

Involvement of Non-governmental Organizations in Promoting Primary Education in Bangladesh

Md. Azizul Alam

Department of Sociology, North Bengal International University, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to investigate the engagement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in primary education activities in Bangladesh as development agents. We understand that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have immense potential as catalysts of social change, and we analyze numerous aspects that affect their purported powers. Investing in developing NGOs and service delivery capacities is crucial for their long-term viability as intermediaries in meeting societal demands. The number of NGOs has soared in Bangladesh during the past decade largely because foreign donors have made funds available to them. Over the past decade, donors have increasingly turned their attention to NGOs to provide funds to community-based programs. The principal task of most NGOs in Bangladesh has been to undertake various poverty alleviation and empowerment of women programs in rural areas. Many NGOs have placed education and health as a top priority, as they play a crucial role in human resources development. Therefore, in this paper, it is propitious for non-governmental organizations to make solid contributions to strengthening the institutional fabric of primary education in Bangladesh.

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Corresponding Author:

Name: Md. Azizul Alam

Institution: Department of Sociology, North Bengal International University, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

Email: azizulalamswru@gmail.com

1. INTRODUCTION

Soon after gaining independence, the government of Bangladesh made primary education mandatory for everyone [1]–[4]. The 1972 constitution acknowledged the value of education in the advancement of the country [5]. "The state must take decisive action to create a universal, mass-oriented, and uniform educational system and provide free and mandatory education to all children at such stage as may be determined by law; 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," according to article 17 of the Constitution of Bangladesh [6], [7]. Primary education is the type of education that helps kids in the 6–11 age range develop their mental, behavioral, and attitude skills. This primary education is the foundation of all education [8], [9]. Since the mid-1980s, particularly since the Jomtien conference, several new initiatives have been undertaken by the public, private, and non-governmental organization (NGO) sectors to promote

primary education in the country. Although the amount of primary schooling in Bangladesh has increased recently, the quality has not kept up with the growth. In the nation, there are eleven different kinds of elementary schools. These can be secular or religiously oriented, official or informal [10]. The duration of primary education is five years, and children aged 6-10 years are supposed to enroll in the primary education institutions. Available data indicate that gross enrollment in primary education reached over 96% [11]. But the net enrollment rate of primary education is still only 80% [12]. Besides, a large number of over-aged children are also enrolled in the primary schools. Access to primary education significantly increased during the last 10-15 years. There are over 400 NGOs in Bangladesh today involved with providing basic education [13]. Since the early 1990s, the number of NGO schools in Bangladesh has quadrupled, making up 8.5% of the country's educational system [14].

The majority of these NGO schools are widely considered to be more effective than government schools. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) is one of the largest NGOs in the country working on primary education. BRAC schools make up 76% of all NGO primary schools [15]. Following Bangladesh's independence in 1971, BRAC was established in 1972 to assist with the relocation of refugees in the Sylhet district. Their focus was, and still is, poverty elimination. The Non-Formal Primary Education Program started in 1984 after adults in a literacy class asked about their children, wondering why their children should have to wait until they were adults before they would be able to learn how to read. There were just 22 pilot schools when the education program first began.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Conceptual Framework

Primary education:

Education is a lifelong process for human beings. People learn from the very beginning of their birth to the end of their lives about various facts and

happenings as well as various activities about their lives and society. It is noteworthy that primary education is the base of other educational activities; in fact, higher education and other educational activities mainly depend on primary education. Among elementary school students, primary education refers to a lesson. It indicates a certain level of knowledge, skill, attitude, habit, and capacity, which bring positive value and behavioral change among the primary school-going children who belong to certain age groups. Primary education should be universal, free, and compulsory. "Everyone has the right to education. At the very least, elementary and foundational education must be free. Elementary education shall be compulsory" [16].

NGO: Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in Bangladesh constitute the country's non-profit private sector in development. Their activities embrace various fields of development and are largely geared to alleviating poverty and promoting sustainable development. The term "NGO" often refers to an organization that provides non-governmental aid. A non-governmental organization is a non-profit organization that serves the public interest, according to the social science dictionary. Non-governmental organizations are created to serve social goals other than giving donors financial advantages. Although the phrase technically refers to government or tax-supported organizations, it is typically used to refer to private, nonprofit social organizations and does not

include for-profit, proprietary organizations [13]. Stated differently, "NGOs are typically characterized as a voluntary association of individuals formed by the initiative of one or more committed individuals who are committed to the planning and execution of development projects at the grassroots level." NGOs operate under the nation's legal framework even if they are not part of the government "[15].

3. METHODS

This study is based on the extensively systematic literature review. The objectives of the study are to assess the role of NGOs in promoting primary education in Bangladesh. According to the objectives, this study chiefly followed the secondary sources for collecting data. For finding the secondary sources, this study extensively reviewed and analysed various literatures. As a part of literatures, this study explored research articles, relevant books, newspaper articles, some scholarly research works and education policies of the government of Bangladesh.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Historical Background of Primary Education

Bangladesh's educational background was chosen from the 1947 Indian subcontinental split, namely the basic school system of independent Pakistan. It was imported during the British civilization's linking period, and its manifestation in basic education today is mirrored in it. At various levels of education, it is divided part by part. The British rule is responsible for establishing such a structure of education; the British got the idea of their primary education from the noted revolution of Europe, "Ecole Unique". A portion of that they imported to establish an administrative structure here. After the British, there was continuing conventional education in our country, though several attempts were made to restructure the

education system of Bangladesh in general and primary education in particular.

1. Vaidik Era

At the Vaidik decade, when there was no existence of state, no state rule or administration, then learning was under religious binding that is appreciable to any modern civilization. The Vaidik education was established depending on the holy religious book 'Bed'. The main objective of this learning was to build the children on the aspect of Vaidik thought and philosophy. 'Sanskrit' was the medium of Vaidik learning. All the teachers were Brahman. There are three sorts of education in the Brahman education. The schools were entitled as toll and pathshala. Pathshala was an ancient educational institution in this country. The Brahman was in charge of payment (tolls), and all got a chance at primary education except the Shudra. In Pathshala, reading, numeracy, and ancient (puranic) history were learned. "The teachers received no compensation. At the time of the harvests and puja ceremony, they received some honoraria."

2. Buddhist Era

The education of Buddhism was adopted based on its initiator, Buddha, on non-discrimination after Vaidik education in India. The last target of Buddhism is to award 'Norton'. The Buddhist education was that 'Nirvana' is gotten through eight ways. The elements of it are honest thinking, honest worship, honest words, honest faith, honest activity, honest earning, and honest memory. When the baby was six, then the education was started in Buddhist education, and that was continued up to fourteen. Though the oral story process was the education medium of Buddhist education, sometimes discussion and debating meetings took place. Democracy was the root of Buddhist education. The door of education was opened for all. Lord Monra, William Adam, and Sir L. Finstone, when evaluating the domestic education, said that the Buddhist education was more developed, wider, and democratic than the Hindu education.

3. Muslim Era

In the Christian era, in the eighth century, Muha'mmad Bin Kashem had initiated the Muslim remise here, having won in the battle. Muslim rule was started in Bangladesh in the thirteenth century. Ikhtiar Uddin Bakhtiar Khilji won Bangladesh in 1203 of the Christian era. We found in Muslim reign that they also built mosques, schools, and madrash like Hindus. Education about the pardah system was basically religious-based. But that was a qualitative feature. Pathsfiala were conducted in the mosque, temple, and even under these. Books were not available, but hard slate and soil writing were continued. The teacher provided education of their own style. Missionary Max Muller said there were 80,000 primary schools in that British period in this area.

4. British Period (up to 1947)

Education was introduced by the British at the beginning of the nineteenth century. The conventional schools were abolished in 1757 when the East India Company won the Palashi War. Then the rule of the English was initiated in India, and at the beginning, they did not take any responsibility for the education of the people here. In 1813 the British government ordered the East India Company to educate the people of India and to allocate one lakh taka per year. In 1844, Lord Hardinge built 102 Jornakura primary schools to explore primary education using the mother tongue at the village level [16]. "William Adam," in his education report, stressed the following.

- a. Collection of district-wise information on education.
- b. Introducing textbooks in various mother tongues.
- c. Placement of an inspector in every district to implement the education plan.
- d. Establishment of the normal school system of training of teachers.
- e. Encouraging the teaching profession by allocating land as an incentive.

- f. Introduction of scholarships through competitive examinations.

The Wood's Education Dispatch of 1854 was a significant example of the efforts to modernize education by the British rulers in Bengal. A Department of Public Instruction was established in 1855–1856 as a result of its recommendation. Lord Curzon took some steps to expand primary education in 1910. Gopal Krishna Gokhale placed a bill in the law council for making primary education compulsory. The bill was, however, rejected in 1912. Later on, in 1919, a bill making primary education compulsory in the municipal areas was passed. With the provision of limited autonomy in the Indian Book Act of 1921, the Bengal (Rural) Primary Education Act was enacted in 1930. There was very little follow-up action for more than ten years following this. Under this act, district school boards were set up to control, direct and manage the dissemination of education and ultimately reach the goal of universal compulsory and free education. Despite the fact that the director of public instruction oversaw, managed, and controlled primary education, the district, subdivision, or circle offices conducted school inspections. After the Second World War, the Sergeant Commission Report 1944 for the development of education was published. It was the first report to recognize pre-primary education. The Sergeant Commission Report was never put into practice since British rule ended in 1947.

5. Pakistan Period

India and Pakistan, two states, had been reformed in 1947 due to the long revolution. As Bangladesh was far off, 1200 miles was included with Pakistan for so-called religious nationalism. During the Pakistan reign, one-fourth of the time, one century of primary education was polluted by all colonial affairs. Was the primary education reform that was implemented during Pakistan's rule solely focused on improving the quality and organization of the system? In order to overhaul the primary education

system and rebuild Pakistan before its inspection, the first national conference was organized in Karachi. In this conference, the provisional East Pakistan government formed the East Pakistan Education Committee and the committee passed a recommendation, which in 1931 established a new ordinance. According to that law the free and compulsory primary education had been launched and the ordinance was effective only for two years. Primary education had been promoted for five years rather than four years according to the law and in class five "Primary scholarship" had been adopted [17]. In 1957, by the recommendation of the "Aaur Rahman Khan Education Commission." The responsibility of conducting primary education had come from the district board to the control of Thana Parishad, and the responsibility of government schools to the district magistrate. In some selected primary schools, the previous education system was cancelled before launching compulsory primary education, and few model primary schools were adopted. As a result, all over East Pakistan, the conflict of model and non-model has started. The Managed Primary School had been launched, abolishing model and non-model provision in 1965. The five-

year plan of three sessions (1955-60, 1960-65, and 1965-70) was implemented. Primary education was universal and compulsory, and several times the time was fixed for five years. But lacking initiative and the necessary finance, no single benefit had come to this sector. At that time the allocation was less." A few of the allotments were expended (18%-20%) to primary education.

It has been recognized for the five years of planning (1973-1978) that in 1947-48, the primary schools numbered 29,633 in Bangladesh, which has been reduced to 26,665. It was found that around 10% of schools had been closed. The education planning of the Pakistan government had not been fruitful to the primary education in Bangladesh; rather, the primary education was widely ruined. So, it had been found that the literacy rate in Bangladesh was 78%-82% from 1951 to 1961, but the learners had increased from 26 lac to 60 lac in primary school from 1947 to 1973. After getting their freedom in 1947, the people did not accept the discriminatory education plan of Pakistan. From the table below, the discriminatory education plan of the Pakistani government is easily imagined.

Table 1. Discrimination in education sector

Timing	Total expense	East Pakistan	Percentage	West Pakistan	Percentage
1947-48	34.70	12.40	35.73	22.37	64.27
1952-53	104.30	43.60	41.60	60.70	58.20
1956-57	139.30	43.20	32.02	96.10	68.99
1967-68	713.90	348.60	48.83	365.30	51.17

Source: Education statistics of Pakistan in 1947-48 (Rawalpindi: Religious Book Society, 1969), Statistical Yearbook of Pakistan.

Was the primary education reform that was implemented during Pakistan's rule solely focused on improving the quality and organization of the system? In order to overhaul the primary education system and rebuild Pakistan before its inspection, the first national conference was organized in Karachi.

6. Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission-1972

Qudrat-e-Khuda The Education Commission was formed in 1972, headed by the leading educationist and scientist Dr.

Qudrat-e-Khuda. The commission submitted its report to the government in May 1974. The report was formulated and is based on the socioeconomic and political state and cultural heritage of the country. The perspectives and this scenario of the education system of the contemporary world were also taken into consideration. In fact, the Qudrat-e-Khuda Commission report reflected the fundamentals of the newly framed constitution of Bangladesh. The concerned authority examined the report carefully and the preparator/steps that were taken to

implement the report were delayed. In light of the recommendations of this commission, a committee for developing national curricula & syllabi was formed in 1976. The National Committee consisted of 47 eminent educationists of the country headed by Prof. Shamsul Haque.

The National Committee developed a detailed procedure and mechanism for developing national curricula & syllabi. To achieve its target, the NCSC (National Curriculum Syllabus Committee) constituted 10 subcommittees and 27 subject committees. The NCSC submitted its report to the government in 07 volumes in 1976, 1977 and 1987. The Qudrat-e-Khuda commission suggested some major changes in the primary, secondary, and higher secondary stages of education. According to the commission report, primary education will be 8 years (Class 1 to Class VIII) and secondary education will be 4 years (Class IX to Class XII). In the field of higher education, a combined degree course of 4 years and a 1-year master's course will be offered at the universities. Regarding curriculum, syllabus, and textbooks, the commission suggested a uniform curriculum for the primary level based on competence. The commission gave special emphasis to an improved assessment system and suggested letter grading in the assessment of student performance in all stages of education.

7. Mofiz Uddin Education Commission-1988

After the publication of the Qudrat-e-Khuda Education Commission report, some of the recommendations were implemented. In 1979, the government felt the necessity of reviewing the report. In February 1988, the Mofiz Uddin Commission's reports were made public, and the Advisory Council for National Education released Interim Education Policy Recommendations.

8. Shamsul Haque Education Committee-1997

Qudrat-e-Khuda In 1974, the Education Commission delivered its report. Because of unforeseen circumstances, the

committee's recommendations were not adequately executed, and it was believed that in order to satisfy the national needs and keep pace with the unprecedented advancement in the field of knowledge in the contemporary world, original and qualitative changes in our education system were needed. With this end in view, the government of Bangladesh constituted a 56-member committee headed by Prof. Shamsul Haque. The committee has made all-out efforts to develop an education policy in order to introduce a pragmatic education system suitable for the country. A cabinet committee was established to examine the commission's report, which was placed in the cabinet. The National Assembly received the committee's report.

9. Dr. M.A. Bari Commission-2002

An expert committee headed by Dr. M.A. Bari was formed in 2002 to identify immediate implemental reforms of the education sector. The committee suggested several interventions in the sector which were considered later by the Education Commission 2003.

10. Mohammad Moniruzzaman Mia Commission—2003

In order to improve the quality of education and initiate a set of reforms to develop the sector, the government undertook several actions of which the formation of the Education Commission in January 2003 was one of the major initiatives. In March 2004, the government received the commission's report. All of the education sub-sectors are the subject of 880 recommendations in the Commission Report. Evaluation of last year's program and drawing up of the program for the coming year;

- a. TV and media coverage;
- b. Circulation of posters;
- c. Meetings and rallies at school, district, and national levels.

4.2 NGOs involvement of primary education in Bangladesh

NGOs in Bangladesh are involved in many areas of public services and are

documented as being some of the most active in the world [18]. In the area of primary education, NGOs in Bangladesh have been heavily involved in the provision of primary education, particularly to children from economically disadvantaged families. At present, about 1.4 million children, or 8% of the children enrolled in primary schools, attend non-formal primary schools provided by NGOs. Since it was believed that government-provided primary education could not reach the poorest children in isolated places, non-formal primary education was introduced in the mid-1980s. Currently, more than 400 NGOs are involved in non-formal primary education. The largest NGO working in the field of education in Bangladesh is the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), which provides non-formal primary education to 1.2 million children out of 1.4 million children currently receiving non-formal education [19]. Though BRAC and other NGOs have been operating non-formal education since the 1980s, they have had the least notable efforts in the formal education system. They did not invest enough money in permanent schools, school infrastructure, and classroom development. In 2005, there were only 289 formal primary schools, where 37,690 pupils were taught by 1,175 teachers, i.e., only 0.23% of primary school students were enrolled in the NGO schools [20]. This shows trivial participation of NGOs in the formal primary education in Bangladesh. On April 23, 2008, the government decided to give BRAC the responsibility of monitoring all the primary schools, including government, private, and community schools, in 30 upazilas across the country. Experience suggests that BRAC launched its experimental Education Program with 22 one-room primary schools in 1985. The BRAC Education Program is now providing non-formal primary education to underprivileged children out of the formal education system. BRAC schools work to build the skills and confidence level of the children and motivate them to continue their education through the formal system. The BRAC Education Program currently operates several types of primary schools, such as

BRAC Primary Schools, BRAC Adolescent Primary Schools, Educational Support Programs Schools, Urban Cluster Schools, and Education for Indigenous Children Schools. BRAC arranges monthly refreshers, year-end training, and subject-based training for its primary teachers. But all these programs are related to non-formal education. Nevertheless, a strong protest was enthused among the teachers of the primary schools and leaders of the primary schools. They apprehended that the country's primary educational system, supervised by 'such an inexperienced institution like BRAC' would bring about further mismanagement in the rural areas. To pacify the situation Khondaker M. Asaduzzaman, director general of the directorate of primary education said that the pilot program of BRAC will assist the government's second phase of the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP II), and monitoring of the government program on primary education has not been given to BRAC or any other NGO (The New Nation, June 4, 2008). It is irrefutable that BRAC has the least experience in the management of formal education management; rather, they have vast experience in training matters. Therefore, it would be preferable if the relationship in this area continued just for teacher training, as opposed to academic supervision or activity monitoring.

Area Coverage of the NGOs (in educational program)

The education programs offered by the NGOs are covered all over the country. Division-wise analysis shows that 43.9% of the NGOs had education programs in the Rajshahi division, 42.3% in the Dhaka division, 27.8% in the Khulna division, 22.1% in Chittagong, 12.2% in the Barisal division, and 6.5% in the Sylhet division. Graph 5.1 presents the number of NGOs providing education services by division. District-wise, the highest number of NGOs was concentrated in Dhaka district 80 NGOs operated education programs there. The second place went to Chittagong (62 NGOs) and the third place went to Jessore (61 NGOs). The lowest number of NGOs operated

education programs in Feni (14 NGOs), Jhalokathi (14 NGOs) and Munshiganj (10 NGOs).

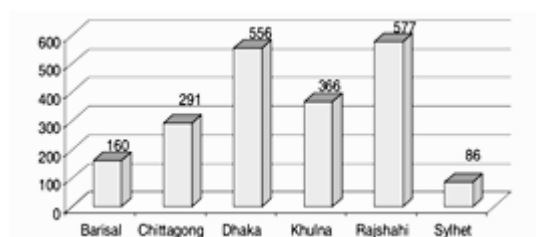


Figure 1. Division-Wise Basic Education Program

The NGOs operate various types of education programs. It can be divided into three major categories. They are Early Childhood Development & Education, Basic Education, and Continuing Education. Under Early Childhood Development & Education, there are parenting, early stimulation, learning & protection activities, and pre-primary programs. Under Basic Education, there are Primary Education, NFPE, Adolescent Education, Adult Literacy, Disable Education, J.S.C., and ROSC programs. Under Continuing Education, there are post-literacy, vocational

entrepreneurship, employment skills, and quality of life improvement activities. Not all NGOs worked in all the areas. About 77% of the NGOs had a primary education program (NFPE and primary education combined), 28.3% of the NGOs had pre-primary, 15.7% had an adult literacy program, 13.5% of the NGOs were implementing a ROSC program, 12.2% had an adolescent education program, and 10% of the NGOs had a vocational entrepreneurship employment skills program. Graph 5.2 presents the number of NGOs involved in various types of education programs.

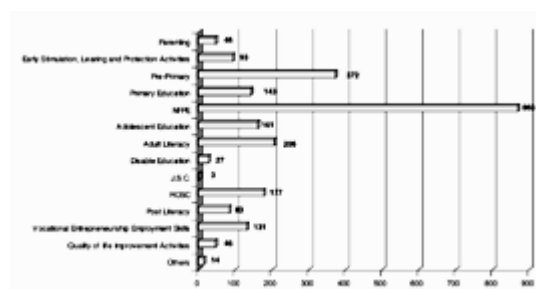


Figure 2. Number of NGOs Involved in Various Education Programs

4.3 NGOs Innovations in primary Education in Bangladesh

Given the large number of children and adults who remain uncovered by present educational programs, it is felt that some innovations are needed in primary education to offer affordable, high-quality education that would guarantee high attendance, retention, and success rates. Several innovative programs have been initiated in primary education by both governmental and non-governmental agencies to achieve these

aims. Based on these criteria, some of the more prominent and successful innovative programs by NGOs in the field of primary education in Bangladesh are as follows:

BRAC Non-formal primary education program: The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) was one of the first NGOs to have started large-scale programs of non-formal primary education in Bangladesh. While BRAC started as a relief and development agency for the rural poor in 1973, its education program began with only

22 experimental schools in 1985. Today, its NFPE program is by far the largest single non-government primary education program in Bangladesh, currently with more than 30,000 schools and about a million pupils. More than 90 percent of the children who start in BRAC schools graduate, and a large proportion of the NFPE program graduates are admitted into grade 4 or higher of the government school system. BRAC organizes two types of schools: three-year NFPE schools for 8-10-year-olds who have never attended school and two-year Kishor-Kishori (KK) schools for 11-16-year-olds who have dropped out of primary school and are unlikely to return. The major components of the NFPE program are the following:

GSS Primary Education Program:

GSS (Gono Shahajjo Shangstha), a leading NGO in the country, was set up in 1983, aiming at the empowerment of the rural and urban poor. It started its activities by organizing and mobilizing agricultural laborers of fourteen villages of Khulna district in southwestern Bangladesh. Over time, it has grown into a national-level NGO that has development intervention in 16 out of the 64 districts of Bangladesh, covering over 450,000 households. GSS joined the private sector effort for promoting basic education in mid-1987 with the first education center in a village. Since then, its educational program has been expanded to about 250 centers for both rural and urban children. The education of children living in slums is a key focus of the GSS.

CMES Technology School: The CMES (Centre for Mass Education in Science) was founded by Dr. M. Ibrahim and originated from the publication and distribution of a science periodical by him. The first step towards the goal of CMES was establishing basic schools which were designed to provide non-formal primary education to disadvantaged children and youth along with integration of technology training and marketing. The basic school is a grass-roots school within the home environment of the target group. Its inner campus consists of a small bamboo-and-mud house or shed provided by the beneficiary

families right within their homesteads. A Rural Technology Centre for Basic Schools (RTCBS) services twenty elementary schools in a region equivalent to a union, the smallest governmental unit in Bangladesh. There are four educational levels in the system: Agrosor I (Advanced I), Agrosor II (Advanced II), Bikash (developing), and Ankur (germinating). It serves twenty basic schools in an area equal to a union, which is Bangladesh's lowest administrative unit. The system comprises four educational levels: Agrosor I (Advanced I), Agrosor II (Advanced II), Bikash (developing), and Ankur (germinating). These levels are approximately similar to A region corresponding to a union (Bangladesh's smallest administrative entity) is administered by a Rural Technology Centre for Basic Schools (RTCBS), which serves twenty basic schools. The system comprises four educational levels: Agrosor I (Advanced I), Agrosor II (Advanced II), Bikash (Developing), and Ankur (Germinating). These levels are approximately similar to grades 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively, of the formal system, and each takes about one year. The first two levels are available in the basic schools, and the last two only in the RTCBS.

Dhaka Ahsania Mission Alternative Primary School Program: Children of 6-8 years are the target group. Three grades, each lasting nine months, make up the 27-month course. Three grades, each lasting nine months, make up the 27-month course. The school premises are provided by the local community.

UCEP School: The Underprivileged Children's Program School is a specialized program designed for working children in the age group 6-14 years. The duration of this program is 7 years. It is a mixture of general and technical education.

Terre des Hommes (TDH) Street Children Program: Children aged 8-10 years who work at railway stations, bus and launch terminals etc. are the groups of this program. Such children are assembled for teaching under the sheds of railway stations or bus and launch terminals with the help of local authorities including the police. BRAC curriculum and materials are used. Many of these programs

have shown that even with very limited facilities, through better design of materials, improved teaching methods, and better management and supervision, schools can be made highly attractive to children so that dropout and absenteeism are almost totally eliminated.

NGO profile: BARC practical action in Bangladesh

Pupils: A school consists of 33 children, 72 percent of whom are girls living in rural areas within about a two-kilometer radius of the school. For the most part, pupils come from relatively disadvantaged homes, their families being landless or owning only their homesteads.

Teachers: Teachers are generally married adults, 95 percent women, who have completed nine or more years of education and live within easy walking distance of the school. The teachers are hired on a temporary, part-time basis and are paid modest wages. One teacher is assigned to every 33 students. The 27-month program consists of three teacher training sessions, including a 12-day initial training at a residential BRAC training center and monthly one- or two-day refresher training sessions led by BRAC staff at a BRAC office near the teacher's school. Regular input is provided by BRAC field personnel who visit once a week.

Parents: The parents of most BRAC school pupils are illiterate and are usually the most socio-economically disadvantaged in their villages. The parents of most BRAC school pupils are illiterate and are usually the most socio-economically disadvantaged in their villages. Parents pay no fees for the schooling, apart from replacing broken slate boards and worn mats; BRAC provides all pupil and teacher supplies — pencils, notebooks, textbooks, teacher manuals, slate boards, chalk, etc. Prior to the opening of a new school, parents and BRAC staff meet several times. Parents must pledge to attend monthly meetings and to send their children to school each day.

Schedule: Three-year cycles are used to offer the NFPE instructional curriculum. The school is in session for 2½ to 3 hours a day, six days per week, 268 days per year, at a

time of day selected by the parents. The group of 33 pupils is enrolled at the beginning of the program and advances together through the program. At the end of the program, the school begins another three-year cycle if there are enough eligible children in the community.

Instructional site: Instruction is provided in one-room premises rented for just three hours per day. These rooms generally have bamboo and mud walls, an earthen floor, a tin roof, and a blackboard. The children sit on the floor on bamboo mats, holding their slate boards on their knees. The teacher has a stool and a metal trunk that serves as a desk as well as a supply cabinet.

Curriculum: Bangla, social science, and mathematics make up the curriculum for both NFPE and KK schools, which has evolved and undergone multiple revisions. The material covered is roughly equivalent to grades 1-3 in the formal school system. Since the formal school system requires English, the NFPE schools include English in their curriculum during the third year so that children who want to join formal schools later are well prepared. BRAC's ability to implement all the necessary elements of a targeted basic education program derives largely from its expertise in development management. In terms of development, since its creation 20 years ago, BRAC has designed surveys that help it develop and target its programs for the most disadvantaged rural families. BRAC has also developed ways to encourage these families to participate in the decisions that most affect program implementation.

Cost Efficiency: Independent cost studies have confirmed BRAC costs for schooling (about Tk.800 or US \$20 per annum) as roughly equal to the government's formal schooling, without considering the extra private costs that make the formal schools more expensive and lead to high dropout and low enrollment rates in the formal schools. In addition, unlike the formal school system, which allocates most of its resources to teachers' salaries and school facilities, BRAC allocates almost 30 percent of the NFPE program budget to management and supervision. Only 29 percent is allocated to

salaries and 6 percent to rent school space. Students from BRAC attain on par with or better than those from regular schools. BRAC pupils complete the NFPE program and enter the formal grade 4 at a higher rate than do formal school pupils. BRAC pupils score as much as or better than formal school pupils in basic education assessments and basic literacy tests. The comparatively higher attendance rates, lower repetition rates, and greater grade 3 completion rates in BRAC and the formal school system persist even when the annual costs per enrolled student are almost comparable, and higher grade 4 continuation rates for BRAC pupils mean that BRAC schools are substantially more cost-efficient per graduate than the government's formal schools.

5. CONCLUSION

Education is a basic human right while literacy is the first step to education in the lifelong learning process of all human beings. Education is the foundation of all skills and a prerequisite for economic development, promoting human values and the quality of human resources. In the context of Bangladesh, the lack of basic education amongst a vast number of the population, especially the rural poor and slum dwellers, is a major hindrance to the progress of human development. NGOs believe that in order to mount a literacy movement successfully at all levels, it is crucial to have cooperation among different stakeholders, particularly the government, NGOs, civil society (like learners, teachers, teachers associations, researchers, think tanks, community development partners, etc. and other institutions that are dynamic and democratic.

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