

ROLE OF BANGLADESH ARMY IN ACHIEVING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOAL 4

Brigadier General Muhammad Ali Talukder, afwc, psc

Introduction

In the year 2000, leaders from 189 countries of the world agreed on a vision for the new millennium. They wanted to end extreme poverty in all its forms. So, they made a list of eight goals called the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and they wanted to achieve these goals in fifteen years. As a result, the number of primary school age kids who don't go to schools was down to half by 2015. But every sixth adult in the world still remained illiterate, two third of them being women (The Guardian, 2015). Accordingly, after the expiration of the MDGs, in September 2015, the 193 Member States of the UN met and agreed on the proposed agenda, titled Transforming Our World:2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (SD), consisting of a Declaration, 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and 169 targets and a section on means of implementation. This officially flagged off the quest for sustainable development with a target aimed at the year 2030 (UN, 2015).

The SDGs, also known as Global Goals, build on the success of the MDGs, aimed to go further to end all forms of poverty. The new goals are unique. They call for action by all countries, poor, rich and middle-income to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and addresses a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities while tackling climate change and environmental protection (UN, 2015).

Bangladesh is a development surprise. It is a model MDG nation through monumental progress in poverty reduction and social development and is hopeful to fulfill the SDGs. Government's 7th five year plan (2016-2020) has aptly incorporated most of the proposed 17 goals of the SDGs. As a pioneer, the country has also launched an SDG tracker to monitor implementation progress as part of an all-inclusive effort to achieve SDGs by the target year 2030. Bangladesh Army, though not directly responsible to attain the SDGs, yet being an important state organ, may effectively contribute to the national endeavour.

Bangladesh Army has a well reputed organizational culture, capability and acceptability in the national development effort. Its personnel are well trained and highly motivated to accomplish excellence. Out of the 17 SDG goals, Bangladesh Army is already poised to contribute to the achievement of health, education, infrastructure, habitation, gender equality and climate action related goals. With disciplined and efficient workforce, Bangladesh Army is well-poised to contribute towards the achievement of the SDGs by the nation.

UN 2030 Development Agenda

Education is a basic human right and sustainable development starts with education. The SDGs are not legally binding, but governments are expected to take ownership and establish national frameworks for the achievement of the 17 Goals. The primary responsibility for follow-up and review of the progress made in implementing the goals rests with the countries (UN, 2015). MDGs, in theory, was applied to all countries, but in reality, they were considered targets for poor countries to achieve, with finance from wealthy states. Conversely, every country will be expected to work towards achieving the SDGs (The Guardian, 2015).

Targets: Statement of the SDG 4 is ‘Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all’. Specific targets of the SDG 4 are to achieve quality early childhood development, ensure complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education for all girls and boys, ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, increase relevant skills for employment, eliminate gender disparities in education, ensure equal access to all levels of education for the vulnerable (including persons with disabilities, indigenous people and children in vulnerable situations) and ensure that all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017).

The Progress of Goal 4: Report of the UN Secretary-General, titled Progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, (E/2017/66) delineates progress of Goal 4. In 2014, about 66% of children worldwide participated in pre-primary or primary education in the year prior to official entry age for primary school. However, in the least developed countries, the ratio was only 40%. The adjusted net enrolment rates in 2014 were 91% for primary education, 84% for lower secondary education and 63% for upper secondary education. Sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia account for over 70% of the global out of school population in primary and secondary education. However, many children didn’t acquire basic skills in reading and mathematics. Equity issues constitute a major challenge in education where urban children scored higher in reading than rural children (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2017).

Challenges to Attain the SDG 4: The seven precise SDG 4 targets include completion of primary and secondary education for all children as well as access to early childhood development and pre-primary school education; similar access to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education; and ensuring literacy and numeracy for all youths and adults (UN, 2015). The first two targets of the goal will be difficult to

implement in Bangladesh, as the literacy rate still drifts around 60% and no significant progress has been made in the areas of pre-primary education and early childhood development (Ahmed, 2016).

Deductions: An assessment of MDG shows that globally 263 million children remained out of school in 2015 and children who enrolled in school don't necessarily have access to quality education. The SDG 4 with focus on 'quality' and 'lifelong' education seem to be part of an extensive list of ambitious wishes that are sought by the global community in the light of prevailing realities, future potentials as well as resource constraints. MDG experience demonstrated that achievement of SDG targets and goals are likely to be restricted by country's level of development, budget, time and resources. If the egalitarian ideals on which these are founded are not accepted globally, specially by developing and underdeveloped countries and a holistic approach by all stakeholders including military outfits of the country is not taken, the SDG 4 will remain unfulfilled. To transform the SDG targets into reality all organs of the government including the Army has to play an efficient role. Scopes exist for the Army to contribute in all sphere of education including regular, technical and vocational education. The army can also work for the education of the vulnerable groups and persons with disabilities.

National Sustainable Development Strategy

The World Bank's recent estimates of Gross National Income per capita (GNI) show that Bangladesh has ascended to a lower-middle income country status (The World Bank, 2015). Currently, the nation is in the quest for attaining higher middle-income status by the year 2021. The SDG corroborates this pursuit as the stated targets are in consonance with the Vision 2021, which aspires the framework of a future Bangladesh that reflects the hopes and aspirations of the citizens of the country for an economically inclusive and politically accountable society.

The Response of the Bangladesh Government to SDG-4: Ministry of Planning published the National Sustainable Development Strategy in 2013. The report endorsed challenges in achieving the desired goals, set sector wise priorities, outlined details of specific strategy and elaborated on the institutional framework necessary for a successful outcome. The government strives to ensure quality education and training by sustaining gender parity in primary and secondary enrolment, achieving gender parity at tertiary level and improving quality of education in all types of education systems. The strategy also endeavours to ensure equity and equality in all levels of education, history, heritage, promote the spirit of liberation war, and national culture in education. It also encompasses teaching environmental issues in primary and secondary curriculum, emphasizes science and technology education and promotes research and development. The quality of technical and vocational education and training is planned to be enhanced through improving efficiency and quality of programmes, establish a link between training and job markets, and teacher training. The government has taken four major steps to improve the quality of education. First, digitalization in education; second, to update curriculum at the primary and secondary level, third, to improve the classroom environment; and, fourth, to strengthen education management (Planning Commission, 2013).

Key Challenges: Globally, the key challenges of SDG are understanding the goals, appropriate financing and monitoring the progress in attainment (Sustainable Development Solution Network, 2015). National Sustainable Development Strategy of Bangladesh highlights population, poverty and inequality, unplanned urbanization, energy security, inefficient water resource management, natural disasters and climate change are the challenges in reaching SDGs (Halim, 2015). Professor Selim Raihan in his article ‘Are South Asian countries ready to meet the targets of SDGs by 2030?’ opined that in the case of SDG 4, most South Asian countries spend much lower proportion to the GDP in education sector than their East and Southeast Asian counterparts (Raihan, 2017). He also mentioned

that the South Asian countries are yet to be on the right track to attain most of the goals under the SDGs. Specific challenges in relation to general and technical/vocational education are as follows:

- **General Education:** Challenges are to ensure universal education at primary and secondary levels, increasing the quality of education to reduce differential between urban and rural areas and providing adequate and appropriate education to cope with the demand of manpower market. Establishing centre of excellence in higher education, providing quality science and technology education and imparting social and human values are also duly considered.
- **Technical and Vocational Education and Training:** Shortage of skilled manpower in technical and vocational sector, mismatch of jobs and skills and training content/quality and a shortage of well-equipped training institutes are principal ones.

Deductions: Capitalising on the success of MDGs, the government has taken a detailed strategy to achieve the SDGs. For SDG 4, future challenges remain in relation to increasing the quality of education; proper training of teachers at the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels; making school environment attractive; and raising completion rates. The number of schools, colleges and universities are also inadequate to meet the demand of the growing number of students. However, the increasing rural demand for educational facilities calls for serious attention to be given to expanding educational opportunities in rural areas. Besides, management issues of education system remain highly debatable including examination system, syllabi, leakage of questions etc. The government action plan seems ambitious and needs a concerted effort by all stakeholders and organs of the state including the Army.

Prospects and Challenges of Bangladesh Army

Relevance of Bangladesh Army's Contribution: Bangladesh Army is an important state organ and part of the greater society. Though the Planning

Commission has not included the Army or for that matter the Ministry of Defence (MOD) or Armed Forces Division in its job allocation list, the Army is already involved in education sector of the country and has capabilities to take part in the achievement of the Government's 7th five years plan and beyond.

- To the general mass of Bangladesh, Army has acceptance for its organizational culture and efficiency. Since independence, Army has earned repute and stature through discipline and best practices. Bangladesh Army's capacity and capability are derived from its training, discipline, human resource management, teamwork, experiences in nation-building activities, involvement in disaster management, and exposure to UN peace support operations. Experiences gained in those aspects can be capitalized in chosen SDG's requirements (Imani, 2017).
- As the world experiences a lesser number of war and conflicts in the 21st century, Bangladesh Army, in the coming days, is likely to participate more in nation-building activities. As such, the Army's participation may be considered and taken into account in SDG 4 implementation plan. Bangladesh Army may be taken on board from the planning stage. This will ease the enactment and likely to make the execution faster and more effective (Imani, 2017).

Potentials of Army at Various Levels of Education: Since its birth, Bangladesh Army inherited the involvement in academic education to meet the internal requirement of education for military wards. Over the period it grew good facilities and expertise which started contributing beyond its own community. The educational facilities of the Army were not aimed to provide mass education and it was not possible also. As such it always focused on quality and thrived to set example. Besides public schools and colleges, Army expanded scope and capacity by establishing English Schools, Schools for Special Children etc. Subsequently, tires of public education were raised by establishing institutes of technology, medicine, business administration and off late by establishing few universities focusing on quality and not the quantity. Nationally, good public and

private educational institutions are mostly Dhaka based. Army has good schools, colleges, universities and institutes all over the country including the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Army is not addressing mass education, yet the Army operated educational institutions presently have about 200,000 students including foreign citizens. Army's educational institutions have earned credentials at national and international levels which validates their credibility and contribution to the nation. All these make a platform for Army to effectively contribute to country's achievement of the SDG-4 (Imani, 2017).

Army in Public Education - Present State: The educational institutions directly or indirectly operated by Bangladesh Army are of various types and stature. These cover various levels of education and are located all over the country. A summary is given in Table-1 and Table-2 below. Besides Army provides administrators to many model colleges, public colleges, government medical colleges etc.

Table 1: Army Operated Schools and Colleges		
School/ College	Number	Remarks
Cadet College	12	Boys-9, Girls-3
Cantonment Public School and College	19	College-46, School-63
Cantonment Public College	5	
Cantonment College	4	
English Medium School and College	6	
Cantonment Public School	1	
Cantonment Board School	35	
English Medium School	16	
School for Differently Able Children (Proyash)	11	
Total	109	
Source: Education Directorate, Army Headquarters		

Table 2: Army Operated Institutions for Higher Education		
Educational Institution	Number	Location
Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP)	1	Mirpur
Military Institute of Science and Technology (MIST)	1	Mirpur
Armed Forces Medical College (AFMC)	1	Dhaka
Bangladesh Army University of Engineering and Technology	1	Natore
Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology	1	Cumilla
Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology (BAUST)	2	Cumilla and Saidpur
Army Institute of Business Administration	2	Savar and Sylhet
Army Medical College	5	Bogura, Chattogram, Cumilla, Jashore and Rangpur
Army Nursing College	3	Dhaka, Cumilla and Rangpur
Total	17	
Source: Education Directorate, Army Headquarters		

Compatibility to Targets of SDG-4: SDG-4 focuses not only on education but education with a set of standards to be fulfilled by 2030. The existing public education facilities of Bangladesh Army can match the criteria of the goal in the following aspects:

- **Quality Education Leading to Relevant and Effective Learning Outcomes:** Army operated secondary and higher secondary educational institutions are considered amongst the best in the country. Cadet Colleges and Public School and Colleges operated by Army are consistently among the first few in terms of the result in public examinations. Besides, though at nascent stage, MIST, AFMC and BUP are well reputed at home and abroad for academic excellence. Besides, Army-run schools and colleges focus on the high standard of discipline and moral education leading to developing each student as an enlightened citizen.
- **Pre-primary Education:** Almost all Cantonment Public Schools and English Schools has pre-primary level education facility. These schools are located in around half of the districts of the country allowing distributed reach to the mass population as students other than military wards are the majority.
- **Relevant Skills for Employment and Entrepreneurship:** The army maintains a very high standard of technical training for officers and men and after retirement, many of them enter into the job market endowed with unparalleled skill sets. Army established first vocational training institute in 2009 namely Trust Technical Training Institute. Few more technical and vocational institutions at various places of the country started their academic sessions from 2018. Diploma Courses (shown in Table-3) will be conducted in those institutions under the technical assistance of Bangladesh Industrial and Technical Assistance Centre and academic curriculum of Bangladesh Technical Education Board. Additional to creating a skilled workforce for the local economy, these institutes also prepare efficient labours for overseas employment.

Table 3: Technical/Vocational Education Institutes Operated by Army		
Discipline	Operating Institution	Location
Diploma in Construction Engineering	ECSME (Engineer Centre and School of Military Engineering)	Quadirabad
Diploma in Survey Engineering	ECSME	Quadirabad
Diploma in Communication Technology	Signals Training Centre and School	Jashore
Diploma in Mechanical Engineering	Electrical and Mechanical Engineering Centre and School	Saidpur
Source: Engineers Directorate, Army Headquarters		

Education for Persons with Disabilities and Children in Vulnerable Situations: ‘Proyash’ school for children with special needs was established in 2006 for Army wards. Today Proyash is the largest non-profitable education institute for children with special needs in the country of its kind with eleven schools all over the country with total 2000 students where 75% of students are from non-military society. Currently, Proyash Dhaka also conducts training for teachers and therapists.

Gender Equality: All Army operated educational institutions provide safe, non-violent, gender sensitive, inclusive and effective learning environment. Currently, there are eighty-six co-education schools and colleges and three girl’s cadet colleges in different cantonments and district towns which are run to maintain apposite gender equality.

Challenges Faced by Army in Relation to SDG 4

Harmonization with Role and Task: The primary role of the Army is to safeguard sovereignty and territorial integrity of the country. Contribution in the education sector is part of the nation-building role and not a

direct task assigned to the Army. Therefore, the scale and magnitude of resource and manpower allocation in attaining SDG 4 are likely to remain constrained by higher priority tasks.

Balancing Quality vs Quantity: Ever increasing public interest to enroll their children in Army run schools and colleges are occasionally causing impediments in maintaining quality education. As the number of Army run schools and colleges are directly proportional to the number of existing cantonments and a total number of military wards, the public entry becomes proportionally limited. Again, recruiting quality teachers and getting adequate number of students for english medium schools in rural garrisons is relatively difficult.

Education for Remote Areas: Most of the Army operated educational institutions are located in the district towns with some exceptional ones in upazilas including those in CHT. Besides, except few, Army operated schools and colleges are non-residential. As such a limited number of students from rural areas can take the benefit of quality education. Asrayon projects which are implemented by Army in the rural areas for marginalised population include only housing. Thus, pre-primary and primary education may remain elusive to the children of these communities.

Limited Budget: Sparing hefty sum from Army budget for public education is extremely difficult amidst other operational and organizational priorities. Newly established tertiary education institutions are yet to be fully financed by the government for appropriate infrastructure and facilities. Last but not least, tuition for children with special needs in Proyash incurs additional expenditure which is currently financed by parents.

Manpower Shortage: The army does not have dedicated manpower for employment in the educational institutes. All currently employed serving officers and soldiers at schools, colleges, and universities are usually deficient at the formations and units. Any additional withdrawal of manpower for employment in an educational institution will result training difficulties and administrative complications.

Inadequacy of Space and Infrastructure: The newly established Bangladesh Army University of Engineering and Technology, Bangladesh Army International University of Science and Technology, Bangladesh Army University of Science and Technology (BAUST), Army Institutes of Business Administration and Army Medical Colleges are housed in unit/soldier's barracks. These buildings are spacious enough and are not conducive for appropriate educational facilities. Technical and vocational institutes which are accommodated within the cantonment barracks need own permanent infrastructure.

Suggested Modality for Bangladesh Army

Bringing Uniformity with Role and Task: The Army cannot get directly involved in the education sector. Rather, as the current practice, Army should continue to contribute in this sector as part of its nation-building role. Employment of serving members of Army in educational institutions as administrator should be minimum in number and time-bound. Serving officers and soldiers may not be employed in public schools and colleges except in selected special cases. The allocation of education-related responsibilities should be corroborated by allotting sufficient budget allocation from the Ministry of Finance. Army run schools, colleges, universities and Proyash should form part of the government's planning and execution of SDG 4.

Ensure Quality against Quantity: Quality of education should remain as cornerstone in Army run public education institutes. Number of students for each school/college/university should be kept restricted within a specified limit to ensure quality education. If the available infrastructure permits, number of student admission may be increased by opening new sections but not increasing the number of students per section. It is imperative to recruit and train competent teachers for maintaining the education standard. Monitoring and supervision of the Army-run schools and colleges should follow the current practice where local Area Commander ensures maintenance of the desired standard of education

under the overall supervision of Army Headquarters. Though a difficult proposition, the best practices of the Army-run schools and colleges may be considered by Ministry of Education for adoption in the public schools and colleges.

Education for Remote Areas: Primary school going aged children who are not yet enrolled in schools are essentially from the remotest part of the country or are from the extreme poor band of the population. Army may take the initiative to convince the government to include and construct a primary school within each Asrayon project or within close proximity to allow the children of homeless parents to enroll in school. In the existing realities, it will not be possible to establish any Army run schools or colleges away from the cantonment. New and upcoming cantonments should calculate the student numbers of their schools and colleges to allow more non-military background students admission.

Limited Budget: In Bangladesh, the annual budget for education sector hovers around 2% of the GDP which must be increased to a minimum 6%-8% of GDP to achieve the SGD 4. It is understandable that in the current realities government is not in a position to raise the education budget significantly. However, part of the unspent portion of the development budget may be allotted for education. Army may get some share of this residual allotment for tertiary level education and for Proyash through Ministry of Education. These allotments should be special grants and not form part of defence budget. For infrastructure development of Cantonment Public Schools and Colleges of new garrisons at Ramu, Padma Bridge and Patuakhali government should allot funds under Annual Development Projects (ADP) of the Ministry of Education. Revision of current project profile of Asrayon Project may be undertaken to allocate additional budget for construction of one primary school for each community. Land for these primary schools may be taken from the Asrayon locality or from the vicinity under the arrangement of local administration. Army may be tasked to supervise the implementation of primary school establishment as quick impact project.

Manpower Shortage: Authorized manpower of Army is calculated on the basis of war-fighting and not bearing in mind nation-building responsibilities. At present Army is not in a position to depute additional serving officers or soldiers in the education sector either inside or outside the cantonments. Such a provision will strain the manning level of the formations and units and may affect the routine operational and military training activities. However, qualified personnel with required educational qualification may be identified prior to retirement and may be allowed to make the transition to the education sector. After retirement, these officers and men may be absorbed in the Army-run or public colleges and universities as teachers and administrators.

Inadequacy of Space and Infrastructure: To derive appropriate benefits from the recently established Army Medical Colleges, Engineering Colleges and Business Administration Colleges, it is imperative to shift them from cantonment barracks and outside but in adjacent areas of the cantonments. Adequate land should be purchased and fitting infrastructure and facilities should be developed immediately out of the Annual Development Projects. The effort may be also taken to acquire separate land adjacent to existing cantonments for establishing future Proyash and vocational training institutes.

Recommendations

Apropos the discussion and findings following are recommended for achieving the SDG 4 by Bangladesh Army:

- The Army should continue to contribute in the education sector as part of its nation-building role. Army run schools, colleges, universities and Proyash should form part of the government planning and execution of SDG 4.
- To ensure quality education number of students for each school/college/university should be kept restricted within a specified limit. However, a number of student admission may be increased by opening new sections but not increasing the number of students per section/classroom.

- To facilitate 100% primary school going aged children get enrolled in schools, revision of current project profile of Asrayon Project may be undertaken to allocate additional budget for construction of one primary school for each Asrayon project.
- Infrastructure development of Cantonment Public Schools and Colleges of new garrisons at Ramu, Padma Bridge and Patuakhali may be implemented under Annual Development Projects (ADP) of the Ministry of Education.
- Personnel with required educational qualification may be identified from Bangladesh Army prior to retirement and absorbed in the Army-run or public colleges and universities as teachers and administrators.
- Army Medical Colleges, Engineering Colleges and Business Administration Colleges, may be shifted to permanent campus.

Conclusion

UN 2030 development agenda is launched only before three years where GDP growth is seen as a means to the desired end of human development. Today the world is experiencing an education revolution where the literacy rate is rising rapidly and education is becoming cheaper and more accessible. Education is now the major social vaccine against diseases, harmful effects of smoking, child marriage, racism and infant mortality. As a direct benefit of better education, people have a greater job opportunity, better living condition and enhanced social security. The goals and targets of SDGs are definitely ambitious but attainable. Amartya Sen opines that human insecurity is intolerable and SDGs should be approached not in terms of numbers but the conditions. SDG focuses on the three-dimensional approach on economic, social and ecological aspects those are viewed as the development trinity.

Bangladesh can be proud of the achievements of MDGs but should not be complacent. Timely achievement of SDGs by Bangladesh is a huge task where the Government needs support from all state organs and Bangladesh Army being a major organ may contribute to the process of

achieving SDGs. Among the goals of UN Development Agenda 2030, SDG 4 have a significant relation to the socio-economic development and Bangladesh Army by default has the potentials to contribute towards the achievement of the targets. For over four decades, the Army is providing quality education through its educational institutions at various levels and setting the standard for others to emulate.

As a nation-building responsibility, the scale and magnitude of resource and manpower allocation in attaining SDG 4 will be constrained by higher priority tasks. All Army run education institutions are enduring the challenged with the tough task of balancing quality against quantity. Ever increasing public interest and aspiration to enroll a greater number of students in Army run schools and colleges are posing additional challenges in maintaining the quality of education. Newly established universities are yet to be fully financed by the government for appropriate infrastructure and facilities.

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