



## Necessity of BRAC education in development of primary level in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

The study explores the necessity of BRAC in development of primary education. BRAC has taken crucial steps to raise literacy rate through non-formal education along with government efforts. Non-formal education for children provided by BRAC is a unique program to increase literacy rate of Bangladesh. The study explores BRAC roles in promoting education for children in Bangladesh. Here the researcher applies a social survey method approach of research where BRAC Education for Children program is selected purposefully. Data is derived from BRAC field officials, students and their guardians by using a set of questionnaire, an interview schedule for guardians and focus group discussions with the students. Study also illustrates that sustaining quality of education and ensuring good governance in BRAC's education is continuous efforts. BRAC field officials and teachers receive various kinds of trainings related to governance and academic subjects of different grades and some special training to maintain teaching and education quality. Almost all groups of respondents say that BRAC education has positive impact on their society. BRAC education increases the rate of enrolment and decrease the rate of dropout. For these BRAC education program is very necessary in development of primary education in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** BRAC, primary education, Bangladesh

### Introduction

Development of a nation is directly related with education. Access to education is a fundamental human right. Education stands out as the best cost-effective means of increasing human capital and achieving sustainable economic growth and development. It is a key determinant for enhancing the productive capacities of individual Ahmed (2015) [1]. The Government is trying to promote primary education through all its effort. Primary education has been declared universal. It has also been made compulsory since 1994. There is a large-scale national campaign for enrolling all school-aged children at primary educational institutions Haq (2014) [7]. Recently government has introduced pre-primary education in primary schools to make base for the children in starting their primary education. Besides the regular programs, government launched non-formal primary education, informal education for aged and different marginalized people. All these programs are contributing to augmenting literacy rate and promoting primary education. NGOs are playing a complimentary role in this area to a great deal. They have their own programs at the one hand, and are also furnishing activities in partnership with the government on the other. BRAC is one of the recognized NGO, deal education program for the development of primary education. In more than 40 years since BRAC was founded, the organization has extended its reach to 11 countries, serving 135 million people with a broad range of development programs and social enterprises Jabbar (2005) [10]. BRAC works to empower poor people to lift themselves out of poverty and to improve their lives through microfinance, health, education, agricultural

extension and legal services, access to safe drinking water and sanitary latrines, livelihood training, support for safe migration and assistance during natural disasters (BRAC Annual Report, 2013). With education programs in six countries and more than 900,000 students worldwide enrolled in its primary schools, BRAC has built the largest secular, private education system in the world. These schools are designed to give a second chance at learning to the disadvantaged students left out from the formal education systems. At the pre-primary level, BRAC also targets underprivileged children to prepare them for mainstream primary school entry (BRAC Annual Report, 2014). Thus, BRAC is the pioneer in launching primary education and has become the single largest NGO working in primary education all over the country and also in the abroad.

### Background of BRAC Education program

BRAC's education program (BEP) has become the largest secular and private education system in the world, reaching seven countries. BRAC primary schools are designed to give a second chance at learning to disadvantaged children who have been left out of the formal education system due to extreme poverty, violence, displacement or discrimination. BRAC non-formal primary schools complement the mainstream school system Zumakpeh, (2005) [16]. BEP was initially launched as BRAC Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) in 1985. In 2003 it was renamed as BRAC Education Program (BEP). There are two primary school models in the BRAC Education Program. In 1985, the Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE) model was initiated as a three-year Program for children

between the ages of 8 and 10 years. These were children who had never enrolled in any school or who had dropped out from the formal schools. In 1998, this model was expanded to a four-year Program which covers the primary curriculum for grades 1 to 5. This was in response to the large number of BRAC graduates interested in continuing their education to secondary level. The BEOC (Basic Education for Older Children) schools known as Kishor-Kishori schools were opened in 1987. These schools run for three-years catering to the basic educational needs of 11 to 14 year old children Fatema (2013) [6]. Both the NFPE and BEOC schools are provided with books and other materials free of charge. Most BRAC schools are bamboo or mud-walled, one-room village structures with a thatch or tin roof, and a minimum floor space of 360 square feet. BEP carries out its program activities in accordance with a five-year plan and is active in five major areas.

### Five Major Areas of BEP

Non-formal primary education (NFPE) is one of the major programs through which BRAC provides quality primary education to underprivileged children. Pre- primary schooling program prepares children across the country aged 5 + for primary school entry. Adolescent Development Program (ADP) ADP aims at improving the quality of life of vulnerable adolescents, especially girls, by training them in vocational skills, health awareness (including reproductive health) and leadership.

### Key Features of BRAC Primary School

BRAC establishes primary school(s) in an area where they find at least 33 boys and girls crossing the age of 8 years. They are the target group of BRAC primary education system who are dropped out from government primary schools (in few cases, may be other schools also) or who have not been enrolled in primary schools yet though they have crossed the age of enrolment (5 years for pre-primary and 6 years for class 1) Hossain (2014) [8].

### Target Groups of BRAC Primary School:

The program's main target groups are: Children aged 5+ eligible for pre-primary schooling; Out-of-school children (8-10 and 11-14 years), with a special focus on girls; Youth (15-24 years); Poor populations and the unemployed; Ethnic minorities Families; and Children with special needs (children from poor urban slums, remote rural/hard to reach areas, children with disabilities) Riddell, (2006) [12]. BEP's primary target group comprises women and girls, especially from the rural areas, as they represent the most disadvantaged sector of the population.

### Statement of the Problem

MDGs are in the terms of enrolment of children in primary schools and ensured gender parity in enrolment. Enrolment rate increased from 85% in 1990 to 94% in 2010 (Directorate of Primary Education and The Millennium Development Goals Bangladesh Progress Report 2011). Drop out in rural and slum areas remains as a big threat. According to a study of

UNICEF (2012), net enrolment ratio at primary education 94 per cent in 2010 implies that about 1.16 million children (6-10 years old) did not enroll in age specific appropriate grades. 32.8 per cent (5.97million) of school aged children do not complete the full primary schooling cycle Sharafuddin, (2015) [14]. Child population constitutes about 40 per cent of total population of Bangladesh. Therefore, the country has huge potential to gain increased level of economic growth by enhancing productive capacity through investing in quality education. Realizing this potential, policy makers are looking into the existing challenges of quality primary education and continue to exert efforts to address these challenges through policies, programs and budgetary allocations. primary education relate children's right to education and attainment of goals and targets in primary education; focusing on the key prevailing gaps and challenges towards attaining a sustainable quality primary education. It is difficult for the government to afford all the programs involving a huge budget. NGOs working side by side with government are contributing to our primary education, but much effort from both sides is needed to meet the gaps that address the existing challenges Ruchibakhai (2014) [13]. BRAC is in the top position among the NGOs working in this sector. BRAC is working in many remote places for marginalized and poor children. BRAC support the disadvantaged group where government steps have not reached yet. On the other hand NGOs are implementing some programs that are playing a contributing role in achieving certain targets of primary education. Two major fields of concern in primary education are enrolment and reducing the drop out to near zero. Government has got significant success in enrolment, but reducing drop out has still remained a challenge for the government. BRAC can play role to reduce drop out because they have the capability to reach the marginalized people and to the grass root level. BRAC is performing non-formal education targeting to enroll the students dropped- out from government and other primary schools and the unreached out of school children Nath (2014) [11]. NGOs can fill up the areas where government is less successful or have lower degree of implementing arrangements. Besides, in reality it is very difficult for the government to perform a huge task of primary education alone. BRAC is very much needed to achieve the targets of primary education within shortest possible of time.

### Objective

To establish the necessity of BRAC education program in Bangladesh

### Methodology

Durgapur Upazila of Rajshahi district has been selected as the study area purposively to collect primary data from the beneficiaries (mainly guardians), but officers from both DPEO Office and BRAC of the district level were mainly included in the sample as the source of primary data. This study is of exploratory in nature and is based on both qualitative and quantitative data (mixed method). The primary data were collected mainly from two groups of respondents: the BRAC staff, mainly engaged in education program and the targeted

beneficiaries, the guardians of the students of BRAC primary school (six schools of Durgapur Upazila). Secondary sources were mainly used to understand the concept of BRAC and its impact on primary education development by analyzing different research works done by the scholars. The tools used in this study are: interview (both closed and open ended), (Key Informant Interview) and personal observation etc. At the same time, secondary literature review has also been done. Both printed and unprinted documents were examined. The sample sizes from two groups of respondents are as follows: 1) The BRAC staff- 18; 2) Beneficiaries, the guardians of students of six BRAC Primary Schools of Durgapur Upazila-60. So, a total number of 78 respondents were interviewed for this study. Converting relatively large amount of data into a condensed form is the main intention in the study to make an easy interpretation of findings.

### Comparison in drop-out rate between government primary schools and BRAC primary schools in Durgapur Upazila

Table 1

Sl. No.	Year	Dropout rate in Government Primary School (%)	Dropout rate in BRAC Primary School (%)
1	2013	14.66	2.50
2	2014	13.50	2.30
3	2015	11.45	1.10
4	2016	13.70	1.00

BRAC primary schools are well ahead of government primary schools in terms of reducing drop-out. The highest drop-out rate of government primary schools in Durgapur Upazila is 2013(14.66%), 2014(13.50%),2015(11.45%), 2016(13.70%) and Dropout rate in BRAC Primary School is 2013(2.50%), 2014(2.30%), 2015(1.10%), 2016 (1.00%) which was in the year of 2013, while the lowest drop-out rate is 11.45% having in the year of 2015. In comparison, the highest drop-out rate in BRAC primary schools was 2.50% in 2013, and then there is a consistent decrease in drop-out rate stirring to 1.00% in 2016.

### Reason for Choosing BRAC School

Table 2

Reason	Number of Respondents	%
Govt. primary school is far away	15	25.00
Good quality of BRAC education	30	50.00
Poverty	7	11.67
Education materials are free	3	5.00
Communication to govt. school is not good	4	6.67
Quality of govt. primary education is not good	1	1.67

The table reveals the reason of why guardians and children of study area are choosing BRAC schools, though the govt. schools are available there. Almost 25% of the respondents said that the government primary schools are far away from most of their household. 50.00% of them claim good quality of BRAC education, where 1.67 talk against the quality of government primary education. They think about the quality of BRAC education is better than other type of primary

### Drop out at Primary Level and BRAC Education in Bangladesh

Increasing the public literacy level is an important goal for the growth of any country in the world. However, a developing country like Bangladesh usually faces several challenges in achieving that goal. One such challenge is the high rate of primary school dropout. Primary school dropout is when a child enrolls in school but fails to complete the minimum expected amount of schooling of the education cycle. Primary school dropouts belong to the population that is considered illiterate from educational perspective. Hence, it is imperative to identify the key reasons behind primary school dropouts and resolve them accordingly in order to increase the literacy rate among adolescent, and overall population.

education in the study area. 11.67 % of the respondents say that they send their children to BRAC schools due to poverty. Again 5.00% point out that BRAC provide all education materials free of cost and rest of the 6.67% say that the roads and transportation of going to government schools is not up to the mark.

### Services of BRAC Primary Schools

BRAC also works with other development organizations to expand education opportunities for disadvantaged children by partnering with them and providing them with technical and financial support to implement BRAC's non-formal primary education model with changes as needed. These collaboration activities are called education support programmed.

### Comparison in the services of BRAC primary schools not government primary schools of Durgapur Upazila

Table 3

S. No.	Exclusive services/benefits / advantages from BRAC schools	No. of Respondents	%
1	Providing all the learning materials for the students	18	100.00
2	Highly caring	15	83.33
3	Admission of dropped out students	13	72.22
4	Monthly guardians' meeting is being held on regular basis	12	66.67
5	In every session 5 – 6 evaluation tests are taken for each subject.	16	88.89

Source: field work

According to the response of the BRAC staffs, there are as many as 5 services or benefits exclusively provided by BRAC primary schools which are not given by the government primary schools. Among those five services/benefits the service- “providing all the learning materials for the students” 100% respondents mentioned about this service. The second in ranking is ‘highly caring’ which was identified by 83.33%

of the respondents. The third exclusive service in the ranking of the survey is “admission of dropped out students” which was referred to by 72.22% of the respondents from BRAC staffs. The services ‘regular monthly guardians’ meeting’66.67% and ‘taking five 88.89.Services/benefits provided for the students by BRAC Schools, not by the Government primary schools as responded by the BRAC staffs.

**Benefits provided for the students by BRAC School, not by the Government as responded by the government officials.**

**Table 4**

S. No.	Exclusive services/ benefits/ advantages from BRAC Schools	No. of Respondents in favor of the Point	%
1	Providing all the learning materials for the students	18	100
2	Teaching/ Learning Aid	10	55.56

Source: field work

The government officials (officers of Primary Education Department) in their judgment could identify only two exclusive services/ benefits/ advantages from BRAC primary schools. These two services are: 1) Providing all the learning materials for the students; 100% respondent and 2) teaching/

learning aid 55.56% respondent.

**Behavioral change of BRAC School Students**

Students’ daily behavioral activities before and after joining BRAC School.

**Table 5**

Activity Options	Before School			After School		
	Always	Sometimes	Never	Always	Sometimes	Never
Using sanitary latrine	0	15	45	60	0	0
Using sandals at latrine	2	16	42	60	0	0
Wash hands before meal and after toilet	5	20	35	60	0	0
Use safe water for drinking and daily use	8	12	40	60	0	0
Cut nails regularly	10	20	30	60	0	0
Wear clean cloths daily	9	22	29	60	0	0
Respect parents and elders	7	21	32	60	0	0
Help parents in their household task	6	23	31	60	0	0

In this study the researcher efforts to employ this tool to collect data and information from the students of BRAC School. 60 students are selected from three different classes. Researcher discuss various issues with students related to the roles of BRAC schools, education system, teaching system, education quality, learning materials, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and learning etc. with the help of BRAC field officials and teacher. All of the students said that the feel very comfortable to come and stay in the school. They learn poems, rhymes, various stories from their books. Beside this, they learn different social issues like-the use and benefit of sanitary toilet, show respect to elders and affection to younger, social norms and values, rules and disciplines, dance and songs, drawing and reciting etc. from their teacher. They said that they help other weak students and learn in group in the afternoon. They help their classmate and peers when they fall into some socio-cultural problems. Some of the students would not go to schools because the government schools and other NGO schools are far from their house. A table chart is used to understand the daily behavioral activities of the students of BRAC education programs which are given the table.

**Findings**

BRAC primary schools are few in number in comparison to the number of government primary schools, but they have a

significant positive impact on primary education in rural areas in terms of 1) enrolling the over aged (8+ years) boys and girls within non-formal framework, 2) reducing the drop-out rate and 3) delivering quality education. Primary education for children provided by BRAC is a unique program to increase literacy rate in Bangladesh. All of the children of study area are going to schools, among which most of them are the students of BRAC schools due to different economic and technical facilities. Though most of the guardians are living below the poverty line, they have eagerness to send their children to the schools. Good governance is the key pre-condition of successful program implementation. Accountability, monitoring, participation etc. are the measures of governance. BRAC education program is trying to maintain the conditions of good governance. The program organizers on maintain official rules and regulations at the time of selecting children for the schools from the community. BRAC education has a support and supervision program options for BRAC School’s graduate to get admission into different secondary schools. BRAC field officials and teachers receive various kind of trainings related to the academic subject of different grades and some special training to maintain teaching and education quality. The training is provided by BRAC field officials and head office representatives. There are some factors for why guardians and children of study area are choosing BRAC schools, though the govt. schools are

available there. Almost 25% of the respondents said that the government primary schools are far away from most of their household. 50.00% of them claim good quality of BRAC education, where 1.67 talk against the quality of government primary education. They think about the quality of BRAC education is better than other type of primary education in the study area. 11.67 % of the respondents say that they send their children to BRAC schools due to poverty. Again 5.00% point out that BRAC provide all education materials free of cost and rest of the 6.67% say that the roads and transportation of going to government schools is not up to the mark. Teachers argued that the school infrastructure is not adequate to arrange teaching facilities properly though school environment is essential to sustain quality of education. They think the schools need to be restructured for better education. On the other hand, teaching material are vital to teach students properly. All concerned respondents agree that BRAC provide necessary educational materials regularly and timely. Though some problems are existence, all groups of respondents positively talk about the significance of BRAC education for children. They think that BRAC schools are better than other primary schools and they demand more BRAC schools in the area. Every education has its socio-economic returns and benefits. Almost all group of respondents say that BRAC education has positive impact on their society. Co-curricular and extra-curricular learning's are common activities in BRAC schools. Most of the teachers say that they teach their students cleanliness for good health, using sandals at latrine, rules and discipline, use sanitary latrine, cutting nails regularly, social norms and values and respect parents and elders. It is no doubt that BRAC schools contribute a lot to educate children. BRAC plays pivotal role in creating employment for the female in Bangladesh. BRAC (case study NGO) has a great contribution to reducing the drop-out rate, as it is found from the study that, the drop-out rate is much lower in BRAC primary schools than government primary schools. One key informant (high school teacher) said that, almost all of the students they get from BRAC primary schools are good students. Some other key informants gave opinion that BRAC primary schools are very organized and disciplined even with some limitations (e.g. weak infrastructure). Thus it was found that BRAC schooling has a positive impact on ensuring quality education of primary level.

### Conclusion

Education is the first tool to create human capital and primary education is the base for that. So, there is no scope to overlook primary education. Government's effort will be enhanced by active and proper participation of non-government organizations. Coordination between these two bodies within collaboration framework is very crucial so that the government can capitalize the role of NGOs to attain the desired goal of the primary education development. It is very important to determine how the NGOs are playing their roles and contributing to primary education in the country and to what extent the coordination between the government and the NGOs is working. This study is intended to determine the actual state of GO-NGO collaboration in primary education in the study area. NGOs have a great opportunity to develop all

the sectors of education and they play an important role to maintain the standards of education. The quality of educational programs run by BRAC is also good; another point where they edge over their government counterparts is there access; as these can reach at the places where government faces difficulty. But one thing they need to improve upon is their untrained human power and management of funds. The BRAC help to instruct local people in educational field and also aid in developing learning materials for different trades. BRAC primary schools need or can get the government support to make their programs more effective. On the other hand, there are some areas where government can capitalize the experiences and best practices and results of BRAC. Government can take their innovative ideas and invite them in areas where they have networks.

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