

## Implications and Role of NGOs on Primary Education in Bangladesh: An Evaluation

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**Abstract:** *Education is an important aspect and one of the basic needs of human society and promotes human society to a superior stage. Government took several efforts to facilitate educational programme in Bangladesh to keep pace with, the international community, and international instruments relating to education, where education sector sanctioned the highest budgetary allotment. Besides efforts of government, several NGOs assist government at educational programme, in particular, in primary education programme to increase literacy rate in Bangladesh. That is to say, in this regard, NGOs play undeniable role in addition to government initiative. NGOs use their educational programme as a weapon against poverty. Both Government and NGOs struggle against poverty that is one of the targeted areas of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. Though, both education and poverty are the goals of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. In fact, the main aim of several NGOs to alleviate poverty from country. Thus, NGOs identified education a weapon against poverty and illiteracy. In addition, they play an important role in the education sector of the country.*

### Introduction

Bangladesh is a country of third world situated in South Asia, which is considered the most densely populated region of the world. It is not only most crowded region of the world but also the region where most of the illiterate poor and distress people of the world reside. Unlike Bangladesh is a country of this region it is confined by the aforesaid circumstances. In abroad, Bangladesh generally known as a country of high population growth rate, endemic poverty and high rate of adult illiteracy. The education sector of Bangladesh is not so developed. Literacy rate is low and there is a significant disparity between male and female literacy rates. At this age, no one can ignore the importance of education to make free society and country as well as the world from poverty, hunger etc. which create bar to development of human society.

Education is the main key to remove the entire bar in this regard. It helps human society to open the door of success. One can come to know about the environment surrounding him only by dint of education. In this regard it can rightly be said that Education is the single most critical element in combating

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poverty, empowering women, protecting children from hazardous and exploitive labour, sexual exploitation and promoting human right and democracy. [1] It opens the window of knowledge to a person. It prepares a person for the future. On the other hand, education is the passport to the future and for tomorrow. Education is the lift to increase ones ability to do anything. In makes one able to realize and to understand that what is occurring around us scientifically, logically and clearly. In this context, famous American social philosopher John Dewey thinks that education is not a preparation of life, rather it is living. [2]

### **Background of the study**

It would not be wrong to say that the present development of the modern world in the gift of education. That is to say, the present growth of the world in entire aspect could not be possible without aid of education. To day it is proved that well educated nation can reach to the summit of pyramid of success. It is said that education is the best investment for tomorrow. Philosopher Spencer says that education is the preparation for complete living in future. [3] This is because well educated people have more opportunities to, do something for him as well as nation, and play vital role in development of the human society. An educated person can take viable decisions and make right moves at the right moment.

Thus education is important for everyone in the world. At this moment, in particular, it is very important to Bangladesh for socio-economic development. Education can facilitate and promote the present development of Bangladesh. Acceleration of sustainable socio-economic development can only be ensured by virtue of education as well as well educated population. Because well educated and well equipped population is not burden for nation, they are treated as wealth for nation.

Understanding the importance of education, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has taken various initiatives to reduce the rate of illiteracy in the country. In the year of 1972, Government introduced Article 17 in the Constitution of People's Republic of Bangladesh regarding government initiative of education and fundamental education. [4] Earlier, in Pakistan, the provision of universal education is both a constitutional and religious. While the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan (in 1962) laid down as a principle of policy that illiteracy should be eliminated and free and compulsory primary education should be provided for all, as soon as practicable. [5] However, subsequently, Bangladesh Government also has taken nationwide programmes to tackle the overwhelming problem of illiteracy. It is very difficult task for government alone. That is why, besides government initiative, several NGOs took step to reduce illiteracy from the country by spreading primary education amongst illiterate people.

### **Research Objectives**

In order to mitigate the study problem, the study has been conducted on the primary education on the following objectives-

- a) to analyze the role of NGOs in reducing illiteracy from country by spreading primary education in country
- b) to laid down the efforts and initiatives that taken by NGOs in reducing illiteracy
- c) to find out present position of NGOs in reducing illiteracy

### **Problems in Primary Education in Bangladesh**

Education has been given priority over last two decades by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). The government sanction largest budgetary shares every year in education sector but the development of primary education in Bangladesh is poor. Though significant efforts taken by the government and other development partner, that is to say NGOs, a considerable number of children fail to complete primary school. As a result, the literacy rate, in Bangladesh is significantly lower than that of other developing countries. Apart from these, the NGOs face different problem in, performing educational function, reducing illiteracy rate.

### **Methodology**

This paper is an analysis oriented exploratory study. In this study different types of methodology have been resorted to bring out materials, information and data about the primary education, in particular, conducted by the NGOs. In the present study analytical method is adopted for analyzing the Bangladeshi NGOs role, in particular BRAC, in the field of primary education and its operation. Comparative methodology is carried out comparative study with Government primary education programme. Secondary data relevant to study's objectives were collected from various documents, which include books, journal articles Acts, Conventions and Charters. Moreover, internet was used, as, there are some organizations, which have their own websites, and some sorts of data are available there.

### **Role of Primary Education in Bangladesh**

In the year of 1990 The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990 has been enacted by the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). According to section 3(1) of the Act, "The Government may by notification in the official Gazette, declare primary education obligatory in whatever area from whenever onwards." [6] That empower the government undertook the Compulsory Primary Education Programme. In January 1992, government undertook Compulsory Primary Education Programme in 68 thanas out of 460 thanas. Thereafter that programme was extended nationwide. Apart from those efforts, other same type of efforts was taken by government with the aim of meeting the basic education needs of all children, youths and adults as the result of the Jomtien World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) held in March 1990 which promoted an expanded vision of primary education. As per Article 1(1) of the World Conference on Education for All, 1990, "Every person—child, youth, and adult—shall be able

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to benefit from educational opportunities designed to meet their basic learning needs.”[7]

Earlier a number of NGOs took effort of basic education programme with the aim of their poverty alleviation activities. An important result of the Juntien WCEFA has been that several NGOs have identified education as a priority sector for their areas of operation [8]. They felt the close collaboration among illiteracy, poverty and education as well as the other progressive forces. Consequently, in 1990 a coalition of the mainstream NGOs having major education programmes was formed under the title “Gono Shakkharata Ovijan” (Campaign for Popular Education -- CAMPE). The aim was to foster cooperation among the NGOs, the government and civil society in developing a mass movement encompassing both formal and non-formal programme in order to eradicate illiteracy [9].

At present several NGOs carry on programmes that are needed in primary education to, provide quality education at low cost, considerable number of children and adults who remain uncovered by present educational programmes. Some efforts of NGOs in this regard are as follows---

1. BRAC Non-Formal Primary Education Programme: The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has developed this programme. This caters to children 8-10 years of age who could not get admission in formal primary schools. Thus the learners are older children who never attended school. The programme covers grades 1-3.
2. GSS Primary Education Programme: This programme has been initiated by the Gono Shahajjo Shangstha (GSS). Children who could not get admission in formal primary schools are enrolled in these schools. The children are taught up to grade 3, which is now being extended to grade 5. Classes are generally held in brick schoolhouses built by GSS.
3. CMES Technology School: The Centre for Mass Education in Science (CMES), a science- and technology-oriented NGO, has initiated this programme. In grades 1-2, pupils are provided general education; in grades 4-5, some science lessons are included covering environment, popular science and technology. The aim is to make people conscious of the importance and impact of science education in real life.
4. Government Satellite School Programme: Under this programme, ‘feeder schools’ are set up within the catchment areas of the formal primary schools so that small out-of-school children who are unable to walk a long distance can receive early education in grades 1-2. The aim is to bring school facilities near the homes of poor children, especially girls, to ensure school attendance. Teaching is done by a couple of volunteer women teachers who get a small honorarium. The schools are run entirely by the local communities.
5. Dhaka Ahsania Mission Alternative Primary School Programme: Children of 6-8 years are the target group. The course duration is 27

months with 3 grades, each of 9 months. The school premises are provided by the local community.

6. UCEP School: The Under-privileged Children's Programme School is a specialised programme designed for working children in the age group 6-14 years. The duration of this programme is 7 years. It is a mixture of general and technical education.
7. Terre Des Hommes (TDH) Street Children Programme: Children aged 8-10 years who work at railway stations, bus and launch terminals, etc., are the target groups of this programme. 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 programmes 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 drop-outs and absenteeism are almost totally eliminated. The details of some of these programmes are given here. [10]

### **BRAC and Promotion of Education**

Education sector is one of the priorities one of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and expenses more than 2.4% of GNP where access to primary education is 91%, total youth literacy rate (15-24 years) is 64%. [11] In recent decade Bangladesh has made remarkable progress to achieve Education For All (EFA) by 2015. [12] Remarkable progress has also been made at the initial or primary enrolment. Despite these achievements, it is estimated that about 1.3 million primary school age children still have no access to primary education. The rate of student drop out from formal school is also high due to poverty as the expenses involved in accessing education are high.

In an effort towards education, BRAC launched BRAC Education Programme (BEP) in 1985 towards, assist Government of Bangladesh (GoB), achieving Education For All (EFA) by 2015. Earlier Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC), a non-government development organization, was founded in early 1972. The early name of BRAC Education Programme (BEP) was BRAC Non-formal Primary Education (NFPE). In the year of 2003, NFPE was renamed as BRAC Education Programme (BEP).

In accordance with the audit report of the year 2007, the annual cost (January to December) of the BRAC Education Programme (BEP) is BDT 3,322,331,606 (equivalent to USD 47,461,220) as the development partner of the Government of Bangladesh (GoB). The average cost per learner is USD 23 per year. [13] The general aim of BRAC is to assist the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) in its effort to achieve the Millennium Development Goal (MDGs) and Education For All (EFA) goals by 2015. The MDGs reflect a set of actions and targets contained in the Millennium Declaration that was adopted by 193 nations in

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2002 based on the Millennium Declaration agreed in September 2000. [14]

To this ends, BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has introduced its following objects—

- to provide quality primary education for children outside formal education institutions.
- to improve access to education, especially for girls.
- to enhance the success of formal primary education through pre-primary schools.
- to improve the quality of secondary education.
- to empower adolescents by improving their life skills.
- to build capacities through the establishment of lifelong education and learning.

BEP's primary target group comprises women and girls, especially from the rural areas, as they represent the most disadvantaged sector of the population. BEP has extended its outreach to children from ethnic minority groups and children with disabilities. It is to be noted that, they are entitled to be participated in the education programme as per the proviso of the Constitution of Bangladesh. It is also cited in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948 and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 along with countless other emphasize. Everyone has the human right to education and that education is directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening human right and fundamental freedoms. As per Article 26 (1) of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, "Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory." [15] It is also cited in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989 that States Parties recognize the right of the child to education on the basis of equal opportunity and to make primary education compulsory and available free to all. [16] Education is a basic right for all children in the principle of equal opportunity, the purpose of which is to develop the full potential, tolerance and gender equity of children.

To this ends, that is to say, to achieve the goals and assists the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), BEP categorize the target group are as follows--

1. children aged 5 and over eligible for pre-primary schooling;
2. out-of-school children (8-10 and 11-14 years), with a special focus on girls;
3. youth (15-24 years);
4. poor populations and the unemployed;
5. ethnic minorities;

6. families; and

7. children with special needs (children from poor urban slums, remote rural/hard-to-reach areas, children with disabilities). [17]

BEP implement its plans and methodologies upon the aforesaid target group for achieving the aim of the programme. BEP is mainly focusing on increase access of basic education in unreached and underserved population and improve quality in formal education system as well as support the government in achieving Millennium Development Goal 2 - Education for All (EFA) by 2015.[18] BEP carries out its programme activities in five mafor areas that are given follows—

- Non-formal Primary Education
- The Pre-primary School
- The Adolescent Development Programme (ADP)
- The Multi Purpose Learning Centre
- The Mainstream Secondary Schools Support. [19]

In carrying out BEP's programme activities, BRAC primary schools follow the national curriculum while other components have their own curriculum. BRAC school provide a child friendly environment in which students receive individual care and attention. School premises are rented from the community that also provides safe environments where children can play games or participate in co-curricular activities. Students are also provided clean drinking water and proper sanitation. [20] Since most school children assist their parents with housework and activities, it is difficult for them to attend school at fixed and due times. Thus, a flexible time schedule has been introduced in BRAC school.

It is believed that monitoring is a crucial element for improving the programme's quality. BEP appoints required number of monitor for monitoring the programme activities. Evaluations focus on both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the programme. In order to ensure the quality of the evaluation results, standardized guidelines are provided for monitors. BEP is based on a complex structure of management and component has its own supervision and monitoring mechanism. The organizational structure helps to keep all stakeholders informed and permits them to take the necessary initiatives to improve the programme's quality. [21] The following figure gives a broad idea of BEP's result--

- Across the country, almost 1.1 million children participate in BRAC schools each year.
- To date, 3.8 million children have graduated from BRAC schools.
- More than 2.3 million children have successfully completed the pre-primary school level.
- The ADP serves over 250,000 learners, while the 1,830 rural libraries in Multi Purpose Community Learning Centres (Gonokendras) and 8,660

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Kishori Kendras give members access to a variety of reading materials. Those community learning centres have almost 762,000 members.

- 98% of all students transferred to a primary school after completing the pre-primary course.
- Around 93% of all graduates from primary school transferred to secondary schools.
- 78% of all pupils gain the required skills upon completion of their course.
- Drop-out rate total just 6%.
- 75% of Gonokendros are self-funded. [22]

### **Conclusion**

Education is the master key to success. A country like Bangladesh can shine by dint of education in the age of science and technology. But it is very difficult for the government to take adequate effort in this regard. Everyone including civil society, NGOs and concerned parties should come forward to assist the government to this end. At present, NGOs are playing vital role through their educational programmes in reducing illiteracy from the country.

BRAC launched its activities on education in 1985 with just 22 one-room schools. The programme cover three upzillas, served less than 700 children and were administered by just five staff members. [23] Now-a-days, BEP has extended its programme activities. Today BEP operates on a national level. It reaches more than 470 upazillas in all 64 districts of Bangladesh. Moreover, the BRAC school models have been replicated on a national and international level. In Bangladesh, more than 714 partner NGOs are applying the BEAC non-formal school model to provide basic primary education service in remote and rural areas. The BRAC school model has also been replicated in other countries of the world such as Afghanistan, Tanzania, Uganda, Sudan and Pakistan. [24]

BRAC has been carrying out its education programme activities throughout the country to assist the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) and achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and Education For All (EFA) by 2012. It is hoped that with the assistance of BRAC and other NGOs like BRAC Bangladesh will be turned into an educated and sustainable State of the world that will lift Bangladesh in the list of solvent State of the world.

### **Refereces**

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- [3] Uddin, M Amez and others (2008), Shikkadorson, Second Edition, Dhaka. P-14
- [4] Article 17 of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh



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- [6] *The Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990. Section 3(1)*
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- [8] [www.ignca.nic.in/cd\\_06022](http://www.ignca.nic.in/cd_06022). (access on 10.05.2012)
- [9] ibid
- [10] [www.ignca.nic.in/cd\\_06022](http://www.ignca.nic.in/cd_06022) (access on 10.05.2012)
- [11] <http://www.unesco.org/uii/litbase/?menu=4> & programme=28 (access on 13.05.2012)
- [12] "Education For All" means that school should accommodate children in all conditions.
- [13] <http://www.unesco.org/uii/litbase/?menu=4> & programme=28 (access on 13.05.2012)
- [14] <http://www.undp.org.bd/mdgs.php> (access on 15.05.2012)
- [15] The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948, Article 26 (1)
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- [23] [http:// www.brac.net/content/where-we-work-bangladesh/education](http://www.brac.net/content/where-we-work-bangladesh/education) (access on 10.05.2012)
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