisms for coordination and planning of provision for primary education involving all actors and providers;
- Move towards compulsory education up to grade eight with agreed roles and contribution of all providers;
- Indicate financing criteria and principles ensuring adequate resources for basic education of acceptable quality for all children, regardless of geographical area and type of institution;
- Promote greater authority and responsibility at the institution level for organising teaching-learning, managing personnel, and using financial resources with accountability to parents and community.
- Devise appropriate collaborative mechanisms to apply the regulatory framework to non-state providers.

A regulatory framework with the elements noted above is particularly significant at present, as the Government attempts to put into effect a new national education policy and design a five year national development plan (2011-15). This will have a decisive impact on progress towards the EFA goal of universal primary education by 2015.

Key words: Multiple providers, access and participation, quality with equity.

Debating Diversity in Provision of Universal Primary Education in Bangladesh

1. Introduction

The provision of primary education, universally recognized as a human right and a public good, is generally seen as the responsibility of the state. Historically, however, in many societies a variety of organisations (for example, religious authorities, private philanthropy, community organisations and the private sector) initiated primary provision and have played a critical role in its expansion. Today, the state is the principal provider of primary education both in countries where it is universally accessible to children and in countries where universal access is still to be achieved. At the same time, in many countries, multiple provision continues and can be a significant component of the total primary education system; and new forms of diversity have emerged in some.

The Education for All (EFA) goal of Universal Primary Education (UPE), articulated in the World Conference on Education For All in Jomtien, Thailand in 1990, remains unfulfilled. The goal was re-affirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar and in the United Nations General Assembly Millennium Conference in 2000, with a global target date of 2015. The difficulties encountered in making progress towards the 2015 goal redirected attention to the role of non-state providers of primary education, especially in the developing countries where the goal remains elusive (UNESCO, 2007a).

Three reports produced by the Consortium for Research on Educational Access, Transitions and Equity (CREATE¹) have highlighted how non-state providers may contribute to fulfilling the goal of universal access to basic education (Rose, 2007a, Rose, 2007b, Lewin, 2007). Rose (2007a:vii) argues that:

a hardcore of marginalised children ... find access through ... non-government organisations (NGOs)... [These NGOs see themselves as] complementary to the state system, with the intention of ultimately supporting children's access to a state-provided education.

Rose makes the point that the existence of diverse providers and provisions has important implications for NGO-government collaboration, sustainability of educational access, especially for those who would otherwise be excluded, and integrating multiple providers of education into a system-wide approach (Rose, 2007a:vii). Rose then argues in another paper that an on-going dialogue, recognizing the diversity among both non-state and state providers, to promote collaboration between them would benefit the under-served and help achieve EFA goals (Rose, 2007b:vi).

¹ See: www.create-rpc.org for further information.

Lewin (2007:3), drawing on data from sub-Saharan Africa, argues that:

Non-government schooling especially that which is truly private and completely unsubsidised will have a limited impact on progress towards universalising access to basic education in SSA.

He concludes that unsubsidized private providers cannot serve the poor on a substantial scale and that the presumed advantages of market-based solution of out-sourcing service delivery cannot be realised in programmes aimed at meeting the educational needs of vulnerable, marginalized and excluded groups (Lewin, 2007:3).

Having made remarkable progress in terms of initial enrolment in primary education as well as gender equality (Ahmed et al, 2007), Bangladesh still faces enormous challenges in ensuring completion of primary education and enabling acceptable learning achievement. Multiple providers (including state, quasi-state and non-state ones) have contributed to raising initial enrolments and improving gender equality. The critical question is how multiplicity and diversity of provision can contribute to achieving truly universal primary education with high completion rates and acceptable levels of learning.

There are a range of sub-questions related to this broad question, namely:

- What is meant by multiple provision?
- Which various components make up the multiple providers?
- How can state and non-state providers be differentiated?
- What is the role of NGOs?
- What is and should be the relationship and the nature of interaction among the multiple providers, recognizing that it is much more than a binary state / non-state relationship?
- How can diversity of provision be shaped into components of a system that serves the goal of effective and equitable access?

In this paper, these questions will be addressed in the context of history and circumstances of educational development in Bangladesh. They are particularly significant, at present, as the recently elected government² pledged in its election manifesto to achieve universal primary education by 2015. The government has appointed a high-level National Education Policy Committee to formulate a national educational policy to help achieve its political commitments. It is also preparing a five-year national development plan to guide development programmes in the education sector. The five-year plan is expected to come into effect in 2011 and thus replace the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). While PRSP has been used mainly to negotiate external aid from international development partners, the five-year plan is expected to serve as the guide for planning and implementing development programmes.

² A new government formed by the Awami League came into power in January 2009

The next section (section two) of this paper gives a brief introduction to the primary education system in Bangladesh; section three describes the evolution of policy regarding primary education provisions; section four presents the perceived rationale for multiple providers and provisions; and section five discusses the relationship between the sector-wide approach and multiple provision. The concluding section recapitulates the significance of multiple provisions and points to the need for a policy and regulatory framework to optimize the role of multiple provisions in enhancing access to primary education with equity and quality.

We have attempted to answer the questions posed above by examining primary education data that shed light on the characteristics and magnitude of multiple provisions, by reviewing the historical evolution of relevant policy decisions and their implementation, and by drawing on the discourse on the PEDP II experience and lessons from it for the future, as these are reflected in available documents and reports.

2. Primary Education Provisions in Bangladesh

Primary provision has increased greatly over the past six decades. In 1947, there were around 19,000 primary schools in Bangladesh (then part of Pakistan and just freed from British colonial rule). The number rose to 29,000 by 1971, when Bangladesh became independent. By the mid-2000s, the number of primary level institutions had increased to over 80,000. These included both government and non-government providers (Ahmed et al, 2007).

Government primary schools comprise all institutions directly managed by the government including experimental schools in Primary Teacher Training Institutes. Non-government schools include registered non-government primary schools, non-registered non-government primary schools, *ebtedayee madrasas*³, kindergartens, NGO schools (formal), community schools, satellite schools, and those attached to High *Madrassa* and High Schools. This table based on official data does not include statistics about non-formal primary education of NGOs.

Table 1: Number of primary schools, teachers and students (government and non-government schools) (1990-2005)

Year	No. of schools			No. of teachers			No. of students		
	Govt.	Non-govt.	Total	Govt.	Non-govt.	Total	Govt.	Non-govt.	Total
1990	37,655	8,262	45,917	158,113	31,395	189,508	10,128,293	1,811,656	11,939,949
1991	37,694	11,845	49,539	158,663	47,805	206,468	10,410,025	2,459,085	12,869,110
1992	37,740	12,574	50,314	165,327	50,596	215,923	10,714,043	2,461,409	13,175,452
1994	37,763	39,052	76,815	158,704	150,439	309,143	11,392,239	5,384,585	16,776,824
1995	37,763	40,331	78,094	185,908	133,204	319,112	11,600,305	5,533,393	17,133,698
1996	37,763	40,832	78,595	161,764	163,039	324,803	11,769,132	5,811,284	17,580,416
1997	37,763	39,922	77,685	158,311	158,172	316,483	11,816,060	6,215,613	18,031,673
1998	37,762	41,960	79,722	153,522	156,071	309,593	11,711,507	6,625,889	18,337,396
1999	37,762	41,064	78,826	149,785	162,460	312,245	11,034,507	6,587,224	17,621,731
2000	37,730	40,284	78,014	154,405	154,532	308,937	10,843,958	6,824,027	17,667,985
2001	37,724	40,402	78,126	162,345	158,349	320,694	10,842,255	6,816,965	17,659,220
2002	37,724	40,639	78,363	157,487	157,568	315,055	10,680,530	6,881,298	17,561,828
2003	37,724	49,013	86,737	162,364	191,921	354,285	10,677,187	7,754,133	18,431,320
2004	37,725	45,143	82,868	162,472	190,463	352,935	10,372,426	7,580,874	17,953,300
2005	37,672	42,725	80,397	162,084	182,705	344,789	9,483,891	6,741,767	16,225,658

Source: DPE EMIS Unit cited in Ahmed et al, 2007:4 (Table 2); 2005 data provided by DPE

Table 1 shows that multiple providers are a distinctive feature of primary education in Bangladesh. The number of fully government-managed schools has remained virtually the same since 1990, while non-government institutions have increased almost six-fold over this

³ *Ebtedayee madrasas* are religious schools that receive government funding for teacher's salaries and follow the national curriculum as well as providing religious education.

period. The story actually is more complex, as can be seen in Table 2. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the types of institutions and enrolments in them in Bangladesh. The statistical tables reveal significant information about the diversity of provision in primary education. Namely:

- The number of government schools, as noted, and enrolment in them remained largely unchanged, while total enrolment in primary education increased by about 50 percent in 15 years since 1990.
- Non-government providers consist of several types of institutions with a varying degree of government involvement in their operations. Registered non-government primary schools (RNGPS), both in terms of number of institutions and enrolment, are the second largest provider after government schools. This category of school also has the highest growth rate, although enrolment has not increased in the same proportion as the number of institutions. Teachers' salaries are paid by the government as a fixed amount equal to the initial salary of teachers in government schools. These schools follow the same curriculum as government schools, students receive free text books from the government, teachers are allowed to participate in teacher training programmes run by the Directorate of Primary Education and the schools come under the supervision of the Upazila³ Education Office. The main difference between these and government schools, is that RNGPS have been set up as a community initiative. Each school has a management committee to oversee the management of schools and which consists of representatives of parents, the community and teachers. However, the management committee has very limited authority in terms of personnel and finances - with their control over hiring and firing and the budget circumscribed by government regulations. The schools become eligible for government support on meeting specific conditions regarding teachers, facilities and formation of the managing committee. The non-registered non-government primary schools are those which are waiting to be registered and become eligible for government assistance.
- *Ebtedayee madrasas* are similar to the RNGPS in respect to their relationship with government. The main difference is in the curriculum. In addition to the regular curriculum (i.e. Bangla, English, math and science etc.) there is an emphasis on Islamic subjects and Arabic. The curriculum for *ebtedayee madrasas* are set by the government-appointed *Madrasa* Education Board.
- Some secondary schools and *madrasas* also teach primary classes. These follow the standard primary school and *ebtedayee madrasa* curriculum and are eligible for the same assistance from government as the registered non-government primary schools and *madrasas*.

- Community schools are usually small schools established by the community with teachers appointed by the community. A modest subvention is paid by the government for teachers' salaries and the schools are subject to general supervision of the Upazila⁴ Education Office.
- A small number of formal primary schools are run by NGOs following the government curriculum. These schools do not receive any government assistance and are generally not given any supervisory attention from the Upazila Education Office. These are different from non-formal primary education provided on a substantial scale by NGOs in Bangladesh, but which are not included in official primary education statistics (See below).
- Kindergartens are proprietary schools usually run on a commercial basis. Some of these are part of English medium schools which offer secondary level instruction. The kindergartens generally use English as the language of instruction and do not follow the government curriculum, do not receive any government assistance, and are not subject to supervision or inspection by the government education authorities.

Table 2: Breakdown of primary providers, with enrolment and teacher numbers 2004 (excluding NGO-operated non-formal primary education)

Type of Institution	Number of institutions	Teachers		Enrolment		Pupils per school	Pupil teacher ratio
		Total	Female	Total	Girls		
Govt. Primary School (GPS)	37,671	162,220	66,725	10,359,813	5,223,613	275	64:1
Regd. NGPS	19,814	77,206	21,184	4,079,119	2,034,548	206	53:1
Non-regd. NGPS	1,699	6,612	3,145	297,249	146,124	175	45:1
Experimental	54	252	95	12,613	6,435	234	50:1
<i>Ebtedayee Madrasa</i>	6,723	28,119	2,972	846,092	399,947	126	30:1
Kindergarten	3,745	21,928	12,030	226,635	108,060	60	10:1
NGO (formal)	447	1,828	1043	78,482	39,426	176	43:1
Community	3,218	12,641	6,920	436,122	212,316	135	35:1
Attached to High (Alia) Madrasa	8,214	31,691	2,176	1,128,342	491,577	137	36:1
Attached to High School	1,283	10,438	4,521	488,833	244,821	381	47:1
Total	82,868	352,935	120,811	17,953,300	8,906,867	217	51:1

Source: DPE and MOPME Official Records cited in Ahmed et al 2007:5 (Table 3)

⁴ An upazila is an administrative sub-district; there are approximately 500 upazilas or their city/municipal counterparts in the country.

A closer look at Table 2 reveals the distinctive features of primary education provisions in Bangladesh.

The government schools (GPS), comprising less than half of the total number of schools, served 58 percent of students. Registered non-government schools (RNGPS), although more than half of all institutions, serve only 26 percent of the students. GPS and RNGPS, together, serve around 84 percent of children enrolled in primary education. Given the commonality of the curriculum, government support of salaries, and supervisory oversight the government applies to RNGPS, this category of institutions cannot really be regarded as a non-state provider (although officially, these are known as non-government schools).

Madrasas, both independent primary institutions (*ebtedayee*) and those attached to higher level *madrasas*, serve 11 percent of primary level students. Once again they have similar financial support to RNGPS and the government exercises control over the curriculum. *Madrasas* can be more aptly described as state-supported alternative providers; they do not properly fall in the category of non-state providers. There is another category of *madrasas*, known as the *quomi* (indigenous) *madrasa*, which remain outside the scope of government regulations, do not receive any government support, and reliable information about enrolments in them is not available. The role of these institutions is not considered in this paper, but they remain a category of providers and their role in providing primary education services remains a policy issue to be clarified by the government.

Community schools, non-registered non-government schools and formal schools run by NGOs combined serve around 4 percent of enrolled students. All of them follow the government curriculum. Community schools receive partial government support for teachers' salaries. Community schools continue to demand larger government subsidy, similar to those for RNGPS.

In a strict sense, therefore, only kindergartens, which follow their own curriculum and language of instruction, receive no government financial assistance, and are subject to minimal government regulations, can be described as non-state providers of primary education. They served about one percent of the children in primary education in 2004.

The above analysis of numbers about primary education provisions, based on government statistics, significantly, does not take into account non-formal primary education (NFPE) services provided by NGOs (as well as *quomi madrasas*, as noted above). On average, over 1 million children annually have attended NGO operated non-formal primary education programmes during the period 2000-2005 (Ahmed et al, 2007).

Pioneered by BRAC in the mid-1980s (with BRAC and other NGOs currently using the approach), NFPE is the principal means for offering a second chance opportunity for children who do not enrol in formal primary school or who drop out. NFPE has been designed, developed and offered by NGOs, with BRAC being by far the largest provider, and is financed mainly from bilateral donor support. The government has permitted NGOs to receive external contribution on fulfilment of regulatory requirements of the NGO Affairs Bureau.

On average, over 30,000 non-formal primary education centres have been in operation in recent years. These centres are one-room one-teacher classes in which a cohort of 30 children are offered an accelerated four-year primary education course with learning objectives borrowed from the national curriculum. The target group for this programme is children over age eight, reflecting a deliberate decision not to be in competition for enrolment with regular primary schools. How NFPE is perceived as a primary education provider is key to understanding diversity of provision and ultimately how this diversity can contribute to achieving UPE. We return to this point later.

Enrolment figures change somewhat when NFPE figures are included (see Table 3). Education Watch (CAMPE, 2008) provides data based on a nationwide cluster sample survey of 440 primary level institutions of six principal types, including NFPE. The survey shows almost 10 percent of the primary level students to be enrolled in NFPE, which is not included in government statistics. It also indicates a higher proportion of enrolment in kindergartens compared to official data for 2004.

Table 3: Percentage distribution of primary school students by school type, 2008 (including the non-formal primary education programmes)

School type	Enrolment Percentage
Government Primary Schools	56.9
Registered Non-government Primary School	18.7
Non-formal Primary Education	9.6
<i>Madrassa</i>	7.0
Kindergarten	4.7
Primary attached to high school	1.3
Others (Community school, unregistered, etc)	1.8
Total	100.0

Source: Campaign for Popular Education, 2008:63 (Table 5.1).

Taking into account NFPE provision, and considering the levels of state management and control for other providers, it can be argued that 85 percent of primary level students are served by different kinds of state providers and 15 percent by non-state providers.

The rationale for the diversity that has existed historically, the non-expansion of the fully state-run schools, and the role of state-assisted non-government schools and non-state providers in filling the gap in provision for services has never been fully articulated in government statements of policy and strategy for primary education in Bangladesh. Even in the plan for PEDP II, the government development programme for primary education characterized as a sector-wide approach, discussed further in section 5, the role of NFPE and non-state providers has not been recognized. The principle of inclusive education, focusing on extending primary education services to children with special needs, has been emphasized in PEDP II, but even in this context the actual and potential role of NGOs and non-state providers has not been given explicit attention (Government of Bangladesh, 2003).

So far, the state system has not provided for, and arguably has not recognized the importance of, second chance non-formal opportunities for primary education. This is evidenced in the exclusion from official primary education data of NFPE programmes. The exclusion of

NFPE from official data collection systems makes it difficult to have a complete picture of primary education services and gain a proper understanding of the role of various providers and the significance of multiple provisions for primary education services.

3. Policy background

Primary education is generally regarded as a state responsibility, but the manner that this state responsibility is conceived and fulfilled can and does allow a degree of diversity of provision in most countries. This can also include a role for non-state providers within a national policy framework and a regulatory structure of the state related to the state's overall responsibility to ensure the fulfilment of the right to education of children. In Bangladesh, diversity in respect of providers and provisions for primary level education has evolved historically, but ambivalence and lack of clarity regarding policy, strategy and regulatory framework continues. This section presents the background and historical evolution of this ambivalence regarding the role and even the legitimacy of multiple providers of primary education.

3.1 Historical policy context

Modern education developed in what is now Bangladesh under British colonial rule in the latter half of the 19th century. In 1882, the district and municipal education boards were entrusted to administer primary education, by raising money through local taxation. The Primary Education Act, 1919, located responsibility for primary provision with provincial governments and set universal primary education as an eventual goal. The Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act, 1930 followed. This policy sought to introduce UPE and provided details about how to establish and administer primary schools under local management. Widening access was encouraged through the use of local and private philanthropic contribution (Ahmed et al, 2007:5-6.).

The Constitution of Bangladesh adopted in 1972 provided for free and compulsory education as one of the 'fundamental principles of state policy'. Article 17 of the constitution (1972) states that (Government of Bangladesh, 1972):

The state shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of - (a) establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law; (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law.

The constitutional provision regarding 'free and compulsory education,' was by its very nature subject to interpretation. While the spirit and intent of fundamental principles must be honoured by the state, they are different from the obligatory provisions of the constitution, which would require specific implementation steps to be taken by the state.

The constitution describes a 'uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education' which has often been invoked to justify a state-provided common type of primary school for all children. At times, the words have been used as a political and populist argument to ban one or other type of non-state provision, such as, NGO-run, private (especially English medium) and *madrassa*-based primary education. At the very least, it has been argued; the

constitution requires a standard national curriculum, common textbooks, and other regulatory measures to be applied to all primary education activities in Bangladesh. This argument finds its place in various education policy statements including the most recent draft of education policy. It says: “The process of nationalization of primary education should continue. The responsibility for primary education cannot be transferred to the private sector or NGOs.” The draft policy ambiguously agrees at the same time that a non-government organization or an individual can run primary schools subject to approval of authorities and state regulations (Government of Bangladesh, 2009:12).

The post-liberation Bangladeshi government repealed earlier colonial era Acts by ordinance in 1973, later enacted as permanent law (Primary Schools (Taking Over) Act 1974). Under this law, all primary schools were taken over by the government and all employees became national government employees. It abolished primary school management committees, giving government management responsibility for the nationalized primary schools. The purpose of nationalization was to improve management of schools and thereby accelerate access.

Primary Schools (Taking Over) Act (1974) removed the role of district and local government bodies and the involvement of communities in school management. In this, it could be argued, a century’s old culture of community involvement running primary schools was effectively curbed. By implication, the law discouraged non-government providers, such as institutions run by NGOs, community organisations or private providers. As a result of centralising management, the system became non-responsive to the varied circumstances and needs in primary education delivery (Ahmed et al, 2007:5-6).

Many of the present problems of government-run or government-controlled primary schools can be traced back to the nationalization of primary schools in 1973. This measure brought over 36,000 schools under the control of a monolithic centralized bureaucracy and an inflexible system of management.

The Primary Education Act, 1981 sought to ‘provide for better organization of primary education and efficient administration and management of the affairs of primary schools’. This was an attempt to bring back a degree of decentralization into the management of primary education. It aimed to introduce a new tier, Local Education Authority, in each area with powers to appoint and manage teachers, to supervise the functioning of primary schools, manage budgets and conduct examinations. However, due to a change in the political regime, the innovative features of the 1981 law were not implemented and school management reverted to a more centralised pattern (Ahmed et al, 2007).

In line with the EFA goals adopted at the World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, Bangladesh adopted the Primary Education Compulsory Act in 1990. It made provision for setting up compulsory primary education committees at the lowest tier of local government, the union (a cluster of villages) and wards (urban neighbourhoods). The committees were to ensure the enrolment and regular attendance of all children in the area in primary school. Primary education was made compulsory under this Act, first in 68 upazilas (sub-districts) in 1992 and throughout the country from 1993. The compulsory education law,

however, did not explicitly specify the roles and mechanisms of sharing responsibility between different kinds of education providers.

The implementation of the compulsory education initiative also fell victim to regime change in the country. The government that succeeded in 1991, though committed to the goal of universal primary education, was unenthusiastic about following and supporting the specific strategies and plans of the previous regime. Although primary education expansion and development efforts, such as the First and Second Primary Education Development Programmes (PEDP I and PEDP II), which spanned 1997-2010 continued, initial community mobilization through formation of local support committees accompanying the adoption of the compulsory education law lost steam. The local compulsory primary education committees, envisaged as a key mechanism for mobilization and coordination, became non-functional, but were not replaced with an effective alternative.

3.2 Current policy ambiguity about multiple provisions

The Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II) was launched in 2004 as a sequel to PEDP I with the aim of expanding access to quality primary education for all eligible children in Bangladesh. More than two dozen separate projects carried out under the umbrella of PEDP I had been regarded as suffering from weak coordination and duplication. To overcome these identified weaknesses, a macro plan for PEDP II was prepared with the involvement of the concerned ministries, directorates and Development Partners (DPs). It was visualized as a Sector Wide Approach (SWAP) for the major public sector development initiative in primary education. It was planned for the period July 2004 to June 2009, but the implementation was delayed and its duration extended to mid-2010. PEDP II was financed by the Government of Bangladesh and eleven external development partners, with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) serving as the lead agency. Although, labelled a sector-wide approach, PEDP II dealt only with GPS and RNGPS, excluding from its remit significant numbers of children served by the *madrasas* and NGOs (Ahmed et al, 2007).

The Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project was developed to supplement PEDP II by addressing the needs of out-of-school children by identifying children who were not in school, focusing mainly on areas where enrolment was low and poverty incidence high. Since PEDP II focused solely on the formal education system, it had little or no chance of including out-of-school children deprived of access to formal education due to poverty and other reasons. The non-formal primary education provisions offered by NGOs, as noted above, already served quite successfully a large proportion of never-enrolled or dropout children.

The government and the World Bank handed over management of the ROSC programme to local level offices of the Directorate of Primary Education. Local primary education offices at the upazila level were expected to oversee setting up ROSC centres, establish centre management committees and supervise their operations. This added to the workload of upazila education offices which already had difficulties effectively supervising formal schools in their respective areas. The ambivalent position of the government regarding the role of NGOs in primary education led to the decision not to give the main responsibility for managing the project to NGOs, except that the centres were allowed to be run by local

community or NGOs. However, the fact that the government recognized the need for a second chance alternative to supplement the mainstream formal programme, a need addressed so far entirely by NGOs, itself could be regarded as a sign of progress (Ahmed et al, 2007).

3.3 NGO initiatives: BRAC

The BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has put together various initiatives to develop a relationship of cooperation and partnership with public sector formal primary education. In 2001, the BEP initiated PRIME (Primary Initiative in Mainstreaming Education) with the aim of improving the quality of primary education by working with key stakeholders in primary education and providing training to Head teachers of formal primary schools (Boeren et al, 2009:25). The initiative was renamed Partnership with Primary Schools (PPS) in 2005. It attempted to engage with both Government Primary Schools (GPS) and Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS), especially in the area of teacher training and social mobilisation. The programme was implemented with 989 schools in three upazilas. In addition to providing training for teachers of Mathematics and English, management training for head teachers, and orientation sessions for school managing committee (SMC) members, BRAC also initiated post-training monitoring at the school and classroom level. According to BRAC, the experience was encouraging, as attendance of students increased, teachers were more responsive in the classroom, making efforts to improve teaching and learning, and the community was taking a higher level of interest in school-related issues (Boren et al, 2009).

The experience of activities in these three upazilas under the PPS encouraged BRAC to propose formal cooperation through a pilot project in 20 upazilas in 9 districts involving 2,600 GPS and RNGPS. The objectives, similar to those in the three upazilas, were to bring qualitative improvement to the schools by reducing the dropout rates by 20 percent, increasing learners' attendance rates to 80–85 percent, raising primary completion rates to 75-80 percent and improving the teaching and learning process, working jointly with the government education authorities.

The MoPME (Ministry of Primary and Mass Education) and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) with BRAC were to initiate a 'joint pilot' of PPS activities in 20 upazilas. MoPME agreed in principle to the proposal and preparatory steps were taken to start the project in mid-2008. However, when news about the pilot project became public, objections were raised by teachers' unions, various civil society bodies, and some academics. Many thought the government was reneging on its constitutional responsibility to provide primary education to all children, that it was the first step towards privatizing primary education and that NGOs should not be involved in primary education.

At a press conference on May 27, 2008 Mohammad Shamsul Alam, President of Bangladesh Non-Government Primary Teachers' Association, announced:

If necessary we will go for a tough agitation programme, including closing down all the schools across the country, to protest against the government's decision to launch the BRAC-sponsored training programme (*Daily New Age*, May 28, 2008).

It was interesting that some academics, both from the political left and the right, united in their opposition to the proposal. Those regarded as politically 'progressive and left-of centre' took an ideological position that the state should be the sole provider of one uniform primary education model for all children nationwide. Those on the conservative-right were opposed to the involvement of BRAC, which is seen as promoter of secular education and gender equality. The news media, especially some of the Bangla language newspapers, gave extensive coverage to the debate, with some writing editorials in opposition to the pilot project (see, for example, *Daily Naya Diganta*, May 28, 2008). As a result of the debate, the plan for the cooperative partnership was put on hold, with the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education reluctant to follow up and act upon the agreement in principle reached with BRAC. Tensions were heightened by the combination of vested interests, overly partisan politics, the bureaucratic culture and a lack of transparency and openness in dialogue among stakeholders.

3.4 Education Policy Commissions

The Government of Bangladesh has set up education policy commissions and committees at various times, with the task of examining policy issues. In the past, at least half-a-dozen of these bodies have discussed the state's obligation for providing basic education and offered recommendations regarding how this obligation should be fulfilled. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission, appointed in 1974, soon after Bangladesh became an independent nation, was the first one to provide comprehensive policy recommendations (Government of Bangladesh, 1974).

The most important common feature of these reports, however, is that few of their substantive recommendations have been fully implemented (Ahmed et al, 2005:17).

In April 2009 the Government set up the most recent Education Policy Committee with the task of recommending policy and action priorities based on a review of earlier policy statements, in particular, those of the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission and the National Education Policy⁵ (Government of Bangladesh, 2000). In respect of diversity of provisions for primary education, the following was said in these two reports:

The Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission:

One common primary education programme at government expense should be introduced for the whole country based on a scientifically developed basic curriculum. Within the basic framework, opportunities may be created for some variations according to social needs (Government of Bangladesh, 1974).

The National Education Policy 2000:

One common curriculum should be introduced in all institutions at the primary stage. The disparities that exist among different streams of primary education must be ended

⁵ Approved in national policy, but archived after the change in government in 2001.

and opportunities created for one common programme of education with the same standard and characteristics (Government of Bangladesh, 2000:10).

Both reports proposed a common programme of primary education with a common curriculum. Both also recommended extending compulsory primary education up to grade 8. There is however, one important difference between the two in respect of provision. The Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission proposed that a common programme should be financed entirely by the government, with the strong implication that there would be one basic model of publicly funded primary education in the country. It appears to permit some variation within the common model with supplementary curricular content in addition to the basic or core curriculum. The 2000 report also advocated a common curriculum, but it did not stipulate a common publicly funded model and appears to leave the door open for diversity in delivery, if 'the disparities that exist among different streams of primary education' can be ended and opportunities for one common programme 'with the same standards and characteristics' can be created (Government of Bangladesh, 2000:10).

The historical evolution in educational provision and the socio-economic context in the quarter century that elapsed between the two reports may offer some of the explanation for the differing stance in the two reports. The Khuda Commission report was prepared just after the 'nationalization' of primary education in 1973, and the NGO-run non-formal primary education model and the proprietary English medium KGs were yet to emerge in any significant quantity. By the end of the 1990s, these were important components of the primary education system. The *madrasas* also grew in significance during this period.

Madrasas, in fact, bring out sharply the difference in positions taken by the two reports. The Khuda Commission recommended the full integration of the primary stage (up to grade eight) of *madrasa* education into the common national primary education model. It proposed that only at the secondary and tertiary stages, *madrasas* could be regarded as a separate stream offering a specialized vocational and professional education programme that would prepare people for Islamic religion-related occupations, such as Imams in mosques, religious scholars and *Quazis* (Islamic marriage registrars) (Government of Bangladesh, 1974).

The National Education Policy of 2000, on the other hand, recognized the reality that the *madrasas* had developed into a parallel educational system extending from preschool to tertiary level. It recommended the modernization of curriculum and measures for improving and ensuring quality in *madrasa* education, whilst maintaining its identity as a parallel stream.

The distinct positions espoused by the two education policy formulation bodies a quarter of a century apart regarding the diversity and multiplicity of provision in primary education represent the core of the dilemma. The issue has remained unresolved for over three decades. If primary education is extended up to grade eight as a compulsory stage of education, as endorsed in both the reports, the question of diversity and multiplicity of provision has to be settled, as this extended stage would involve a substantially larger number of students and institutions.

The new Education Policy Committee which presented its recommendations to the government on 30th September, 2009 and which remains under consideration, adopts remarkably similar language and tone as of the 2000 commission, thus maintaining, as before, a degree of ambivalence in addressing the dilemma faced by the earlier policy formulating bodies.

The 2009 policy draft, echoing the 1974 policy statement, endorses “nationalization”, or bringing under full government control including full financing, of all primary level institutions (as noted earlier). At the same time, in line with the 2000 policy, the 2009 draft recognizes the reality of multiple provisions including *madrasas*, NGO programmes and English medium private schools.

The policy draft proposes a common core curriculum for primary education and common minimum standards for staff and facilities in all institutions. It goes somewhat further than the 2000 policy statement in specifically proposing (Government of Bangladesh 2009:11-13):

- adoption of special measures to remove the serious disparities that prevail between different types of institutions, such as community schools, non-registered schools, registered schools, government schools and schools in rural and urban areas; and registration of all institutions including *quomi madrasas*;
- implementation in all primary institutions, including *quomi madrasas*, the common core curriculum, which can be supplemented by other contents with the approval of concerned education authorities.

The new policy draft emphasizes the need for expanding access to children with special needs, creating opportunities for ethnic minorities, and removing geographical disparities. However, the role or significance of multiple and flexible provisions in responding to these diverse needs or the limitations of a centralized and rigid pattern in this regard are not specifically mentioned, when it would be relevant to do so (Government of Bangladesh 2009:11, 14, and 15).

The 2009 draft recognises the need for “second chance” primary education opportunity through non-formal equivalent of primary education for children of age 8-14 years. This is similar in design to the existing NFPE of BRAC and other NGOs, which has not been fully embraced officially as a necessary component of the national strategy to achieve universal primary education (Government of Bangladesh 2009:19).

Two other potentially significant recommendations have been made but not elaborated in the draft policy, which may have far-reaching implications (Government of Bangladesh 2009:20). These are:

- All programmes and activities for mass education should be conducted in a coordinated way. For this purpose, the Directorate of Primary Education and the Bureau of Non-formal Education should be transformed and combined into the Bangladesh Continuing Education and Skill Development Organisation

- A legal framework should be adopted which would specify how the constitutional obligations regarding adult and non-formal education would be fulfilled.

The intention of the first of the above proposals perhaps is to facilitate coordination of non-formal primary education with skill development rather than placing all of primary education and skill development under one new body by abolishing the Directorate of Primary Education. But this was left unclear. The proposed legal framework may have implications for multiple provisions, but this was not elaborated.

The government, in considering the draft policy recommendations and adopting a new policy, has the challenge now of reconciling the ambiguities regarding diversity and multiplicity of provision in primary education and providing pragmatic guidelines that will enable all actors in primary education to make an optimal contribution.

4. Why diversity of provision?

This section elaborates beyond the background given earlier about why diversity of provision in primary education has developed and has continued to be an important feature of primary education in Bangladesh and elsewhere. This explanation also helps to describe the relationship and interaction between the different kinds of state and non-state providers.

In Bangladesh, non-government and quasi-government schools have flourished, despite ideological inclinations which favour a common single government-run model of primary education and the reluctance of government to recognize and articulate the role and place of non-government providers. Without announcing an official policy decision, the long-standing position adopted by the government in Bangladesh appears to be not to increase significantly the number of directly government-run schools, but to allow the quasi-government institutions to carry much of the burden of expanding primary education services to achieve UPE.

An important consideration may be limitations of centralized financing and personnel management structures (with all primary teachers as central government employees) established under the 1974 Nationalisation of Primary Education Law. Successive regimes have been reluctant to move away from the highly centralized structure which exists. At the same time, there has been a reluctance to take on the additional burden of direct financial and personnel management that the expansion of a fully government managed school system would impose on the government. Apparently, an acceptable compromise was to support the expansion of registered non-government schools and *madrasas*.

Diversity in primary education provision appears to be gaining momentum internationally. UIS data from 136 developing countries for which enrolment data were available indicated that there were 69 million more children in primary school in 2004 than in 1991. More than 23 million of them attended non-state schools, representing one third of the increase. During this period, non-state primary school enrolments increased by 58 percent (from 39 million to 62 million) while public sector enrolments increased by 10 percent (from 484 million to 530 million) (UIS data, cited in Aga Khan Foundation Team, 2007:3).

Admittedly, there are definitional problems about state and non-state providers, but there is no doubt that both including non-state providers reflect and are affected by a spectrum of state involvement indicating diversity in financing, management and curricular provision.

The experience from Bangladesh (and other countries) shows three reasons for the persistence and growth of multiple providers: i) equity and inclusiveness concerns; ii) responding to different quality issues; and iii) capacity and resource constraints in the public sector. These will be looked at below:

Equity and inclusiveness concerns: Many alternative providers in Bangladesh serve population groups which have been marginalized or disadvantaged for different reasons and may be better served by flexible and responsive approaches to service delivery. For example, BRAC's non-formal primary education and the ROSC project are flexible in terms of

organization and structure of the programme, recruitment and preparation of teachers, involvement of the community, and absence of a permanent school building. Such flexibility can be difficult to apply in a centralized government system.

A typology of non-state providers (in their various forms), and how they might reach marginalized children, has been put forward by the Aga Khan Foundation (2007) (see Annex 1). Strategies followed by these providers to serve marginalized and variously disadvantaged children included:

- Locating classrooms close to homes, especially for younger children and girls;
- Flexibility in school hours and calendar, especially to accommodate agricultural seasons and religious customs; “bridge courses” aimed at out-of-school children and working children; and providing intensive learning within shorter time frames;
- Facilitating new access into formal schooling through developing equivalency in learning assessment,
- Developing curricula that is adjusted to local realities and that draws upon local culture and resources;
- Recruiting local teachers and/or training and supporting teachers to be sensitive towards ethnic, religious and cultural differences; and
- Building a relationship of trust with the local community to generate support and develop relevant strategies for education of all children. (Aga Khan Foundation Team, 2007:19).

At the same time, as pointed out in the AKF review, NGO providers may exacerbate inequity and exclusion by offering children of disadvantaged populations services that do not meet acceptable standards; and private providers may attract only those who can afford the fees, not necessarily those most in need. Diversity is not a virtue in itself; it can only serve the goals of equity and inclusion if it is designed and managed to achieve these goals. The point, however, is that alternatives to a standard model are needed to serve these goals.

Responding to different quality issues: The quality of education, reflected in the learning achievements of children, is clearly of paramount concern in Bangladeshi primary education. While good progress has been made in terms of access and initial enrolments, learning outcomes remain a serious problem. A central premise of CREATE research, reflected in the construct of ‘zones of exclusion,’ is that the concept of access must incorporate the notion of acceptable learning achievement of students (see Lewin, 2007).

Does diversity/multiplicity in provisions contribute to quality in primary education? The literature provides contradictory answers. There is an assumption at least in some quarters that non-state schools provide a level of quality which is worse than at state schools, which contributes to aggravating inequality in educational access⁶.

⁶ Note the raging debate about the Right to Education Bill and the Common School System in India in the context of the 86th Constitutional Amendment adopted in 2001, see: Sadgopal, 2008.

On the other hand, the low quality of government schools is seen as a major cause for the growth of private schools (Rose, 2002, Härmä, 2010). A survey in eight states in India cited teacher absenteeism and fewer working days in government schools (compared to private unaided schools) as well as better availability of toilets for teachers and for girls in private schools as reasons for parents' preference for private schools (Mehrotra, 2006). The existence of NGO run or low-budget private schools near government schools appears to encourage improvements in government schools' work and accountability, such as teachers being in classrooms more punctually and regularly (World Bank, 2003).

The recent Education Watch Report 2008 in Bangladesh (CAMPE, 2009), based on a cohort analysis of a national sample of 15,000 primary school students, provided information about completion rates of primary students. It also provided data on the performance of students in tests administered to a sample of grade five students on 27 competencies prescribed in the primary education curriculum (CAMPE, 2009). As shown in Table 4, the completion rate was significantly better for the fully government-run schools than for registered non-government schools (although still low). However, NGO-run non-formal primary schools (NFPE), with over 95 percent completion rates, surpassed all other categories. The gap between the two types of formal primary schools (GPS and RNGPS) was larger in urban areas. The completion rate was substantially lower in the *ebtedayee madrasas*. Primary classes attached to high schools and high *madrasas* did significantly better than regular primary schools.

In respect to competencies⁷ achieved by students (see Table 5), the primary schools attached to high schools and the non-formal schools came ahead of regular primary schools. *Ebtedayee madrasas* scored the lowest with a substantial gap with other school types. The same test had been administered in 2000 on GPS, RNGPS and non-formal programme students. All categories showed an improvement in 2008, but their relative positions remained unchanged as presented in Table 5 (CAMPE, 2009).

Table 4: Completion Rates in different types of primary schools, 2008 (percentages based on reconstructed cohort analysis)

Type of school	Rural	Urban
Government schools (GPS)	50.6	67.4
Regd. Non-govt. schools (RNGPS)	39.4	41.1
Ebtedayee madrasa	31.4	30.6
Primary classes in high schools	72.0	85.5
Primary classes in high madrasas	65.3	66.3
Total completion rate for formal schools (urban and rural)	50.1	
Non-formal Primary (NFPE) Completion rate	rural >95	

Source: CAMPE, 2009:87, (Table 6.8)

⁷ As a part of the EW survey, a test to measure achievement of curriculum-prescribed competencies was developed and administered to grade 5 students.

Table 5: Mean numbers of competencies achieved by grade 5 students, 2008 (out of 27 tested competencies)

Type of school	2000	2008
Government school (GPS)	16.1	19.0
Regd. non-govt. pry. school (RNGPS)	15.2	18.0
<i>Ebtedayee madrasas</i>	n/a	15.2
Non-formal (NFPE)	17.2	20.0
Pry. classes in high schools	n/a	20.8
Primary classes in high <i>madrasas</i>	n/a	17.0
Total for all types	16.1	18.7

Source: CAMPE, 2008:98, (Figure 7.5, 7.6)

The overall messages from the above references to literature and the data from Bangladesh are that:

- Diversity by itself does not provide a solution to the problem of quality, but there are interventions which are appropriate for the diverse circumstances of learners.
- The diverse categories of provision are not necessarily substitutable; it may not be possible to attract and retain children in GPS or RNGPS, who are served by NFPE or *madrasas*. Quality constraints for each category have to be assessed and solutions found within each category. However, a coordinated approach to provide services through multiple providers, and the willingness to learn and apply lessons from their distinct characteristics and varying outcomes, can help improve the performance of the system as a whole.
- With about 50 percent completion rates and relatively low mean achievement rates in respect to 27 quantifiable and testable competencies for students in all types of schools, learning outcomes remain the principal concern in primary education for all types of provision. The policy challenge is to assess and identify relative strengths of each type and its potential for contributing to improved outcomes by children in specific circumstances and making best use of these strengths and potentials.

Resource and capacity constraints: The potential to supplement public financial resources and the institutional capacity of government and using these resources more effectively are clearly a strong justification for harnessing multiple providers including non-state providers for primary education. Supplementation of resources and greater efficiency in their use are achieved in various ways.

The Aga Khan Foundation's Team noted:

Because many non-state institutions have limited access to traditional revenue streams and capital, they are quite skilled at mobilizing resources, and doing a lot with a little (Aga Khan Foundation Team 2007:21).

This indeed is the case in Bangladesh, where non state institutions have mobilised resources from communities, parents and others. External donors make substantial contributions to NGOs in the education sector. These constitute additional resources which are not necessarily available to the government. The donor financial support for BRAC's non-formal primary education programme, for which a consortium of donors has been established, is a very significant complement to external support for the government's PEDP II.

Studies have also shown evidence of NGO and community providers operating at a lower cost than their government counterparts, while achieving the same or better results in terms of learning outcomes and completion rates. For example, a study by the USAID supported Educational Quality Improvement Program 2 (EQUIP2) compared the cost-effectiveness of complementary models to the cost effectiveness of government schools. The study concluded that the complementary education models studied were effective at reaching underserved populations and were more cost-effective in terms of completion and learning achieved for the resources spent. Per student costs of access, completion, and learning were calculated and evaluated with respect to the outcomes achieved (DeStefano et al, 2006).

The Academy for Educational Development (2006) drew similar conclusions when government schools were compared to NFPE programmes in Bangladesh. However, as Rose cautions, complementary non-state schools are not cost-efficient by virtue of being non-state; they achieve efficiency under specific conditions as to how they are designed and managed; these specifics need to be examined and what works where needs to be better understood (Rose, 2007a).

In terms of responsiveness and flexibility, public systems find it difficult to change and innovate, often because of the inherent characteristics of bureaucracies and tradition within which they operate. Political and systemic realities in government programmes are often formidable obstacles to innovation, even if they would like to experiment, if resources were available (Academy for Educational Development, 2003).

The Aga Khan Foundation's review points out that NGOs can add value in terms of engaging parents and communities. It also suggests that civil society organisations in their programmes:

often have a grassroots reach that helps them to understand local contexts – what citizens want for their children; what the obstacles to education access, participation, and quality are; and how local institutions can be strengthened and decentralization processes supported – often better than national governments and donors do (Aga Khan Foundation, 2007:20).

5. SWAPs and Multiple Provision in Primary Education

The government's ambivalence about multiple provision constrained the design of PEDP II, limiting it to GPS and RNGPS, although it was called a sector-wide approach for national primary education development. As PEDP II winds down, policy questions around the diversity of provision and government/donor roles in this regard have surfaced again. This section explores the significance and potential role of multiple provisions in the context of a sector-wide approach for primary education development, and the need for adapting the sector-wide approach pragmatically, recognizing the role of NGOs and other non-state providers.

A position paper prepared by CAMPE outlined a 'set of propositions about the status, situation, and an envisioned future of universal primary education in Bangladesh' (CAMPE, 2008:4). One key point made in this paper was that:

the most critical feature of a sectoral approach is *sectoral thinking*, not a rigid administrative modality. Sectoral thinking should permeate planning and coordinating, and may include multiple components or projects and multiple implementation mechanisms within an overall programme plan. Indeed, such flexibility is needed to make the scope of the programme as much sectoral as possible and to implement effectively the multiplicity of tasks an education programme is expected to incorporate within itself and implement (CAMPE, 2008:4).

The position paper emphasized that fulfilling a vision for universal primary education consistent with human resource and national development priorities required:

that the system move beyond current incrementalism, and the structural constraints that prevent thinking and acting "out-of-the-box," re-examining the framework of 1973 Primary Education Nationalisation Act, confining in some ways, in the light of current challenges (CAMPE, 2008:7).

The CAMPE (2008) paper pointed out several critical areas of concern which need to be addressed in a comprehensive programme for primary education development in 2010-15. A sector-wide approach has to justify its relevance and value by being effective in addressing concerns. These concerns are summarised below:

- *Low quality* associated with large variations in outcomes in different geographic regions and for different groups within the population has resulted in *serious inequity* which must be addressed. Realizing quality with equity goals will require effective strategies regarding numbers and skills of *teachers*, changes in *curriculum, teaching-learning materials and assessment*, major investments in *physical infra-structure*, expansion of *preschool education*, and a time-bound plan to extend *the basic education stage to grade eight*. Substantially greater *resources* will be needed and these have to be used effectively to assure minimum necessary levels of quality with equity.

- Moving beyond incremental change requires the system to build *learning and capacity-development* mechanisms, involving academic and research institutions and NGOs.
- *Effective Governance and management*, at both central and school levels, will require meaningful decentralisation in planning and resource management, recognizing the need for professionalism and capacity building, especially at school, upazila and district levels.
- Building a *unified national system* (not necessarily uniform) with common core curriculum and core standards for provisions that allows a common educational experience to all children, irrespective of the school they go to, call for making use of the strengths and overcoming the weaknesses of the diversity of the delivery mechanisms, with up to eleven different types of primary schools, that now exist.
- As a national responsibility, rather than just a government function, primary education should involve *participation* and consultation by all major stakeholders—parents, NGOs, academic institutions, and other institutions of civil society—in developing the programme, maintaining an oversight over its implementation, and contributing to the provision of primary education. (CAMPE, 2008:7-8)

CAMPE's position regarding the need for a diversity of delivery mechanisms is taken in the context of the PEDP II's limited scope and a deliberate lack of recognition of complementarity and mutually beneficial interaction between state and NGO actors. There would be little disagreement that for a new primary education sub-sectoral programme for the years 2010-15, which is under consideration by the government, and for the longer-range development of primary and basic education, the concerns listed above have to be taken into account seriously and systematically. CAMPE underscores the point that the subsector programme being designed now needs to learn from PEDP II experience and recognize explicitly the role and relevance of diversity of providers and provisions to address the critical deficiencies of the primary education system.

The sectoral programmes (SWAPs), despite the logic and intentions, remain an experimental form, subject to adaptation to specific contexts. As a recent review of experience concludes:

... the most important lesson emerging from the increasing experience of SWAP development and implementation is the necessity to contextualise. Each country will have a different context, not only because of its existing development plans, but also because of its history and particular relationships with international development partners (UNESCO, 2007:12).

It is well recognized that the project mode — often piecemeal and uncoordinated efforts, dependent on outside technical support — may not lead to sustained sectoral reform or capacity building. The logical aim is to make coordinated, policy framework-guided, country-owned programmes work. It is easier said than done, because the contexts and conditions are different in each country. In that sense, the SWAP is still an experimental

learning experience in each country in which it is attempted (Williams and Ahmed, 2007), with specific design tailored according to national capacity and needs.

For the next phase of development in primary education, in order to make a complex multi-faceted programme with multiple providers work, it is necessary to develop a matrix of policy priorities, major programme components, implementation mechanisms and responsibilities and financing mechanisms. Flexibility in management and financing arrangements has to be allowed with diversity in provisions. The CAMPE position paper suggests such a matrix as a starting point for dialogue. It anticipates a budget support approach from multiple sources, as well as consortia of development partners to support NGO activities. The approach can fit into a five-year planning cycle, if the government so decides (CAMPE, 2008, Annex 3).

6. Conclusions

The government of Bangladesh is the dominant provider of primary education and by constitutional and international treaty obligations, the provider of last resort – no other agent can provide the social guarantee for those otherwise excluded. This is consistent with the notion of primary education as a right and a public good. Fundamental principles of Bangladesh's Constitution (Article 17) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (Article 28) require that the opportunities for education at the primary level should be free and universal.

At the same time, the significant role that multiple providers play in education in Bangladesh shows that the state does not have a monopoly on service provision. The government's role in relation to non-state providers is important, and might include regulating and monitoring of services; entering into cooperation arrangements and assisting parents to make choices regarding education services.

The government needs to enable educational services to become responsive to the needs of the children who may access them. As explained in the Aga Khan Foundation paper:

The key point ... may be government commitment to education, rather than government necessarily doing it all... Success for all children could be a result of governments providing adequate finance and appropriate policies, enabling regulation, and ensuring oversight and accountability by all involved... A pluralist system, which includes, in addition to government schools, non-state, demand-responsive schools and agencies that deliver quality education could provide significant added value in reaching EFA and MDG targets (Aga Khan Foundation Team, 2007:8).

At the same time, it has to be recognized that there is wariness in relationships between governments and non-state actors in education. The history of the development of multiple providers in Bangladesh and the ambiguities in government policy and strategy demonstrate the tension and distrust that exists between state and non state providers of primary education about each others' role, legitimacy, rights, capacity, and motivations. Lewin's comment about Africa is relevant for Bangladesh, when he observes that there is anxiety among governments and development partners regarding possible "destructive interference" arising from, for instance, battles over students or qualified teachers, or competition over the same funding sources (Lewin, 2007:3).

The overarching policy imperative is to develop a regulatory framework for universal primary education that reconciles the state's obligation to guarantee basic education of acceptable quality for all children with the reality of multiple providers who are able to reach certain groups of the population more effectively. With this in mind, we argue the regulatory framework should:

- Articulate the principles of multiple providers, recognizing the reality of state, quasi-state and non-state providers, their strengths and potentials;

- Envision criteria and principles for determining relative size and role of different providers within a common national primary education system;
- Establish common core standards regarding physical facilities, teachers, class-size, financing and management with accountability in all types of primary education institutions;
- Develop and introduce common curricular standards with core and flexible supplementary curriculum, textbooks and learning materials for all types of institutions;
- Provide assessment of learning achievement and outcomes by all students based on grade-appropriate standards of competencies achieved by students in all types of institutions;
- Introduce area-based (for each upazila) mechanisms for coordination and planning of provision for primary education involving all actors and providers;
- Move towards compulsory education up to grade eight with agreed roles and contribution of all providers;
- Indicate financing criteria and principles ensuring adequate resources for basic education of acceptable quality for all children, regardless of geographical area and type of institution;
- Promote greater authority and responsibility at the institution level for organising teaching-learning, managing personnel, and using financial resources with accountability to parents and community;
- Devise appropriate collaborative mechanisms to apply the regulatory framework to distinctly non-state providers.

A way to introduce an effective regulatory framework for universal primary education provision would be to accept and act upon the recommendations of the draft Education Policy 2009 regarding adoption of a national framework education law. Such a law may incorporate appropriate and relevant provisions of the 1990 Compulsory Primary Education Act with necessary modification.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Types and Features of Non-State Providers

NSP type	Definition	Access	Funding	Government Recognition and Regulation	Examples
NON-PROFIT					
Community	Schools created and managed by communities, often with support from NGOs and donors Communities may be involved in construction, financing and/or oversight of schools	Demand-driven provision, often in rural areas	Community NGOs Donors	Often undergo a process of registration to gain government support	Mali community schools, supported by Save the Children, World Education and others AKES-initiated community schools in Sindh, Pakistan
NGO	Local, national or international NGOs providing both formal and non-formal education, often using alternative service delivery models and innovative approaches	Focus is usually on reaching marginalised groups	Donors Charities Individual or corporate sponsorship	May or may not be explicitly recognised in government policy. Registration may be with ministries other than MoE, e.g. in Bangladesh, NGOs register with the NGO Affairs Bureau or the Directorate of Social Welfare	BRAC, Bangladesh Save the Children
Faith-based	Schools established by international private voluntary organisations and foundations; local faith-based NGOs and benevolent associations; and individual religious institutions. Some combine secular and religious education, while others focus only on religious education.	Responsive to differentiated demand and may include moral obligation to cater for the poor	Religious associations or missionaries Individual, congregation, or corporate sponsorship	Some registered (particularly if grant-aided) and recognised in government policy Others choose to avoid government intervention	<i>Madrasas</i> /Quranic schools Church-owned schools
Philanthropic	Schools established and/or supported by philanthropic individuals or associations	Focus on poorest	Individual or corporate sponsorship	Often seek government recognition	Indian family and corporate trusts
Private, not-for-profit fee paying schools	Private schools that serve low-income areas. Fees range from low to high	Access for poor students dependent on availability of scholarships	Plus corporate or individual sponsorship Tuition Fees	Some registered, others without formal recognition	AKES schools in rural area of Pakistan and India

FOR-PROFIT					
Higher cost, private	Established for the small proportion of the population that can afford their fees. Also includes schools created by international bodies to provide education with internationally recognised qualifications for expatriate children	Targeted at those among the population who are able to afford the fees and children of expatriates	Individual or corporate ownership Tuition Fees	Some registered, others without formal recognition	
“Budget” non-state, private	Private schools that serve low-income areas and populations	Demand-driven provision that caters for particular groups of the population e.g. urban poor; remote rural populations and nomadic groups	Individual or corporate ownership Tuition Fees	Some registered, others without formal recognition	Independent private schools such as in Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Nigeria, Ghana

Source: Aga Khan Foundation Team 2007. “Non-State Providers and Public-Private-Community Partnerships in Education,” background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008, Education for All by 2015: will we make it?



Consortium for Research on
Educational Access, Transitions & Equity

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Report summary:

Multiple providers (including state, quasi-state and non-state ones) have contributed to raising initial enrolment and improving gender balance in Bangladesh. The critical question is how multiplicity and diversity of provision can contribute to achieving truly universal primary education with high completion rates and acceptable levels of learning. In this paper, these questions are addressed in the context of history and circumstances of educational development in Bangladesh, as the Government attempts to put into effect a new national education policy and design a five year (2011-15) national development plan.

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