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ABSTRACT

This report presents the results of a study of the Nonformal Primary Education (NFPE) program, a relatively new educational delivery system developed and implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). The NFPE program is a collaboration among a non-governmental organization (NGO), international donors, and some of the most disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh. The program has proven relatively successful in rapidly expanding access to primary education to those historically neglected by the formal primary education system: children, especially girls, from poor, rural, landless and near-landless families. The scope of work for this case study included three key areas: (1) What is BRAC's NFPE program? and What are its strengths and weaknesses? (2) What is the potential for rapidly expanding the NFPE program in Bangladesh? In particular, what might be the relationship between a large-scale NFPE program and the national system of primary education? and (3) What elements of BRAC's NFPE program might be relevant to other developing countries in their efforts to expand rapidly the primary education systems? This nonformal model might be useful to other less-developed countries seeking to expand their educational systems. The book contains 4 sections and more than 100 references. (EH)

PRIMARY EDUCATION FOR ALL
LEARNING FROM THE BRAC EXPERIENCE

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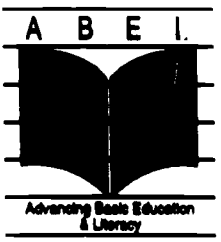

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Acknowledgements

Primary Education for All: Learning from the BRAC Experience presents the findings from a multi-donor, multi-disciplinary investigation of one of the more important implementations of a basic education philosophy and strategy in the developing world.

Initiated jointly by USAID and UNICEF, and conducted by the Academy for Educational Development (AED) under Project ABEL, this case study attempts to provide a fresh look at how the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) has improved educational access for the poorest of the poor and provided a viable adjunct to an overextended public school system. The study also outlines implications for countries with similar educational challenges.

A number of people contributed to the effort. Manzoor Ahmed of UNICEF initially suggested the idea during meetings with James Hoxeng and Sam Rea of USAID's Research and Development/Education Office. F. H. Abed, Executive Director of BRAC, and Kaniz Fatema, Program Coordinator of BRAC's Nonformal Primary Education Program (NFPE), provided important information about BRAC and the NFPE program design, management, and implementation.

Others contributed more directly to project design and implementation. The research was conducted by a four-person team comprised of AED team leader and primary author, Colette Chabbott, Manzoor Ahmed of UNICEF, Rohini Pande of the Rockefeller Foundation, and Arun Joshi of Harvard University. These researchers were assisted in Bangladesh by a team from the Center for Social Studies at Dhaka University, led by Z. Rahman Khan and H. K. Arefeen, and by a team from the chartered public accounting firm of Rahman Rahman and Huq, led by M. Kaiser Rahman and Sharyar Hussain. In the United States, Leon Clark of American University and Joanne Capper of AED contributed technically to several chapters. William Cummings of the Harvard Institute for International Development provided early suggestions on a project approach, which was later modified by ABEL leadership. Ted Thomas and Kaniz Fatema reviewed later drafts. Finally, editorial and administrative support was provided by Cynthia Prather of Creative Associates International, Inc., and Linda Caswell, Lynette Johnson, Sonjai Reynolds, and Karla Korden of AED. USAID, via Project ABEL, managed the project, funded project expenses, and supported two of the four team members. UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation donated the time of their staff members.

Although this case study is the result of extensive effort by a number of people, it should not be considered the "final word" on BRAC's NFPE

program. BRAC is a learning organization that uses formal and informal reporting and feedback to improve its development activities. Because of this, the program is continually evolving. For example, since this research was conducted, the NFPE program's per-school class size, both in terms of physical space and also number of students, has been increased, and the curriculum has been modified in response to mid-term assessment outcomes. This orientation towards learning and the resulting flexibility present new challenges for those of us attempting to disseminate program outcomes. Those same elements, however, allow BRAC to adjust and readjust its NFPE program to meet the needs of the community and are key to the program's success.

This document does provide important implications for those committed to the aims and objectives of Education for All. ABEL is releasing it with the hope that by sharing the insights gained by BRAC, children's—and particularly girls'—participation in primary education will be improved and the vision of worldwide literacy can become a reality.

Kurt D. Moses
Vice President and Director
Project ABEL

Acronyms

ABEL	Advancing Basic Education and Literacy Project
AED	Academy for Educational Development
AEM	Area Educational Managers
BANBEIS	Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics
BCS	Bangladesh Civil Service
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
CPE	Compulsory Primary Education
EFA	Education for All
ESP	BRAC's Educational Support Project
FAPE	Facilitation and Assistance Program for Education
FO	Field Officer
GEP	General Education Project
GOB	Government of Bangladesh
GSS	Gonoshahajjo Sangstha
IDA	International Development Association
KK	Kishor-Kishori (NFPE schools for 11- to 16-year-old children)
NFPE	BRAC's Nonformal Primary Education Program
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PO	BRAC Program Organizer
RDP	BRAC's Rural Development Program
RDRS	Rangpur-Dinajpur Service
RED	BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division
RM	Regional Managers
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Education Program
UNICEF/Dhaka	United Nations Children's Fund Mission to Bangladesh, Dhaka
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund, New York, N.Y.
UPE	Universal Primary Education
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development, Washington, D.C.
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All, Jomtien, Thailand, 1990

Introduction

Purpose

Primary Education for All: Learning from the BRAC Experience presents the results of a study of the Nonformal Primary Education (NFPE) program, a relatively new educational delivery system developed and implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). The NFPE program represents a collaboration among a non-governmental organization (NGO), international donors, and some of the most disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh. The program has proven relatively successful in rapidly expanding access to primary education to those historically neglected by the formal primary education system: children, especially girls, from poor, rural, landless and near-landless families.

The scope of work for this case study included three key questions:

- What is BRAC's NFPE program? What are its strengths and weaknesses?
- What is the potential for rapidly expanding the NFPE program in Bangladesh? In particular, what might be the relationship between a large-scale NFPE program and the national system of primary education?
- What elements of BRAC's NFPE program might be relevant to other developing countries in their efforts to rapidly expand their primary education systems?

The study is expected to be useful to donors, NGOs, governments, and students of education interested in using nonformal models to rapidly expand access to primary education, particularly for girls, in less-developed countries. These groups might also use the study findings to develop donor-NGO-government-community partnerships to improve school quality and to establish decentralized management systems that ensure low-cost, high-quality human services delivery.

Methodology

Representatives from the Rockefeller Foundation and UNICEF, together with a comparative child development specialist and a USAID-supported team leader from the Academy for Educational Development, conducted two fact-finding visits to Bangladesh during the spring and summer of 1992. Information collected for this study included secondary data from several recent donor-funded evaluations (Lovell and Fatema 1990; Shordt 1991; Gajanayake 1992), an independently funded study of BRAC (Lovell 1992), and studies prepared by BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division. The research team also incorporated primary data from a cost study and a household survey commissioned expressly for this study and from field visits to Government, BRAC, and other NGO offices and

schools. Additional documents were collected in the fall of 1992 and winter of 1993.

The independent studies and primary data collection efforts funded under this study established that BRAC's primary schools at the community level indeed operate much as the BRAC literature describes them. As a result, the research team for this study spent more than 70 percent of its time in-country determining the role that BRAC schools currently play—and have the potential to play—in the national primary education system, and less than 10 percent of its time observing BRAC classrooms.

Background

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

BRAC, the largest NGO in Bangladesh, is recognized throughout the world for its rural development, credit, and health programs. In 1985, in response to requests from participants in its rural development programs, BRAC initiated the NFPE program for eight- to ten-year-olds in 22 villages. The original objective of the program was to develop a primary education model that could provide, in a three-year period, basic literacy and numeracy to the poorest rural children—the children who remain unreached by the formal school system. Girls were given special emphasis. By late 1991, the program had expanded to 6,003 schools, serving 11- to 16-year-olds as well as eight- to ten-year-olds. Over 8,000 schools were operating in 1992.

In recent years, BRAC's NFPE program has received considerable attention from the Education for All (EFA) community. Several studies and evaluations of the NFPE program have demonstrated that BRAC's approaches to teacher selection, training, and supervision and parent and community involvement can be effective. Based on these findings and its track record in health and rural development programs, BRAC is considering a rapid expansion of the NFPE program that could result in 50,000 BRAC schools nationwide by 1995. This expansion requires ongoing support from BRAC's existing international donor consortium, as well as new support from other international donors.

In light of this proposed expansion, international organizations, particularly UNICEF and USAID, have begun examining the NFPE program's role in achieving universal primary education in Bangladesh and its potential contribution to the achievement of universal primary education in other less developed countries with similar "gaps" in their education systems. Although BRAC officials developed the NFPE program to be a model education program for other communities in Bangladesh, they do not consider this model "replicable" in or "exportable" to other countries.

Nevertheless, they recognize that some of the lessons they have learned may be useful to others interested in rapidly expanding primary education to previously underserved areas. In late 1991, BRAC readily agreed to a UNICEF/USAID recommendation to conduct an independent case study of the NFPE program. The document, *Primary Education for All: Learning from the BRAC Experience*, presents the results of that study.

Bangladesh: The Context

Bangladesh is a densely populated, low-income country in Asia. Although situated on one of the largest, most fertile deltas in the world, the country is characterized by pervasive poverty, a rural-based economy, high levels of under- and unemployment, rapid population growth, frequently occurring natural disasters, and generally low status for girls and women. Bangladesh is also characterized by linguistic, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity, a relatively stable political environment in recent years, and a fairly well-developed, although not well-funded or service-oriented, system of public administration. National and international voluntary social welfare and development agencies are involved extensively in developmental and poverty alleviation work.

Apart from its land, water, and natural gas, Bangladesh's greatest potential for economic development lies in its human resources. Low investments to date in primary education, however, have resulted in limited access to schools for the majority of the rural population, literacy rates among the lowest in the world, and low levels of productivity in all sectors of the economy.

In 1990 the Government of Bangladesh (GOB) passed compulsory primary education legislation and began implementing that legislation in 68 of the country's thanas (sub-districts) in 1992. The Government strategy is to enroll all six-year-old children in first grade, increase their retention significantly up to fifth grade, and do the same for successive groups of six-year-olds. Other efforts, including the establishment of a National Committee on Basic Education for All, a social mobilization program, a five-year General Education Project, and a Government-run Program for Integrated Nonformal Education also have been initiated. Despite these ambitious plans, Bangladesh's primary education system still enrolls about 60 percent of the eligible age group. About half of those enrolled attend school with some regularity, and only about 20 percent of those enrolled complete the full five-year cycle of primary education.

The GOB has recognized the important role NGOs can play in supplementing Government efforts to improve the social conditions of the disadvantaged population. Collectively, NGOs already play a national role in Bangladesh in health and family planning service delivery and in the expansion of rural credit. Although NGO work in the education sector has been modest to date, increased NGO involvement appears promising.

Findings

The NFPE Program: Its Strengths and Weaknesses

Program Elements

BRAC's NFPE program is by far the largest single non-government primary education program in Bangladesh. Although less than ten years old, it is one of the most promising programs. More than 90 percent of the children who start BRAC schools graduate, and a large proportion of the NFPE program graduates are admitted into Class IV or higher of the Government school system.

BRAC supports two types of schools: three-year NFPE schools for eight- to ten-year-olds who have never attended primary school; and two-year Kishor-Kishori (KK) schools for 11- to 16-year-olds who have dropped out of primary school and are unlikely ever to return.

The NFPE program has the same elements as more traditional educational programs: students, teachers, parents, schedules, an instructional site, an instructional approach, and a specified curriculum. The composition of these elements, however, is what makes the NFPE program distinctive. The NFPE program consists of the following:

- *Students:* A school consists of 30 children, 60-70 percent of whom are girls, who live in rural areas, within about a two kilometer radius of the school. For the most part, students come from relatively disadvantaged homes. Their families generally are landless or own only their homesteads, and the family members survive on less than US$70 per capita annually.
- *Teachers:* Teachers are generally married adults, 60-70 percent of whom are women, who have completed nine or more years of education and live within easy walking distance of the school. These teachers are hired on a temporary, part-time basis and are paid modest wages. There is one teacher for each 30 students. Teacher training includes 15 days of initial training at a residential BRAC training center and one- or two-day refresher training sessions each month conducted by BRAC staff at a BRAC office near the teacher's school. Weekly visits from BRAC field workers provide regular feedback.
- *Parents:* The parents of most BRAC school students are illiterate and are usually the most socio-economically disadvantaged in their villages. Parents make no monetary contribution to the school, apart from replacing broken slateboards and worn mats; BRAC provides all student and teacher supplies -- pencils, notebooks, textbooks, teacher manuals, slateboards, chalk, etc. Parents are expected to support the program in other ways, however. Prior to a new school opening, parents and BRAC staff meet several times. Parents also must pledge to attend monthly parent meetings and to send their children to school each day.

- *Schedule:* The NFPE instructional program is presented in three-year cycles. The school is in session for two and one-half to three hours a day, six days per week, 268 days per year at a time of day selected by the parents. The group of 30 students are 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 houses and storerooms rented for just three hours per day. These rooms generally have bamboo and mud walls, a packed earth floor, a tin roof, and a blackboard. The children sit on the floor, on bamboo mats, holding slateboards on their knees. The teacher has a stool and a metal trunk that doubles as a desk and a supply cabinet.
- *Instructional Approach:* Although the pedagogical approach in BRAC schools is intended to be student-centered and the curriculum approach activity-based, more traditional methods tend to dominate. Group lectures are generally followed by individual assignments that require minimal analysis by students. There is little opportunity for discussion.
- *Curriculum:* The curriculum for both NFPE and KK schools, consisting of Bangla, social science, and mathematics, has been developed and revised several times by BRAC. The material covered is roughly equivalent to Class I-III 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 matriculate to formal schools after three years are well prepared.

BRAC's Approach to Development Management

BRAC's ability to implement all the necessary elements of a targeted basic education program derives not so much from its knowledge of education as from its expertise in development management. In terms of development, since its creation 20 years ago, BRAC has developed surveys that help it develop and target its programs for the most disadvantaged rural families. BRAC also has developed ways to encourage these families to participate in the decisions that most affect program implementation. BRAC's "sectoral integrated" approach allows the NFPE program to operate relatively independently of BRAC's other development efforts yet still remain under the general oversight of the larger, more seasoned organization. Finally, BRAC managers, based on their experience in other areas of development, are accustomed to thinking nationally. BRAC's plans to rapidly expand the NFPE program are based on a combination of perceived need and proven competence.

BRAC's approach to management is based on at least four characteristics:

- *Field-Oriented:* Less than 10 percent of BRAC's staff are based at headquarters. Field-based mid-level managers and program organizers, supported by technical and support services staff, implement the program.
- *Learning-Oriented:* BRAC uses a variety of formal and informal reporting and monitoring systems to shape program strategies, management procedures, instructional materials, and teacher training. Regular meetings are held to solicit opinions from all levels of the organization.
- *Strategic:* BRAC identifies the sectors or areas of greatest need and then develops and implements programs based on those needs. If necessary, BRAC uses its own funds to try out new ideas. BRAC regularly assesses its organizational capacity and adjusts its program targets accordingly. Regular independent evaluations and external audits are provided for in all of BRAC's program plans. Results of its major studies and evaluations are published in English and Bangla to ensure maximum dissemination.
- *Support-Oriented:* BRAC's central office provides important support services to the NFPE program and other sectoral programs. Training centers, printers, a motor pool, and other support mechanisms are available to ensure that the schools operate smoothly.

Cost Efficiency and Cost Effectiveness

Cost efficiency and cost effectiveness were assessed by comparing costs and student performance in BRAC schools and formal primary schools. Independent cost studies confirmed BRAC costs for schooling at roughly equal to that of 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 the vast majority of its resources to teacher salaries and school facilities, BRAC allocates almost 30 percent of the NFPE program budget to management and supervision. Only 29 percent are allocated to teacher salaries, and 6 percent are used to rent school space.

Because poverty is identified by Bangladeshi parents as a major reason for their children dropping out or not enrolling in the formal schools, the NFPE program is designed so that parents incur practically no direct costs for sending their children to BRAC schools. Books and supplies are provided free, uniforms are not required, school hours are varied to home and agricultural cycle needs, and schools are located in close proximity to the students' homes. BRAC school attendance results in less income loss to the families than does formal school attendance.

BRAC students achieve as much as or more than formal school students. During a three-year period, BRAC students completed the NFPE program

and entered the formal school Class IV at a higher rate than did formal school students who began in the formal system. BRAC students are scoring equally or higher than formal school students on basic education assessment and basic literacy tests.

Even with annual costs per enrolled student in BRAC and the formal school system approximately equal, the relatively higher attendance rates, lower repetition rates, higher Class III completion rates, and higher Class IV continuation rates for BRAC students mean that *BRAC schools are substantially more cost efficient per graduate than the Government's formal schools.*

Issues to Consider for NFPE Program Improvement

Some issues related to improving the efficiency and effectiveness of the existing NFPE program are as follows:

- *Classroom Environment:* BRAC classrooms are more child-centered than those of Bangladeshi formal schools, but limited classroom space restricts the range of child-centered activities. Making schools more child-centered would require the use of larger rooms, which might require higher rental fees and in turn might increase the per-child cost of the program.
- *Curriculum:* Most NFPE program graduates who enter Class IV in the formal system drop out before they complete Class V. It is difficult to develop a two- or three-year curriculum that prepares some children to enter the Government educational system and others to function effectively in rural Bangladesh. A more diverse curriculum would affect a variety of program elements, including the instructional schedule and teacher training.
- *The Pedagogic Approach:* The need to rely on teachers with limited formal education and no professional training, the limited hours in a school day, and the bare-bones provisions for physical facilities and learning materials have led to a simplified curricular content and a structured and well-defined sequence of classroom activities. While this approach has been successful, there may be room to improve the classroom practices, use of instructional time, and the creativity and spontaneity of teachers and students. Master teachers, more supportive materials, and innovative training strategies might increase instructional effectiveness.
- *Teacher Supervision:* BRAC's decentralized management model provides effective administrative and logistical support for the NFPE program but very little technical expertise in education at the school level.
- *Gender Equity in Program Management:* Although the NFPE program targets female students, recruits female teachers, and is supported primarily by mothers, most management and coordinating positions are

held by men. To a large extent, this lack of women in management and decision-making positions reflects hiring practices that have inadvertently excluded women. Initial steps have been taken to address this issue.

Expanding the NFPE Program in Bangladesh

BRAC's Potential Roles

Within Bangladesh, BRAC can make several major contributions towards the goal of universal primary education:

- expand its own NFPE program, thereby reaching more of the hardest-to-reach children and providing a testing ground for increased parent and community participation in primary schools, a simplified/modified curriculum for children from non-literate households, and a shorter school day;
- support, through the sharing of BRAC's methodology and materials, other NGOs involved in primary education;
- improve community participation in local compulsory primary education planning and management by creating a mechanism for local input, mobilizing resources at the local level, encouraging more effective use of Government resources, and acting as the intermediary for community participation in local planning and management;
- foster local primary education planning and management capacity in specific pilot areas, developing plans that include Government, NGOs, and other institutions;
- help, through the services of its Research and Evaluation Division, to assess and monitor national progress in basic education; and
- serve secondary level children by establishing flexible, locally adapted programs that help older girls and boys make the transition to the world of work and adult responsibilities.

The first potential contribution, expanding its own educational program, is currently BRAC's primary focus.

Issues

BRAC's expansion plan calls for increasing the current number of schools from over 8,000 to 15,000 by the end of 1993 in areas where BRAC already works and creating 35,000 more schools between 1993 and 1995 in areas where BRAC has not worked previously, thus operating a total of 50,000 schools by the end of 1995. The BRAC model is a viable one, and the proposed three-year expansion plan is feasible. Questions to be answered in expanding BRAC's NFPE program as specified in this three-year plan, however, include the following:

- How big can the NFPE program become without sacrificing efficiency and instructional effectiveness?

- How can BRAC balance quantitative and qualitative goals?
- Should BRAC broaden its NFPE program goals and objectives to provide higher levels of basic education, prepare students for formal school, and/or prepare students for work?
- As expansion progresses, should the NFPE program continue to serve only the more disadvantaged youth or all children of a certain age in a particular community?
- If the NFPE program becomes an important aspect of the national universal primary education effort, should it continue to be funded by external sources?
- What should be BRAC's relationship with the formal education system?

Implications for the Global EFA Community

Internationally, BRAC serves as an object lesson on the potential of the non-government sector. It also illustrates how a combination of targeting, school design, flexibility, and follow through can increase girls' primary school participation rates dramatically. Several of the specific factors that have shaped BRAC's approach to the NFPE program in Bangladesh—such as high rural population density and high levels of rural, educated people who are under- or unemployed—are not found in many developing countries. Nonetheless, the institutional environment in which BRAC operates is common in many less-developed countries. This institutional environment includes organizations that implement development activities in Bangladesh and comprises international donors, Bangladeshi Government agencies, and international and national non-government organizations, plus all their norms, rules, regulations, and conventions. It is characterized by three elements:

- heavy reliance on foreign donor funds, provided in the form of short-term "projects" targeted at long-term problems, such as establishing universal primary education;
- national ministries of education and formal primary education systems that have the formal mandate to develop the primary education system but lack the human, financial, and administrative resources and/or the bureaucratic flexibility to do so; and
- NGOs that have greater flexibility than government bureaucracies and often are able to reach specific target groups more effectively but serve only a small proportion of the population.

Following are selected implications of BRAC's work, not only in the conditions particular to Bangladesh, but also in the institutional environment common in many parts of the world.

Selected Implications of BRAC's Primary School Model

- **Part-time paraprofessionals can make good teachers for the lower grades of primary school, providing they are adequately trained, supplied with a very structured curriculum, and, most importantly, adequately supervised.** BRAC's model for teachers is not that of part-time paraprofessionals, but rather part-time paraprofessionals *plus* continuous training *plus* intense supervision. "Low-cost" paraprofessional teachers need more "higher-cost" supervision and guidance than do "high-cost" professionals. Paraprofessional teachers also need detailed teacher versions of textbooks to guide them through the lessons.
- **Primary school participation can be improved, even with traditionally hard-to-reach populations.** The BRAC case supports other studies that suggest that primary school enrollment is strongly affected by cost and safety, persistence is strongly affected by school quality and parental as well as teacher follow-up, and timely completion is strongly affected by continuous assessment and follow-up.
- **A basic, no-frills program that is fully implemented is better than a more progressive one that is not.** BRAC school students are scoring as well on several standardized achievement tests as Government students who have been exposed to a more elaborate curriculum.
- **The features needed to increase girls' access to and persistence in primary school need not make schools more expensive.** Features of the BRAC model that were adopted for their low-cost properties—small schools with small catchment areas and female paraprofessional teachers hired from within those catchment areas—are also attractive to girls. It is usually easier, however, to plan these features into a new school system than to introduce them into an existing one.
- **NFPE schools do not appear to be handicapped by a lack of permanent school buildings.** Rented rooms provide adequate space, at minimal cost, for the small group format and basic instruction that BRAC schools provide. Renting school rooms on a part-time basis enables BRAC schools to start up quickly. When one three-year cycle is finished, the second cycle can either be held in the same location or moved to one closer to the new students. Rental costs appear lower than Government investments in permanent school buildings and maintenance costs.
- **Securing significant participation by illiterate parents requires not just appropriate participation structures but also ongoing individual follow-up.** In addition to convening monthly parent meetings, BRAC field staff follow up absentee students with home visits, and the staff are encouraged to develop contacts and rapport with individual

parents and parents' groups. This individual contact is a significant contributing factor to high attendance rates at school and parent meetings.

- **Nonformal programs for older girls must balance preparation for participation in the Government school system and participation in the work force.** Given the high levels of private costs expected, if not required, to remain in Government schools, BRAC is not convinced that the majority of its students will be able to complete Class IV and V in the Government system. Already it has discovered that most of its KK graduates, who are far beyond primary school age, will not persist in Class IV in the Government system. BRAC is therefore discussing ways to make the curriculum even more relevant for girls who are not likely to finish primary school and who will need to make their own employment opportunities as access to land continues to drive a larger proportion of the rural population out of agriculture.

Implications of BRAC's Development Management Model

- **Managerial expertise may be more important than technical expertise in ensuring the rapid expansion of a basic education program of adequate quality.** The NFPE program's success to date is related less to the rigor of BRAC's original technical design and more to its willingness to "learn as it goes" plus its determination to fully implement its no-frills approach.
- **A key element of managerial expertise is the ability to recognize the type of services necessary to support any particular program and to plan and budget for those services.** BRAC's previous experience in setting up field offices, ensuring timely delivery of project materials to remote sites, developing staff training materials, and providing other support services played a critical role in developing and expanding the NFPE program.
- **In addition to a pool of experienced, well-trained, support service managers and senior executives, the start-up of a new project can benefit enormously from the availability of experienced, well-trained, mid-level managers who can be seconded from older, successful projects to work at the field level.** BRAC staffed its NFPE program in the early days with experienced field managers from its other rural development and credit programs. In addition, BRAC has routinely allocated significant resources for in-country management training for all of its managers and for overseas training at places like the Asian Institute of Management for some of its staff.
- **Donors interested in funding large-scale NGO projects should be prepared to cover the full cost of the support services that each project requires—i.e., motor pool, printing, staff training, etc.** The

NFPE program budget includes adequate allocations for staff, training, and logistical support for both technical and managerial functions.

- **In the national EFA community, depending on economies of scale, it may be economical for certain agencies to specialize in specific support services—such as textbook production or management training—and for other agencies to contract with them for those services.** Because of the size of BRAC's overall organization, economies of scale make it possible for BRAC to provide most of its own support services and even to provide some services—like training at its Center for Development Management—to other NGOs.
- **The benefits of economies of scale in either technical delivery or support systems need to be weighed carefully against the dangers of taking a monolithic approach.** BRAC's model has created a standard against which all other NGO programs are currently being measured. There is some pressure for NGOs that are interested in expanding their primary educational programs to adopt the BRAC model. This pressure comes both from the NGOs themselves, because the models that they may have been using to date are not clearly better than the BRAC model, and from the donors, who want to fund the "best" model.
- **NGOs that provide basic education programs do not have to be restricted to limited funding sources.** In the process of seeking large-scale funding, national NGOs may be able to retain some independence—including the opportunity to experiment with alternative models—in at least two ways: by developing profit-making enterprises that can provide pilot funding for new activities and "bridge funding" during periods of rapid expansion; and by increasing the number of donors that fund their projects. BRAC has used both of these methods successfully.
- **National NGOs can reduce the amount of administrative and coordination time required for multiple donors by forming donor consortia, the members of which accept a single set of standardized reports and evaluations.** BRAC already has a donor consortium for its seven-year-old rural development program and is currently forming a new one for its NFPE program.
- **When one project initially succeeds in delivering some social service to a high priority, difficult-to-reach target group, that project may come to be seen as a potential vehicle for a myriad of other services.** The rapid expansion of BRAC's NFPE program to date is in part a function of its focus on a single purpose: providing basic education to children left out of the Government system. Proposals to add services to existing successful projects in BRAC are evaluated carefully, on a case-by-case basis. For example, offers from donors to add more components, like school feeding programs, must be viewed very critically.

- **Foreign donors are keenly interested in the impact of projects on girls and women.** BRAC has found that it may be easier to design projects targeted at girls than to integrate women fully into the implementation and management of those projects. BRAC is still working on increasing the number of women in mid- and senior-level management positions in the NFPE program.

BRAC's Potential Role in Bangladesh

- **Short-term, rapid responses to EFA mandates with less than national scope can be encouraged and supported while systematic, medium-term EFA planning among concerned government agencies, donors, and NGOs is proceeding.** By emphasizing its stop-gap nature, BRAC has been able to move forward with the NFPE and, in the process, has been able to prove the viability of several innovations that may prove useful in the medium term to the formal system.
- **An NGO-sponsored nonformal primary education program with a proven management system and prior experience working with EFA's target group will be more effective in the short term in reaching EFA goals than formal government education systems constrained by traditional goals and embedded bureaucratic procedures.** The presence of teachers' unions in Bangladesh, which are unlikely to support the concept of paraprofessional teachers, help to explain why the Government of Bangladesh has been slower than the NGO sector to respond to EFA mandates. Other contributors include the Government's desire to use existing classrooms, the impossibility of implementing all improvements simultaneously nationwide, and the need to balance these factors.

  Hence, the formal primary education system's slow response to potential UPE initiatives relative to the nonformal system's response should not be taken as prima facie evidence of any lack of Government commitment to EFA. BRAC sees the NFPE program as a stop-gap measure useful until a permanent, formal Governmental system is in place; it does not see BRAC schools as a long-term substitute for Government schools.
- **NGOs need not, necessarily, be limited to small pilot projects but may also carry out large-scale social service delivery projects.** BRAC has proven that in both health and education, with proper management and an appropriate program, NGOs can assume a substantial responsibility for large-scale delivery. At the same time, it should be remembered that considerable commitment and training are necessary to create a cadre of real managers capable of large-scale implementation.

- **As NGO programs increase in number and effectiveness, the need will arise for better coordination between the Government and other NGOs.** Frequent turnover of senior Government officials charged with elaborating Government basic education policies and designing responses to EFA indicates that Government commitment to EFA goals is probably weak. From its experience in the health sector, BRAC derived the lesson that "NGO cooperation with the Government can work well in sectors that have been assigned high priority by the Government (BRAC 1992a, 9)."
- **Respected efforts like those offered by BRAC can inhibit other innovations, as smaller programs are asked to conform to its successes.** A program like BRAC's, which has grown considerably larger and is deemed successful, can inhibit other programs. Ironically, its size and success may discourage the type of innovation that is necessary to pilot new delivery systems, promote greater grassroots participation in education, and increase services to disadvantaged groups. BRAC has made special efforts to encourage and support other NGOs, in part to alleviate this very feature of success.
- **National EFA networks and consortia provide opportunities to foster support for a diversity of NGO models and individual initiatives.** Such networks can also foster an appreciation of the complementary roles of Government and non-government agencies. For example, the Campaign for Public Education in Bangladesh is currently acting as a clearinghouse for information on alternative nonformal primary education materials. Its success in fostering diversity will depend to some extent on some donors' willingness to fund alternative models.

The Relevance of BRAC's Experience to Other Countries

The institutional environment in which BRAC operates, with a heavy reliance on foreign donor funds, national mandates but limited resources to develop the primary education system, and established NGOs that are effective in reaching specific groups of people, is common in many developing countries. On the other hand, the technical environment in which BRAC works—political stability, cultural and linguistic homogeneity, a large and sophisticated NGO community, high levels of educated unemployment in rural areas, and dense populations in areas underserved by the education system—cannot be found in many other countries. The BRAC model, in its entirety, therefore, may be applicable only in a few countries considered high priority by the global EFA community. Nevertheless, the following individual elements of the BRAC model may prove beneficial and transferrable to other countries.

- clear focus on a social goal widely perceived as important by parents, students, and government;

- a simplified curriculum for primary education that focuses on basic skills and is appropriate to the targeted population;
- paraprofessional teachers, selected from the community, with short pre-service training, scheduled in-service training, and strong supervision;
- small instructional units and correspondingly small catchment areas, so that no student or parent is far removed from his/her home;
- active parent and community involvement as a major goal;
- comprehensive management support systems that emphasize staff training, logistics, follow-through, and delivery of services;
- flexible timetable and an organization that adjusts its services to the client/student needs and alters its own organization depending upon its ability to service its clients/students;
- reduced capital costs, where funds are expended for current operation and services, and not on "bricks and mortar;" and
- viable, mutually reinforcing NGO/community partnerships characterized by regular and open communication and cooperative planning.

The conscious blending and restructuring of these elements in the existing BRAC sites have created a critical mass of experience that allows us to point to BRAC as an important success. Worldwide experience indicates repeatedly, however, that wholesale transplanting of an innovation from one country to another, without substantial "ownership" and a sense of origination by the recipient country, is doomed to failure. Careful understanding and then use of the elements of a success, like BRAC, within the social, cultural, and political environment of a recipient country is the necessary first challenge to committed educational entrepreneurs, educational planners, and/or country policymakers.

SECTION I

Setting the Stage

Primary Education for All: Learning from the BRAC Experience is a case study of the Nonformal Primary Education Program (NFPE), a relatively new educational delivery system developed and implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC). The NFPE program, which represents a collaboration among non-governmental organizations (NGO)s, international donors, and some of the most disadvantaged communities in Bangladesh, has proven relatively successful in rapidly expanding access to primary education to those historically neglected by the formal primary education system: children, especially girls, from poor, rural, landless and near-landless families.

This case study addresses key questions concerning the program's strengths and weaknesses and the potential for implementing the program throughout Bangladesh and the developing world. Section I sets the stage for these questions to be answered. Chapter I recaps the Education for All (EFA) initiative, introduces BRAC and its NFPE program, and presents the outcomes that inspired USAID, UNICEF, and the Rockefeller Foundation to commission further investigation of this educational program. Program goals and objectives and the research methodology are provided.

The remainder of the section describes the conditions under which the program has been implemented. Chapter II describes the economic, demographic, political, and social environment in Bangladesh. Chapter III focuses on the educational conditions that created the need for such a program.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Background

Universal Primary Education: A Worldwide Goal

During the last 50 years Universal Primary Education (UPE) has become a priority throughout the world. The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was adopted in 1948, declared that "everyone has a right to education" and called for compulsory elementary education. The Convention on the Rights of the Child adopted in 1990 by the United Nations reaffirms every child's right to education and the states' obligation to enforce this right. At the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA), delegates from 155 governments reaffirmed the previously established commitment to education as a human right and acknowledged the responsibility of their governments to provide access to basic education for all citizens. Nonetheless, many governments in the less developed world lack the financial resources, the administrative capacity, and/or the political will to implement the legislation necessary to fulfill their basic education mandates. As a result, a large proportion of children and adults in the low-income countries remain without access to basic education.

In recent years, international donors and local NGOs in several countries have supplemented national educational financing and tested alternative basic education service delivery systems. BRAC, an NGO that has provided rural development, credit, and health programs to the people of Bangladesh since the 1970s, is one such organization.

The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

Like many of the more established NGOs engaged in development activities in Bangladesh today, BRAC began as a response to the man-made and natural disasters that decimated Bangladesh during and after its War of Independence in 1971. As it became apparent that natural disasters would be a continual part of life in Bangladesh and that disadvantaged Bangladeshis would be particularly vulnerable following those disasters, BRAC began experimenting with medium-term development schemes. Over the last two decades, BRAC has emerged as a leader in working with the rural poor. With 3,556 full-time permanent employees, approximately 10,000 paraprofessionals, several thousand more part-time paraprofessional veterinarians, legal assistants, and other staff, and an annual budget of more than US$35 million, BRAC is by far the largest NGO in Bangladesh.

BRAC became involved in basic education in 1985 when, in response to requests from participants in its rural development programs, it initiated a NFPE program for eight- to ten-year-olds in 22 villages in Bangladesh. Initially, the objective of the program was to develop a primary education model that could provide, in a three-year period, basic literacy and numeracy to those historically neglected by Bangladesh's formal school system: children, especially girls, from poor, rural, landless and near-landless families. By December 1992, the NFPE program had expanded to serve 11- to 16-year-olds as well as eight- to ten-year-olds in about 12,000 schools, with 70 percent girls' enrollment in these schools. Unexpectedly, many of BRAC's younger NFPE program graduates have continued their education in Classes IV and V in the formal primary school system. As a result, BRAC's NFPE program for the younger age group has the added benefit of preparing its graduates to enter the formal school system.

Although BRAC's NFPE program is a relatively new undertaking in comparison to its other established social programs, the program's rapid growth has attracted considerable attention from the international Education for All community Studies and evaluations of the program's initial implementation suggest several important findings:

- Paraprofessional teachers, carefully but quickly trained and paid a small stipend for part-time work, can effectively provide primary level instruction.
- Nonformal programs can be effective in providing basic literacy and numeracy instruction to disadvantaged, rural, and other unreached populations, particularly girls.
- If properly selected, trained, and supervised, young village women and men with less than ten years of formal schooling also can become dedicated and responsible primary school teachers.
- Significant parent and teacher involvement is an important factor in a program's success.
- Effective management is essential to the success of nonformal educational programs.

BRAC is considering a major NFPE program expansion that could result in 50,000 NFPE program schools nationwide by 1995. This expansion requires ongoing support from BRAC's existing international donor consortium as well as new support from other international donors. In light of this proposed expansion, international organizations, particularly UNICEF and USAID, have begun examining the NFPE program's potential to reach larger numbers of girls in Bangladesh and to contribute to the achievement of universal primary education in other less developed countries with similar "gaps" in their primary education systems. None of the studies of BRAC's NFPE program to date have examined the implica-

tions of such a rapid expansion in Bangladesh or the potential for replicating the approach in other countries. BRAC officials do not consider its entire model "replicable" in or "exportable" to other countries. Nevertheless, they recognize that some of the lessons they have learned might be useful to others interested in rapidly expanding primary education to previously underserved areas.

In early 1992, BRAC readily agreed to a UNICEF/USAID recommendation to conduct an independent case study of the NFPE program to identify its strengths, determine its potential for expansion within Bangladesh, and identify any implications for nonformal, mass primary education programs in other parts of the developing world. This report presents the results of that case study.

Purpose and Audience

This case study was commissioned to answer three key questions:

- What are the strengths and weaknesses of BRAC's NFPE program?
- What is the potential for rapidly expanding the NFPE program in Bangladesh? In particular, what might be the relationship between a large-scale NFPE program and the national system of primary education?
- What is the potential for exporting the NFPE program to other countries, particularly those in West and North Africa?

The study is expected to be useful to donors, NGOs, governments, and students of education involved in using nonformal models to rapidly expand access to primary education, particularly for girls, in less-developed countries. These groups might also find the study useful in developing donor-NGO-Government-community partnerships to improve school quality and in establishing decentralized management systems to ensure low-cost, high quality human services delivery.

Methodology

A three-person team consisting of one AED consultant and staff members from UNICEF and the Rockefeller Foundation conducted a preliminary fact-finding visit to Bangladesh from March 19 to April 4, 1992. During this visit the team collected and reviewed relevant documents relating to the BRAC program and to universal primary education efforts in Bangladesh. The team also interviewed BRAC staff, donors, Bangladeshi Government officials, and other individuals involved in primary education research, policy development, and implementation and conducted site visits to NFPE program schools and training centers.

On the basis of this work, the team identified critical information gaps in existing reports and decided the gaps to be addressed either by a second fact-finding team or by local consultants in Bangladesh who would conduct interim studies before the second fact-finding team returned. Scopes of work were developed for the interim studies, and the second fact-finding team was selected. Bangladeshi firms were identified to conduct the interim studies.

The documents collected during the first and second fact-finding visits are listed in the bibliography at the end of this study. The scopes of work for the two interim studies identified by the first fact-finding mission—an independent assessment of cost and an independent ethnographic survey of the household characteristics of children attending BRAC and other schools—were primarily intended to address outstanding issues associated with the strengths of the NFPE program. The cost study and ethnographic survey were commissioned from a chartered public accounting firm, Rahman Rahman Huq, and from the Center for Social Studies at Dhaka University, respectively.

The second fact-finding team, consisting of the same AED team leader and UNICEF senior education advisor, and a newly recruited child development specialist, returned to Bangladesh for six weeks in July and August 1992. The team explored the basic structures and processes of the BRAC school system using three sources: secondary data in the form of several recent donor-funded evaluations (Lovell and Fatema 1990; Shordt 1991a; Gajanayake 1992) and studies initiated by BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division; primary data from the cost and household surveys conducted by Rahman Rahman Huq and the Center for Social Studies respectively; and field visits to Government, BRAC, and other NGO offices and schools.

Because several recent independent evaluations had included extensive visits to schools throughout BRAC's wide operating area, and because both the cost and household surveys included primary data collection in rural areas, the team spent comparatively little time visiting BRAC schools (less than 10 percent total time in country). Instead, the team spent most of its time conducting five activities: interviewing BRAC, other NGO, donor, and Government officials (50 percent); visiting other NGO and Government schools (10 percent); assembling and reviewing documents (20 percent); supervising the completion of the cost and household studies (10 percent); and drafting text (10 percent). In most instances, the primary data collected by the team related to BRAC's relationship with the rest of the primary education system, both formal and nonformal.

Finally, BRAC provided copies of all of its curriculum and teacher training materials, in both English and Bangla, for analysis by curriculum and teacher training experts in the United States.

Terminology: Nonformal Education and Non-Governmental Organizations

BRAC calls its program "Nonformal Primary Education." This is consistent with the use of the terms formal and nonformal education in Bangladeshi Government documents and education literature in Bangladesh. In the Bangladesh context, "nonformal education" appears to be any intentional, purposive instruction that 1) occurs outside the formal Government primary school system and 2) incorporates certain flexibilities in the organization and management of the program and the curriculum. Used in this way, nonformal does not imply informal, and, therefore, the term encompasses BRAC's highly structured approach. In order to avoid confusion with many key reference documents, this case study adopts this definition of formal and nonformal education.

The term "non-governmental organizations" and the acronym "NGOs" will be used throughout this study to refer to formal organizations that are registered as nonprofit with the Bangladesh Ministry of Social Services or, in the case of international organizations, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and are involved in nonpartisan economic and/or social development activities. These NGOs are distinct from ad hoc civic groups, sports and recreation societies, trade unions, political parties, etc., that may take an interest in education activities and are also, technically, non-governmental organizations. This again conforms with general usage in the literature produced in Bangladesh.

Organization of the Report

This report is divided into four sections, each of which comprises several chapters. Section 1, which sets the stage for the case study, provides an overview of the basic characteristics of Bangladesh, gives specific details about the country's educational environment, and establishes the need for programs to support the formal education structure. Sections 2, 3, and 4 address the three study questions: *What are the strengths and weaknesses of BRAC's NFPE program?; what is the potential for rapidly expanding the NFPE program in Bangladesh?; and what essential elements of the NFPE program might be relevant in efforts to rapidly expand primary education systems in other countries?* A bibliography is included in the Appendix.

Bangladesh: The Country

Overview

Bangladesh is a small, densely populated country located on the Bay of Bengal, bordered by India and Burma. More than 85 percent of the population are Muslim, and 85 percent live in villages. The national language is Bangla, and over 95 percent of the population identify themselves as ethnic Bengali. A summary profile is provided in Table II.1.

More specifically, Bangladesh is characterized by the following:

- pervasive poverty;
- a rural economy;
- demographic pressure created by rising population growth; and
- gender inequities.

Nonetheless, Bangladesh may be distinguished from many of the other countries with similarly low levels of income per capita by several factors that have a direct bearing on its ability to expand access to primary education:

- linguistic, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity;
- political stability;
- a functioning public administration system; and
- a large, sophisticated NGO community.

These characteristics and distinguishing factors are described below.

TABLE II.1

Profile of Bangladesh

Area	143,998 sq km
Population	115,594,000
Primary Religion	Muslim
Income Per Capita	170 (in U.S. Dollars)
Population Growth Rate	2.7 percent
Rural Population	86.4 percent
Adult Literacy Rate	35.3 percent
Gross Primary Enrollment	70 percent (1988)

Source: UNESCO 1991

Characteristics

Pervasive Poverty

Bangladesh's primary natural resources are land, water, and people. Bangladesh's strategic position on the confluence of three of the largest rivers in Asia provides silt and water sufficient to support one to three crops per year on almost 70 percent of its land mass. As a result, Bangladesh's population density per hectare of arable cropland is just 11.6, which compares favorably with the Netherlands' 16.43 or Japan's 26.09, countries similarly unendowed with mineral resources (World Resources 1990, 269).

Despite this, Bangladesh is one of the poorest countries in the world. The GNP per capita of US$170 per year is among the lowest in Asia or Africa.[1] Further, UNDP estimates that the poorest 40 percent of the Bangladeshi population survive on less than US$70 per capita annually (UNDP 1992, 161). The total number of people living below the poverty line in Bangladesh, therefore, exceeds the population of all but ten countries in the world (World Bank 1992, Table 1, 218-219).

The key to understanding Bangladesh's poverty does not lie in its population density or its limited natural resources but in its lack of a physical infrastructure and trained human resources. The agriculture sector in recent decades has benefitted from the development and distribution of improved seeds and irrigation methods, but the distribution of these improvements has been slow. In 1986, despite desperate need, Bangladesh's yields per hectare of cereal were less than one-half of Japan's and one-third of the Netherlands' (World Resources 1990, 269, 271, 279). Low levels of literacy ensure that agricultural innovations must be spread on a one-to-one basis, and small, fragmented landholdings provide poor collateral for the credit needed to purchase such innovations. Moreover, many agricultural innovations result in a reduction of the demand for day laborers, who make up more than 50 percent of the rural population and who, as illiterates, have limited access to off-farm employment. More than half of the rural households in Bangladesh are considered functionally landless (they own less than 0.25 hectare). Improvements in agricultural productivity that do not require more hired labor effectively leave more than half of the rural population unemployed (Lovell 1992, 14).

Bangladesh's lack of physical and human capital is exacerbated by its short history as an independent country and the chronic natural and man-made disasters that occur. Bangladesh became a sovereign nation less than 25 years ago in the aftermath of a bloody civil conflict that caused massive

[1] As reported in UNESCO's 1991 *World Education Report*, only two countries in Asia—the Lao People's Democratic Republic and Nepal—have GNPs less than $180. In Africa, only Ethiopia, Mozambique, and Somalia have lower GNPs.

capital flight and ruined much physical infrastructure. Since that time, scarcely a year has gone by when Bangladesh has not suffered at least one severe flood or cyclone. These floods and cyclones not only cause immediate destruction to human lives, private property, and public infrastructure, but also wash away the land on which many homesteads stand, creating thousands of new homeless internal refugees every year.

The pervasiveness of poverty is evidenced by the minimal average daily calorie intake for men and women, low birth weights for babies, high rates of malnutrition, and mortality rates for children under five years of age that are more than twice the average for all developing countries (UNICEF 1992a, Table 6; Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) 1991, Vol.1, Table 2.3, 55; BBS Report of the Child Nutrition Survey 1989-90, cited in UNICEF 1992a, 7). One-third of all under-five deaths are caused by diarrhea and malnutrition; another third is attributable to vaccine-preventable causes such as measles, pertussis, tetanus, and acute respiratory infections. All of these are outgrowths of poverty and ignorance.

Rural Economy and Employment

Poverty is often discussed in Bangladesh in terms of inadequate access to the means of production and/or wage-earning opportunities. As noted above, the Bangladesh economy is still defined in terms of agriculture. Approximately 80 percent of the population live in rural areas, and 50 percent of the work force are engaged in agricultural activities. The agricultural sector's share of GDP, however, has gradually declined in the last two decades to just over 40 percent, thus reducing the average earnings of most agricultural workers. The proportion of the total work force employed in agriculture has remained about the same throughout this period (UNICEF 1992a, 29).

The pressure of a growing population on limited land resources has progressively reduced the size of land holdings and increased the proportion of the landless. The latest available statistics show that in 1983-4 56.5 percent of the total rural households were landless or near landless, e.g., they possessed less than one-half acre of cultivable land (Bangladesh Census of Agriculture and Livestock, 1983-84 cited in Huq and Sultan 1991, 155). For the bottom 50 percent of the rural population, who are landless or marginal farmers, agriculture is a part-time occupation that must be supplemented.

While employment opportunities in industries, services, and nonfarm employment have grown (from some 4.5 million to 12 million between 1974 and 1986, correspondingly from 21 percent to 40 percent of the labor force), this growth has not kept pace with the growth of the total employment-seeking population (UNDP 1992, Table 2.3). Even for the people

who come from families that can afford to send them to school for nine years, wage-earning, nonfarm employment is scarce. Poor people, of course, cannot afford to remain unemployed; instead, they accept very low wages. Consequently, productivity, wages, and standards of living have failed to improve, especially in rural areas. The average daily wage of rural unskilled workers, who form the bulk of the work force, has remained the money equivalent of about three kg of rice for the last two decades (UNDP 1992, Table 3.5).

Micro- and cottage industries are one way that families in rural Bangladesh attempt to make ends meet. A survey in 1978-80 showed that over 80 percent of rural, small industrial units employed less than five workers. Of those employed, unpaid family laborers constituted 44 percent, of which two thirds were women. Only 45 percent of the owners of these industries said they were pursuing a family tradition (Rural Industries Study 1978-80 in Huq and Sultan 1991, 156). Because the informal sector in the rural areas has the potential to absorb more enterprising individuals, many NGOs are involved in micro-credit programs that help the poor set up informal businesses such as milk production, rice trading, silkworm cultivation, and weaving. Microenterprises offer one of the few opportunities for the rural poor to escape dependence on day-labor in the fields or service in wealthier households.

Improvements in worker productivity and earnings in all sectors of the formal and informal economy are generally facilitated by literacy and numeracy, which enhance workers' ability to acquire and use skills, knowledge, and information that are relevant in the marketplace. The dilemma is that the poor are the ones without effective access to formal schooling. By one estimate, 55 percent of the poor and 60 percent of the "hard-core" poor are without the benefit of formal schooling. Completing a cycle of primary education, however, helps improve their chances of entry into nonfarm economic activities with a higher earning potential, despite the often-cited weaknesses of the curriculum and content of primary education (Rahman and Hossain 1992, 312-313).

High Growth Rate

The estimated population growth rate for Bangladesh for the decade of the 1990s varies between 2.7 percent and 1.8 percent, resulting in population estimates for the year 2000 ranging from 150.5 to 128 million (UNDP 1992, 171; World Bank 1992, 268). As of 1990, 42.9 percent of the population were under 15 years of age (World Bank 1992, 28). This demographic phenomenon poses an educational and development challenge. Providing educational and other essential services for the large, young population presents a heavy burden on the nation's economy. Keeping pace with the growth of the population itself is an enormous task,

and a very high level of cost effectiveness has to be achieved in basic education and other social services. In many instances, providing adequate services requires departing from conventional approaches. For basic education, this means that a significant reduction in illiteracy and improvement in the level of basic education of the people can be achieved in the next ten to 20 years only if the "floodgates of illiteracy" can be closed and the vast numbers of children can be assured of effective participation in primary education.

Bangladesh has an active family planning program, and it follows a policy of controlling unchecked population growth. Decades of efforts in this area have begun to bear fruit. The contraceptive acceptance rate between 1985 and 1989 has been reported between 25 and 31 percent of married women of childbearing age (World Bank 1992, 271; UNDP 1992, 171), but is expected to be lower in rural areas. Low literacy rates in rural areas are a major obstacle to increasing modern family planning. For example, information about contraceptives must be spread by word of mouth, and instructions for using them must be communicated and repeated by health workers one-on-one or in small groups.

Gender Disparities

Contrary to the situation in most of the rest of the world, the life expectancy for women in Bangladesh is lower than the life expectancy for men (51 years versus 52 years), and the under-five mortality rate for girls is higher than that for boys (162 versus 146 per 1,000 live births). These numbers reflect the double jeopardy in which Bangladeshi women find themselves—first as members of the poor majority and second as females in a traditionally male-oriented society.

A poor family is less likely to spend scarce cash to pay for medicine for a sick girl child than for a boy. As the girl grows older, the family will need to collect a large dowry in order to secure her a good husband, and then she will leave to live with that husband. The parents' long-term security, therefore, lies in their sons, who will bring in brides with dowries and who would, in earlier times, support them in their old age. In recent generations, however, the land or the family's traditional business is rarely adequate to supply the dowry for daughters or adequate employment for the sons. As a result, a growing proportion of men have migrated alone to the cities, leaving many women as de facto heads of households for much of their lives. In traditional Bengali society, a respectable woman is expected to observe "purdah," which means she minimizes contact with males outside her immediate family, usually by remaining within the confines of her home. This norm breaks down for poor women, who often must look for work outside their homes in order for their families to survive.

The tradition of early marriage also adversely affects women's status and welfare and has a negative impact on women's access to education and on women's health, as girls begin bearing children at a very young age. Although the mean age of marriage is reported to be 18 in the mid-1980s, a significant proportion of rural girls are married by 15 (UNICEF 1992a, 21-22). Early marriages thus contribute to both high maternal mortality and fertility rates.

Girls have less access to basic education opportunities and they drop out faster than boys. Only 22 percent of adult women are literate compared to 47 percent for men (UNESCO 1991). Enrollment of girls in primary education is reported to have increased in recent years, reaching a female-male ratio of 44:56 by 1990.

Distinguishing Factors

Linguistic, Ethnic, and Cultural Homogeneity

Unlike many developing countries that have a multiplicity of languages, major ethnic and racial divisions, and strongly held loyalty to separate religious and cultural traditions, Bangladesh enjoys the advantages of a largely homogeneous society. The Bengali people have inhabited the territory comprising the present Bangladesh since the ancient times, and they are proud of its common cultural and linguistic identity. Islam came to Bangladesh in the 11th century through Arab traders and missionaries and spread rapidly throughout the country with the Muslim rulers' emergence in the region. In 1991, 86 percent of the people of Bangladesh were Muslim, with an additional 12 percent Hindu and the rest mainly Buddhist and Christian (BBS 1992).

Bangla, a language with a highly developed literary tradition, is universally spoken. This language has been designated as the language of Government business, and with the exception of some small tribal groups along the eastern and norther borde s, it is claimed as the mother tongue by the vast majority of the Bangladeshi people. The universality of Bangla and its use as the language of instruction are particularly advantageous in the spread of literacy and basic education.

Political Stability

Although Bangladesh is among the ten poorest countries in the world in terms of GNP, unlike most of these countries, the causes of Bangladesh's poverty are neither war nor famine. Aside from periodic conflicts with ethnic minorities along its eastern border, Bangladesh has not suffered widespread war or ethnic strife since its War of Independence in 1971. Although two of the four heads of state since independence were killed in

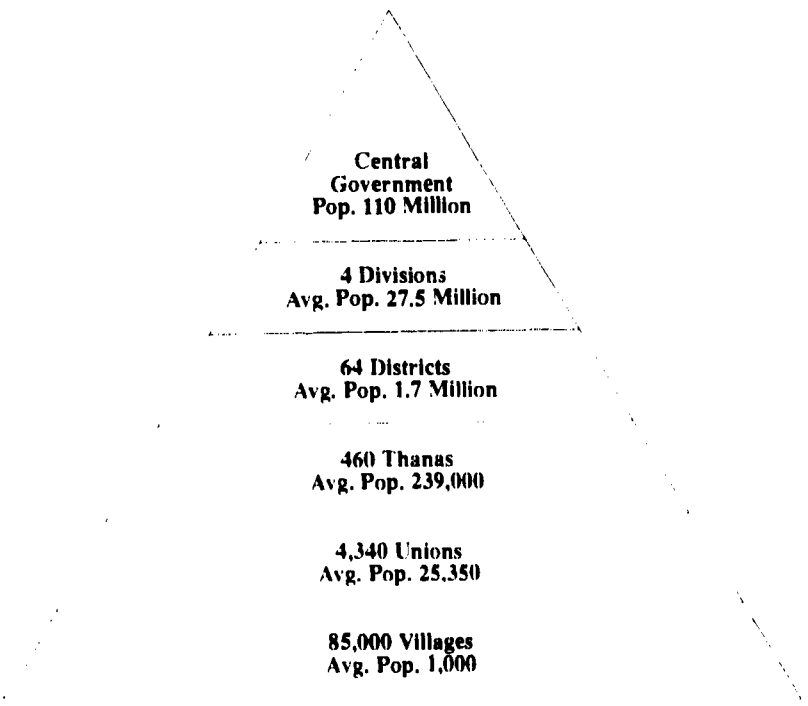
coups d'état, the periods following each coup did not see massive purges or persecution of the followers of these leaders. The major political parties are not divided along purely ethnic or regional lines. A democratically elected Government is currently in power, and the previous military government leaders are on trial.

Functioning Public Administration System

A common, coherent public administration system functions throughout Bangladesh. Although Britain and then later Pakistan exploited Bangladesh, these countries also left behind a fairly well developed, multi-tiered system consisting of 64 districts and 460 thanas (sub-districts), each with unions and wards/villages as subunits of those unions. (See Figure II.1). Bangladesh has adopted a parliamentary system and has added locally elected Government bodies to this administrative structure. The Bangladeshi Government

FIGURE II.1

Bangladesh Administrative Structure (1991)



Compiled from Bangladesh Bureau Data

has also begun the process of modernizing and decentralizing the civil service, and the military frequently serves as a channel for delivering relief goods during disasters.

The capacity of the Government is, however, limited in two important ways. First, it has limited revenue-generating capacity, either at the national or local level. In many ways, therefore, Government offices do little more than exist (Blair 1989). Nonetheless, official development assistance, although comprising more than 80 percent of the public sector development budget, is equal to less than 10 percent of Bangladesh's GNP (World Bank 1991, 242). Second, like most bureaucracies, the Bangladeshi Government is not well suited to deliver client-oriented, grassroots development programs. In this area, however, a significant and growing proportion of the rural poor is being served by nonprofit, non-governmental development organizations.

Sophisticated NGO Community

There is a growing awareness worldwide that the enterprise of national and human development requires an effective partnership between the Government, represented by its bureaucracy, and citizens, represented by formal and informal community organizations and individual community-based activists. NGOs engaged in development activities often play an active role in facilitating this partnership by helping to organize community residents, educate them in terms of their rights, and offer opportunities to participate in self-help activities.

Bangladesh is fortunate to have a large, diverse, and dynamic community of NGOs engaged in economic and social development as well as disaster relief. These organizations provide a testing ground for alternative approaches to development and relief and attract additional international funding. Of the 13,000 voluntary social welfare and development agencies in Bangladesh, some 500 are directly involved in developmental and poverty alleviation activities. Some 12 to 15 percent of total external assistance to Bangladesh flow through NGOs (UNDP 1992, 87).

The Bangladeshi Government recognizes the magnitude of NGO activities and the important role NGOs can play in national development. The Fourth Five-Year Plan affirms:

> in expanding the roles and impact of the NGOs for benefiting the poor and the disadvantaged . . . the NGO activities . . . should supplement the main thrust towards decentralized participatory planning . . . (and) all NGO programs should aim at increasing the capability of the poor and the disadvantaged to save and invest over time so that a NGO can gradually withdraw . . . and shift its activities to another area not yet

> covered by such program of graduation to self-reliance. (Bangladesh Government 1991 Fourth Five Year Plan, I-13)

Although BRAC currently has the largest nonformal primary education program in Bangladesh, it is not the only NGO innovating with and promoting nonformal basic education for children. CARITAS and the Rangpur-Dinajpur Service (RDRS), two Bangladeshi NGOs funded by the international Catholic and Lutheran communities respectively, started primary schools in rural areas in 1980-1. Likewise, in urban areas, the Underprivileged Children's Education Program (UCEP) and Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) sponsored schools for urban working children in 1983 and 1987 respectively.

BRAC is another of the funding recipients. Although the organization did not become involved in primary education until 1985, BRAC, recognized as the largest and one of the most well managed NGOs in Bangladesh, emerged as a leader in that area as well. In the context of the special needs and challenges in Bangladesh, the NGOs that are engaged in basic education activities appear to be re-assessing their strategies and involvement. Many have approached BRAC for training and materials, and BRAC is presently experimenting with various ways of responding to these requests.

Summary

Bangladesh has some features that exist in many developing countries and other features that are somewhat uncommon. Like several other developing countries, Bangladesh has few natural resources, a rural economy, a high population growth rate, a culture that favors boys over girls, frequent natural disasters, and a weak social service delivery system for areas other than disaster relief, particularly with respect to education. On the other hand, the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural homogeneity, the high proportion of educated Bangladeshis who are under- or unemployed and live in densely populated rural villages, the absence of civil conflict, an extensive governing system that has local units functioning throughout the country, and the presence of a large, relatively sophisticated NGO community give Bangladesh an edge among poor developing countries.

Chapter III

The Primary Education System in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a formal education system that has had limited success in providing basic education to its growing population. Despite a series of development plans that have set targets for attaining universal primary education, enrollment, attendance, and completion rates have remained low. About 65 percent of the adult population are illiterate.

This chapter presents a summary of Bangladesh's universalization gap in providing primary education and the formal and nonformal responses to that gap.

The Universalization Gap in Primary Education in Bangladesh

The primary education system in Bangladesh consists of 45,800 primary schools (including 8,000 non-government schools) and 200,000 teachers. This system served 12.3 million students in 1990 (BBS 1992a, Table 1.2), which is nominally 75 percent of the country's estimated 15 million children six to ten years old. These statistics appear promising, but in actuality major quantitative and qualitative gaps in service delivery exist. These gaps are summarized below.

Real Versus Ideal Enrollment, Attendance, and Completion Rates

Although the system serves about 12 million students, the rates of eligible children actually served are much lower than the estimated 75 percent. Using adjustments after a post-enumeration check for the 1991 census, the population of Bangladesh in 1991 was 109.8 million (BBS 1992b). Based on a 1981 census age breakdown of the population and surveys in compulsory education areas in December 1991 of eligible primary school-age children, an estimated 13.5 percent of the 1991 population was in the compulsory education age range of six to ten years. Thus, the number of children in the primary school age group in 1991 was 14.8 million. If, however, 25 percent of the 12.3 million enrolled children are assumed to be outside the primary age norm – a reasonable assumption based on spot checks of children's ages as reported by children themselves in classrooms and the 10-20 percent repetition rate reported for Classes III to V – only about nine million of the children enrolled in primary schools in 1991 were a part of the eligible age group. This translates into a net enrollment rate of 60 percent of the eligible children (net enrollment of nine million compared to an estimated six- to ten-year-old population of 14.8 million). The Government estimates that of those enrolled in the first grade, 30-35 percent actually complete five years of education. Limited information available on attendance and dropout rates from UNICEF and others,

however, suggest that perhaps only 15-20 percent of those enrolled in Class I complete five years of primary education (BANBEIS 1986, 4; Qadir 1986). The overall picture that emerges, even if one interprets the available data optimistically, is presented in Table III.1.

TABLE III.1

Estimated Primary Level Enrollment, Attendance, and Completion Rates in Bangladesh

Category	Rate (in %)
Net enrollment of the age group	60
Average school attendance, proportion of those enrolled	50-60
Proportion of those enrolled completing 5 years	30-35
Proportion of the age group completing 5 years	15-20

Data compiled and computed from BBS statistics.

The System's Capacity

Assuming that 60 percent of the 15 million children of primary school age in Bangladesh currently are participating in primary education and no more than 20 percent of them complete the five-year cycle, several factors suggest that the existing system does not have the capability—particularly the physical facilities and the teachers—to achieve the national goal of universal primary education.

Physical Facilities

Primary school class size in Bangladesh is large by international standards. The exact number and condition of primary classrooms in the country is not known, but it was estimated for 1990 that there were 130,000 classrooms in 45,800 schools to serve the nine million enrolled (BANBEIS 1991a and c). Allowing for the current norm of two shifts (the first shift for the larger enrollment of Classes I and II for two hours, and the second shift of three and a half to four hours for Classes III to V, which have about half the number of students as Classes I and II), the average class size is about 62 students for Classes I and II and 31 for Classes III to V. These averages allow for considerable variation, including classes of over 100 children in the primary school.

In addition, schools are not close enough to children's homes. The 45,800 schools average almost one school for every two of the 85,000 natural villages in Bangladesh, with an average school catchment area of 3.2 square kilometers. A school or a classroom, therefore, does not exist in every rural neighborhood. In Bangladesh's flood-prone and riverine landscape, even a short distance of one to two kilometers can become a barrier for young children.

Teachers

Of the 200,000 teachers working in 1990 in the formal system, some 170,000 were in Government schools. Due to the double-shift system, the student-teacher ratios are 40 to 1 for Classes I and II and 20 to one for Classes III to V. These are acceptable ratios. In practice, however, teachers, classrooms, and students cannot be perfectly matched for the whole country. As indicated in Table III.2, BBS reports a variation in gross student-teacher ratio (not considering double shifts) among 21 regions for the year 1990 (BBS 1992a, Table 12.43) (See Table III.2).

TABLE III.2

Regional Variations in Student-Teacher Ratios in Bangladesh

Students per Teacher	Number of Regions
34	1
41 to 55	5
56 to 79	15

Source: BBS 1992a

Since 1985, an average of 3,800 new teachers has been added every year to the system on a net basis. The 53 primary teacher training institutions, with a theoretical capacity for producing 10,000 teachers every year, are seriously underutilized. In the 1989-90 academic year, the total enrollment for the one-year course was 5,561—a little over half of the capacity and lower than the peak enrollment of 8,400 in 1986-87 (See Table III.3). This underenrollment is probably due in part to the Government's limited efforts to recruit primary teachers, which, in turn, are linked to its unwillingness to commit itself to pay those teachers' salaries without adequate recurrent funds in its budgets.

Instructional Quality

The low attendance and completion rates in Bangladesh suggest that just enrolling children in school does not solve the problem of educational

TABLE III.3

Primary-Level Teacher Training Institution Capability and Utilization in Bangladesh

	Year	
	1986-87	1989-90
Capacity	10,000	10,000
Enrollment	8,400	5,561
Unused Training Spaces	1,600	4,439

Source: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, 1991b, Table 12.46

participation. The deeper causes behind these numbers—why children do not enroll, why they do not attend classes even if they do enroll, why they do not stay on to complete the cycle, and how much they actually learn if they participate—all may relate to the qualitative features of the system, which may be called the qualitative dimension of the universalization gap. The elements of the qualitative gap are related to program effectiveness (i.e., the provision of and effective use of the available physical facilities, teachers, and learning materials) and the circumstances of the learners (i.e., the economic and social obstacles that they may face, their and their families' expectations and perceptions about the educational program, and their ability and willingness to participate effectively in learning).

Implications

Clearing backlogs of all primary school-age children and raising the retention rates of those who do enroll will require doubling the physical capacities and the teaching force. To keep pace with the growth of the primary school age group, *all components of the primary school system must grow at an additional annual rate of 2 percent over the next decade* or the period during which universal primary education is expected to be achieved.

Assuming that 100,000 new classrooms with double shifts in all schools and 60 children per classroom in Classes I and II will be needed by the year 2000, the World Bank estimates that the additional physical facilities will cost US$700 million at 1989 prices (World Bank 1990b, 8). Assuming that the teaching force will also increase by 100,000 (a 50 percent increase over the present number rather than a doubling as suggested above) in the next ten years, an additional expenditure of US$344 million at 1990 prices during this period (at the rate of US$625 per teacher each year for teacher salaries) will also be required.

Government Responses to the Primary Education Gap

Successive national Five-Year National Development Plans since the early 1970s set ambitious targets for primary education for all children and for major reductions in adult illiteracy. Progress toward meeting these goals, however, has been slow. At the beginning of the 1990s, no more than one out of five children completed five years of primary school, and two-thirds of the population over 15 years of age remained illiterate.

Targets for the Fourth Five-Year Plan period ending in 1995 and for the year 2000 are presented in Table III.4.

TABLE III.4

Bangladesh National Primary Education Targets for the Years 1990, 1995, and 2000 (in percent)

Category	1990	1995	2000
Primary school enrollment as proportion of eligible (6-10) age group	60	85	95
Percentage of children enrolled completing five years of primary education	30-35	45	60
Adult literacy rate (population over age fifteen)	30	40	45

Source UNICEF 1992a

Given the current situation in primary education and literacy, even the relatively modest goals for 1995 and 2000 pose an enormous challenge.

In the last two decades, Bangladesh has adopted various efforts to define and address the quantitative and qualitative gaps that have kept universal primary education a distant goal. These initiatives, which represent national strategies and priorities with respect to universal education, include the Compulsory Primary Education (CPE) Program, the General Education Project (GEP), which involves a major international collaboration effort, and the Program for Integrated Nonformal Education. Each is briefly described below.

Compulsory Primary Education (CPE)

Bangladesh promulgated a CPE Act in 1990. In January 1992, the Government initiated a program to implement the Act in 68 thanas of the

total 64 districts. The Act is designed to enroll all six- and seven-year-old children in 1992 and to keep as many as possible in school until the end of the five-year cycle. Successive cohorts of six- and seven-year-old children also will be enrolled. The legislation also calls for parent and community involvement to ensure that all children attend school and includes penalties for parents who fail to enroll their children in school, although no instance of imposing a penalty has been reported. The program, which was begun initially in the thanas where district towns are located (except in the larger urban areas of Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi, and Khulna) is expected to be expanded to other thanas, but a specific plan of expansion has not been announced. (How the step-by-step implementation of the program relates to overall national targets for enrollment and retention in 1995 and 2000 had not been worked out at the time of writing.)

Program implementation in the first 68 thanas included several steps: conducting a census of six- and seven-year-old children who should be enrolled in school; organizing compulsory primary education committees at the most grassroots level, i.e., in each ward of union councils in rural areas and urban wards in the municipalities; establishing compulsory primary education implementation and coordination committees in each of the thanas; establishing a Directorate General to monitor and implement the compulsory primary education program in the Ministry of Education; and supplementing the salaries of non-governmental primary school teachers (at the rate of Taka 500 per month) in the compulsory primary education areas. Potentially, the compulsory primary education program provides a framework for mobilizing public support, energizing the education establishment, helping make compulsory primary education a Government-wide priority, encouraging the civil administration to be more active at all levels in promoting compulsory primary education, and encouraging all others, locally and nationally, who can contribute, including NGOs, to become involved in the effort.

These are all appropriate initial steps, and if the intentions and ambitions behind these moves are backed by necessary action, the CPE program will certainly be given a major boost. Nevertheless, early reports regarding how the CPE program is being implemented in the thanas suggest that problems still exist. UNICEF field office data from eight thanas in different parts of the country show that although gross enrollment at the beginning of the year is over 90 percent, five to ten points higher than the previous year, average daily attendance remains at 50 to 60 percent of those enrolled. The data do not make a distinction between gross and net enrollment. While CPE committees have been formed at the ward/village and thana levels, they generally have not been very active. The school managing committees and parent-teacher associations, which have existed in name for some

years, have not shown any spark of life. So far, the CPE program appears to have been taken as a routine education department activity rather than a national priority that demands attention and support from all concerned parts of the Government, the civil administration, and the public.

One exception to this general situation is the Sadar thana in the Kushtia district, where in four of its 14 subunits an integrated basic education program has been developed jointly by the Primary Education Department, NGOs, and the local civil administration. A plan has been developed to bring into the educational system all primary-age children and to provide a second chance for basic education to older youths and adults through nonformal primary education and adult education centers. The nonformal primary education program and adult education activities are run by local NGOs. A local political figure, a former chairman of the recently abolished upazila council, seems to have been the catalytic force in bringing the Primary Education Department, the NGOs, and the local administration together. Financial support for NGO activities has been provided by UNICEF.

The Kushtia experience indicates both the potential and the problems of the CPE effort. It shows that when all those who can contribute come together and the project is perceived as more than a work-a-day activity of the education department, progress can be made. Ironically, generating enthusiasm in the communities and bringing more children and young adults into the educational programs worsen the problems of crowded classrooms, large classes, and shortages of learning materials that, in turn, create an environment that is unconducive to student retention and achievement.

Other National Efforts

In response to the initiatives arising from the WCEFA and the advocacy efforts in the wake of the World Summit for Children, the Bangladesh Government established a National Committee on Basic Education for All, which is headed by the Minister of Education and consists of representatives of Government ministries and NGOs. The committee's task is to help identify national policy and strategy options, promote coordination, and review progress. A Steering Committee headed by the Secretary of Education also has been set up at the working level to support the work of the National Committee.

In addition, with the participation of the Prime Minister and the Executive Director of UNICEF, the Government initiated a social mobilization program in 1992. The objectives of this initiative are to generate and sustain national awareness of and commitment to education for all at all levels. This program is expected to implement several strategies: develop a consensus among politicians, planners, and administrators; activate community bodies such as school managing committees and parent-

teacher groups; remove gender bias in all educational materials; and promote coordinated involvement of the Government, NGOs, and other allies (UNICEF 1992a).

The General Education Project (GEP)

The GEP, the largest international assistance project in education in Bangladesh, is a large multi-donor project attempting to direct international assistance in a coordinated manner to address basic education needs in the country. The GEP is co-financed by eight external donors and the Government of Bangladesh.[2]

The five-year, $310.2 million project was initiated in 1990 as a follow-up to two previous International Development Association (IDA) education projects implemented since 1980. The major aims of the GEP are to increase equitable access to primary schools, improve the quality of primary education, and strengthen the management of primary education. The project also includes a small component for secondary education improvement and studies for policy reforms in education. Project components include investment costs, such as construction of physical facilities, curriculum and textbook development, support for teachers, and development of a management information system for policy analysis and program management. The GEP also includes a substantial allocation of funds for teachers' salaries. In addition, US$84 million has been set aside as subvention to NGOs for promoting nonformal primary education approaches. The allocations of funds are presented in Table III.5.

Despite GEP's focus, its actual contribution to increasing overall enrollment and attendance in primary schools, particularly for the children of the rural poor currently left out of the primary education system, is unclear. Efforts to expand school construction, improve community involvement in providing physical space, and shift more resources towards learning materials, consumables in schools, and teacher supervision have met with limited success. In addition, crucial qualitative issues including responsibility and accountability in primary education, responsiveness to the needs and circumstances of disadvantaged and unserved children, decentralized planning and management, the involvement and authority of the community and parents, the nature of partnership between the Government and the non-government sectors including voluntary organizations, and ways of

[2] The co-financiers and their contributions (in U.S. millions) are as follows: International Development Association (IDA), the soft-loan window of the World Bank, $159.3; Asian Development Bank (ADB), $57.5; Netherlands Ministry for Development Cooperation (DGIS), $14.0; Swedish International Development Authority (SIDA), $14.0; United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), $5.0; United Nations Development Program (UNDP), $10.0; United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), $2.4; Norwegian Development Cooperation Agency (NORAD), $5.7; and the Government of Bangladesh, $42.3.

TABLE III.5

Allocation of General Education Project Funds

Investment Costs	Percentage
Construction and other civil works	41
Furniture, equipment, vehicles	5
Textbooks and learning materials	21
Technical assistance and professional fees	5
Local training of teachers	8
Recurrent Costs	
Salaries for newly recruited teachers and staff	17
Operations/maintenance of buildings, vehicles, and consumable items	3
TOTAL	100

Source: General Education Project Implementation Unit, Dhaka

mobilizing new resources and promoting their effective use have been raised by international experts in national studies and reports but not effectively addressed.

The organizational and management philosophy underlying the GEP and its implementation mechanism does not promote a significant departure from primary education's current centralized and top-down management to substantial planning and management authority at the local level, meaningful involvement of communities, and accountability in the primary education system either to the community or in the administrative hierarchy. Primary education, since the shifting of direct responsibility in 1973 from District school boards to the Ministry of Education, has come to be seen as a Government task to be carried out by the centrally appointed bureaucracy of the Directorate of Primary Education. In 1992, primary and basic education was taken out of the Ministry of Education and placed in a new Department of Primary and Mass Education supervised by the Prime Minister. This move indicates a greater Government political commitment to primary education but does not alter its centralized character.

The GEP attempts to inject a degree of efficiency into this centralized bureaucracy by providing such inputs as buildings, textbooks, support for training, and budgetary support for additional teachers. Although aimed at addressing the issues of increased equitable access and quality of education, this project does not deal with the question of transforming the present management structure into one that allows local decision making, accountability to the community, and active community involvement in primary education management. Limiting the involvement of communities, or,

more accurately, asking communities without any part in decision making to contribute to low-cost construction has faltered because of the top-down character of the management process.

The formation of active community bodies with clearly specified authority and responsibility--whether they take the form of the village education committee, the school managing committee, or a parent-teachers organization—for supporting and managing the local primary school and possibly other related basic education activities is not addressed by the GEP. The project, therefore, also does not consider how the administrative superstructure from the Ministry of Education and Directorate of Primary Education at the central level to the thana Education Officer and the Assistant Education Officers at the local level can support, guide, and facilitate the work of the community body rather than itself attempt to direct and manage primary education of children in the villages.

The inertia of a centralized bureaucracy and perhaps a lingering ambivalence in the official education establishment about departures from that routine approach and about a prominent role of NGOs in primary education have slowed the implementation of the experimental component in nonformal primary education through subvention to NGOs. At the end of August 1992, a full two years after the GEP was launched, no funds had yet been disbursed to any NGOs through GEP.

The Program for Integrated Nonformal Education

The Program for Integrated Nonformal Education is an MOE-designed effort "to institutionalize a comprehensive nonformal education system in Bangladesh" that will run "parallel to the formal system." A major component of this program is to provide education equivalent to formal Classes I and II to children who never enter or who drop out of the formal system. Other components of the program are pre-primary education for ages four to five, adult education with a focus on the 15 to 35 age group, and continuing education.

Although this program was intended to have begun in mid-1991, the preparatory phase and the Government approval process have taken longer than expected, and as of mid-1992 it had not been launched. This demonstration program, initially approved for a two-year period, is budgeted at Taka 498 million (approximately US$13 million) and is to be financed largely with external assistance. UNICEF's contribution of US$5 million will cover the cost of the pre-primary and primary education components.

The graded, age-specific structure of the program components, the definition of learning content and duration in terms of the primary school program, and the organizational structure for regulating the NGO-support

element of the program implies a slightly different interpretation of nonformal education than the one by which BRAC is guided. There do appear, however, to be two identifiable nonformal features of the program. First, teachers and their supervisors will be part-time nonprofessional volunteers and will receive a modest honorarium. Each part-time supervisor will supervise 15 centers and will receive a regular salary. The second nonformal feature is the class site, which will occupy any available facility rather than a dedicated school building.

Of some 1,500 pre-primary centers—3,000 centers for the six- to ten-year-olds and 3,000 centers for the 11- to 16-year olds to be established in two years—"one-third to one-half" are proposed to be run by the newly established Office of Nonformal Education. The office, headed by an Executive Director, will have an organizational structure consisting of some 277 employees at the national, regional, and district levels in addition to part-time instructors and supervisors. The remaining one-half to two-thirds of the centers are expected to be run by NGOs, which would be offered subventions according to procedures and criteria set by the Government.

A number of issues about the program remain unresolved. Although the program for six- to ten-year-olds appears to be a feeder program to prepare children for joining the regular primary school, the coordination between the two systems has not been worked out. It has not been determined who may go to primary school and who may attend the NFE center, how the NFE children can be prepared effectively for primary school, and how the primary school will receive the children coming out of NFE centers. For example, the BRAC NFPE program has stricter dropout and age criteria for enrolling children in its centers; nonetheless, questions are sometimes raised about competition and duplication between primary and NFPE program schools and about the adequacy of preparation for transition from the NFPE program to primary school. Similar questions exist for the program for 11- to 16-year-olds. Are these children also intended to join the primary school in Class III? If so, how would they fit in a class with children who are mostly much younger than they are? Should there be a longer and self-contained primary equivalency program for this older group, or, perhaps, an abridged two- to two-and-a-half-year program that would prepare at least the motivated ones to join Class IV or V in primary school? The rationale for using a nonformal approach is to allow for these flexible options, yet the present NFE program design does not authorize such flexibility.

Another issue is the wisdom of introducing and expanding a preschool program for the four- to five-year-old children when a large proportion of the primary school age group is not assured a full cycle of primary education. The value of family and community-based, low-cost programs of care and stimulation for young children is not in dispute. An institution-

alized preschool program, however, is not necessarily the answer for this problem. There is a need for experiment and development work on appropriate and affordable forms of early childhood development activities that can effectively serve children of poor families before any particular model is spread under Government auspices.

The most serious question concerns the capacity of a Government organization to run nonformal programs with volunteers receiving a small honorarium as instructors and supervisors. The Mass Education Program, which had responsibility for a national adult education and literacy program in the 1980s and carried out intermittent campaigns, did not experience much success. The Office of Nonformal Education, in fact, has inherited the organizational structure and some of the personnel of the former Mass Education Program. Indeed, it is proposed that up to two-thirds of the centers may be run by NGOs with subvention from the Office of Nonformal Education. In the spirit of the nonformal approach, however, care has to be exercised so that the procedures and regulations are not so restrictive that they defeat the very purpose of both the nonformal approach and the involvement of NGOs in the program. Subvention, disbursements, and NGO activity monitoring may be based on the agreed-upon criteria of program results and the assessment of those results rather than on the enforcement of specific operational details in the implementation process. The program also does not offer the opportunity for experimentation and flexibility in dealing with the various unresolved questions raised above. It does not acknowledge the considerable experience that many of the NGOs have in implementing nonformal programs, assessing and responding to community needs, and involving the communities in educational programs.

Non-Government Responses to the Primary Education Gap

A full inventory of nonformal schools in Bangladesh, or even a limited inventory of the nonformal schools associated with registered NGOs, has not been compiled by the Ministry of Education or any other group in Bangladesh. Based on the research conducted for this study, however, the following three types of nonformal schools have been initiated by NGOs to address universal primary education:

- nonformal schools organized by unregistered civic groups and private individuals that were operated primarily prior to the early 1980s;
- nonformal schools operated by religious schools; and
- nonformal schools organized and operated by registered NGOs, which have increased rapidly since the 1980s and now far outnumber other types of nonformal schools.

Nonformal Schools by Unregistered Civic Groups and Private Individuals

The most familiar type of nonformal school is organized by unregistered civic groups or private individuals. These schools are often organized in a somewhat ad hoc way, using the Government curriculum and structure. The organizers apply for Government registration as soon as possible. Once schools are registered, they are no longer considered "nonformal" and, in recent years, the Government has offered a Taka 500 per month subsidy to each teacher in a registered private school. The registration and subsidy collection process brings the Government into contact with these schools frequently.

Religious Schools

In 1990 there were 15,748 religious schools offering primary instruction for the first five years (*Ebtedayee madrasahs*). Some of these schools offer part or all of the formal Government curriculum. A larger network of *maktabs* offers religious instruction in Arabic and Koranic studies to much of the primary school age group. These institutions enjoy a high degree of community support.

Nonformal Education Programs Operated by Registered NGOs

Prior to the early 1980s only a few registered NGOs—Swarnirnvar, CARITAS, and BRAC—were associated with nonformal schools. This scarcity is related to the lack of interest in primary education on the part of international donors throughout the 1970s and the first half of the 1980s. The NGOs, like the Government, depend on foreign donor funding for financing their development activities. That some NGOs managed to find funds to experiment with nonformal primary education models in the early and mid-1980s is evidence of their intrinsic interest in primary education.

After the 1980s, other registered NGOs joined the nonformal education effort. Some NGOs brought to the nonformal primary education sector better developed organizational skills, greater social awareness, and more appreciation of the need for parent and student participation in the administration and curriculum of the school. Other NGOs were even more ad hoc than the private individual and citizen group approaches. An informal survey of some of the larger NGOs involved in nonformal primary education in mid-1992 revealed a limited number of curricula, many experiments in parent participation, relatively successful targeting, and much respect for the BRAC model.

Most nonformal schools use either the BRAC or the Government curriculum, supplemented by their own or other NGO teaching aids (the Village Education Resource Center and Gono Shahajjo Sangstha are popular

sources) and neo-literate materials (Friends in Village Development/ Bangladesh is one of the better known sources). Others are developing their own curricula.

Among all the NGOs involved in establishing nonformal primary schools, the amount of initiative, support, and supervision required from the local community varies. Most NGO development work in Bangladesh is based on building solidarity among the poor through group formation, consciousness-building, savings, and/or income generation. Many NGO primary education efforts appear to have grown out of these groups, either because the NGOs perceive the development groups as a base from which other community development activities may be launched and/or because the NGOs and groups themselves begin to ask what they can do about the future of their children.

The original focus of NGO groups on people in a disadvantaged position in their communities has ensured that most NGOs have been relatively successful in targeting their nonformal primary education to some of the most disadvantaged children left out of the formal system, particularly girls. CARITAS, for example, has had particular success in reaching non-Bengali ethnic groups who speak Bangla as a second language; over 50 percent of the students and teachers in CARITAS' 398 schools are from these groups. The formal school curriculum is only available in Bengali; CARITAS has pioneered the development of Class I materials in some ethnic languages.

Nevertheless, most of the NGOs involved in the relatively early community-based primary education efforts appear to be re-assessing both the effort needed to organize and maintain the relatively high level of required community contributions—i.e., community-supplied and -maintained classrooms—and the ability of illiterate parents to supervise paraprofessional teachers who need more, not less, supervision than professionals. The parents in several of the NGO schools with higher levels of parent participation and financial responsibility were quick to seek Government registration, and some of these schools did indeed become part of the "formal" Government system. The formalization process, however, had little effect on the quality of education offered. While some of these other NGO schools succeeded in producing graduates who competed for and won scholarships for secondary education, in general, the quality of many NGO nonformal primary schools has been inconsistent. Several of the NGOs that started out with their own nonformal primary education models have recently switched to the BRAC model because of the relative ease with which it can be replicated and the quality control aspects of the management approach.

In 1990, in response to WCEFA, 16 NGOs, which accounted for more than 90 percent of the nonformal education funding in Bangladesh, formed the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE), a resource organization for nonformal adult and primary education. CAMPE's objectives include an emphasis on developing NGO responses to illiteracy and fostering cooperation between NGOs, Government, and civic groups in developing nonformal programs to reach the illiterate majority in Bangladesh. In addition, CAMPE is the secretariat for the Bangladesh national chapter of the EFA Network. CAMPE's work plan for 1992-93 includes the following range of activities: producing a 25 to 40-minute video feature film on "the importance of literacy;" translating the UNESCO APPEAL training materials for literacy personnel; developing continuing education materials based on folk literature; organizing training workshops for literacy program managers and trainers; and arranging ten meetings with members of Parliament and other Government leaders and ten national level public discussions. BRAC's Executive Director is one of the founders and the current chairman of CAMPE.

Summary

Despite ambitious plans and targets, Bangladesh's primary education system is one that still enrolls about 60 percent of the applicable age group, with only about half of those enrolled attending school with some regularity and only about 20 percent of those enrolled completing the full five-year cycle of primary education. It is characterized by the following:

- physical facilities and teachers barely able to accommodate the current enrollees, even by operating schools in two shifts and by cutting back the daily school hours to a bare minimum, especially for Classes I and II;
- various Government initiatives that mandate primary school attendance and more facilities, teachers, and materials, but do not appear to be able to bring about the targeted primary level enrollment, attendance, and completion rates;
- still un-implemented plans for Government-sponsored nonformal educational programs that incorporate many elements of the formal school system and are not likely to promote decentralized management and community involvement; and
- non-governmental organizations that are interested in and willing to include primary education as part of their development initiatives.

Table III.6 provides a tentative picture of the total primary education system in Bangladesh as of July 1992. This table shows that the formal system provides the majority of classes on any given day, but that the nonformal system provides instruction as well. BRAC is the largest

provider of nonformal primary education, but other NGOs provide a significant number of classrooms.

TABLE III.6

The Bangladesh National Primary School System

Type of School	Number of Schools	Classes Per Day
Formal Schools		
Government each with approximately 3 classrooms running 2 shifts (1989-90)	37,634[1]	225,804
Private each with approximately 5 classrooms running 1 shift (1989-90)	8,073[1]	40,365
Nonformal Schools		
Associated with Registered NGOs		
Classes I-III only *(program start date, where available)*		
Swarnirvar {1984}	1,396[2]	N/A
Community Health Care Project	366[3]	N/A
CARITAS {1979}	307[2]	600
Institute for Integrated Rural Development (IIRD) {1991}	204[2]	N/A
Center for Mass Education in Science	127[3]	N/A
All others (105 organizations, none with > than 100 schools)	920[3]	N/A
BRAC {1979/1985*}	7,000[2]	7,000
Classes I-V Less than 50 organizations, none with > 50 schools	371[3]	1,855
Private	1,000[3]	N/A
Government (4/92) *(GEP satellite schools)*	62[4]	62
Religious Schools (Ebtedayee)[1]	15,748	N/A

*BRAC opened its first primary school in 1979, but did not start the NFPE program as currently configured until 1985.

Sources
[1] BANBEIS 1991, (a) and (c)
[2] BRAC Records
[3] Estimates by authors based on available incomplete information
[4] GEP Implementation Unit

NFPE: What It Is and Why It Works

BRAC's NFPE program is an initiative designed for and tested in poor, rural areas of Bangladesh to provide basic education to the large numbers of children who were not being reached through Government and other nonformal educational efforts. BRAC schools include three-year NFPE schools for eight- to ten-year-olds and two-year KK schools for 11- to 16-year-olds.

The NFPE program schools are characterized by several distinct features. BRAC students are some of the poorest and most disadvantaged in Bangladesh. BRAC schools maintain relatively high levels of contact between parents and school administrators, and parents' concerns are incorporated into both the structure of the schools and day-to-day management. Compared with teachers in the formal school system, BRAC teachers have smaller classes (30 students only), teach fewer subjects, address fewer objectives, and provide an estimated 500 *additional* hours per year of *engaged* instructional time. Although it has been more effective in articulating a strong commitment to child-centered instruction than in operationalizing that commitment, BRAC's teacher training is distinguishable for its brevity (15 days initially) and continual follow-up. In addition, there are no fees to attend school and all materials and supplies are provided free-of-charge to the children and parents.

Despite its uniqueness, BRAC's NFPE program also reflects several elements that are indistinguishable from those in traditional primary schools in many other parts of the world. BRAC textbooks and observed classroom instruction are remarkably similar to those found in classrooms in many developing countries where the teacher talks and students listen. Although the teaching/learning process emphasizes basic skills and practical information, the NFPE program staff, like educators in developing and developed countries, are still struggling to develop systems to ensure that teachers promote active learning, meaningful understanding, and analytical thinking.

This section addresses the first research question: *What are the strengths and weaknesses of BRAC's NFPE program?* Chapter IV presents a program history and provides detailed descriptions of the elements of NFPE. Chapter V presents BRAC's unique approach to managing the program. Chapter VI discusses the cost effectiveness of BRAC schools and issues to be addressed in improving the existing program.

BRAC's Nonformal Primary Education Program

The first BRAC NFPE program school opened in 1979 in response to concerns voiced by women enrolled in one of BRAC's functional education programs who asked, "What about our children? Must they grow up illiterate and wait until they are 18 to come to your program?" BRAC responded by helping these women form a school committee, find a site, and select a teacher. BRAC then guided them in managing their school.

Between 1982 and 1985, BRAC opened another 51 schools, also at the request of parents, and increased the number to 410 by 1987 in response to high rates of attendance (see Table IV.1). All schools opened to this point were one-room schools consisting of 30 students between eight- and ten-years-old. In 1988, BRAC began addressing the needs of older students and opened 223 KK schools for 11- to 16-year-old children who had dropped out of Government schools. In many instances, the same building and teacher accommodated both groups of students within a village, with one group attending in the morning and the other in the afternoon. By the end of 1991, BRAC had established a total of 6,003 schools, including 2,833 KK schools. In mid-1992, BRAC circulated a proposal to finance another 44,000 schools by 1995.

BRAC schools are not intended to operate as permanent institutions but rather to address a single cohort of students who enroll during the same school year and move together through the three years of schooling. Once that cohort completes the three-year cycle, the school ceases to exist unless there are at least 30 eligible children in the community whose families are

TABLE IV.1

NFPE Program Expansion - 1985-1992

Year	No. of Schools Opened	New Enrollment	Age Group
1985	22	676	8-10
1986	154	4,672	8-10
1987	410	12,305	8-10
1988	223	6,690	11-16
1989	1,606	48,180	8-10; 11-16
1990	2,204	69,124	8-10; 11-16
1991	2,890	86,700	8-10; 11-16
1992	5,675	170,250	8-10; 11-16

Source BRAC 1992b

interested in enrolling them in an NFPE program. In recent years, all BRAC schools have continued into a second or third three-year cycle.

BRAC's NFPE program consists of the same elements included in most formal school programs: students, teachers, parents, schedule, instructional site, classroom environment, curriculum, and instructional materials. NFPE's treatment of these elements, however, is somewhat unique. A summary of the program elements is provided in Figure IV.1. A description of each element is provided below.

FIGURE IV.1

Summary of BRAC'S NFPE Program

Students	30 students ages 8-10 or 11-16 60-70 percent girls
Teacher Selection	village residents, Class 9+ education 60-70 percent women part-time employees
Teacher Training	15 days basic training 2-day training before school opens and 1-day monthly refresher sessions in year one; 4-day refresher at beginning of year 2
Teacher Supervision	1 Program Organizer (PO) for 15 schools PO school visits twice a week PO, student, and parent follow-up of teacher absences
Parents	determine school schedule pledge to send children to school and attend monthly meetings replace broken slates and worn mats
Instructional Schedule	2 1/2 to 3 hours per day (specified times selected by parents) 6 days/week, year round 3-year instructional cycle
Instructional Site	basic structure >= 240 square feet rented for 3 hrs/day basic furnishings and equipment (mats for the children, stool for the teacher, and a blackboard)
Classroom Environment	30:1 student/teacher ratio "traditional" approaches to instruction no corporal punishment
Curriculum	content similar to that covered in formal school Classes I-III daily co-curricula tivities little homework
Instructional Materials	"traditional" textbooks developed by BRAC that resemble reading primers and basic arithmetic books males and females equally represented in materials teaching manuals and teaching aids guide use of textbooks

Students

The NFPE program targets the rural children most likely to be left out or to have dropped out of formal primary schools. Eligibility and characteristics criteria presented in Figures IV.2, IV.3, and IV.4 give additional details (Lovell 1992, 33). In the eight villages included in the Khan and

FIGURE IV.2

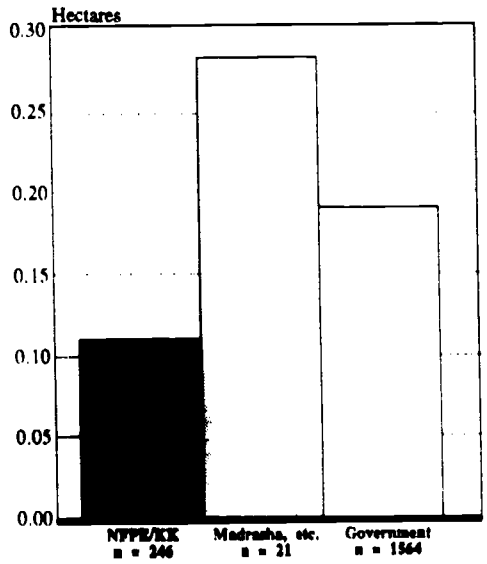
NFPE Program
Eligibility Criteria

- At least eight years old
- Family with less than 1.50 bigha (.2 hectares) of land, including its homestead
- Never attended primary school or dropped out of school
- 70 percent targeted to girls

Arefeen study (1992), children from households with low income or small landholdings were much more likely to drop out of or never attend primary school. In addition, Khan and Arefeen found that NFPE students, compared with Government school students, are more likely to come from

FIGURE IV.3

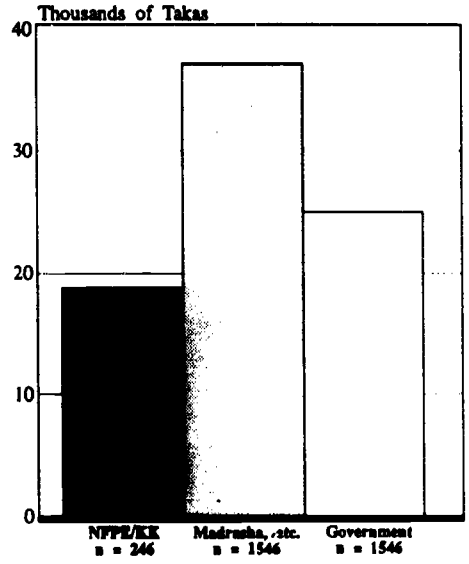
Landholding Size of Families by School Type



Source Khan and Arafeen 1992

FIGURE IV.4

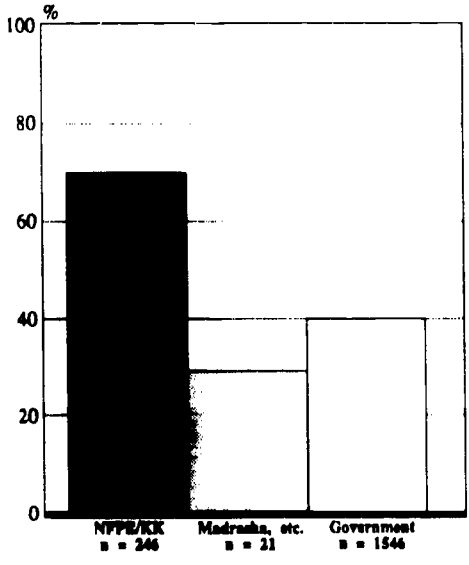
Mean Yearly Income of Families by School Type



Source: Khan and Arafeen 1992.

FIGURE IV.5

Percentage of Girls Enrolled by School Type



Source Khan and Arafeen 1992.

households with little land (72 percent versus 59 percent) and low levels of cash income (54 percent versus 40 percent). NFPE student households also are more likely to be headed by parents with less than three years of formal education (76 percent versus 63 percent) (Khan and Arefeen 1992, Tables 4, 5, and 6).

Given the particularly disadvantaged position of women in Bangladeshi society, their vulnerability to abandonment, their limited access to any means of production or relief assistance, and their lower life expectancy and literacy rates (World Bank 1990a, xi-xiii), BRAC has chosen to target more than half of all its development programs to women. Consistent with this policy, BRAC targets 70 percent of the places in NFPE program schools to girls (see Figure IV.5).

The Khan and Arefeen census of eight villages found an average, per village, of 24 girls and 35 boys between 6- and 15-years-old who had never attended or who had dropped out of primary school (Khan and Arefeen 1992, Tables 2b, 2c, and 3). BRAC staff say there are usually more than 30 children in the catchment area of a BRAC school who are eligible to participate in NFPE program schools. BRAC is, therefore, able to be somewhat selective; it does not accept children with obvious learning disabilities, and it maintains a waiting list of children who may be drawn upon to replace those who do not attend regularly and whose parents do not respond to efforts to improve their attendance. These replacements usually take place during the preparatory phase of the first year, which lasts six weeks for the eight- to ten-year-olds and two weeks for the older students, but may occur later. The proportions of boys and students from middle-income households enrolled in NFPE program schools is likely to be slightly higher in NFPE program schools that have completed one three-year cycle, since schools in their second or third three-year cycle may have already enrolled most of the girls from the poorer families.

Teachers

Selection

Teachers are selected by BRAC field staff from men and women who live in the school catchment area and have a minimum of nine years of schooling. Consistent with BRAC's organization-wide emphasis on increasing women's employment opportunities, preference is given to women. As a result, approximately 75 percent of the NFPE program teaching force are female. The staff look for individuals who are articulate, committed, and married. This last characteristic is particularly important because in the Bangladesh context, the women with the level of education required by BRAC will not remain unmarried long. Bangladeshi tradition

dictates that when women do marry, they will move to their new husband's village. Hiring women after they are married lessens the chance that they will move and, therefore, helps BRAC keep the teacher attrition rate down.

Because there are few alternative employment opportunities, most teachers provide instruction through at least one three-year cycle. In 1991, the teacher dropout rate was 4.7 percent; most of the teachers who left did so when their husbands moved out of the area. BRAC has not had difficulty finding alternate teachers in most of the areas where it works. The teachers are hired to work for three hours a day, which allows them to continue their responsibilities at home. Teachers who serve competently for one two- or three-year cycle may be assigned to teach at two schools—one in the morning and one in the afternoon—in subsequent cycles.

Teacher Training

Teacher training in the NFPE program involves several components. Basic teacher training includes a residential course at one of BRAC's regional training centers, where new teachers receive practical training in student-centered learning. This basic training, which was recently extended from 13 to 15 days, is kept short because many of the NFPE program's best teacher candidates find it difficult to be away from their responsibilities at home for more than two weeks. In addition to basic training, NFPE program teachers attend a one-day refresher training each month at the BRAC office nearest their community. This refresher training provides a place for the teachers to discuss their current problems, role-play, and give and receive feedback from BRAC staff and other teachers working in the same area. Finally, BRAC staff visit the teachers at their schools at least twice a month to provide additional on-the-job training and feedback.

A teacher training manual is the guiding document for the 15-day residential course. This manual emphasizes active student participation in the classroom and student-centered learning. Prior to participating in the BRAC teacher training course, the trainees have spent nine years or more in the formal school system where the main pedagogical methods are lectures and rote memorization, often reinforced with corporal punishment. In an effort to counteract the effects of this prolonged exposure to teacher-centered methods, the first 20 pages of the BRAC teacher training manual provide a basic introduction to child psychology. The rest of the manual uses child psychology as the foundation for more child-centered, less authoritarian classroom practices. For example, the first section of the manual describes children's needs for affection, their limited attention spans, and their different learning speeds. The manual exhorts teachers to apply this understanding in the classroom. Sample statements include:

"Give children the opportunity to speak . . . Efforts should be made to improve students' comprehension instead of putting emphasis on learning by heart . . . The teacher should try to find out new ways of teaching effectively from her or his own creative thoughts." Unfortunately, the manual in many instances lacks concrete examples of how to apply these principles. The refresher teacher manual has more concrete examples, but like the basic manual, in many cases it does not provide the sort of structured framework that can help students connect new words to things that are familiar to their daily lives.

The second section of the teacher training manual describes both child-centered and teacher-centered approaches. For each category, several methods are suggested, and teachers are cautioned about the importance of using the correct method. Suggested child-centered approaches include the activity method, the kindergarten method, and the question-answer method. Teacher-centered approaches include the lecture method, the demonstration method, the recitation method, and the discussion method. Each method and approach is discussed briefly, again without sufficient detail to enable teachers to actually implement the method. For example, in the teacher training manual, the discussion method is described as, "The method by which the teacher and students participate in discussing the subject matter of the lesson . . . (When students' participation is higher, it is called the pupil-centered method, and when the participation of the teacher is greater, it is called the teacher-centered method.)" (Sarker and Howladar 1988, 37).

"Points to remember" are offered for use in selecting the appropriate teaching method, but none of these contain criteria. For example, the points include number and age of students and duration of time for class, etc. The manual would be more useful if it provided more specific guidelines, such as, "Use the X method when you have Y situation." In the final section of the manual, teachers are taught to prepare lesson plans, and the details are very precise. Several sample lessons are provided as models.

A senior NFPE technical staff member recently returned from a year at the Institute for International Education in Paris and is now working on revising the teacher training curricula, incorporating more child-centered approaches to classroom teaching.

Teacher Supervision

BRAC supplements its relatively brief basic teacher training course with close supervision at the field level. Teachers are required to prepare daily lesson plans. BRAC staff visit each school *at least once per week* to review the plans, observe the classroom instruction, and monitor student attendance. Because of limited education-related training, varied administrative responsibilities, and a lack of concrete teaching experience them-

selves, field staff may not have the time or the capacity to carefully assess teachers' classroom practices. They monitor attendance and completion but do not measure teaching quality.

In addition to the supervision provided by BRAC staff, parents and students also supervise NFPE program teachers, although on a more informal basis. Whereas teacher absenteeism is a major problem in the formal school system, BRAC reports that parents and students, who live close to the teacher, ensure that NFPE program teacher absenteeism is negligible. In interviews with approximately 15 parents from two BRAC schools, parents reported that BRAC teachers relate well to both parents and children and that they often visit students' homes to discuss specific problems with parents. Building and maintaining a close relationship with parents is a core component of the BRAC teacher training program. These warm relationships were supported by interviews with several BRAC students and teachers. For example, one teacher reported that when she is absent from school, students come to her house to find her; she also said she turned down a job at a Government school that offered a much higher salary because of her attachment to her students. Teachers are also reported to seek out students in their homes when they are absent. (Joshi 1992).

Parents

Substantial parent involvement is a major feature of BRAC schools. At least two meetings are held with the parents of prospective students before the BRAC schools open. During these meetings, the parents assist in selecting the teacher and setting the school schedule. In addition, parents may help BRAC locate, renovate, and lease an appropriate school room.

After the school starts, BRAC staff convene monthly meetings with teachers and parents. Meetings are held at a convenient time and place set by the parents, usually during the day, which means that they are usually attended by women since men are in the fields during the day. The meetings often will not start until a guardian representing each child is present; BRAC staff or teachers may go directly to a tardy guardian's home to encourage him or her to attend the meeting. By contrast, a recent survey of randomly selected parents of formal primary school children found that only 32 percent could recall a single parent-teacher meeting in the previous 12 months. Of those who did recall meetings, only 60 percent reported attending (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, Annex IV).

The most frequently discussed topic in the BRAC parent-teacher meetings is the parents' responsibility to send their children to school regularly. Other topics may include maternal and child health, and social issues such as dowry and early marriage. BRAC takes definite positions on these

issues and articulates these positions both within the classrooms and in parent meetings. Parent meetings are also intended to provide a forum for parents to express their concerns to BRAC staff and teachers, although in the three meetings observed by one of the report authors, there was little time devoted to airing of parents' concerns.

What are parents' concerns? According to Khan and Arefeen (1992), parents from low-income families report that the chief obstacles that prevent children from participating in primary school are direct and indirect costs. Although the Government provides free textbooks and charges no tuition, parents of children attending Government schools incur direct costs when they purchase uniforms and school supplies, engage private tutors, and pay miscellaneous fees. As described in Chapter VI, these direct costs are substantial to an average rural family in Bangladesh. In addition, parents incur indirect opportunity costs when they release children from their chores at home to attend and to travel to and from school. Khan and Arefeen also documented other parent concerns not directly related to cost, such as discrimination against students from less well-off families, scheduling, discipline, classroom environment, and distance. As described in this report, BRAC schools address all of these concerns, and parent satisfaction with BRAC schools is accordingly high.

Instructional Schedule

BRAC schools meet two and one-half to three hours per day for 268 days per year. School is held six days a week. As noted above, the school hours are established by the parents and may be changed according to the parents' needs for their children's labor throughout the agricultural year. Parents report that their children "can do household work and study in the school as well" (Begum, Akhter, and Rahman 1988, 96). Homework for BRAC students requires less than 20 minutes per day and is designed to be completed without assistance from a literate person, minimizing the time needed away from household duties for both the children and other family members. The BRAC school schedule allows for a short vacation, which is determined jointly by parents and teachers. In addition, teachers are permitted up to 12 days of leave, beyond which Taka ten per day is deducted from their honorarium and given to the substitute teacher for taking the class. Teacher absences, however, are reportedly quite low.

Actual engaged time is reported to be high in BRAC schools. Because of the relatively low student-teacher ratio, teachers require little time to take roll and no time is wasted moving from one class to another. In addition, BRAC teachers assign little homework and consequently spend a modicum of class time on it.

By contrast, the Government schools operate 220 days a year for one or two, two to three hour shifts per day. In addition, teachers in Government schools may have as many as 100 students in a classroom, at least tripling the amount of time allocated to simply taking roll. A recent study of Government schools also reported considerable wastage of class time while teachers corrected students' homework one at a time rather than reviewing the homework with the whole class (Karim 1992). The Karim study estimated that after roll call, homework correction, and breaks between classes, the actual instructional time is only one hour per day in Government schools, resulting in approximately 220 hours of engaged time per year rather than the 660 hours allocated.

Because most of BRAC's classroom time is allocated to instruction, the estimated annual range of actual instruction is between 670 and 804 hours (less 36 hours if a teacher were to take the full 12 days of leave per year). If indeed Government students are engaged in actual learning only one hour per day, this means that, in comparison to their Government counterparts, BRAC students may be receiving between 450 and 584 additional hours of instructional time per year, and from 1,350 to 1,752 extra hours over three years. In terms of the annual engaged time in Government schools, this may be comparable to almost seven years of additional schooling for BRAC children. These estimates, however, must also take into account the fact that the BRAC curriculum comprises only four subjects while the Government curriculum comprises six.

Instructional Site

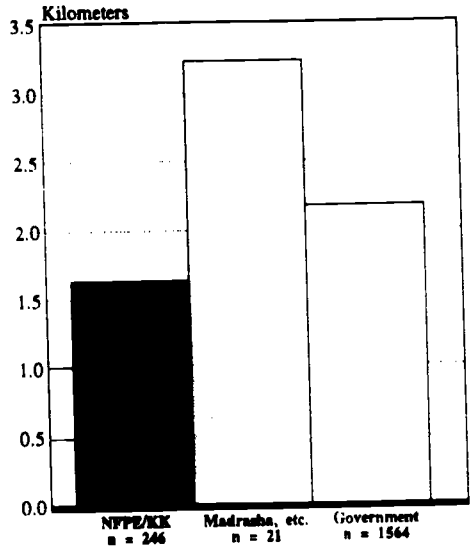
BRAC schools operate in rented one-room houses and storerooms at least 240 square feet in size made of bamboo and mud walls with corrugated tin roofs. BRAC rents these buildings for just two and one-half to three hours per day, for less than US$5 per month. Students sit on woven mats on a packed mud floor in a "U" shape, with a blackboard and teaching aids in the front of the classroom. Neither the teacher nor the students have desks, and students do not usually wear uniforms, but are expected to be clean. All books and stationery are supplied by BRAC.

Government schools, by contrast, are typically plastered brick buildings or corrugated tin sheds. Classrooms contain benches and desks for children and a table and chair for the teacher. Most have a blackboard, and some have wall charts. Books and basic school supplies are provided by the Government, although parents must pay for notebooks and fees for private tutors.

The distance from home to school for BRAC students ranges from less than 1 km to 2.5 km. In comparison, the average catchment area for Government schools is about 3.2 sq km, with distances somewhat higher in the remote

FIGURE IV.6

Mean Distance Between Home and School by School Types



Source: Khan and Arafeen 1992

rural areas (see Figure IV.6). Proximity to students' households is important for several reasons. First, the opportunity cost to parents is lower as children lose less of their time in travel to and from school. Second, when girls are able to attend school in their neighborhoods, the opportunities for harassment and embarrassment are reduced. Finally, parents are able to monitor what happens inside the schoolroom; they can see how their children are treated and whether they are happy and busy.

Classroom Environment

The 30 students that comprise a BRAC school move through three years of course work as a single group. One teacher leads the group. This student-teacher ratio is very low in comparison to the lower grades of Government schools where the Khan and Arefeen survey of eight schools found more than 50 children per teacher in Classes I and II (Khan and Arefeen 1992, Annexure 2). Students are often divided into small working groups, in which quicker students help the slower. There is no tracking, and all students move together through the lessons at a single pace.

Although BRAC materials stress a child-centered philosophy of learning, the classrooms observed were relatively traditional. For each lesson, the teacher gave brief instruction on the board, asked if everyone understood,

and then assigned problems or work. The teacher then evaluated each student individually. Students received immediate individual feedback on their work, but there appeared to be a great deal of time wasted as students waited for the teacher to correct each student's work. The teacher asked straightforward questions that required little analysis by students or offered little opportunity for discussion. A team member recorded the following description of one teacher: "She turns to the part [of the social studies book] on religious places and talks about mosques, temples, and churches. The class listens . . . She then gets into the history of the British Raj in larger India . . . describes the splitting of Pakistan and then the independence of Bangladesh . . . [There are a lot of chorus replies from the class as she reads and clarifies for them the details]. She asks the class to look at a particular page and point to the words as she reads them aloud. 'Do you understand?' asks the teacher. Now the whole class is asked to repeat after the teacher—the same passage. The class does this one sentence at a time." (Joshi 1992).

Other activities included making sentences out of English words, with the teacher reading sentences as students point to words, having students take turns reading, having students explain what they understand about specific words, having students write sentences with vocabulary words, and copying lines of a poem. Throughout all written activities, the teacher circled the room correcting each student's work individually.

Instruction in the core subjects was broken up with co-curricular activities, sometimes for as little as five minutes between subjects. This resulted in the students remaining stationary for more than one hour at a time.

Curriculum

Early Curriculum and Materials

The first set of NFPE program instructional materials were developed in an experimental children's education project operated by BRAC's Training and Resource Center in Savar, which were themselves adapted from BRAC's adult literacy materials. The materials consisted of one large book that was used as both text and workbook and covered mathematics and reading and writing in Bangla. In 1982, a materials specialist developed and field-tested new instructional materials, consisting of several separate texts, including a Bangla primer, a Class I math book, and a Class I reading-preparation book. These materials have been revised several times with assistance from the Institute for Education and Research at Dhaka University and several outside consultants, and are reported on more fully in the next section.

The curriculum originally covered three subjects: Bangla, math, and social studies. By 1987 it was clear that many of the NFPE program graduates planned to continue in the Government schools, and the BRAC curriculum was modified to incorporate English, a required subject in the Government schools.

Current Curriculum and Materials

The current BRAC curriculum spans Classes I through III and includes Bangla, mathematics, social studies, and English with an emphasis on the practical health and social issues that are likely to be encountered by a typical BRAC student. Class time is allocated in the following segments: Bangla (25 minutes reading and 25 minutes writing); mathematics (35 minutes); social studies (25 minutes); and two 20-minute co-curricular activities, which include physical exercise, field trips, singing, and dancing. English is added to the schedule in Class III.

The following analyses are based on textbooks provided by BRAC in March 1992. The BRAC Materials Section is aware of the weaknesses described below and has been working to revise all the textbooks to make them more child-centered and activity-based. An entirely revised social studies textbook, scheduled for release in March 1993, is not covered in these analyses.

Objectives

The BRAC curriculum addresses significantly fewer objectives than does the Government's primary curriculum, particularly in language and mathematics. Table IV.2 shows that in Bangla, the BRAC curriculum contains an average of about six objectives per grade while the Government curriculum addresses an average of 23. In mathematics the differences are even greater, with an average of nine objectives per grade for BRAC as compared with an average of 31 objectives for the Government curriculum.

TABLE IV.2

Comparison of Number of Objectives in BRAC and Government Curricula

	Bangla		*Math*		*Social Studies*	
	BRAC	Gov't	BRAC	Gov't	BRAC	Gov't
Class 1	5	22	3	22	36	14
Class 2	7	23	16	35	27	29
Class 3	6	25	9	36	26	38

Source: Corey 1991

In the social studies curriculum, however, BRAC tends to address almost as many objectives (actually more in Class I) as the Government curriculum, with the major difference being that BRAC places a greater emphasis on health-related issues such as the harmful effects of rotten food; the importance of safe water, immunizations, a clean environment, and personal hygiene; the prevention of diseases; and the problems of overpopulation.

The Government curriculum is somewhat more oriented toward the scientific process, i.e., observing, classifying, describing, determining cause and effect, and drawing conclusions. This scientific-process theme permeates the Government's Classes I through III. In addition, the Government curriculum articulates the importance of "realizing the needs of poor classmates and if necessary, sharing food, books, pencils, etc. with them."

It is conceivable that BRAC's lean curriculum may be a contributing factor to its success. Having a curriculum that addresses fewer topics allows teachers to cover them at a deeper level than if the teacher is responsible for covering many topics, although this was not necessarily confirmed in the classroom observations. The major differences between the two curricula, however, is that BRAC's simplified curriculum is effectively implemented in BRAC schools while the more comprehensive Government curriculum is not fully implemented in most Government classrooms.

Instructional Materials

The materials in the BRAC NFPE program can best be described as traditional. They resemble the reading primers and basic arithmetic books that have been used for decades throughout much of the world. For example, they begin with simple words for recognition and move to increasingly complex language; they begin with pictures of objects, have students count the objects, and then move to increasingly complex and abstract mathematical operations.

The materials are carefully sequenced, segmented into short, discrete lessons, and attractively printed in small, non-threatening booklets (as opposed to larger books that can overwhelm young learners). There is one reading primer for the eight-week preparatory phase (this phase is only two weeks for older students), one reading booklet and one math booklet for each of the three primary grades, and one social studies booklet for each of grades two and three. Concrete examples from everyday life are used throughout the booklets, especially in the social studies materials, where students are exposed to the critical development topics cited above.

These materials support traditional, didactic teaching—control, direction, predictability—and they rely on, and in some ways encourage, rote learning through repetition, recognition, recall, and recitation. A certain

amount of each of these methods is necessary for learning to take place, and given the limited time available for teacher training—a total of 15 days of pre-service training—there is some merit to using a simple, unambiguous, even lock-step approach to teaching. In addition, BRAC's instructional materials do not support the activity-based or child-centered approach to learning articulated in the teacher training materials, and it is questionable whether the materials would further the BRAC goal of empowering students.

For example, on the first page of the first reader, a red ball is shown next to the word "ball." Under that, the word "red" is boxed in, with lines to give it prominence. The rest of the page consists of three lines of words: ball, ball, ball; red ball; red ball. The basic method used here is sight recognition and oral recitation. This same method is used for all 20 lessons in the primer used for the preparatory phase. This approach to reading is called "whole word," as opposed to the "alphabetical method," which the manual considers out of date. In fact, it is more common to refer to these approaches as "whole language" and "phonetic," and both methods are generally considered effective (Singer and Ruddell 1989), and are widely used in tandem in the United States and many other countries. The approach used in the BRAC primer is a time-proven way to teach students "sight words." Whether this method teaches reading, which implies meaning, is quite another question.

Generally, good reading sequences begin in context, move to isolated analysis of component parts, and end in a new context. In contrast, the method revealed in BRAC's curriculum, as of March 1992, may help students develop a sight-word vocabulary but does not directly help students construct meaning or gain mastery (ownership) over language, an important foundation for supporting lifelong literacy. This foundation is all the more important for students who may attend school for only a few years. Nevertheless, given learners' innate capacity to synthesize and reconstruct knowledge, the limited time in the classroom, the teacher educational background and skills, and the focus on basic skills, the sight-word approach seems at least appropriate.

The basic NFPE program reading series, called "Esho Pori" ("Let's Read"), continues with this approach through the first, second, and third levels. While the reading gradually becomes more complex, culminating in full-blown stories, the method of dealing with the written material is essentially the same rote-recall approach. The questions that follow the stories ask students to recall facts from the story, repeat phrases verbatim, choose the right answer from multiple-choice questions, fill in the blanks, and make sentences using specific words. Nowhere in these readers are

students asked to retell the stories in their own words; nor are they asked open-ended questions that allow them to make personal discoveries. All answers are predetermined.

The same methodology is present in the mathematics and social studies booklets, where the learning is deductive, the examples are given and not elicited, the exercises are routine, and the answers are fixed and lie outside the world of the learner in either the text or the teacher's head. The work that students do at home is not used in the social studies lessons; the objects of the students' daily lives—the tools they use, the plants they grow, the grain they pound—are not brought to class to discuss, to measure, to grow, or to analyze.

Gender Balance

Males and females are represented equally in the BRAC textbooks. When families are introduced, fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, and all relatives are equally represented by gender. This is also true of examples drawn from work: fathers farm, fish, and run shops; mothers fetch water, cook, and nurse the sick. By and large, traditional gender roles are depicted in the materials. There are some notable exceptions, however. In the second level social studies reader, women are shown teaching school, working as a nurse, and sitting behind a large desk in an office. In the third level social studies reader, the only health worker depicted is a woman. While the number of "non-traditional" jobs available to women (or men) in the villages of Bangladesh is limited—some argue that depicting such employment only encourages rural-urban migration—it seems appropriate that BRAC, because of its recruitment of girls and its extensive use of female teachers, would emphasize employment opportunities for women based on an expanded definition of female social roles.

In summary, as of March 1992, BRAC's curriculum materials meet the standards set for them: they required little or no homework; they were appropriate for the grade levels they covered; they were complete, in that they provided both the teacher and the students with sufficient material for the pedagogy they support; and they were produced on durable, low-cost paper. Despite BRAC's goals, however, there was nothing inherent in the materials to make them especially activity-based or learner-centered. Although the materials seem to be effective as measured by NFPE program students' performance, there remains much room for improvement. Many of the potential curriculum improvements, however, may not be compatible with other aspects of BRAC's low-cost, fast replicating model. Most follow from a transformation of the actual pedagogy used in the classroom, which depends on reform of teacher training and supervision. While the curriculum materials themselves, through their implied or explicit learning

modes, can influence teaching styles, they seldom do; at the most, they tend to support a teaching style, not transform it.

NFPE program headquarters staff were particularly eager to have the team look at the curriculum and are well aware of its weaknesses. Until recently, the teachers were given a separate teacher's guide to parallel each textbook; since BRAC teachers do not have desks and are encouraged to move around the classroom, switching back and forth between the text and the teachers' guide has proved unwieldy. The staff are now producing teachers' editions of the textbooks that incorporate suggestions for child-centered activities and questions in the margins of the text. In addition, in 1992-93, while a senior staff member recently returned from a year of overseas training and will begin to update the teacher training curriculum, the head of the materials development section is spending a year in a diploma program in London. BRAC hopes that this training will expose the staff member to some of the latest innovations in child-centered, activity-based education. When the staff member returns in September 1993, these innovations will be used to revise the NFPE program curricula. Meanwhile, as this report goes to press, the NFPE materials unit is scheduled to release a revised version of the social studies textbook that is intended to make it more child-centered and activity-based. In March 1993, BRAC schools began receiving semi-monthly wall newspapers that provide additional neo-literate-appropriate reading material in the classroom and also provide new ideas for co-curricular activities.

Conclusions

Two points should be emphasized in concluding this review of BRAC's NFPE program. First, the NFPE program is one of BRAC's newest programs. BRAC did not start out as an expert in education. It responded to an identified need. Its staff has developed expertise by doing and by actively seeking out appropriate training in Bangladesh and overseas. BRAC's success in primary education in Bangladesh can be attributed partially to its staff's willingness to revise and re-revise every aspect of its program to make it more and more relevant to the target group's needs.

Second, by Bangladeshi standards, BRAC classrooms are quite progressive. However traditional the NFPE program learning approach may be to those outside of the country, it is considered innovative in Bangladesh. For example, Khan and Arefeen (1992) described the instruction as follows:

> The teaching method in the NFPE program is similar to the kindergarten system based on the Montessori method. The first few weeks the children . . . get accustomed to the school through extra-curricular activities, such as songs, dancing, story telling, etc. The children are

> encouraged to take the initiative in these [activities] and to participate freely. Even the learning material is introduced through a method in which the children can participate and relate to real life situations. Punishment in any form by the teachers is strictly prohibited in the NFPE programs. The other aspect of the NFPE program which attracts the children is the teachers' interest and suggestions in learning good manners and neatness and cleanliness. The teachers encourage the girls and boys to neaten their hair and [wash] themselves [before] coming to school. The NFPE program . . . children that we met in the village clearly stood out from those who did not [participate] by . . . the [outgoing and polite] way they greeted us, the language they used to talk to us, and their general appearance (pp. 23-24).

In conclusion, BRAC's main innovation, in Bangladeshi or global terms, is its design of a low-cost, rapidly replicable model that reaches the most disadvantaged children. To understand this aspect of its model requires a closer look at its approach to development management, which is the subject of the next chapter.

Chapter V

BRAC's Approach to Development Management

BRAC's ability to implement all the necessary elements of a targeted basic education program derives not so much from its expertise in education as its proven experience in managing rural development and health service delivery programs. The elements of BRAC's education program described in Chapter IV are familiar to educators all over the world. While familiar to those working in rural development, however, BRAC's development management model may be new to those working in nonformal education and with NGOs.

In this chapter, BRAC's approach to development management is presented in two segments: BRAC's approach to development, and BRAC's approach to management.

BRAC's Approach to Development

Targeted

By global standards, almost everyone in rural Bangladesh is poor. For an outsider, accurately identifying the relatively more disadvantaged poor—those unable to participate in even the small opportunities for advancement available in rural Bangladesh—is almost impossible. For this reason, many of the development agencies that began working in Bangladesh villages during the first half of the 1970s, including BRAC, initially adopted a community-wide approach.

By the last half of the 1970s, however, many of the development agencies concluded that the wealthier villagers had benefitted most and the poorer villagers had benefitted least from this untargeted approach. In 1977, based on its own experience and research in rural villages, BRAC decided to target all of its programs to the more disadvantaged rural households. Since that time, the BRAC strategy has been to place more and more emphasis on women (Chen 1983). By June 1992, 60 percent of BRAC's village organizations were exclusively for women.

Existing surveys and censuses do not provide the kind of detailed information on income and landholdings that BRAC needs to identify the target groups for its rural development programs. BRAC has therefore designed its own household survey instrument to be used in conducting sample surveys prior to starting work in any new areas. These surveys are used to identify the most disadvantaged rural households in each area. When the NFPE program decides to open schools in an area where BRAC already has programs, NFPE program staff use existing surveys and the knowledge of experienced BRAC staff working in that area to identify the children most likely to be left out of the Government primary system. In areas

without operational BRAC programs, NFPE program staff use BRAC's household survey protocols to identify target households. The criteria for selecting new sites for NFPE program and KK schools state that there must be an adequate number of target girls within one or two kilometers of the proposed school site and several qualified teacher candidates, preferably women, within the same area. According to BRAC staff and to the Khan and Arefeen survey, few sites are unable to meet these criteria. It appears, however, that setting these criteria in advance and including gender-desegregated statistics for both students and teachers in both routine reporting documents and periodic external evaluations have played a critical role in helping the NFPE program meet its 70 percent target for female teachers and students.

Participatory

BRAC's approach to development is also based on parent and community participation. This is a particular challenge in that the adults in BRAC's target households, in addition to being poor even by Bangladesh standards, are also likely to be illiterate. While many have benefitted from BRAC's functional literacy and conscientization programs, few can write more than their names or read more than the sign on a Government office. What role can these illiterate parents play in school management and supervision?

Having experimented with many combinations of financial, in-kind, and time contributions—from building a straw hut with their own labor to pressuring local elites for access to a one-room building three hours per day—BRAC has settled on a modest level of parent involvement. Parents help select the students and the teacher and determine the school hours and holidays. In addition, they pledge to send their children to school, attend monthly parents' meetings, and replace broken slates and worn mats.

BRAC originally hoped that parents might assume more financial responsibility for the school after the first three-year cycle was completed and a second was begun. To date, this has not proved to be the case; BRAC has thus far been unable to mobilize more parental support for second- or even third-cycle schools than for first-cycle schools. Nonetheless, once the younger students graduate from NFPE program schools, more than 90 percent of their families find funds, if only temporarily, to send them on to Class IV (see Chapter VI for a more detailed discussion of the private costs associated with formal primary education).

Sectoral

At the same time that BRAC switched from a "community" to a "targeted" approach, it also switched from a "comprehensive integrated" approach -- developing all basic services in a community at the same time--to a

"sectoral integrated" approach—providing all the intermediary services necessary to make interventions in selected sectors work. BRAC now has two types of credit and income-generating programs, a primary education program, several health programs, and periodic disaster assistance programs. Each program is considered a separate cost center with its own donors. All are not present in every BRAC area. Each program has its own objectives, and BRAC avoids burdening one program with the objectives of another. For example, NFPE program parents' meetings are not combined with savings group meetings, and NFPE program schools are just schools, not multi-purpose community development centers, credit unions, etc.

To the degree that the NFPE program is not burdened with multiple objectives, it is relatively easy to eliminate components that do not work and to substitute others quickly. In 1985, BRAC's original NFPE program project budget included uniforms; however, by the time the children had been selected, it was clear that uniforms were not needed to ensure the target group's school attendance or performance. BRAC subsequently used the uniform budget line item to open more schools than originally planned. More recently, although none of the three external evaluations to date cited malnutrition or the lack of a school feeding program as a problem in NFPE program schools, an offer from an international donor to fund a school feeding component is causing BRAC to consider the pros and cons of such a move. Is this an unforeseen opportunity that will strengthen the program and should not be passed up? Will the benefits outweigh the additional administrative burden, or would a feeding program complicate the NFPE program model and slow down expansion? Will it help or hinder efforts to increase community management of the schools in the medium term? Will it change the parents' motivation for sending children to school for better or worse? Will it cause unwanted competition with Government schools?

BRAC's de facto policy in all of its sectoral programs is to become involved in those intermediary activities judged instrumental to meet sectoral program goals. The NFPE program is considering incorporating non-school components to the extent that those components contribute to the overall goal of providing basic numeracy and literacy to children that will be useful to them as they become adults. For example, to help NFPE program graduates who do not continue in the formal system to maintain their literacy, NFPE is experimenting with self-supporting Community Reading Centers. Likewise, NFPE program staff are discussing ways to help NFPE program graduates who continue their education to handle the large amounts of homework assigned in the formal system. Employing part-time tutors is one idea currently being explored.

National

> BRAC management does not consider the organization's only or even principal job to be one of building and demonstrating development models. Although transfer of experience and systems (to Government and other non-government organizations) is considered important, the essential job of BRAC is to reach as many of the rural poor as possible, as fast as possible, with interventions that can help them change their lives. BRAC's management believes that because it has learned (and continues to learn) how to do rural development, because it has the structural base and resource capacity to expand rapidly, and because there is such need, it has a responsibility and imperative to scale up rapidly. (Lovell 1992, 26)

As Lovell notes, this strategy is not an appropriate one for all NGOs, but BRAC has already proven its ability to work on a national scale, both independently and as a partner with the Government. Through its Oral Therapy Extension Program (1980-90), BRAC reached 12 million households with a seven-point message that taught at least one woman in each household how to make and when to use a simple oral rehydration solution. Between 1986 and 1990, BRAC helped the Government reach 4.5 million households with immunizations for the most common childhood diseases. BRAC has derived several lessons from these two experiences: "NGO collaboration with the Government can work well in sectors that have been assigned high priority by the Government," human service programs do not necessarily have to lose quality when they go to scale, and NGOs are not necessarily "limited to small, localized activities that have little national consequence" (BRAC 1992a, 19).

To a large degree, BRAC's success with these national programs in the health sector provided both the experience and confidence needed to look for ways to address the current gap between the supply of and demand for primary education in rural areas.

BRAC's Approach to Management

The NFPE program management model is an adaptation of a decentralized management model developed by trial and error in BRAC's early years and now adapted to each of BRAC's programs. The NFPE program's first managers had come up through the ranks of BRAC's ongoing sectoral programs—credit, health, etc. While they had everything to learn about the technical aspects of implementing an education program, the common understanding of BRAC's management model and goals that they brought with them meant that the NFPE program did not have to invent a management model. Likewise, in its early years, NFPE program staff used

office space in field offices established by older BRAC programs; the early NFPE program was not burdened with the time-consuming logistics associated with finding and furnishing work and living space for its staff. By mid-1992, however, the NFPE program had outgrown available space in existing BRAC offices and began establishing independent field offices in all of its areas.

Field-Oriented

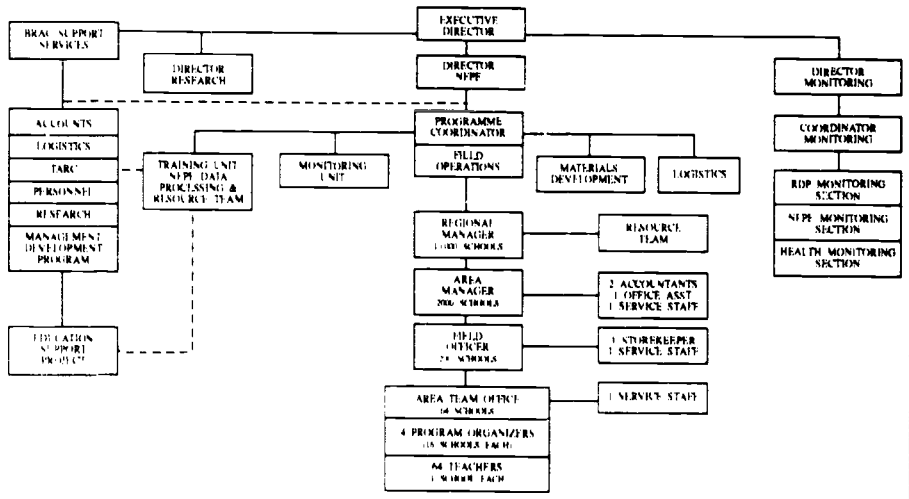
As of June 1992, 90 percent of BRAC's 3,556 full-time, permanent staff members were working out of the head office and decentralized offices, including seven training centers, scattered across half of Bangladesh's 64 districts in Dhaka houses a skeleton staff of senior managers and technical specialists as well as the central personnel and accounting office staff. A tight-knit team of decentralized mid-level managers and organizers with clear geographic and sectoral responsibilities, loosely coupled with a fairly comprehensive array of field-oriented technical and support services staff, implement the program.

In August 1992, the full-time NFPE program field staff consisted of four regional managers (RMs), ten area educational managers (AEMs), 61 field officers (FOs), and 580 program organizers (POs), with another 140 new POs scheduled to be hired before December 1992 (Anis 1992a). These field staff report to one field operations manager in the NFPE program head office and are supported by one training manager with four training staff, one materials development manager with six staff, and two logistics staff. All head office managers and the regional managers, to some extent, report directly to the Program Coordinator, who is assisted by one Program Assistant and five monitoring officers. As of mid-1992, about 6,000 teachers were classified as temporary project staff. The number of teachers is usually less than the number of schools; a significant number of teachers with more than three years of experience and demonstrated aptitude teach in more than one school if the school hours are not overlapping. An organization chart is provided in Figure V.1.

The critical link between BRAC and the members and beneficiaries of all its programs is the PO, a bachelor's or masters' degree holder hired at the Dhaka or regional office, who works in a fixed geographic area with a fixed number of groups or project sites. Because the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS), one of the country's largest employers of college-educated personnel in Bangladesh, was under a hiring freeze in recent years, BRAC has been able to recruit POs from among the top graduates of the best universities. Nevertheless, the average PO is usually less than 30 years old, has no formal training in rural development, and receives less than 15 days of orientation at a BRAC training center before being assigned to the field.

FIGURE 1

NFPE Organizational Chart



POs serve as the grassroots management force for the NFPE program. Their work, as described in the 49-page manual for the program, *Organizers Appointed for the Nonformal Primary Education Program* (BRAC 1991b), falls into three broad stages: surveying sites for new centers; starting new centers; and supporting ongoing centers.

The average PO supervises 15 to 20 centers and may be engaged in all three stages of work simultaneously. In addition to the guidance received from field officers, the POs' work is structured by detailed practical guidance in the manual. For example, the survey sites manual describes the following tasks that the PO must carry out:

Surveying Sites

- visit villages;
- conduct household surveys as needed and tabulate data; and
- select sites.

Starting New Centers

- procure school supplies from the local market;
- negotiate a long-term lease and renovations for a school room;
- organize three parents' meetings; and
- select and schedule training for a teacher.

Supporting Ongoing Centers

- visit the school at least two times per month, each time checking on the condition of the classroom, students, and teacher, and the progress of the lessons (the handbook provides a list of more than 50 quantitative and qualitative indicators to check during each visit. For example, the PO manual suggests five common reasons for irregular student attendance along with 14 different potential responses);
- meet weekly with school committees;
- facilitate the delivery of some supplies from the head office and procurement from the local market of others;
- prepare reports;
- teach monthly refresher courses; and
- use informal meetings to develop warm and cordial relationships with as many students, teachers, and parents as humanly possible.

The BRAC field office, which is frequently located in isolated areas with no telephone and perhaps irregular electricity, is the home, office, and recreation center for ten to 11 POs and one FO. Field staff typically work long hours, six days a week. They generally travel by bicycle or, as they gain seniority, by motorcycle, often in inclement weather.

Given this heavy workload and the difficult working conditions, it is not surprising that more than 50 percent of all POs drop out during the first year.[3] If they survive several months, over the course of their first year they will be eligible for training at one of BRAC's training and resource centers. The training is outlined in Table V.1.

TABLE V.1

Training Provided to NFPE First-Year Program Organizers

Staff development (NFPE program-specific orientation)	6 days
Training of trainers (preparation to do teachers' monthly refresher training)	8 days
Basic teacher training (an abridged version of the teacher training course)	8 days
TOTAL	**22 days**

Source: BRAC Training and Resource Center

[3] This dropout rate is similar to the rates of other Bangladeshi NGOs that use recent college graduates as front-line staff.

POs with two or more years of experience are eligible for promotion to FO or trainers and later may move up to area manager, regional manager, and perhaps even division chief. All BRAC's field staff and even its trainers are promoted through the PO ranks. Although in the early years, NFPE program managers were recruited from other, older BRAC programs, by mid-1992 all NFPE program mid-level management had come up through the ranks of the NFPE program. Only a few technical specialists are hired and kept at the Dhaka and regional offices. BRAC purposely recruits field officers with college degrees so that all have the necessary academic background to be eligible for the more advanced management training necessary for promotion into mid-level and senior management positions. In-house training is provided to mid-level managers, and a significant number of mid- and senior-level managers are also sent overseas for short and long-term regional and international training.

In the first half of 1992, in an effort to further stretch its field staff, the NFPE program began field-testing para-professional teacher-supervisors recruited from one of the villages near a cluster of schools that they would be supervising. This is an adaptation of a para-professional model used in many BRAC programs to stretch professional field staff further and to involve more local people in the development process. During the field-trial period, one experienced PO supervised three teacher-supervisors, and each teacher-supervisor was responsible for 15 to 17 schools. An internal evaluation in 1993 will help the NFPE program to decide if and how to generalize this model.

Table V.2 shows NFPE's planned staffing pattern for its 1993-95 expansion in areas where it has not previously worked. In addition, during the same period, BRAC will be expanding the number of schools in its ongoing Rural Development Program from approximately 12,000 to 14,500. This will result in a total of 50,000 schools at the end of 1995.

Learning-Oriented

Lovell (1992), drawing on Peter Senge's work in 1990, characterizes BRAC as a "learning" organization that uses formal and informal reporting and feedback to help its staff build a shared vision, encourage personal mastery, examine mental models, foster team learning, and promote systems thinking. The evolution of the NFPE program is consistent with this characterization. Since 1979, BRAC has tested at least three distinct approaches to nonformal primary education, of which the present NFPE program is the most recent hybrid. Since 1986 it has revised its curriculum and teacher training several times. The teacher-supervisor pilot activity described in the preceding section is typical of the type of experiments

BRAC is constantly trying out in its two well-monitored "laboratory" areas in Manikganj and Sulla.

The "learning" process described by Lovell involves at least three essential activities: the gathering and timely dissemination of relevant formal and informal data by the people who need it; the self-conscious use of that data in identifying issues and developing appropriate responses; and the provision of resources to address the issues raised by the data analysis.

Data Collection and Dissemination

The three main sources of management information for the NFPE program—an MIS and Monitoring Unit established in 1992, occasional reports from BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division, and routine external evaluations carried out by independent consultants—regularly provide data for routine management and policy decisions. The relevance and quality of the data and its systematic dissemination to the levels of the organization most likely to use it, however, are not necessarily assured. These systems still serve as a backup to the information shared at routine meetings involving participants from various levels of the organization.

TABLE V.2

NFPE's Planned Staffing Pattern
1993 - 1995

New School Requirement

	1993	1994	1995	Total
Total New Schools This Proposal	9,000	10,000	16,500	35,500

Field Staff Requirement

	1993	1994	1995	Total
Regional Manager - Field Operations	1	1	2	4
Area Manager	5	5	9	19
Field Officer	45	50	82	177
Program Organizer	562	625	1,031	2,218
Program Monitor	5	5	9	19
Accountant	5	5	9	19
Office Assistant	5	5	9	19
Accounts Assistant cum storekeeper	45	50	82	177

Source BRAC 1992b (November)

BRAC's senior management response to negative feedback from each of these three systems sometimes takes the form of pilot activities that test alternative solutions to implementation problems. This type of response helps to send a message to the field that negative feedback is welcome and that senior management is ready to provide the field with the help it needs to implement the program effectively.

BRAC's formal reporting system includes overlapping systems of accounting, monitoring, evaluation, research, and auditing, each of which gathers its own data for different, though sometimes overlapping, audiences. The regular management information system starts at the field level, where POs prepare weekly work plans, describing the groups they will visit. Progress on these work plans and standardized quantitative data on school performance are reviewed each week at meetings attended by the entire field staff. The standardized quantitative data is in turn forwarded to the Head Office through the Area Managers. The Head Office uses the data to rank the schools, and the newly created NFPE program Monitoring Unit conducts random checks on the quality of the data. The NFPE program Monitoring Unit also collects qualitative data at the school level in a sample of areas each month and subsequently shares the data with the POs in those areas. At present, the field offices receive less feedback from the head office on qualitative measures than on quantitative measures, and the message this sends to field offices deserves to be considered. Some of the quantitative data collected through routine reports is prominently displayed in NFPE program field offices, and all of the staff we talked to seemed to understand the performance implications of these displays.

BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division (RED) carries out internal evaluations and ad hoc studies of the NFPE program on an ongoing basis. Most of the requests for these evaluations and studies are generated at the head office, although BRAC is making efforts to make RED more responsive to field needs. At present, RED's ability to address the NFPE program's research needs is limited by a lack of permanent staff with expertise in education. As a result, the quality of the RED education studies to date is uneven, and few have provided the sort of in-depth analysis that can help to inform either pragmatic management or broader policy decisions in a timely way. In order to address this problem, at least one RED staff member is now in long-term training in Canada, and RED plans to hire and train at least two other education researchers to meet the increasing demand for educational research being generated by the NFPE program expansion. Finally, since many BRAC staff are not fluent in English, RED has begun to produce synopses of its reports in Bangla.

In the meantime, the head office is using the new NFPE program Monitoring Unit to carry out ad hoc studies as issues arise. For example, in early 1992, the Monitoring Unit looked at the one-day teachers' refresher courses and discovered that many POs were having trouble covering all the issues associated with three subjects in one day. POs are now recommended to cover just one subject per monthly refresher course and to extend the courses to two days, as needed.

The final formal source of data for NFPE program management is the periodic external evaluations prepared by expatriate consultants funded by international donors. Each of the last two evaluations (Shordt 1991a; Gajanayake 1992) were produced by a single consultant, each with only two weeks in country. More important, neither the 1991 nor the 1992 evaluation addressed the quality issues raised by the 1988 evaluation (Begum, Akhter, and Rahman, 1988), and the 1992 evaluation did not build on the management issues raised by the 1991 evaluation. As a result, although three evaluations have been carried out to date, one cannot derive from them any sense of "progress" other than quantitative expansion. It is not clear if the results of the latter two studies have been translated into Bangla and disseminated and discussed widely within the NFPE program. If they were, given the quantitative focus of both studies, the recommendations would tend to reinforce the emphasis on quantitative outputs already implicit in the management information system.

Use of Data

As BRAC continues to develop the capacity of its formal information systems, the informal systems that have served it well for the last 20 years continue to prove their worth. The combination of living/working space in BRAC field offices, as well as the day-long trips to project sites in common vehicles and week-long residential training courses, encourages the flow of informal information among staff. In addition, the emphasis on grassroots participation in BRAC programs translates into an emphasis on field-level participation in management and operations. BRAC managers are encouraged to solicit ideas and feedback from their subordinates both in informal contacts and also in formal meetings. Modeling this facilitative type of management style is an important part of the on-the-job training that senior managers provide to their subordinates. Such training is necessary for at least two reasons. First, the training helps to counteract the cultural norms that promote rigid deference to superiors and acceptance of what one BRAC senior manager characterized as "management by shouting". Second, groups and meetings are at the core of BRAC's operating style; most decisions do not result from position papers or memos, but rather from discussions (Lovell 1992, 178). Ideally, informal feedback provided

by lower-level staff during these meetings is treated very seriously and indeed has led to many minor and some major changes in the NFPE program. For example, an experiment to increase the number of students from 30 to 33 in some pilot centers was abandoned for an unexpected reason on the basis of feedback from the field. The POs reported that teachers had no trouble maintaining order, but additional students meant additional time for individual corrections and feedback; they were not able to complete the lessons without lengthening the school day, which was not acceptable to parents.

Service Provision Based on Program Implementation

Targets contained in program plans and strategies are just that: targets. While most new programs are field-tested in several well-monitored areas before they are expanded, formal and informal feedback from the field in fact determines the pace of most programs. Visitors to BRAC are often disconcerted by discrepancies between relatively recent program proposals and actual implementation at the field level. To the degree that the discrepancies are the result of field experience overtaking design and lead to a stronger program, deviations from proposed plans should be viewed as the mark of a robust learning approach rather than evidence of poor planning.

Focus on Logistics

In comparison with most other NGO programs in Bangladesh, the NFPE program devotes an unusual amount of time and energy to logistics. By 1992, the Coordinator's office had developed a detailed annual plan which set the target dates for all the key logistics support activities for the entire year. Thus the NFPE program is prepared to present requisitions to the BRAC purchasing office four or five months in advance of the date supplies will be needed. Advances are forwarded to field offices in time to purchase locally procured supplies before schools open. Requisitions for textbooks are forwarded to the BRAC printers in time to allow for both printing and delivery to isolated field offices.

BRAC's internal management systems include a well-established accounting system, a research and evaluation division, a commercial printing operation, a logistics department accustomed to arranging delivery to some of the most remote parts of the country, a public relations division, a donor liaison office used to mobilize donor support and then minimize the demands those donors make on the system, a motor pool, area offices in 32 districts, and training centers in eight districts. The NFPE program depends upon the BRAC printers to produce several hundred thousand textbooks on time each year. It depends on the logistics department to import slates from India and send them with the textbooks to the most remote parts of the

country, via the BRAC motor pool or hired trucks, in a timely manner. It depends on the Executive Director's office to raise funds based, at least in early years, on BRAC's track record with programs in other sectors. It depends on BRAC enterprises to provide funds for experimental programs donors are not yet interested in. It depends on RED to provide in-house research.

Finally, like many other BRAC programs, the NFPE program depends heavily on BRAC training centers to provide formal training to its POs and teachers. The next phase of NFPE program's expansion involves a training component large enough to justify starting independent NFPE program training centers. In 1991 and 1992, BRAC successfully experimented with rented facilities to handle surges in demand at BRAC's existing training centers that resulted from a backlog of training commitments, slow construction of permanent training facilities, and unexpectedly rapid expansion of some programs. That experiment provides the basis for the proposed decentralized NFPE program training facilities, which will be largely based around rented facilities.

The actual cost of the BRAC support services that the NFPE program will need for its proposed expansion are included in each proposed budget. The NFPE program reimburses RED and other BRAC support divisions for the actual cost of their services on a schedule determined by the divisions themselves. As the NFPE program's demands on these support divisions grow, so do the reimbursements. This flow of reimbursements ensures that the support divisions have the funds necessary to expand along with the NFPE program and other BRAC programs.

Strategic

BRAC has gained a reputation both for thinking big and for planning ahead. Because the organization has developed its own sources of funds—cold storage plants, a printing operation, handicraft retail stores, etc. --it is able to test pilot programs and have working models to show donors by the time it is ready to scale up. The proposed NFPE program expansion is a good example of this strategy. By the end of 1991, 6,003 NFPE program schools were located in areas where BRAC's larger Rural Development Program (RDP) had ongoing programs. BRAC's current target-- 50,000 schools by the end of 1995--includes only 15,000 schools in RDP areas. This means BRAC proposes to open 35,000 schools between 1992 and 1995 in areas where it has never worked before. In 1992, to see whether its model was indeed viable in areas with no other BRAC programs, BRAC used its own funds to start 200 schools in Kaliakoir and Kushtia. In addition, in 1992, BRAC used its own funds to hire and

begin to train the additional staff needed to implement the proposed expansion in 1993.

BRAC's planning has led its decision makers to conclude that BRAC cannot provide NFPE program schools for all the left-out children in Bangladesh. Because of this, NFPE program staff now spend significant time forging long-term alliances with and strengthening the Bangladeshi Government, other NGOs, and donors interested or active in the primary education sector. In addition, BRAC is sharing its textbooks, management model, and teacher training materials with other NGOs. By mid-1992, BRAC was providing full or partial support to more than 35 NGOs, affecting 175 schools.

NFPE program head office staff spend a significant amount of time attending Government and donor seminars as resource persons to address issues relating to nonformal primary education. The staff views these seminars as opportunities to introduce the NFPE program to those outside BRAC and considers the time well-spent if it advances the national dialogue on UPE in the short run and results in better coordination in the medium-run. The rapid turnover of Government and donor personnel, however, means that NFPE program staff often give the same introduction to the NFPE program several times a year, with little apparent advance in the national dialogue. Similarly, at the decentralized level, NFPE program staff are encouraged to keep local Government officials informed of their work and supplement local Government UPE initiatives wherever possible. BRAC also offers training for Government and other NGO personnel at the residential Center for Development Management that it opened in 1991. (These NFPE program activities relating to compulsory and Universal Primary Education were discussed more fully in Chapter III.)

Other NGOs occasionally complain that BRAC tailors its strategy to meet the whims of donors and/or international development fads. Dozens of independent evaluations of BRAC to date, however, confirm that BRAC's programs are substantive and that they meet real, pressing rural development needs as effectively as any other poverty alleviation program in Bangladesh. In addition, the fact remains that BRAC's strategy has succeeded in mobilizing more international donor support than any other NGO in Bangladesh with the exception of the Grameen Bank, which is now semi-Governmental.

Bangla is the national language of Bangladesh and the primary medium of instruction for most primary and secondary schools. BRAC ensures, however, that its key documents are translated into English and accessible to the many outside researchers interested in its programs. For example, it was possible to produce this report in a "modest" time period with

independent outside consultants because most of BRAC's key documents—including the teacher training manuals, the PO manual, and internal research reports—were available in English. Again, without the benefit of independent funds, translations are a luxury that few NGOs can afford to produce on a regular basis, but they are a strategic investment BRAC has decided to make.

Summary and Conclusions

BRAC's management of the NFPE program incorporates the organization's combined expertise in development and general project management. In the area of development, BRAC pinpoints the target group most likely to benefit from any development effort by conducting its own survey to supplement national data on community populations. Selected parents and community members are encouraged to participate in decision making and problem solving. BRAC's "sectoral integrated" approach allows health, nutrition, education, or other focused programs to operate relatively independently yet still benefit from the resources and expertise of the umbrella organization. With the overriding objective of "reaching as many of the rural poor as possible as quickly as possible," BRAC works to expand any successful development initiative to a large-scale effort.

NFPE's approach to program management is based on BRAC's decentralized management model, where the implementation process as well as the technical content are considered important to the program's success. Field-based staff visit classrooms on a regular basis to monitor activities and provide feedback. In addition, time and energy are devoted to administrative and logistical details to ensure that needed resources are available. Through formal and informal reporting and feedback, staff learn from the program and make adjustments. By including time to plan for the future, NFPE helps ensure that the program will be sustained once a particular cycle is completed.

Chapter VI

NFPE Program Cost Efficiency and Effectiveness

BRAC has a solid basic education program with all the features needed to attract and retain the hardest-to-reach illiterate children (Chapter IV). It has a management structure capable of maintaining quality while expanding rapidly (Chapter V). What exactly does it cost? How do its students measure up? Is this an effective school system both in terms of cost and learning?

To answer these questions, this chapter first presents comparisons of the expenditures of BRAC schools to those of formal primary schools and analyzes the structure of the NFPE program's budget. The chapter then compares the achievement of NFPE program students with the achievement of Government students using two different measures: scores on a national exam given at the end of Class IV in the Government schools and scores on a Basic Education Achievement test administered recently to 11- and 12-year-olds. Comparisons of NFPE program students with formal school students in terms of persistence to Class IV and V and dropout rates in Class IV and V are also provided. Finally, the chapter concludes with a variety of issues relevant to BRAC's existing NFPE program and BRAC's potential responses to them.

Costs Associated with the NFPE Program

BRAC's NFPE program costs are, by any standards in the world, low. In 1992, BRAC calculated its total cost per enrolled child *per year* at less than US$18. A 1992 independent cost analysis of ten BRAC schools, excluding head office costs, found that BRAC spends less than US$14 per enrolled child per year (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992a, 2). A similar analysis of 33 rural Government primary schools found roughly similar public expenditures per enrolled student (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, 2). This cost is about the same as the public cost per enrolled student of Government primary schools.

The structure of BRAC's expenditures, which reflects its priorities, is shown in Table VI.1. Although BRAC's program is relatively people intensive, by world standards the proportion of its budget allocated for teacher salaries is very low. This is a function of several factors particular to the Bangladesh context. First, most villages appear to have at least two or three women with the academic credentials needed to teach NFPE program Classes I-III. Second, there appear to be few, if any jobs, at the village level that require or remunerate for the relatively high education level of these women. Finally, many of these women have substantial responsibilities within their households that, although formally unpaid, constitute a significant contribution to household income. Consequently,

most of these women are not looking for full-time permanent employment outside the home. As a result, BRAC is able to find an adequate pool of teacher candidates in most villages for wages twice those offered to agricultural day laborers: about 50 cents for three hours of work.

TABLE VII

BRAC's NFPE Program Expenditures

Expenditure	Percent
Teacher salaries and benefits	29.1
Direct management and supervision	27.0
Students' books and supplies	20.2
School rent	12.1
Training	6.1
Teaching aids and equipment	4.0
Staff offices and housing	1.5
TOTAL	100

Source: Rahman Rahman Huq 1992a.

By contrast, the amount allocated to direct management and supervision—about equal to the amount allocated for teacher salaries—is relatively high by world standards. This reflects the link BRAC has established in all of its programs among quality control and continuous guidance, on-the-job training, and feedback for village-level workers. As described in Chapter V, BRAC Program Officers (POs) and their supervisors do more than inspect schools; their responsibilities encompass everything necessary to ensure that the schools run smoothly. This integrated approach to management, backed by comprehensive support services, is the key to BRAC's current success, and it is not free. It is precisely the unwillingness to make substantial investments in decentralized professional management, however, that has resulted in the failure of many other grassroots education activities in Bangladesh (see Chapter III).

The absence of a line item for capital investments and the small size of the line item for rent reflect the temporary nature of BRAC's NFPE program. BRAC plans to close NFPE program schools as soon as the Government can ensure access to public schools for the target group in BRAC's catchment areas. In the meantime, instead of building classrooms, BRAC pays, on average, less than US$5 per month to rent space in existing buildings for three or four hours per day. This not only reduces the time needed to open new schools from months to weeks, but also reduces the

misappropriation of funds often associated with construction activities and the monitoring necessary to minimize that misappropriation.

A large proportion of BRAC's NFPE program budget is allocated for student books and supplies, which are provided free to all students. In a baseline survey carried out by BRAC in 1987, 20 percent of the parents of children who had never enrolled in primary school reported "poverty" as the chief reason (Chowdhury 1988, Table 9). The 1992 cost analysis confirmed that BRAC schools are indeed practically free. In the ten BRAC schools surveyed, the parents' financial contribution consisted of replacing worn mats and slates, altogether accounting for less than 1 percent of the total cost of school operations (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992a, Table III).

Government schools are nominally free of cost; textbooks are provided to each child, and there are no uniform or tuition charges. There are, however, substantial private costs associated with attending public schools. The 1992 survey of 167 rural Government school students and their families, which shows the breakdown of total average private expenditures for the first three years of primary school, is summarized in Table VI.2.

TABLE VI.2

Private Costs Per Class III Graduate (Three Years of Instruction) in Government Primary Schools

Category	Cost (In US Dollars)	Percent
Private tutoring	45.11	43
Student supplies	43.92	42
Pocket money	10.46	10
Other	4.49	5
TOTAL	**103.98**	**100**

Source: Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, 14-16

Are these private expenditures necessary? The largest item, private tutoring, may reflect parents' concerns with the low number of teaching hours and the small amount of per-pupil attention available in the Government schools. In Class I-III, student:teacher ratios often exceed 50:1, and teachers are often absent. Some studies suggest that, even at the primary level, teachers specialize in one subject and students may move to a different classroom for each subject, losing precious instructional time with each move and roll call. One recent study showed that the average time *per day* devoted to actual instruction in traditional Government

primary schools is less than 40 minutes (Karim 1992, 4). Progress in school, therefore, depends on large amounts of homework. Educated parents with extra time often help their children complete their school work; however, 65 percent of the parents surveyed in the 1992 cost analysis employed private tutors (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, Annex IV).

The need for tutors is a double-bind for parents with less financial means. First, since poor parents are more likely to be illiterate, their children are more likely to need outside tutors to help them complete their school work. Second, because income in poorer households is so limited, even the small contribution made for the children is apt to be significant. The poor, in comparison with the rich, make a proportionally greater sacrifice in terms of household income when they allow their children to attend school; sacrificing another hour or two of their children's labor, in addition to paying the fees for private tutoring, is often beyond their means.

The second largest private expenditure item in Government schools is student supplies. Although textbooks in Government schools are free, students must supply their own paper, pencils, and pens. While the annual cost of these items is less than US$15 per year,[4] it is equal to 8 percent of GNP per capita and to a significantly larger proportion of annual income for BRAC's low-income target group. Likewise, although the pocket money received by 78 percent of the students surveyed in rural Government schools appears negligible, to parents who often work as day laborers for Taka 30 (US$ 0.75) per day, no amount is negligible (UNICEF/Dhaka 1992a, Table 7).

Other reported private costs, in order of importance, are as follows: reference books, exam fees, sports and extracurricular fees, and admission/registration fees. While these costs may appear insignificant, there are cases of BRAC graduates who have been unable to continue their education for lack of Taka 5 (US$ 0.13) exam fees (Lovell and Fatema 1989, 30).

In summary, the costs to the funder for BRAC's NFPE program are similar to those for the formal public schools, while the private school costs for the children and families of those attending NFPE program schools is lower than the private family costs associated with public primary schools. It is doubtful that the cost of BRAC's program can be reduced further or that parents of BRAC's target children will be able to absorb more of the costs in the near future. As discussed in greater detail in Chapter III, several other NGO NFPE program models that have attempted to incorporate more parental supervision and/or financial contributions have been too expensive in terms of staff time and too irregular in terms of learning achievement

[4] Note that the $43.92 of private costs for student supplies indicated in Table VI.2 is for a three year period, Classes I to III

to be recommended widely for replication. In fact, as BRAC looks for ways to improve the quality of its curriculum and teaching methods and to ensure that its students, once graduated, stay literate and use their education to better their lives, any necessary improvements are likely to increase rather than decrease the cost per child.

Student Achievement in the NFPE Program

Student Advancement to the Formal System

As stated earlier, BRAC's NFPE program serves children from households with a relatively lower socio-economic status who are most likely to be left out of the formal school system. A recent, independent, ethnographic sample survey (Khan and Arefeen 1992) found that, to a large degree, this targeting succeeds; in comparison with households that send children to formal schools, households that send children to BRAC schools have a lower mean income (Taka 19,998 versus Taka 30,347; and own less land (.87 versus 1.48 acres). The Khan and Arefeen study also confirms a relationship between socio-economic status and education consistent with research throughout the world; children from lower-income households with little access to land are more likely to drop out of primary school than children from higher-income households. Likewise, rural Bangladeshi children from households with little access to land are almost two times as likely to drop out of primary school as children from households with relatively large landholdings (Khan and Arefeen 1992, Tables 5 and 6). Finally, girls are more likely to drop out of primary schools than boys (Gustavsson 1990), and the proportion of girls in BRAC schools (70 percent) is substantially higher than in Government schools (46 percent). For these reasons, and because the BRAC curriculum is a somewhat abridged form of the Government curriculum, the academic performance of BRAC students who continue on to Class IV in the Government system might be expected to be lower than that of students who had completed Class I-III in the formal system.

This is, however, not necessarily the case. The proportion of students in the BRAC schools who complete Class III and enter Class IV is much larger than the proportion of students in the formal system who reach Class IV. As of 1990, BRAC NFPE program schools starting with 30 children in Class I on average delivered 27 children to Class IV in the Government schools three years later. This represents a 90 percent efficiency level (Gajanayake 1992, Annex 5). High repetition rates create difficulties in estimating a similar measure of efficiency for Government schools. As a proxy, however, in the eight Government primary schools in the Khan and Arefeen survey, attendance in Class IV was only 53 percent of attendance

in Class I (Khan and Arefeen 1992, Annexure 2) and in the 33 Government primary schools included in the 1992 market survey, graduates of Class III represented only 40 percent of Class I enrollment (Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, Annex V). These data are consistent with the estimate in Table III.1 of a Government primary school drop out rate of 70-75 percent by the end of Class V. We therefore estimate that BRAC students enter Class IV at a rate 70 to 125 percent higher than Government school students.

NFPE Program Student Performance in Formal Schools

How do BRAC students perform once they are in Government schools? A recent BRAC study (Khan and Chowdhury 1991) followed a sample of former BRAC students who had been admitted to Government schools in 1989 and 1990. According to this study, 58 percent of the BRAC graduates entering Class IV in 1989 and 74 percent of those entering in 1990 progressed to Class V. Again, although we do not have the exact dropout rate for Government school students in Class IV, we know that by the end of Class V, 80 percent or more will have dropped out (see Table III.1). Since no studies suggest that dropout rates accelerate in Class IV and V, we conclude that the dropout rate for Class IV is substantially lower for BRAC than for Government school students. The overwhelming reason for dropping out given by both BRAC students and their parents was poverty (62 percent by students versus 70 percent by parents), followed by conflicts with the family work schedule (17 percent versus 13 percent). These findings were replicated by Khan and Arefeen (1992, 35-39). According to Khan and Chowdhury, neither parents nor students mentioned academic difficulties as a reason for dropping out, although such self-reports are obviously difficult to verify. These data are consistent with the estimate in Table III.1 of a Government primary school dropout rate of 80-85 percent by the end of Class V. We therefore estimate that BRAC students enter Class IV at roughly double the rate of Government school students.

Khan and Chowdhury (1991) go on to compare the academic performance of former BRAC students and non-BRAC students in Classes IV and V, using an annual Government exam administered in November 1990, one month before the end of the school year. The test reveals little difference between the two groups. Again, although we do not have the exact dropout rate for Government school students in Class IV, we know that by the end of Class V, 65 percent or more will have dropped out (see Table III.1). Since no studies suggest that dropout rates accelerate in Classes IV and V, we conclude that the dropout rate for Class IV is substantially lower for BRAC than for Government school students. In addition, former BRAC students performed marginally better in English and Bengali, and the formal school students performed marginally better in mathematics and social studies.

Finally, the BRAC study asked the teachers in the formal primary schools to assess former BRAC students as not good, average, good, or very good on nine characteristics such as attentiveness, punctuality, etc. Overall, BRAC students rated average, good, or very good in 79 percent of the responses. Significantly, the only characteristic where more than 30 percent of the former BRAC students fell into the "not good" range was attendance (54 percent not good).

These academic results are an improvement over those of an independent achievement test (Begum, Akhter, and Rahman 1988, 52-66) conducted and administered in August and October 1988, where the former BRAC students in Class IV scored significantly lower in math and environmental studies than their fellow students who were enrolled in the formal system for Class I-III. Improvements in the BRAC students' math and social studies scores in 1988 and in 1990 may have resulted from changes made to the NFPE program curriculum to better prepare students for formal school.

NFPE Program Student Performance on Basic Education Achievement Tests

Neither BRAC nor its current donors, however, are convinced that performance in Government schools is the only measure, or even the most important measure, of the quality and relevance of the education provided in NFPE program schools. In 1992, as part of an inter-agency Advisory Committee for Basic Education Assessment in Bangladesh, the Research and Evaluation Division (RED) administered a Basic Education Achievement test to a sample of 2,100 11- to 12-year-old children in 30 thanas of Bangladesh. For the purpose of this assessment, basic education was defined as:

> . . . education intended to develop basic learning skills (i.e., the three Rs) as well as some basic life skills necessary for children to survive, to improve the quality of their lives, and to continue learning. (UNICEF/Dhaka 1992a, 2)

This test required about 30 minutes to administer and comprised four parts: life skills/knowledge, reading, writing, and numeracy. A child was considered to have attained an acceptable level of basic education if he/she could correctly complete the following:

- answer at least three of four reading comprehension questions;
- communicate correctly a simple message in writing;
- solve at least three of four mental arithmetic problems requiring skill in four simple operations; and
- correctly answer at least seven of ten life skill/knowledge questions.

In addition, RED also administered the test to a second sample of 200 11- to 19-year-olds who had graduated from BRAC NFPE program schools in

1990. This second sample included 78 11- to 12-year-olds. The proportions of 11- to 12-year-olds satisfying the basic education criteria are shown in Table VI.3.

TABLE VI.3

Proportions of 11- to 12-Year-Old Students Who Satisfied the Basic Education Criteria, 1992 (in percent)

Sample	Boys	Girls	Total
Total rural[1] (n=2100)	23	22	22
Gov't students[1]	—	—	20
BRAC students[1]	—	—	38
BRAC graduates[2] (n=78)	52	53	53

Source. [1] UNICEF Dhaka 1992b, Figures 1 and 12
[2] Nath, Mohsin, and Chowdhury 1992, 4

Most of the children scored lowest on writing, a little higher on reading and life skills, and significantly higher on numeracy. While it is clear that BRAC students are more than twice as likely than their rural neighbors to have satisfied the basic education criteria, it is equally clear that almost half of the 11- to 12-year-olds who complete BRAC schools still have not attained an acceptable level of basic education according to this criteria. In addition, the test does not measure an extremely important aspect of basic education: the degree to which basic education skills acquired in different educational settings at ages 11 and 12 are retained and used in later years. The results, however, confirm what most NFPE program staff have already concluded: for a large proportion of rural children, three years of primary education, as currently provided in BRAC and Government schools, does not add up to a basic education.

Cost Efficiency and Cost Effectiveness

If the research results above are borne out over time, it will mean that BRAC, starting with a pool of children statistically less likely to succeed in school than the children who enter Government school, is producing primary level students that perform comparable to or even better than formal school students in terms that the formal school considers most

important: achievement test scores. These results suggest that, in terms of the two quantitative measures of achievement—the annual Government exam and the Basic Education Achievement Test—the output of BRAC's schools is at least as good or better than the output of formal schools and that it is therefore valid to evaluate BRAC schools in terms of cost efficiency, using Government schools as a benchmark.

As noted earlier in this chapter, although the public cost per enrolled student in the Government and BRAC primary systems is about the same, the cost per Class III graduate is another matter. The Government system suffers from high repetition and low completion rates; fewer than five out of ten children who start Class I in Government schools will enter Class IV (Chowdhury 1988, Table 7; Gustavsson 1990, Table 8; Rahman Rahman Huq 1992b, Table V). In contrast, BRAC's NFPE program efficiency rate is much higher; more than nine out of ten students who start Class I in BRAC schools will enter Class IV in the Government schools (Gajanayake 1992, Annex 5). Therefore, as a feeder school to the higher levels of the Government primary system, BRAC's schools are, for the moment, more cost efficient than the Government's.

BRAC's follow-up data on a sample of the second and third cohorts of BRAC graduates to enter the Government system suggests that BRAC also may be relatively cost efficient in terms of preparing students who persist through Class IV and V in the Government system. Khan and Chowdhury (1991), however, provide data for just two relatively early cohorts of NFPE program graduates, and comparable data for Government students are not available. The dropout rate for former BRAC students in Class IV fell by almost 50 percent from 1989 to 1990. If this is a trend, persistence rates for BRAC students beyond Class IV may be even higher.

One strategy for increasing the cost effectiveness of the NFPE program would be to reduce the dropout rate of those NFPE program graduates who later enroll in Government schools. There are, however, several reasons why dropout rates may remain high. The parents of BRAC students who dropped out of Government schools in 1989 and 1990 say it is because of "poverty." "Poverty" in this context may mean that Government school hours conflict with the child's essential chores at home, very poor parents cannot afford small "voluntary" fees, and/or illiterate parents cannot afford the private tutors necessary to help the child keep up academically. Whatever the combination, these types of problems cannot be addressed by improving BRAC's curriculum or teaching methods. BRAC staff say dropout rates vary considerably from one area to another, based less on student characteristics than on the quality of the Government school in any

given area. Former BRAC students persist better, they say, in those Government schools that are relatively less crowded, with better physical facilities, more diligent teachers, and adequate supervision and supplies.

Increasing the cost efficiency of BRAC schools in terms of the persistence of their students in Class IV and V, therefore, depends to some degree on the ability of the Government schools to expand fast enough to absorb a rapidly increasing number of BRAC graduates, to minimize private costs, and to adopt a school-based, rather than home-based, approach to learning. These changes in the Government system are beyond BRAC's ability to control but they are essential issues in Bangladesh's UPE strategy discussed more fully in Chapter III.

In the meantime, BRAC has begun the long, complex task of sorting out the effectiveness of its NFPE program as a basic education program. As noted above, BRAC's RED hopes to track the 400 former BRAC students included in the Khan and Chowdhury (1991) follow-up study every two years for the foreseeable future. RED plans to use this longitudinal database to examine the impact of BRAC schooling on the students' educational and employment histories, their income, and their families' welfare.

In addition, under the auspices of the Advisory Committee for Basic Education Assessment, RED will be repeating the Basic Education Assessment on a regular basis for the next few years. BRAC is hoping that planned improvements in the quality of instruction in BRAC schools will enable a larger proportion of its Class III graduates to meet this basic education criteria in the future. NFPE program staff are continuously improving curriculum and teaching training materials and are using the program monitoring unit to help them identify and track qualitative issues. BRAC is still struggling to determine the "right" amount of basic education and how to make it "relevant" for children who are likely to spend their economic lives at best self-employed in small rural enterprises or, at worst, as housewives in rural, "subsistence" households. BRAC is also struggling with how to ensure that, whatever the level of education attained in the BRAC schools, it is maintained and becomes a building block for more human development.

For the older children in its primary program, whose achievement level in terms of the "basic education criteria" and whose completion rate in Government schools are much lower than the younger children, BRAC has already taken action. BRAC is convinced that the difference in the older children's performance is related to the shorter KK cycle. Beginning in 1992, all new BRAC schools for older children will be expanded from a two- to a three-year-cycle. BRAC has decided not to make this third year

the equivalent of Class IV and V for several reasons. First, given the complexity of math included in the formal Class IV and V curriculum, it is doubtful that BRAC's teachers, who themselves have only a Class IX or X education, can learn to teach it within the time constraints of the existing basic and refresher teachers' training courses. The NFPE program is therefore considering designing a third year math textbook that would review and provide additional practical applications for math learned in the first two years. Second, some subjects included in the formal Class IV and V curriculum, such as English, are not directly useful to the students and take time away from the fundamentals. These subjects may be dropped. Third, because many of the older girls are of marriageable age, it is expected that few will complete the third year. The curriculum may therefore take a more modular approach. Given the expected high dropout rate in the third year for older children, BRAC is also experimenting with semi-self-supporting reading centers for older graduates in some villages.

Issues and BRAC's Responses

With its basic learning program and its unique approach to management, the NFPE program has been effective in providing basic education to hundreds of thousands of girls and boys left out of the formal education system. Yet there are several issues that could be addressed in improving the program as presently designed. These are described below.

Classroom Environment

According to all sources, the BRAC classrooms are much more "child friendly" than traditional formal schools. Does this environment, however, prepare students to participate in Government schools, which are definitely more teacher-centered and autocratic? More importantly, knowing that a large proportion of BRAC graduates will not complete primary school nor will they secure salaried jobs, how can the BRAC schools promote more entrepreneurial and problem-solving attitudes?

Although it is unclear whether child-centered instruction prepares students for the formal school environment, this type of instruction does promote independent thinking and problem solving. One of the more common ways to promote child-centered instruction is through learning centers or activity areas in classrooms. The following centers might be included: a language area, where children would read, write, and tell stories; a mathematics corner for sorting, counting, manipulating, building, and playing games; an environmental studies corner for growing plants, tending small animals, and exploring health, home, family, and community; an art center for designing, copying, drawing, painting, and sculpting; and a quiet area, where children can go to be alone, read, or do an individual project.

Another NGO in Bangladesh, GSS, has incorporated such learning areas into its schools, but its classrooms are much larger and more permanent than BRAC's, are equipped with furniture and many learning aids, and are staffed with teaching assistants. While BRAC could conceivably rent larger classrooms and increase the number of learning aids, all of these innovations would increase the cost per student, and more importantly in terms of EFA, the complexity of the program. It is not clear how much more complex BRAC can become without jeopardizing its rapid expansion plans.

Curriculum

As mentioned earlier, most NFPE program graduates enter Class IV in the formal system but drop out before they complete Class V. This phenomenon raises questions about the appropriate orientation of the BRAC curriculum. What should be the NFPE program's primary purpose: to prepare children to enter the Government system or to prepare children for life in rural Bangladesh? While these two purposes are not mutually exclusive, the current Government curriculum is not particularly life-oriented; the English component is of questionable value, and the mathematics component does not focus on problem solving in rural Bangladesh.

An analysis of the NFPE program curriculum included the following suggestions for improving the curriculum materials: rewriting or supplementing the texts to offer students discovery exercises and problem-solving activities; rewriting or supplementing the teacher's guide to include activities that will encourage self-directed learning on the part of students; giving each student a "dictionary" for each level of the NFPE program; and producing a series of oversized "big books" to introduce students to stories, reading, and critical thinking. All of these suggestions for curriculum materials, while perhaps helpful in themselves, will only make a difference if the teaching methodology in the NFPE program classes changes to take advantage of them.

Pedagogic Approach

BRAC's NFPE program has appropriately concentrated on providing the bare essentials of a primary education program that functions at an acceptable level of effectiveness. The need to rely on teachers with limited formal education and no professional training, the shortened school day, and the bare-bones provisions for physical facilities and learning materials have led to a simplified curriculum and a structured and well-defined sequence of classroom activities. The aim is to ensure that children acquire the "basics" of literacy and numeracy and the "essential" knowledge about the social and physical environment as defined in the primary curriculum. By all evidence, the program has succeeded in achieving this aim.

The question still remains: even within the program's limitations, is there room for improvement in the pedagogic approach? Can changes in classroom practices, use of instruction time, and the creativity and spontaneity by teachers and students make the program more learner-centered than didactic and encourage reasoning and thinking along with teaching the basics? BRAC is currently implementing several strategies to revise its teacher training and field support. First, a staff member who recently returned from a year at IIEP in Paris is expected to introduce several new innovations. Second, BRAC is now developing teacher versions of the basic textbooks. These teacher editions will include suggestions for increasing student participation and child-centered activities next to the text used by the students. Finally, the NFPE program head office staff is considering introducing a new type of technical field staff—a master teacher—who can spend more intensive time in classrooms with teachers and offer more concrete, expert pedagogical advice.

The level of material that the BRAC teachers will be able to cover is limited to some extent by the poor quality of their own formal education and the short periods of time that they are willing to spend in residential training away from their families and household responsibilities. As the whole program grows further in size, new possibilities arise that can be applied cost effectively in large-scale programs. One such possibility is interactive radio for in-service staff development as well as classroom instruction. Other possibilities include large-scale production of low-cost supplementary reading materials with graded vocabulary, simple learning aids, a teachers' journal with general tips and specific activities for topics to be covered at a particular time in the calendar year, and a journal for managing committee and parents' committee members. A substantial research and experimentation center addressing innovations in the classroom and in the organization and management of the education program would constitute a small overhead cost in a large program, but would be likely to yield a significant payoff.

Parent Attitudes

The parents of most NFPE program students are illiterate and do not perceive of the NFPE program in terms of learning objectives. Among the rural poor in Bangladesh, the most security parents can give their daughters is a good marriage; a little schooling makes a girl a more sought-after bride, while too much schooling may drive away prospective husbands with less education. In some cases, nonformal education does reduce the amount of dowry the girl's parents must pay to the new husband's parents. The extent to which parents will support "improvements" in the NFPE program's learning approach will probably depend on the extent to which they

improve girls' marriage prospects and/or they make the NFPE program schools look more equivalent to Government schools, and in any case, require no additional costs for parents. For example, BRAC staff have reported that some parents have requested that corporal punishment, a characteristic feature of formal schools, be introduced into NFPE program schools. Given the NFPE program's emphasis on parent participation and the rather narrow traditional range of many parents' interests, there is likely to be some tension between NFPE program staff's desire to "improve" the NFPE program in educational terms and parents' desires to have a school that looks as much like a Government school as possible.

Teacher Supervision

BRAC's generic decentralized management model has been transformed into an effective system of school administration and logistical support for the NFPE program. Much of this transformation has been effected through feedback from POs and other field-based staff. Most POs, however, have little or no teaching experience and are limited in their ability to help teachers identify problems with the learning—as opposed to the administrative—aspects of the program or to improve teaching methods in some of the ways described above. More importantly, the level of observation and feedback needed to review and reinforce more child-centered learning approaches requires more time in classrooms than POs can afford to give.

At the present, most of the suggestions for improving the learning program come from a handful of technical staff who have limited contact with teachers. In an effort to provide more technical assistance at the field level, BRAC recently placed one resource materials staff person in each division office. BRAC is also discussing the possibility of introducing a network of master teachers at the field level. These master teachers would be able to spend more concentrated time with individual teachers.

Gender Equity in Program Management

A trip to an average NFPE program area reveals schools filled with female students and teachers, parents' meetings attended primarily by mothers, and everything coordinated by men. In fact, although its Program Coordinator is a dynamic woman, the NFPE program has no female RMs or AEMs—only two women FOs—and less than 30 percent female POs.

To a large extent, the lack of women in managerial positions in the NFPE program is related to BRAC's policy to promote managers from the ranks of POs. Until recently, BRAC did not hire women as POs both because of cultural norms that restrict women's movements among men outside their

families and also because few women were interested in PO jobs as they were then designed. As a result, the NFPE program did not hire women as POs until July 1990. Even then, almost 100 percent of the first group of women POs resigned within one year. BRAC staff attributed these initial high attrition rates to their inability to communicate to the candidates the difficult conditions of the entry-level field positions and to some recruiting and assignment procedures that proved especially discouraging for Bangladeshi women. BRAC has since adjusted several procedures to take into account the female candidates' major concerns. Today, all candidates are recruited at the regional level, so that women do not have to travel long distances for job interviews and, to the extent possible, women POs are initially assigned to field offices near their families. At least three women POs are assigned to one field office at a time, so if one is away for leave or training, at least two remain together. By mid-1992, 25-30 percent of all NFPE program POs were women. Because unaccompanied women travelling from village to village are sometimes targets of physical and verbal harassment, the female POs' dropout rate might be expected to be higher than that of the male POs'. By mid-1992, however, both rates were about 50 percent.

While there are some "fast trackers," BRAC female staff members generally experience many of the same handicaps shared by women anywhere in the world who are entering the professional job market for the first time. The academic qualifications and work experience of women POs are generally less competitive than those of their male counterparts. Few have significant life experience outside the confines of their families, and many do not like to speak up in open discussions where organizational decisions are often hammered out. In addition, the existing BRAC system for upward mobility—transfer to and work in several geographical areas—may restrict women's movements into management positions.

Gender awareness issues are currently scheduled to be incorporated into orientation and staff development training for all first-year POs. The need for such a seminar was highlighted by the visits to several field offices. During these visits, some younger field staff could explain BRAC's focus on female participation because of their more disadvantaged position in society, and a few could discuss some reasons why female teachers might be preferable, but none could explain the logic behind the efforts to recruit and make special arrangements for female POs.

The fact remains that BRAC is making a genuine and largely successful effort to enroll girls into primary schools and to keep them there for at least three years. Likewise, it is providing village women income and status without requiring them to leave their homes. There is no doubt that

BRAC's ability to do both of these tasks would be enhanced by more input from women inside the program and that BRAC's continuing efforts to improve recruitment, assignment, and promotion processes for female POs is one way to obtain it.

Conclusions

Rigorous internal cost-accounting procedures and frequent independent audits have enabled BRAC to develop a relatively complete picture of the direct and indirect costs of the NFPE program at each level of operation. At any given point in time, a fully operational field office has a standard number of POs and schools, a standard number of graduates, and fairly standardized costs. These costs are competitive with those associated with public primary schools. Because BRAC includes within its standardized cost figures many of the private costs associated with Bangladesh's public schools, BRAC schools are less expensive to students and their families than public schools. Because of the standardized costs, however, there are likely to be few economies of scale associated with the expansion of the NFPE program. In fact, continuing efforts to improve the quality of instruction and to maintain students' literacy once they leave the BRAC schools are more likely to bring modest increases rather than decreases in cost in the next few years. For example, the development of libraries and other resources for neo-literates is likely to increase marginally the cost per student. Likewise, the development of more teaching aids may increase costs marginally. Additional initial training and refresher courses for teacher supervisors may increase costs, but as they replace more expensive, college-educated POs, teacher supervisors may enable BRAC to more than recoup the cost of their training.

Most of the anticipated increases in costs are related to improving the quality of the learning program and should result in increases in learning achievement. Whether these increases in achievement will be sufficiently large to offset increases in cost remains to be determined. However, given the NFPE program's comparatively high level of cost efficiency in comparison with the main alternative—the Government primary system—in terms of completion of Class III, entry into Class IV, achievement on Class IV examinations, and achievement on the Basic Education Assessment test instrument, only extremely large increases in costs could make the NFPE program cost-inefficient or -ineffective.

This chapter has proceeded from the premise that basic education, particularly for girls, is a good investment of scarce development funds. The analysis indicates that at the present time and for the next three years, the BRAC schools appear to be a cost effective way to provide basic education to children, particularly girls, currently left out of the existing formal

system. The analysis of comparative efficiency advantage of BRAC schools should remain valid even if there is a significant improvement in capacity, cost, and student achievement in the formal primary education system.

Expanding the NFPE Program in Bangladesh: Potential Roles and Related Issues

As indicated in the previous section, results of program implementation since 1985 show that NFPE program schools have been effective in providing basic education to poor, rural children, particularly girls. This section addresses the second major question posed in this report:

> *What is the potential for rapidly expanding the NFPE program in Bangladesh? In particular, what might be the relationship between a large-scale NFPE program and the national system of primary education?*

Chapter VII presents the potential roles that BRAC could play. Chapter VIII presents major issues involved with rapid expansion.

BRAC's Potential Roles in Bangladesh

It is clear that universal primary education (UPE) in Bangladesh cannot be achieved in the short run merely by increasing the number of formal primary schools. Providing a meaningful basic education to those children left out of the formal primary education system today and increasing the capacity of the formal system in the future suggests the need for a new form of partnership among the Government, non-governmental organizations, and the local communities. As the NGO with the largest, most clearly articulated approach to nonformal primary education and an international reputation in poverty alleviation and health, BRAC has a potentially important role to play in the development of this partnership. This chapter explores BRAC's potential roles in Bangladesh.

BRAC appears well-positioned to contribute to UPE in Bangladesh in at least seven ways: expanding its own NFPE program to provide basic education to more rural, low-income children; supporting other NGOs involved in primary education; improving community participation in local compulsory primary education planning and management; coordinating local primary education planning and management; providing general support to the Government's primary education program; monitoring and assessing national progress in basic education; and developing a post-primary nonformal program. Each one of these potential roles is discussed below.

Provide Basic Education to More Rural, Low-Income Children

BRAC's most obvious contribution to Bangladesh's UPE effort is adding to the capacity of the national primary education system by absorbing children left out of the formal Government system. By mid-1992, 8,000 BRAC schools had given 240,000 children a first or second chance at primary education. If its present expansion plans proceed as scheduled, by 1995 BRAC will have served 1.5 million children in 50,000 centers. By 1998, this number may grow to three million children in 100,000 centers all over the country. If fully implemented, this ambitious expansion plan will serve about 15 percent of the total number of children who should be, but are not in, primary schools.

The value of BRAC's program lies not only in the number but in the type of children served. BRAC's NFPE program targets the children whom formal primary schools find most difficult to reach and retain: the rural poor and, more specifically, poor girls. BRAC's 70 percent target for girls' enrollment helps to address the gender imbalance in primary education,

which is diminishing but still persists. The program has demonstrated how a modest per-child expenditure can be used cost effectively to provide basic education. As BRAC's NFPE program begins to serve a significant proportion of the primary school age cohort, its accomplishments will become better known and appreciated, the formal primary education system will be more inclined to recognize BRAC's contribution, and lessons from BRAC's experience will be more likely to influence the national primary education system.

Support Other NGOs

As noted earlier, many NGOs recognized the futility of efforts to eliminate adult illiteracy without addressing the unending stream of children and youth who do not receive basic education. CAMPE, the NGO forum on basic education, has compiled a preliminary list of 108 NGOs with children's education programs. In addition, almost every thana in Bangladesh has at least a few primary schools that have been established or are supported by a local non-governmental welfare and development organization or an ad hoc group of community members. Most of these schools are established with the goal that they will eventually be taken over, or at least subsidized, by the Government. These schools follow the same curriculum, textbooks, teaching practices, and school organization as those of Government schools. Barring some half dozen notable exceptions other than BRAC, the small-scale NGO efforts in primary education have not attempted significant innovations in teaching methods and content, school organization and management, teacher qualifications and preparation, or mobilization and use of resources.

Small, local NGOs do not have the technical and financial resources to develop new approaches and methods to overcome the obstacles to primary education for the targeted children. A systematic training and support program that provides the learning materials, textbooks, and training modules for teachers and supervisors as well as actual training and advice to small NGOs would greatly enhance their capacity to play a much larger role in primary education throughout Bangladesh. Over the last five years, BRAC has experimented with various ways to share its NFPE program model with other NGOs. The primary lesson from these experiments was that teacher training and the use of the BRAC curriculum are not enough to ensure a successful program. Without incorporating BRAC's management model, the quality of other NGOs' NFPE programs was very uneven.

In September 1991, BRAC created the Educational Support Project (ESP) to streamline the dissemination of its NFPE program model to other NGOs.

By July 1992, 26 partner NGOs had received in-kind materials, training, and supervision as well as small grants to set up five schools each. In 1992, ESP added another 20 partner NGOs, each with five schools. In 1993, ESP plans to add an additional seven schools to each of its partners. BRAC also assisted in organizing the CAMPE, a resource organization for nonformal adult and primary education.

Other NGOs receive BRAC training and materials on a pay-as-you-go basis. In part because of their association with BRAC's proven NFPE program model, two partner NGOs in the ESP program have already secured independent funding for their five schools and have graduated to a pay-as-you-go basis.

Improve Community Participation in Local Compulsory Primary Education Planning and Management

As was noted earlier, the Government's compulsory primary education (CPE) program was launched in 68 thanas in the beginning of 1992 in an effort to address the limited effectiveness of the formal primary education system. These limitations relate to the physical or quantitative constraints of the system such as classrooms, teachers, and learning materials as well as the system's qualitative constraints such as poor morale and motivation of teachers and supervisors, absence of effective involvement of community members and parents in school affairs, and the lack of a process of accountability for performance.

BRAC, other NGOs, and NGO-supported community members can help in overcoming the quantitative and qualitative deficiencies in local primary education by creating and participating in a mechanism for planning and managing local schools and nonformal programs, mobilizing resources at the local level, and making effective use of Government resources. NGOs can also be the intermediary for community participation in local planning and management by raising popular awareness of educational issues and helping citizens improve their skills in civic participation.

As mentioned in Chapter III, the Sadar thana's (Kushtia district) integrated basic education program is an example of an NGO's contribution to local educational planning and management. In Kushtia, BRAC and another local NGO, Jagoroni Chakra, have been active participants with the Government primary education authorities and the local civil administration in developing the integrated education program for the thana. The program brings all school-age children and youth into a variety of complementary Government and non-government primary education activities, facilitates their effective functioning, and mobilizes resources and support

for the total program. This cooperative effort, which originated at the local level rather than by national education authorities at the central level, needs nurturing and support by the educational administration hierarchy and replication in other parts of the country.

Coordinate Local Primary Education Planning and Management

Few would argue against decentralized local planning and management of primary education as a necessary condition for realizing the goal of primary education for all children. Many in Bangladesh, however, dispute the practicality and feasibility of instituting a true devolution of responsibility and authority to communities. The obstacles cited by the skeptics are the political environment that militates against community and popular authority, the opposition of the teacher's union, the culture and tradition of a centralized bureaucracy, the absence of a cohesive community structure, and the lack of necessary skills at the local level.

These constraints indeed are real and formidable. BRAC, however, with its proven record of working effectively with the disadvantaged groups in communities, works with Government agencies in developing ways to build community-based planning and management mechanisms for primary education and other related basic education components.

With Government agreement, BRAC could work in designated thanas, especially in those where BRAC already has a substantial presence through its rural development and education programs, to establish the local educational planning and management structure. BRAC could develop a comprehensive local plan for universal coverage encompassing Government schools, nonformal centers, and other institutions such as religious schools that offer primary instruction and then manage the resources available from the Government and those mobilized locally.

Precedents for these types of activities already exist. BRAC took this type of responsibility from 1980 to 1990 in helping achieve national goals in the health area by successfully planning and organizing a massive project to educate 13 million rural families about the effective homemade oral rehydration treatment for diarrhea, a major killer of young children (Lovell 1992, 60-61). In two other activities—the Child Survival Program and the Women's Health and Development Program—BRAC worked closely with the Government and the local community in achieving the national targets for universal child immunization and improving the health status of mothers and children (Lovell 1992, 62-65, 65-68).

Provide General Support to the Government Primary Education Program

A frequently-asked question is whether the major elements that make the BRAC NFPE program effective can be incorporated into the Government primary education system. Beginning in July 1988, BRAC provided assistance to 324 Government primary schools in nine thanas in three districts through the Facilitation and Assistance Program for Education (FAPE). The premise underlying this effort was that a number of BRAC personnel, working with the teachers, supervisors, and community members in the three districts, could help activate the community bodies such as the school managing committees and parent-teacher associations. This interaction would improve the management and supervision skills of the thana level supervisors and headmasters of Government schools and thus bring about positive changes in teacher behavior and classroom practices. During the three-year experiment, BRAC personnel conducted briefings and orientations for community members and local civil administration officials, organized teacher and supervisor training, helped prepare action plans with school managing committees and parent-teacher groups, and worked with teachers in improving classroom practices and making the schools more attractive to children.

Although a thorough assessment of the experiment has not been undertaken, a descriptive account prepared in early 1991 and conversations with researchers who have collected data for an evaluation of the project suggest that FAPE has not been a resounding success (Latif 1992; Latif and Huq 1992). BRAC's activities led to some increase in the number of times the school managing committees and PTAs met, some improvement in frequency of supervision of schools and teacher attendance, and some increase in enrollment and attendance by students.

Nevertheless, both the 1991 report and the preliminary analysis of the evaluation data cast doubt about the substantive impact of the indicated changes in terms of reaching the UPE goals and the sustainability of the changes after the withdrawal of the BRAC personnel. The system of accountability for performance, the pattern of incentives and motivation of personnel, and the emphasis on interaction with the community in BRAC are the features farthest from the dominant characteristics of the Government schools. Perhaps even more important, the FAPE program did not bring with it any additional funds or proven methods for raising funds locally. Without such funds, operationalization of even the most modest improvements developed by the school management committees proved impractical.

In the summer of 1992, several Government officials described BRAC schools to us primarily in terms of several elements: their satellite charac-

teristics; their part-time nonprofessional teachers; their emphasis on rural girls; and the relatively active parent/school relationship. Most were convinced that the BRAC schools were much more expensive than the Government schools. No officials mentioned any of the management components discussed in Chapter V as the cornerstone of BRAC's success: the large proportion of the budget allocated for management and supervision; strong field support, including provision of transport and fuel; a rolling design that incorporates feedback from the field as well as from regular external evaluations; etc. Until such management components are appreciated and steps are taken to restructure the Ministry of Education and its budget accordingly, the likelihood BRAC will be able to "facilitate" management reforms at the local level appears limited.

Contribute to Monitoring and Assessing Progress in Basic Education

It has been noted earlier that Bangladesh lacks the basic planning data necessary for planning and managing primary education. The numbers and proportions of children who complete the full cycle, the resources that are mobilized at various levels, the use of those resources, the qualitative information on children's learning, and even the total number of children eligible for primary education are all a matter of debate.

The Government's routine reporting system, under the auspices of the Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics (BANBEIS), appears to have built-in incentives to inflate statistics at all levels in order to show progress. The data are not analyzed and reported on time. In addition, the data are not presented in a form that is helpful for planning and management functions at different levels or for appraising policies and options. Moreover, irrespective of measures taken to improve the routine reporting system, it is still useful to have independent data collection mechanisms that provide a validity check on the routine system and complement the routine data with additional information that helps address major issues in primary education.

Taking the cue from the health sector, BRAC and other NGOs can establish sentinel sites in different parts of the country in order to collect and analyze essential quantitative information and undertake to collect and report on qualitative and longitudinal data necessary for probing qualitative issues. A reliable source of relevant information can provide the ingredients of an "education watch" function for assessing and reporting on the nation's progress in basic education. Periodically presented, independent education watch reports that address critical issues could have a significant impact on policy dialogue and social mobilization.

The activities of the RED of BRAC indicate what systematic, well-designed, and professionally conducted monitoring and analysis can contribute to policy development and programming. RED research efforts result in benchmark monitoring, diagnostic, impact, and policy-related studies. An ambitious long-term village study project started in 1989 is designed to identify the process of change in villages and to operate a laboratory area for testing new project inputs. In 1992 RED completed an exploratory study of basic education learning achievement of 11- to 12-year-olds by adopting the cluster sampling technique used in the health sector. The methodology needs further development and trial, but it shows promise as a simple, affordable, and quick assessment of learning achievement that can provide valuable information for considering policy and management options. Such information is not available at present through existing educational data collection and reporting systems. RED also has provided research on infant feeding practices to policymakers as well as to BRAC staff at the operational level (Lovell 1992, 146-48).

Develop a Post-Primary Nonformal Program

At present, only half of the children completing primary education (which is only 15 percent of the relevant age group) enter the junior secondary level. The number of schools with junior secondary grades six to eight in Bangladesh is less than one-quarter of the number of primary schools. The junior secondary schools, therefore, are not easily accessible to most children. This distance constraint affects all those in rural areas who complete primary school but is particularly detrimental to rural girls. Successful expansion of primary education leading to a significantly higher proportion of children completing primary education will increase proportionately the demand for secondary education. The probable growth of the secondary system in the foreseeable future will fall far short of the rise in demand.

The problem of a post-primary learning gap for the large number of young people not entering the secondary school after primary education needs to be addressed. An answer may lie, given a scarcity of resources and the deficiencies of the national education establishment, in flexible, locally adapted, nonformal programs that can help young people in their transition from the relatively sheltered world of primary education to the world of work and life. It is no longer a matter of debate any more that primary schools by themselves cannot be expected to prepare young people for occupations and employment and also fulfill the central role of equipping them with basic literacy, numeracy, and life skills.

Moreover, in order not to close the door of education permanently to anyone, nonformal courses at the post-primary level, consisting of func-

tional learning based on real life experience, could be counted as "credits" for an existing formal or new nonformal secondary education program. In the absence of any post-primary transitional program of learning, BRAC, with its combined experience in managing marketing and entrepreneurial activities and in implementing nonformal primary education, could indeed be a pace-setter in developing a viable model for nonformal post-primary education.

Conclusions

BRAC's NFPE program offers basic education opportunities to children and youth who are typically left out of the educational system. The need for such low-cost, rapidly expandable—and contractable—programs will be acute during the next decade or two while the gap between the capacity of the formal system and the size of the primary school-age population remains very large. BRAC's current expansion plan—to 50,000 schools by 1995 and to 100,000 by 1998—will only bridge a fraction of this gap; the other NGO and Government programs incorporating the BRAC or other models will have to expand dramatically as well. The potential for BRAC's NFPE program model to play a significant role in filling this gap will depend to a large extent on its ability to expand faster, on a larger scale than it has to date.

The analyses in this report indicate that BRAC's NFPE program model is a sound one and that BRAC as an organization appears both ready and able to expand to 50,000 schools by 1995. Its current proposal for such an expansion needs to be refined, however, to ensure that the new areas where it plans to work are within the geographic scope of its support services and are indeed underserved by other primary education programs, both formal and nonformal. Alternatively, BRAC may develop a partnership with the Government and other NGOs to ensure comprehensive coverage of all primary school-age children within selected thanas designated for compulsory primary education. The dialogue necessary to create such partnerships, however, given the current state of Government/non-government relations in Bangladesh, will likely require months, if not years. The initial BRAC plans for expansion to 50,000 schools should not be held back while this necessary, but time-consuming, dialogue proceeds. Given BRAC's commitment to work in rural areas and the relative scarcity of formal schools outside towns and urban areas, the potential for overlap with Government programs is not so overwhelming as to make prior planning for the first 50,000 schools essential.

Expanding the NFPE Program in Bangladesh: Implementation Issues

Of the potential roles for BRAC in supporting UPE in Bangladesh, expanding the program to reach more children appears to be the highest priority. An expansion plan has already been developed.

This expansion plan is divided into two phases. Phase I involves increasing the number of centers from the present 8,000 to 15,000 by the end of 1993 in areas where BRAC already works and adding another 35,000 centers between 1993 and 1995 in areas where BRAC has not worked before. The funding of centers in areas where BRAC already works is being considered by an existing consortium of donors now funding BRAC's larger rural development project. A new consortium is coming together to fund the additional centers to be opened by 1995. Phase II, which is still very tentative, involves expanding to 100,000 centers if Phase I is successfully completed.

Expanding the BRAC education program in Bangladesh from 8,000 to 50,000 centers is a quantum leap that has implications beyond just the increase in number. A sizeable proportion of the children and youth in Bangladesh receiving their primary education in BRAC schools will affect how BRAC is perceived by the Government and society at large and, indeed, how BRAC perceives itself. All of the issues regarding program policy and implementation that are nascent at present may be magnified by the growth of the BRAC program.

Issues

How Big Can the NFPE Program Become?

Given the primary education gap in Bangladesh described earlier in this paper and BRAC's demonstrated ability to target and reach those children left out of the formal primary education system, the need for an NFPE program expansion is not in dispute. There are, however, three major issues associated with the rapid expansion of any program and NFPE in particular:

- the availability of the necessary human resources to staff the expansion;
- the capacity of the organization to accommodate the expansion without sacrificing the integrity and quality of the program; and
- the possibility of mobilizing resources for expansion.

BRAC's success in rapid expansion will depend largely on its ability to address these issues.

Availability of the Necessary Human Resources

Like BRAC's other programs, the quality and consistency of the NFPE program depends on diligent, motivated, well-trained, and well-supervised POs. In the short-term, NFPE program's expansion rate, to a great extent, will depend upon BRAC's ability to recruit, train, and retain enough good POs.

BRAC should be able to staff an expanded program. Although BRAC is currently undergoing a major expansion in another of its programs, the Rural Development Program (RDP), as of 1992 there appeared to be an adequate pool of candidates in Bangladesh to recruit for both of these programs. The large number of unemployed college graduates and young people with secondary level education in Bangladesh will contribute to provide sufficient numbers of qualified candidates for the new administrative and teacher positions implicit in the two expansion plans.

BRAC also should be able to provide the initial training to any new staff. An RDP III appraisal in the first half of 1992, anticipating a training bottleneck, drew attention to the need for a consolidated training needs assessment for all BRAC's programs in order to project the total demand on BRAC's training facilities over the next five years. In response to this report, in mid-1992 BRAC developed a consolidated training plan that included the initiation of NFPE program-specific training facilities to accommodate planned expansion of both teachers and POs.

On-the-job training, however, which is an important part of PO development, may prove to be more challenging. As the numbers of new POs continue to grow and the NFPE program moves into field offices independent of BRAC's other more-established development activities, new POs will have less contact with the larger BRAC operation, both in terms of their interaction with POs from other BRAC programs and in terms of exposure to more senior BRAC staff through monitoring visits and field trips. BRAC may want to consider the advantages of rotating new POs through NFPE programs in RDP areas prior to assigning them to the more sparsely-staffed non-RDP areas.

In order to meet the NFPE program's medium-term goals, it is particularly important that POs develop a broader perspective of development activities. NFPE will need enough good POs to fill a rapidly increasing number of Field Officer (FO) and trainer positions and to subsequently provide FOs with enough intensive on-the-job supervision and training to enable BRAC to maintain quality control at the field level. Adequate contact with accomplished senior staff who can model and supervise a more participation-oriented approach to development, training, and management is the only insurance BRAC has that its programs will remain adaptive to grassroots realities, that the innovative approaches introduced in short-

term training don't get lost enroute to the field, and the rapid pressure for expansion does not result in "management by shouting."

Capacity to Maintain Quality During Expansion

Can BRAC maintain its reputation for efficiency, results, and its standards of accountability under the strain of such a rapid increase in personnel and geographic scope?

Already, the overall impression of a visit to NFPE program's offices is a combination of excitement and fatigue. Staff appear uniformly convinced of the pressing need for and the efficacy of the NFPE program, yet the demands are taxing. BRAC's commitment to keeping its head office small means a relatively small number of senior NFPE program staff in Dhaka must deal with an ever-increasing flow of visitors and juggle frequent requests from donors and Government agencies in the city to participate in "coordinating" meetings that contribute little to ongoing NFPE program implementation. While BRAC's recently expanded public relations office can handle some of these inquiries and requests, many visitors are quite senior and expect to meet directly with senior staff.

Long-term and short-term programs of study and travel provide welcome respite to the selected staff members and bring fresh ideas into the program, but the small NFPE program head office staff suffers keenly from their absence. In 1993, during NFPE program's major expansion drive, the head of BRAC's RED, the new education specialist, and the NFPE program's chief materials developer will be in long-term training for at least half the year. In addition, the NFPE Program Coordinator has an ongoing contract with UNICEF to provide expert consulting to nonformal NGO primary education programs in Africa, which takes her away from Bangladesh for several weeks at a time.

The flood of new POs and teachers pouring into the NFPE program have placed strains on BRAC's formal training system. While BRAC has adequate plans to address the NFPE program's medium-term training needs, a recent BRAC-wide management and training review (Young and Hossain 1992) calculated a training overload in 1991 of 8,350 participant days and suggested that a significant overload might also result in 1992. This overload, stretched over a two- to three-year period, translates into trainer fatigue and reduced time for training follow-up.

The NFPE program expansion will also result in a rapid increase in the number of NFPE program field offices, which will increase the number of opportunities for field staff to be promoted to middle management positions and, therefore, in and of itself will create a certain amount of energy and enthusiasm. More field offices, however, require more field visits from

an essentially static number of senior head office staff in order to maintain a modicum of contact between central office staff and field staff. Such contact is worth maintaining for several reasons. First, contact with the field provides reality checks as head office staff grope for ways to improve the program and measure changes in quality. Second, until qualitative measures of program performance can be articulated, regular contact is critical to staff morale and may help head office staff gauge the feasibility of existing quantitative targets during a period when field staff may, lacking any other measure of their performance, be reluctant to admit their inability to meet the targets. Third, given the occasional weaknesses of the current formal information and feedback channels described in Chapter V, this contact may provide the most dependable channel for exchange of general information between the field and the head office. Fourth, several staff are expecting decreases in BRAC's hallmark indicators—attendance and completion rates—as the program expands and quality control becomes more difficult. Regular open discussions at the field level concerning the situation contributing to any such declines are needed to influence head office decisions about how much slippage is acceptable and at what point expansion plans need to be adjusted. While central office contact with the field staff is important, however, devoting significant amounts of time to this aspect leaves little time for other program-related activities.

Nevertheless, BRAC has been in a rapid growth mode since its inception, even though its supporters and donors have continuously sounded a note of caution about its ability to manage this pace of growth. "In spite of the cautions," as Lovell put it, "BRAC has continued to scale up and continues to have the capacity to manage; and according to the most recent evaluations, it has the capacity to manage effectively." (Lovell 1992, 133-34).

This obviously does not mean that there can be an unlimited growth in size, complexity, and diversity of programs without ever reaching a breaking point in management capacity and quality. The proposed expansion of the education program, however, does not add to the complexity and diversity of the program. A well-tested structure of management and supervision for the education program has been developed over the past several years. This system also has grown in a modular fashion with self-contained supervisory and training structures for clusters of schools, field offices, and area offices added to the existing system. It appears that this pattern of modular growth can accommodate the anticipated expansion of the education program without a major strain on the management system.

Ability to Mobilize Resources

In order to ensure a smooth and efficient expansion process, BRAC needs the staff and the time – and the funds needed to provide them—to carry out

two types of activities well in advance of reaching the first intended beneficiaries. First, BRAC needs to secure new donors and receive new funds for major new NGO activities in Bangladesh, tasks that often require two or more years of dialogue with donors and the Government, proposal development, and the development and dissemination of relevant background studies. Second, BRAC needs to print additional project materials (in the case of the NFPE program, textbooks, teacher manuals, and PO manuals), hire and train additional staff, secure field office and residential space, and construct or rent project sites. BRAC needs at least six months' lead time to hire new POs, set up new field offices, survey new areas, hold at least three parents' meetings, procure school materials, and hire and train teachers.

Whether or not funding arrives in a timely way, targets linked to schedules tend to take on a life of their own. BRAC management and donors need to ask themselves if BRAC would be better served by linking targets to the receipt of funding rather than to calendar years. Fortunately, so far BRAC has managed to attract sufficient international support, and funding for the 1993-95 expansion plan appears to have been fully secured or pledged.

How Can BRAC Balance Quantitative and Qualitative Goals?

Every staff member in the NFPE program knows that BRAC's target is to open 50,000 schools by the end of 1995. There are, however, many answers when the staff try to explain the goal of opening these schools. Everyone agrees that the schools are designed to reach children left out of the formal primary system, but it is not clear whether these schools are to provide a self-sufficient, well-rounded, basic education appropriate in the rural context, replace the need for adult literacy programs for this generation, or provide a primary education at least equivalent to that provided in the formal system. These purposes, like the seven items listed in the June 1992 version of the 1993-95 NFPE program goal statement, are not necessarily mutually exclusive. Management literature suggests, however, that although multiple goals are useful for holding together multiple stakeholders with diverse interests, it is harder to hold together large, highly decentralized organizations when goals are broad, ambiguous, or contradictory. In other words, while BRAC's expansion program can readily address a large number of broad goals, field staff and managers need a few, clearly articulated goals that can provide guidance and help set priorities when all the broad goals, inevitably, cannot be met at once.

Articulating qualitative as well as quantitative goals is particularly critical during a period of rapid, ambitious expansion. During such periods, there is a tendency for concrete quantitative goals to take precedence over more difficult-to-measure qualitative goals. The NFPE program's vulnerability

to such pressures was recently illustrated when several field offices, unable to meet supervisory schedules, falsified routine reports rather than report a legitimate inability to meet those schedules (two out of four POs were in training, and no replacement POs were provided during the training period). This false reporting, and the unrealistic targets underlying it, were relatively rapidly uncovered and addressed. The incident, however, points to the NFPE program's need for a succinct, easily understood goal statement, to which staff can moderate their approach to meeting targets and adopting innovations.

Should NFPE Provide Basic Education or Serve as a Feeder School?

One of the goal-related issues is whether the NFPE program should provide self-contained basic education. BRAC's NFPE program was started to provide a self-contained basic education to children who have been left out of primary school. The premise was that three years of education would permit the older children and adolescents to acquire a functional level of literacy, numeracy, and basic knowledge that would enable them to continue learning on their own and become productive members of society. As mentioned in Chapter VI, however, because a high percentage of BRAC's graduates were continuing to Class IV in the formal system, BRAC adjusted its NFPE school goals to encompass preparation for formal schools as well. The results of the "Basic Education Assessment" discussed in greater detail in Chapter VI show that only 53 percent of a sample of NFPE program graduates successfully pass the assessment. While the results show BRAC students scoring higher on average than rural children in general and even higher than a sub-sample of Government students, they clearly demonstrate that basic education is not generally achieved in three years of primary schooling in Bangladesh, whether in Government formal schools or nonformal schools.

BRAC has developed plans to address those who enroll in formal school and those who do not participate in educational programs after their involvement in the NFPE program. To provide primary education for the older (11- to 16-year-old) children, BRAC will add a third year to the two-year course. The assumption is that the more mature children in this program can handle the equivalent of a five-year primary education in three years with appropriate modifications to the curriculum and to teaching practices. This assumption remains to be tested in practice. Having the three-year program accepted as a full equivalent of primary education in terms of eligibility for secondary education for those who want to go on to the secondary level will also be a struggle. The justification for making the older children's program equivalent to the full cycle of primary education is that when these children, especially girls, complete two years of the program, they are already at least 13 years old and would feel uncomfort-

able in the fourth or fifth grades of primary school with eight- to ten-year-old children. For the older students, who do not usually persist beyond Class IV, BRAC is considering community libraries and newsletters to help them maintain their literacy and numeracy skills.

Since over 90 percent of the program graduates enroll in Class IV or V of the primary school, BRAC plans to continue the NFPE program for the eight- to ten-year-old groups with the current three-year duration, using it as a feeder program. Feeding into the formal school presents its own set of obstacles, however. The weaknesses of primary schools, with their poor learning environments, weak management and supervision, low teacher morale, and the gap in physical capacity for absorbing additional children, have been described earlier. There are also the social and psychological obstacles that BRAC children, coming from the low end of the social strata and just having been in a supportive learning environment with sympathetic teachers, face when they join the primary school in fourth or fifth grade with children who are a select group, having survived a very high rate of dropout in primary schools. Not surprisingly, the dropout rate for the first cohort of BRAC students transferring to primary school was high (42 percent). In the subsequent two years for which data are available, the dropout rate declined somewhat, due to specific efforts in NFPE program schools to better prepare children for primary school.

To the extent that BRAC's NFPE program becomes a significant feeder to the higher grades of the primary school, all of the various ways BRAC can work with and strengthen the national primary school system discussed in the previous section need to be pursued vigorously. The implication for BRAC is that there has to be a serious and systematic effort to interact with the primary education system at both the national level and the local areas where BRAC is active. This effort needs to be reflected in BRAC's policies and program priorities even though the Government education hierarchy may not always be enthusiastic about interaction and collaboration with NGOs. Another implication for donor support for BRAC is that a proportion of the funds should be designated to support BRAC's collaboration with the national system.

Whom Should the NFPE Program Serve?

A targeted approach to rural development helps to ensure that development programs to benefit the relatively poor do not disproportionately benefit the relatively rich. In a UPE campaign, however, the target group is not just the relatively more disadvantaged poor but all children of a certain age. Given the relatively uneven distribution of permanent structures to house the formal primary schools, as the Government designs its UPE strategy,

NGOs with NFPE programs might be asked to move into geographically underserved areas. In such areas, an invidious separation between an NFPE program school for the relatively more disadvantaged and a Government school for the relatively better off children is likely to create political problems and social tension. Consequently, NGOs that agree to work in such areas should be prepared to plan their efforts within the framework of a plan to provide comprehensive geographic coverage for all income groups.

To date, NFPE program has been framed entirely in terms of capturing the children "left out" of formal primary schools due to their relatively low socio-economic status. It is not clear what, if any, changes would need to take place in the NFPE program should BRAC attempt to switch to a comprehensive approach. In the communities where BRAC is already working, one NFPE program school is usually not adequate to cover all left-out children in one three-year cycle. To cover both the left-out and the better-off children in one community, would BRAC start several schools simultaneously in one community? Or would it start one school in many communities and seek to cover the entire range of primary-school age children in those communities over the course of several three-year cycles?

A decision to provide comprehensive coverage raises issues about student composition and patterns of coverage as well as issues relating to parent committee composition and patterns of community participation. Because BRAC does not, at this time, provide comprehensive coverage, it is able to pick and choose among potential students. One of the criteria BRAC uses to choose students is the commitment and expected participation level of parents. This is because, as described in Chapter IV, parent commitment is one of the most important variables in regular attendance, which in turn, is a good predictor of completion and achievement. NFPE program student absences are rigorously followed up with the parents; if the absences occur frequently during the first three months of the first year of the NFPE program cycle and follow up does not result in more regular attendance, the child may be removed from school and replaced by another on the waiting list. This replacement procedure is one contributing factor to BRAC's high attendance and completion rates.

Should BRAC adopt a comprehensive approach to enrollment, it might have to accept the less along with the more motivated parents. Less motivated parents translate into less regular student attendance, which, in turn, calls for more staff time devoted to follow-up with parents who may be less receptive to BRAC staff's moral suasion. A move toward a more comprehensive approach, therefore, has both cost and effectiveness implications: staff costs are likely to increase, and attendance and completion rates are likely to decrease. (The overall issue of current cost effectiveness

and the implications of the proposed expansion plan and more comprehensive plans were discussed more fully in Chapter VI.)

Who Should Fund NFPE?

Implementation of BRAC's NFPE program expansion and other primary education activities will depend on the availability of external financing. Two questions are often asked about external financing. First, should a basic education program, especially one run by an NGO, depend almost entirely on external funding, since basic education is a fundamental responsibility of the Government? Second, what would happen to the program if external financing dried up?

On the question of dependence on external assistance, the reality is that over 80 percent of total development expenditure in *all sectors* in Bangladesh at present is financed by external assistance. There is no justification for subjecting only primary education to the principle of self-reliance. Moreover, the BRAC program, even at the peak of its anticipated expansion, will serve no more than 15 percent of the children of primary school age. At the same time, it has the potential to influence significantly, though not determine, the national primary education policies and strategies. All these are arguments for international assistance for the program.

The second question can be put another way: How long will external support on a substantial scale be available for the nonformal primary education program? It is difficult to answer this question definitively, it should be noted that external donors seriously interested in assisting basic education in Bangladesh should not anticipate terminating their assistance at the end of a three-year commitment. External assistance for the Government's formal education efforts has grown in recent years and in all probability will grow further in the future. The question for donors, then, is whether a part of this assistance would not be better utilized through NGO-managed basic education activities. By the same token, if a new partnership of Government, NGOs, and community becomes a key element in the strategy for UPE, a part of the regular Government budget for primary education could support nonformal programs of NGOs. Policy dialogue with the Government on the part of external donors in negotiating assistance programs for education could encourage a move in this direction.

What Should Be BRAC's Relationship with the Formal Primary Education System?

BRAC considers its schools a stop-gap measure until the Government is prepared to implement its own mandate to provide UPE. The components of BRAC schools that are worth integrating into a permanent school

system remain to be determined by education experts and policymakers inside Bangladesh. That evaluation and decision process, as well as the re-orientation of the educational bureaucracy and the creation of a local funding base for more ambitious CPE and UPE initiatives, is a medium- rather than short-term activity. In the meantime, there is likely to be continued tension between a dynamic, nonformal but temporary school system and a moribund formal school system which, nonetheless, will provide the base for a new primary education system in Bangladesh.

For example, already there exists considerable overlap in Government primary and BRAC NFPE program schools' catchment areas. BRAC claims it only recruits children who drop out of or never enroll in Government schools. It targets eight- to ten-year-olds who have already had several opportunities to enroll in Government schools and 11- to 16-year-olds who have already dropped out and are too old to return. BRAC schools open three months after Government schools, and in recent years Field Officers have presented their list of potential BRAC students to the thana education officer before the NFPE program begins to ensure that no current Government students are enrolled in BRAC schools. In addition, because BRAC schools meet in temporary structures without benches or desks and are taught by village women, there is a sense, at least during the first three-year cycle, among the better-off villagers that BRAC schools are somehow second-rate. This, in itself, helps to minimize the number of non-target children.

Nevertheless, the Khan and Arefeen (1992) study reported that Government teachers occasionally charge that BRAC is luring students away from the formal schools. Since the target group for the Government schools is all children of primary age, it is in fact true that BRAC's target group is a subset of the Government's target group.

Further, anecdotal evidence suggests some parents worry that access to other BRAC programs—health, credit, disaster relief—may be at risk if their children do not attend BRAC schools. Such misunderstandings are more likely to arise when inexperienced and/or overly enthusiastic POs, anxious to meet their targets, meet cautious villagers. Particularly in areas where BRAC is running a second or third three-year cycle, non-target children—boys or children from middle- or upper-income households—may be enrolled in BRAC schools to ensure 30 students per school. These indeed may be children who otherwise might have attended formal schools.

At this time, the Government has no system for identifying those children most likely to be left out of formal schools nor has it concluded that nonformal non-government primary educational programs are the best way to reach these children. A smooth working relationship with formal

schools and local Government education officials could help in identifying students for both programs.

The importance of local level leadership in helping to overcome this tension was highlighted during a visit to the Kushtia project, described as one example of "participation in local compulsory primary education planning and management" given in Chapter VII. A fine political balance has to be struck between the need to develop coherent, decentralized plans that integrate both Government and non-government contributions and the imperative to meet the educational needs of the 40+ percent of the children who are left out of the current system. Keeping the momentum for change high and pushing forward with immediate programs to meet the needs of the neglected children require the finesse of accomplished local leaders. The process of identifying and recruiting such leaders is not an explicit part of any of BRAC's current programs, although it easily might be.

In addition, local formal school committees will not become empowered until such time as they have at least a modest amount of funds at their disposal. This points to the need for generating sources of funds for local schools that do not depend on disbursements from central authorities. Gustavsson (1990) provides a menu of potential sources of local school financing. More work deserves to be done in this area. It should be noted that the funding area is not one in which BRAC at this time has a great deal to contribute. At present, BRAC and its donors pay the full cost of establishing all BRAC NFPE program schools.

Summary and Conclusions

BRAC's plan to add 35,000 new NFPE centers by 1995 and operate 100,000 centers by the year 1998 is an ambitious one and challenges even this established, well-managed organization. Nevertheless, BRAC appears to have access to the human manpower and the ability to mobilize resources quickly while maintaining quality. Questions about quantitative and qualitative goals, the target audience, funding sources, and BRAC's relationship with the formal primary school system will need to be addressed as the NFPE program expands.

As stated in Chapter VII, given the current state of Government/NGO relations in Bangladesh, the dialogue necessary to create many of the potential partnerships described in Chapter VII will require months, if not years. During this time, thousands of children will go unserved. Well-documented reports of NFPE program's expansion and further research on the achievements of NFPE program graduates could help to move the dialogue more quickly. BRAC has demonstrated the expertise, capacity, and needed commitment to establish schools and provide instruction. It

therefore seems likely that BRAC's 1993-95 NFPE program expansion could proceed as planned. As noted earlier, given BRAC's commitment to work in rural areas and the relative scarcity of formal schools outside towns and urban areas, the potential for overlap is not so overwhelming as to make prior planning essential.

The government/non-government dialogue is likely to provide direction for the second stage of BRAC's NFPE program expansion, which involves increasing the number of schools from 50,000 to 100,000 schools in 1996-1998. By 1996, BRAC will have helped more than 100 other NGOs implement its NFPE program model, and these NGOs, hopefully, will have secured independent funding to continue their own expansion after their pilot grants from BRAC are finished. While these NGOs will add substantially to the capacity of the nonformal system, the effort required to coordinate the growing number of actors in this system, to maximize coverage of the left-out children, and to minimize overlap of formal and nonformal systems, will be substantial. The Government/non-government dialogue that should take place over the next three or four years is likely to be the best forum for developing an appropriate coordinating mechanism for these two systems.

The ambitious expansion plan does raise questions about the feasibility of BRAC to implement many of the potential, additional roles described in Chapter VII during the proposed 1993-95 expansion period. The development and coordination of each of these roles will require substantial amounts of senior staff time that will be needed simultaneously in the expansion effort. Prior to committing itself to explore any of these roles, BRAC will, of course, project the senior staff requirements of the NFPE program expansion program, taking into account the additional field visits recommended above and the additional workload implied by planned, long-term training for senior staff. Such projections would have to include non-NFPE senior BRAC staff, such as the Executive Director, those in RED, and those in other key support offices. Based on these projections and the priorities it establishes with the Bangladeshi Government and international donors, BRAC can then decide to which, if any, of these roles it is prepared to commit its limited senior staff time.

Implications for Bangladesh and Other Countries

This section addresses the third question in this case study:

What elements of the BRAC program might prove useful to other countries embarking on new, large-scale EFA initiatives?

The section consists of Chapter IX, which includes summaries of the NFPE program's primary school model, its administrative and financial management approach, and its potential roles in Bangladesh. Implications for educational planners and policymakers considering EFA initiatives are included after each summary.

While the chapter provides implications, it stops short of offering definite conclusions or lessons learned. It is difficult to be conclusive from a single case study; to determine the cause of "effectiveness," one must compare one or more effective schools with one or more less effective schools. Rather, it is hoped that this study will be the first in a series examining several programs that have the potential to move EFA implementation forward in some of the most challenging areas of the world. When several case studies are completed, it may then be possible to derive alternately appropriate concrete lessons.

Program Summary and Implications

The NFPE program's rapid expansion together with BRAC's proven reputation in implementing other development initiatives suggest that the first phase of BRAC's proposed expansion plan—increasing from 8,000 to 50,000 schools—has a good chance of being successful in providing basic education to underserved families throughout the country. Findings on the NFPE program's implementation in Bangladesh also imply that some, if not all, of the program could be beneficial to other countries in the developing world.

Implications drawn from the implementation of BRAC's NFPE program relate to three major areas: BRAC's approach to nonformal primary education; BRAC's approach to administrative and financial management; and BRAC's potential roles in Bangladesh.

BRAC's Approach to Nonformal Primary Education

BRAC's Primary School Model

As detailed in Chapter IV, BRAC provides primary level instruction for disadvantaged children, 60-70 percent of whom are girls, who are from some of the most disadvantaged families in Bangladesh. Instruction is provided through two types of schools: three-year schools for eight-to ten-year-olds who have never attended formal primary school; and two-year schools for 11-to 16-year-olds who have dropped out of primary school and are unlikely ever to re-enroll. The program is characterized by the following:

- free education, with no hidden costs for tutoring, books, materials, or supplies;
- small, minimally equipped community-based schools, located within a radius of two kilometers from the child's home, in buildings rented in the community;
- modestly paid, paraprofessional teachers hired for two to three hours a day from the local community who are trained and supervised throughout the program cycle;
- a simplified curriculum that mirrors the formal school curriculum;
- a shorter instructional day and a longer school year that results in more *engaged* instructional time than is provided in the formal school system;
- a classroom environment with a 30:1 student/teacher ratio, and teacher-centered as well as child-centered approaches to instruction; and
- parents who contribute little financially but participate in planning the program and ensuring student participation.

More than 90 percent of the children who start BRAC schools graduate, and the proportion of NFPE program graduates who complete Class III and enter Class IV is much larger than the proportion of students in the formal, public system who reach Class IV. BRAC students perform as well as Government students on exams given at the end of Class IV, and many continue to Class V. On a national exam to test mastery of basic education, more than 50 percent of the BRAC graduates passed the exam, compared with 20 percent of the Government students.

Implications from BRAC's Primary School Model

- **Part-time paraprofessionals can make good teachers for the lower grades of primary school, providing they are adequately trained, supplied with a very structured curriculum, and, most importantly, adequately supervised.** BRAC's model for teachers is not that of part-time paraprofessionals, but rather part-time paraprofessionals *plus* continuous training *plus* intense supervision. "Low-cost" paraprofessional teachers need more "higher-cost" supervision and guidance than do "high-cost" professionals. Paraprofessional teachers also need detailed teacher versions of the textbooks to guide them through the lessons.
- **Primary school participation can be improved, even with traditionally hard-to-reach populations.** The BRAC case supports other studies that suggest that primary school enrollment is strongly affected by cost and safety, persistence is strongly affected by school quality and parental as well as teacher follow-up, and timely completion is strongly affected by continuous assessment and follow-up.
- **A basic, no-frills program that is fully implemented is better than a more progressive one that is not.** BRAC school students are scoring as well on several standardized achievement tests as Government students who have been exposed to a more elaborate curriculum.
- **The features needed to increase girls' access to and persistence in primary school need not make schools more expensive.** Features of the BRAC model that were adopted for their low-cost properties—small schools with small catchment areas and female paraprofessional teachers hired from within those catchment areas—are also attractive to girls. It is usually easier, however, to plan these features into a new school system than to introduce them into an existing one.
- **NFPE schools do not appear to be handicapped by a lack of permanent school buildings.** Renting school rooms on a part-time basis enables BRAC schools to start up quickly. When one three-year cycle is finished, the second cycle can either be held in the same location

or moved to one closer to the new students. Rental costs appear lower than Government investments in permanent school buildings and maintenance costs.

- **Securing significant participation by illiterate parents requires not just appropriate participation structures but also ongoing individual follow-up.** In addition to convening monthly parent meetings, BRAC field staff follow up absentee students with home visits, and the staff are encouraged to develop contacts and rapport with individual parents and parents' groups. This individual contact is a significant contributing factor to high attendance rates at school and parent meetings.
- **Nonformal programs for older girls must balance preparation for participation in the Government system and participation in the work force.** Given the high levels of private costs expected, if not required, to remain in Government schools, BRAC is not convinced that the majority of its students will be able to complete Class IV and V in the Government system. Already it has discovered that most of its KK graduates, who are far beyond primary school age, will not persist in Class IV in the Government system. BRAC is therefore discussing ways to make the curriculum even more relevant for girls who are not likely to finish primary school and who will need to make their own employment opportunities as access to land in rural areas continues to drive a larger proportion of the rural population out of agriculture.

BRAC's Approach to Administrative and Financial Management

The Development Management Approach

BRAC has earned global recognition for its health programs and operates the largest non-governmental rural development program in Bangladesh. Hence, while BRAC appears to be a relative newcomer to primary education, it has brought to the education sector over 20 years of experience in designing and delivering grassroots social service programs. The NFPE program can be effectively targeted to the children most likely to be left out of the formal system because NFPE program staff have at their disposal time-tested household survey techniques developed by other BRAC programs. NFPE program field staff are able to mobilize parents using participatory methodologies developed by the rural development program. Having learned by trial and error not to burden each of its sectoral programs with the goals of all the others, the NFPE program keeps its structure simple, operating with the support of but without time-consuming coordination with all other BRAC sectoral programs. Finally, BRAC has already "gone national" with its health programs and has learned many

lessons that will facilitate implementation of the proposed NFPE expansion plan summarized previously in Table IV.1.

BRAC's relatively flat organizational structure, with decentralized middle management for each of its sectoral programs and support services at the regional and national levels, also contributes to the NFPE program's success. Within this framework, the NFPE program has adopted a highly field-oriented, personnel-intensive, training-intensive management structure similar to BRAC's larger Rural Development Program. Program implementation is supported by field-based Program Officers through weekly visits to local schools, regular interactions with teachers, and meetings with parents. Information collected during these activities, together with regular internal and external evaluations, internal and external audits, and periodic research projects, is used to monitor progress and ensure that the organization continues learning from its experience.

BRAC's executive and central administrative staff provide accounting, research and evaluation, logistics, purchasing, printing, public relations, and other needed support services. The NFPE program also benefits from a Donor Liaison Office set up to simplify BRAC's interactions with its many donors and to develop a single reporting protocol that is acceptable to all. BRAC's Office of the Executive Director raises funds, which it does to a large extent based on BRAC's reputation in other sectors. Finally, the NFPE program is able to experiment with new approaches and expand on its own schedule because BRAC's independent funds provide it with a cushion from the delays often associated with foreign donor funding.

NFPE Cost Effectiveness

As indicated in data from cost studies of the Government primary education system and BRAC's NFPE program system, total public costs from the classroom up to the sub-district level per enrolled student for BRAC and the Government are almost equal: about US$14 per year. The NFPE program's relatively low expenditure on salaries and high expenditures on management and supervision (29 percent on teacher salaries and 27 percent on management and supervision for NFPE versus over 85 percent for teacher salaries and less than 0.5 percent for direct management and supervision by the Government) results in higher completion and achievement rates for NFPE program students. These outcomes occur without BRAC parents having to pay the private costs generally associated with Government schools.

For BRAC, which graduates 28 of every 30 children who originally enroll, costs are about the same per graduate and per enrollee. The Government system, however, suffers from high dropout and repetition rates; as a result,

less than half of the children who enter Class I graduate from Class III. When considering the high private costs and low graduation rates, the cost per Government Class III graduate is substantially higher than BRAC's per graduate costs.

BRAC's development management approach raises many issues because its potential is great and the situations in which it might be applied are so varied. These issues include the tendency for the NFPE program to be a program for women but run by men, the tension between developing quality field staff with a clear vision of BRAC's operating style and the need to send new staff to the field quickly, the tendency for clear quantitative goals to override difficult-to-articulate qualitative ones, the chronic pressure created by the donor funding process to repeatedly produce dramatic results, and, finally, the tradeoff between excitement and fatigue, both for the head office staff, who are not expected to expand commensurate with the rest of the program, and for the field staff, who bear the pressure for meeting program targets.

No one can say with certainty that BRAC can handle its ambitious expansion exactly as planned. In fact, BRAC has never implemented any of its programs exactly as planned, and the programs appear to have benefitted as a result. A somewhat rolling design process has been the pattern for all BRAC programs, and the NFPE program appears to be holding true to form. The only true test of the expansion capacity of the BRAC NFPE program model is to try it on a large scale.

Implications of BRAC's Development Management Model

- **Managerial expertise may be more important than technical expertise in ensuring the rapid expansion of a basic education program of adequate quality.** The NFPE program's success to date is related less to the rigor of BRAC's original technical design and more to its willingness to "learn as it goes" plus its determination to fully implement its no-frills approach.
- **A key element of managerial expertise is the ability to recognize services necessary to support any particular program and to plan and budget for those services.** BRAC's previous experience in setting up field offices, ensuring timely delivery of project materials to remote sites, developing staff training materials, and providing other support services played a critical role in developing and expanding the NFPE program.
- **In addition to a pool of experienced, well-trained, support service managers and senior executives, the start-up of a new project can benefit enormously from the availability of experienced, well-**

trained, mid-level managers who can be seconded from older, successful projects to work at the field level. BRAC staffed its NFPE program in the early days with experienced field managers from its other rural development and credit programs. In addition, BRAC has routinely allocated significant resources for in-country management training for all of its managers and for overseas training at places like the Asian Institute of Management for some of its staff.

- **Donors interested in funding large-scale NGO projects should be prepared to cover the full cost of the support services that each project requires—i.e., motor pool, printing, staff training, etc.** The NFPE program budget includes adequate allocations for staff, training, and logistical support for both technical and managerial functions.
- **In the national EFA community, depending on economies of scale, it may be economical for certain agencies to specialize in specific support services—such as textbook production or management training—and for other agencies to contract with them for those services.** Because of the size of BRAC's overall organization, economies of scale make it possible for BRAC to provide most of its own support services and even to provide some services—like training at its Center for Development Management—to other NGOs.
- **The benefits of economies of scale in either technical delivery or support systems need to be carefully weighed against the dangers of taking a monolithic approach.** BRAC's model has created a standard against which all other NGO programs are currently being measured. There is some pressure for NGOs that are interested in expanding their primary educational programs to adopt the BRAC model. This pressure comes both from the NGOs themselves, because the models that they may have been using to date are not clearly better than the BRAC model, and from the donors, who want to fund the "best" model.
- **NGOs that provide basic education programs do not have to be restricted to limited funding sources.** In the process of seeking large-scale funding, national NGOs may be able to retain some independence—including the opportunity to experiment with alternative models—in at least two ways: by developing profit-making enterprises that can provide pilot funding for new activities and "bridge funding" during periods of rapid expansion; and by increasing the number of donors that fund their projects. BRAC has used both of these methods successfully.
- **National NGOs can reduce the amount of administrative and coordination time required for multiple donors by forming donor consortia, the members of which accept a single set of standard-**

ized reports and evaluations. BRAC already has a donor consortium for its seven-year-old rural development program and is currently in the process of forming a new one for its NFPE program.

- **When one project initially succeeds in delivering some social service to a high priority, difficult-to-reach target group, that project may come to be seen as a potential vehicle for a myriad of other services.** The rapid expansion of BRAC's NFPE program to date is in part a function of its focus on a single purpose: providing basic education to children left out of the Government system. Proposals to add services to existing successful projects in BRAC are evaluated carefully, on a case-by-case basis. For example, offers from donors to add more components, like school feeding programs, must be viewed very critically.
- **Foreign donors are keenly interested in the impact of projects on girls and women.** BRAC has found that it may be easier to design projects targeted at girls than to integrate women fully into the implementation and management of those projects. BRAC is still working on increasing the number of women in mid- and senior-level management positions in the NFPE program.

BRAC's Potential Roles in Bangladesh

Description of BRAC's Potential Roles

BRAC appears well-positioned to contribute to the universal primary education effort in Bangladesh in at least six ways: expanding its own NFPE program; expanding its support to other NGOs; improving community participation in local primary education planning and management; coordinating local primary education planning and management; monitoring and assessing progress in basic education; and developing a post-primary nonformal education model. The last four roles are illustrative of what BRAC, or an NGO in a similar position in another country, could do. The degree to which BRAC assumes these roles will depend to a large degree on Government interest and on the time constraints of its mid- and senior-level staff.

The issues associated with these roles are numerous. Perhaps the most important of these is the number of roles that BRAC can assume without overextending itself. The Government must approve BRAC's expanded participation in several roles. Approval is likely to be delayed until BRAC and other NGO schools have expanded to serve a more substantial proportion of the primary school-age population. As noted at the beginning of this section, BRAC's participation in coordination meetings and other potential contributions to the universalization of primary education in

Bangladesh will be limited in the short term by time constraints on its senior staff.

There is, at the moment, no firm limit on BRAC's expansion capacity. As the number of schools increases, however, or if the Government invites BRAC to work in thanas where compulsory primary education programs are being implemented, BRAC schools may need to consider more carefully any potential overlap with the Government system. In the meantime, BRAC has much to contribute in the areas of research and development for pedagogy and learning and in strategies to ensure that its target group, once literate, remains literate for life.

BRAC is not the only NGO working on these and other innovations. This fact is sometimes obscured, however, by the immediate expansion potential of the BRAC model and the apparent lack of other NGO alternatives. The development community throughout the world looks to NGOs to provide innovative technical approaches and social service delivery mechanisms. In order to continue to play this role in Bangladesh, a variety of NGOs need continued support to experiment with approaches that diverge from the dominant model—whether the Government's or BRAC's.

Without external funding, BRAC's NFPE program is perhaps no more or less sustainable in the long run than any other development program—governmental or non-governmental—in Bangladesh. More than 80 percent of the Government's development budget comes from foreign donors; likewise, more than 80 percent of the funding for the expansion of BRAC's NFPE program will come from foreign donors. At present, this dependence on foreign funding is justified in terms of providing both a basic human right and also the foundation that Bangladeshi children need to participate in the future in more productive forms of off-farm employment. BRAC's NFPE program model does not presently include any form—innovative or otherwise—of major local resource mobilization in support of local primary schools.

Implications of BRAC's Potential Role in Bangladesh

- **Short-term, rapid responses to EFA mandates with less than national scope can be encouraged and supported while systematic, medium-term EFA planning among concerned Government agencies, donors, and NGOs is proceeding.** By emphasizing its stopgap nature, BRAC has been able to move forward with the NFPE and, in the process, has been able to prove the viability of several innovations that may prove useful in the medium-term to the formal system.
- **An NGO-sponsored, nonformal primary education program with a proven management system and prior experience with EFA's**

target group will be more effective in the short term in reaching EFA goals than formal government school education systems constrained by traditional goals and embedded bureaucratic procedures. The presence of teachers' unions in Bangladesh that are unlikely to support the concept of paraprofessional teachers, the Government's desire to use existing classrooms, the impossibility of implementing all improvements simultaneously nationwide, and hence the need to balance these factors explains, at least in part, why the Government of Bangladesh has been slower than the NGO sector to respond to EFA mandates.

Hence, the formal primary education system's slow response to potential UPE initiatives relative to the nonformal system's response should not be taken as prima facie evidence of any lack of Government commitment to EFA. BRAC sees the NFPE program as a stop-gap measure that can be useful until a permanent, formal Governmental system is in place; it does not see BRAC schools as a long-term substitute for Government schools.

- **NGOs need not, necessarily, be limited to small pilot projects but may also implement large-scale social service delivery projects.** BRAC has proven that in both health and education, with proper management and an appropriate program, NGOs can assume a substantial responsibility for large-scale delivery. At the same time, it should be remembered that considerable commitment and training are necessary to create a cadre of real managers capable of large-scale implementation.
- **As NGO programs increase in number and effectiveness, there will be a growing need for better coordination between the Government and other NGOs.** Frequent turnover of senior Government officials charged with elaborating Government basic education policies and designing responses to EFA indicates that the Bangladeshi Government commitment to EFA goals is probably weak at this time. From its experience in the health sector, however, BRAC derived the lesson that "NGO cooperation with the Government can work well in sectors that have been assigned high priority by the Government (BRAC 1992a, 9)."
- **Respected efforts, like those offered by BRAC, can inhibit other innovations, as smaller programs are asked to conform to its successes.** A program like BRAC's, which has grown considerably larger and is deemed successful, can inhibit other programs. Ironically, its size and success may discourage the type of innovation that is necessary to pilot new delivery systems, promote greater grassroots participation in education, and increase services to disadvantaged groups. BRAC has made special efforts to encourage and support other NGOs, in part to alleviate this very feature of success.

- **National EFA networks and consortia provide opportunities to foster support for a diversity of NGO models and individual initiatives.** Such networks can also foster an appreciation of the complementary roles of government and non-government agencies. The Campaign for Public Education in Bangladesh, as an example, is currently acting as a clearinghouse for information on alternative nonformal primary education materials. Its success in fostering diversity will depend to some extent on some donors' willingness to fund alternative models.

The Relevance of BRAC's Experience to Other Countries

The institutional environment in which BRAC operates is one that is common to many developing countries. This environment includes organizations that implement development activities as well as international donors, national Government agencies, international non-governmental organizations, and an entire subset of rules, norms, and conventions associated with development. The institutional environment, common to Bangladesh and other countries, is characterized by three key elements:

- a heavy reliance on foreign donor funds, which are typically provided in the form of short-term "projects" targeted at long-term problems, such as universal primary education;
- national ministries of education and formal primary education systems that have a formal mandate to develop the primary education system but lack the human, financial, and administrative resources, as well as the bureaucratic flexibility, to do so; and
- non-governmental organizations that have considerable flexibility and often are able to reach specific groups of people more effectively than governments, although they typically operate on a small scale.

On the other hand, the technical environment in which BRAC works—the political stability, cultural and linguistic homogeneity, large and sophisticated NGO community, high levels of educated unemployment in rural areas, and dense populations in areas underserved by the education system—will not be found in many other countries. The BRAC model, in its entirety, therefore, may be applicable only in a few countries considered high priority by the global EFA community. Nevertheless, individual elements of the BRAC model, described in more detail in early chapters, may prove beneficial and transferrable to some other countries. These elements include:

- clear focus on a social goal widely perceived as important by parents, students, and government;

- a simplified curriculum for primary education that focusses on basic skills and is appropriate to the targeted population;
- paraprofessional teachers, selected from the community, with short pre-service training, scheduled in-service training, and strong supervision;
- small instructional units and correspondingly small catchment areas, so that no student or parent is far removed from his/her home;
- active parent and community involvement as a major goal;
- comprehensive management support systems that emphasize staff training, logistics, follow-through, and delivery of services;
- flexible timetable and an organization that adjusts services to the client/student needs and alters its own organization depending upon its ability to service its clients/students;
- reduced capital costs, where funds are expended for current operation and services, and not on "bricks and mortar," and
- viable, mutually reinforcing NGO/community partnerships characterized by regular and open communication and cooperative planning.

The conscious blending and restructuring of these elements in the existing BRAC sites have created a critical mass of experience that allows us to point to BRAC as an important success. Worldwide experience indicates repeatedly, however, that wholesale transplanting of an innovation from one country to another, without substantial "ownership" and sense of origination by the recipient country, is doomed to failure. Careful understanding and then use of the elements of a success, like BRAC, within the social, cultural, and political environment of a recipient country is the necessary first challenge to committed educational entrepreneurs, educational planners, and/or country policymakers.

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