

BRAC Research Report

July 2007

BRAC's Partnership with Mainstream Primary Schools: Some Early Findings from an Evaluation Study

Samir Ranjan Nath
Rifat Afroze
Notan Chandra Dutta
Anwar Hossain
Md. Mahbubul Kabir
Goutan Roy

BRAC's Partnership with Mainstream Primary Schools: Some Early Findings from an Evaluation Study

**Samir Ranjan Nath
and
A Team of Researchers¹**

July 2007

Research and Evaluation Division
BRAC Centre, 75 Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh
E-mail: research@brac.net, www.brac.net/research
Telephone: 9881265, 8824180-87

For more details about the report please contact: nath.sr@brac.net

¹ The team members include Rifat Afroze, Notan Chandra Dutta, Anwar Hossain, Md Mahbubul Kabir, and Goutam Roy.

ABSTRACT

This study investigates BRAC's partnership with mainstream primary school programme which was undertaken in Fulbari, Nageshwari and Chunarughat *upazilas* in 2004. The programme aimed to provide various training and workshops for teachers' of government and non-government primary schools and social mobilization. In 2004, a baseline survey was carried out by the programme staff in 154 schools in these three *upazilas*. The repeat survey was conducted by the Research and Evaluation Division. Issues for explorations were the changes in teachers in terms of capacity building, school and class management, and guardian and community in terms of participation in school activities. In addition, some qualitative exercises were done to supplement the quantitative findings. The results reveal a positive sign. The training and workshops helped participants to enter into the insights of their works. The school activities ran in more disciplined manner due to frequent visit and close supervision of the programme staff. However, of the two types of schools, the non-government schools show less improvement than the other.

BACKGROUND

BRAC is well known for its non-formal primary education programme. BRAC's education model is followed not only in Bangladesh but also in other parts of the world. The model was found very effective in the areas where national provisions have faced challenges to provide education services especially in the remote rural areas, urban slums and in the poorer communities. Studies show that community participation from the beginning, continuous teacher training through monthly refresher courses and regular monitoring by the programme organizers were the most significant contributors behind the success of the model. We experienced in BRAC schools that if joyful learning is arranged, pupils come to school regularly. So, there is far less absenteeism in BRAC schools. Again, if trained teachers can be provided and they are monitored and supervised regularly effective learning can be arranged in the classrooms. At the same time adequate teaching learning materials should also be provided as a condition of success of the model.

BRAC started school programme for the children in 1985. About 3.3 million children completed the full course of primary education, of which over 90% enrolled in the formal secondary schools. Starting in 1997, BRAC now operates over 16 thousand pre-primary schools in the catchment areas of nearly 10 thousand formal primary schools (both government and registered non-government). Graduates of these schools enrol in the respective formal schools. The aim of all these efforts of BRAC is to supplement State efforts to achieving Education for All by 2015. BRAC education activities are mostly donor funded.

Success of the programme especially in two areas – completion of primary education of a large proportion of the enrolees with a fairly good quality of education and their continuation in the formal secondary schools inspired BRAC to work with the formal education sector at primary level. BRAC thought that its involvement with the formal sector would help share its experiences with the mainstream education provision and ultimately help provide quality education to the larger proportion of primary students.

THE PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME

With the above aim, BRAC initiated a special project called 'Partnership with Mainstream Primary Schools' (PPS) in 2004. The project was initially started in Fulbari *upazila* under Kurigram district. Within a short period it was expanded to two other areas viz., Nageshwari *upazila* under the same district and Chunarughat *upazila* under Habiganj district. The government and the registered non-government schools (in short GPS and RNGPS) were brought under this project. The local education authorities cooperated with BRAC in providing access to these schools. The main activities under the project are given below.

- Training/refreshers for the teachers
 - Management training for the head teachers
 - Foundation training for untrained teachers
 - Subject based training for assistant teachers (English and mathematics)

The training aims to build capacity of the teachers and improve classroom teaching.

- Social mobilization
 - Arranging workshop for SMC members
 - Holding meeting with parents
 - Continuous communication and discussion with head teachers
 - Involving community with school activities

Social mobilization aims at creating a favourable condition and to increase students' attendance and completion rates, and decrease dropout and repetition rates.

THE STUDY

After about three years of start of the programme in three *upazilas* a study was undertaken recently to see whether the intervention of BRAC has made any changes in the schools under the project. Both quantitative survey and qualitative investigations were initiated for data collection.

A baseline survey was carried out in 2004 by the programme staff in 154 schools in these three *upazilas* where intervention was initiated. Of these schools, 106 were government and 48 were registered non-government primary schools. We revisited those schools in the middle of this year and collected information using a similar questionnaire. It would allow us to provide information on change in the programme schools during last three years. Besides, interviews were conducted with the trained teachers and other concerned persons to know their views about the training provided. The classrooms were observed to see the implementation of training. Eighteen research assistants completed field investigation in June 2007. All of them got a week-long training before starting the fieldwork. Data collected during the revisit are still under processing. This short report provides some early findings of this evaluation study.

FINDINGS

This section starts with some information on various types of training provided by BRAC to the teachers and the SMC members. Voices of the teachers were also put alongside of these findings. Information on enrolment, promotion, dropout, and repetition are also presented. States of community participation, infrastructure development, teaching-learning provisions, etc. were also provided at the end.

Teacher training: Training is one of the most important ways of enhancing teachers' professional capacity. Four different types of training courses were offered to the teachers. These are week-long management training for the head teachers, Two week-long foundation course for those who did not receive Certificate in Education (C-in-Ed) course, week-long subject training in English and mathematics. Regarding training on specific subject, BRAC's aim was to provide training to at least two teachers in each school – one in each subject. We came to know that 72.4% of the teachers of the study schools had C-in-Ed in 2004, which increased to 74.4% in 2007. This means that only 2% of the teachers got this basic training during last three years and still a quarter of the teachers are untrained (without C-in-Ed).

Of the 154 schools under study, 152 had head teachers in place. Of them, 10.5% received management training from any other sources other than BRAC and 77.6% received BRAC's management training. Some of these head teachers (8.6%) received management training from BRAC and other sources as well.

A section of the head teachers who received management training from BRAC were asked about what lessons they had learned from this course. Over a quarter mentioned that they learned basic techniques of school management, their responsibilities as head teachers, and how to work together. Another quarter of them said, it gave them the opportunity to learn some techniques on how to keep friendly relationship with the colleagues and supervise their works. About a fifth of the head teachers learned how to work with the SMC and keep the SMC members active. Almost all of them said that they benefited from the training; it increased their skills as head of institutions. When the head teachers were asked to mention some of the strong side of this training course they mentioned the following:

- Punctuality, discipline and proper use of time were the main attraction of the course.
- The trainers were very gentle and they respected the trainees too.
- The trainers used various types of methods; they were skilled in both training methods and the subject areas they taught.

A good portion of the head teachers mentioned their satisfaction about training venue, overall environment of BRAC training centres and the food served during the course. The head teachers also made some suggestions towards improvement of the training course. Sixty percent of the teachers suggested to increase duration of training which ranges from two weeks to two months. Nearly half of them suggested arranging refreshers training once a year.

BRAC provided two-week foundation training to 56 teachers of these schools who had not gone through the C-in-Ed course offered from the Primary Teacher Training Institutes (PTI). These teachers were asked to mention about the changes they have seen in them after receiving the course from BRAC. Majority of them said that they introduced lesson plan, teaching aids and materials, study in small group, joyful learning environment, and co-curricular activities in their classes after receiving foundation training from BRAC. As they had no training beforehand, they were not aware of these before.

One hundred thirty teachers of the study schools received one-week mathematics training from BRAC and 111 teachers received training on English language; they are respectively 18.3% and 15.6% of the total number of teachers in the schools. This means that BRAC provided subject-based training to about a third of the teachers in the study schools. Seventy-one percent of the teachers who received training in English and 80% of those received training in mathematics mentioned that they regularly use in their classes what they had learned in the training courses. Nearly a quarter of the trainees in English and 20% of those in mathematics sometimes used these.

When the trainees were asked what changes they have seen in them after receiving BRAC subject-based training they mentioned the following.

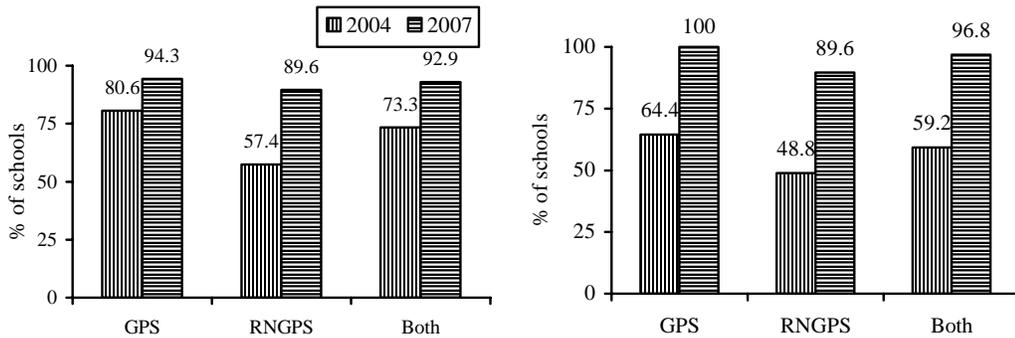
- It increased punctuality. I try to keep myself the whole period in the classroom.
- It's now easier to make presentation in the classes. My students can understand easily than before.
- I can speak English better than before. My students have started to follow me. It's a good sign.

- The training increased my mathematics skill. I can teach mathematics easily and my students are benefited.
- I can use materials from real life while teaching mathematics and also can provide practical examples.
- I can make mathematics joyful to my students.

Majority of the chairpersons of the school managing committees and a good proportion of the members have participated in a day-long workshop. Roles and responsibilities of SMC members, community mobilization, resource mobilization, parental involvement in school and quality education, etc. were discussed in the workshop.

Community participation: There are at least two formal ways to ensure community participation in the primary schools. The major one is the school managing committee (SMC) and the other one is the parent teacher association (PTA) (Fig. 1a). Besides, there is a provision of mothers' assembly (MA) (Fig. 1b) which is rather informal.

Figure 1a. Percentage of schools having PTA by year **Figure 1b. Percentage of schools having mothers assembly by year**



The SMC is supposed to play important role in the development of schools if active people are involved in it. BRAC initiated democratization of the SMCs through ensuring parental choice in their formation. For instance, when BRAC started working with these schools all members of about 96% of the SMCs were selected by the previous committees. After working for three years with these schools all members of nearly 3% of the schools are now elected by the parents. In case of a third of the committees, some members were selected and some were elected. Meetings are now held each month in majority of the schools which was not the case previously. BRAC organized workshops with the SMC members of the schools in order to discuss about their roles and responsibilities in school development. This also made them more active than before; a reflection of which can be seen in their involvement in infrastructure development of the schools.

There were no parent teacher association in 27% of the study schools in 2004, which reduced to 7% in 2007. Major improvement in the formation of PTA was found in the RNGPSs. In 2004, 57.4% of the RNGPSs had PTAs which increased to about 90% in 2007. The baseline data show that less than two-thirds of the PTAs were active, it is now 91% in 2007.

About 40% of the schools – over a third of the government schools and more than half of the registered non-government schools had no provision of mothers' assembly in 2004. The

situation has improved. During the first half of 2007, all the government schools under study and 89.6% of the registered non-government schools organized mothers' assembly.

Attendance: Pupils' regular attendance in schools is a crucial one and has significant impact on learning. The database shows that on average, it improved slightly from 68% in 2004 to 70.4% in 2007. The reason behind this improvement lies in information collection period. This year's data were collected during rain, which was not the case for baseline survey. Although no significant change was noticed in attendance of the pupils in the GPSs, a great improvement was observed in the RNGPSs. Whereas, the attendance rate was 68-69% in the GPSs in both the years; it was 63% in 2004 and 77% in 2007 in the RNGPSs – an improvement of 14 percentage points.

Participation in annual examination: Due to flexible promotion policy in the first two grades and no external intervention for the promotion in other grades and absence of any public examination at the end of primary education, the annual examinations in the primary schools do not carry that much importance. As a result, a good number of students do not participate in the annual examination. Due to some mobilization activities among the students and their parents, the participation rate (Fig. 2a) of students in the annual examination (Fig. 2b) has increased 9.5 percentage points during the last three years – from 78.5% in 2003 to 88% in 2006. The rate of improvement was found similar in both types of school.

Figure 2a. Participation rate in annual examination by year and school type

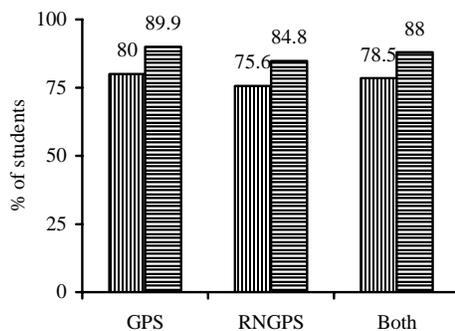
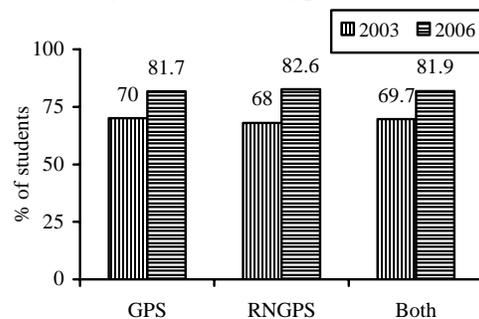


Figure 2b. Pass rate in annual examination by year and school type



Promotion, repetition and dropout rates: These are three important indicators considered for analysing students flow from one grade to another and from one level to the next. The average promotion rate of the students in the annual examination in 2004 was below 70% in the programme schools, which increased to 82% after three years of intervention in 2007. This ultimately reduced the repetition and dropout rates in the schools. For instance, the repetition rate was 16.5% in 2004, which reduced to 10% in 2007 and the dropout rate reduced from 13.8% to 8% during the same period. Improvement in the promotion rate over the last three years was mostly equal in both GPS and RNGPS; however, the rate was lower in the RNGPSs than the GPSs in both the surveys. Again, the repetition rates were slightly higher in the GPSs and dropout rates in the RNGPSs.

School infrastructure: Infrastructure development of the schools under the programme was initiated mostly through activating the school managing committees and community mobilization. Improvements have been noticed in some of the areas in this regard. The situation was better in the GPSs than the RNGPSs when BRAC started the programme but the improvements were much more in the RNGPSs than the GPSs.

Decoration of school office and classrooms were initiated under the programme. While 70.4% of the school offices and 62.7% of the classrooms were decorated with paintings, charts and maps at the beginning of BRAC activities, these improved to 88.3% in 2007 in both the cases. BRAC also did some activities in order to keep the classrooms, school premises and toilets clean. In some schools the classrooms were so clean that the students enter there keeping their shoes outside.

Table 1. Percentage of schools against some indicators related to infrastructure development by year

Indicators	GPS		RNGPS		Both	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
Decoration of school office	75.5	91.5	59.1	81.3	70.4	88.3
Decoration of classrooms	67.9	87.7	52.4	89.6	62.7	88.3
School garden	27.3	58.5	15.9	45.8	23.8	45.5
Platform for national flag	86.3	86.8	65.2	79.2	79.7	84.4

Less than a quarter of the schools had garden in 2004; 27.3% of the government and 15.9% of the registered non-government schools had this. These schools improved their gardens with the help from BRAC. BRAC made the other school teachers interested in gardening and provided saplings free. The teachers also asked their students to bring saplings. When the resurvey was done in 2007 we found that 58.5% of the GPSs and 45.8% of the RNGPSs had garden in the school premises; totalling 45.5% of the schools under the programme. It is to be noted that there were variations in size and beauty of the gardens. Some of the school gardens were very beautiful. The schools started to be green day by day. BRAC also initiated construction or reconstruction of the platform for the national flag stands in the schools. The platform for national flag stand was damaged in nearly 13% of the GPSs in 2004, where BRAC could not do any improvement; however, in RNGPSs 35% of the platforms needed construction or reconstruction in 2004 which reduced to 21% in 2007 due to intervention of BRAC.

School development plan: Two-thirds of the schools had some sort of yearly development plan in 2004, which increased to 94.8% in 2007 with the help of BRAC education programme. Three quarters of the GPSs and less than half of the RNGPSs had development plan in 2004 which went up to 97.2% and 89.6% in 2007. Although implementation of the plans were highly dependent on availability of resources; the SMC members and the teachers could understand that it is better to have something in front of them which they can try to implement.

Teaching-learning matters: BRAC had little to do with the academic calendar of the schools because 92% of the GPSs and 80% of the RNGPSs had such plan already. However, BRAC tried it in other schools and ultimately made some improvements. Now in 2007, 96% of the GPSs and 92% of the RNGPSs follow some sort of written academic plan prepared by them.

About 97% of the intervention schools had various types of charts and maps due to various government projects. However, these were not used that much in the classrooms. BRAC provided some more and now all the schools have charts and maps. In majority of the schools these are in use. Use of blackboard is very important for better teaching and learning. The blackboards in 77% of the intervention schools were in good condition in 2004, now it improved to 93% in 2007.

Table 2. Percentage of schools against some indicators related to teaching-learning matters by year

Indicators	GPS		RNGPS		Both	
	2004	2007	2004	2007	2004	2007
Yearly development plan	74.3	97.2	47.9	89.6	66.0	94.8
Academic calendar	92.2	96.2	80.4	91.7	88.5	94.8
Charts, maps etc.	98.0	100.0	95.5	100.0	97.2	100.0
Good condition of black board	79.6	96.2	71.7	85.4	77.0	92.9
Library facility	29.2	67.0	20.8	77.1	26.6	70.1
Cub activities	44.1	67.9	12.5	77.1	34.0	70.8

Only 26.6% of the schools – 29.2% among the GPSs and 20.8% among the RNGPSs had some library facilities in the teachers’ rooms. These were mostly one or two bookshelves with some academic and supplementary books. BRAC requested the other school authorities (SMC and teachers) to create library facilities in the schools. With the help of the communities and support from BRAC some of these schools improved their libraries and some others established new libraries in their schools. The resurvey results show that 67% of the government and 77% of the registered non-government schools had library facilities; totalling 70% of the intervention schools.

Cub is considered as one of the windows for multiple developments of the students. BRAC programme organizers initiated to spreading Cub activities in the intervention schools. In 2004, 34% of the intervention schools had Cub activities which increased to 70.8% in 2007. Major improvement was observed in the RNGPSs from 12.5% to 77%. In the GPSs, it improved from 44% in 2004 to 68% in 2007. BRAC distributed sports materials in all the intervention schools. It was observed that less than a quarter of the intervention schools – 28.3% of the GPSs and 14.6% of the RNGPSs had some sports materials for the students in 2004. After BRAC intervention all the schools have a number of sports materials.

CONCLUSION

We used a small amount of information for this preliminary report. A full report with all the information collected will be prepared when we will be able to make all data ready for analysis. The full report would give us a broader picture of the impact of BRAC partnership programme on the study schools. However, we can make few concluding remarks based on the above mentioned small amount of information.

We have seen that the training courses and the workshops helped the participants to enter into the insights of the works they are involved in. This as well as time to time visit of the BRAC programme organizers helped make the teachers and the SMC members more active than before. As a result some positive changes have started in the study schools. Some of the changes were very much encouraging.

One must recognize that three years is not enough to have a big change in the schools. The second observation was that the improvement was more in the registered non-government schools rather than the government schools. One reason might be the vulnerability of the RNGPSs compared to the GPSs at the baseline. Thus, the need as well as the scope of improvement was more in this type of school. The second reason is related to accessibility. Access to the GPSs was relatively harder than the RNGPSs and the teachers of the GPSs were less likely to accept changes that BRAC wanted to make.

The activities run by BRAC in the study schools was done through some local arrangement with the *upazila* education offices; no role of DPE was there. It would be interesting to see what happens if the Ministry's support is included with BRAC initiative. A collaborative mechanism can be developed between BRAC and the *upazila* resource centres.