

## Attracting and Retaining Underprivileged Students



### The Case of Secondary Education Stipends Program In Bangladesh

#### Overview

From its inception in 2008, an innovative project backed by the World Bank has provided over two million targeted stipends for secondary education in Bangladesh, 60 percent of which are provided for girls' education. This stipend program was targeted to poorer students and has resulted in a 20 percentage point increase in retention rates overall and a rise of around 24 percentage points for girls and boys from the poorest households.

#### Challenge

Bangladesh pioneered the use of conditional cash transfers for girls' education with the launch of the Female Secondary School Assistance Program in the early 1990s. This initiative led to a fourfold increase in female schooling, reversing the pronounced gender-gap (the female-to-male ratio was then 120:1) within a decade. However, it was still difficult for children from low-income families, especially boys, to have access to an education and there were growing concerns about low learning achievements and high dropout rates for both boys and girls (particularly for the poor). Building on the success of the earlier interventions and to address the remaining challenges, the Government of Bangladesh launched the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) in 2008, with the support of the International Development Association (IDA). The project has been implemented in 122 Upazilas (subdistricts) of Bangladesh, benefitting more than 2 million students and teachers in about 7,000 secondary schools.

#### Approach

SEQAEP focuses on two key interventions: Firstly, proxy means testing-targeted stipends and tuition to economically poor girls and boys, and secondly, quality-enhancing incentives to students, teachers, and schools. Bangladesh is one of the first in the region to adopt a rigorous and transparent targeting mechanism to identify poor beneficiaries on a large scale. It is a method that generates welfare scores for applicants based on a set of observable household characteristics. Students eligible for the stipend

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More Results 

**38%**

of poor children now enrolled in secondary school, up from 30%

**2.1 million**

students have benefitted from the program

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receive from \$20-to-\$40 a year, depending on grade, and benefits are conditional on students maintaining 75 percent average attendance, receiving a passing grade in final examinations, and remaining unmarried until they complete Grade 10. These education compliance criteria for each student are confirmed every six months and funds are provided to individual student bank accounts.

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## Results

Some positive results of SEQAEP are already visible in 2011 through independent impact assessment. These include:

- The share of poor children in total secondary enrolment has increased from 30 percent to 38 percent;
- SEQAEP benefits about 2.1 million students, 54 percent of them girls, out of the four million girls and 3.5 million boys attending secondary school in Bangladesh;
- Net impact on secondary schooling enrolment due to stipends is twenty percentage point increase. The effects are higher among children from poor families, particularly for boys;
- The ratio of male-to-female students in project areas has improved by three percentage points in three years (from 0.82 in 2008 to 0.85 in 2011);
- Secondary school graduation rate (measured as the percentage of Grade 6 entrants passing Grade 10 exams) has climbed from 30 percent to 39 percent;
- Some 800,000 students have been benefitted through performance-based monetary incentives, additional classes in English and Mathematics, and the Reading Habit Program.

## Voices

“By the time I reached Class 9 all four of us siblings were in secondary school. It would have been impossible for my father, a farmer, to have paid our tuitions had it not been for the stipend.”

— *Parvin, Mother*

## Bank Contribution

SEQAEP financing consists of IDA support of \$130 million and government funding of \$25 million.

## Partners

IDA and the Asian Development Bank are the only active donors in the secondary education sector of Bangladesh. However, SEQAEP is supported only by IDA financing in conjunction with the government funds. The Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, under the Ministry of Education, is the principal implementing agency.

## Toward the Future

At present, SEQAEP is active across one-third of Bangladesh. The SEQAEP experience and results are expected to contribute to more effective and systematic targeting of the poor, and the approach itself is likely to be replicated nationally.