



## EDUCATION STILL EMBODIES HOPE AND DISAPPOINTMENT IN THE DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

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### Abstract

Education is a fundamental birthright of a person. For this reason, right to free and obligatory primary education has universally declared and accepted to endorse education accessible for all children through Education for All (EFA) and education goals in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG). But EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in primary education has failed to provide education as a development tool for a developing country. Hitherto, education is full of dissatisfaction and anticipation in the developing countries of the world. The objective of this article is emphasized on the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asian countries primary education where EFA and MDGs referring to education are unlikely to achieve its aim. The study follows content analysis approach. Before proceed to the analysis, discussed concisely the background of EFA and how global geopolitical dimensions influenced in the MDGs agreement. Later, the study result found the obstacle factors like role and objectives of education aid, new geo-politics in education after 9/11, flaws of new re-conceptualized education policy, dominant education approach and the overall ambiguous meaning of MDGs which are appearing as the hurdle for educational development in the developing countries.

**Key words:** Education for All (EFA), Millennium Development Goal (MDG), geo-politics, SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), gender equality.

### Introduction

Education is considered as one of the basic human right of a person. Education provides entry to knowledge and represents a site of struggle over the societal distribution of wealth and power. In developing countries, education is regarded as an essential vehicle - where it shows how a society is structured and should be structured in future. Hence universal steps have been instigated to make education accessible to every child. In this regard, right to free and obligatory primary education has universally declared and accepted to endorse education accessible for all children through Education for All (EFA) and education goals in the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) (Tomaševski 2006; McCowan and Unterhalter 2015). In the developing countries, enrolment rate in primary education has continued to upsurge – reached at 89% but the speed of development is insufficient (UN 2010).

According to the MDG report (2015), enrolment in primary education in developing countries has reached 91 percent but 57 million children remain out of school, with the worst shortfalls in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asia. Among them, almost 31 million children are out-of-school from SSA, and more than 18 million from Southern Asia (UN 2010, p. 17).

Moreover, girls continue to be disproportionately marginalized in SSA. Almost 12 million girls never enroll in school in this region (UNESCO 2010, p. 60). Therefore, the present approach of education failed to achieve the MDGs (2 and 3)<sup>2</sup> or to fulfill the constitutional assurance to widen free and compulsory education to all children. So it is necessary to pinpoint why education goals failed to achieve the desired success in the developing countries, though, a number of universal steps initiated in education development.

This paper will discuss some failure of EFA and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in primary education which has failed to provide education as a development tool for a developing country. Hitherto, education is full of dissatisfaction and anticipation in the developing countries of the world.

At first, it will also highlight the background of EFA and will discuss concisely how EFA was generated and how global geopolitical dimensions influenced MDG agreement. After that it will discuss the factors which are appearing as the obstacle for educational development in these regions like role and objectives of education aid, new geo-politics in education after 9/11, flaws of new re-conceptualized education policy, dominant education approach and the overall ambiguous meaning of MDGs.

### Methodology

The present study is based on the review of secondary data to assess the background of the EFA and

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<sup>2</sup> MDG2: Achieve universal primary education, and MDG3: Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education.

education goals in MDGs as well as find out the obstacle factors for the primary education development in the Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA) and South Asian countries which collected through content analysis method.

To analyze the arguments, McCowan and Unterhalter (2015) "Education and International Development: An Introduction" provided the starting point of this review and complemented by Tomaševski (2006) "The State of the Right to Education Worldwide: Free or Fee".

### **Finding and Discussions**

#### **Geopolitical Interest and EFA (1945-1980)**

After Second World War, geopolitical and inter-state relationships shaped the universal commitment to education. Formal schooling was regarded as the most significant way of cultural export of colonial power which was leading to the widespread institutionalization of educational systems as part of the common apparatus of emerging nation states.

After ending of colonial rule, education remained deeply implicated in the neocolonial relationships between Western countries and post-colonial societies where educational cooperation was emerged as one of the effective way to enhance geopolitical and economic ties (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015). Education was also increasingly viewed in the Western world and in newly independent colonies as a significant contributor to economic development and growth. Thus the universal commitment to education for all started in the years between 1945 and 1980 with a regime of actors and activities (*ibid*). A wide network of actors and actions concentrated on education for development (Mundy 2002, 2006) which was shaped both by demand raised from newly independent governments and by the geopolitical interests of donors.

It also included the normative approach of the predominantly Western hegemony of the world order (*ibid*). The new regime was dominated by many small to medium and short-term bilateral efforts - where donor nations have the geographical focus on former colonies or regions due to geopolitical significance and economic interest. So donor countries might pick according to their interest.

Moreover, the diffuse nature of the educational-aid regime also played a significant role in primary education which is fractious. Consequently, this fractious educational activity maintained a very loose coupling between word-craft commitment and practical activities. The education for development regime was constructed primarily around flows of aid which helps international organizations to emerge as policy entrepreneurs. Policy dominated by 'official actors' like multi-lateral organizations such as UNESCO, UNICEF and World Bank with non-government actors, international humanitarian organizations also involved within the regime (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015, p.53).

Therefore, coordination of bilateral education for development activities has failed which has taken in last four decades (1660 to 1990s) at the global level because most of the education aid was focused at levels beyond primary education (McCowan 2013). All these activities were primarily organized around bilateral intergovernmental relationships with the geographical focus.

In addition, education is also used as an instrument for disparagement of indigenous cultures during the post-colonial development. In term of alternatives contraction - decolonizing education - which means education, is a process of learning to read the world through other eyes (Andreotti 2011).

In contrast, the notion of a universal right to education figured strongly in the international conversation during this period but after the breakdown the Soviet Union in the year 1989 and fiscal difficulties faced by Western states, education turned in a new dimension (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015). The Western world tried to adjust these challenges with international economic integration - which lead to a steeper decline in aid for education (Lewin 2007).

The cavity between rhetoric and reality in the implementation of EFA became particularly acute in the 1990s. Despite efforts to cultivate peace through education - the issues of global poverty and inequality were sidelined. The market-led liberalization programs advocated by WB and the UN promoted human development model also frenzied this issue (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015, p.33, 55). So from the beginning, international big powers have an intention to use education as an effective instrument to establish their dominance all over the world.

#### **The new geopolitics of development in education after 9/11 incidence**

Security agenda is increasingly influencing the development policy and practice. In this regard, education is emerging as a central component in the development policy and producing a variety of challenges and dilemmas for development agencies, NGOs, practitioners and academics working field.

Using aid as a political weapon to prompt policy change and using education as a medium of socializing target people to accepting Western and capitalist hegemony (Altbach and Kelly 1978; King 1991). This is mostly disturbing as it comes at a time when the effectiveness and utility of international aid is being questioned from a range of different perspectives as well as a period where the high costs of the global financial crisis are prominent to a careful reexamination of budgetary priorities amongst the major bilateral donors (IMF 2009). So in numerous ways, development aid has been always politicized in the developing countries.

During the Post-World War-II period aids allotted largely depending on a country's distinct position in the great Cold War confrontation (Lundborg 1998). Critically, the geography of aid was focused on political alliances rather than perceived the humanitarian need. Since the end of the Cold War - the effects of overall development aid was very much visible, and then a shift of focus experienced in the development and education policy towards the least developed countries and population groups.

This shift led to an increasing focus on SSA and increased effort to expand the coordination of international development policy between major donors which culminated in the EFA and MDGs objectives (Novelli 2010b, Mundy 2002, 2006). Moreover, the post-9/11 atmosphere has elevated this process of politicization.

The United States and other Western powers have prioritized concerns over terrorism and sought to integrate all other attributes of government policy under this overarching objective. Therefore, it developed a critical globalization approach in the context of education and conflict (Novelli and Cardozo 2008; Novelli 2009). Though, the relationship between education and the new dimension of geopolitics - the war on terrorism does not stop the worldwide bloodshed.

Moreover, education aid is being targeted at strategic locations in the Post-Cold War World which played a spirited instrument in the hearts of the battle. Investment in less developed countries education systems also served as a sweetener for cooperation in other domains. The increasing aid flows to South Asia and Africa represent the example of flowing aid to education in Post-9/11 which is occurring in parallel with the development of US military bases. United States warlike development used as launching pads of military activities in Afghanistan, Somalia, Rwanda, Sudan and Iraq (Novelli 2010a).

Indeed it is needed to be observed whether the objectives of education aid to poverty eradication or counter-terror -are both concepts mutually complimentary? Or donor countries will be given equal priority and importance on the military and national security interest determination, as in the Cold War. Hence, post-9/11 world has also proved that donors do not prioritize development in education (Novelli 2010b).

So, Western donors often used education as development block but in reality, they are using education to infiltrate their own interest and ideology in the developing countries.

#### **The new re-conceptualized education policy**

Finally, the international community realized disappointment to accomplish the educational goals in the conference in the 1990s, at the World Conference on EFA at Jomtien, Thailand (Chabbott 2003).

Then the international conferences on EFA has apprehended at Jomtien and Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 (UNESCO 2000) - all participating countries and development agencies committed to universalize primary education for all children (MDG 2) and promote gender equality (MDG 3) by 2015 (UNESCO 2000; Little et al. 1994). Significant changes have seen in commitments to deal with global poverty and inequality which based on liberal egalitarian development theory (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015, p.35). Under this theory, education treated as a basic needs and human rights and it is respective country's government responsibility to provide free education for all (*ibid*). Furthermore, education is considered as the constitutional guarantee as well as global obligations to distribute educational opportunities to all in the society which will enhance human capabilities (Tomaševski 2006).

In this respect, with good aim, the widely endorsed Dakar framework established a more expansive set of global education goals but the reality is different. In fact, the new consensus of educational development is re-establish the cordial relationship between neo-liberal and pro-economic approached in the globalization which legitimated by IMF and World Bank (Mundy 2006; McCowan 2013).

At this point, development was also shaped by post-colonial political events in the developing countries because neo-liberalism began to hold lean with a strong message about the free market commodity, state bureaucracy and more integration into the world economy. In addition, the European Union and its welfare state capitalism along with market oriented transformation in China also played a significant role in this esteem (Noël 2005, p.15).

The post-2000 agreement on development encouraged both internal and external trade and simultaneously stimulated investment in health and education (McCowan and Unterhalter 2015, p.57). Besides private sector organizations, the new bilateral donors form the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and other emerging economies also took place in the MDGs (*ibid*).

It showed the remarkable growth of effective transnational organizations and networks in the new regime. The new international development agreement also backed up new ways where efforts made to hold national governments of the SSA and South Asian countries to account their development commitment. Initially, the World Bank (WB) did not have any lending policy for education which associated with private rates of return.

In the year 1960, UNESCO realized that policy need to be changed because investment in education is crucial for economic growth- which leads to WB to engage in developing integrated research policy on education and international development (Jones 2006; Unterhalter 2014). The right to compulsory and free education is globally announced as a global commitment but common aim of powerful global

organizations is to provide aid as a loan or in shape of development cooperation in the developing countries (Unterhalter 2014). It seems, WB has supported the user free education for all but took no attempts so that it could make a difference in the education system in the developing countries such as debt relief (Tomaševski 2006).

In addition after the oil shocks in 1970 and the debt crisis in 1980, the WB has used its economic power to promote structural adjustment and forced the government to cut their expenditure in the SSA and South Asian countries (Lewin 2009). Consequently, WB policy has introduced both direct and indirect school fees in these regions. For instance, primary school enrollment is very high in many SSA like Ghana, Tanzania (Unterhalter 2014, p.181) but the children dropped out from the school after a certain period and failed to complete their education due to school fees (Tomaševski 2006, Unterhalter 2014).

In the developing countries - poor families are struggling for their sustainable level of income and cannot afford both direct and indirect school fees for their children. Afterwards when situation bounds poor parents to take responsibility for paying school fees and other costs, then they stop sending their children to schools due to acute economic constrained (Sen 2003, Tomaševski 2006). In Asia and the Pacific regions - 45 percent of the world's children never attend school due to fee-based education - where the largest numbers are from Bangladesh, India, China and Pakistan. Over 30% children of SSA countries have also remained out of school for the same reason (Tomaševski 2006).

Thus, different types of school fees and its consequences demand query that how could education cost ensured the free and compulsory primary education for all children? According to human rights outline, the government should be made education available, reachable, adaptable and acceptable to an individual (Tomaševski 2005).

But in reality, the United States and World Bank has denied accepting education as a universal human right, hence pressurized governments to transfer education cost on families and parents (Tomaševski 2006). Therefore, WB's regressive ideology has thrown away the law and exercise of free and compulsory education. Consequently, education converts as a priced commodity in these regions.

School fees also affect to achieve the of goal gender equality in MDGs because education depends on parent's investment decision in the developing countries. For example, in Bangladesh, female child marriage imposes the financial burden to their parents which give them an impression that investment in female child education may not be beneficial for them (Rahman et al. 1999). Moreover, Girls are in the more disadvantaged position in education than boys in those countries. In South Asia and SSA, girls are highly marginalized in education where 83% girls are out of school - which is discriminated by their parents (Fentiman et al. 1999; Tomaševski 2006; Romaine 2013). It shows how the cost of education affects the right of female education both in access and accomplishment

### **The mainstream approach to education at present**

From the beginning, bilateral international donors focus is determined by their national political priorities in the SSA and South Asian countries. Therefore, education right is affirmed but yet denied within the international community rather they focused on their personal mission. As a result, the numbers of children start school but could not complete the basic cycle of education in these regions.

Indeed WB and international donors are trying to get closer to developing countries economic growth with developed countries through education (Abadzi 2004) rather education for development - which also serves the interest of neoliberalism. Herein, WB, political and dominant elites are trying to control people's lives through education and educator.

Additionally, in the SSA and South Asia, education approach is descriptive in nature - where teachers as narrators which leads the students to memorize without thinking of the described contents. The contents of education whether it's related to values or reality - everything is the part of narration to become lifeless and fossilized. This processes of education as "banking" concept of education - where both teachers and students are playing the role of depositors and depositories respectively (Freire 1972, p.53). In fact, human activity starts with learning, dialects of reflection and actions; it cannot be reduced either by verbalism or activism. Nevertheless, this system destroys the distinctive capacity of creative thinking of people and transform into the structure according to the western donors' interest.

Besides language is another significant issue and is the pivot on which educational development depends but MDGs explain nothing about the role of language (Romaine 2013). Yet education is delivered mainly in international language at the expense of local vernaculars. The international donor agencies are preparing syllabus and curriculum in the foreign language where they do not consider the respective countries political, social, economic and cultural context. It is believed that students' ability to comprehend learning in a foreign language is more limited than mother tongue. Then again limited and insufficiently instructional time in the schools is the hallmark of the pedagogy of the poverty in the developing countries (Abadzi 2004, p.273). Hence, poor children may fail to acquire the fluency and vocabulary needed to deal foreign language within limited instructional time.

In this situation, the meaning of MDG-2 and MDG-3 are ambiguous and also overlapping each other. Because these MDGs goals cannot be achieved in isolation nor it is possible to meet the targets without improvement in overall quality of education. For example, MDG- 2 involves an input measure for

education and enrollment rates, but explain nothing about the actual outcome of education (literacy, completion rates, employment success and human capital). So simply design measures for boosting school enrollment without increasing resources and improving the capacity of schools to deal increased enrollment, would not be able to achieve much success.

On the contrary the, presence of crime and violence in and around the schools, Poor school infrastructures, large size class and non-availability of learning materials, unavailability of trained and skilled teachers are also important factors for not achieving the desired goal on education. Therefore, developing countries failed to meet MDGs on education which are not only hurting the well-being and economic prospects but also compromised the progress on overall development including meeting other MDGs (Klasen 2005).

At present, World Bank operation has the dual focal point- to assist SSA countries to achieve universal primary education along with help to build skill human capital to compete in the today's knowledge-driven global markets (Aslam and Rawal 2015). Developing human capacity and capability through education will helps donor countries to establish their foothold more strongly in the globalized world. Besides the rate of return was significantly higher in primary education which placed a stronger emphasis on the 'quantity of schooling' development (Unterhalter 2014, p.178) rather ensuring quality education. Therefore education and international development set at an intersection of global, political, local institutional and organizational structures in the EFA and MDGs which brought a wide range of economic, political and cultural development miseries.

Although EFA and MDGs aim to poverty eradication as well as ensure higher economic growth in the developing countries through educational access. However, it is unclear how these changes are occurring with expanded education access.

### **Conclusion:**

From the above discussion, it is clear that EFA and MDGs have failed to provide appropriate educational development framework in the developing countries. In fact, education is not limited merely to the children sitting in classrooms and acquiring skills. Education is far more universal and complex than the suggested usual international discourse in terms of both input and output.

Though, the rights-based approaches have gained prominence in the Dakar World Education Forum in 2000 that stressed on equitable access to reasonable quality of education. In reality, it is denied by large proportions of the population and reproducing inequality of access to education in the developing countries of the SSA and South Asian region.

From the beginning, education is victimized by donor countries geopolitical and economic interest - focusing their own missions and also re-conceptualized the educational goals according to their strategies. Education aid is targeted and shaped on the basis of the geopolitical interest of the donor countries and international organizations. Even international donor agencies preparing syllabus and curriculum in the foreign language where a number of issues ignored such as foreign language barrier, the economic and social condition of parents, limited and insufficiently time, unavailability of trained teachers, etc.

So, it is important to modify education goal but before that previous failures need to identify and necessary steps to be initiated in light of previous failure to ensure the development of education. Though the 'post-2015' concepts of SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) focused on economic, human and social development but if SDGs are also with the spirit of MDGs which is merely a function of sending a child to school, then achieving desired aim of SDGs would be impossible.

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