

Stipends Triple Girls Access to School



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CHALLENGE

The stipends program has been a testing ground for innovations, where approaches and instruments pioneered under FSSAP have tended to find their way into other Government- and donor-funded projects, including primary school initiatives, in Bangladesh and elsewhere. The project does not attempt to tackle wholesale reform, rather it is a piece within the larger efforts championed by the Government of Bangladesh in partnership with other donors, including the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (NORAD), and the European Union (EU).

APPROACH

The IDA-financed Bangladesh Female Secondary School Assistance Program (FSSAP), launched in 1993, supported a government program to improve access to secondary education for girls by providing tuition stipends. It improved the quality of schools through teacher training, provision of performance incentives to schools and students, and water and sanitation facilities. The project covered 121 of Bangladesh's 507 sub-districts.

RESULTS

Girl's enrollment in secondary schools in Bangladesh jumped to 3.9 million in 2005, from 1.1 million in 1991, including an increasing number of girls from disadvantaged or remote areas. This has enabled Bangladesh to achieve one of its Millennium Development Goals ahead of time—gender parity in education.

Highlights:

- Girls' enrollment spiked 67 percent in 17 years. Female enrollment, as a percentage of total enrollment, increased from 33 percent in 1991 to 48 percent in 1997 and close to 55 percent in 2008.
- Girls pass rates soared. Secondary School Certificate pass rates for girls in the project area increased from 39 percent in 2001 to 62.8 percent in 2008.
- Training grew, and focused on quality. More than 33,000 teachers were trained under the project. Some 64,000 members of school management committees and another 64,000 members of Parent-Teacher Associations from 6,000 institutions were trained in school management accountability, with a focus on education quality and conducive learning environments.
- Participating schools exceeded the target. About 7,000 schools—many more than originally

targeted—participated in the program through a cooperative agreement with the Ministry of Education.

- New schools built to meet needs. Twenty-five new schools were established to enhance access to secondary education in very remote areas and in disadvantaged communities.

- Additional benefits accrued. Studies show that indirect benefits of the project included reduced early-age marriages and fertility rates, better nutrition, and more females employed with higher incomes.

IDA CONTRIBUTION

IDA has contributed US\$185 million since 1993 for several projects designed to enhance girls' access to secondary education. In the early 1990s, the Government formulated its policy, and IDA established implementation arrangements to take forward the Government's policy initiative on a major scale. IDA then helped build and strengthen a program management unit within the Ministry of Education that manages and oversees the stipend program. With IDA support for the program in 121 upazilas (sub-districts), the Government scaled up the program to the whole country after its success in these upazilas. A key innovation was the direct funding mechanism featuring the transfer of stipends directly from banks to individual girls' bank accounts.

PARTNERS

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NEXT STEPS

The program has proven groundbreaking in addressing girls' access to education and is widely recognized as a pioneering undertaking. As a result, the Government has expanded the program nationwide. A number of other countries, learning from the Bangladesh experience, have implemented similar stipend or conditional cash transfer programs with IDA support.

Having achieved gender parity at the country level, the Government is now focusing more on reaching economically and geographically disadvantaged girls, as well as poor boys, under a new project—the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project—also supported by IDA. Along with the stipend program, the Ministry of Education is undertaking reforms aimed at improving education quality through better governance and accountability. IDA is supporting this through a series of education sector development credits.

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