

Bangladesh

Civil Society Participation and the Governance of Educational Systems in the Context of Sector-Wide Approaches To Basic Education

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Executive Summary

Bangladesh has gone through cycles of democracy and military rule since its independence from Pakistan in 1971. The current political landscape is a parliamentary democracy plagued by confrontational politics and poor governance (CIDA, 2003). Despite this volatile political situation, the World Bank (2005) notes strong economic performance, with annual GDP growth averaging 5 percent, although half of the population continues to live under the poverty line (UNDP, 2005). The country is ranked 139th on the UN's 2005 Human Development Index.

Bangladesh has a long history of civil society activity, shifting between a focus on political activism and a social development agenda (Zafarullah and Rahman, 2002). Despite a large and diverse civil society, the literature focuses on domestic NGOs as the main actors in civil society. Approximately 2000 NGOs registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs are currently working in development, 1882 of which are registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau to receive foreign funding (World Bank, 2005b). NGOs receive approximately 25% of total aid to Bangladesh (World Bank, 2005b), about 85% of which is given to the ten largest NGOs (Lewis, 2004).

Universal primary education is enshrined in the Constitution (Hossain, 2004) and the formal education system saw impressive expansion throughout the 1980s and 90s (Hossain, 2004). However, education expenditure remains the lowest in the region at 2.2% of GDP (CEF, 2005). Gross primary enrollment is 97.38% (2003) (BANBEIS, 2005). Net enrollment is estimated to be 84% at the primary level (with gender parity) and 45% at the secondary level (UNDP, 2005) (the official government figure for NER is 87.34%). The Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) estimates that the combined un-enrolled and dropped-out population of primary aged children is approximately 5.83 million (2003). Education's share of the recurrent budget fell from 19.9% in 1998/99 to 18.1% in 2001/2002, although gains in government financing far outstripped increases in donor funding between 1990-2000. Total EFA primary program costs are estimated to be \$338.8 million US for 2006, of which \$122.1 million US will come from direct donor funding (EFA/FTI, 2004).

For many years, donors have directly supported the non-formal/NGO education sector, in particular the educational activities of BRAC, Bangladesh's largest non-formal education service provider, in order to reach un-enrolled children. Non-formal NGO-provided education represents approximately 10% of

enrollments in primary education and receives approximately 12% of all donor funding to NGOs (World Bank, 2005b). Ahmed and Chowdhury (2005) estimate that 500 NGOs offer their own unregistered non-formal education programs, focusing specifically on girls' education and hard-to-reach populations and reaching about 1.5 million students annually.

In 2003, Bangladesh developed a sub-sectoral approach to primary education. The main objectives of the Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II) (2003-2009) are to introduce national standards of quality, increase accessibility and rates of completion, ensure accountability and transparency, and to decentralize education management (MoPME, 2005). External doors have been steadily moving towards a coordinated sector support program based on the PEDP II. A donor consortium led by the Asian Development Bank and including the World Bank, NORAD, SIDA, CIDA, the European Council, DFID, the Netherlands, UNICEF, Aus-Aid and JICA has played a part in the evolution of the sub-sector program that strongly emphasizes the enhancement of government ownership and capacity to deliver universal quality primary education. However, the PEDP II has been criticized for neglecting the important and successful non-formal sub-sector, as well as for poor management of the plan and slow implementation.

Although MoPME has been somewhat apathetic towards government-NGO partnership, donor organizations have been encouraging government-led programs of support for the expansion of NGO-delivered non-formal primary schooling. A government managed NGO pooled fund was proposed by DFID, Netherlands and the EC in 2004 (CIDA, 2004). More recently, the World Bank launched the "Reaching Out of School Children" program (ROSC), to "fill the gap left by PEDP II by developing demand-side interventions" in the non-formal sector (World Bank, 2003:2). While this project is outside the sub-sector approach funded by donors, the World Bank considers ROSC to be consistent with and complementary to the PEDP II framework. Funds for this program will be channeled through MoPME to established NGOs. There are some concerns that conflict may arise between ROSC and PEDP II and that NGOs were not sufficiently involved in ROSC's design (ELCG, 2004). Some studies indicate that many civil society actors feel that international pressure for NGO-government partnerships acts to undermine social justice goals and the grassroots character of development NGOs in Bangladesh (Haque, 2004), and restricts the ability of NGOs to undertake advocacy work (World Bank, 2005b).

Bangladesh was the first country in the Commonwealth to develop a national NGO-EFA coalition (CEF 2005). The Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) acts as an advocacy body for education-providing NGOs, working closely with the sophisticated policy department of BRAC. CAMPE conducts research on basic education issues in Bangladesh, and is active in public engagement and policy dialogue. Its annual *Education Watch* reports have at times been controversial when they highlight government failure or contradict official statistics, but the reports are widely circulated and cited by donors and viewed by NGOs in other countries as a model for education NGO advocacy work. In fact, CAMPE has increasingly attracted donor funding, and is currently funded by the Swiss Development Corporation, the Netherlands, and NOVIB (CAMPE, 2005). CAMPE is a member of the Education Local Consultative Group, as well as the Global Campaign for Education and various regional education bodies.

Despite the success of CAMPE and BRAC, a considerable gap remains between NGOs and the government in terms of the former's ability to participate in policy discussions. It appears that the MoPME continues to view NGOs mainly as subcontractors rather than policy partners (Haque, 2004). MoPME, in particular, is viewed as having a history of anti-NGO sentiment, more so than any other government ministry, and seems to be more resistant to NGO collaboration and participation in decision-making. Thus, even though international organizations have been keen to reframe the relationship between government and NGOs as one of cooperation and complementarity, donors continue to engage in sub-sector financing of NGOs, as in the case of donor-pooled funds which provide direct budgetary support to BRAC's Education Programme. Despite donor initiatives, many studies suggest that government continues to disregard NGOs as partners in policy (Hossain, 2004, Lewis, 2004, Haque, 2004, Ahmed and Nath, 2004). BRAC itself has begun to focus more of its energies on changing its relationship with the ministries of education, moving away from primary service provision and direct advocacy and seeking towards greater influence through new initiatives on the margins of the formal school system such as the opening of preschools and the development of in-service teacher training programs. The aim of these initiatives is to move away from NGOs working in a parallel system toward "partnership" with the government to improve the overall quality of education in Bangladesh (Ahmed, 2005).

Overall, this desk study highlights many of the conflicts facing NGOs involved in education in the context of sector-wide approaches to aid. NGOs face pressure from bilateral and multilateral donors to work with governments, but even in a context where NGOs have a strong and effective tradition of policy analysis and advocacy, they find difficulty in gaining a strong voice in national policies. This may be confounded by sector support programs, which tend to position NGOs as subcontractors to government, and limit the amount of direct funding available to NGOs. The Bangladesh case has been unique among our cases because direct program support has been given to the NGO sector.

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List of Acronyms

ADAB	Association for Development Agencies in Bangladesh
AsDB	Asian Development Bank
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BNP	Bangladesh National Party
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (formerly)
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CEF	Commonwealth Education Fund
CIDA	Canadian International Development Agency
DFID	Department for International Development
EC	European Commission
EFA	Education for All
ELCG	Education sub-group of the Local Consultative Group
GNCC	Government-NGO Consultative Council
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
IDA	International Development Association (World Bank)
IDPAA	Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy (Proshika)
I-PRSP	Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan
JICA	Japan International Cooperation Agency
MoA	Ministry of Agriculture
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NGO-AB	NGO Affairs Bureau
NPA II	National Plan of Action II (EFA Plan)
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PEDP II	Primary Education Development Plan II
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan
ROSC	Reaching Out of School Children
SESIP	Secondary Education Sector Improvement Programme
SDC	Swiss Development Corporation
SIDA	Swedish International Development Agency

1. Background: The History and Political Economy of Bangladesh

Bangladesh is a South-Asian country bordered by India to the West, North and Northeast, Myanmar to the East, and the Bay of Bengal to the South. The partition of India by Britain in 1947 divided the continent along religious lines, thus grouping Pakistan and Bangladesh into one country despite thousands of miles between the two regions. East Pakistan separated from Pakistan after a violent independence war in 1971 and became the Democratic Republic of Bangladesh. The population of 136.6 million (UNDP, 2005) is approximately 88% Muslims, 10% Hindu, 1% Christian, and the remaining Buddhist or animist. Just over 1% of the population are indigenous people from approximately 30 ethno-linguistic groups. Annual population growth between 1975-2003 was 2.2% (UNDP, 2005).

With the overthrow of a military government in 1991, Bangladesh became a parliamentary democracy, yet the current political situation in Bangladesh continues to be one of great tension between the two founding parties, the Awami League and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). This on-going tension has left parliament largely dysfunctional (CIDA, 2003). Elections in 1991, 1996 and 2001, while marked by violence, were declared free and fair by international observers (CIDA, 2003). The BNP came to power in 2001 with 35% of the popular vote (World Bank, 2001).

Issues of poor governance plague the modern state. Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index has ranked Bangladesh as the most corrupt country for several consecutive years (CIDA, 2003). The state "remains weak in terms of citizen accountability, its capacities to provide social welfare provisions or ensure an independent judiciary, to collect taxes or to represent the interests of the poor" (Lewis, 2004:308). Furthermore, interest groups and opposition political parties frequently call 'hartals' or general strikes, resulting in violence and weakening formal democratic processes (World Bank, 2001). Zafarullah and Rahman (2002:1013) report a volatile political order in which "there is a lack of political consensus, weak legislative authority, unhealthy modes of political competition, undemocratic political party structure, political and administrative patronage, and weak local governance." This political environment has, according to the World Bank (2001:3), "bred violence in labor and student politics and contributed to an overall climate of lawlessness in which life and property are both insecure."

Despite this volatile political situation, the World Bank (2005) notes strong economic performance, with annual GDP growth averaging 5%. Yet major impediments to economic growth continue, including a rapidly growing labour force, frequent natural disasters, difficulties in exploiting natural resources and slow implementation of economic reforms.

Bangladesh's economy continues to rely heavily on small-scale agriculture, with two-thirds of the population employed in this sector (CIA, 2006) and recognition of its role in reducing rural poverty (MoA, 2005). Rice is the most important crop, but jute, tea, wheat, sugarcane, potatoes, tobacco, pulses, oilseeds, spices, fruit, beef, milk and poultry are also important (CIA, 2006). The main actors in the agriculture sector are individual land-holding farmers, share-croppers and landless day-labourers, although the Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) notes that the sector is currently undergoing a shift from subsistence farming into commercial farming for export to the European market. As a result, MoA is undergoing policy reforms to provide "greater scope and opportunities for private sector participation and a suitable environment towards promoting agro-business and investment" (MoA, 2005).

Although the energy (natural gas) and garment manufacturing industries are growing in importance due to foreign direct investment (projected to increase from \$470 million per year 1996-2000 to over \$750 million in 2001-2005), Bangladesh has been less successful in expanding its export base (World Bank, 2001). The reliance on ready-made garments for three-quarters of the country's export earnings is expected to result in medium-term economic uncertainty given that the Multi Fiber Agreement and Generalized System of Preferences has been phased-out (2005), leading to greater competition (World Bank, 2001). This may impact the 1.5 million jobs created by the garment industry, the vast majority of which are held by women. Remittances by Bangladeshi workers overseas are a major contributor to the economy, totaling \$2.6 billion in 2002, double the total amount of foreign aid received by the country (CIDA, 2003).

GDP 2003	\$51.9 billion US
GDP per capita 2003	\$376 US
ODA 2003	\$1393.4 million US
ODA as % of GDP 2003	2.7%
Net foreign investment inflows (% of GDP) 2003	0.2%
Remittances (2002)	\$2.6 billion

Source: UNDP, 2005

Bangladesh has the highest incidence of poverty in South Asia, and the third highest number of poor people living in a single country (World Bank, 2005). While half of the population continue to live under the poverty line, progress has been made in poverty reduction, with a 9% decline between 1991-2001 in both rural and urban areas. More than 75% of the population live in rural areas (UNDP, 2005), representing 90% of those living under the national poverty line (1998 estimates) (World Bank, 2001). Differential rates of growth in main industries account for the disparity between rural and urban populations, with agriculture making small gains while growth in urban industry grew by 20% per annum in the decade beginning in the mid-1980s (World Bank, 2001). The rural poor are handicapped by lack of diversification, seasonal fluctuations and natural disasters, low human capital and skills and limited access to assets, inputs and credit (World Bank, 2001). “Land ownership and education are key determinants of living standards in the country” (World Bank, 2001:2).

Bangladesh has been gradually decreasing its dependence on Official Development Assistance (ODA) and is considered a less-indebted country. ODA as percentage of GNP has fallen from 9.4% in 1990 to 2.7% in 2003 (CIDA, 2003; UNDP, 2005). Between the years 1998-2000, donors made large investments in agriculture, rural development, water, and transportation. Smaller investments were made in education and health. The top 10 donors are IDA, AsDB, Japan, European Commission, United States, United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, Canada and the Netherlands, with the first three contributing more than 50% of ODA (CIDA, 2003). Other bilateral donors include Sweden, Switzerland, and Kuwait. The International Fund for Agricultural Development, the European Union and various UN organizations are also active donors in the country (World Bank, 2001). ODA in 2003 was \$1,393.4 million US (UNDP, 2005).

There has been growing investment in the NGO sector on the part of donors: DFID (cited in Lewis, 2004) estimates that NGOs receive approximately 17% of aid to Bangladesh, while the World Bank

(2005b), adding grants and loans, puts this figure at 25%. A vast portion of the aid (85%) goes to the ten largest NGOs, including Proshika and BRAC, while half of the NGOs in the country do not benefit from this aid (Lewis, 2004:306). A breakdown of aid channeled to NGOs by sector reveals that health receives 31%, while the micro-credit and education sectors each receive 12% (World Bank, 2005b:38).

2. The Education Landscape in Bangladesh

The education system in Bangladesh was neglected during rule under Pakistan. Schools were largely established, managed and financed by communities (Karim, 2004). Limited progress was made during the post-independence period, although primary schools were nationalized by the government (Karim, 2004, Unterhalter et al, 2003). Universal primary education was one of the promises of the Liberation Movement and was enshrined in article 17 of the Constitution (Hossain, 2004; Government of Bangladesh, 2004). Despite this, the modest ambitions of the First Five Year Plan were never realized due to a lack of donor aid to the sector and the socio-political and environmental crises of the mid-1970s (Hossain, 2004, Unterhalter et al, 2003). As a result of continued public pressure and political will, the 1980s saw a gradual expansion of the education sector, with a greater focus on universal primary education, mass literacy and gender equity (Hossain, 2004).

These modest gains made in educational expansion set the stage for staggering growth in the sector and a whole-hearted adoption of Education for All goals in the 1990s (Ahmed & Chowdhury, 2005). Nineteen-ninety saw the passing of a compulsory education act “in order to implement the constitutional provision for free, universal and compulsory education” (Ahmed et. al., 2005). This period saw an increase in donor funding to the sector, increased household and community investment in education, and a significant increase in government spending for both primary and secondary education (Hossain, 2004, Unterhalter et al, 2003), such that “Bangladesh now boasts one of the largest primary education systems in the world” (Hossain, 2004:4).

Table 2: Education Funding

	1998/1999	1999/2000	2000/2001	2001/2002
Education’s share of recurrent budget (%)	19.9	17.7	18.3	18.1

Primary share of recurrent education budget (%)	44.5	46.5	38.1	45.1
	2004	2005	2006	
Total EFA primary programme costs (US\$ millions)	48.4	242.0	338.8	
Government Funding (US\$ millions)	31.0	154.8	216.7	
Direct Donor Funding (US\$ millions)	17.4	87.2	122.1	

Source: World Bank, 2005c

Aid to education (US\$ millions)		Aid to basic education (US\$ millions)	
1999	42.8	1999	32.2
2003	109.1	2003	91.6

Source: UNDP, 2005.

Education expenditure represents only 2.2% of GDP, the lowest spending of any South-Asian country (CEF, 2005). The Education for All National Plan of Action II (NPA II) calls for an increase in expenditure on basic education to 4% of GDP in 2003-2004, increasing to 10% by 2015 (MoPME, 2003). The jump in government spending towards meeting EFA primary goals between 2004 and 2005 (see table above) would suggest that this scenario is already beginning to change. Karim (2004:23) writes that “education now constitutes one of the largest items in both the revenue and development budgets and education’s share in the government’s total budget has also increased over time.” The Commonwealth Education Fund (2003:5-6) reports that “more than 90% of the revenue expenditure is spent in meeting teachers’ salaries and benefits, leaving very little for quality enhancing activities.”

Half of the financing for the primary education sector 1990-1995 was provided by donors (Hossain, 2004). Foreign aid to education increased steadily between 1990 and 2000, but this was significantly outstripped by gains in public spending in the sector (Hossain, 2004). Asian Development Bank is the lead coordinating agency for educational aid, and main donors to the sector include: Australia, Canada, European Commission, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UNICEF and World Bank. Donor coordination occurs through the standing sub-group on education of the Local Consultative Group (ELCG), consisting of 30 members from bilateral and multilateral agencies and civil society stakeholders who meet bi-monthly. The ELCG’s main priority areas are

- sharing of information about programmes and the financing of education for harmonization and collaboration, contributing to policy and strategy issues i.e. Education For All, Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) etc;

discussing relevant issues in primary education, non formal education, secondary education and higher education” (LCG, 2005).

Education Demographics

Since the 1980s the government has tried to implement universal primary education, yet the Education for All National Plan of Action II (MoPME, 2003:16) notes that “the sheer size of the target clientele of basic education is in itself a big challenge.” Over 17 million children are enrolled in the formal primary education system, and 11 million youth in the secondary education system (GoB, 2005). Gross primary enrollment was 97.38% in 2003 (BANBEIS, 2005). Net enrollment was estimated at 84% (UNDP, 2005) or 87.34% (BANBEIS, 2005) at the primary level and 45% at the secondary level in 2002/3 (UNDP, 2005). MoPME estimates that the combined un-enrolled and dropped-out population of primary aged children is approximately 5.83 million (2003).

The gender gap in primary education witnessed into the 1990s has been largely eliminated by the efforts of the government and NGOs. “In fact, girls have surpassed boys in enrollment and reduction in drop out” (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005:5). Despite 51.3% of secondary students being female, gender parity in education has not spread to vocational training or technical, professional or tertiary education (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005). Approximately one-third of students in degree colleges and less than a quarter of students in universities are female (GoB, 2005).

Despite initiatives such as the Food and Cash for Education Programmes, access and quality remain significant issues. One in five eligible students do not enroll in primary school and 40% of students enrolled in grade 1 do not complete a full cycle of primary education (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005, CAMPE, 2001). Those who do complete the primary cycle take, on average, 6.6 years to complete the 5-year cycle (CEF, 2005). Significantly, *Education Watch* (CAMPE, 2000) found that less than two percent of the students achieved competencies prescribed by the national curriculum for primary education, particularly in Math and English. One in three children in the formal system remain non-literate or semi-literate after 5 years primary school (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005; CAMPE, 2002). Other significant *Education Watch* findings include a lack of space for children in the formal system and private family expenditure on education which exceeds per student public expenditure (Ahmed and Nath, 2004). Significant disparities in access and quality remain between urban and rural schools.

It is noted that issues of access continue to plague the system regarding the poor, ethnic groups and those in remote locations (GoB, 2005). Estimates suggest that up to 50% of school-aged children from ethno-linguistic minority backgrounds do not have access or are not enrolled in primary schools in either the formal or non-formal sub-systems. Additionally, approximately 1 million disabled children are estimated to have no access to formal schooling, although there are limited NGO programmes which either target or enroll these children in the non-formal sector (MoPME, 2003).

Drop-out is also a significant issue at the secondary level. In 2002 the dropout rate was 18.7% in classes 6-8, 51.6% in classes 9-10, and 43.8% in classes 11-12 (GoB, 2005). The final secondary school exam, necessary to gain admission to higher levels, remains a major hurdle for students, as only 40% of students who take the exam pass (MoPME, 2003).

	Year	Statistic	Source
Gross primary enrollment rate	2003	97.38%	BANBEIS, 2005
Net primary enrollment rate	2003	84% / 87.34%	UNDP, 2005 / BANBEIS, 2005
Net secondary enrollment rate	2003	45%	UNDP, 2005
Completion rate (5 years primary)	2001	60%	CAMPE, 2001
Time to complete (5 years primary)	2001	6.6 years	CAMPE, 2001
Teacher-pupil ratio (government primary)	2003	1:66	BANBEIS, 2005
Teacher-pupil ration (non-registered NGO primary)	2003	1:32	BANBEIS, 2005

The Formal and Non-formal Sub-sectors

The education sector is divided into two sub-systems (formal and non-formal). The macro-level management structure of the formal education system includes two Ministries, a number of directorates and support organizations. Management is characterized by a high degree of centralization, “strong government control over parts of the system with absence of any public oversight over other parts, and lack of professionalization of management functions” (Ahmed et. al., 2005:20).

The formal primary and basic education system is governed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME). A separate Ministry of Education (MoE) oversees the secondary system, higher

education and religious education at all levels (MoPME, 2003). MoPME, first created as a division of MoE in 1992, was separated from the Ministry of Education and put under the Prime Minister's portfolio in 2002 in order to give primary education more prominence, but the reality is that the PM is too busy and the political advisors that have been appointed have not proven to be effective historically (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005). The Ministry of Education is responsible for policy and programme development, as well as legislation and regulations, concerning post-primary to higher education, including Madrasah, technical and vocational education (MoE, 2005).

In addition to the Ministries, management includes three Directorates of Education corresponding to the three levels of education. The Directorates are responsible for the administration and management of the formal education system, as well as for initiating, formulating and implementing policy changes (Ahmed et. al., 2005). From 1995-2003 a Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) oversaw government interventions in the non-formal basic education system (mostly in adult literacy), but the department was closed following reports of widespread corruption in contractual processes (World Bank, 2005b) and public criticism (Ahmed et. al, 2005). As of January 2006 a new Non-Formal Policy has been approved, although the content of the policy is unknown to the author. The Ministries and Directorates are supported by a number of organizations which help the implementing/planning organizations to work effectively for the achievement of educational goals (see Appendix A for a full description of roles and responsibilities in the education management structure).

The formal sector represents 87% of all primary institutions and enrolls approximately 93% of students (MoPME, 2003). Of this, 49% of the formal sector primary schools are managed directly by the government, with the remainder being subsidized in registered non-governmental schools, Madrasah schools (5% of enrollment) and English-medium private schools (less than 2% of enrollment) (MoPME, 2003). The non-formal sector is made of unregistered NGO non-formal schools (7-10% of enrollment) (Hossain, 2004, MoPME, 2003). Non-mainstream religious schools, such as Hindu, Christian and Buddhist, also operate in the country.

At the secondary level 98% of students are enrolled in schools managed by the community with government subsidization (Hossain, 2004, GoB, 2005). These schools operate under a regulatory

framework under the Ministry of Education. Approximately a quarter of these community secondary schools are Madrasahs (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005).

NGOs primarily provide services in the non-formal education sector, defined in Bangladesh as targeting students from poor households who have either dropped-out or never been enrolled in formal schooling. Approximately 500 NGOs offer their own unregistered non-formal education programmes (MoPME, 2003). One and a half million students have been serviced by the non-formal sector every year since the mid-1990s (Ahmed and Chowdhury, 2005), over a million of whom are enrolled in BRAC schools (World Bank, 2005b). The non-formal sub-sector is not regulated by the government, although many NGOs use competencies established by the government and government textbooks at the higher primary levels, and children are often mainstreamed into the formal system after 3 or 4 years in the non-formal system. The ability of the education system to expand and to reach poor children and girls has largely been due to the activities of the NGO sector (Hossain, 2004), which are internationally recognized for introducing innovation in non-formal approaches into primary education (Ahmed et. al., 2005). Despite the breadth and success of the non-formal sector, Ahmed et. al. (2005:16) note that the government has, so far, been reluctant to recognize non-formal education as legitimate primary education.

Education Planning

Public pressure for expansion of the formal education system has been an issue in every election since Liberation, and public demands are made to local politicians for increased education services (Hossain, 2004). At the national level, political parties debate and compete over educational issues, especially access and curriculum content; educational issues are a key issue in the government's legitimacy efforts (Hossain, 2004). The government has initiated many educational strategies in order to increase and improve the education system and created various development documents about education or including education as part of a targeted approach to development. These include an Education for All National Plan of Action II (2003), The Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II) (2003), the I-PRSP and PRSP (2005), and the Secondary Education Sector Improvement Project (SESIP) (1999-2005). However, Ahmed et. al. (2005:17) highlight the fact that, although the state has frequently appointed national education commissions and committees to develop education policies

and programmes, there is a history of inaction concerning educational policy statements confounded by aggravation of political divisiveness which has led to “skepticism about formal policy exercises.”

Planning is the shared responsibility of the planning departments within the Ministries and the Directorates, and the chief of the social sector in the Planning Commission. Major priorities for the education system include “fighting poverty, promoting sustainable development, addressing globalization challenges, and upholding quality in education” (Ahmed et. al., 2005). Despite recognition of these priorities, Ahmed et. al. (2005) argue that coordination is difficult without a long-term policy framework and that the mechanisms and processes for moving from these broad priorities into coordinated sector-wide programs and strategies with effective implementation are lacking. Development projects and the new sub-sector plan for primary education draw heavily upon external technical assistance (Ahmed et. al., 2005). In addition, the reliance of government on external donors for one-third of the annual development budget in education allows donors considerable leverage concerning the development of policies and strategies (Ahmed et. al., 2005).

Bangladesh does not have a national education sector plan, but has developed an Education For All National Plan of Action (NPA). The NPA was first developed after the 1990 World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, and sought to address issues in five programme areas: 1) early childhood care, education and development, 2) universalization of formal primary education, 3) non-formal basic education, 4) adult education, and 5) continuing education and lifelong learning (MoPME, 2003). A group of “expert” participants from academia, practitioners, NGOs and civil society were asked to contribute to the formation of the second NPA (2003-2015). The goal of the NPA II is

to establish a knowledge-based and technologically-oriented competent society and ensure every school age child has access to primary level institutions that provide all necessary facilities, continue in school to receive and achieve quality education and provide opportunities to pre-school children, young persons and adults to meet their learning needs in a competitive world, both in the formal and non-formal sub-sectors of basic education without any discrimination. (MoPME, 2003:23)

This goal is to be achieved through:

- Attendance of all pre-school aged children (3-5 years old) in ECCE programmes
- Enrollment of all primary aged children (6-10 years old) in either the formal or non-formal systems, and successful completion of primary schooling
- Adequate ability for all students to continue on to secondary education
- Meaningful learning opportunities for illiterate and semi-literate youth and adults

- Standardized quality basic education across all providers
- Gender equity in basic education for both learners and teachers
- Transparency and accountability in both the formal and non-formal systems
- Shared responsibility between the government and NGOs for reaching these goals
(MoPME, 2003:15-16)

Despite several years, the NPA has yet to be approved by the government.

While this National Plan of Action is not considered a sector plan, sub-sector plans have been created in order to meet the goals laid out in the NPA. MoPME has developed a six-year donor supported primary education sub-sector plan for the formal system, the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II), 2003-2009. PEDP II has 10 main objectives (MoPME, 2005):

- i) to introduce national standards of quality
- ii) to increase accessibility of all children
- iii) to increase enrollment, attendance, and rate of completion
- iv) to create a more learner-centred environment
- v) to integrate PEDP activities into MoPME and DPE
- vi) to decentralize education management and decision making
- vii) to strengthen the capacity of school management systems at all levels
- viii) to ensure accountability and transparency
- ix) to provide free textbooks and learning materials
- x) to strengthen the role of parents and the community in school management and support

PEDP II is supported by AsBD, World Bank, NORAD, SIDA, CIDA, EC, DFID, Netherlands, UNICEF, Aus-Aid, and JICA.

PEDPII has been criticized for being constructed largely by external donor consultants, and for ignoring the important role that NGOs play in education in Bangladesh. Consultations between the PEDPII donor consortium and NGOs (held separately from those held with the government) resulted in recommendations to learn from the successes of the non-formal education sector and to involve NGOs in the implementation of PEDPII, but the final document focuses on the formal system only.

Furthermore, implementation of the plan has fallen seriously behind. Management of the plan has been particularly problematic, with heavy dependence on foreign consultants and handicapped by a culture of highly centralized and bureaucratic decision-making even in matters of small details. National civil society actors are not included in any official review mechanisms, despite the fact that the issue of civil society participation is a frequent subject of discussion in the donor coordination meetings and in

donor-government dialogues. In the face of resistance from the government, donors are reluctant or unable to pursue the issue to a logical conclusion (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005).

More recently, the World Bank launched the “Reaching Out-of-School Children” programme (ROSC), to “fill the gap left by PEDP II by developing demand-side interventions” in the non-formal sector (World Bank, 2003:2). The World Bank considers this funding to the non-formal sector as a “transitional instrument” to help the country meet EFA targets while the government concentrates its efforts on strengthening the formal sector (World Bank, 2003:2). While this project is outside the sub-sector approach funded by donors, the World Bank considers ROSC to be consistent with and complementary to the PEDP II framework. Funds for this programme will be channeled through MoPME to established NGOs. There are some concerns that conflict may arise between ROSC and PEDP II and that NGOs were not sufficiently involved in ROSC’s design (ELCG, 2004).

The Poverty Reduction Strategy Plan (PRSP) includes issues of education under the broader category of human development. Quality education is listed in the medium-term strategic agenda of the PRSP. The PRSP primarily notes the importance of full implementation of government reform projects such as the PEDP II and the SESIP (GoB, 2005). It also argues for the importance of collaboration and partnership between government and NGOs in meeting education and poverty alleviation goals.

Issues in Basic Education

Primary education has consistently remained a priority of successive governments, yet Karim (2004:24) notes that “there is considerable disparity between the developmental needs and the basic form, content and orientation of the education system.” Infrastructure shortfalls, inaccessibility in rural areas, lack of teaching and learning materials, shortage of teachers and high teacher absenteeism are all issues requiring immediate attention (Karim, 2004).

As the education system continues to make quantitative gains, the quality of education arises as a major concern. Teachers’ capabilities, classroom size and availability of texts and learning materials all require attention (CIDA, 2003). Consultation workshops for the development of the PRSP made the following recommendations to address issues of quality in education: hire qualified teachers and provide in-service training, improve the student-teacher ratio, develop effective monitoring and

evaluation mechanisms, improve the capacity of School Management Committees (GoB, 2005). The recommendations also noted the need to “reduce the gap in quality of education between urban and rural areas, accord priority to technical and vocational education and make education more job-oriented” (GoB, 2005:30). Additionally, the NPA II notes that quality differs widely between primary implementing institutions and recommends standardization and increased monitoring (MoPME, 2003). More concerted efforts must be undertaken to reach ethno-linguistic minorities and disabled children who are currently excluded from both the formal and non-formal systems on a wide scale (CEF, 2003).

A study done by Transparency International Bangladesh (Karim, 2004) revealed serious issues in the governance of the education system which negatively impact educational quality and attainment. Although the education system in Bangladesh is supposedly free, surveys revealed that “teachers, the school management and government employees were major actors in incidences of corruption,” requiring students to “make unauthorized payments for admission into the schools, purchase of books, sporting events, promotion to higher classes, entertainment of officers from the Upazilla Education Offices, holding of religious events...and examination fees” (Karim, 2004:35-36). CAMPE’s 2001 *Education Watch* study found that 90% of parents report paying, on average, an annual amount of 1000 taka per child in extra expenditures. This figure represents 2% of the average household income in Bangladesh (CAMPE, 2002).

Professionalism and professionalization have been identified as important issues. Ahmed et. al. (2005:21) argue that personnel in government departments and support units are generalists within the civil service and are “subject to frequent rotation and other civil service regulations.” In my observation, professionalism is also an issue in the NGO non-formal sector. Training of a cohort of national professionals is required to generate innovative solutions to local educational issues and to reduce dependency on foreign consultants. Professionalization is also required in regards to research capacity. Ahmed et. al. (2005:15) note that “research capacity and culture in education remains relatively underdeveloped. Much of what exists is supported by non-governmental organizations” such as CAMPE, IED and BRAC.

The administrative structure of the education system is described as being highly centralized, and one of the recurring recommendations in the PRSP is the decentralization of the sector. Ahmed et. al. (2005:20) note that “the highly centralized political and administrative structure has a special implication for the education system, because the far-flung education network is more extensive and directly involves more citizens than any other public service.” The National Plan of Action II (MoPME, 2003:19) notes that “centralization of authority holds up appropriate and timely action at the field level, causing delays and waste of resources as well as creating clogs in the system and programmes.” The Commonwealth Education Fund Bangladesh (2005) notes that the centralized financial system results in schools being extremely limited in their ability to set budgets of manage themselves financially. In regards to secondary level education, decentralization is recommended in the PRSP in order to “increase authority and capacity at the zonal, district and Upazilla levels for effective planning, monitoring and inspection, audit, and academic supervision to improve the quality of secondary education” (GoB, 2005).

Finally, one of the largest issues in primary education is the lack of coordination between the different streams. Ahmed et. al. (2005:22) argue that “the overall organization and management of education show critical disjunctions and discontinuities.” The formal, non-formal, madrasa, and private English medium schools all work with different learning objectives and academic standards with little sharing of experience or learning, and there is “limited opportunity for horizontal movement of students, and no interaction among organizational authorities running these different streams” (Ahmed et. al., 2005:22).

3. Civil Society in Bangladesh

Civil society is not a new phenomenon in Bangladesh, but can be traced back to colonial times. Zafarullah and Rahman (2002:1013) write that “over the centuries, its features and focus have changed; sometimes it has acted with a political purpose, and at other times, with a social agenda.” They cite civil society as being at the forefront of “mass movements to establish rights to liberty, language, democracy, autonomy and self-rule” (Zafarullah and Rahman, 2002:1013). ‘Traditional’ civil society actors involved in these movements have been students, lawyers, journalists and cultural activists. Today the World Bank (2005b:11) defines civil society in Bangladesh as including:

(i) approximately 45,000 clubs, local-level organizations, religious organizations, foundations and development-oriented NGOs which are registered with the Department of Social Welfare (ii) national and local trade unions, professional and business associations and (iii) numerous local community-based organizations (CBOs), including savings, religious, community development or social welfare groups, many of which may be temporary and informally constituted.

Despite a large and diverse civil society, the literature focuses on domestic NGOs as the main actors in civil society, perhaps since NGOs are more organized, active and prominent while other actors are more diffused (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005). Bangladesh has a large and active NGO community that differs widely in terms of “size, structure, location and orientation (White, 1999). Approximately 45, 000 NGOs are registered with the Ministry of Social Affairs, although only about 2000 are estimated to be currently working in development (World Bank, 2005b). The World Bank (2005b) note that NGOs have a presence in over 90% of rural communities, reaching approximately 13 million citizens, and providing services in credit, health and education. 1882 NGOs registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau in 2004 to receive foreign funding (World Bank, 2005b).

International aid agencies have played a decisive role in the flourishing of Bangladeshi NGOs. The World Bank (2005b) notes that grants to NGOs averaged \$160 million annually 1990-1995, increasing to \$238 million annually since. The World Bank estimates that NGOs receive approximately 25% of total aid to Bangladesh (2005b). The absence of “heavy-handed constraints” by the government has also been influential (World Bank, 2005b:4). Indeed, the World Bank (2005b:53) argues that

a laissez-faire regulatory stance, an outdated legal framework and the lack of capacity of various regulatory agencies has provided considerable flexibility for NGOs to undertake new activities, expand their programs and diversity their funding sources, including entering into commercial ventures.

Many of the gains made in Bangladesh since Independence have been largely attributed to the work of its dynamic and innovative NGO sector. Indeed, it is recognized by many that “acting alone, the Government of Bangladesh cannot command the resources, personnel, administrative reach or expertise necessary to maintain progress on poverty reduction” (World Bank, 2005b:1). The PRSP discusses the important role of NGOs in strengthening such varied areas as “agriculture, education, health, micro-finance, safety nets, nutrition, local governance, anti-corruption, and access to justice” (World Bank, 2005b:4). A move from competition to increased collaboration between the government and NGOs began in the mid-1990s with the transition to a democratically elected government, but this

partnership remains problematic (Haque, 2004, White, 1999). Among other issues to be discussed here, White (1999:308) argues that “the rise of NGOs as the agents of development par excellence has been achieved at the cost of the legitimacy of the state.”

The transition from “traditional” to “newer” forms of civil society, such as NGOs and pressure groups, saw a separation between the NGO sector and wider society. White (1999) states that the NGO sector has become increasingly autonomous from civil society as it moves away from grassroots development and becomes increasingly professionalized and dependent on donor funding. In addition, the public have at times viewed NGOs as being self-interested and accountable only to donors (Lewis, 2004). Lewis (2004) notes that there has been considerable public debate in the media concerning the role of civil society and its origins as a national or foreign concept. White (1999:311) argues that this public debate often “swings between extremes and seem to feed on misinformation.” Violent conflict has erupted in the past between NGO staff in rural areas and local religious groups (Lewis, 2004). “From the mid-1990s this began to change, with the ... efforts of NGOs such as Proshika to seek a higher public profile and to build alliances with women’s organizations, the media, trade unions and political groups.” (Lewis, 2004: 309-310). While most sectors of society are now supportive of the work of NGOs, the recent movement of some NGOs into income-generating activities has tarnished their image somewhat in public opinion and private business circles (World Bank, 2005b).

White (1999) notes that most NGOs in Bangladesh claim to represent ‘the people’ instead of adhering to explicit ideological allegiances. Despite strong patriarchal norms, women are overwhelming the largest beneficiaries of NGO programming and advocacy initiatives in Bangladesh (World Bank, 2005b). Hossain (2004:19) argues that “it is most useful to understand this group as representing the values of a non-party, pro-poor section of the elite: secular, progressive and focused on poverty reduction and gender equity outcomes.”

Civil Society – Government Relations

The state’s relationship with civil society is very complex and at times contradictory. Hossain (2004:19) notes that “the state has displayed a tendency to move between giving NGOs latitude and support, to denying them a legitimate role and seeking to control them.” White (1999:308) notes that “the mythic opposition of state and NGO reflects real struggles to establish themselves as the

legitimate voice of the Bangladesh people” in order to gain legitimacy and rights to aid money. The government sometimes sees NGOs as being favoured by donor support and feels they are lacking in accountability (Mia, 2004). They are also concerned about the involvement of NGOs in political activities and increasing involvement in income-generating activities (World Bank, 2005b). White (1999:313) argues “there is also without a doubt both envy and distrust amongst higher government officials of the economic resources and increasingly political influence wielded by senior NGO leaders.” Interestingly, friction between NGOs and the government is reportedly often “smoothed by the close personal relationships between senior officials and NGO leaders, facilitated by their mutual membership of a close-knit national elite” (World Bank, 2005b:5).

The government, with support from donors, created the GO-NGO Consultative Council (GNCC) in 1996 in order to “build complementarity between the government and NGOs” (Lewis, 2004:300).

The GNCC consists of both government and NGO representatives, and functions as a forum for dialogue between government agencies and NGOs in order to increase interaction, create greater mutual understanding, and promote collaboration between the two partners. It also helps identify the main impediments to the GO-NGO collaboration in Bangladesh and formulates a framework for involving NGOs in the government’s development policies and projects. (Haque, 2004:277)

The Association for Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) was the apex body of local, national and international NGOs involved in development activities, and played a role in self-regulating the sector. It also worked to create an atmosphere conducive to government-NGO partnerships (Haque, 2004). It became largely defunct in 2002 when some NGOs felt the need to distance themselves from the head of the apex body, who was also the leader of Proshika, when conflict between Proshika and the government threatened to negatively impact the whole NGO sector (World Bank, 2005b). It has been replaced by the Federation of NGOs in Bangladesh, an umbrella group spearheaded by BRAC in 2004 in order to improve government-NGO relations, with the aim of becoming a collective voice of NGOs in shaping their collaboration with government and donors. (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005).

Civil society in Bangladesh is regulated by a legislative framework that is described as both simplistic and complex in the literature. It is comparatively simplistic as it requires NGOs to deal with only one level of government (World Bank, 2005b). Its complexity lies in the fact that there are 12 laws

concerning the registration and regulation of NGOs (World Bank, 2005b). These laws contain numerous ambiguities and inconsistencies, and limit the capacity of NGOs to respond to needs “in a flexible and fully participatory way” (Banglapedia, 2005). This legislative framework is implemented by four government agencies: the Social Welfare Ministry, the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), the Ministry of Commerce, and the Ministry of Women and Children (World Bank, 2005b). The Ministry of Social Welfare has sweeping powers to suspend or dissolve the governing body of an NGO without recourse to judicial appeal (World Bank, 2005b).

Any NGO receiving funds from foreign donors must be registered with the NGO Affairs Bureau (NGOAB), created in 1991 as part of the Prime Minister’s Office. The number of NGOs registered by the end of 2004 was 1882 (World Bank, 2005b). The objective of NGOAB is to ensure quality and accountability within the NGO sector and was conceived as one-stop shop for NGOs. NGOAB activities include:

registering NGOs, processing and approving NGO project proposals, disbursing project funds, approving appointment and tenure or services of expatriate officials and consultants, coordinating, monitoring, inspecting and evaluation NGO programmes, reviewing reports and statements, realizing fees/service charges from the NGOs, and maintaining liaison with the NGOs and donor agencies. (Banglapedia, 2005)

Before foreign-funded NGOs register with NGOAB they must first “establish themselves under the various Acts ... that are administered by other agencies” (World Bank, 2005b:57).

Despite this seemingly complex legislative framework, regulation of NGOs is considered quite weak. There has been no recent reform of regulations despite the changing organizational form and role of NGOs, which are considerably different than when legislation was designed (World Bank, 2005b). One of the most important laws still in use dates back to 1861, and no changes to legislation have been made since 1982. A World Bank report (2005b:53) argues that “the legal framework is outdated, obsolete and in some cases not in sync with modern NGO regulatory concepts.” Regulations concerning the internal governance of NGOs, especially in regards to transparency and disclosure, are considered rudimentary (World Bank, 2005b). Furthermore, current legislation lacks “appropriate procedures for censure and appeals” (World Bank, 2005b:56).

NGOs whose primary goal is to provide services, such as BRAC, stress their complementarity with the state system and, as such, are rarely impeded in their work (Hossain, 2004). The degree of social development in Bangladesh is seen as being heavily influenced by the basic service provision of NGOs within a weak state with limited service delivery capacity (GoB, 2005). Indeed, since democratization in the 1990s, “the government has sought the involvement on NGOs in various projects which required nationwide personnel and logistical support that the government could not provide in the short term” (Mia, 2004:91), especially in regards to service delivery to hard to reach sectors of society. Haque (2004:275) argues that the main forms of partnership include “the joint implementation of projects by both partners, the subcontracting of public sector services to major NGOs, and the direct financial support of government extended to various NGOs.” Partnerships have been created in sectors such as banking, primary education, health, crop storage and training, to name a few (Haque, 2004). This environment of seeming cooperation and complementarity is thought to be highly influenced by donor expectations and prescriptions (Hossain, 2004; Lewis, 2004; Haque, 2004). Indeed, the World Bank (2001) notes that donors see partnerships between the government and civil society as essential for improving the quality of policies and institutions in order to achieve aid effectiveness.

These partnerships are not without their pitfalls. Haque (2004:283) argues that the NGO community has become increasingly polarized, the result being that government-NGO collaboration “has empowered NGOs themselves instead of empowering the people.” Haque further argues that there is a growing sense that these businesslike arrangements between government and NGOs undermine the “grassroots character and developmental mission” of civil society in Bangladesh” (2004:286). These collaborations may also negatively impact the scope of NGOs to undertake advocacy work as organizations dependent on official financing are less likely to risk criticizing the Government” (World Bank, 2005b). Even outside of formal contractual relationships, an NGO’s advocacy work and service delivery can be at odds.

The conflict arises because it is imperative for service delivery NGOs that they are granted permission – and as Government funding of NGO activity grows in importance, approval – for their activities. This contradiction meant many NGOs were hesitant to involve themselves in pro-democracy and related campaigns through the 1980s and beyond, and were correspondingly treated with mistrust by other parts of civil society; there remains lingering skepticism about the scope for NGOs to combine effective pro-poor advocacy with service delivery (World Bank, 2005b:31).

NGOs that are more vocal in the political sphere do indeed tread on more shaky ground. “Where the ‘political’ line is drawn is a matter of continual negotiation and conflict between NGOs, other civil society actors, political parties and the state” (World Bank, 2005b:31). The government has continually blocked the registration of a Bangladesh chapter of Amnesty International under the Societies Registration Act. In addition, educational programmes aimed at increasing political awareness are frowned upon (Mia, 2004). NGOs suspected of being politically aligned have provoked “annoyance and sharp scrutiny of NGOs suspected of playing a political role. These circumstances create division among members of the NGO community itself” (Mia, 2004). The current government has implemented measures to marginalize politically active NGOs it feels are sympathetic to the opposition or former regime (Lewis, 2004).

Increasing government concern with the perceived partisan political activity of NGOs (including accusations of electioneering and sedition) and financial irregularities recently resulted in proposed amendments to regulations concerning NGOs receiving foreign funding (World Bank, 2005b). The definition of ‘political’ activities is a grey area in current legislation. The suspension of funding to a few NGOs and the arrest of the leader of Proshika in 2004 resulted in strong public outcry and criticism, and the proposed legislation was withdrawn (World Bank, 2005b). These events prompted the Local Consultative Groups of Development Partners to commission a review of the legislative framework concerning NGOs in 2005. The review found that current legislation is among the most restrictive in the world (personal communication, Edmunds, 2005). NGOs accuse the government of relying on these legislative frameworks to “regulate and control rather than facilitate, support, and promote the capacity of NGOs” (Mia, 2004:90). The commissioned report recommended a process of full review of legislation and amendment based on best practices. The report was forwarded to the Government in June 2005.

Ahmed (personal communication, 2005) argues that “the single most serious obstacle to education reform is the relationship between political leaders and civil society.” What is most interesting regarding the government-NGO relationship is that NGOs are primarily seen as service providers and implementing partners, as opposed to policy discussants. While consultation often occurs between the two sectors (largely given the expectations of donors), it is seen as a formality that does not significantly impact government action (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005). The atmosphere is

perhaps best described as one of mutual tolerance, within which a general feeling of mistrust persists due to the production of reports by NGOs (such as CAMPE's *Education Watch*) which contradict official government statistics (Mia, 2004). Ahmed (personal communication, 2005) argues that "MoPME seems to view formal primary education as its own preserve, not to be shared with non-government actors. This attitude has led to expressions by some senior Ministry officials of anti-NGO sentiments, more so than in other government ministries."

NGOs and Advocacy

The late-1980s saw the beginnings of increased advocacy work on the part of civil society. The use of public interest litigation for civil liberty, environmental concerns and economic rights established itself as an important tool (World Bank, 2005b). Despite its continued use as an advocacy strategy, litigation has resulted in only a few "proactive policy changes," for example, legislation concerning violence against women, but rulings are often stayed through various means (World Bank, 2005b:34). Due to the aid agenda, the 1990s saw a shift towards advocacy around good governance issues (Lewis, 2004, World Bank, 2005b). A survey done of NGOs in 2003 reports that 42% were involved in advocacy or lobbying the Government within the previous year (World Bank, 2005b), but only 20% report lobbying for policy change (World Bank, 2005b).

Civil society organizations attempt to influence the formal political system indirectly through their mobilizing and advocacy work. Zafarullah and Rahman (2002) note that civil society is very active in mobilizing public opinion through seminars, debates, workshops, litigation, networking and media campaigns. Local governance is a key mobilizing issue. In addition, voter education has become an important NGO activity (Zafarullah & Rahman, 2002), and one where the definition of what is 'political' is quite grey. During the 1996 elections, the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) is said to have impacted voter turnout by conducting awareness workshops across the country (Lewis, 2004). One NGO, the Gono Shahajjo Sangstha, worked to have a landless member be a candidate in the local election, and was met with violence and resistance (Lewis, 2004). On a more negative note, Karim (2001, cited in Lewis, 2004:316) found that some NGOs "active in community-level lending activities used their influence to deliver votes to political parties."

Proshika was one of the first NGOs to institutionalize its advocacy activities (World Bank, 2005b). The Institute for Development Policy Analysis and Advocacy (IDPAA), was created in 1994 in order

to provide “systematic advocacy interventions for the creation of macro policy environment committed to the eradication of poverty in Bangladesh” (Proshika, 2004). Proshika conducted various advocacy activities by means of research dissemination workshops and media campaigns at the national level, and advocacy activities at the international level through involvement in the CIVICUS World Assembly. Research and advocacy campaigns related to policy have included:

- *Participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy: People’s Perspective*- a broad study meant to engage the poor, CSOs and NGOs in consultation about the PRSP in order to provide the government with input into the final PRSP document
- *Monitoring Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) from the Perspective of Interim Participatory Poverty Reduction Strategy and National Budget* – a document meant to identify the connections and contradictions between the I-PRSP, the national budget and the Millennium Development Goals; to examine the implementation of these strategies; to forward a coherent plan of action .
(Proshika, 2004)

While these campaigns were meant to offer interesting alternative policy statements, IDPAA has remained ineffectual in this regard. The studies were never completed due to “non-availability of funds” and “unavoidable circumstances” (Proshika, 2004) after the government suspended donor funds to Proshika due to accusations of partisan political behaviour.

4. Civil Society and Education

As noted above, NGOs form an important part of the education system in Bangladesh, constituting what is often referred to as a “parallel structure” in education (Unterhalter et al. 2003:90). NGOs have acted as implementing partners of government programmes, and have initiated their own non-formal education programmes serving 1.5 million hard-to-reach children annually. The Education for All National Plan of Action II (NPA II) argues that “the government, NGOs, broader civil society, the community and other stakeholders share the responsibility and work in conjunction to achieve the EFA national goals” (MoPME, 2003:16). Yet the role of NGOs in education has been largely relegated to service provision in a parallel system. NGOs and other civil society are not recognized as potential actors in PEDP II, and NGO schools are not recognized in official statistics. Moreover, the World Bank (2005b:28) notes that “coordination between Government and NGO education programs in primary education remains weak.” Archer (1994:225) writes that “there is no joint planning, no joint training, no sharing of materials, no exchange of experience.” For this reason, donors continue to give direct budgetary support to BRAC, the largest implementer of non-formal education programmes, through a donor consortium. (See Appendix B for a list of civil society players in education.)

Some of the larger NGO service providers, such as BRAC, have recently begun to focus more of their energies on changing their relationship with the Ministries of Education, moving away from primary service provision and seeking greater influence through new initiatives on the margins of the formal school system. These initiatives include opening preschools and the development of secondary in-service teacher training programmes. The aim of these initiatives is to move away from NGOs working in a parallel system towards ‘partnership’ with the government to improve the overall quality of education (Ahmed, 2005). The World Bank (2005b:28) argues that “this role as facilitator of better quality education is likely to yield greater results for larger numbers of people than if NGOs focused on becoming a direct provider of post-primary education.”

There is a dearth of information concerning an important group of civil society actors involved in education – teachers’ unions. Teachers’ unions at all levels are important stakeholders within the education system. Hossain (2004) notes that the vast membership of the teaching force (see table below) gives primary school teachers’ associations a considerable amount of power. Ahmed et. al. (2005:16) note that unions “play an important role in education development and policy-making,” although they fail to mention the nature of this role aside from the fact that successful implementation of programs and policies rests with teachers as front-line workers. Unfortunately unions have not come together to advocate around educational issues regarding teaching and learning, and instead focus their attentions on service terms and remuneration (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005). In fact, the plethora of unions at each level is encouraged and exploited by the political parties with which various unions are affiliated. Ahmed et. al. (2005:16) argue that “this rivalry has harmed the interests of teachers and has limited the prospects of playing a constructive role by teachers’ organizations in educational development.” Much more research is required to understand the structure, role and activities of teachers’ unions and organizations in Bangladesh.

Table 4: Number of teachers	
Government primary teachers	162, 114
Non-government and other primary teachers (registered and non-registered)	164, 255
Non-government junior secondary school teachers	28, 347
Government secondary school teachers	7, 323

Non-government secondary school teachers	170, 887
Total:	532, 926

Source: MoE, 2005

Civil Society and Advocacy in Education

NGOs are becoming increasingly involved in public engagement and advocacy surrounding educational issues. Hossain (2004) notes that a recent important development is the growing ability of civil society to pressure the government to improve the provision and quality of education. Research and advocacy capacity is high within many civil society/NGO organizations (*see* Appendix B).

One advocacy strategy which has been successful is the “Report Card” of the formal primary education system undertaken by Transparency International Bangladesh. This study revealed major issues of corruption at various levels of the primary education system. The organization then undertook an advocacy campaign aimed at the local, regional and national levels. The objectives of the campaign were to raise awareness about corruption at different levels in order to improve the quality of education at the primary level (Karim, 2004). Activities included press conferences, direct dissemination of the report to various education officials, creation of a list of targeted recommendations, and awareness building seminars with local peoples (Karim, 2004). Transparency International Bangladesh reports widespread promises of vigilance and small changes in practice, but hopes that “over a period of time such ‘questioning’ by an enlightened group of concerned citizens will help to increase the level of accountability of these public servants” (Karim, 2004:66). Yet regardless of the findings, the report notes that “the most important element [of the survey] was the spontaneous and eager involvement of concerned citizens. Without such involvement the project would have been undermined or sabotaged by the intransigence of the local bureaucracy/politicians” (Karim, 2004:63). We can therefore see this initiative as a successful example of civil society engagement in building community participation in and awareness of educational issues which will hopefully have a long-term impact on educational change.

Another example of civil society participation in public engagement and policy and advocacy work is the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE). Bangladesh was the first Commonwealth country to develop a national NGO-EFA coalition (CEF, 2005). Created in 1991, CAMPE is a 700 member

coalition which has ensured a voice for NGOs at the policy table. The purpose of CAMPE “is to raise public awareness, conduct advocacy and facilitate policy dialogue in favour of EFA” (Ahmed and Nath, 2004:2). The forum started with the support of individuals, but gradually attracted the participation of national NGOs, such as BRAC and Asanya Mission, which offered financial support in the early years. The high profile of the organization and its *Education Watch* reports (below) has since attracted external donor funding, and CAMPE is currently funded by the Swiss Development Corporation (SDC), the Netherlands, and NOVIB (Oxfam Netherlands) (CAMPE, 2005). Additionally, CAMPE is a member of the national donor coordination agency, the Education Local Consultative Group (personal communication, Ahmed, 2005).

CAMPE’s main objectives are to:

- Increase awareness of people of all classes about the importance of popular education in terms of literacy, democracy, human rights, gender, and environment.
- Establish and promote a nation-wide network and coalition of NGOs and civil society to achieve Education for All (EFA).
- Promote and support education programmes focusing on early childhood care and development, formal and non-formal primary education, adolescent education, adult literacy, continuing education and inclusive education.
- Strengthen, supplement and complement the primary and mass education programmes (both formal and non-formal) of government providing networking, liaison, coordination and facilitation services and technical assistance.
- Strengthen capacity of partner NGOs through providing technical assistance and other services.
- Advocate and lobbying to enhance NGO participation in educational policy making and other national and international educational activity/issues.

(CAMPE, 2005)

CAMPE is the secretariat of the annual reports entitled *Education Watch*. *Education Watch* was created after a civil society-organized National Conference on Universal Primary Education (1996), at which time participants identified the need for valid and reliable information for monitoring the country’s EFA progress, as well as for developing policies and plans (Ahmed and Nath, 2004). The aims of *Education Watch* are to:

1. Conduct periodic independent review of the state of primary and basic education through research, surveys and studies and publish annually a report on aspects of basic and primary education.
2. Disseminate the findings of the research to all stakeholders at various levels in order to enhance public awareness about education and promote public participation in educational policy dialogue.
3. Engage in advocacy in support of quality Education for All in the country. (CAMPE, 2005)

A number of committees guide and oversee *Education Watch*, including an Advisory Board, a Working Group and a Technical Committee (Ahmed and Nath, 2004). Committee members are drawn from professionals, researchers, academics, activists and government officials, although Ahmed and Nath (2004:2) note that “government officials in the committees, although included in their personal capacities, were generally not active.” (see Appendix C for a list of CAMPE council members.)

Significant findings of the *Education Watch* reports include (Ahmed and Nath, 2004:6-7; Ahmed, 2005):

- Collection of baseline statistics on enrollment, achievement, attendance, gender participation, etc..
- The overall poor quality of the primary education system
- Large urban-rural gaps in achievement and quality
- Large gaps between gross enrollment rates and net enrollment rates
- Households incur major direct costs which are higher than per student public spending
- Teacher training does not impact student achievement

Each *Education Watch* report is launched with a large media campaign and the presence of government authorities, including Education Ministers. Ahmed and Nath (2004:7) write that “the media has been highly responsive. The EW reports each year created a flurry of headlines, editorials, special feature articles and a public debate which help to make the public aware of the issues and influence public opinion.” A series of national and regional workshops and seminars are held following the launch in order to create space “for local functionaries and civil society groups to interact with the EW effort” (Ahmed and Nath, 2004:8) and to receive feedback from the local level. Recently, CAMPE has been challenged to provide more “user-friendly” versions of their findings for local grassroots use (Ahmed and Nath, 2004).

NGOs and donor agencies are the main consumers of *Education Watch* reports. Regarding the impact of the reports, Ahmed and Nath (2004:6) note that “*Education Watch* has established itself as an independent, alternative and complementary system of monitoring EFA.” Indeed, bilateral and multilateral donors often cite *Education Watch* findings and statistics, as does the PRSP report. Still, Ahmed and Nath (2004:7) argue that one of the weaknesses of *Education Watch* is that the “concerned ministry ... of the government has been critical about findings of *Education Watch* and has not used these sufficiently in policy development and programme planning.” Yet, Hossain (2004:20)

optimistically argues that “the high-profile nature of these reports, and the government’s tolerance of their role in this process, suggest that primary education is an area in which pressure on government to perform is accepted as appropriate or necessary.” Perhaps, Ahmed (2005) hopes, *Education Watch* and CAMPE are laying better ground for moving in a more positive direction toward full cooperation of civil society in policy discussions.

5. Final Thoughts: Civil Society and Educational Change

Overall, this desk study highlights many of the conflicts facing NGOs involved in the context of sector-wide approaches to aid. The space in which NGOs involved in education work is, for the most part, created of their own volition and with the support of bilateral and multilateral donors. The rudimentary and outdated legislative and regulatory framework within which NGOs function is characterized largely by a laissez-faire attitude on the part of the government, punctuated by periods of great political tension. As NGOs have increasingly turned towards a dual role in service delivery and advocacy, this tension has offered its own set of challenges and issues surrounding contractual arrangements, financial support, donor expectations, and the freedom of NGOs to provide services.

Despite the increasing work of NGOs in public engagement and advocacy, the government continues to see them primarily as service providers and very few opportunities exist for real participation and learning to occur between the two sectors. Although there are successful examples of government-NGO collaborations and more meaningful dialogue in sectors other than education, MoPME seems particularly apathetic towards shifting its relationship with civil society. Thus, the participation of civil society in the governance of education in Bangladesh has been largely facilitated by donor support for such participation. NGOs have been consulted during the PRSP process and in the creation of sub-sector education plans, yet Ahmed (personal communication, 2005) notes that donor-government-NGO consultations is seen as a formality that does not significantly affect policy discussions. The general atmosphere has resulted in the donor community neglecting broad civil society participation in regards to such activities as the annual PRSP review, despite their individual policy commitments to the contrary. Instead of sectoral cooperation, donors seem content to continue separate bilateral and multilateral support to the government and to large NGOs active in the non-formal sector, as can be seen by the World Bank’s ROSC project and donor pooled funding to BRAC. NGOs’ ability to claim

an active and meaningful seat at the policy table may be confounded by sub-sectoral support programmes which tend to position NGOs as subcontractors to government.

More research is required to paint a clearer picture of civil society's ability to impact educational change within sector wide approaches. A detailed examination of non-NGO civil society actors, including teachers' unions, and their activities and networks is necessary. Furthermore, it is necessary to gather more information concerning the disparities between what organizations and policy statements say in principle and the reality of the situation. Of particular concern are government documents, such as the PEDP II, which are often written by foreign consultants who are well versed in the appropriate language of partnership with civil society. Uncovering how "partnership," "collaboration," and "advocacy," are defined by different sectors and by whom, as well as how these terms are implemented, is essential.

What we do know about the large number of civil society organizations in Bangladesh and their ability to network and organize remains both fascinating and optimistic regarding their future capacity to impact change. CAMPE is an example of a particularly successful networking and advocacy structure which allows NGOs involved in education to influence public opinion, but their work continues to be officially disregarded by the government. They, and other NGOs, continue to develop in-house capacity to undertake rigorous educational research and prepare alternative policy solutions. It is hoped that increased public awareness and mobilization, as well as continued donor interventions, will result in the long-term transformation of the education policy atmosphere into one that allows a broad range of civil society actors to participate at the policy dialogue, programme design, and monitoring and evaluation levels.

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Appendix A

Table: Education Management Structure			
Organization	Role	Responsibilities	Works with:
Ministry of Education (MoE)	Administration, management of planning, except for primary and adult education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • allocation and oversight of functions of education managers at the directorates down to the district education officers • recruitment, selection, promotion, transfer, dismissal and disciplinary actions regarding teachers of the government-run high schools and colleges • selection of teachers for training abroad • inspection of education institutions managed directly or assisted financially by the MOE 	Directorates of Education (for planning activities) Directorate of Inspection and Audit
Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME)	Determines policy and implements development programs in primary and general adult education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mobilizing public and community support for compulsory primary education • overseeing the approval of the registration of non-government primary schools and their eligibility for receiving salary subvention for teachers • carrying out periodic national child and literacy surveys 	
Directorate of Primary Education (DEP)	Implementing policies and development programs, managing sub-sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • construction • repair and supply of furniture, supplies 	MoPME
Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education (DSHE)	Implementation of policies and development programs, managing sub-sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enforcement of academic standards of secondary and college education • recruitment of teachers and non-teaching employees of the government schools and colleges, (decision-making lies with MoE) • payment of salary subvention 	MoE
Directorate of Technical Education (DTE)	Planning, development, coordination and supervision of technical and vocational education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess the needs of skilled manpower • prepare policy guidelines for the MoE on consolidation, improvement and expansion of technical and vocational education and training • prepare annual budget proposals for institutions under its purview • allocate funds from the approved budget, and supervise its implementation. 	MoE
National	Developing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • review curricula and introduce changes 	MoE, MoPME

Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB)	curricula and publishing textbooks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate curricula and textbooks • prepare textbook manuscripts • approve textbooks • publish and ensure distribution of textbooks (increasingly privatized) 	
Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education (BISE)	Accreditation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accreditation of non-government secondary education institutions • administration of secondary level examinations 	Autonomous
National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE)	Training and research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • training Primary Training Institute (PTI) instructors and primary education personnel • conducting PTI examinations • research activities 	Autonomous
National Academy of Education Management (NAEM)	Training	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • foundation training for civil service positions • management training for heads of institutions 	
Madrasa Education Board	Manages sub-sector from primary to tertiary levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • deciding curricular content • setting and enforcing academic standards • conducting public examinations • providing a regulatory framework for academic management of the madrasa education system 	MoE, DSHE
Technical Education Board	Standards-setting and assessment of formal vocational and technical training (public and private)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conducting examinations • inspection of institutions • development and revision of curricula and syllabuses for courses 	DTE
Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS)	Developing and maintaining education database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • produces annual publication • periodic specific surveys • supporting MOE tasks requiring large-scale data processing • aims to develop its data base and enhance its analysis capacity to serve as an effective EMIS for the MoE 	MoE Receives stats from DPE

Source: Ahmed et. al., 2005

Appendix B

Main NGOs with a stake in education		
Type		NGO Name
International Organization		UNICEF
International NGOs		ActionAid
		Plan Bangladesh
		Save the Children
National NGOs	Service Delivery NGOs	
		BRAC
		Proshika
		FIVDB
		HEED Bangladesh
		Dhaka Ahsania Mission
	Education NGO Network	CAMPE
	Research Organizations	CAMPE
		Proshika
		Institute of Education and Development (BRAC University)
		Bangladesh Foundation for Education Development
		Foundation for Research in Education Policy and Development
		Power and Participation Research Centre
		ActionAid Bangladesh
		Centre for Policy Dialogue
		Research and Evaluation Division (BRAC)
		Dhaka Ahsania Mission
Faith based groups	Service Delivery	Seventh Day Adventist
		Baptist Mission Bangladesh

Appendix C

CAMPE Council Members 2004		2005
Portfolio	Name	Organization
Chairperson	Mr. Fazle Hasan Abed	BRAC
Vice Chairperson	Mr. Kazi Rafiqul Alam	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
Vice Chairperson	Ms. Shamsi Ara Hasan	Gono Shahajjo Sangstha
Treasurer	Mr. Md. Azizul Haq	BACE
Member Secretary	Ms. Rasheda Choudhury	CAMPE
Council Member	Mr. A.N.M. Eusuf	CAMPE
Council Member	Mr. Zahin Ahmad	FIVDB
Council Member	Mr. Shafiqul Chowdhury	ASA
Council Member	Mr. Kamaluddin Akbar	RDBS
Council Member	Dr. Manzoor Ahmed	BRAC University
Council Member	Ms. Aroma Dutta	PRIP-Trust
Council Member	Mr. Sheikh Halim	VERC
Council Member	Mr. Harun Ur Rashid	PROSHIKA
Council Member	Mr. Thomas D. Costa	Caritas Bangladesh
Council Member	Mr. Ahmed Tazul Islam	CCDB
Council Member	Mr. S.A. Wahab	Gono Unnayan Prochesta
Council Member	Mr. Shafiq Khan	Gono Shasthaya Kendra
Council Member	Brig Gen (Rtd.) Aftab Uddin Ahmad	UCEP
Council Member	Mr. Harun Ar Rashid Lal	Solidarity
Council Member	Dr. Khurshid Alam	CODEC
Council Member	Ms. Nasreen Pervin Haq	ActionAid Bangladesh

Source: CAMPE, 2005