

## **Achieving SDG-4 during COVID-19 Pandemic**

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Corona Virus shortly COVID is a name of frightened at the present world from December 2019 to till now. The COVID-19 has sprayed as pandemic when the world is preparing to achieve the Sustainable Development Goal which is called SDG. The world has successfully completed the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and on September 2015 UN Summit the world leaders have initiated the SDG as the "blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all". Transforming our world: the 2030 agenda for sustainable development outlines a transformative vision with 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) for economic, social, and environmental development, while only SDG 4, to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

In Bangladesh, major progress has been made in access to education, specifically at the primary school level, for both boys and girls. At present, a total of 2,09,19,201 students are enrolled in primary level education which is considering the remarkable number in South Asian countries. Apart from this, the high school level along with the tertiary level education is also rising rapidly. The initiatives are taken by the government to provide the educational facility for boosting these trends day by day. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina received the world's highest excellence UNICEF award for a significant role in the education sector.

Even in the COVID-19 pandemic situation, the service of education is still ongoing through virtual media and television school. The beneficiary of the facility goes to every corner of the country. So, the line of achieving the SDG-4 is not pending during the period of COVID-19 pandemic situation while the government is still alert and aware of providing quality education for all, especially for children's primary education.

After an exciting and exhilarating performance in the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), that was widely acclaimed across the globe, Bangladesh embarked on embracing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The agenda has been already incorporated in some of the goals and 7<sup>th</sup> Five Year Plan. The SDG includes inclusive and equitable education. It aims at ensuring quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all.

The education system has been facing a great challenge during this Covid-19 pandemic as all education institutions are reaming closed from March 2020. The government of Bangladesh has taken initiatives to make it closed until October 2020. Actually, the decision has been taken by understanding the realization of the current situation of the pandemic and ensuring security for the children. Especially pre-primary children, primary children, and secondary level children are the most vulnerable in this situation. Actually, the measurement of SDG Goal-4 taken into consideration about the progress of these levels' education. Examinations are postponed in undue time which is a great threat to ensuring the quality of education. It is a great obstacle to reaching the SDG Goal-4.

Developing countries like Bangladesh are facing a great problem to teach the children through an internet facility because we have less access to internet do not have an uninterrupted internet facility and even our villages are still under the dark of the internet facility. On the other hand, a vast population do not have internet access or they are not habituated to use an android phone or any other mode of internet devices. It is good to hear that our virtual education is continuing through Shangshad Television.

The situation tells that it is high time for Bangladesh to rethink the digitalization of the education system of Bangladesh especially ensuring the primary education for the children. During the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, eLearning or distance learning has gained priority in the education sector; media, like Zoom, a video communication system, has gained huge popularity during these quarantine days.

UNESCO estimates about 1.25 billion students are affected by lockdowns. UNDP estimates 86 percent of primary school children in developing countries are not being educated. The pandemic has re-emphasized the ‘digital divide’ and the right to internet access, particularly for those in rural areas. UNESCO estimates that closing the digital divide would reduce by more than two-thirds the number of children not learning because of school closure.

The Corona virus outbreak brought almost all aspects of life to a standstill. Stuck at home amid the nationwide shutdown, students all across the country were left with little to do. At such a time, the a2i Program of the ICT Division and the Cabinet Division, supported by the UNDP, took initiatives to ensure remote education for the students. Separate initiatives have been taken for four educational streams: Primary Education, Secondary and higher Education, Madrasha and technical education. Remote classes not only helped them keep up with academics, but they also had the opportunity to collaborate over online resources.

If the shutdown continues for a long period, the competencies we expect from children upon completion of their education cycle will be negatively affected. However the most significant impact will be the increased inequality in learning as many hard-to-reach groups are now missing out on different government and other ongoing educational initiatives through state-run TV and online courses.

The department of Primary and Mass Education has recently introduced the remote teaching for their children over phone. The name of the program is “Ghore Bose Shikhi”. Its educators are embracing this system cordially. Certainly, this is a good symptom for us to achieve the education goal. But the challenge is facing by the teacher and students of remote areas who do not have the access to the mobile phone as well. The teachers are already started their activity basically in urban areas. The government has been trying to make up for this loss primarily through four platforms—TV channels, mobile networks, online and radio. We have observed that despite some limitations, secondary-level lessons are being delivered in a better way through television, but lessons for the primary students are not being delivered in a child-friendly manner.

Considering the current and post-pandemic situation, the government should prioritise education along with other important areas like food safety and livelihood, employment generation and economic development. We may hopefully manage the adverse impacts of economic slowdown caused by the pandemic, but if we lose a generation of learners in education, it will be difficult to overcome the loss in years.

We understand that for now the government's top priority is to address hunger and poverty resulting from the global pandemic and the unprecedented shutdown. However, it is good to see that the government has already taken some initiatives to make up for the learning loss, and has been trying to address the challenges at different levels of education.

The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education is already developing a very impressive three-phase response plan—short term (six months), medium term (12 months) and long term (24 months)—which is in its final stage. The plan includes students' improvement tracking, regular assessment, teachers' skills development, health-hygiene, protection of learners, among many other things. We hope the plan will be finalised and approved by the decision makers as soon as possible. The plan should consider revisiting the syllabus and discontinuing unproductive national exams like the Primary Education Completion Exam (PECE).

The lessons currently being aired on TV for primary students have to be more attractive with provisions for learning through games, cartoons, etc. As nearly 30 percent of our primary students are first-generation learners, their parents are unable to help them with their education at homes.

Since 96 percent of our population has access to mobile phones, their networks could be used for providing lessons (that are already being given through TV or other platforms) to primary children for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening.

The mobile phone service providers should contribute here through providing free service to the unreachable children as part of their corporate social responsibility. BTRC can make such a suggestion to the mobile phone companies with specific guidelines for doing it. It would make a huge difference in primary education during the shutdown period if carried out with appropriate strategies and proper monitoring.

Covid-19 is a threatened word of present world. People of all corner are now passing a crucial time to cope up with this pandemic. When the work has been started a good start for building a blueprint and more sustainable future for all namely Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) where this pandemic has already become a curse for all. SDG-4 is an important goal for achieving the sustainable development of the world. Bangladesh is also a part of SDG. Due to COVID-19 pandemic, ensuring quality and equitable education has become under threat to achieve. But it is good to hear that the countries are trying their level best to ensure continuity of primary education through various online and virtual education. Bangladesh has been teaching their students through Shangshad Television. The Covid-19 makes the policy maker to rethink about the digitalization of the education system of Bangladesh. During the current COVID-19 pandemic situation, eLearning or distance learning has gained priority in the education sector; media, like Zoom, has gained huge popularity during these quarantine days. We know for a fact that some of these are already happening, but the tension is growing rapidly about the tenure of the sustainability of the COVID-19 pandemic. The initiatives of Primary and Mass Education “Ghore Bose Shikhi” is certainly a remarkable and welcomed initiatives for achieving the SDG-4. So we do not have enough time to loss our time to embrace the initiatives to make continuity for ensuring the quality education.

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