

Bangladesh Education Sector Review

Report No. 3: NGOs as Deliverers of Basic Education

BEPS

Basic Education and Policy Support (BEPS) Activity

CREATIVE ASSOCIATES INTERNATIONAL[®]

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CARE, THE GEORGE WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY, AND GROUNDWORK



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NGOs as Deliverers of Basic Education

Prepared by:
GroundWork, Inc
1825 Eye Street, N.W., Suite 400
Washington, D.C. 20006

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Acronyms

| | |
|-------|---|
| BRAC | Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee |
| CAMPE | Campaign For Popular Education |
| CBA | Center Based Approach |
| CMES | Center for Mass Education and Science |
| DAM | Dhaka Ashania Mission |
| DGIS | The Royal Netherlands Government Assistance |
| DNFE | Directorate of Nonformal Education |
| DPE | Directorate of Primary Education |
| FIVDB | Friends In Village Development |
| GSS | Gonoshahjjo Sangstha |
| INFEP | Integrated Nonformal Education Project |
| INGO | International Non-Governmental Organizations |
| NFE | Nonformal Education |
| NFPE | Nonformal Primary Education |
| NORAD | Norwegian Development Assistance |
| PL&CE | Post Literacy and Continuing Education |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| Sida | Sweden Development Assistance |
| TLM | Total Literacy Movement |
| UCEP | Underprivileged Children's' Education Program |

Executive Summary

NGOs are visible actors in the field of socioeconomic transformation of Bangladesh. Since the birth of Bangladesh as a nation in 1971, the number and the role and function of NGOs in the education sector have steadily and gradually increased. Today there are over 400 NGOs involved in the delivery of basic education programs. NGOs are working mostly with the children of the poor. NGO programs are designed to reach the unreached out of school children. The diversity amongst these NGOs is also obvious. National NGOs such as BRAC provide nonformal primary education (NFPE) to over one million children in 34,000 education centers nationwide. While some smaller NGOs, or rather the Community Based Organizations (CBO), operate only in one subdistrict with a very small number of NFPE centers. Though the number of NGOs involved in the delivery of education is high, the type of NFPE education offered by most of the NGOs is similar because the smaller NGOs simply copied the NFPE program of the largest NGO, BRAC. However, there are several different models in practice. NGOs such as Center for Mass Education in Science (CMES), Underprivileged Children's Education Program (UCEP) are two NGOs programs that are significantly different from BRAC model and these programs have brought together basic education and vocational skills development to empower the children of the poor. Most NGOs offer three to four years of schooling in a learning center more on a temporary arrangement for the delivery of basic education to overaged out of school children. These are not schools because these centers neither annually enroll new children nor continue after completing three years of education for a set of 33 children who enrolled at the beginning of the center. Most NFPE centers enroll the children of their membership. However, a few NGOs such as Friends in Village Development (FIVDB) and Gonoshajjo Sangstha (GSS) offer five years of quality primary education.

NGOs in Bangladesh responded very positively and quickly to the Education For All (EFA) declaration. Immediately after EFA, CAMP was formed as an umbrella organization of the education sector NGOs. These NGOs made a significant contribution. Today, approximately 4 percent to 8 percent of the primary school aged children in Bangladesh receive nonformal primary education (NFPE) in NGO programs. NGOs also have contributed to the development of supplementary reading materials for the primary school children. Government also has recognized the contribution of the NGOs in the field of education and has handed over some problematic and nonfunctioning government community schools to some of the leading NGOs such as BRAC to revive them to serve its purpose of providing basic education

Though NGOs have made positive contributions in the delivery of basic education, increased social awareness of the value of education has now created a new situation in Bangladesh which demands NGOs to redefine their role in the education sector. Demands for increased quality of education require NGOs to revisit the conventional NFPE model practices. Several International NGOs (INGO) have taken more innovative and timely approaches to provide directions to NGOs. Save the Children alliance is geared to promote Early Childhood Development (EDC). PLAN International has introduced a Community Learning Assistance Program (CLAP) to strengthen the school based education through community involvement to increase contact time and support

quality improvement in education. BRAC has undertaken a new program to promote leadership in adolescent girls (APON). There is a larger vacuum that NGOs could fill. Millions of children leave school at age 11+ years either graduating or dropping out of formal or nonformal schools. These adolescents need vocational skills to bring them closer to the expanding global markets. Development partners such as USAID could encourage NGOs to find new program directions, rather than replicating the conventional NFPE programs.

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I. Organization of the NGO Education Sub-Sector¹

In 1991, the government of Bangladesh commissioned the first nonformal education Project to reach the unreached out-of-school children and adolescents, and the illiterate adults. The government invited the NGOs to implement the government’s NFE program. This was an important event, as it was the first time that government was willing to disburse education funds to NGOs. Under this scheme NGOs entered into contract agreements with the government to implement government prescribed NFE programs. NGOs also implement their own NFE programs.

Thus, the relationship between the government and NGO programs in education is a complex one. The government’s programs span all age groups and grade levels, from early childhood through university and adult education. NGO programs concentrate at the primary and adult levels, with some activities for early childhood and for youth. Table 1 graphically presents government and NGO roles in the sector.

Table 1. NGOs in the Education Sector

| | Government | Government NGOs | NGOs |
|------------------|-------------------|---|------------------------------|
| Early childhood | DPE | | SAVE, PLAN |
| Primary | DPE | DNFE (NFPE 3), 98 gov’t owned NGO schools | BRAC, DAM, GSS, PROSHIKA, |
| Youth and adults | DNFE (NFE 4) | DNFE (NFE 1, NFE 2, Postliteracy) | UCEP, CMES, CARITAS |

DPE is the Directorate of Primary Education, which is close to providing universal primary education and is beginning to focus on early childhood education (see Report #1, the Overview, for more information).

DNFE is the Directorate of Nonformal Education, which manages four separate literacy programs:

- NFE 1 *and* a part of NFE 2 are implemented through contracts with NGOs, targeting youth and adults.
- NFE 3 is also implemented through contracts with NGOs, but it targets primary school age (“hard-to-reach”)

¹ This is the first of six reports covering various aspects of basic education. The other reports cover an overview of the sector, gender equity, teachers, working with the government, and alternative strategies for USAID investment. Acknowledging the number of thorough reports that have been recently published or are in draft form on the subject of basic education, this report does not attempt to repeat or add to them. Instead, it gleans the information that USAID needs to move toward its investment strategy. To help USAID make good use of other reports, we frequently refer the reader to those that contain more detailed information.

- NFE 4 in full and a part of NFE 2 *are* implemented through the government’s administrative structure. It is called the Total Literacy Movement (TLM) and targets youth and adults.
- BRAC, UCEP, and CMES are key NGOs in the education sector. They will be discussed at length later.
- Seventeen NGOs contract with the government to operate 98 “community”² schools.

From this matrix and these definitions, one can see that “NFE” and “NGO” are not synonymous. “NFE” is nonformal education, meaning education that is outside the formal primary-secondary-tertiary school system of government. It includes government programs for primary children and for adults and youth. An “NGO” in the education sector offers primary education outside of the government’s formal system. Some NGOs, however, contract with government to provide education services, but not through formal government schools. An exception is that some international NGOs (INGOs) include a small number of government schools in their geographically focused programs. These will be discussed further on.

Since USAID’s interest is in children below the age of 14 years this paper only briefly touches on programs for adults, even though they constitute a large part of government managed NGO programs.

Government Managed NGO Programs (DNFE)

Prior to 1991 in Bangladesh, NGOs were the only providers of nonformal education. However, since the Jomtien Conference for Education For All (EFA) in March 1990, the role as well as the identity of NGOs as providers of nonformal education has changed, because government took new initiatives to target populations other than those targeted by NGOs. EFA targeted basic education for children and adults. Today, largely because of its adult and youth literacy programs, the government system is the larger nonformal education system, and NGOs, while having their own NFE programs, also implement basic nonformal education programs of the government under contract arrangements.

Youth and Adult Literacy (NFE 1, 2, and 4)

Following its EFA commitment, the government recognized the importance of nonformal education (NFE) in reaching the out-of-school children and the illiterate poor. The first NFE project, the Integrated Nonformal Education Project (INFEP), commissioned in 1991, was a pilot. Encouraged by the accomplishment of INFEP, in 1994 the government formally established a Directorate of Nonformal Education (DNFE) and, with financial

² There are nearly 2600 Community schools. These 2-classroomed schools were given two teachers by government and paid a monthly honorarium of 500 taka/ per teacher. Subsequently some schools were upgraded to full primary schools and Some of the schools were not running well and government invited NGOs such as BRAC to take over the management of these schools and run these schools efficiently.

assistance from the Asian Development Bank, the World Bank, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), SIDA, NORAD, DFID and UNICEF, commissioned four separate NFE projects (NFE 1, NFE 2, NFE 3, and NFE 4). Except for NFE 3, financed by Unicef, DfID, and SIDA, the projects deliver literacy programs to illiterate adults and youth. The DNFE developed its own NFE literacy models, literacy materials, a training system and delivery mechanisms. The materials development started under INFEP project continued.³

Primary Education (NFPE 3)

The Basic Literacy Program for Adults and Nonformal Primary Education Program (NFPE) is for the working children in the urban slums; this is better known as the Hard-to-Reach-Children's Basic Education Project. It is a two-year school program for 8 – 14 year old children. The two years are divided into three grade levels to achieve a literacy level of Class Three in two years. NGOs implement this program in 11,600 centers in urban slums of the largest cities of the six divisional headquarters.

Independent NGO programs

NGOs are the oldest providers of NFE, and BRAC was the pioneer in the field of nonformal education. In 1985, BRAC developed its own model for the out-of-school children. Today, about 500 NGOs are involved in the delivery of nonformal education programs. Almost 50 percent of them were formed after 1994 to be delivered through DNFE's adult and youth literacy program. Almost all of their programs have the same organizational structure. Not all NGOs deliver primary education. Of those that do, most simply follow the BRAC model.

The larger national level NGOs in education, such as BRAC, PROSHIKA, Dhaka Ashania Mission, FIVDB, CMES, UCEP, and Nijarshikki have their own primary education programs⁴. The larger and more established national NGOs support the smaller NGOs to run primary education programs. The larger national NGOs provide Educational Support Services (ESP), such as limited funds, learning material and training to the

³ The NFE programs that are implemented through the NGOs under contract arrangements (NFE 1 and NFE 2) are known as the Center-Based Approach (CBA), because instruction is delivered through NGO centers. The NGOs were chosen through tender invitation procedures. Nearly all education sector NGOs (544 NGOs) applied for contracts and 253 NGOs have participated under contract arrangements. DNFE 4 implements its own programs through the District Administration and the Philanthropic Societies (see Annex 1 for a brief description).

⁴ See pages 34 – 43 in Sedere Upali and Us-Sabur Zia (December 1998), A Resource book- Nonformal Primary Education in Bangladesh, SDC, Dhaka

smaller NGOs to implement the model of the parent NGO. While this support helps build capacity of the smaller NGOs, it also builds the strength and prestige of the larger NGOs.

International NGOs collaborate with and support other national NGOs, including the larger ones, in the implementation of primary education programs and Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs. The difference between international NGO support and local NGO support is that the international NGOs have developed a collaborative approach to work. They together develop models and share experiences and experiment with ideas and strategies.

II. Targeted groups and their NGO providers

Nonformal education programs have four target groups; not all NGOs serve all four groups:

- Early Childhood Development (ECD)
- Out-of-School Children
- Adolescents
- Illiterate Adults and Neoliterate Adults.

Another NGO, (CAMPE), is an umbrella group for NGOs in education, which aims to provide more systemic interventions.

ECD

In the last few years there has been a growing concern with providing Early Childhood Development programs. Both the government and NGOs have expressed their concern. The government has not framed any policy for the Primary Education Division (PMED) to take responsibility of providing ECD care, though the draft EFA National Plan of Action (2002) targets Early Childhood Education as a priority area. NGOs have targeted programs for the preschool aged children.⁵

⁵ The government's role in ECD is described in Report #1, the Overview. Here is a summary: It is in a very limited way early childhood development care available for the children of the poor. Other than the private sector operated pre-schools for the privileged class particularly in the urban areas, there is hardly any formal facility available for the pre-school aged children of the poor. Government policy considers this as a responsibility of the Social Welfare Department. However, some government primary schools do have a Baby Class for 5-year olds, unofficially included. Also the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has developed a primer for this class. DNFE does not have any program for pre-school aged children.

The government EFA Action Plan (2002) has cited eight agencies now providing early childhood programs. These are: *Baby Classes in Primary Schools, Play Groups in Nursery Schools, Pre-schools in NGOs, Orphanage Children Homes, Shishu Academy Day Care Centers, Maktabs and Mosque Forkania and Ethnic Minority Schools - (EFA Workshop National Plan of Action, 2002)*. However, the number is insignificant to consider as substantive interventions explain and all these are supply-oriented conventional programs run in isolation, with no links to other development interventions.

NGOs have recognized the need for preschool education. According to a CAMPE 1995 survey only 4 percent (17) of the 414 NGOs provided preschool education. According the SDC Survey 22 percent of the NGOs (35 out of 157 responded) had preschool programs. These NGOs had 38 thousand children enrolled. The NGOs reported that they have 33 children in a preschool class and most of the NGOs were running 10 to 20 preschool centers (Sedere, 1998).

Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs operated by NGOs are distinctly different from government-run programs such as day care centers, orphanages, and Baby Classes (UNESCO /Dhaka 2001). The main difference between the government schools attached 'baby classes' and the NGO run ECD programs is in the focus. NGOs run these as a program activity and government schools do it just because underage children attend school. The community owns most of the NGO EDC programs by paying a token fee and parents volunteering to assist the teacher in class as a helping hand.

- Save the Children Alliance - (USA, UK and Sweden) and PLAN International are active players in ECD program development. The ECD program *Reading For Children*, of Save the Children Alliance has also filled a gap that had not been noticed by others (Save the Children USA 2001). Further, it is a very low cost project that helps neoliterate mothers sustain their literacy, extend their new abilities for the good of their children, and raise the self image of the mothers while providing added care for the children.
- Save the Children USA, PLAN International and GSS together have formed an ECD Unit and developed an ECD model. These activities are more comprehensive in nature, as they include parenting, home based learning, nutrition and health care, and pre-schools. The recent initiative by the Save the Children USA to link neo-literate mothers with early childhood parenting is an innovative approach to early childhood education (*Reading for Children*, Save the Children USA 2001). UNICEF has been working with the Ministry for Women Affairs and the Shishu Academy to develop policy as well as early childhood programs.
- Save the Children USA has initiated ECD programs in collaboration with several national NGOs on a pilot basis to expand early childhood care. PLAN International and Save the Children Alliance have jointly financed an ECD Unit and, in affiliation with national NGOs, have piloted ECD programs. This is a step in the right direction. Save the Children's research on *Reading for Children* indicates its impact is noteworthy. The pilot phase has produced good evidence of its impact and it has the potential to be replicated (*Reading for Children*, Save the Children USA, September 2001). PLAN supports a community owned EDC program under the CLAP program⁶. These initiatives could be supported and strengthened to develop a more

⁶ CLAP= Community Learning Assistance Project

comprehensive ECD program that in turn supports the EFA initiative of the government.

- BRAC started a preschool program in 1997 on an experimental basis, and the positive results have led to an expansion of the program to 1,434 centers, with an enrollment of 36,500 children. BRAC charges a nominal sum of 10 taka per month and a 40 taka one time payment for materials. This is a 12-month program.
- Dhaka Ahsania Mission reports that their programs enroll nearly 9,600 children in a preschool program.

Primary

Although the government plays the lead role in providing primary education, NGOs claim to cover 8 percent of the primary school age children, most of whom are difficult to reach.⁷ BRAC reports that it runs 34,334 nonformal primary level centers, with an enrollment figure of 1.13million (BRAC 2001). Most of the NGOs enroll children at around the age of 8, indicating that these children are either the children who have not enrolled in formal schools at the age of 6 years or have dropped out of formal school after a year or two.

According to CAMPE Data (1995) and an SDC study (Sedere 1998):

- 187 NGOs out of the 410 that responded to the study offered primary education programs for children.
- Nearly 2 million children are enrolled in NGO operated primary education centers outside DNFE programs.
- Most of the primary education centers expect to transfer students after 3 years of schooling to the formal schools to continue their education.
- Approximately 54 percent of these students are girls; in BRAC schools girls constitute nearly 67 percent.
- Most of the primary education centers find it difficult to transfer their students to formal schools due to three reasons. Most of the formal primary schools are crowded and have no space now due to increased enrollment. Those who graduate from programs such as BRAC though completes primary education they cannot continue on to secondary school due to lack of curriculum equivalence and even join they drop out due to lack of orientation to a formal system of education.

⁷ According to government statistics, the Government Primary Schools (GPS) and Government Assisted Registered Non-Governmental Primary Schools (RNGPS) cover 87 percent of the primary school enrollment (DPE, 2001).

- About 70 percent of the NGOs have less than 20 primary education centers.

Characteristics of NGO Schools and Centers. Primary education programs of the NGOs record a better school completion rate, particularly when compared with the formal schools. However, over 50 percent of the children in the formal schools continue on to secondary level, whereas children graduating from the NGO centers are not eligible to enter government secondary schools.

NGOs have higher completion rates than formal schools do. One of the reasons for the higher completion rate at NGO centers is that the NGOs offer integrated programs to parents of these children. The parents have other advantages and economic benefits, as the student's family may take membership in the Rural Development Program, where credit and other facilities are extended to the family. Therefore, the parents willingly send the out-of-school children to BRAC Schools.

Models. In general there are two types of NFE models implemented by the NGOs, which we label the "Center-Based Model" and the "School-Based Model." The basic difference between the two is that the center-based models aim simply to fill the gap left by formal schools, providing basic skills to children without access to those schools, while the school-based models aim to give children a more complete education that leads to further opportunities.

Center-based programs target school dropouts and out-of-school children, and the usual entry age for a child is 8 or above. Most programs take 30-35 children in a given year, and those children follow a three to four year basic education program. Most—but not all—programs do not take in new children on an annual basis. There is very good supervision, and teachers are given a one-day refresher training every month. These programs use their own textbooks. BRAC centers and the smaller NGOs that they support are center-based.

School-based programs have a permanent schoolhouse and admit children to Grade One on a regular basis and keep children promoted to higher levels. At a certain point, they link the academic program with vocational skills development.

The following five examples of primary education illustrate the range between Center-Based Models and School-Based Models. Another important dimension of these five examples is that some are "gap filler" programs while others are "empowerment" programs. The 'gap filler' programs are temporary in nature and the center serves a particular target group for three to four years and do not enroll all eligible primary school age children on regular basis. Whereas an 'empowerment program' ensures the child is developed as a human resource either to profit from education by continued schooling to higher levels or develop the child to acquire employable vocational skill sets.

- BRAC: This is a gap filler program, which offers three to four years of primary education. BRAC establishes a learning center in a rented space for 33 students, and out of the 33 a minimum of 21 have to be girls. BRAC uses its own textbooks and learning materials. A locally hired woman with a minimum of 9 years of formal

schooling is hired as the teacher. All BRAC teachers are given 14 days of foundation training at one of the 14 Regional Training Centers. BRAC provides academic supervision and mentoring. The learning centers do not take any new students on a yearly basis, as is usually done in regular schools. BRAC has 37.4 thousand centers, with an enrollment of 1.3 million children. The organizational structure of the BRAC primary education program is more innovative in approach than it used to be, and its major concern is quality teaching and learning - (See BRAC's Primary Education Report, Phase 2, pp. 20-21).

- CMES: This program uses an empowerment model that has evolved over the years since the program started in 1978. The Center for Mass Education in Science is an NGO that has developed a primary education system for bringing science and technology closer to the life of the children and adolescents. CMES has 17 operational units, 400 schools and Rural Technology Centers (RTC). A child is first admitted to the Basic School and also is exposed to science through various activities that are supported by the RTC. At the completion of the Basic Education phase the child is sent to the RTC, which caters to a cluster of Basic Schools. The RTC basically caters to the adolescents. A unit comprises of 20 to 25 Basic Schools and one Technology Center to serve the cluster of schools. In a given year approximately 20 thousand students are enrolled, and 70 percent are girls. This program has been identified as one of the ten innovative NGO programs. (see CMES-Basic School System 1999).
- UCEP: This is also an empowerment model. UCEP enrolls age 10 and older working children of the urban poor to continue to learn while working. UCEP offers four years of basic schooling in two years and then transfers the students to vocational training for employable skills within the UCEP system. However, about 50 percent of the students tend to leave at this stage, as the vocational training schools cannot absorb them all. Vocational schools are also linked to bring them in contact with employers for apprenticeship training. UCEP has 30 Schools for Adolescents and caters to 20 thousand students a year; nearly 50 percent of the enrollments are girls. (UCEP also runs 30 pre-primary schools.)
- FIVDB: This is a formal school model, which has a longer term impact if the student is successfully transferred to the formal school. The FIVDB model is activity based and emphasizes group work. The learning process at FIVDB schools is more child centered and process oriented than in most of the other NFE programs. FIVDB has nearly 100 primary schools with over 15 thousand students enrolled (as well as 500 adult literacy centers and post-literacy centers, with another 15 thousand learners). FIVDB is well known as a producer of good quality learning materials, and many NGOs use FIVDB materials. FIVDB has all its schools in the Sylhet division.
- GSS: This too is a formal school model, which has a longer term impact if the student is successfully transferred to the formal school. GSS has been a leader in providing quality nonformal primary education and had over 750 schools, which were more formal than nonformal. The GSS model has received a lot of attention, as student achievement was noteworthy when compared with BRAC and government schools.

The GSS model also followed the principle of group learning and individual learning. Each child must read a minimum of 10 minutes every day and the teacher uses a well-structured schedule of activities. Unlike BRAC schools, where the teacher is paid 500 taka monthly honorarium, GSS pays a salary equivalent to a government school teacher and recruits qualified teachers with HSC qualifications. GSS has had to reduce its operations within the last few years, due to a conflict with the DNFE, and most of the schools have closed down.

International NGOs in Primary Education. A new development in NGO primary education is the entry of several international NGOs. CARE and PLAN International work with government schools. They do not try to open up parallel schools. This new trend is encouraging, as it establishes a meaningful working relationship with the formal schools and the NGO interventions.

- PLAN International works with the formal school in the village where it has other sector activities. It aims to improve the school's credibility and quality of learning and to involve the school in community development work through social mobilization programs. PLAN's assistance to schools includes improved physical facilities, learning materials, and teacher training. PLAN has introduced a Community Learning Assistance Program (CLAP) where, after or before school hours, school children are provided with additional coaching in school subjects. This has enhanced their learning achievement and also has increased the low contact teaching time in schools. The importance of CLAP program is that parents own the program as they pay 20-30 taka per month and therefore are much involved in the activity through parents meetings. This has increased the school contact time to 4 hours from 2 hours for Grade 1 and 2 for all children. PLAN trains village adolescents who have passed SSC to serve as teachers in the CLAP program, which has raised the image of the schoolteachers and the formal schools, as parents and community members find that these adolescent teachers are better teachers than the teachers in school.
- CARE is new in the field of education in Bangladesh. CARE works through the local NGOs in selected areas of the Chittagong Hill Tracts districts (CARE 2002-2006). CARE has developed the *CHOLEN* pilot project, which supports Chittagong Hill Tracts basic and girls education. CARE established partnerships with several local NGOs (Green Hill, Mrochet, Graus, Toymu and CIPD) in the Hill Tract area, where it helps to improve existing schools. The program is appealing for several reasons. Hill Tract districts are long neglected areas with many minority, language and cultural issues. The progress in education recorded in the last ten years in the rest of the country has not happened in the Hill Tracts. It is a difficult area, which is not prioritized by any national level NGOs such as BRAC and PROSHIKA. Though these NGOs are present in the Hill Tract areas, it is only in a very small way in the Upazila headquarters; only CARE has given priority to Hill Tract villages in the interior of the districts. Thirteen different language groups are spoken, and most of the children cannot follow the regular school curriculum, due to language barriers. Since the minority issue is rather sensitive, it is difficult for the national NGOs to win over the Hill Tract people, whereas CARE, being an international NGO having

partnerships with Hill Tract based NGOs, has more acceptance among the minority communities. CARE is also beginning to extend its education program into the flood-prone Tista-Jamuna riverbed districts.

Several smaller NGOs are also working with the formal primary schools, providing additional inputs and after school vocational skills.

Youth

The estimated adolescent population of Bangladesh, 11 to 19 years old, is around 28 million. Due to the poor quality of primary education, 70 percent of the primary school leavers are estimated to leave school without basic literacy skills. Even those who complete primary and lower secondary education do not have employable or marketable skills. These semiliterate school leavers are adolescents who would easily lapse into illiteracy. Forty percent of the children who drop out of school after one or two years are not reached by the DNFE programs.

Many youth over the age of 10 years have either dropped out of school or have never been to school and remain illiterate. Except for the DNFE Hard-To-Reach-Urban Children's Basic Education Project (NFE 3), there is no adolescent program run by the PMED for this group of adolescents. The DNFE programs in adult and youth literacy (NFE 1, NFE 2, and NFE 3) target a broad age range—11 to 45 years—and its programs have not attracted adolescents. The actual number of adolescents covered by these programs is not known.

NFE 3, which is implemented by NGOs, gives a limited number of urban working children some literacy, life skills and vocational skills. NFE 3 provides 61 thousand NFE centers for 0.35 million urban adolescents, though the actual number of adolescents covered by these programs is much less, as many younger aged children too are enrolled in these programs.

According to CAMPE data, 108 NGOs of the 410 surveyed offer NFE programs for adolescents, many of these through NFE 3. NGOs have about 10 thousand NFE centers beyond those in NFE 3, serving an additional 34 million adolescents. (These figures are difficult to interpret, as they include NFE centers and beneficiaries that serve broad age groups; they are not necessarily targeted to adolescents.)

In recent years several of the larger NGOs have designed special NFE programs for adolescents. The following three programs are more appealing than conventional programs, which simply offer literacy to adolescents and adults.⁸

⁸ Unity Service Cooperation Of Canada In Bangladesh (USCCB) in cooperation with 14 smaller NGOs offers an Adolescent Education program for the age group 11-17 years. However, this program is only providing awareness and education and no program to develop employable economic skills.

- UCEP: This model targets urban adolescents, providing them with vocational skills after they have acquired basic skills at the primary level. The UCEP model is a vocational school in which the adolescent receives basic literacy and continues on to vocational training. Although the unit cost is on the higher side, the outcomes are encouraging as almost all graduates find meaningful employment.
- CMES: CMES is one of the pioneers in adolescent education. The program started in 1991. CMES offers basic education, vocational training, credit and provides leadership training through the Adolescent Group Program.
- BRAC: BRAC's NFE program also has had a focus on the adolescent. In particular, adolescents use BRAC's reading centers. These centers are called Reading Centers for Adolescents (Kishori Pathkendra). BRAC reports 7,904 such centers serving 221,000 adolescents. The Adolescent Peer Organizational Network (APON) is a new initiative by BRAC to empower adolescent girls (the program has UNICEF assistance). The project envisages the education of adolescent girls through peer education programs and leadership training programs; it gives opportunity for vocational training and credit for investment. BRAC also runs six Domestic Child Labor schools in the urban areas.

Each of these four NGOs uses a different empowerment model. UCEP schools give urban underprivileged adolescents a basic education, employable vocational skills, and apprenticeships. UCEP offers job placement services. The rate of placement in jobs is impressive. The CMES school gives rural youth a basic education, with an emphasis on science and technology, then transfers the learner to Rural Technology Centers, where it trains them in marketable productions of items and finds them markets to sell their products. BRAC's APON program helps empower the girls through awareness building and leadership training.

Adults

The target groups for adult literacy and post-literacy are those who are either receiving Basic Literacy (BL) classes or/and have been exposed to basic literacy program. Those who have acquired certain literacy skills are then targeted for Post-Literacy and Continuing Education (PLCE). The Directorate of Nonformal Education is the largest provider of adult literacy programs and continuing education. However, the NGOs have been involved in adult education for a longer time as it was considered an essential development intervention. The government's plan of action for EFA gave high priority to adult literacy and targeted 34.5 million illiterates in the 11-45 year age group to be provided with 6 months of *Basic Literacy (BL)* and 3 months of *Post-Literacy (PL)*. The government now claims that 17 million have attended literacy classes and are literate. Since the neoliterate could lapse to illiteracy again, DNFE has now commissioned two projects, with World Bank, ADB, SDC and DFID assistance, to provide six months of continuing education to selected neoliterates. This program will be implemented in partnership with the NGOs.

Systemic Interventions: CAMPE

CAMPE (Campaign For Popular Education), as the umbrella organization of the education sector NGOs, has played an important role in recent years by serving as a watchdog and conducting good quality research studies on the status of primary education. In this regard, CAMPE fills a role missing in government efforts; providing comprehensive and comprehensible reports on the sector that can engage the public and policy makers in discussion of needs and priorities. CAMPE's Education Watch research program has completed two major primary education sector studies; the first in 1999 on access, efficiency, and equity, and the second in 2000 on quality. The third study is now being carried out. These studies have been eye openers for both the government and NGOs, which have never had such inputs from universities, academics or any other institutes.

This is the first time in Bangladesh where an organization has taken the initiative to assess the accountability of public expenditure in education. Other institutions, particularly the Institute of Educational Research (IER) and the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies (BIDS), have the potential to provide such research and information. It has been the NGO, CAMPE, however, that has brought together renowned researchers (some from IER and BIDS) to hold the government accountable for its spending on education.

III. Funding

External and local donors finance NGO education programs.

Funding by External Donors

Most of the basic education programs of the NGOs are external donor financed. Sedere and Us-Sabur (1999, pp. 58-70) listed 136 external donor agencies that finance NGO basic education programs. This list can be divided into the following categories:

- **NGOs financed under government's DNFE projects.** The DNFE projects are financed by ADB, WB loans; and SDC, Sida, NORAD, DFID, UNICEF, ILO, UNESCO, WFP, UNCHR and UNFPA. Grants are contracted out to NGOs for implementation.
- **NGOs financed under bilateral grants.** Many bilateral donors assist NGOs in Bangladesh. AusAide, CIDA, DANIDA, DFID, DGIS, EU, EC, EF, FINIDA, GTZ, JAICA, NORAD, Sida, SDC, and USAID are some of the bilateral donors.
- **NGOs financed by international foundations.** There are many such foundations, such as Aga Khan Foundation, Ford Foundation, Japan Foundation, Damien Foundation, Helen Keller Foundation, Pally Karma Shayahka Foundation, Seed Foundation, and the Stromme Memorial Foundation.

- **NGOs financed by international NGOs.** Many of the international NGOs, whether they are actually present or not present in Bangladesh, provide financial support to national and local NGOs. Action Aide, Save the Children –USA, UK, Sweden, Australia; PLAN International, SAP, ADRA-Australia, Sweden, Asian Partnership, Care, CARITAS, CEBEMO, CIP-India, Concern, DIAKONIA, FFCI Canada, Freedom From Hunger Campaign, HELP Asia, Oxfam, and World Vision are examples.

ActionAid supports 20 smaller NGOs to run basic education programs. Save the Children USA implements programs in collaboration with medium scale NGOs such as FIVDB, Bangladesh Development Society (BDC) and Dhaka Ahsania Mission and Grameen Shikka. Most of these programs are Early Childhood Development (ECD) programs. PLAN International supports smaller NGOs and also works with the Government and Non Governmental schools to enhance the quality of primary education. Caritas runs education programs in urban and rural areas in collaboration with smaller NGOs.

- **NGOs financed by international religious organizations:** There are many religious organizations providing financial assistance to smaller NGOs. These include the Anglican Church of Canada, Christian Community, Christian Aid, Church World Service, Reformed Churches-Netherlands, Secures Catholic, Save Our Souls, and World Vision Prayer League.

Local Donor Funding

Some of the larger and more established local NGOs provide educational support to smaller NGOs. For example:

- BRAC: About 300 NGOs implement the BRAC Model and BRAC provides financial and program support such as textbooks, material and training.
- PROSHIKA: Nearly 100 smaller NGOs implement education programs in collaboration with this second largest NGO in Bangladesh.
- Dhaka Ahsanai Mission (DAM) also provides literacy support to 25 smaller NGOs to run 500 centers for 13,000 learners.
- FIVDB supports 131 smaller NGOs
- BRACE supports 257 NGOs to operate 2,500 centers.

Most external donors require NGO contributions as well. However, only a few of the larger NGOs can contribute to the project with funds. All other NGOs account for their contributions as “in-kind” and list whatever resources that they have provided as their contribution to the project. Therefore, in reality often 100 percent of the financing comes from the donor.ⁱ

IV. Effectiveness

Comparing NGO and Government Schools

NGOs have been able to show better results in primary education programs than government programs. Most of the NGO operated primary education programs such as BRAC, CMES, FIVDB programs indicate better performance in school attendance, dropout, completion and even academic achievement in learning. Table 2 displays the CAMPE Study (1999 and 2000) results for the Government Schools and NGOs run primary education programs.

Table 2. School and Student Performance Data of government and NGO Schools

| | NGO | GOB |
|-----------------------------------|------------|------------|
| <i>Enrollment</i> | | |
| Average | 8.5% | 68% |
| Girls | 10% | 67.5% |
| Rural Girls | 10% | 69% |
| Urban Girls | 9% | 58% |
| <i>General Performance</i> | | |
| Female Teachers | 89% | 43% |
| Teachers Absent | 2.5% | 19% |
| Teacher-Pupil Ratio ⁹ | 1:31 | 1:73 |
| School Attendance | 90% | 66% |
| School Dropout Cumulative | 16% | 35% |
| Dropout In a Year | 3% | 6% |
| Completion Rate | 90% | 46% |
| Repetition | NR | 7% |
| <i>Achievement</i> | | |
| Basic Education | 38% | 22% |
| Rural | 39% | 20% |
| Urban | 36% | 33% |
| Literacy at Class Five | 77% | 59% |
| On ABC Scale | 38% | 29% |
| <i>Quality</i> | NGO | GOB |
| Mastery of all 27 competencies | 6% | 1.6% |
| Language (Average) | 43% | 36% |

⁹ The reported Teacher-Pupil Ratio for Government Schools is incorrect as the schools operate in shifts.

| | | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|-----|
| Reading | 67% | 64% |
| Writing | 67% | 55% |
| Listening | 81% | 80% |
| English Language | 22% | 7% |
| Mathematics | 19% | 11% |
| Number Concept | 75% | 71% |
| Four Rules | 72% | 42% |
| Problem Solving | 33% | 25% |
| Measurement | 44% | 43% |
| Geometric | 52% | 55% |
| Social Studies | 24% | 19% |
| General Science | 20% | 17% |
| Religious Studies | 29% | 28% |
| Mean Number of Competencies Mastered | 17 | 15 |

(Source CAMPE 1999, 2000)

Table 2 indicates that NGO schools have performed better than government schools on all reported indicators. It is important to examine these data more carefully. The following observations are critical in making a judgment of the two systems. First, NGOs cater to 8 percent of relatively older children while government schools serve 68 percent of the students who are relatively younger children. In any child development theory it is known that a few years of difference in a child's age, below the age of 10, makes a significant difference in cognitive maturity levels. Unless NGO schools record significantly different higher percentages, it is difficult for any one to say that the NGO schools produce better results. Second, government schools are bigger and full-fledged schools and are bound to admit all children disregarding the number of students already admitted. The government school provides access to all children who want to enroll. The NGO schools shut their doors once their limit of 33 students is enrolled. Therefore, government schools do have a larger class size, 68 students to a class, and a teacher-to-pupil ratio of 1:70, whereas NGO schools have a 1:33 ratio.

Yet NGOs have other claims to better performance. First, they provide primary education as part of a set of integrated services, while government schools are not integrated into any other aspects of families' lives. Second, NGOs work with marginal populations and are reaching the un-reached children. Therefore, even the little superiority demonstrated in learning achievement in their programs has to be valued more highly as it is achieved while working under more difficult circumstances. What is lacking in government schools is school level leadership and academic supervision. This is due to the lack of authority, capability and accountability of the Headteachers to mobilize community and school resources that address the school level issues leading to the establishment of child centered learning environments that are conducive to learning. NGO schools provide these services.

Although the government is expected to use its administrative and academic support system to provide a child centered learning environment, the interventions have failed to manage the expected change in school, whereas NGO schools do have a better and more effective supervision system. A BRAC school supervisor visits a school twice every week whereas an Assistant Upazila Education Officer (AUEO), the lowest level of supervisor in the system, is supposed to visit at least once a month but often fails to do so. BRAC supervisors are often experienced teachers and could mentor a teacher, whereas the AUEO is an inexperienced fresh college graduate who cannot provide such academic guidance to a formal schoolteacher. These differences have contributed to a lower level of performance in formal schools.

Potential for NGOs to Be Catalysts for Change

In the last decade there have been more opportunities for the NGOs to interact with the mainstream of basic education. Yet many NGO programs simply follow the BRAC model, which has serious limitations compared to the formal school model. Just as government schools offer 2-3 hrs of contact teaching, all NGOs also offer the same. Only the FIVDB approach has the potential for influencing the mainstream of primary education, as FIVDB runs schools (not learning centers), accepts the primary education competencies identified by the formal system, and tries to produce a learning process that is more innovative and activity oriented. However, FIVDB has not made any effort to influence government primary schools. One important influence the NGOs could have on the formal system is to provide supplementary learning materials to formal schools. Most of the NGOs have produced good reading materials but have not been able to convince the government system to purchase these books as supplementary readers.

Cost Effectiveness

Although there is no reliable assessment of the unit cost of government programs and NGO programs, the unit cost of the NGO programs is much higher than of government programs. For instance in the DNFE the government runs its own adult literacy program (NFE 4, or TLM) with a unit cost of 396 taka, while the average unit cost of an NGO-run program is 600 taka. In primary education, the only comparative data available is in unit cost of 18 NGOs supported under World Bank-assisted GEP project, where, the unit costs were much higher than the government's unit costs. The government schools' unit cost was 300 taka, while for NGOs the cost of programs was higher. Examples include: Maleraht Juba Shangha, 1306 taka; BRAC, 967 taka; DAM, 980 taka; CMES, 939 taka; VERC, 773 taka; Swanirvar Bangladesh. 775 taka. (Sedere 1995). The Sedere report further compared the cost of the government-operated Satellite Schools program, where the student cost was only 250 taka and the results were better and dropout was zero percent. The report further stated that the only low cost item was the teacher, often paid less than 500 taka/ a month. Payments were irregular and all supervisory staff were receiving much higher salaries than government officers (Sedere 1995). This situation has not changed. For the higher cost the returns were not too different.

Thus, government schools have lower unit costs, but they also have lower rates of efficiency, quality, and achievement.

V. Considerations for USAID

The education sector, especially that sub-sector serving children through age 14, is changing, as the government strives to meet EFA targets, focusing on ECD as well as primary education. Also, external assistance agencies are managing a wide variety of programs, and the larger agencies are trying to move the government toward sector-wide programming. What describes the ECD, primary, and even lower secondary sub-sectors today may change within months.

NGO Learning Centers have Some Advantages Over Government Schools.

At present, NGOs stand out clearly in three ways:

- NGOs reach pre-primary children and out-of-school youth. NGOs have programs that provide good-quality education to pre-primary children and to youth of post-primary age (ages 11 to 14). The government is still weak in these areas, though it is beginning to focus on ECD. NGOs can also pick up drop-outs at grade 3 and give them basic skills.
- NGOs serve girls. NGO schools have a high rate of enrollment of girls. It is a prerequisite condition that 60 percent of the school enrollment has to be girls in order to establish a learning center. Starting in the 1980s BRAC took the initiative to target girls education as there were more out of school girls than boys. NGO schools have a higher percentage of girls enrolled -- in BRAC schools 67 percent are girls. It is also true, however, that government gender equity rates are not bad.
- In NGO schools, education is treated as part of integrated rural programs. In contrast to the government, NGOs view primary education as one of the interventions of an integrated development program and the child's family is given other program benefits such as credit and health care. Therefore, the child who is enrolled in primary education program stays on in the system without dropping out of school. Opposed to this, the formal school offers pure education and cannot retain the children of the poor.

NGOs are not Full-Fledged Primary Schools.

The purpose of basic education for children goes beyond that of providing literacy for illiterate adults. Basic education for the children should be to educate them and empower them to overcome their impoverished conditions and live as fuller citizens than their parents, taking part in productive services of the economy. This has to be achieved either by continuation of basic education to other levels or providing them with employable skills training. Empowerment cannot be achieved simply by giving some basic literacy skills to enable them read, write and make simple calculations. Therefore, the basic education programs for children either should have continuity with other levels of

education, or the program should enhance their skills to enable them to participate in the economy.

The distinct difference in the delivery of basic primary education by the NGOs and Government and Registered Non-Government Schools is that the formal schools are full-primary schools having five grade levels running in the same schoolhouse and NGO basic education centers are temporary centers of learning. The formal schools are established under the policy guidelines established by government. There are minimum standards a school has to satisfy such as a minimum of 150 students on the rolls and a minimum of four teachers and minimum space both for schoolhouse and ground area. The formal schools admit new cohorts of 6-year old children to Grade-1 every year and even to the other higher grades depending on demand and space availability. Therefore, the formal schools are full-fledged primary schools whereas NGO schools are not.

Furthermore, the NGO schools cannot be called primary schools as most of them admit 30 – 35 children to a center and educate them for 3 – 4 years, then transfer the students to formal primary schools to continue their education. During the 3-4 years of an NGO school's existence in the village, the NGO centers neither admit new children every year to the beginning grade nor establish a new center to provide basic education to the newly available out of school children. The center runs for 2 –3 hrs a day and at the end of that 3 – 4 year period the center could be even closed down. Therefore, most NGO schools are a temporary arrangement only. There are exceptions. There are some NGOs who establish full-fledged primary schools – (FIVDB, CMES, UCEP, Suvernirbhan Bangladesh and GSS).

Is the Government System Reaching Most Children?

In 1998 the government reported that 18.3 million of the 19.5 million primary school-aged population were in schools. Of these only 0.75 million children (4 percent) were enrolled in NGO schools. NGOs report that 8 percent of the primary enrollment is in NGO schools.¹⁰ Since the formal school system has reached at least 17 million of the 18.3 million children, why could it not be further mobilized to ensure all children are enrolled?

Government schools now address equity and poverty issues. The Food for Education Program, the Primary School Stipend Program, the free textbooks, free learning materials for the children of the poorest are some examples of the equity programs of the

¹⁰ It may be noted of that in the government's Primary Education Monitoring Reports for 1998 and 1999, the number of NGO centers and the student numbers were noted. However, reports for 2000 and 2001 have excluded these centers and included only the NGO's full primary schools. The number of these has decreased from 22,000 to 368 schools. This may be an indication of the government's intention to have full-fledged schools rather than NGO-run centers (DPE/PMED June 2000).

government, and these programs account for nearly 60 percent of primary sector expenditures.

Unlike in the 1980 and early 1990s, there is now competition between government schools and the NGO schools. Often government schools complain that they lose students to NGO school simply because the latter attach other program benefits and therefore the parents prefer sending their children to NGO schools. Some children leave the government school in the middle of an academic year to join a newly opened NGO school. Under the IDA and ADB assisted projects, the provision is there to construct new schools where there are gaps. According to the government the larger issue today is not access but over-crowding in classrooms. The IDA and ADB projects have the provisions to add classrooms where necessary and the Upazila Education Committee is expected to assess these situations and request new schools and additional classrooms to further increase access. Since the primary school population has begun to decline this situation should ease further.

NGOs have played a distinct role in reaching the un-reached marginal population, and they have three significant strengths in this regard. First, though the government school system is wide-spread, generally having schools within the radius of one kilometer, there are some villages where there is no formal primary school. Second, the children of the poor, even if get admitted to a formal primary school, often drop out of school due to poverty-related conditions. Third, in such situations, the poor find the NGO school are better for their children, as NGOs provide other benefits to the family whereas the formal school offers only education.

Do NGOs Actually Reach Marginal Groups in Primary Education?

Unreliable data make it difficult for one to give a precise answer to this question. The NGOs claim that they work with the poorest and the landless sections of the population. In a country where more than 50 percent of the people live below the poverty line, this is a difficult question to answer. However, when one examines the booming micro-credit industry of the NGOs, one may doubt the accuracy of the NGO claims. Sedere (October 1998) noted that most of the NGOs do not work in extremely difficult locations. For instance none of the national NGOs work in 45 Upazilas and most of those are the remote areas such as Bishvambapur, Dawara Bazar, Jamalpure, in Sunomgong district. There were 34 Upazilas classified as “very high in food insecurity” by the World Food Programme, where no NGO had a NFE program (Sedere at al December 1998).

Could the Government Finance the Schools that External Agencies Now Finance?

All NGOs operate primary education and adult literacy education programs and the adult literacy programs are run with external assistance. Even BRAC says that if external financing ceases, it will close down its primary education program (BRAC has turned to other, more financially viable activities). On the other hand, government-run or government-assisted primary schools would be sustained. The five-year PEDP program was costed at \$2.2 billion. The government was looking for an \$800 million development

budget; it only received \$550 million, but its program continued with additional government assistance. Public expenditure on primary education increased from 1339 million taka (0.9 percent of GDP) in 1990 to 8171 million taka (2.2 percent of GDP) in 1999. Not only has the government increased support to Registered Non-Government Primary Schools, added 80 percent of teacher's salaries, provided free textbooks and construction of schools but the number of schools has grown from 6,000 in 1991 to 20,000 by 2000. This clearly shows that government is able to absorb even another one to two million children outside the mainstream and sustain them. Today, government finances at least half of the primary education budget and 100 percent of the recurrent budget, and external donor finance is needed only for further innovations and improvements.

Can NGOs Work with the Government?

The government-NGO relationship has improved over the years. At the planning stage of EFA in 1990 the government clearly recognized the role that NGOs could play in providing basic education to the out-of-school children and illiterate adults. The GO-NGO partnership became more evident when the government, from Sida and DGIS grants, invited the NGOs to operate primary education programs and in 1992 the INFEP project invited and selected NGOs to run literacy programs under a CBA approach. This partnership grew further when the DNFE was established and a large-scale nationwide literacy campaign was launched with NGO participation. Today, DNFE is the largest financier of NFE programs run by the NGOs. This is true for most of the smaller scale NGOs.

Though such positive developments have taken place, the government-NGO relationship also has been strained. New NGOs that were formed to take DNFE work were awarded contracts that did not go to more experienced NGOs, and this created some amount of tension in the relationship.ⁱⁱ The DNFE contracts also have given room for politicization, as well as unethical and unacceptable corrupt practices. With the recent change of government the list of NGOs selected to implement the IDA and SDC assisted Post Literacy and Continuing education Project by the previous government was cancelled, as it was the out-going government's wish list, and re-advertised for NGOs to reapply. The selection will now happen according to the new government's wishes. The Director General of DNFE does the initial selection of NGOs but the selections have to be finally approved and cleared by the Secretary of PMED. Often NGOs have had to satisfy officials to get contracts. The new NGOs often agreed to these practices, while many of the larger and more established NGOs either have withdrawn from the programs or have taken up a few centers simply to avoid the blame of non-participation in the government's literacy campaign. Government-NGO relationships were also hampered by DNFE's decision to use government officers as trainers, leaving out the more experienced trainers of the NGOs (Ahmed 2001). Some of the education NGO leaders have taken an active role in national politics, and that has also strained the Government-NGO relationship to some extent.

On the other hand, DNFE complains that the NGOs have no capacity to manage funds and often they fail to produce the correct vouchers in the manner acceptable to

government audits. This is particularly so with the newly formed NGOs. As a result there are many audit queries about spending. NGOs are not used to accountability and they violate the agreed-upon principles in the contracts. Further, many NGOs do not have the agreed-upon number of centers in operation. Many of them run half the number and collect funds for the full number of centers, denying literacy to the illiterate. (NFPE-2 Appraisal Report 1997, Rahman 1997).

There are signs of better cooperation between the government and the NGOs. NGOs have agreed to participate in the new DNFE Post-Literacy and Continuing Education Project, assisted by the IDA, ADB, SDC and DIFD. With an ADB initiative, the government also has formed a Consultative Committee to develop a more acceptable framework for government-NGO cooperation. CAMPE has been active in all government discussions representing all NGOs to keep the government-NGO partnership alive. NGOs and the government work together running thousands of centers under contract agreement, and although they complain about each other, they carry out the work together. The underlying situation is that the two parties are learning to work together. If they could iron out their differences, in the long run government-NGO cooperation will further improve.

The Problem of Unreliable Data

A final concern is that data on activities in education, including that on NGOs, is inconsistent and unreliable. This is true not only in the education sector but also in all other sectors. The absence of a birth registration or other system of identification partly explains the problem. For instance the actual 6 to 10 year primary school age population is not known. In the 1996 PEDP negotiations between government and the World Bank this became a controversial issue. The government was reluctant to say that the primary school age population would decline. Yet, since 1999 the number of children in primary school did start to decline. This was due to two phenomena. First, after the 1990 EFA push to enroll children, not only did 6-year-old children enroll but also many older children enrolled in grade 1. By 1998 the backlog of older aged children was cleared and only the 6-year-old cohort was seeking admission. Data indicated that there were 17 to 22 percent fewer children in primary schools. Second, the declining fertility has slowed down the birth rate and the absolute number of children added to the population is not increasing at the same rate as it was in the late 1980s. Actual enrollment in primary schools is not known. The government estimates 18 million children in the 6-10 year age cohort, and the World Bank estimates only 15 million for year 2002.

There is a lot of over-reporting in primary school enrollment statistics. Both NGO reports and government reports are inaccurate. The government reports a 97 percent net enrollment in primary education. However, the CAMPE 1999 study states that the net enrollment is only 77 percent and that 23 percent of the 6-10 year old children are out of school. When the 2000 school statistics were compiled, the grade 1 enrollment added up to 4.2 million children. This was not possible when the 6-year-old population was estimated to be 2.4 million. The government realized that double reporting, double registration, and over-reporting were reasons for this and corrected the statistics to say 96 percent were enrolled. How was this done? No one knows.

The Food for Education program has motivated parents to admit a child to two or three neighboring schools: the same child is enrolled in a Madrassah school and an NGO school, for different reasons. Head teachers also purposely over-report enrollment to raise the entitled teacher quota, and Registered Non-Governmental Schools often record a minimum of 150 students to keep their school registration and get the teacher salary benefits. Enrollment reports are loaded with “ghost students” to satisfy bureaucratic reporting requirements. There is not a single published report where student attendance in rural schools has been even 80 percent.

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