



Education Quality Key to Bangladeshs Goal to Become Middle Income Country

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DHAKA, March 3, 2014: Bangladesh needs to focus on high-quality learning, and strong foundational cognitive and behavioral skills from early childhood, says a new World Bank report "Seeding Fertile Ground: Education That Works for Bangladesh." The findings and recommendations of the report were discussed today at a national dialogue organized by the Campaign for Popular Organization (CAMPE). Today's event was preceded by six divisional workshops. The report, which focuses on access and equity, quality and skills, was prepared under the guidance of two advisory groups drawn from the members of civil society, the government, academia, think-tanks and development partners in Bangladesh. The report praises Bangladeshs success in improving access to education and completion at all levels, despite daunting challenges. Bangladesh achieved gender equity in primary and secondary education well ahead of the 2015 Millennium Development Goal. About 76% of youth aged 15-19 completed primary education in 2010. Progress in education has paved the way for an increasing number of women to enter the labor market, bolstering the countrys manufacturing production. "With more youth entering the working age population, Bangladesh is poised to benefit from a demographic dividend in the next 10 years, said Johannes Zutt, World Bank Country Director for Bangladesh. "To reap the benefits of demographic changes, Bangladesh will need policies that create higher-skilled jobs with higher wages. By improving education quality and skills development, the country can link its youth to productive employment in local or overseas job markets. Although the country has succeeded in expanding access to education, learning is currently low and unequal. Only a limited number of students remain competent in their respective grades. An assessment of literacy and numeracy at grade 5 indicates that only 25 percent of grade 5 students master Bangla competencies, and only 33 percent master Mathematics. Students with low levels of learning at lower grades are most at risk for dropping out and are most likely to join the informal labor market. An important determinant of learning within the school is the quality of the teachers. Studies show that many teachers lack adequate training and career progression opportunities. Lack of knowledge about subjects and overemphasis on rote-learning than encouraging creative thinking and problem-solving skills further affects students learning. Bangladeshs current momentum in improving education can be harnessed for greater advances, states the report. Understanding the complexity and interrelated nature of education quality, skills development, and the labor market will aid in policy planning. The country needs to shift and strengthen the focus on education relevant to the labor market and on the quality of education. In both the formal and informal labor markets, possessing strong cognitive skills, along with positive behavioral skills, can lead to better jobs and career advancement. Improving skills and productivity are crucial for Bangladesh to achieve middle income status. Currently, most of the labor force is in informal sector and possess low levels of education - 96 percent of workers have up to a secondary education, and less than 5 percent of the workforce has a tertiary education. The report emphasizes that skill development is incremental, cumulative and transformational. A good skills-development policy recognizes that skills are not built at a certain time in an individuals life - skills development is an incremental and lifelong process, acquired through formal and non-formal education, from pre-primary through higher education, networks, jobs, and other means. In Dhaka Mehrin Ahmed Mahbub tel : (+880-2) 8159001 mmahbub@worldbank.org In Washington Gabriela Aguilar tel : (+1-202) 473-8955 gaguilar2@worldbank.org

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