



Townhall Citizen Report

December, 2022

Learning Collaboratives to work on Demand-driven Participatory Education Budget

Background

There is a lack of scope for people to participate in the national budget formulation process in Bangladesh, which is true for the education budget as well. However, according to the policy, parents can express their views and needs in the budget formulation process at the school level. But the actual picture is different. In many cases, it is seen that without holding a teachers' and parents' meeting, the school committee members prepare the demand letter on their own and submit it to the upazila education office. The negligence of school committee members is responsible in this context. In many cases, due to a lack of time, it is not possible to prepare a demand letter for a budget following due process. But at the same time, people's

lack of awareness also plays a big role.

In most cases, various budget-related activities and discussions take place at the national and local levels during the months of May and June. However, the majority of the budget formulation work was completed well before this time. As a result, these activities cannot have a sustainable impact in most cases. In making a truly people-friendly budget, yearly awareness activities should be planned so that people are simultaneously aware of the budget-making process and can present their views and demands through a proper channel. In particular, it is important to ensure public participation in the budget of the education sector so that the actual needs of the students can be identified and funds allocated accordingly.

The Event

To ensure demand-driven participatory education budget, two townhall meetings were organized on December 28, 2022 in Sreemangal Upazila of Moulvibazar district and on December 31, 2022 in Saghat

Upazila of Gaibandha district. The focus of the event was how a participatory demand-driven budget can prepare for a resilient education system and address learning loss. Honorable chairmen of both upazilas, UP chairmen, upazila education officers, teachers, SMC members, and parents were present in the meetings.

In his speech, **Chairman of Sreemangal Upazila Bhanulal Roy** emphasized the budget allocation based on the upazila's needs for the development of the upazila level education system. He said,

“There is no alternative to budget allocation based on the upazila's needs for the development of the upazila level education system. On the other hand, it is important to establish connections between parents, teachers, students, and public representatives to ensure public involvement in the education budget formulation process. I think this townhall meeting organized by IID has started the work of establishing that connection.”



He further urged to strengthen the secondary education system of Sreemangal Upazila. According to him secondary education has not advanced at the same pace as primary education. There are numerous reasons for this. There are 138 primary schools in the upazila, in contrary there are only 27 secondary schools and their education facilities are very limited.

On the other hand, **Chairman of Saghata Upazila, Mr. Md. Jahangir Kabir**, said,

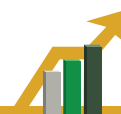
“Before finalizing the SLIP budget of the primary schools, teachers, parents, and SMC members need to sit together and determine the needs. It will help us to understand the actual needs of the students and will contribute significantly to improving the quality of education.”



He also said, "Many schools cannot spend the allocated amount of the budget they receive each year. This is because teachers and SMC members do not meet regularly. They need to make a sound annual plan for the development of the school and improving the quality of education".

The Resilience of The Education System of Bangladesh

At the beginning of the meeting, **Falguni Reza, Joint Director of IID** presented the research findings conducted on the resilience of the education system of Bangladesh during the disaster period.



Research shows that during the COVID period, when children's education became online-dependent, most of the students in rural areas were deprived of digital access. In the research area, 99% of households did not have a computer. 49% of households did not have a smartphone or tablet, and 80% of households did not have an internet connection. As a result, in general, the children of this region have fallen behind in education. 56 percent of parents feel that their child has forgotten what they learned at school before Covid. 60% of teachers agreed with the parents in this concern. In such a situation, the importance of participatory demand-based budgeting is highlighted so that children's education is less disrupted during times of disaster.

Highlights from The Discussion

Online class, smartphones and its challenges

In terms of challenges during online class, most of the teachers said the network problem was a big hindrance to taking our online classes. Attendance was also very low, as not all students had devices. Besides, buying megabytes was also very expensive. However, the teachers and guardians were concern about the side-effects of using smartphones.

Mr. Kamal Uddin, a senior teacher of Sreemangal Govt. Girls High School stressed that the uncontrolled use of smart phone of students. According to him,

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With the advent of smart phone education, students have become more and more addicted to it. They tend to do other things on their mobile devices rather than study. So now is the time to bring their mobile usage under surveillance and look at the controlled mobile usage of students. Therefore, instead of mobile

phones, students should be ensured a in hand material-based education.”



A guardian echoed with his concern,

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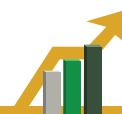
After starting study through mobile, students are really addicted to it. Students appear to be unwilling to do anything without their mobile devices. They react negatively if they are not given mobile phones.”



In this context, a teacher emphasized on the awareness of parents,

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Parents should also be aware so that students do not become addicted to mobile phones. If the online class has to be done through mobile, then the parents need to know the class time correctly. Everything has to be checked and balanced. Because of today's digital age, it is difficult to move without a smart phone. Now, attention should be paid to those places where there are network problems, a lack of devices, or no internet connection. And how to prevent all technological



abuses should be properly researched. In general, smartphones should be accepted, and their controlled use should be ensured. ”



Rural education system and demand-driven budget

Mr. Uddin further pointed out the importance of infra-structural development and resources in rural level education system. He said,

“ Infrastructural development of educational institutions should be ensured in rural areas. At the same time, the number of teachers should also be increased. Besides, more 4th class employees should be appointed to reduce the workload of teachers. Besides, importance should be given to career-oriented education. For effective teaching, teachers should be properly trained. ”



In this context the discussant pointed out the importance of the participatory demand-driven budget. A member of **School Managing Committee (SMC)** said in this context,

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According to the policy, a meeting with the parents should be organized before the budget is formulated. The budget should be finalized based on the demands of the parents and other stakeholders. However, many times, the meetings do not take place because of time constraints. In that case, it can be seen that the school teachers themselves are finalizing the budget based on consultation with each other. In some cases, not even all members of the SMC are aware. ”



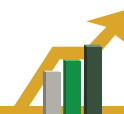
A guardian echoed the concern,

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We have no clear idea about the budget. All the processes are controlled by SMC members. To make the budget more participatory, the bridge between teachers and parents is important in this case. ”



Ayub Hossain, a teacher from Saghata Upazila reflected on the actual scenario,



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The annual budget allotted to each school is significant in terms of school development. But the schools do not have regular meetings of teachers and SMC members, due to which the headmaster cannot spend according to the needs of the school. ”



A guardian added with him,

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We have no idea about the school budget. If the SMC members hold regular meetings in schools and discuss the budget sectors with us, then we can understand what needs to be improved in that school. Our schools do not have the necessary facilities for children's entertainment; there is no garden on the school grounds. But if a school has these materials, children will become very interested in going to school. ”



In this context, the **Assistant Upazila Education Officer of Sreemangal Upazila Abul Hasnat Mohammad Johir Ahmed Bhuiyan** said,

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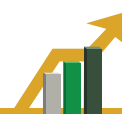
If such townhall meetings are held regularly, then awareness of the school budget will increase among the parents, teachers, and other stakeholders. At the same time, arrangements for regular training of SMC members are also necessary, so that they can properly prepare the budget and implement it. ”



The **Upazila Academic Supervisor of Saghata, Md. Siddiqur Rahman** thoughts in the same way,

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In the education sector, besides improving the infrastructure of students and schools, there is a need to keep an allocation in the budget for parents. Monthly and quarterly parent meetings should be held, and budget matters should be discussed there. ”



Suggestions:

1. Learning collaboratives to carry on the initiative:

Learning collaboratives at local level including school management committee (SMC) members, parents, teachers, students, local community and political leaders education officers and CSOs will be brought together to raise their voices, present their demands, monitor government's commitment, and get informed about the progress of education financing.

2. Arranging bi-monthly Townhall:

Learning collaboratives agreed to hold a townhall meeting every two months, where public representatives, teachers, parents, and other stakeholders will meet to ensure participatory demand-driven budgeting at the school level and track the progress of the activities.

3. Involving the student council in the budgeting process:

The Student Council is formed with the aim of building democratic attitudes and tolerance of others' opinions among students and involving them in school development activities. In the primary schools, a seven-member students' council is formed with at least two candidates from each class for a one-year term. Students from the schools can take part in all phases of the election and also cast their votes to

elect the council members spontaneously. This council should be involved in the budgeting process, so students may get a chance to present their demands and get familiar with good practices.

4. Raising awareness among parents about monitoring students' smartphone usage:

As many parents and teachers expressed concern about students' smartphone addiction, parents should be more aware of how to ensure controlled phone usage and monitor their children. To reduce the misuse of the technology, proper research should be conducted.

5. Formulating budget based on Upazila's demand:

As the infrastructural facilities, socio-economic conditions, and resources vary from upazila to upazila, the budget allocation process should not be generalized but formulated based on the requirements of a particular upazila

6. Addressing the gap in secondary education policy:

To ensure the quality of secondary education, the nationalization of the local secondary schools and their inclusion in the MPO list must be ensured.