

# Out-of-school children in Bangladesh



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# Summary

*Bangladesh has made good progress in primary school enrolment, yet more than 4 million children aged 6-10 years (23 per cent of the age group) remained out of school in 2011. Of those children, 2 million (11 per cent) had never been to school; some 1.9 million (10 per cent) started schooling late; and about 400,000 (2 per cent) were dropouts. Out-of-school children were found in almost all districts of the country, with the highest concentration in Bandarban, Sunamganj, Bhola, Netrokona and Cox's Bazar and the lowest in Jhalokati, Barguna, Pirojpur, Feni and Jessore districts. There are clear geographic disparities in access to primary education. Out of school children are associated with poverty of families, mothers' level of education and educational environment including inclusive education. MICS 2012-13 results show the rate of out of school children of primary school age is about 27 per cent. Bangladesh must ensure that all out-of-school children secure their right to quality education to flourish and reach their potential and to contribute to the realization of Bangladesh VISION 2021.*

*This policy brief examines the prevalence of out-of-school children and related issues, and proposes policy options and recommendations to address this social inequity and bring all children into school.*

## Key policy recommendations:

- *Adopt case and area-specific child-sensitive social protection interventions and address the multifaceted causes of out-of-school children;*
- *Increase education and social protection budgets in general as well as the budgets of specific social protection programmes, such as the Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) and School Feeding Programme (SFP), and adjust the monthly amount of the PESP stipend per child to match the opportunity and private costs of schooling children from poor families;*
- *Expand and coordinate income- and employment generating interventions to reach poorer families in deprived geographical areas, particularly in remote areas such as char, haor and the coastal belt where the concentration of out-of-school children is high; and*
- *Implement appropriate measures to improve inclusiveness in mainstream education services for children with disabilities.*

## Introduction

- 1 Education builds sound intellectual, psychological, emotional, social and physical foundations for children, helping them to become productive citizens. Education is a core part of individual development as well as the cornerstone for national economic and social development. Thus, the Government of Bangladesh is implementing policies and programmes to ensure compulsory primary education for all children, in line with the obligations contained in the Constitution of Bangladesh and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- 2 To meet these obligations, the Government has built partnerships and collaborations, at the national and sub-national levels, with development partners, civil society organizations, community-based organizations, the private sector and families.
- 3 In addition to its legal obligations, the Government recognizes education as being in the best interest of the country as a whole. The *National Education Policy 2010* promotes education as a basis for human capital and socioeconomic development. Therefore, the Government strongly committed to pre-primary and primary education, inclusive education, technical and vocational education, educational environments, creative talent hunts, higher education, eradication of illiteracy and other education-related initiatives.
- 4 Bangladesh's achievement of reaching the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) for education demonstrates the Government's continuing commitment to this sector. Owing to the implementation of the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) and relevant complementary interventions, the country has made notable progress in increasing enrolment with gender parity.
- 5 Despite these concerted efforts, millions of children are not in school. The issue of out-of-school children challenges the national education policy and its aspirations. The high number of children deprived of their right to primary education is a significant loss of resources for the nation; it undermines the goal of attaining education for all children by 2015 with equity; and hinders the progress of education-related MDGs and other development targets.



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- 6 Irrespective of the cause, the prevalence of out-of-school children requires concerted action by all stakeholders – government, development organizations, private sector, communities, families and other actors (*See Table 1 for prevalence and estimate overview*).

**Table 1: Trends in prevalence (in per cent) of Out-of-School Children (aged 6-10 years) by age and category, Bangladesh, 2006 -2011**

More than 4 million children aged 6-10 years, representing about one fifth of the children in this age group, are out of school in Bangladesh.

Age/category	MICS <sup>1</sup> 2006	MICS 2009	HIES <sup>2</sup> 2010	Census 2011
<b>By age</b>				
6 years	30	23	35	53
7 years	15	18	14	21
8 years	9	13	8	13
9 years	9	12	6	11
10 years	12	15	8	13
Total (6-10 years)	19	19	15	23
<b>By category</b>				
Never attended school	9	12	6	11
Dropouts	3	3	2	2
Late school entrants	7	4	7	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>23</b>

Source: MICS 2006, 2009; HIES 2010; Bangladesh Population and Housing Census, BBS 2011.

## The extent of the problem

Even in the best performing districts, about 15 per cent of the children aged 6-10 years are out of school.

- 7 More than 4 million children aged 6-10 years, representing about one fifth of the children in this age group, are out of school in Bangladesh<sup>3</sup>. Among these, about 2 million (11 per cent of this age group), have never been to school. About 1.9 million (10 per cent) entered school late, while about 0.4 million (2 per cent) dropped out. Essentially one in every five children aged 6-10 years old in Bangladesh is out of school because he or she was either never enrolled, dropped out or entered late. MICS 2012-13 results show that the rate of out of school children of primary school age is about 27 per cent - 29 per cent for boys and 24 per cent for girls<sup>4</sup>.
- 8 The out-of-school child population varies by district, upazila (sub-district), rural and urban residence, ages, male and female and wealth quintiles. Every district has a significant number of out-of-school children, ranging from 32 per cent in Bandarban to 15 per cent in Jhalokati (see Map 1). Even in the best performing districts, about 15 per cent of the children aged 6-10 years are out of school.

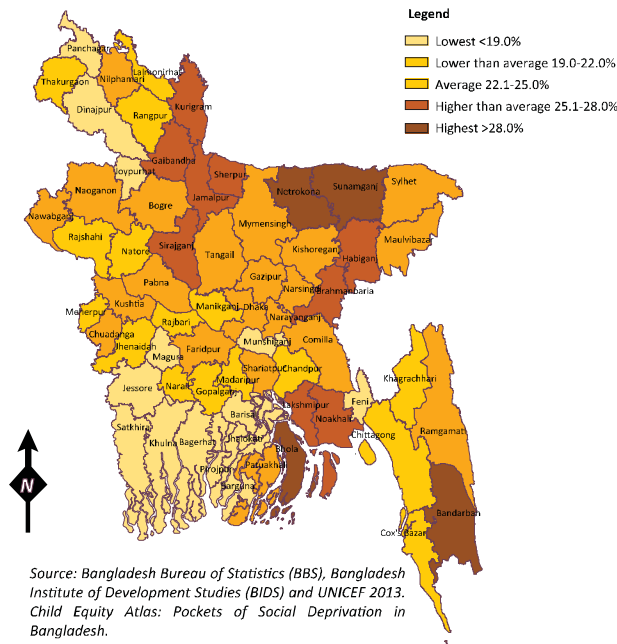
<sup>1</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS)

<sup>2</sup> Household Income and expenditure Survey (HIES)

<sup>3</sup> Estimate based on data from the Population and Housing Census 2011, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

<sup>4</sup> BBS, and UNICEF, Bangladesh Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2012-13, Progotir Pathay: Final Report, (Dhaka: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and United Nations Children's Fund, 2015).

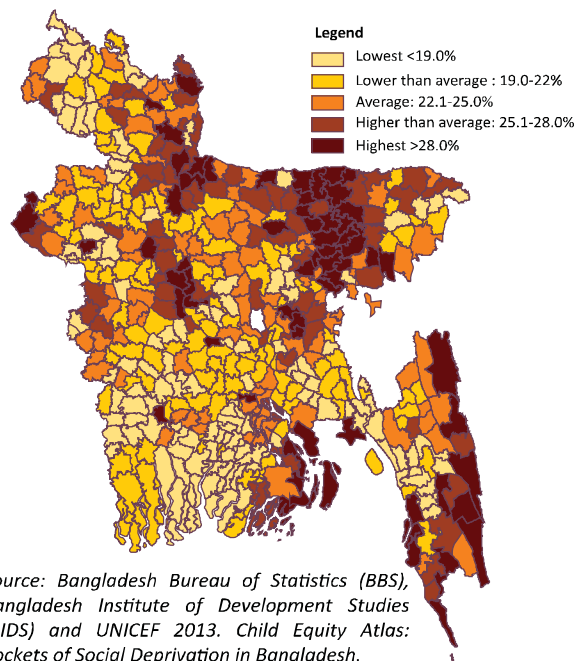
**Map 1: Out-of-school children aged 6-10 years by District, Bangladesh, 2011**



9 At the upazila (sub-district) level, the prevalence of out-of-school children ranges from about 13 to 45 per cent, indicating great disparities (see Map 2). Of the 483 upazilas, 72 carry a higher burden of out-of-school children than the rest of the country. The sub-district map highlights the complexity of intra-district disparities. Even in districts with relatively low rates of out-of-school children, there are upazilas with high rates, such as Nazirpur in Pirojpur district. Similarly, in districts with high numbers of out-of-school children, there are upazilas that perform relatively well, such as Bandarban Sadar in Bandarban district.

At the upazila (sub-district) level, the prevalence of out-of-school children ranges from about 13 to 45 per cent, indicating great disparities.

**Map 2: Out-of-school children aged 6-10 years by upazila (sub-district), Bangladesh, 2011**



The aggregate proportion of boys who are out of school is negligibly higher than that of the girls, at 23 per cent and 22 percent, respectively. This is in line with gender parity in enrolment throughout primary education.

10 The age-wise distribution of the out-of-school children shows that the proportion of children out of school is almost five times as high among children aged 6 years (53 per cent) compared to children aged 9 years (11 per cent). After the age of 9, the number of out-of-school children starts to rise with the increasing age of the child (see Table 2 and Figure 1)<sup>5</sup>. The aggregate proportion of boys who are out of school is negligibly higher than that of the girls, at 23 per cent and 22 percent, respectively. This is in line with gender parity in enrolment throughout primary education.

**Table 2: Proportion of children (as per cent) aged 6-10 years who are out of school by age and sex, Bangladesh, 2011**

Age	Total	Boys	Girls
6 years	53	54	53
7 years	21	22	21
8 years	13	14	13
9 years	11	12	11
10 years	13	15	12
<b>Total</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>22</b>

Source: Authors' estimation based on Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011.

It is crucial to dig deeper into the socioeconomic drivers that keep children out of school in these areas to ensure that policy actions are appropriate and informed by the evidence as well as views of the children and the duty bearers responsible for their care.

11 With regards to the rural and urban divide, it is noteworthy that the rate of out-of-school children in rural areas is 5 percentage points higher than in urban areas<sup>6</sup>. However, the drop-out rate is slightly more pronounced in urban than in the rural areas, at 3 per cent and 1 per cent, respectively<sup>7</sup>. On the other hand, the phenomena of children who have never been to school are more likely to be children with disabilities. In absolute numbers, the out-of-school child population is much higher in rural areas; a situation that is however changing rapidly with rising urbanization and phenomenal growth in the urban slums populations.

12 The distribution of out-of-school children in Dhaka exemplifies both how deprivations are hidden and where best to invest to effectively deal with out of school children in urban areas. About 22 per cent of children aged 6-10 years are out of school in Dhaka City Corporation (DCC). Of that cohort, about 13 per cent have never been to school, 2 per cent entered late and 6 per cent dropped out. The prevalence of children who have never been to school and dropouts is significantly higher in DCC than the national average in rural and urban areas.

13 Although out-of-school children are found across DCC, they are concentrated in Pallabi, Mirpur, Mohammadpur, Gulshan and in the old town (see Map 3), areas with a significant presence of industries and services, indicating a link between OOSC and availability of working opportunities in these sectors. It is crucial to dig deeper into the socioeconomic drivers that keep children out of school in these areas to ensure that policy actions are appropriate and informed by the evidence as well as views of the children and the duty bearers responsible for their care.

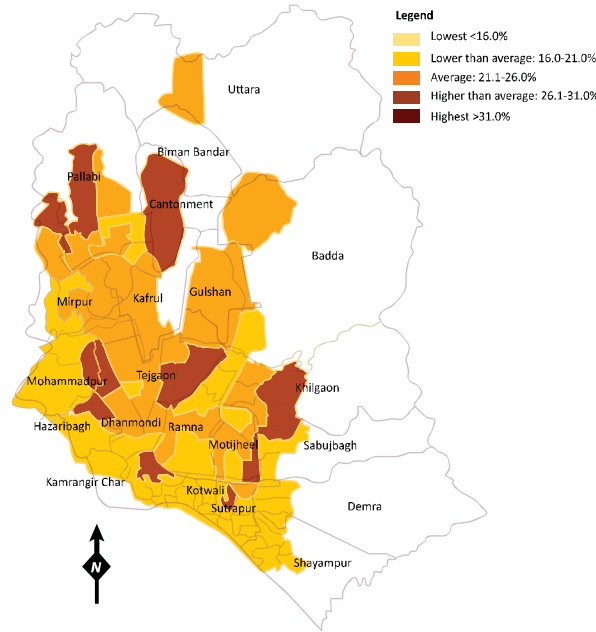
<sup>5</sup> Available data confirm that there is no district with a higher primary school attendance rate before the age of 9 years.

<sup>6</sup> As per the HIES 2010, the proportion of out-of-school children in rural and urban is 16 per cent and 11 per cent, respectively; and dropout is 1 and 3 per cent, respectively.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.



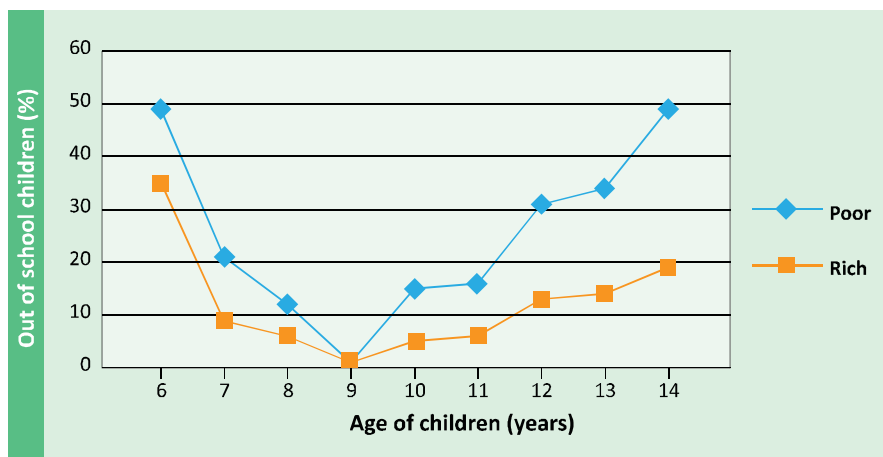
**Map 3: Out-of-school children aged 6-10 years by ward in DCC, Bangladesh, 2011**



Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) and UNICEF 2013. *Child Equity Atlas: Pockets of Social Deprivation in Bangladesh*.

14 Out-of-school children are more prevalent in poor families than in rich families (see Figure 1). However, regardless of wealth status, dropout increases with age, starting from age 9 years. This phenomenon highlights the opportunity cost (lost income from work) of schooling for poor families.

**Figure 1: Association of out-of-school children (as per cent) by level of poverty for each age-group, Bangladesh, 2010**



Source: Authors' estimation from HIES 2010

15 Out-of-school children and their families face social barriers and are often marginalized from wider society. Children who are excluded from schooling are usually deprived of opportunities, live in impoverished areas, and are easy targets of exploitation, abuse or trafficking. In addition to this, out-of-school children are more likely to be socially excluded because of disabilities or other characteristics resulting in discrimination.

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## Policy implications

Acknowledging systemic barriers for delivering primary education, the Government has been implementing the Primary Education Development Programme to increase participation, reduce social disparities and improve quality in primary education.

The dropout rate is higher among children from poor families than among wealthier families. This increases after the age of 9, indicating a link to the higher opportunity cost of schooling for children from poor families.

- 16 Guaranteeing compulsory and free primary education to all children and eliminating illiteracy are Constitutional obligations, under Article 28 (3) of the Constitution of Bangladesh. Under Article 28 (4), the Government is also required to make special provisions for disadvantaged and underprivileged children and women. The country is a signatory to the Education for All Framework (1990), the Convention on the Right of the Child (1990), Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education (1994), the Dakar Framework for Action (2000), and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People Living with Disability (2007), all of which focus on quality education for an children.
- 17 The Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990 provides all children with legal right to be educated up to at least primary level. It also commits the Government to providing quality primary education for all children. In line with that commitment, the National Education Policy 2010 emphasizes that children with a disability should be included in the mainstream education system. However, most of the school-aged children with a physical disability cannot attend school as a result of limited supportive interventions. Acknowledging systemic barriers for delivering primary education, the Government has been implementing the Primary Education Development Programme to increase participation, reduce social disparities and improve quality in primary education.
- 18 There are a range of programmes and policy interventions in Bangladesh that directly and indirectly address the out-of-school phenomenon, including the Education Policy (2010), Non-Formal Education Policy (2006), National Skills Development Policy (2011), National Children's Policy (2011), etc. In addition to the laudable abolition of school fees and free text books from primary through secondary school, the Government is also implementing various stipend programmes for children at risk of dropping out of school due to household poverty. These include the Primary Education Stipend Project (PESP) and other social safety net programmes such as the School Feeding Programme (SFP) and the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project, which complement the Primary Education Development Programme. Despite these efforts, the high number of out-of-school children continues to undermine the country's aspirations to reach middle-income status by 2021. Too often noteworthy interventions fail to cover a sufficient number of children to have a notable impact on the problem.
- 19 Research shows that the one of the main causes for children being out of school is household poverty<sup>8</sup>. The dropout rate is higher among children from poor families than among wealthier families. This increases after the age of 9, indicating a link to the higher opportunity cost of schooling for children from poor families. Evidence has also shown that mothers' education and children's ethnicity are linked to school dropout<sup>9</sup>. While the Government has emphasized girls' and women's education and initiated

<sup>8</sup> Sabates, R., Hossain, A. and Lewin, K., *School dropout in Bangladesh: New Insights from Longitudinal Evidence*. (Falmer, UK: University of Sussex, International Centre for Education and Institute of Education and Development, BRAC University, Dhaka, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, *National report, Bangladesh: Global Study on Child Poverty and disparities*, United Nations Children's Fund, Dhaka, 2009.

special programmes for children, the adequacy and effectiveness of these programmes has not been proved. Easy opportunities to earn money leads poor families to send children to work instead of school. The private or out of pocket cost of education is also linked to dropout. A recent study shows that on average the annual private cost of a grade 4 or 5 child is about BDT 4,800.<sup>10</sup>

- 20 While children who dropped out of school are more likely to be working children or children living on the street, a significant number of children who have never been to school are living with some form of deprivation – either with a disability or in non-inclusive school environments. Although data on children living with disabilities are not available, Das (2011) shows that about 10 per cent of the children within the age group of 6-10 years are living with disabilities in Bangladesh that require special kinds of schooling<sup>11</sup>.
- 21 Hunger too can keep children from school and diminish the educational achievements of children who are in school. The School Feeding Programme (SFP) provides a mid-morning snack for eligible children in order to prevent school dropout. It mainly addresses hunger for school-attending children to increase performance and currently covers about 3 million children, falling short of the 16.5 million school children who are in need.<sup>12</sup> The ROSC intervention provides formal education through a non-formal delivery approach, or a ‘second chance’, to children who have never been to school, have dropped out of school, are from disadvantaged families or are living on the street. It covers about 0.7 million children in 148 upazilas, which is inadequate to address the real need. Most importantly, the project’s overall effectiveness in general and Chittagong Hill Tracts and haor areas in particular, remains unclear, leaving the question of whether the intervention reaches the pockets where out-of-school children are more concentrated.
- 22 Currently, the PESP covers 7.8 million children with about BDT 8.5 billion<sup>13</sup>. Under this programme, a family with a single eligible child, irrespective of grade, receives BDT 100 while families with multiple children receive a total of BDT 125. This means that a family with three eligible children only receives BDT 25 for the two additional children. This is far less than the opportunity cost and private or out of pocket cost of schooling, which increases with the progression of grades and age of the children. Additionally, the real value of BDT 100 has dropped by half since the inception of this programme in 2002-2003. The amount of the primary stipend is an important policy concern. Furthermore, evidence shows that out-of-school children are not only a rural concern but also an urban issue. In Dhaka City Corporation (DCC), for example, about 135,000 children aged 6-10 years are out of school<sup>14</sup>. However, the PESP does not cover urban children from poor families.

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<sup>10</sup> DPE, PPRC and UNICEF, *Bangladesh Primary Education Stipends: A Qualitative Assessment*, Directorate of Primary Education. (Dhaka, Power and Participation Research Centre and UNICEF, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Asim, D 2011. *Inclusion of students with disabilities in mainstream primary education in Bangladesh*, *Journal of International Development Cooperation*, Vol.17, No.2, P.1-10. Available at: [http://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/metadb/up/kiyo/AN10482914/JIDC\\_17-2\\_1.pdf](http://ir.lib.hiroshima-u.ac.jp/metadb/up/kiyo/AN10482914/JIDC_17-2_1.pdf). [Accessed on 12 December 2013]

<sup>12</sup> Coverage and budget-related information was collected from the *Social Safety Net Budget and National Budget Summary Statements of the Finance Division* available at <http://www.mof.gov.bd/en/>.

<sup>13</sup> Finance Division, the Ministry of Finance, *Social Safety Net revised budget, 2012-13*

<sup>14</sup> Authors’ estimation based on *Bangladesh Populations and Housing Census 2011*. As per the Census, the number of children aged 6-10 years in DCC is about 615,000; and 21.7 per cent of the children are out of school.

**While cash transfers are important to address financial barriers, inclusive educational environments and classrooms, disability-skilled teachers and other interventions for accessibility are equally necessary to fulfill the right to education for children with disabilities.**

**Industries that engage and keep children out of school, often operating outside the existing regulatory environment and promoting exploitative labour with no provisions for educating the children.**

- 23 The inadequacy of the stipend also affects children with disabilities. Only about 30,000 children with a disability received a stipend in fiscal year 2013-14. In addition to the lack of stipends, they are also confronted with a lack of adaptive equipment and appropriate interventions within the school environment, a limited scope of personal assistance, absence of accessible transportation, inaccessible infrastructure, social stigma, and negative attitudes by the family, teachers and community<sup>15</sup>. There has clearly been a gap between inclusive policy and practice. Theoretically, schools are open to all children, but in practice many children continue to remain excluded because of disability.<sup>16</sup> Commendably, the coverage of stipends for students with disability are being enhanced. Government has increased the number of students with disability who receive a stipend to 50,000 in 2015 from 29,000 in 2014. However, all children with disabilities, in their various forms, have yet to be effectively covered by the disability-centred safety net. Most existing schools are yet to be fully disability-friendly in their physical, practical and instructional learning facilities. While cash transfers are important to address financial barriers, inclusive educational environments and classrooms, disability-skilled teachers and other interventions for accessibility are equally necessary to fulfill the right to education for children with disabilities. Societal norms and values regarding children with disabilities are changing slowly towards an understanding of the requirement for inclusive education and involvement of social services.
- 24 The interventions for working children are inadequate. In two phases about 512,000 urban working children have been provided with basic education course under the 'Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children' (BEHTRUWC) project has been operational only in major cities, and the vast number of urban working children are not included in this 'second chance' education intervention and outstrips the number of available BEHTRUWC learning spaces and current budgetary provisions. This is further compounded by the industries that engage and keep children out of school, often operating outside the existing regulatory environment and promoting exploitative labour with no provisions for educating the children. Adolescent girls and boys employed as servants in homes, industries and artisanal businesses are typical examples.
- 25 Adequate national budget allocations are crucial to ensure the education of disadvantaged and underprivileged children and to create an effective and child-sensitive social protection system. In this regard, the education sector budget allocation as a proportion of the national budget has fluctuated, with a decreasing trend from 2009-2010 to 2012-2013 and an increasing trend from 2013-2014.<sup>17</sup> However, the social protection budget as a proportion of the national budget has decreased from about 16 per cent in 2010-2011 to 12.18 per cent in 2014-2015 with a question

<sup>15</sup> Choudhury, R. (ed.), *The status of un-served children in education: Children with Disability in Bangladesh*. (Dhaka: Campaign for Popular Education, 2011).

<sup>16</sup> Ahuja, A and Ibrahim, M (n.d). *An Assessment of Inclusive Education in Bangladesh*. UNESCO, Dhaka. Available at: <http://www.un-bd.org/pub/unpubs/UNESCO--An%20Assessment%20of%20Inclusive%20Education.pdf>. [Accessed on 3 June 2014]

<sup>17</sup> Finance Division, Ministry of Finance, Government of Bangladesh; 2009-2015.

about its child-sensitivity. A further important issue as it relates to budget allocations is geographic disparity. Evidence shows that out-of-school children are not equally spread throughout the country; but the coverage of programme to address the problem of out-of-school children is not equitable. Again, the categories of out-of-school children vary depending on area. For example, children who have never been to school and school dropouts are major concerns in certain areas, while late entry into school is a major problem in other areas. A 'One size fits all' approach is not appropriate to adequately address the problem of out-of-school.

- 26 The Government is committed to the goal of educating all the country's children. The education policy stressed eliminating dropouts by 2018. Yet the programmes and interventions that are in place are not entirely adequate to address the existing challenges to meet that goal, including school accessibility, teacher availability, teacher attendance, qualifications and skills, teaching materials and teaching learning environment, remain.

**Evidence shows that out-of-school children are not equally spread throughout the country; but the coverage of programme to address the problem of out-of-school children is not equitable.**

## Conclusion and recommendations

- 27 Education is the best means for increasing human capital, breaking the intergenerational cycle of poverty, and achieving sustainable economic growth and development. The aggregate level of economic growth of a country is strongly linked to the level of educational outcomes. Primary education builds the foundation.<sup>18</sup> Analyses and studies have validated that universal primary education in resource-poor countries boosts the human capital of children living in poverty. A person who completes at least quality primary education is more likely to be engaged in income-producing endeavors as an adult, and becomes an active and productive citizen.
- 28 Reducing the number of out-of-school children in Bangladesh requires the recognition of the numerous contributing factors outlined in this paper. To make a lasting change following key actions are recommended:
- 29 Adopt a case and area-specific approach to child-sensitive social protection interventions that address the multiple causes of the out-of-school phenomenon, particularly for children who are at risk of dropping out. The *Child Equity Atlas: Pockets of Deprivation in Bangladesh* prepared by BBS, BIDS and UNICEF is a useful document for shaping direct interventions and informing decisions.
- 30 Increase and effectively utilize the education and social protection budgets in general as well as the budgets of specific social protection programmes, such as PESP and SFP. The value of the PESP stipend is insufficient when compared with the opportunity cost of schooling for children living in poverty. Thus, the amount of the monthly stipend per child needs to be increased to reflect the country's economic growth and the opportunity cost of schooling for children from poor families. Since urban areas also have high rates of out-of-school children, the programme should also cover poor children in urban areas.

**Analyses and studies have validated that universal primary education in resource-poor countries boosts the human capital of children living in poverty.**

<sup>18</sup> Zhao, Meng and Glewwe, 2010. What determines basic school attainment in development countries? Evidence from Rural China, *Economics of Education Review* 29(3) (06):451-460.

**The provision of stipends and 'second chance' education is not enough if children's families persistently remain in poverty.**

**While there are policies for educating all children, many children with disability have never been to school.**

- 31 Expand and effectively coordinate income- and employment-generating interventions to reach poorer families in deprived geographical areas, particularly in char, haor and the coastal belt where the concentration of out-of-school children is high. The provision of stipends and 'second chance' education is not enough if children's families persistently remain in poverty. Thus, Government and NGO interventions, such as micro-credits, bank loans, 'food for work' and other social safety nets, need to be expanded and well-coordinated to reach the families and geographic regions the rates of never-been-to-school and dropout are high.
- 32 Improve the physical educational environment in schools and provide all relevant educational inputs. Research shows that school dropout is associated with school accessibility and the overall quality of the school environment, such as adequate classrooms, toilets, infrastructural facilities, teacher and teaching-learning materials and methods.
- 33 Implement measures to improve inclusiveness of mainstream education services for children with disabilities and increase coverage and amount of stipends for them. There is a 'rhetoric-action' gap in addressing the educational needs of children with a disability. While there are policies for educating all children, many children with disability have never been to school. They have equal rights and entitlements as citizens and can contribute to the country's development if they are well cared for and included. Bangladesh must ensure their participation in mainstream educational services so they can flourish and reach their potential. Redoubling efforts to ensure the right to education for children with disabilities will require educational environments such as disability-friendly infrastructure, the deployment of disability-sensitive trained teachers, accessibility, assistive devices and support services.

## Methodological note

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The analyses and findings presented here are primarily based on the Child Equity Atlas: Pockets of Social Deprivation in Bangladesh 2013, which was prepared using the Population and Housing Census 2011 carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS); the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2006 and 2009; the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2010 and other secondary sources. Out-of-school children in the brief refer to the sum of (i) children who have never been to school; (ii) children who have dropped out of primary school; and (iii) children who have entered primary school late.

