ANALYSIS OF DIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH:

TO INFORM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STRATEGIES

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ACRONYMS

APSC	:	Annual Primary School Census
BANBEIS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BBS	:	Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
CHT	:	Chittagong Hill Tract
DPE	:	Directorate of Primary Education
ECD	:	Early Childhood Development
ECE	:	Early Childhood Education
EFA	:	Education For All
ESA	:	Education Sector Assessment
ESP	:	Education Sector Plan
FY	:	Fiscal Year
GDP	:	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	:	Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
HDI	:	Human Development Index
HIES	:	Household Income and Expenditure Survey
ICT	:	Information and Communication Technology
IWGIA	:	International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs
MICS	:	Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey
MoE	:	Ministry of Education
MoPME	:	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NER	:	Net Enrolment Ratio
OECD	:	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
SDG	:	Sustainable Development Goals
SEN	:	Special Education Needs
SWB	:	Sesame Workshop Bangladesh
UCEP	:	Under Privileged Children's Education Programmes
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	:	United Nations Children's Fund
WEF	:	World Economic Forum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As Bangladesh progresses in terms of macroeconomic and human development indicators, aspirations regarding access to quality education is increasing among the citizens. But education reform initiatives must consider the inequalities in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, and geographical location. This study, commissioned by Sesame Workshop Bangladesh (SWB), presents **a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic and cultural diversities in Bangladesh**, with the intention of informing any programs/policies aiming to cover Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the country.

It has been observed that experience of the learners at the schools and what they gain from the schools vary based on certain 'beyond school factors' such as demographics, histories and culture, and economic realities. Global experiences have also led experts to propose that addressing/managing learner diversity ought to be viewed as linked with an 'ecology of equity'. That is, **to ensure 'equity' the education system must acknowledge the 'diversities'**.

Income Dimensions of Diversity in Bangladesh
In Bangladesh, households still bear a significant share of the education expenses implying economic status (income) of households has significant impact on learner experiences within and outside the schools. For example, only 14.6 percent 3 to 5 years old children from the poorest households are attending ECE. And as the household income increases tendency to send children for ECE increases. The poor and rich gap further increases for higher education levels. For example, a learner from the richest household is 91 percent more likely to complete lower-secondary education compared to a learner from the poorest household. Almost 38 percent households across the country enjoys access to internet. However, below 9 percent of the poorest household have access to internet. Policy makers as well as ECE content developers ought to keep these realities in mind while planning to develop learning material to broadcast via internet.

Gender Dimensions of Diversity in Bangladesh
As per the latest Global Gender Gap Report 2020, Bangladesh has come up to the 50th position in the list by closing almost 73 percent of its overall gender gap. Of course, the country has achieved near gender parity in primary and secondary levels of education. Yet, there remains a lot of scope of improvement. It has been revealed that the boys are not only lagging in terms of enrolling into the schools, but also, they have a higher tendency of dropping out of schools (at both primary and secondary levels). It has also been revealed that reasons for children dropping out of schools are significantly gendered. For example, the third largest reason for girls dropping out of schools is getting married of, while that for boys is getting engaged in income generating activities.

Cultural Dimensions of Diversity in Bangladesh
A key feature of religion-wise population composition in Bangladesh is that- over almost the last five decades share of the largest group, i.e. Muslims has been growing and that of the second largest group, i.e. the Hindus is decreasing. And that of the remining groups remain somewhat unchanged (Current composition- 90 percent Muslim, 8.6% Hindu, 0.6 percent Buddhist, 0.4 percent Christian as per Bangladesh Population Census of 2011). The people of Bangladesh enjoy better religious freedom compared to many developing and even developed countries. Yet, there are numerous challenges facing the religious minorities in Bangladesh.

As per the CHT Regional Council Act of 1998 (Act XII of 1998 of GoB), there are 11 distinct indigenous groups of people living in CHT. Chakma are the largest indigenous people among the indigenous people living in CHT. They constitute over 45 percent of the indigenous

population in CHT. Other relatively larger groups are Marma (28.2 percent), and Tripura (14.5 percent). In contrast to the rest of the country CHT people are living in acutely disadvantaged conditions, and it was found to be truer for the people belonging to the different indigenous groups. The report showed that average CHT household income was almost 22 percent lesser than the national average.

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 recognized 21 "aboriginal castes and tribes" who are indigenous people living in plain lands of Bangladesh. However, of these 21 groups only 6 were accounted for in the 1991 census. Santhals comprise almost two-third of the plain land indigenous population of Bangladesh. And the second largest group are the Garo people (21.1 percent). Socio-economic conditions of the plain land indigenous people especially those living in north-western parts of the country tend to be even worse than that of the indigenous people living in the CHT region.

Disability Related Diversity in Bangladesh
BANBEIS data show that in 2018, about 46 thousand children with different types of disabilities were enrolled in government primary schools. No reliable information on the share of students with disabilities remaining out of the education system is available. Common causes of non-enrollment of students with disabilities have been found to be the school environment and teaching-learning not adaptive to children's needs, no or low scope of personal assistance, absence of accessible transportation, and inaccessible buildings and environment.

Geographic Diversity in Bangladesh
Based on geographic location, the economic status of learner household can vary (and so can the household's ability to invest in education). Conventionally it is assumed that urban area learners enjoy better educational experience compared to rural area learners (the rural-urban gap). And vulnerability to natural disasters and effects of climate change also vary based on geographic location (thus affecting the learning environment). Poverty data shows that there is higher incidence of extreme poverty in the north-western part of the country compared to the rest. There are other extreme poverty pockets spread over the map as well.

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and this is being exacerbated by climate change. Certain parts of the country are more at risk than others. For example, in the Char areas schools are most likely to be affected by river erosion, drought and other socio-economic challenges due to inadequacy of connectivity and infrastructure.

Addressing Diversity in Schools
Bangladesh is expected to move ahead in improving its education system to suit its lofty macroeconomic and human development aspirations. To attain this goal, it must pay much more attention to addressing diversity in the schooling system. To do so, Bangladesh policy makers and educators can take note from different international experiences.

Firstly, a keen balance must be maintained between 'Denial' and 'Essentialism'. That is, on the one hand, the policy makers and practitioners cannot deny the diversity among the children. And on the other hand, they must also not essentially identify a child with her/his socio-cultural background alone.

Secondly, educators and sector experts need to emphasize on developing culturally responsive pedagogy. That is- institutions need to be able to contain and serve learners coming from diverse backgrounds; educators need to explore their personal history as well as history of the learners they teach; and method of instructions need to be validating cultural identities.

Ways Forward

Ability of households to invest money and/or time in educational activities will continue to vary based on their economic status. Policies and programs designed for education development must be coherent with this reality. Secondly, new gender related concerns are emerging and hence, policy focus also needs to change in alignment with those. Thirdly, it must be acknowledged that in Bangladesh, adequate attention has not been paid to cultural dimensions of diversity. And this necessitates additional emphasis on education development for the indigenous communities. Fourth, Bangladesh education system over the last 4 to 5 decades, have been pre-occupied with basic concerns such as ensuring quality basic education for the mainstream population; and as a result children with special needs have remained quite out of focus. Addressing this gap needs to be prioritized. Finally, it must be noted that differences in geographic realities will further intensify. Hence policy makers and educators must assume that the geographic dimensions of diversity will become more important in education policy and program development.

Apart from the general recommendations mentioned above, the following specific suggestions related to ECE content development for distance learning may be especially considered:

01) **Institutional Dimension:** As access to mobile phones is somewhat more equitable across the country, content developers may consider developing ECE contents that can easily be downloaded and viewed using mobile phones. Distance learning providers may consider getting into special contracts with mobile network operators to ensure concessional charges.
02) **Personal Dimension:** Comprehensive online surveys, direct interaction between the content developers and the target audience etc. may be facilitated so that the educators can gain further knowledge about the target audience.
03) **Instructional Dimension:** Contents need to be responsive to the diverse needs of the learners. For example, eyesight impaired student will benefit from television content if the content developers ensure equal attention to audio instruction.

This study, despite being significantly constrained because of not having the scope of primary data collection, has presented an adequately comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic and cultural diversities in Bangladesh based primarily on available secondary source information. It has explored the economic, gendered, ethnic, disability-related and geographic dimensions of disparity and measured the lack of equity (or prevalence of inequities) across those lines.

ANALYSIS OF DIVERSITIES IN BANGLADESH

TO INFORM EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION STRATEGIES

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1. CONTEXT
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Bangladesh, on the one hand, has made significant progress in terms of macroeconomic as well as human development indicators over the last decade or so which entails further aspirations regarding access to quality education. And on the other hand, Bangladesh economy is in its so-called ignition phase where skilling and re-skilling of its youthful workforce have become a pre-requisite for realization of its macroeconomic growth potential. Hence, be it from a narrow economic point of view, or from a broader right-based social development view- education reforms have become much more prominent in policy discourse of the country compared to a couple of decades ago. In this context, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), has conducted its first ever comprehensive Education Sector Assessment (ESA) based on which a comprehensive Education Sector Plan (ESP) is being developed for the relatively complex education system of the country for a five year period (MoPME & MoE, GoB 2020).

Constitutionally, GoB is committed to deliver a "mass-oriented and universal" education system for its citizens[1]. And the country is committed to attain the SDGs which include the education related goal (SDG 4). Hence the country aims to "Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all". As inequalities in Bangladesh have been found to persist in terms of gender, ethnicity, disability, and geographical location (Sharmin, 2010), and as Bangladesh has been experiencing some rise in income inequality (BBS, 2016) during the recent years, it is obvious that demands for public goods such as education from the diverse groups are not homogeneous. This in turn implies that education reform or development initiatives- be those for sub-sectors or for the whole sector- must take the diverse backgrounds of the people into account.

In this context, this study presents a comprehensive analysis of socio-economic and cultural diversities in Bangladesh, with the intention of informing any programs/policies aiming to cover Early Childhood Development (ECD) in the country. The study has especially focused on this sub-sector of the education sector of the country as Sesame Workshop Bangladesh (SWB), the eminent producer of the national version of the internationally acclaimed children television program Sesame Street (known as *Sisimpur*) has commissioned it expecting that outcomes from this will inform content development for the said television program.

BANGLADESH'S JOURNEY FROM 'ASHES TO PROSPERITY'

Bangladesh as an economy has had a remarkable journey since its independence almost five decades ago. Development experts and economists have acknowledged its amazing macroeconomic transformation as well as its achievements in terms of humane development. It literally "rose to today's prosperity from yesterday's ashes." Especially, over the last decade or so the country has experienced a 'quantum jump' in terms of many development indicators

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[1] Article 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh has provision for free and compulsory education. The Constitution articulates that the "State shall adopt effective measures for the purpose of (a) establishing an uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such a stage as may be determined by law and (b) relating education to the needs of society and producing properly trained and motivated citizens to serve those needs; removing illiteracy within such time as may be determined by law."

and has successfully placed itself as a role model of sustainable and inclusive development for the rest of the world (developing and developed alike) (Rahman, 2020).

Rapid growth of Bangladesh economy naturally entailed similar growth in terms of per capita income. As shown in the next figure per capita income of Bangladeshis has been steadily rising from USD 306 in 1990 to USD 1,638 in 2016 (see Figure 1.1) and furthermore it has been rising at a rate faster than that of Pakistan and India. By 2018, per capita income of Bangladesh reached nearly USD 2,000.

Figure 1.1: Per capita income of Bangladesh, India and Pakistan from 1990 to 2018
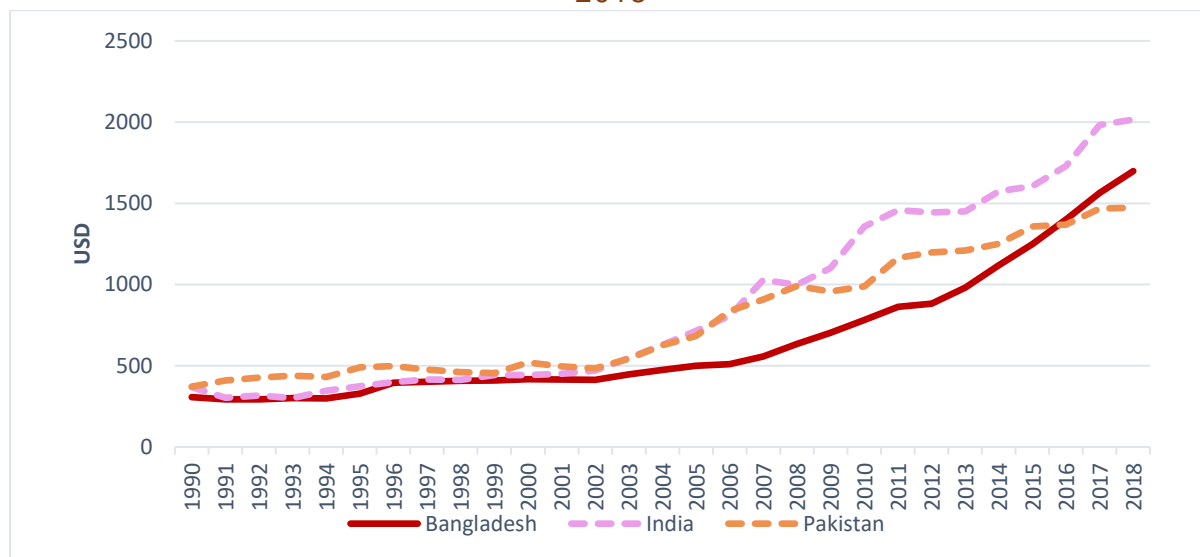
Source: World Bank data

HSBC Global Research (2018) projected that in between 2018 and 2030, Bangladesh's GDP growth rate would be 7.1 percent per year on average. Consequently, according to these projections, by 2030 Bangladesh economy will be larger than that of the Philippines, Pakistan, Vietnam and even Malaysia (Henry and Pomeroy, 2018). This exemplary economic performance coupled with similar (and sometimes even better) performance in terms of many social development indicators has made the process of progress inclusive in Bangladesh. For example: fertility rate has come down to 2.1 (almost an ideal situation); expected life span has increased from just over 65 years in 2005 to 73 years today; MMR has been reduced from 348 per thousand in 2005 to 170 in 2016 (the ratio for developing countries is 232) (Rahman, 2020).

The implication here is that as Bangladesh aspires to move further ahead macroeconomically and attain the high-income country status by another couple of decades, it needs to focus more on education reforms and education system restructuring- to ensure the economy has the fitting human resources to realize the aspirations. At the same time, with exemplary social developments (that too at a very fast pace with low level of per capita income), aspirations of the households have also gone beyond ensuring access to basic education and they are now more conscious about quality of the education. Hence there is significant demand pull for education sector development as well.

ADDRESSING EQUITY IN EDUCATION REFORM/DEVELOPMENT

The Education for All (EFA) movement of the United Nations, since 1990 has been striving globally to ensure that all learners get access to quality basic education (Opertti et al. 2014). While the global consensus has had significant positive outcomes, there remains a lot to be done in attaining the noble goal. A recent report from UNESCO shows that there are still 58 million children out of schools across the world and around 100 million children who have not completed primary education (UNESCO, 2015). The situation has been found to be most dire in the developing world. And more importantly, it has been observed that learners from low socio-economic background are twice as likely to perform low in education institutions (OECD, 2012). The on-going COVID-19 crisis may have further deteriorated their educational performance.

This has necessitated further attention to equity issues in education reform/development agenda. In fact, the World Education Forum meeting held in Dhaka, 2000 reviewed the progress made in ensuring education for all throughout the world during the final decade of the last century. On that occasion the forum had already inferred that to be successful the EFA movement had to take into account the equity concerns in education; that is the education needs of the poor and disadvantaged, including working children, remote rural dwellers and nomads, and ethnic and linguistic minorities etc. should get more policy attention. (Ainskow, 2016).

Bangladesh, despite having commendable achievements in education, has significant challenges to overcome in every sub-sector of education ranging from pre-primary level to tertiary level. The SDG4 strategic framework of GoB (developed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, MoPME) acknowledges these challenges. For example, coverage of children aged below five is low at the pre-primary levels; despite attaining universal enrolment at the primary levels quality of the education provided at this level remains as a concern; and secondary level students in general have been found to have achieved low skills and competencies (MoPME & MoE, GoB, 2020). The point here is that from global experiences (discussed above) it can be inferred that this lacking in education system is affecting learners from low socio-economic backgrounds and from disadvantaged group. This means as the country strives further to improve education it also needs to follow the global trend and pay special attention to equity aspects. And this ought to be especially true for pre-primary education (i.e. Early Childhood Education, ECE) as this sub-sector is relatively new in Bangladesh and GoB, rightly, intends to introduce 2-year pre-primary education in place of the current 1-year pre-primary courses in the coming few years.

RATIONALE FOR ANALYZING DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

As has been mentioned already, this study aims to analyze socio-economic and cultural diversities in Bangladesh expecting that the outcomes of the study will be useful in developing/improving contents created for ECE in Bangladesh. The discussion so far has established that any initiative to develop ECE contents for Bangladesh children needs to be informed about the equity concerns in the context of current Bangladesh, e.g. economic inequality, gender disparity, ethnic discrimination and so on. Being informed about this is pivotal to ensure universality of any such content.

The issues related to equity are strongly linked with the aspects of diversity[2] as it has been observed that the experience of the learners at the schools and what they gain from the schools vary based on certain 'beyond school factors' such as demographics, histories and culture, and economic realities. That is, learners coming from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds may have varying experiences at the school. Hence, to ensure 'equity' the system must acknowledge the 'diversities'. And this is the rationale for undertaking a study of diversity in Bangladesh to improve ECE in the country.

This report presents the outcome of the said study. After this brief introductory section the report puts forward the analytical framework for the study which comprises of further elaboration of the equity-diversity linkage, narration of the different perspectives of diversity, and definition of the indicators of equity.

Sections 3 to 7 of the report covers- income diversity, gender diversity, ethnic diversity, disability related diversity, and geographic diversity aspects of Bangladesh, respectively. Each of these sections deals with a particular aspect of diversity and narrates how access/abilities/opportunities of households vary because of their socio-economic and cultural situation.

The next section of the report is dedicated to narration of international practices and trends related to harnessing/managing diversity. And the final section summarizes the outcomes of this study to point out challenges and attempts to put forward some recommendations that deal with diversity while developing learning materials.

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[2] The equity-diversity linkage is discussed in further details in the next section of the report

2. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

This section firstly discusses the interlinkage between the issues of equity with the aspects of diversity. This is then followed by presentation of the broad perspectives of diversity (i.e. the different points of view from which diversity among the target groups may be tracked). Here the broad perspectives are also further broken down to ensure granularity of the subsequent analysis. Next, different indicators to measure equity/inequity across diverse groups that have been used for the subsequent analyses are discussed in brief.

UNDERSTANDING THE EQUITY-DIVERSITY LINKAGE

The UNESCO World Conference on Special Needs Education of 1994 confirmed a global consensus on importance of an inclusive education stating the educational, social and economic rationales. The report on the conference states- *"Regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all; moreover, they provide an effective education to the majority of children and improve the efficiency and ultimately cost-effectiveness of the education system."* (UNESCO, 1994).

Figure 2.1: Schematic representation of the education equity-diversity linkage
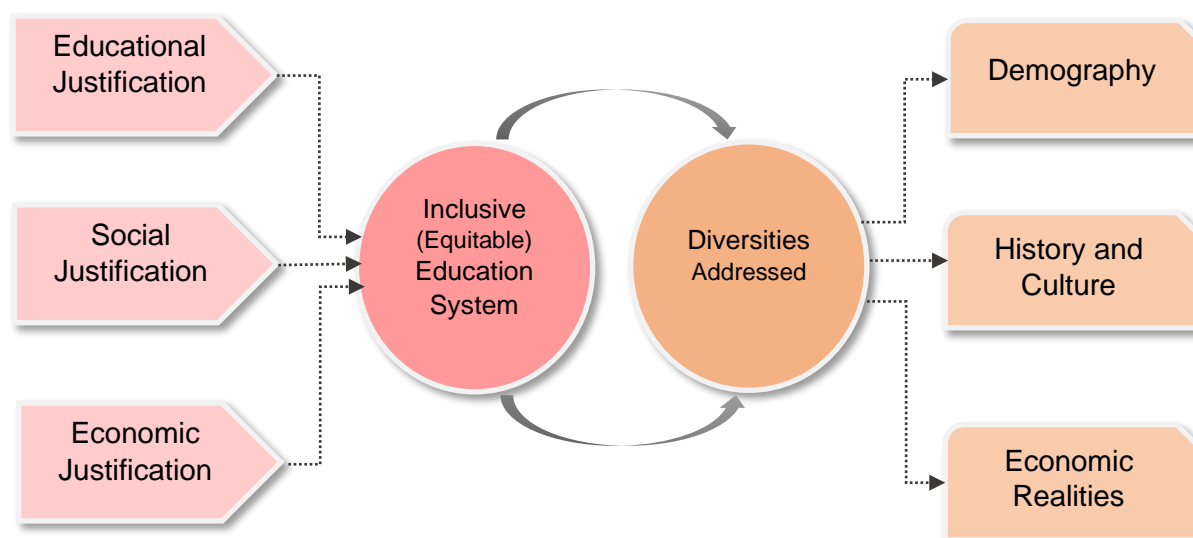
Source: Derivation by Authors from UNESCO (1994), Ainscow (2016), & Ainscow et al. (2012)

Ainscow (2016) further elaborated the said rationales working behind the proposition of inclusive education system:

> Firstly, striving for an inclusive and hence equitable education system ensures catering to all the individual demands of learners coming from different socio-cultural settings (Educational justification).

> Secondly, inclusive schools i.e. those which allow children from all walks of the society are building blocks of a future society that will be non-discriminatory (Social justification).

Finally, having schools that cater to the demand of learners coming from diverse backgrounds is economically more viable compared to having separate schools for students coming from separate backgrounds.

Evidently, the very rationales working behind the promotion of inclusive (equitable) education system are all linked to the aspects of diversity. Global experiences have also led experts to propose that addressing/managing learner diversity ought to be viewed as linked with an 'ecology of equity' (Ainscow et al. 2012). This is because ensuring learning experiences to be equitable does not only depend on the practices within the school, but also on realities outside the school campuses. And this is where the aspects of diversity come in. The 'outside the school realities' broadly means- demographics of the area the schools serve, histories and culture of the households whose children go (or do not go) to the schools, and last but not the lease, economic realities of the households.

The inference here is- to what extent an education system (or a part of that) is being able to manage learner diversity is represented through the extent that system (or the part of the system) is being able to maintain inclusiveness or equity. That is, success or failure of an education system in managing diversity is to be measured through its ability to ensure equity.

PERSPECTIVES OF DIVERSITY

Ainscow et al. (2012) identified three broad perspectives of learner diversity, namely- a) demographic perspective; b) historic and cultural perspective; and c) economic perspective. These perspectives are points of views from which one could map diversity among the target audience, i.e. the children enrolled (or not enrolled) in ECE.

From demographic points of view- the children could be from households that vary in size (nuclear families or joint families); some may come from female headed households while most may be coming from male headed households etc. In this manner the demography of the area where the school is located may result in diversity of the learners that come into that school.

The learners may have different cultural origin/orientations, e.g. religions, ethnic identities etc. This is the cultural perspective of learner diversity. Learner experience within the schools and their experience outside the school significantly vary based on their cultural origin/orientation. The education system needs to be aware about these variances to ensure all learners benefit from the system in an equitable manner.

Last but not the least is the economic perspective of learner diversity. From the economic point of view the learners could be coming from households with varying income and hence consumption patterns. This significantly affects the assimilation process of individuals into the broader community of learners.

The point to be noted here is that these are necessarily broad perspectives of mapping diversity among the learners, and hence are subject to further disintegration when further granular analysis is required. As this study is focused on analyzing diversity in Bangladesh, it demands further breaking down of these broad perspectives that considers the socio-economic and cultural realities of Bangladesh.

Figure 2.2: Relating the broad perspectives of learner diversity with the dimensions of diversity

Broad Perspectives

Dimensions of diversity considered for Bangladesh

| Economic Perspective | → | Income dimension of diversity |

| Demographic Perspective |
| Cultural Perspective |

- Disability dimension of diversity
- Geographic dimension of diversity
- Gender dimension of diversity
- Ethnicity dimension of diversity
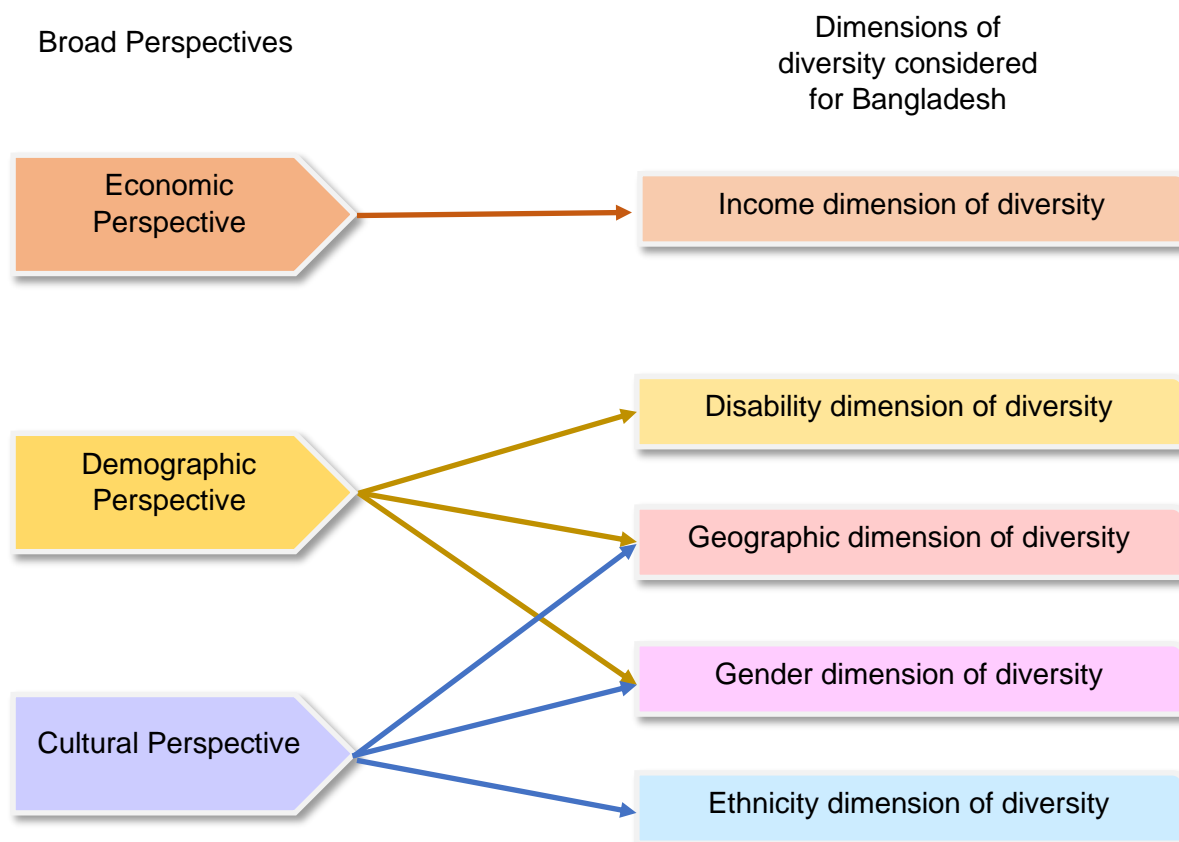
With the intention of narrating learner diversity in Bangladesh from the economic point of view, status of households belonging to different income groups has been analyzed. Household income has been considered as the determinant for overall economic conditions that affects the experience of the learners within and outside the schools.

Geographic dimensions of diversity (i.e. the geographic location within the country where different sets of learners live) is linked with both the demographic point of view and with the cultural point of view. This is because demographic attributes as well as the cultural attributes vary with geographic locations.

Similarly, the gender dimensions of diversity are linked with both the demographic and cultural points of view. The gender issues vary from one culture or sub-culture to another. These also vary with the demographic changes.

As per the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016 by BBS, of the entire male population of Bangladesh 11.57 percent have disability, and the ratio for the female population is 14.58 percent. Taking these figures into account, this study has considered disability as a separate dimension of diversity which is linked to the demographic perspective of learner diversity.

While Bangladesh may appear to be broadly homogeneous considering that 98 percent of the population are Bengalis, numerous ethnic/indigenous groups also belong to the country. The ethnic and religious dimensions, hence, are also considered in the analysis and they are linked to the cultural perspective.

INDICATORS OF EQUITY

As has been discussed earlier, to what extent a system is being able to manage learner diversity is best measured through its ability to ensure equity. This implies the analysis of diversity in Bangladesh must rely on the assessment of equity situation prevailing. This in turn necessitates identifying indicators to be used to measure equity.

Human development of the diverse groups can be a suitable measure. Bangladesh as a country has significant achievements in terms of human development. As per latest data from UNDP, the HDI score of the country has improved from 0.388 in 1990 to 0.614 in 2018, making it a medium human development country (UNDP, 2018)[3]. This, however, is an aggregate representation. It can be safely assumed that not all the diverse groups within the country have enjoyed the same extent of human development. In this context, this proposed study intends to measure access to different public goods/services as indicators to measure of diversity. For the purpose of this study, which is a desk-based research with no scope of primary data collection, the equity indicators are chosen based on available national statistics. Data available from the latest HIES (2016) report and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (2019) report are primarily used here. The following indicators have been utilized for the analysis in the subsequent sections of this report:

- Varying extent of access to education enjoyed by the different groups of the population
- Access to healthcare and overall health conditions of the different groups
- Access to and utilization of ICT by different groups (with special focus on access to internet).

The next five sections of this report are dedicated to the five dimensions of diversity in Bangladesh as shown in Figure 2.2. In each of those sections, equity situation is portrayed using national statistics available against the set of indicators mentioned in the list above.

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[3] Briefing note for countries on the 2019 Human Development Report by UNDP. Refer to: http://hdr.undp.org/sites/all/themes/hdr_theme/country-notes/BGD.pdf

3. INCOME DIMENSION OF DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

Effect of economic realities on the experience and achievements of learners at the schools has already been discussed in the previous sections of this report. And this bears special significance in the case of Bangladesh, because the country has gone through an increase of income inequality over the last few years (BBS, 2016). More importantly, despite significant public investments in all sub-sectors of education, households in Bangladesh still bear a significant share educational expense.

Figure 3.1: Expenditure borne by household as share (%) of total educational expense in Bangladesh between FY 2015-16 and FY 2019-20
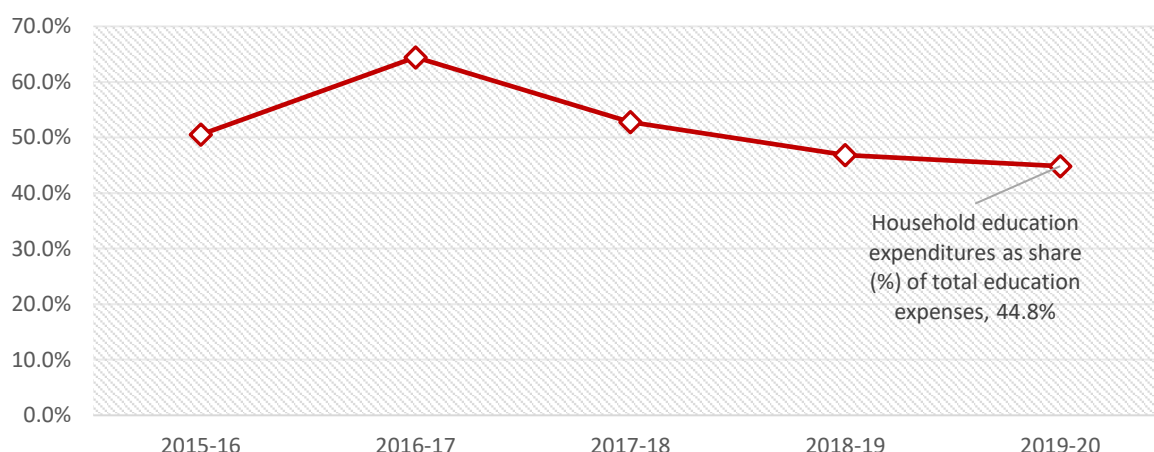
Source: Derived from the data of HIES 2016 by BBS

Figure 3.1 shows that over the last five years, on an average, household share of education expense in the total education expense has come down from over 50 percent to just below 45 percent. Households still bearing a significant share of the education expenses imply that economic status (income) of households has significant impact on learner experiences within and outside the schools. It can be asserted from here that a household with smaller income will have to invest a larger share of their income compared to another with higher income to ensure their children have similar learning experiences. This in turn implies that children from lower income households are less likely to have quality education compared to children from higher income households. In case of ECE, lower income households are less likely to have their children enrolled compared to higher income households.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION (ESPECIALLY ECE) FOR DIFFERENT INCOME GROUPS

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 by BBS and UNICEF has compared participation of children from households with various income in ECE. For these the households are segregated in 5 quintiles (each comprising of 20 percent of the total households). The first quintile households are the poorest households, i.e. these are the bottom 20 percent households in terms of income. The next 20 percent households constitute the second income quintile. The third income quintile households are the middle-income households. The fourth quintile households are the second richest 20 percent households. The final quintile is composed of the households with the highest income.

Figure 3.2 shows that nationally (i.e. aggregate of all households) almost 19 percent of the children aged between 3 to 5 years are attending ECE. However, this ratio varies significantly

from lower income quintiles to higher income quintiles. Only 14.6 percent 3 to 5 years old children from the poorest households are attending ECE (i.e. the ratio is significantly below the national average). As the household income increases, tendency to send children for ECE increases. The ratio is over 26 percent for the richest households in Bangladesh.

Figure 3.2: Share (%) children aged 3-5 years attending ECE from households belonging to different income quintiles.

National	18.9
Poorest	14.6
Second	16
Middle	18.6
Fourth	19.5
Richest	26.4
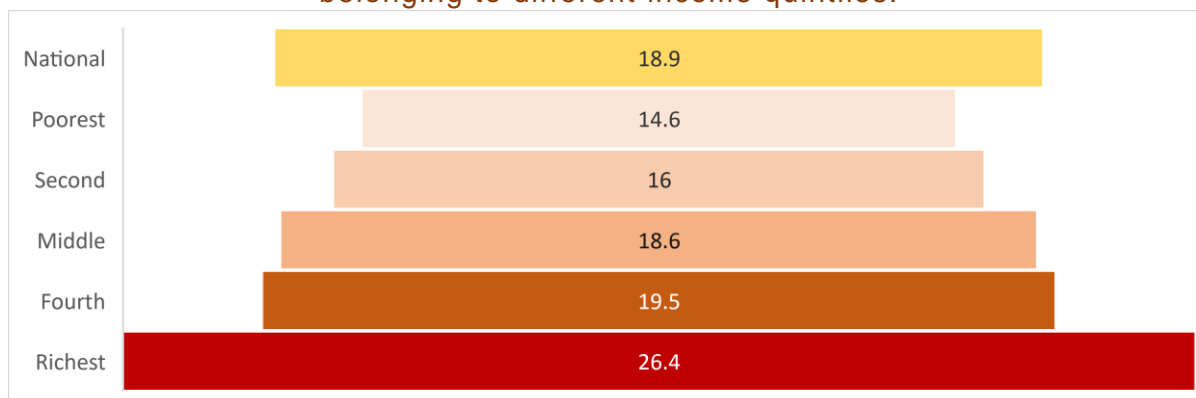
Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS & UNICEF

Figure 3.3 blow shows that completion rate of different education levels also varies significantly from poorest to richest quintile households. Nationally, the primary education completion rate is 83 percent. But the ratio for the poorest household is 70 percent. And it increases for higher income households and is 92 percent for the richest households.

Figure 3.3: Primary, lower-secondary, and higher-secondary education completion rate (national and different income level households)

	Primary level	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
NATIONAL	82.6	64.7	29.4
POOREST	70.4	43.3	12.1
SECOND	79.9	57.7	20.3
MIDDLE	86.6	67.6	27.1
FOURTH	86.7	71.1	32.8
RICHEST	91.5	82.6	50.1
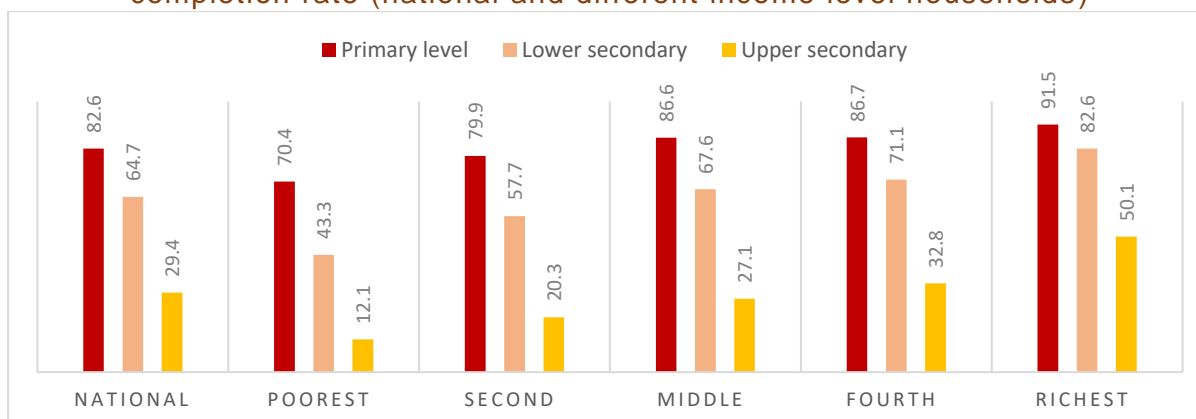
Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS & UNICEF

The poor and rich gap further increases for higher education levels (lower-secondary and higher-secondary). As shown in Figure 3.3, a learner from the richest household is 91 percent more likely to complete lower-secondary education compared to a learner from the poorest household. Again, a learner from richest household is more than 4 times likely to complete higher-secondary education compared to a learner from the poorest household.

The MICS 2019 measured whether children between 3 to 4 years age are developmentally on track through tracking their progress against 4 ECD indicators, namely- learning; social-emotional development; physical development; and literacy-numeracy skills.

Figure 3.4: Progress of children (aged 3-4) along ECD indicators (learning, social-emotional, physical and literacy-numeracy), national and across different income households
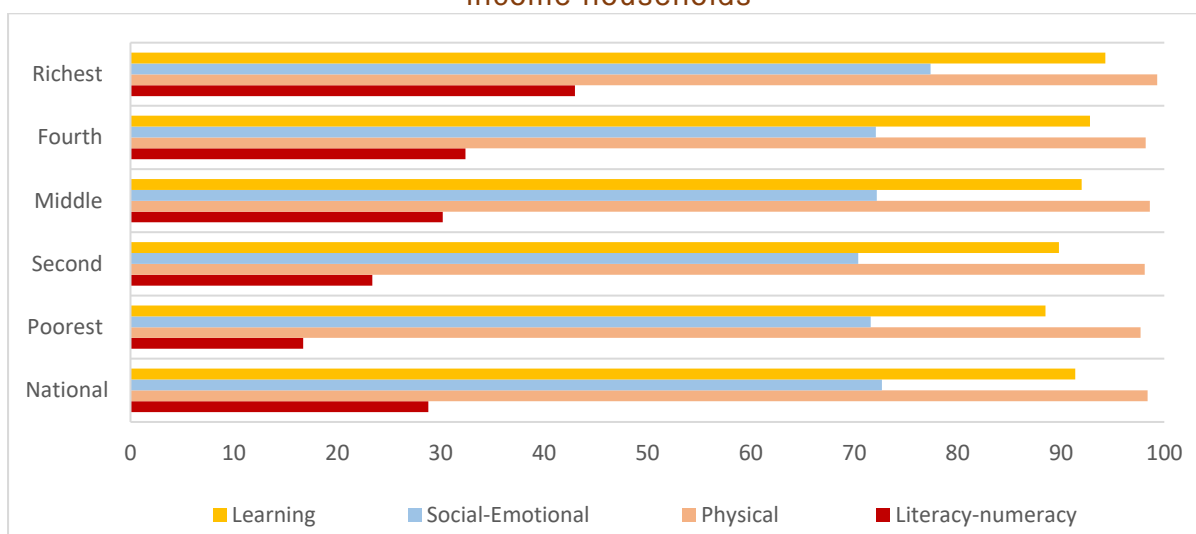
Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS & UNICEF

Figure 3.4 shows that richer the households in Bangladesh (in terms of income) the more the children (aged 3-4 years) are developmentally on track. The most significant gaps are visible in terms of development of literacy-numeracy skills. Nationally, almost 29 percent of the children (aged 3-4 years) are developmentally on track in terms of this ECD indicator. The ratio is 11 percentage points smaller for the children belonging to poorest quintile households (only 18 percent). The ratio for the middle-income households (30 percent) almost matches the national average; and it exceeds the national average by a staggering 14 percentage points for the children belonging to the richest households (43 percent).

HEALTH SITUATION FOR DIFFERENT INCOME GROUPS

Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019 reveals that 23 percent of all the children under age 5 in Bangladesh are underweight, while 2.4 percent are overweight. 28 percent of children of this age group are stunted and 9.8 percent are wasted. While these aggregate ratios are to be concerned with, further disaggregation of data across the household incomes gives an even more alarming picture.

Figure 3.5: Prevalence of health conditions among children (%) aged below 5 years from different income households
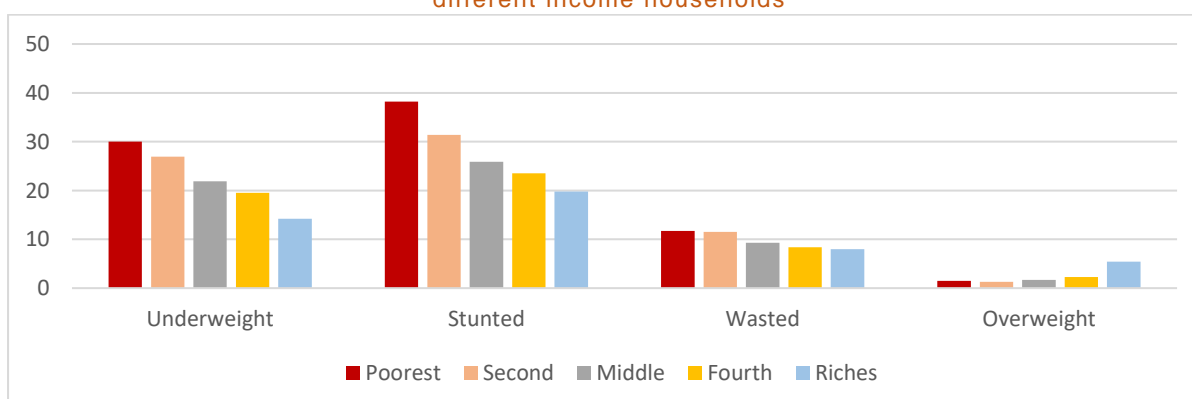
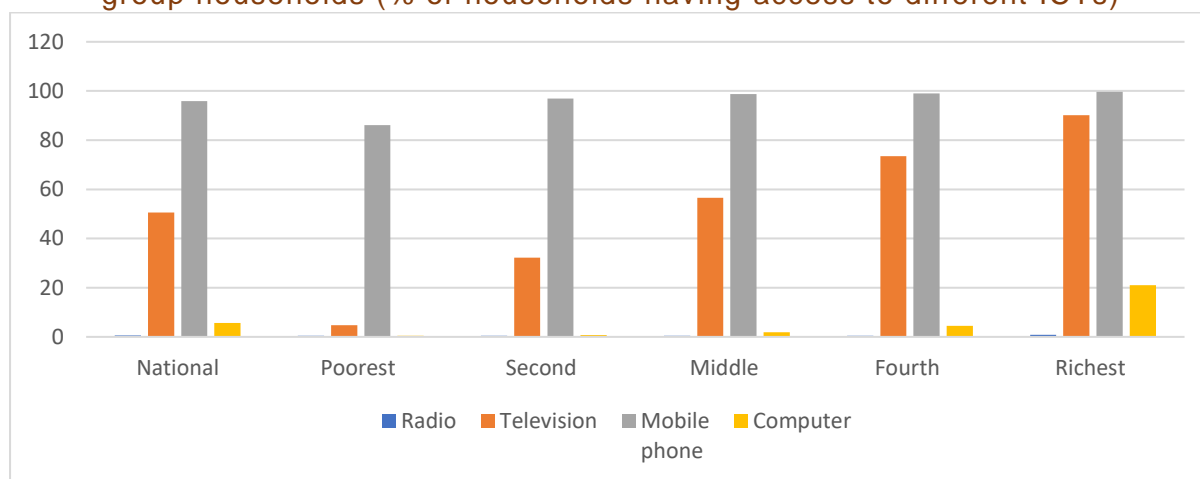Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS & UNICEF

Figure 3.5 shows that be it being underweight or stunted or wasted higher ratio of children (aged below 5 years) from the lower income households are affected. For example, a child from the poorest household is more than twice likely to be underweight than a child from the richest household. Similarly, a child from the poorest household is twice likely to be stunted than a child from the richest household. While overweight children are comparatively a smaller problem in Bangladesh (2.4 percent of all children aged below 5 are overweight), children from higher income households have been found to be more likely to be overweight.

ACCESS TO ICT FOR DIFFERENT INCOME GROUPS

Taking ICT to be pivotal for education and assuming it to be become more integral for the education system in the coming days (in the context of the pandemic-induced lockdowns), this study has chosen access to ICT to be a critical indicator to measure equity situation. MICS 2019 reports the access to radio, television, and computers enjoyed by different income group households.

Figure 3.6: Access to information technologies enjoyed by different income group households (% of households having access to different ICTs)

Figure 3.6 shows that below 5 percent of the poorest quintile households own a television, while nationally more than half of the households own televisions. As income of the households increases percentage of households owning a television also increases; and over 90 percent of the richest households own televisions. This implies that a child from a household belonging to a richest quintile household is much more likely to be able to have access to television-based learning material than a child belonging to a poorest quintile household.

However, access to mobile phones appear to be pretty much equitable among the different income group households. Of course, it can be assumed that quality of the mobile phones used by different income groups and the money they are ready to pay to enjoy mobile phone network services vary significantly. But still, it can be safely inferred that educational content developed for streaming through mobile phone networks is likely to have more equitable outreach compared to those developed for broadcasting via televisions.

On an average, less than 6 percent of Bangladesh households own computers (see Figure 3.6). Just over one-fifth of the richest households own computers. The ratio, as expected, is

smaller for lower income groups (less than 1 percent of the poorest households have computers).

Figure 3.7: Share (%) of households having access to internet. National average and across different income groups
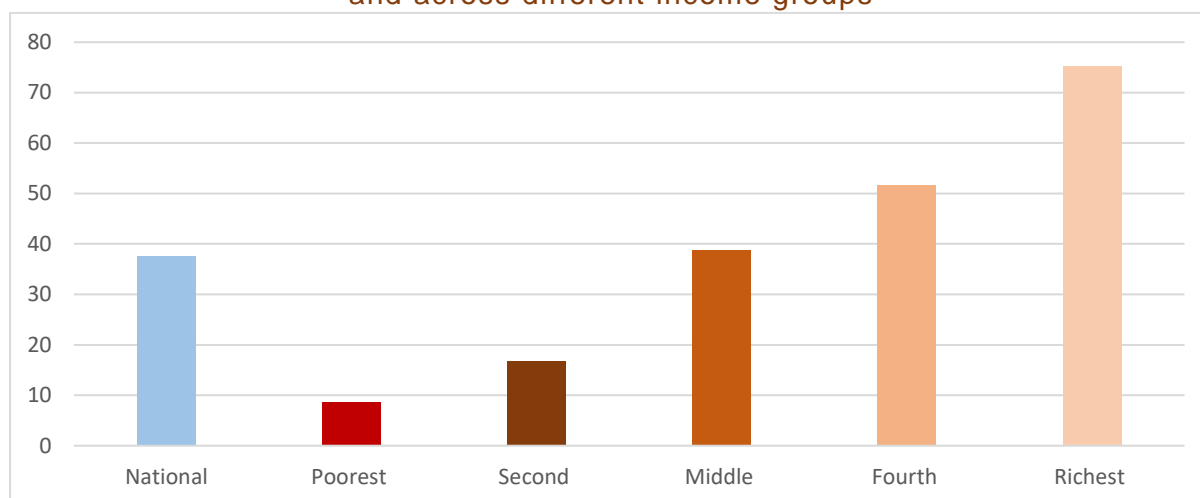
Having internet connections enables learners to access educational material at cheaper and more efficient manner. Given the global as well as national experiences during the ongoing COVID19 outbreak[4], access to internet is going to become even more critical in the coming days. Figure 3.7 shows that almost 38 percent households across the country enjoys access to internet. However, breaking down of the aggregate across the income groups reveals a far more unequitable situation. Below 9 percent of poorest household have access to internet. While the ratio for middle income households (39 percent) almost matches the national average, that for the richest households is significantly higher (over 75 percent). Policy makers as well as ECE content developers ought to keep these realities in mind while planning to develop learning material to broadcast via internet.

OTHER INDICATORS OF EQUITY

Nationally, almost 68 percent of the households are covered by at least one government operated Social Safety Net Program (SSNP)[5]. While it is expected that lower income households would be covered more by SSNPs compared to higher income households, MICS data shows that there is not much difference in coverage received by poorest and that received by the richest. 70.1 percent of the poorest households are covered by at least one SSNP, while the ratio for the richest households is over 64 percent (not far below the national average). Of course, it is most likely that the amount of support received by the poorest household is significantly higher than that received by the richest households. Yet, the poorest and the richest enjoying almost similar coverage indicates significant scope of improvement in terms of targeting program beneficiaries and/or developing further specialized programs.

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[4] Operations of educational institutions across the country are virtually halted for over 6 months due to the pandemic. Few are operating partially via online (internet-based) interactions between the learners and the educators.

[5] These SSNPs include conditional cash transfers, employment generation programs, in kind support, and stipends provided to learners.

MICS 2019 data also reveals that over 11 percent of the children (aged 5-17 years) in Bangladesh are working in hazardous environment despite that being legally prohibited.

Figure 3.8: Share (%) of children (aged 5-17 years) working in hazardous environment. National situation and situation across different income groups

National	11.3
Poorest	16.2
Second	14.3
Middle	11.8
Fourth	8.9
Richest	3.6
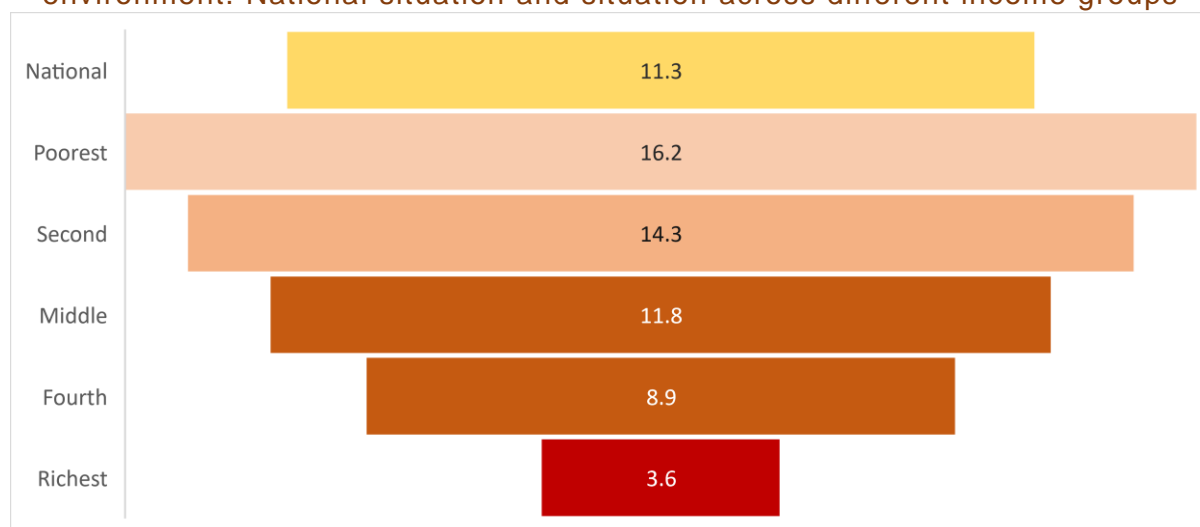
Source: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2019, BBS & UNICEF

In case of the poorest households, over 16 percent of the children are engaged in hazardous work. The ratio decreases with the increase in household income, as expected. However, it is alarming to observe that even among the children belonging to the richest households almost 4 percent are engaged in hazardous work. The implication here is that a significant share of Bangladesh children is still engaged in hazardous work and are likely to perform low in educational institutions (or completely dropout) because of that. And the poorer the household the more likely this is to happen.

4. GENDER DIMENSION OF DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

Just over a decade ago (in 2006) Bangladesh was positioned in the 91st place (among 153 countries of the world) in terms of closing the gender gap. But as per the latest Global Gender Gap Report 2020, Bangladesh has come up to the 50th position in the list by closing almost 73 percent of its overall gender gap (WEF, 2020). Bangladesh has become the top performer in South Asia in terms of closing the gender gap and has done specially well regarding political empowerment of women. In fact, Bangladesh is the only country in the world where women have led the country (as leader of the state) for longer than men since independence (ibid).

Commendable performance in closing the gender gap implies satisfactory levels of gender equity prevailing in education sector of Bangladesh. Of course, the country has achieved near gender parity in primary and secondary levels of education. Yet, there remains a lot of scope of improvement. The said WEF report also states- "there is considerable room to bolster basic rights of women" (which includes education). A recent report jointly produced by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) and UCEP Bangladesh on gender situation in Bangladesh education system has also identified numerous obstacles to education of girls including- child marriage, early motherhood, and prevalence of violence against women (BBS & UCEP Bangladesh, 2017).

## GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF ACCESS TO EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH

As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh has achieved near gender parity in primary, secondary and higher education sub-sectors. Latest information from the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) shows that Net Enrollment Ratio (NER) at primary education for male and female students are 97.65 percent and 98.01 percent (APSC, 2019). Similarly, information from Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS) show NER at secondary level education for male and female students to be 48.9 percent and 60.5 percent respectively; and NER at higher secondary level for male and female students to be 29 percent and 29 percent (BANBEIS, 2018). It appears that in terms of enrolment at primary, secondary and higher secondary levels female students are ahead of male students.

Further investigation into gender-wise participation in education in Bangladesh reveals key areas of concern. BBS and UCEP Bangladesh jointly conducted a study to analyze education scenario in Bangladesh from a gender point of view (BBS & UCEP Bangladesh, 2017). The findings revealed that the boys are not only lagging in terms of enrolling into the schools, but also, they have a higher tendency of dropping out of schools (at both primary and secondary levels). The report shows that between 2012 and 2015, girls average dropout rate was 19.2; whereas the ratio for boys was found to be 25.4 (ibid). While girls having better participation and lower chances of dropping out of schools is commendable, higher dropout rates for boys has also become a point of concern. Many stakeholders opine that government taking special initiatives (such as stipends) to ensure female participation in education may be the main factor working behind higher participation of female students in primary, secondary and higher-secondary levels of education.

The BBS-UCEP joint study also presented analysis about the reasons of students dropping out of schools, and it is observed that these reasons are significantly gendered. Figure 4.1 shows that the biggest reason for which girls drop out primary school in Bangladesh is financial constraint (30 percent of girls drop out because of this reason). However, in case of the boys this is the second biggest reason for dropping out of primary school and only 18 percent of the

dropouts of boys are because of this reason. The biggest reason for boys dropping of primary schools have been found to be their families not being interested to keep them sending to schools. This may be due to many families opting to engage the boys in income generating activities. Findings from the survey also support this inference, as the third biggest reason for boys dropping out of school has been found to be those boys getting engaged in earning for their respective households (17 percent of the boys dropouts are caused by this). The third biggest cause of girls dropout from primary schools has been found to be those girls (12 percent of them) getting married off at an early age.

Figure 4.1: Top three reasons for girls (shown on the left) and for boys (shown on the right) dropping out of primary schools
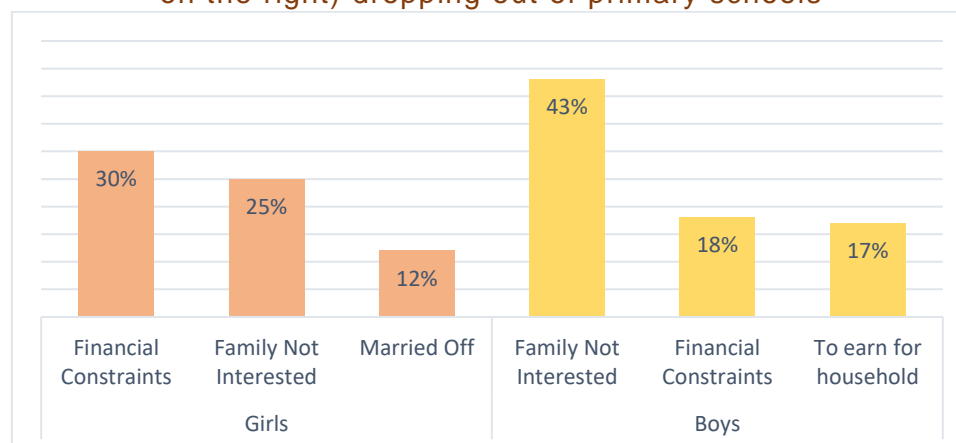
Source: BBS & UCEP, 2017

Top reasons for dropping out of secondary schools have also been found to be significantly gendered. Figure 4.2 shows that girls are mostly taken out of secondary schools so that they may be able to help in domestic works (30 percent), while boys are mostly taken out of those schools so that they may be engaged in income generating activities (39 percent).

Figure 4.2: Top three reasons for girls (shown on the left) and for boys (shown on the right) dropping out of primary schools
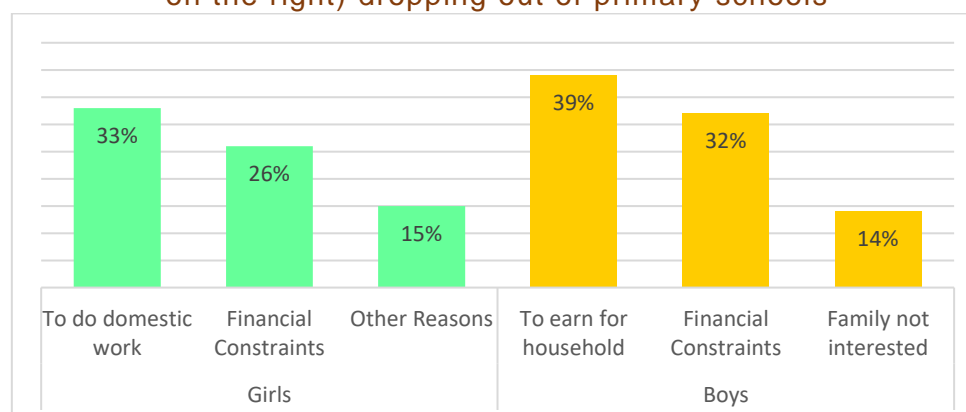
Source: BBS & UCEP, 2017

GENDER PERSPECTIVE OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITIES IN BANGLADESH

As per WEF's Global Gender Gap Report 2020, only 38 percent of the adult women in Bangladesh are part of the workforce, whereas the ratio for men is 84 percent (WEF, 2020). Figure 4.3 shows that Bangladesh currently has over 54 million working age women, and of

them- a meager 17 million (less than one-third) are currently employed. On the other hand, there are over 52 million working age man and of them- more than 41 million are currently employed.

Figure 4.3: Working age population and currently employed population, women versus men
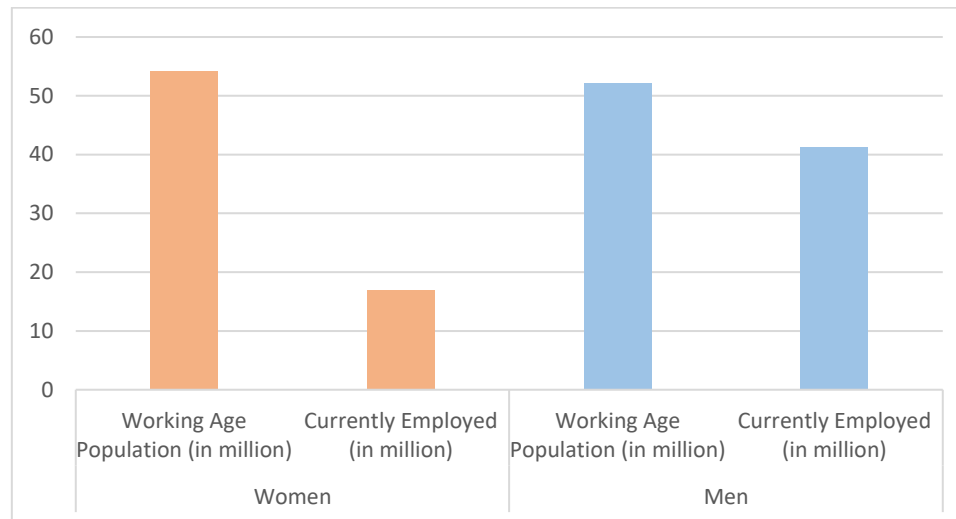
The implication here is that women not being currently employed (in the formal sector) makes them more reliant on others compared to men. Very large share of women remaining outside formal workforce is most likely to have significant linkage with the reasons for girls' dropout of schools. For example, off all the girls dropping out of secondary school the largest chunk drops out as their families engage them in doing household chores (see Figure 4.2). On the other hand, off all the boys dropping out of secondary schools the largest share is taken out of school so that they may be engaged in income generating activities. This means boys get to 'learn by doing' which improves their skill sets and creates scope of better employment in future. On the other hand, girls who are engaged in doing households are later married off and continue to engage themselves in doing household chores and consequently reducing their employability.

MICS 2019 data shows that approximately 13 percent of the households in Bangladesh are woman-headed. Based on the discussions so far it may be inferred that households headed by women are bound to be more vulnerable to shocks. There is ample empirical evidence to support such inferences. It has been observed that in Bangladesh, gendered economic and social risks and vulnerabilities remain strongly intertwined, and poverty continues to have distinct gender features (Holmes, R. et al. 2010).

5. CULTURAL DIMENSION OF DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

Two components of culture in Bangladesh- religion and ethnicity are taken into consideration in this report. Overwhelming majority of the population in Bangladesh is Muslims. As per the latest population census 2011, 90 percent of the total population are Muslims. A similar pattern is visible in terms of ethnic identities in Bangladesh. According to the said census report 98.2 percent of the population in Bangladesh are Bengalis and numerous other indigenous groups constitute only 1.8 percent of the population.

Bangladesh having an overwhelmingly dominant group both in terms of religion and in terms of ethnicity, makes the question of equity even more critical for inclusive development in the country compared to many others.

RELIGIOUS DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

Figure 5.1 shows that after the Muslims (90 percent), the second largest religious group in Bangladesh are the Hindus (8.6 percent). The Buddhists, the Christians and other religious groups all together constitute about another 2 percent.

Figure 5.1: Population composition of Bangladesh by religion
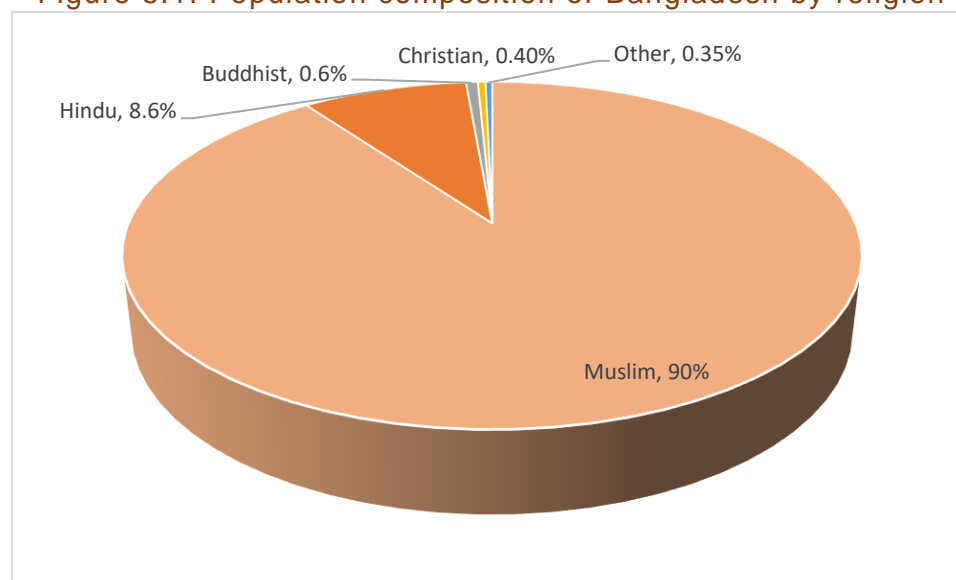
Source: Bangladesh Population Census 2011, BBS

As per the census data about 146 million persons in Bangladesh identify themselves as Sunni Muslims and they constitute 90 percent of the population. There are also very few Shia Muslims, Baha'is, and Ahmadi Muslims in Bangladesh.

Hinduism, being the second largest religious affiliation in Bangladesh, has around 14 million followers in the country. While Hindus in Bangladesh pre-dominantly belong to Bengali ethnicity; a significant share of Hindu population also belongs to the indigenous communities known as Garo, Khasi, Jaintia, Santhal, Bishnupriya Manipuri, Tripuri, Munda, Orao etc.

Bangladesh has approximately 1 million Buddhist who generally adhere to the Theravada school of Buddhism. Most of the Buddhist live in the Chittagong division (South-East Bangladesh). A significant share of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) Buddhists belong to non-Bengali ethnic groups such as the Chakma, Marma, Mru, Khumi, Bawm, Chak, Kuki, Murang, Tanchangya and Khiang communities.

While Christians comprise only 0.4 percent of the Bangladesh population there exists significant diversity within this particular religious group as well. Bengali Christians mostly follow Roman Catholicism, while the remaining adhere to Baptism and others. Few followers of Christianity are also present among certain indigenous communities such as Garo, Santal, Orao, Chakma, khasi, Lushei, Bawm etc.

A key feature of religion-wise population composition in Bangladesh is that over almost the last five decades share of the largest group, i.e. Muslims has been growing and that of the second largest group, i.e. the Hindus is decreasing (while that of the remining groups remain somewhat unchanged) (Alam & Khuda 2011).

Figure 5.2: Religious composition of population in Bangladesh over the last five decades
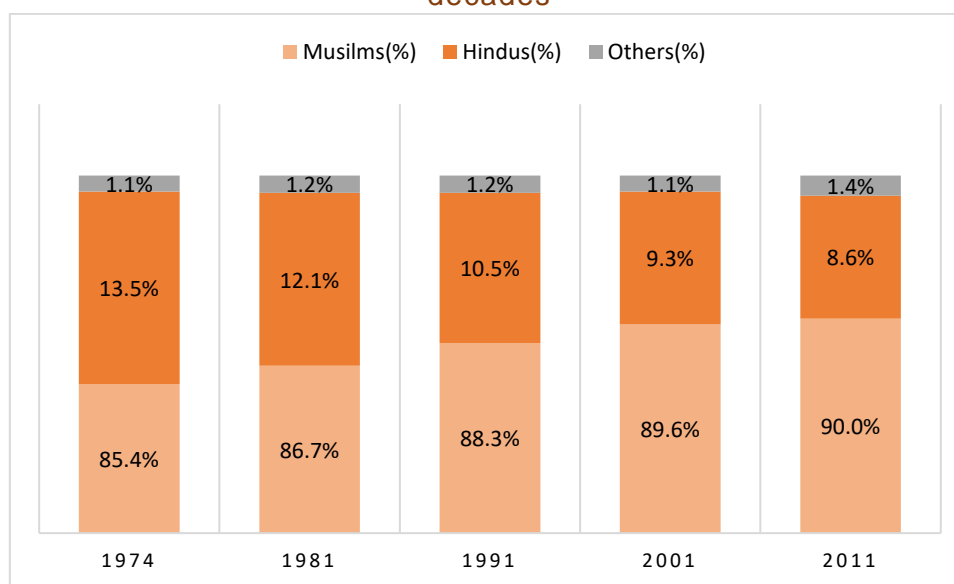
Source: Alam & Khuda, 2011

Figure 5.2 shows that while share of Muslims in total population has risen from 85.4 percent in 1974 to 90 percent in 2011; that of Hindus has decreased almost along the same line from 13.5 percent in 1974 to 8.6 percent in 2011.

The constitution of Bangladesh ensures religious freedom. According to Article 41 of Bangladesh Constitution- *"every citizen has the right to profess, practice, or propagate any religion and for every religious community or denomination to have the right to establish, maintain, and manage its religious institution".* Indeed, the people of Bangladesh enjoys better religious freedom compared to many developing and even developed countries. Yet, there are numerous challenges facing the religious minorities in Bangladesh since independence up to most recent times. For example, the country has been hit by a series of violent incidents which targeted religious minorities among other groups. On the one hand, these incidents have highlighted how vulnerable the religious minorities are to such attacks. On the other hand, these have also brought forward wider structural issues within the society including political marginalization, social prejudices, and economic opportunism. Along with better protection of lives and livelihoods of the minorities; authorities ought to do greater investments in challenging stereotypes and champion respect for all beliefs (MRG, 2016).

ETHNICITY DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

While the indigenous ethnic groups in Bangladesh constitute less than 2 percent of the total population, there exists significant ethnic diversity within this small share. Firstly, the indigenous population in Bangladesh can broadly be segregated into two segments based on their geographic locations, namely- indigenous groups belonging to the Chittagong Hill Tract (CHT) and indigenous groups living in the plain lands across the country. As discussed in the previous sub-section the indigenous groups are quite heterogenous in terms of the religious beliefs they adhere to.

As per the CHT Regional Council Act of 1998 (Act XII of 1998 of GoB), there are 11 distinct indigenous groups of people living in CHT. Table 5-1 shows that Chakma are the largest indigenous people among the indigenous people living in CHT. They constitute over 45 percent of the indigenous population in CHT. Other relatively larger groups are Marma (28.2 percent), and Tripura (14.5 percent).

Table 5-1: Different groups of indigenous people living in CHT and their respective shares (%) in total indigenous population of CHT

	CHT Indigenous Group of People	% share in total indigenous population in CHT*
1	Chakma	45.3%
2	Marma	28.2%
3	Tripura	14.5%
4	Mro	4.0%
5	Tanchangya	3.9%
6	Bawm	2.4%
7	Pangkhua	0.6%
8	Khyang	0.4%
9	Chak	0.4%
10	Khumi	0.2%
11	Lushai	0.1%

*Calculated based on actual population from the Bangladesh Population Census report of 1991
Source: Roy, 2012

HDRC (2009) showed that in contrast to the rest of the country CHT people are living in acutely disadvantaged conditions, and it was found to be truer for the people belonging to the different indigenous groups. The report showed that average CHT household income was almost 22 percent lesser than the national average. The said study also found that primary and secondary education completion rates in the CHT region was significantly lower than those of rest of the country and the structure of the economy in CHT also significantly varied from rest of the country.

The East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act, 1950 recognized 21 "aboriginal castes and tribes" who are indigenous people living in plain lands of Bangladesh. However, of these

21 groups, only 6 were accounted for in the 1991 census (Roy, 2012). These 6 groups and their percentage share in the total plain lands indigenous people are shown in Table 5-2. It shows that Santhals comprise almost two-third of the plain land indigenous population of Bangladesh. And the second largest group are the Garo people (21.1 percent). The other four groups (Koch, Hajang, Oraon, and Munda) altogether comprises around 13 percent of the plain land indigenous population.

Table 5-2: Different groups of indigenous people living in plain lands and their respective shares (%) in total indigenous population of plain lands in Bangladesh

	Plain land Indigenous Group of People	% share in total indigenous plain land population*
1	Santhal	66.3%
2	Garo	21.1%
3	Koch	5.4%
4	Hajang	3.8%
5	Oraon	2.7%
6	Munda	0.7%

*Calculated based on actual population from the Bangladesh Population Census report of 1991
Source: Roy, 2012

Roy (2012) found that socio-economic conditions of the plain land indigenous people especially those living in north-western parts of the country tend to be even worse than that of the indigenous people living in the CHT region.

While the Government of Bangladesh maintains information on 17 groups of indigenous people (mentioned in Table 5-1and Table 5-2) the International Working Group for Indigenous Affairs (IWGIA) in its latest report titled "The Indigenous World 2020" identifies Bangladesh to be home to 54 indigenous groups of people who speak at least 35 languages. Stakeholders acknowledge that GoB has not been able to maintain a reliable and comprehensive database on the indigenous people living across Bangladesh and Roy (2012) identifies this lack of tracking data and maintaining statistics as a form of discrimination against the indigenous communities in Bangladesh.

IWGIA (2020) commends the GoB initiative to introduce pre-primary education learning material in five indigenous people languages namely- Chakma, Garo, Kokborok, Marma and Sadri. However, it identified lack of properly trained teachers, and other learning facilities to be a major challenge facing the learners coming from indigenous communities.

6. DISABILITY RELATED DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

The key element of the principle of inclusive education is that the children with special educational needs (SEN), including those differently abled, are brought into the ambit of quality education services. Children with disabilities are amongst the most marginalized at all levels of education. Only a fraction of children with even moderate to mild disabilities are enrolled in mainstream schools. Inclusive education concepts and practice are at a nascent stage of development in Bangladesh. Awareness and understanding of inclusive education is often limited, with education for children with disabilities such as sight and hearing impairment segregated in a small number of special schools under the Ministry of Social Welfare rather than as part of an integrated system under MoPME and MoE. This underscores the persistent overall "welfare approach" to children with disabilities. Children with disabilities make up a disproportionate number of out of school children at all levels.

The comprehensive data base from national surveys has not provided a clear picture of the state of access to education for children with disabilities. BANBEIS data show that in 2018, about 46 thousand children with different types of disabilities were enrolled in government primary schools. Of these around 21 thousand were girls. However, no data on access to non-government schools or to secondary or tertiary level education institutions are currently recorded (Table 6-1).

Table 6-1: Children with disabilities enrolled in government primary schools

Type of Disabilities	Boy	Girl	Total
Physical Handicap	8,940	6,614	15,554
Poor Eyesight	3,351	2,809	6,160
Short of Hearing	703	700	1,403
Problem in Speech	4,291	3,940	8,231
Intellectual/ Mental	6,640	5,787	12,427
Autistics	742	511	1,253
Others	508	441	949
Total	25,175	20,802	45,977

Source: Bangladesh Education Statistics 2018, BANBEIS

No reliable information on the share of students with disabilities remaining out of the education system is available. Common causes of non-enrollment of students with disabilities have been found to be the school environment and teaching-learning not adaptive to children's needs, no or low scope of personal assistance, absence of accessible transportation, and inaccessible buildings and environment (Choudhury et al. 2011).

However, the inadequacy of the education services available for the learners with disability can be visualized at least to a certain extent through disability related data available from the Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2016. The latest HIES report of BBS identifies six type of disabilities and reports gender-disaggregated data and it rates the extent of disability from minimal (some) to fully unable. As shown in the table below- over 11.5 percent of the male population are suffering from some form of disability and the ratio for the female population is over 14.5 percent. This implies that over one-tenth of Bangladesh population is subjected to some form of disability (the extent may vary from "some" to "fully unable", see Table 6-2).

Table 6-2: Share (%) of male and female population subject to different types of disability

Type of disability	Male (%)			Female (%)		
	Some	Severe	Fully unable	Some	Severe	Fully unable
Overall	8.18	2.18	1.21	11.36	2.15	1.07
Eyesight	3.19	0.37	0.10	4.58	0.46	0.07
Hearing	1.42	0.28	0.09	2.07	0.28	0.08
Walking and climbing	1.22	0.51	0.20	1.57	0.41	0.15
Remembering and concentrating	0.94	0.33	0.21	1.20	0.34	0.17
Self-care	0.73	0.37	0.29	1.03	0.34	0.30
Speaking and communicating	0.68	0.32	0.32	0.91	0.32	0.30

Source: HIES 2016, BBS

MICS 2019 data shows that disability of the mother may be significantly linked with the education of the children. The next table shows percentage of children developmentally on track according to the ECD indicators. The results are disaggregated across children whose mothers have disability and children whose mothers do not have any disability.

Table 6-3: Relating mothers' functional difficulty (disability) with ECD outcomes of children aged between 3 to 4 years

Mother's functional difficulties	Literacy-numeracy	Physical	Social-Emotional	Learning	Early Child Development index score
Has functional difficulty	15.7	92.7	45.9	69.4	41.1
Has no functional difficulty	29.1	98.5	73.4	92	75.5

Source: MICS 2019, BBS and UNICEF

Table 6-3 shows that children whose mothers do not have any kind of disability are significantly more developmentally on track (in terms of ECD indicators) compared to children whose mothers have disability.

7. GEOGRAPHIC DIVERSITY IN BANGLADESH

Based on the geographic location, the learner experience within and outside the schools may vary significantly. Based geographic location, the economic status of learner household can vary (and so can the household's ability to invest in education). Conventionally it is assumed that urban area learners enjoy better educational experience compared to rural area learners (the rural-urban gap). And finally, vulnerability to natural disasters and that to effects of climate change also vary based on geographic location (thus affecting the learning environment).

GEOGRAPHIC LOCATION AND ECONOMIC REALITIES

Figure 7.1 shows that in Bangladesh, there is higher incidence of extreme poverty in the north-western part of the country. There are other extreme poverty pockets spread over the map as well. For example, CHT districts also have high level of extreme poverty rates compared to the rest of the districts from south-western part of Bangladesh.

Figure 7.1: Incidence of extreme poverty across districts of Bangladesh
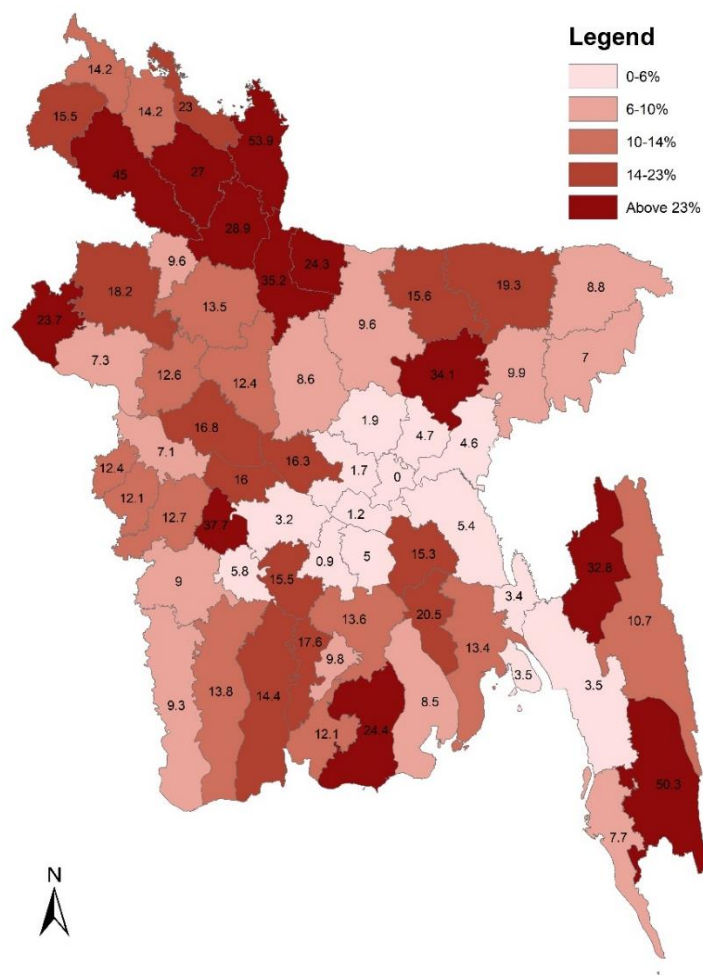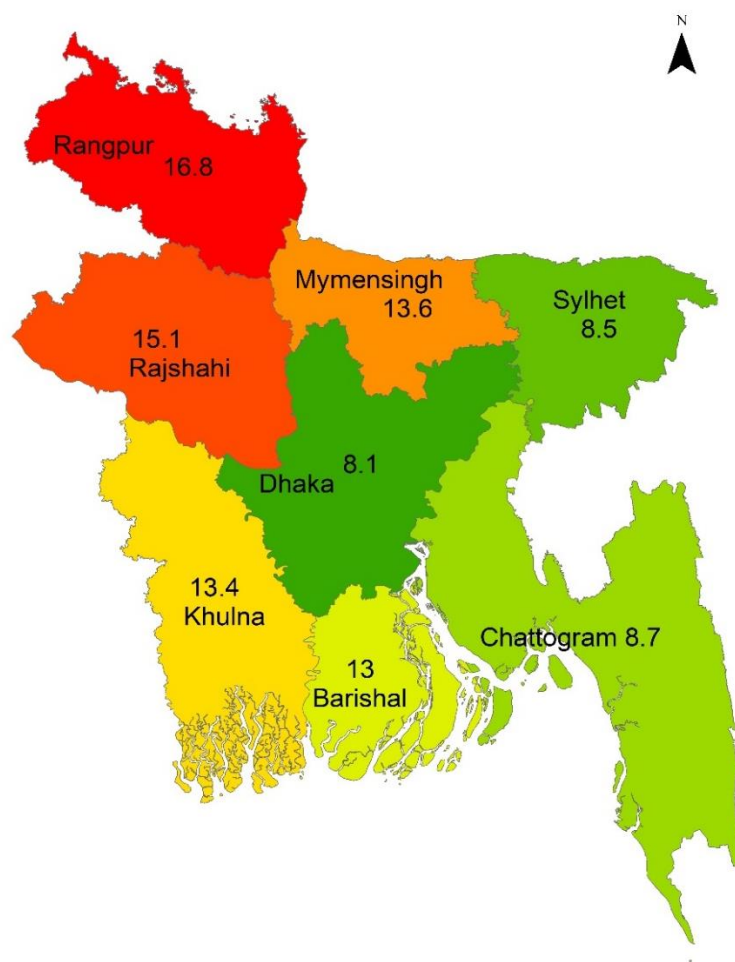

Source: Map developed utilizing HIES 2016 data

It can be positively asserted that households in the high extreme poverty districts will be able to invest lesser in education compared to the rest of the country. Extreme poor households from these districts are more likely to send children to work or marry them off earlier compared to the rest of the country.

This inference can be further justified by Figure 7.2. This map shows incidence of children engaged in hazardous work across different administrative divisions of Bangladesh. And findings here coincide with those from Figure 7.1 (which showed higher incidence of extreme poverty in the north-western part of the country, i.e. Rajshahi and Rangpur divisions). Figure 7.2 also shows that these two divisions have relatively higher incidence of children engaging in hazardous work. The implication here is that children from households with lower income are more likely to be engaged in child labor compared to those from higher income households.

Figure 7.2: Incidence (%) of children being engaged in hazardous work across different administrative divisions of the country

THE RURAL-URBAN GAP

Educational facilities are most likely to vary between rural and urban areas, meaning learner experiences and their educational attainments may also vary based on whether they go to urban area schools or go to rural area schools. The next figure shows the distribution of secondary schools between rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. It also shows the distribution of teachers and the distribution of students across the schools in rural and urban areas (see Figure 7.3).

Figure 7.3: Ratio of institutes, teachers and students enrolled by area (rural vs. urban) for Secondary Education
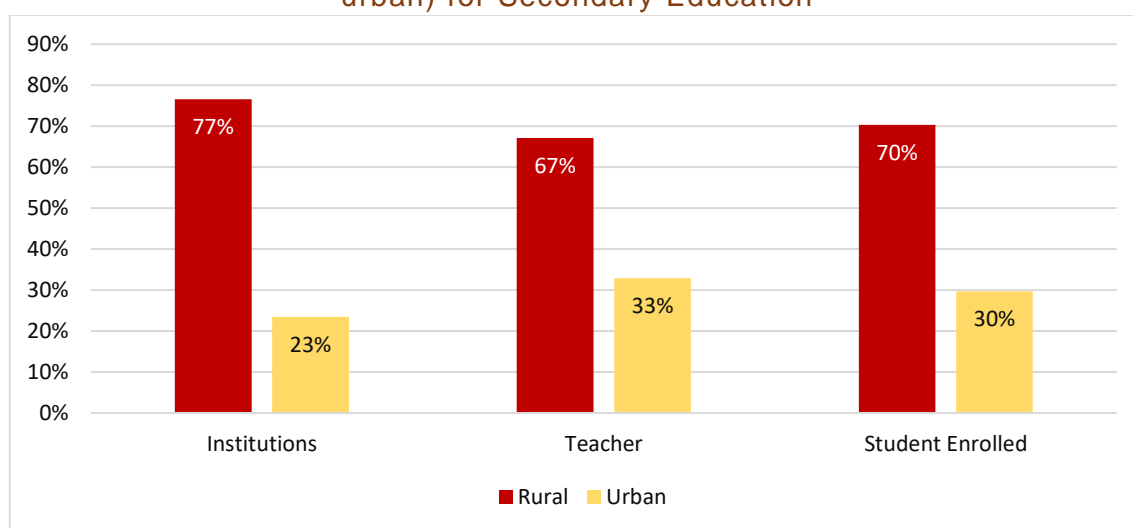
Figure 7.3 shows that rural areas have 77 percent of the secondary education institutes, 67 percent of the teachers and 70 percent of the students. This implies that more institutes in rural areas are serving a lesser share of students. However, urban areas have 33 percent secondary level teachers while these areas have 30 percent of the total students enrolled in secondary level, implying that urban areas in Bangladesh may be enjoying better student-teacher ratios compared to rural areas.

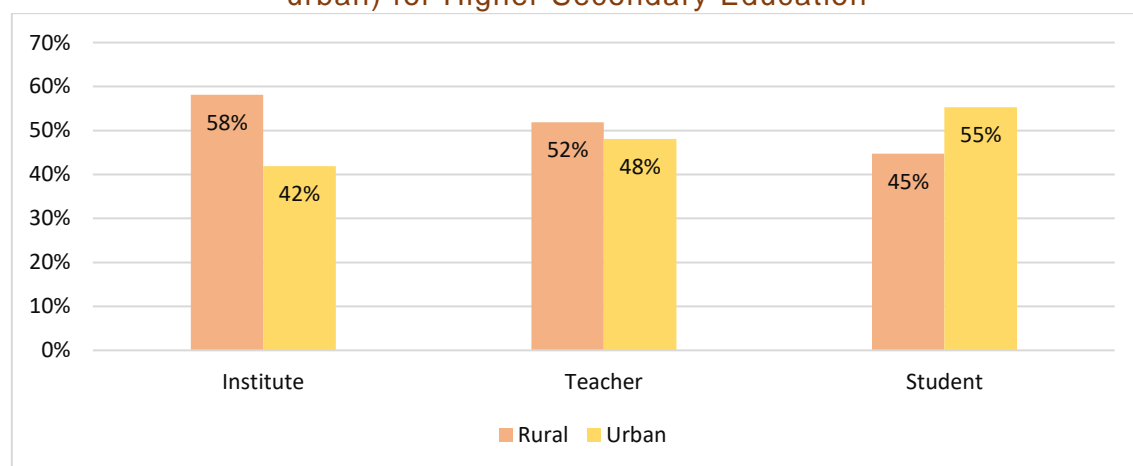**Figure 7.4: Ratio of institutes, teachers and students enrolled by area (rural vs. urban) for Higher Secondary Education**

Figure 7.4 shows that rural areas have 58 percent of the higher secondary education institutes, 52 percent of the secondary level teachers and 45 percent of the students enrolled in higher secondary level. This implies that more institutes in rural areas are serving a lesser share of students. It shows that urban higher secondary institutions have a lesser share of teachers (48 percent) and are serving a higher share of students (55 percent). This may be because-upon completion of secondary education a significant share of rural students usually migrates to urban areas to seek quality higher education. Nevertheless, this is creating additional pressure on urban institutions.

COPING WITH NATURAL DISASTERS AND EFFECTS OF CLIMATE CHANGE

Bangladesh is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world and this is being exacerbated by climate change. The Government of Bangladesh is, however, committed to both being prepared for emergencies and to responding appropriately, quickly and effectively to all emergencies (SDG4 Strategic Framework for Bangladesh).

Figure 7.5: Map showing char areas of Bangladesh where schools are most likely to be affected by river erosion, drought and other socio-economic challenges due to inadequacy of connectivity and infrastructure

Source: Developed with information available from Shamunnay, National Char Alliance Secretariat

Different geographic locations within the country may be vulnerable to different shocks and hence education establishments as well as the learners themselves (and/or their households) need to be prepared accordingly to cope with those shocks. For example, in the char areas of

the country schools are most likely to be affected by river erosion, drought and other socio-economic challenges due to inadequacy of connectivity and infrastructure (see Figure 7.5). Again, schools in the coastal districts and upazilas (sub-districts) are more likely to be exposed different climate change effects (e.g. sea-level rising, frequent tornedoes etc.). These areas are shown in the next figure.

Figure 7.6: Map showing coastal districts and upazilas (sub-districts) where education institutes are exposed to different climate change related threats
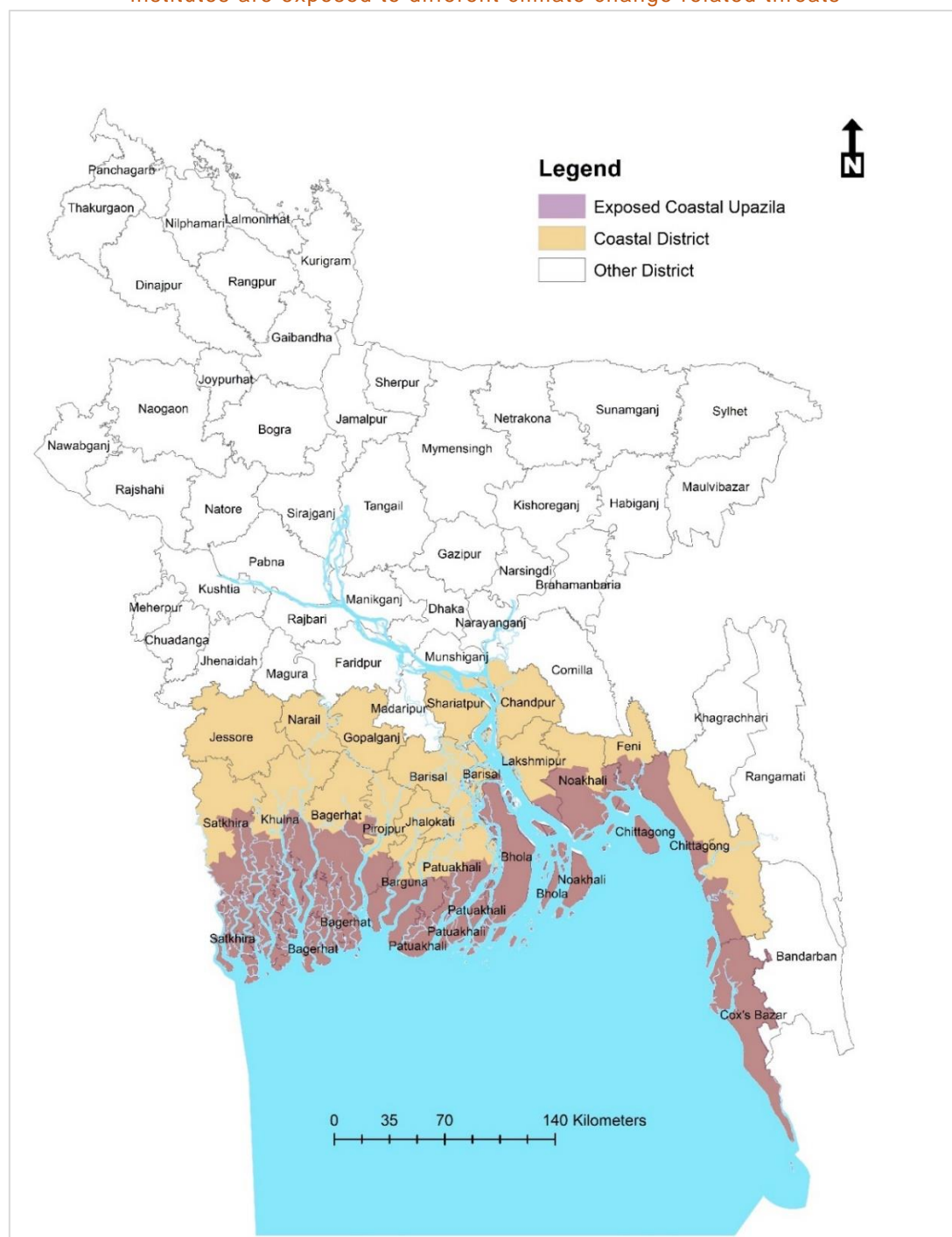
Source: Developed based on information from Delineation of the Coastal Zone (Working Paper 005) (2003) by PDO-ICZMP

8. ADDRESSING DIVERSITY IN SCHOOLS: INTERNATIONAL STANDARDS AND PRACTICES

It is quite evident from the previous sections of this report that addressing diversity in schooling system in Bangladesh is no lesser a challenge than it is in any other countries. In fact, it may be relatively more challenging given the size and complexity of the Bangladesh education system itself as well as the complexity of the dimensions of diversity discussed so far. Nevertheless, the country is expected to move ahead in improving its education system to suit its lofty macroeconomic and human development aspirations. And to do so it must pay much more attention to addressing diversity in the schooling system. For that Bangladesh policy makers and educators can take note from different international experiences. It must be noted that no matter how hard the challenge may appear to be, Bangladesh is not being required to do something that has not been done before. In fact, learning lessons from international experiences and replicating them (after due contextualization) is most likely to make the job easier for Bangladesh.

BALANCING BETWEEN 'DENIAL' AND 'ESSENTIALISM'

Vandenbroeck (2001) showed that to address diversity in the learning process, the curriculum must be family-centered along with being child-centered. Because the 'child', i.e. the learner comes from the 'family', i.e. the social-cultural background of the learner. This implies that the educator must maintain a delicate balance between 'Denial' and 'Essentialism' (Vandenbroeck, 2011).

- On the one hand, the educator and/or the education system cannot deny the diversity among the children they intend to educate.
- On the other hand, they must also not essentially identify a child with her/his socio-cultural background alone (ibid).

The educators while emphasizing on treating equally all the children in the classroom or within the education system, may end up overlooking special needs of the learners coming from different family settings (Brougère et al. 2008). For example: in case of Bangladesh a teacher may end up suggesting the students to go through some online content without knowing that a few students may not have access to internet. This is 'denial', and the policy makers and the educators need to be aware of this pitfall.

The other pitfall (i.e. 'Essentialism') is quite opposite. In this case the educators may end up identifying the learners solely based on their socio-cultural backgrounds (Beck, 1997). While the socio-cultural context is bound to be an integral part of the identity of the learner, but this does not have to essentially be the only identifying factor for that learner. In simpler words- the children may be (in fact are most likely to be) different from their parents. For example, a school management committee may decide that all Muslim students do not have any prejudice against eating beef based on prevalent notions. But there may be certain students from the Muslim community who do not want to take beef.

The overarching implication here is that to address diversity the policy makers and/or educators need to maintain a delicate balance. They must be cautious about the individual needs and at the same time ensure that they are not being too cautious.

DEVELOPING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE PEDAGOGY

It would be most impractical on the part of a 21st century educator or policy maker to expect to have a classroom full of students who are culturally homogenous. With the rapid expansion of ICT, more and more students with diverse cultural backgrounds are joining the same classrooms. And with the wake of global pandemic as virtual classrooms are becoming more common in countries, developing and developed alike, a set of learners to be served in the same classroom is likely to become even more culturally diverse.

Educators and sector experts, taking these realities in consideration, today are emphasizing more on development of culturally responsive pedagogy. Because culturally responsive pedagogy facilitates and supports achievement of all students and schools can identify the strengths students with diverse backgrounds bring into the classrooms (Richards et al. 2007). As the concept of culture is diverse and complex; so is culturally responsive pedagogy. It has three main components/dimensions, namely- institutional, personal, and instructional (ibid).

Figure 8.1: Framework of culturally responsive pedagogy
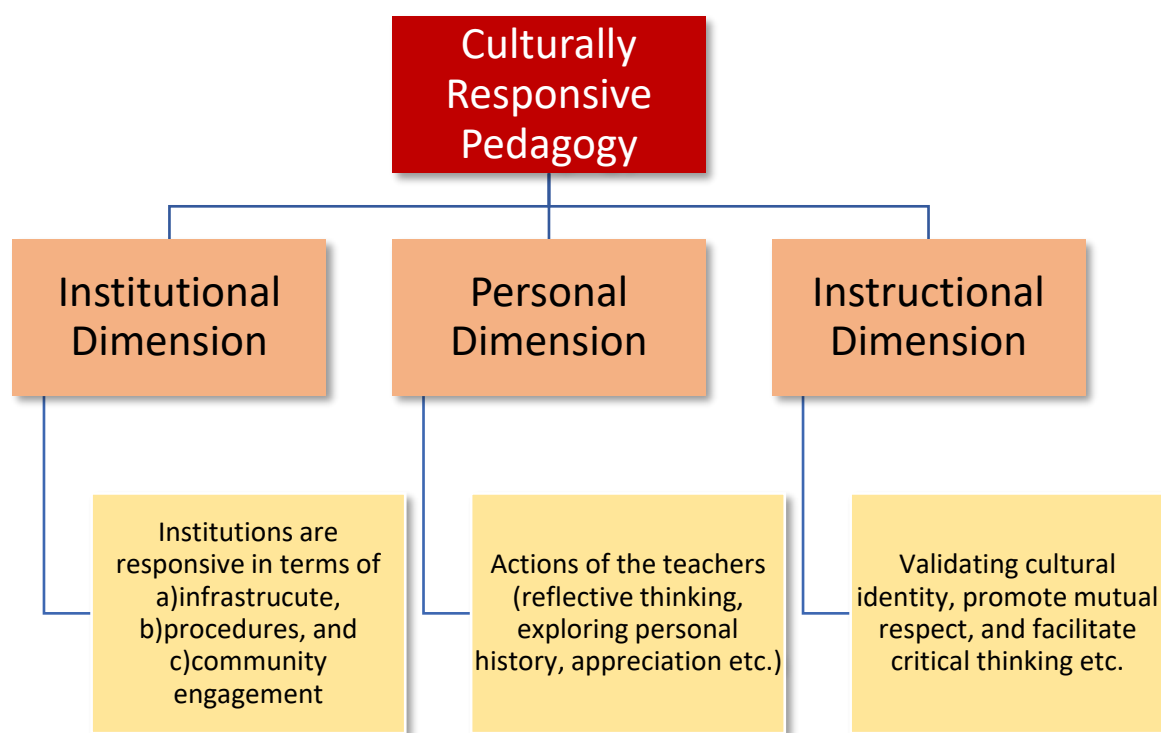
Source: Authors' derivation from Richards et al. (2007)

Institutional Dimension of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
This is about ensuring physical and political structure of the education system to be culturally responsive. It includes having the right kind of infrastructure that creates adequate space for all kinds of learners; ensuring the policies and procedures within the system that encourages all students to participate in the learning process; and finally, engaging the community (from where the students come) in managing the learning process (Little, 1999).

Personal Dimension of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
It has two broad aspects. Firstly, the teachers themselves need to go through a process of self-reflection, i.e. examine their own attitudes and relationships with others with a view to identify the biases that may affect their value systems (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Through this,

teachers will be able to adopt an assessment mechanism which will be neutral to all students regardless of their cultural backgrounds. Secondly, teachers must explore their own personal histories and experiences as well as those of her/his students. With this knowledge the understanding of self and others will emerge and facilitate better communication and a more inclusive learning environment.

Instructional Dimension of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy

The tools of instruction, that is the books, teaching methods, the educational videos etc. must be compatible with the students. Otherwise those will cause more harm than good. Such conditions within the classroom may even end up marginalizing a student or a couple of students coming from different cultural backgrounds (Irvine, 1992).

9. Ways Forward for Bangladesh

The previous sections of the report (from section 3 to section 7) have narrated the current situation of Bangladesh in terms of different diversity dimensions/perspectives (the focus always was more on education aspects due reasons mentioned earlier). Based on these findings, this section first puts forward a set of general recommendations related to addressing diversity in education system of the country. This is then followed by a more specific set of recommendations which related to development of ECE content for distance learning (e.g. through a television program such as *Sisimpur*).

Harnessing Diversity in Education System: General Recommendations

Economic realities have most significant implications. Findings have revealed that no matter how uniform and how universal the Bangladesh education system becomes; the economic diversity dimensions will remain in play as long as there exists income inequalities. Since it is simply not-pragmatic to aspire be a society with minimal (negligible) income inequalities, the policy makers and educators in Bangladesh must always be cautious about the fact that the students (regardless of the education level) in a classroom will be coming from households with different levels of incomes, implying that the ability to invest money and/or time in educational activities will be varying. Policies and programs designed for education development must be coherent with this reality.

Gender dimensions can never be ignored. Of course, Bangladesh has commendable achievements in terms of closing gender gap not only in education but also in other aspects of national life. Yet, the gender challenge remains. Only a couple of decades ago policy makers and educators in Bangladesh were concerned with ensuring more participation of female students in education. Today the Bangladesh education system has grown beyond those participation related concerns. Certainly, new gender related concerns are emerging. Stakeholders now must be concerned with what girls and boys do after completing primary education. Evidence shows that while boys go to work (hence having the opportunity of learning by doing), girls are still getting married off and/or being engaged in household chores.

Adequate attention has not been paid to cultural dimensions of diversity. The mere unavailability of education related data disaggregated across different indigenous groups points to this lack of policy attention. Evidence shows that while Bangladesh has made significant macroeconomic strides, the indigenous communities spread across the map remain significantly lagging. On the one hand, this necessitates additional emphasis on education development for the indigenous communities. On the other hand, the national education system appears to be still at its infancy in terms of ensuring suitable education system for those groups.

Disability dimensions have been virtually ignored. It is quite understandable Bangladesh education system over the last 4 to 5 decades have been pre-occupied with basic concerns such as ensuring quality basic education for the mainstream population. As a result, children with special needs have remained quite out of focus. The gap between the share of population living with different kinds of disabilities and the number of children with disability enrolled in formal schooling system stands as testament to this lack of attention.

Differences in geographic realities will further intensify. Students from more poverty-prone areas are bound to face more challenges in accessing quality education. Similarly, students living in certain areas of the country are more vulnerable to effects of climate change.

In the coming days reducing poverty will become more difficult. At the same time environmental vulnerability of the education system will also increase day by day. Hence policy makers and educators must assume that the geographic dimensions of diversity will become more important in education policy and program development in the coming decades.

DEVELOPING ECE CONTENT FOR DISTANCE LEARNING

This specific set of recommendations are based on the findings stated in the previous sections (sections 3 to 7). However, in the table below they are segregated along the three dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy that have been discussed in the previous section (see Figure 8.1).

Table 9-1: Recommendations related to development of ECE content for distance learning (disaggregated across the dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy)

	Dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy	Recommendations related to development of ECE content for distance learning
01)	Institutional Dimension	• Lower income households have lesser access to television and even lesser access to computer and internet. This is equally true for households belonging to the indigenous groups. • Video content developers may specially consider developing contents that can be easily downloaded and viewed using mobile phones (because mobile phone access is somewhat more equitable across the country). • Distance learning providers may consider getting into special contracts with mobile network operators to ensure concessional charges for users who use internet to view/download and stream educational content. • Policy makers and educators (in this case the distance learning provider and the video content developers) may consider having interactive workshops with parents from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds to ensure community participation in the whole system.
02)	Personal Dimension	• Video content developers must have a clear understanding of the socio-cultural diversity prevalent in Bangladesh. While this report will serve that purpose to some extent, further knowledge must be ensured. This can be done through interactive workshops and exposure to further relevant reading materials for video content developers. • Comprehensive online surveys can be conducted to learn about the history and cultures of the target audience (in this case the children across the country who watches the TV show titled *Sisimpur*). • Interaction between the content developers and the target audience (the children and their parents) can be facilitated.

41	Dimensions of culturally responsive pedagogy	Recommendations related to development of ECE content for distance learning
03)	Instructional Dimension	▪ Contents (including distance learning contents) need to be responsive to the diverse needs of the learners ▪ For example, eyesight impaired student will benefit from television content if the content developers ensure equal attention to audio instruction (as they do for video instructions). ▪ Another example: video content developers can be careful about the size of the content (megabytes) so that when downloading those from any streaming sight the learner does not have to spend much. A very long video content can be segmented into multiple parts and with each part a simple text description can be added so that the learner may opt to not download the parts s/he dims less important. ▪ Video content developed should pay attention to creating mutual respect among the learners. For example: at the time it appears to be very difficult (if not impossible) to develop content using all the indigenous languages. However, video contents (certain episodes) may inform the 'mainstream' learners about the indigenous learners who have separate languages.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This study, despite being significantly constrained because of not having the scope of primary data collection, has presented an adequately comprehensive analysis of the socio-economic and cultural diversities in Bangladesh based primarily on available secondary information. It has explored the economic, gendered, ethnic, disability-related and geographic dimensions of disparity and measured the lack of equity (or prevalence of inequities) across those lines. It is expected that the study findings will enable policy makers and educators to be further informed about the challenges and be able to utilize the knowledge generated to make Bangladesh education system further diversity responsive.

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