

Together In Education

***Promoting Education of Children with Disabilities through
BRAC Non-formal Education Approach***

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**By
Centre for Services and Information on Disability(CSID)**

The Road to Education:

**Promoting education of children with disabilities through
BRAC non-formal education approach.**

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Foreword

I take pride on behalf of the Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID) to have this opportunity of carrying on a research study focusing on appropriate strategies on the inclusion of children with disability in BRAC' Education Program set up. I am grateful to BRAC authority and staff members concerning BRAC education program for their sincere cooperation for successful completion of the study.

I earnestly believe that this study is being carried over just in time to make a visible change in the lives of the most disadvantageous community who were left behind for a prolong period to be viewed. I sincerely hope this study will help in guiding other NGOs to take in the similar initiative in their ongoing program agenda. This study of BRAC, I hope will work as a guiding tools to policy level at different sectors.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to the study team members who had tremendous amount of efforts to make the study a viable one. Hope this study will have a greater impact on promoting a barrier free education environment for children with disabilities in the country.

Khandaker Jahurul Alam
Executive Director
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Acknowledgement

From the Research Team:

While the education of children with disability is one of the most vulnerable areas of development and more than a million primary school-aged children with disabilities do not have access to basic education, BRAC with its full potentialities has initiated intervention towards inclusion of children with special needs into its well-recognized set up of Non-formal Education. BRAC has strategically included the policy of inclusion of discriminated section of children into an inclusive education environment through which the most vulnerable children with special needs are projected to be incorporated. BRAC is inclined towards working closely with its nationwide program approach to address the needs of education of children with special needs.

During such a short intervention, BRAC Education Program, only within a year, had a remarkable achievement of inclusion of over 7000 children with special needs, has created a very positive effect on the overall educational scenario in the country.

The study team is proud of being involved with the BRAC initiated research study having a contributory role to strengthen BRAC journey towards a generous initiative to address the educational challenge of children with disability in the country. The team expressed its deep solidarity that such initiative would certainly have a great impact and would compel to bring change in the life of disabled children in the country.

Since the practices for inclusion of learners with special needs is a recent initiative in BRAC Education Program, the review team had a sincere effort to pick-up findings with analysis in a positive perspective to strengthen the initiative rather than looking into the limitations and inadequacies. The team is confident enough that the feedback reflects a fare and sincere opinion that might help BRAC to design the inclusion practices more systematically.

The team express a sincere thanks and regards to the BEP central staff members, Regional Managers, colleagues at regional offices, and the teachers where the team visited for their cooperation and support to make the review process a rewarding one. The community people along with the disabled children and their parents also deserve appreciation for their tender cooperation with the team, which eventually reflects their sincere motivation to the inclusion process.

Finally the BRAC central management deserves all-out appreciation for considering the issues of inclusion of children with disabilities in BRAC's Non-formal Education.

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On Behalf of the Research Team.

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Executive Summary

In an effort towards inclusive education, BRAC has begun to include children with special needs in their education program. Children with special needs are categorized as so because they comprise the social minority in Bangladesh: young girls, indigenous children, and children with disability. Traditionally, these three groups have been excluded from the mainstream education system, and are being targeted to fulfill the “education for all” human rights standard. Children with disability were most recently included into the BRAC non formal primary education.

This paper is a study of the inclusion process thus far, particularly focussing on the interest of disabled children in BRAC schools. In order to accommodate the needs of these children in the education system, BRAC needs to build capacity in three major areas. These three pillars define the conceptual framework of inclusive education, and consist of (1) developing human resources, (2) developing and adapting school facilities, and (3) ensuring quality teaching, learning materials and assistive tools. If these foundations can effectively be put into practice, enrollment in BRAC schools and the concurrent advancement to higher education could be sustained.

The BRAC education initiative is in its early stages. It has experienced successes and shortcomings from the onset, but because this effort is unprecedented, the process of building a strong program is experimental. BRAC has taken the appropriate steps in implementing the education program, and it is agreeable on paper. In practice, the program has been seen to need some improvements in order to broaden the capacity of schools to accommodate a wider range of students in an accessible, friendly learning environment. The program has done well in organizing the program, taking all of the appropriate steps in an effort to include children with disability, but the reality is far from ideal. Recommendations have been issued to address these shortcomings.

Because BRAC is the largest organization in the country to pursue such an effort towards inclusive education, it will serve as a ‘role model’ to other smaller organizations to follow its lead. Currently, BRAC has enrolled nearly 7000 children with mild to moderate disability. Children with more severe conditions have not been included as of yet. Slowly, BRAC will try to widen its scope to accommodate children with all types, combinations, and degrees of disability. The BRAC schools have changed the lives of several disabled children, and their individual stories are included herein.

This paper discusses the background of the BRAC education project, the conceptual framework of inclusive education, observations and analysis from the field, and recommendations for improving and sustaining the program. The study team is pleased with BRAC’s effort, but in the interest of disabled learners, desires that the initiative be as effective and efficient as possible. The road to inclusive education is a process that takes time. As such, this study acts as the road map towards full inclusion in education. This is just the beginning of the road and the process. With the help of this study evaluation, BRAC will be heading in the right direction.

Introduction and Epitome

All children have a right to education. Children with disability are no exception. No matter how serious or severe their disability may be, children should be able to tap into their fullest potential. That means offering them equal access to education, including them in an accessible learning environment. It is specifically stated in Article 23 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child that disabled children have a right to enjoy a full and decent life, in conditions that promote independence and community inclusion. It must be recognized that children learn and develop in different ways and at different rates. As such, it is important to create a learning environment that responds to the needs of each child. Inclusion of disabled children in mainstream education is one of the only ways to provide learning for all children. Support services need to be brought to the child,

and not vice versa. Teachers and classrooms must adapt in order to accommodate children with special needs.

BRAC initiated a Non-Formal Primary Education program in 1985, currently operating at 32549 and 16000 preprimary schools around the country. More than a million primary school-aged children with disabilities do not have access to basic education. NFPE schools could not accommodate these children. Teachers had a lack of technical know-how as well as a lack of awareness of the special needs for children with disabilities. Teacher training has been used to strengthen its capacity to accommodate these children.

Recently, (in 2003)BRAC has initiated human resource development programs for teachers to accommodate disabled learners in non-formal education, and has started the inclusion process. Over 6000 disabled children in different non-formal education centers around the country are currently enrolled. Since this is just the beginning, BRAC tends to initiate a feasibility study for the inclusion of learners with disabilities in its non-formal preprimary and primary education program.

The Study Objectives

- Assess current inclusion practice of children with disabilities into non-formal schools of BRAC.
- Identify the possible opportunities to include children with disabilities into non-formal schools.
- Develop a conceptual framework on the inclusion of children with disabilities into non-formal schools.
- Develop policy guidelines on inclusion of children with disabilities into non-formal schools.

In addition, the study will focus on assessing the current status and opportunities for inclusion of those children having more than one disability. The interventions prior to inclusion in BRAC's education program will be scrutinized. Policy design, planning, resource identification & mobilization, creation of environment, development of school infrastructure, performance evaluation plan, monitoring and supervision, etc. are examples of such interventions. Other factors will be determined as well, like geographical location, demography, etc.

The Methodologies

The study was mainly focused on qualitative reflection of the situation through the observation of interventions and the analysis of documents and findings related to inclusion of disabled learners in different education set-ups.

This study has reviewed policy documents of different NGOs, Governments, and INGOs, which have addressed education of children with disabilities in inclusive environments. The study has reviewed the NFPE curriculum, teachers training course curriculum, enrollment, and performance documents from selected centers for comparative assessment and analysis.

The study team visited thirteen NFPE centers to obtain practical feedback on the prevailing situation, the physical infrastructure, the attitudes of teachers and learners towards disabled children, scope, and barriers for inclusion. Pre-set guidelines were followed by the study team members to get consistent feedback.

The study team visited Chittagong UCEP School, which has been to a good extent successful in including disabled children in the mainstream education set-up. The team has reviewed the findings and other related documents. The study team has shared its opinions on the inclusion process and its viability with NFPE teachers. Fifteen teachers have been interviewed, among which all have received training on inclusion of disable learners in education. **Five** Focus Group discussions were

conducted to assess sentiments and attitudes concerning the education of disabled learners in NFPE. BRAC staff members have been interviewed, sharing their ideas on the inclusion process. Additionally, five trainers have been interviewed, discussed on training packages and their impact.

After obtaining the results of observations and feedback the review team along with the representatives of BRAC had a two day long participatory sharing workshop where the detail findings of observations have been shared and viewed.

Limitations of the Study:

The study was supposed to come up with a comparative analysis on the level of competencies between the children with special needs and non-disabled learners. This could not be achieved as because many of the centres of BRAC have currently been initiated recently and no such tools were found to come up with the intended analysis.

Socio-economic Situation of Children with Disabilities in the Context of Education in Bangladesh

Traditionally, disability has been seen as a medical concern. However, there is a growing realization that the greatest problems facing children with disabilities are prejudice, social isolation and discrimination in society. Most children with disabilities are silent and invisible members of many communities. They are taken advantage of, at risk of abuse, exploitation, and harassment. The vast majority of children with disabilities never attend schools, and those who do attend mainstream schools usually drop out due to inaccessible school infrastructure and unfriendly school environment. Many of the schools are closed to the idea of education for children with disabilities. In a recent study¹, it was found that only 11% of children with disabilities have received some form of education.

The study also found that children with disabilities that had dropped out from schools had done so because of unfriendly attitudes at school and at home. Many lost confidence when they could not perform as well academically as they had expected. Enrollment in education in urban areas is marginally more than that in rural areas. 74% of respondents, who are currently not enrolled in any form of education, expressed a desire to receive education. 68% of the enrolled children with disabilities were in government and private primary schools. Among the enrolled children, 48% were enrolled in formal education, 23% in integrated schools, 15% in special education, and a mere 5% in inclusive education. While children with mild disability are generally enrolled in formal educational settings, those with severe disability tend to be drawn towards special education set-ups. Among the enrolled children, 55% were children with physical disabilities. The visually impaired constituted 13%. 12% were hearing & speech impaired, while 10% had intellectual disabilities.

The study expressed their satisfaction in the schools that had teachers with previous experience in teaching children with disabilities. The peer students in these schools also exhibited better attitudes towards children with disabilities in comparison to other schools. For the most part, school structures are not accessible for children with physical and visual impairments. A lack of assistive devices for both mobility and communication, and also a lack of classroom adaptations were major barriers for these children. In almost all cases, accommodations and adaptations were not made for disabled students.

Women with disabilities are at high risk for emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Fear of such abuse often dissuades parents from sending their daughters to schools. A recent study² suggests that 92% of women have been subjected to abuse. Physical abuse was reported at 82% equally, while three in four women complained of emotional abuse. About one in three admitted they had been sexually abused. In many cases, parents and relatives are the assailants. Very few people feel comfortable expressing their concerns about these topics, so it is fair to speculate that the numbers could in fact be higher.

Review of Legislation and Policies with regard to Education of Children with Disabilities

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948)

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights holds that everyone has the human right to education, and that education be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It also states that parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children. As far as community inclusion, it holds that everyone has the right to participate in the community.

Conventions and Commitments

The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) along with countless others emphasize that education is a basic right for all children on the principle of equal opportunity, the purpose of which is to develop the full potential, tolerance and gender equity of children. "Education For All" means that schools should accommodate children in all conditions. Education systems must be inclusive, responding in flexible ways to accommodate the needs of all learners in order to attract and retain children from marginalized and excluded groups. The National Education Policy (1997) urges NGOs to be more involved in this process and in the improvement of primary education.

Reflection of Commitments and Reality

The government of Bangladesh has taken initiatives to establish a compulsory primary education through the "Education For All" program and has made it Constitutional. However, children with disabilities are still excluded. What has been present in international commitments has been absent in practice. Though Bangladesh has ratified the Child Rights Convention (1989) as well as the Asia Pacific Decade of Disabled Persons (1993-2002), "Education For All" has been something that has existed only on paper, and not in the lives of over a million uneducated disabled children living in Bangladesh.

The government recognizes the need for integrated education, non-formal education and special Education for children with disabilities. Moreover, it identifies the need to include disability issues in teachers' training curriculum. It is committed to ensuring that all children have access to complete, free and compulsory quality education by 2015. It will take ten years and more for fully inclusive education to take true form. Bangladesh is far behind the target of education for which it aims. Though the literacy rate is increasing day by day, the quality of education is waning. While the enrollment in primary education is satisfactory, the drop out rate is very high in reality. There is no plan as to attract people with disabilities into education systems.

NGO's have been more involved than the government in giving disabled children an opportunity for education. These organizations are conducting the most work with respect to services, data, and resource development for children with disabilities. The reality is that about 5% of disabled children receive an education. This is reflected in the national education budget where disabled children are excluded completely. The major cause of this deficiency is a lack of funds and lack of immediate interest, desire, and need to assist the helpless disabled population. Aside from the financial woes, social stigma and unawareness of disability issues on the part of the community as a whole leave disabled people neglected and abused. Inaccessible infrastructure keeps people with disability bound to their homes and easily navigable areas.

Existing policies related to education and disabilities were found to be contradictory to each other. Appropriate policy formulation & adaptation is required to overcome such barriers. The concerned people involved in education are not adequately informed on the situation of children with disabilities. While an inclusive environment in the mainstream education is being suggested as the best possible option for children with disabilities, many of these children (especially those with severe disability) will need to be enrolled in alternative setups. However, for children with moderate disabilities, partial inclusion could be expected and might be possible. As a complimentary system to mainstream education, special education and integrated education should be designed such that they gradually advance children into mainstream inclusion.

BRAC NFPE Program Towards an Inclusive Environment:

Following the success of BRAC's various program interventions, BRAC commenced Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) in 1985 as a model venture for a period of three years. This has primarily targeted poor children, particularly those who are not currently enrolled in formal education. The success of this program relied entirely on the response from children and parents in the focus group. The response was satisfactory, and enrollment increased from 15,000 to 37,000 schools and 16,000 pre-primary schools during the first phase. The second phase did not see many changes from the first. The third phase, however, faced several challenges with changes and an expansion of learning opportunities. Widening its scope allowed BRAC to develop a various linkages and collaborative activities with the national government, as well as organizations and institutions at home and abroad. As the program developed, BRAC felt the need to focus their activities more directly, giving extra attention to the most neglected groups in society- women, ethnic minorities and children with special needs. Their goal is to move toward a more inclusive environment for those who are most excluded. Now, in its BEP 2004-2009, BRAC pledges to work with like-minded organizations to positively impact the following areas.

Women: Gender equity has always been the main consideration of BRAC's program intervention. NFPE program was developed to cater towards the needs of girls and women. Promoting education in rural areas, with a hope to educate every woman is the main theme in NFPE establishment. BRAC's education model has been successful in the development of rural education in the context of gender equity.

Ethnic Minorities: BRAC is aware of the broad gap between mainstream Bengali culture and that of the ethnic minority community in the country. Through raising awareness, lobbying, and developing materials and curricula to address the needs of ethnic people in the community, BRAC is pressing for a more inclusive environment for ethnic minorities. Bridging the gap in understanding between these two communities is the first and most important step in inclusion. Minority children are encouraged to learn Bengali along with their native tongue in NFPE schools. In 2001, BRAC launched a program for the Education for Indigenous Children, establishing 17 schools in indigenous areas. This number has increased to 250 in just two years, covering 11 districts. On record, 29778 indigenous students are enrolled in 878 NFPE schools. As an attempt to involve ethnic women, BRAC also involves them in teacher training. During this journey, BRAC initiated

inclusion of learners with disability in the year 2003. BRAC Education Program has recently involved (March 2004) external consultant for necessary guidance for systematic operation and management of inclusive education environment including children with disabilities.

Children with Special Needs:

While social, economic, and basic situations of children with disabilities may vary, all disabled children are exposed to discrimination and social exclusion in education. "Education For All" cannot be fully achieved unless children with disabilities are included in schools. With this in mind, BRAC has begun involving children with disabilities in its education program. This needs to be put into practice by other development organizations working in the area of disability as well.

BRAC first took on disability as a development concern in 1999. 10% of the Bangladeshi population has some sort of disability. Bangladesh has over one and a half million children that suffer from disabilities, of which 80% live in rural areas. These children have an equal right to education, socialization and recreation as able children in the country. They have the ability to learn, but are not given the scope and access to do so.

The children that BRAC is targeting are capable of the same level of learning and education as their unchallenged counterparts. A collaborative approach is necessary to ensure equal rights for these marginalized people. Schools, independent and government institutions, NGO's, parents, and community leaders need to work together in an effort towards inclusion. Inclusion is a community concept, and involves everyone therein.

Because there is a range of disabilities, both physical and mental, BRAC recognizes the need to treat each with a corresponding strategy to ensure access to education. In order to provide the best possible service to Children with Disabilities, BRAC has already introduced training and compulsory tools for teachers. In the beginning, BRAC concentrated its enrollment procedure to those who have mild to moderate physical disabilities. Due to the success of the first initiative, it is being encouraged to extend its activities to a wider focus group, integrating children with all types of disabilities. BRAC has established collaborative efforts with the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) to develop human resources.

Some of the remarkable interventions towards inclusion of children with disabilities in the BRAC education program are as follows.

Current Number of Enrollment:

BRAC's education program started bringing in those children who has mild to moderate disability aged eight to ten. BRAC, since its initiation has incorporated 6,697 children with disability in 4,578 schools, covering forty operational areas. Following the current inclusion policy, BRAC has enrolled children with types of disabilities: 41% physical, 30% hearing and speech impaired, 15% intellectual, and 14% visually impaired. The enrollment of new learners are in process.

Programme	Type	Physical	Intellectual	Visual	Hearing	Speech	Total
NFPE		2305	861	776	540	1133	5615
Pre-primary		307	88	73	40	175	683
Prime		87	25	19	15	49	195
Community School		33	10	8	11	33	95
Formal School		9	6	7	3	11	36
Adibashi School		41	1	11	4	6	63
Total		2782	991	894	613	1407	6687

Intervention for HRD:

BRAC has provided training to its staff members and teachers of different education programs. A total of 5 HQ staff and 42 field staff were provided with TOT on inclusion of learners with special needs. The core trainers were contracted by external resource organizations like the CRP, Helen Keller International, IER of Dhaka University and the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD). A six-day training course was held for the core trainers, which was subsequently reduced into three days for QAS. The trained core trainers conducted training of QAS and other concerned staff members. The trained QAS and other staff conducted one day training during the basic course of education teachers. The disability-concerned issues had been incorporated in the refresher courses and also in the monthly review meeting. A total of 5,478 teachers have been imparted with the similar training. Field-level program staff were provided with a general orientation on the policy issues concerning inclusion of disabled learners. The BRAC Education Program has developed a training module for the staff and teachers for both basic and refresher courses. On the basis of recommendation of consultant BRAC

The senior staff members of BRAC Education Program are participating in national and international seminar concerning disability and education.

Reflections from Observation on Inclusion Process:

Policy Issue:

BRAC has developed a policy on the inclusion of children with special needs into their NFPE centres. Many activities like capacity development of concerned staff members and the adaptation of the centres have already been initiated based on the policy. A conscientious review of the policy has identified possibilities of it being developed to be a more comprehensive and efficient guiding tool with regard to inclusion of children with special needs.

The existing policy mainly promotes the inclusion of only children with mild & moderate disabilities. There is also a policy decision that children with severe and profound disabilities will only be included depending on the competencies and capacity of the teacher and availability of learning materials that could facilitate their learning. The study team did not observe the inclusion of children with severe and profound disabilities.

The development of the policy has been a very recent initiative. Previously, there was no directive regarding the inclusion of children with special needs in BRAC's education. Although the team observed many staff members were aware of the policy, there was a large section of the field staff who were not adequately aware of the policy.

The policy mentions inclusion of three children with special needs per NFPE centre. This is approximately 10% of the total children enrolled. In reality, most of the centres had included one or two children with special needs. Normally the target group is children from the poor families. But, in the case of children with special needs, they were enrolled even if they were from better-off families.

Every NFPE centre has a seven-member representative committee. In the policy, there is no mention that this committee should have representation from the family of the children with special needs enrolled in the class. There is also no indication on addressing special needs services essential for children with special needs. If this is addressed, it would facilitate effective and continued learning.

It was also felt that the screening policy was not comprehensive. In a few of the observed schools a few children were wrongly diagnosed.

Conditions of the education centers

BRAC has taken steps to attain the necessary conditions that would facilitate the education of the children with special needs into its education. Most of the new centres have windows that allow necessary lighting inside the room. But in a few cases, especially in the old centres, there were an inadequate number of windows and hence lighting was not sufficient.

Most of the classrooms had one door for entrance and exit. The door and the windows all opened inside the room. The entrance into the classrooms was not always 'disability friendly', especially for the children with physical and visual disabilities.

The teachers appeared aware regarding the placement of the disabled learners in the classrooms. They were sitting very near the teacher and the blackboard.

According to teachers, communicating effectively with the children with speech & hearing impairments was difficult. This made the learning and teaching process ineffective. They were required to spend more time on these students. Non-availability of necessary optical devices and learning materials made it difficult for the children with low vision and visual impairments.

A friendly atmosphere has been created for children with special needs in the classroom. The peer students appeared disability-sensitive and friendly to the children with special needs. A very similar attitude was also exhibited by the teachers.

Access to the sanitary latrine was difficult for the children with special needs, especially the physically impaired. For most of the centres the noise level was low but in a few cases it was found that the centre is near the bazaar or in a noisy place.

School Management

The inner support of School Management Committee of BRAC education centres appeared to be committed to include disabled learners, despite having inadequate knowledge and insufficient experience of inclusion of children with special needs. While CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS seems enthusiastic to have enrolled in education centre, BRAC's nominal stipulation to encourage these children do not cater to them for a long period with adequate support. Initially BRAC education teachers were reluctant about their enrollment since they were not confident about potentialities of children with disabilities. Gradually, things changed and teachers now confess that in many occasions they have found them as a better learners than their normal peers. The strategic management is always found very sound in BRAC set up, where a regular monthly meeting between parents and teachers are shared, concerning disability issues. School management committee plays a vital role in BRAC education setup, which consists of seven members and has a strong monitoring capacity. They are to be present in each parent meeting, and sometimes organize a surprise school visit to see the effectiveness of the activities. There is no provision to include the parents of special need learners in the school management committee.

BRAC schools are much advanced in co-curricular activities. But no such extra-curricular activities for physical disable learners are available. Regional area offices are responsible to supervise the entire monitoring and supervision components, hence monitoring seems to be very organized.

Education Environment

BRAC offers an adaptable and harmonious education environment for learners with special needs in its education setup. Despite ensuring many favorable atmospheres, it has not introduced any specific individual education plan for the children with special needs. BRAC possess a very good environment for peer learners, but in few areas the surroundings were not very friendly for children with special needs. Particularly during rainy season it may create a hindrance in the movement of children with special needs. As far as the environment of the classroom and the attitude of teacher and the peers towards children with special needs are concerned, the teachers were found extremely friendly, cooperative and concerned about children with special needs. Sometimes, they pay more attention to these children compared to the other learners. Children with special needs have also developed a tender relationship with the teacher and classmates. Teachers in education setup often found it difficult to deal and communicate with children with special needs, particularly with those who are visual and hearing impaired. If proper training in sign language is provided to education teachers, it would help narrow the gap of understanding and widen the scope of communication between teachers and disable learners. At the beginning, the peers were scared and afraid to be mixed up with the disabled. In due course, the situation has completely been changed and they are now well acquainted with each other, helping each other in teaching, learning, playing, and other extra curricular activities. However, in order to intensify the inclusion process, BRAC introduced flexibility in school timing. Scope for other recreational arrangements need to be strengthened.

Awareness Raising

After having been trained by different disability training organizations, Staff members of BRAC were found well sensitized, conscious and well aware about the needs and requirements of education of children with special needs. BRAC created opportunity for HO staff, RM, QAS, TI, PO, TARC trainers to be trained on the tools of awareness, raising components for education of children with special needs. Trainers as well as teachers proceeded to awareness-raising initiatives with different parent and community meetings and have successfully brought changes in people's attitudes. The influence of this community awareness has directed many families towards the enrollment of their children with special needs. This process of inclusion was not only limited to a child with mild or moderate disability, moreover, parents were keen to include children with severe and profound disability in the BRAC education setup. However, in order to strengthen the awareness among larger communities, BRAC must increase related resource materials to enhance its awareness-raising program further.

Support Service

Currently BRAC is including children with mild and moderate disabilities. Although most do not need special needs services, some still require therapy, assistive devices & aids, sign language, Braille, counseling, etc. This will become even more essential as BRAC will gradually start to include children with a higher degree of disability. More materials would allow the teachers to teach the children with special needs more easily and efficiently. It will change their lives positively, undoubtedly. In the existing structure BRAC has no mechanism to provide these essential services. At best, there are a few efforts to refer a few children to organizations / institutions for services. Even though BRAC currently has no trained staff members or mechanism that can provide these services, with some effort BRAC could easily acquire these capacities by training its staff members. During the field visits many meetings and discussions were held with a range of BRAC staff members, starting from teachers to the Regional Managers. In all these meeting, one of the major requirements that was put forward was the availability of special needs services that could help the children with special needs.

Training of Staff and Teachers

Before initiating the inclusion practices, BRAC strategically initiated human resource development at various levels. BEP headquarter staff, Regional managers, Quality Assurance Specialist and the teachers have been provided with short duration course training on various issues related to the inclusion of children with special needs. Senior managers training were conducted in association with few specialized organization like Helen Keller International, Institute of Education and Research of Dhaka University, and Centre for Disability in Development. Teachers have been provided with general knowledge on teaching learners with special needs during the basic course training. One-day training on teaching learners with special needs has been provided, which basically covered general knowledge on identification of children with special needs, community awareness-raising and sensitization on disability, teaching learners with special needs etc. Disability topics and agenda have been incorporated in regular refresher training and monthly program review meetings.

During the study, it was observed that there is an absence of comprehensive human resource development plans for acquiring and upgrading skills & knowledge of teachers on teaching learners with special needs in inclusive environments. Teachers lack of adequate skills to manage learners with special needs even with mild and moderate disabilities. Teachers do not have adequate knowledge on teaching aids and skills and on facilities required for disabled learners. Teachers have few documents related to teaching learners with special needs, and do not have a clear idea on its practical implications. Teachers do not make individual plans to teach learners with special needs.

Curriculum and Training Material

There are no such changes made in the existing curriculum to address the needs of children with special needs. The teacher's role on dealing with the children with special needs were explained during basic training and subsequent refresher courses. Issues are discussed in the monthly program meetings of teachers and staff through which technical guidance is provided. Some learning materials were found in use in the classroom like large prints, few handouts etc, but were not adequate. The staff who received training on disability issues had been provided with handouts on various issues on conceptual and teaching aspects, but these were also inadequate. The teachers do not have adequate guideline and materials for their back up. The parents and community meeting often discussed the issue of disability, but no material was found to be used. It eventually limits the discussion on broad areas of disability and encompasses within general awareness only.

Screening/assessment/Placement

The inclusion process of children with special needs starts with the door-to-door survey conducted by BRAC in catchments areas to identify children including children with special needs for enrollment into NFPE Centers. There are, however, a lack of adequate skills and mechanism to assess the level of disability among the identified children. The teachers are not trained and also there are no set indicators to mark eligible factors for enrolling children with special needs. After placement there are no specified tools to determine the individual lesson plans for children with special needs.

Age of enrollment for children with special needs is relaxed. Gender balance and gender issues are always considered with regard to the learners.

Evaluation

The BRAC education program has not yet introduced special measure to adapt an evaluation strategy addressing the issues of learners with special needs. In some centers, they followed tools

for learner's evaluation, but it did not reflect the proper feedback of the performance, particularly for the visually impaired and the intellectually disabled learners. The centre did not face any problems with the physically disabled learners, but had little problem with hearing impaired learners. The teachers were confused, as they had to follow the existing evaluation tools for all learners irrespective to learners with special needs. In some cases it was observed that the teachers managed the situation but no proper uniformed guidelines were provided. In some newly initiated centers, teachers did not yet receive any instruction on the evaluation process.

The Effective Consequence of BRAC's Inclusion Practices

BRAC has initiated practices of inclusion of children with special needs in its non-formal education program since last year. In many areas, the enrollment of children with special needs has been initiated fairly recently. Staff and teachers have a very nominal training and understanding on disability issues. Social awareness has not yet been adequately carried out with community people as it is designed. But a significant positive effect has been observed at all levels concerning all stakeholders.

BRAC has reformed its non-formal education policy to include children with special needs, which opened a wide scope to promote education to children who are excluded from mainstream education. This policy reformation has had an impact on the prevailing disability movement of education as a human right irrespective of disability. Currently, disability has become a considerable issue in both government and non-government education program and is looking for a systematic approach and strategy to include children with special needs in mainstream formal and non-formal education. The BRAC strategy for inclusion would play a vital role to integrate learners with special needs in government and other non-government programs in the country.

Within such a short period, over 6,000 children with special needs (mild & moderate) have access to BRAC non-formal education, which is a breakthrough to the history of education for disabled children in the country. The parents of children with special needs seem to be enthusiastic about the future of their children. This has created opportunity for social inclusion of disabled and non-disabled children in the community. BRAC has included 2-3 children with special needs but in most cases more children with disabilities were found out of school. Demand has been created for inclusion of these out of school children with similar disability and also with severe, profound degrees. Prior to inclusion, BRAC education staff made a survey on the prevailing rate of disabled children in the command community of non-formal centres. This has helped identifying the children with disabilities and at the same time sensitized people for remedial measures for their disabled children.

As a part of inclusion, BRAC teachers along with concerned staff members organize community meetings to sensitize people on disability issues particularly the attitude towards disabled people. Despite of having a very limited interventions at the community level, there has been a certain level of awareness, which in turn developed positive changes. Examples of inclusion of children with disabilities into BRAC education centres build positive attitude among community members. Enrolled children with special needs and their parents were found to be confident in education. This led people to be more participative and contributive towards inclusion of special needs learners in BRAC schools. Interactions among children with disabilities and non-disabled children in the class and outside the class have created a spontaneous and fearless relation overcoming the social stigma attached to disability.

Before initiating inclusion practices, BRAC staff members had limited understanding on inclusion of children with disabilities in BRAC education programs. In almost every case, it was observed that the staff members within and outside BEP hold a positive attitude towards the inclusion of children with disabilities. Such motivation and interest of BRAC staff members led to the expansion of the inclusion processes and practices to a larger extent. The staff is becoming more disability-sensitive and is spontaneously getting involved in acquiring more knowledge on disability issues. .

There are quite a good number of NGOs around the country who are currently working on disability issues, through which education of children with disabilities are being facilitated. Many of such NGOs do not have education program on their own. BRAC's involvement in disability issues, particularly the education of children with disabilities will inspire other NGO's to strengthen their initiative. These NGOs have expressed interest to extend human resource support. It was observed that some NGOs would consider a similar policy in their own program. BRAC's interventions toward promoting education of children with disability have created a positive impact on the national network of NGOs working with the disabled.

BRAC's Inclusion Practices: Strengths and Limitations

Based on the observations and analysis of the situation, the study has reviewed BRAC's strengths and limitations on the interventions towards addressing the inclusion of children with special needs, the children with disabilities.

Strengths

- BRAC is perhaps the only organization in the country that possesses opportunities to create wider scope of promoting education to children with special needs. BRAC has a positive image as the largest and most successful non-government agency both inside and outside the country. It could be a "role model" for the inclusion of children with special needs in education, convincing other NGOs and concerned agencies in the country and abroad to follow their lead. The motivation and interest of a high-level policy authority on inclusion of disability issues is obviously a major strength.
- The current non-formal setup comprise of 32,549 centres spread over the country with a strong network of 32,549 teachers, well-trained Program Officers, Team Leaders, and Quality Assurance Specialist Regional Managers enables BRAC to initiate nationwide interventions addressing the needs of children with special needs. Good governance with systematic program monitoring and follow-up from the education centre up to the Headquarter reflects a strong and positive management capacity, which can influence promotion of countrywide inclusion of children with special needs in non-formal education.
- Community perception on BRAC's program has been established with wider acceptance among community people which enabled easy motivation to the concerned people for inclusion in existing non-formal education set-up. The school environment itself is appropriate for inclusion of children with special needs. Uniform educational structure & setup at all BRAC centres simplifies policy and procedural issues for inclusion. Motivation and commitment of BRAC staff at all levels helps promoting the inclusion process. BRAC teachers are mostly from the locality, which simplifies the process of identification of children with special needs. The currently used survey mechanism and tools allow them for random identification.
- BRAC's partnership with the government education program is another strength for integrating education of children with special needs after completion of non-formal education. BRAC's community school and formal school up to secondary levels create options for inclusion in different structures. The policy on relaxation of the age limit of learners with special needs (from age 5 to 15) addresses the age barrier of inclusion in current practices in most educational set-up.
- BRAC's Training and Resource Centres with pools of resource people established in different geographical locations around the country are the major strength for development and

promotion of human resources. The regional offices of the BRAC Education program are well equipped and organized with potential human resources that enable them to introduce the inclusion process with minor additional input. The provision for regular refresher and monthly review practices offer opportunity for gradual inclusion of disability issues in BRAC mainstream education program.

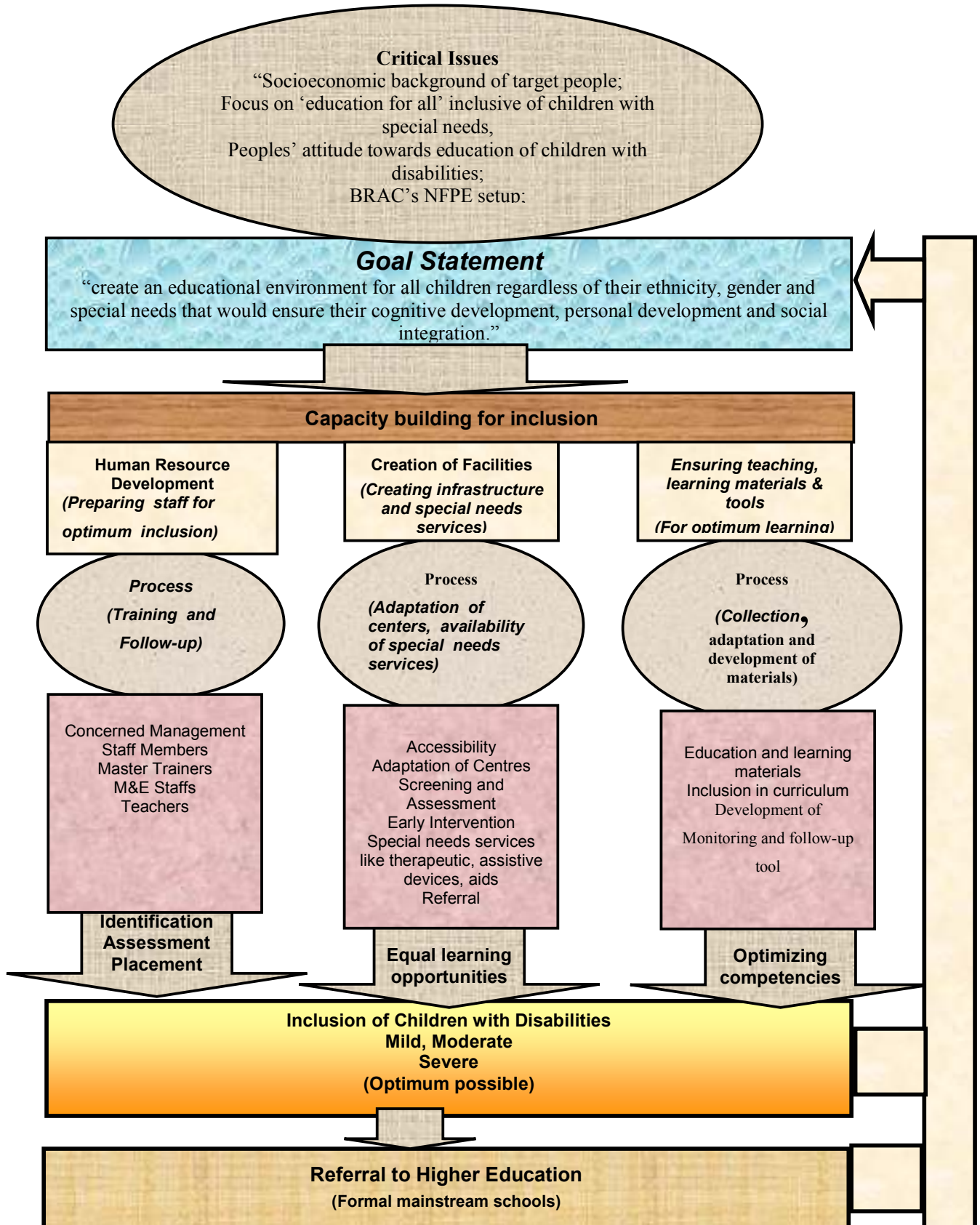
Limitations:

Despite possessing a wide range of strengths and opportunities to run education with an inclusive environment, BRAC has limitations and shortcomings that might be considered a hindrance in achieving the optimum level of its goal.

- Despite of introducing the inclusion process very recently, there is a lack of systematic transfer of adequate knowledge and skills to the concerned staff members and teachers. The staff development strategy and initiative concerning inclusion of learners with special needs do not cover the expected level of knowledge and skills. The training courses particularly for teachers and the QAS do not cover adequate contents that are required for systematic inclusion. The notable missing areas are the knowledge of identification, screening, special needs support etc. Lack of human resources in support of providing rehabilitation service is another missing area.
- BRAC has a wide set-up of comprehensive development efforts like poverty alleviation, health and nutrition, income generation etc. of which some are essential to address the needs of children with disabilities. The lack of coordination with other service components of BRAC has made the inclusion process an isolated one. Coordination with other stakeholders & agencies beyond BRAC has not been established strategically, which could be complementary to the total inclusion process.
- The level of academic education of the teachers seems to be inadequate to address the required level of understanding on disability concerned issues. Low salary structure for teachers seems another barrier for motivation and dedication for extra care required for learners with special needs services.
- Identification, assessment, primary care services etc for children with disability are considered as a precondition for inclusion in any educational set-up. Lack of experts/professional/paraprofessional on disability concerned issues in BRAC Education program are perceived to be a barrier for upholding the capacities and competencies of disabled learners. Since BRAC has the policy to enroll learners with severe and profound level of impairment, the needs for special needs services like therapy, assistive device, speech therapy sign language etc. will gradually be required.
- The Non-formal education infrastructure particularly the centre house has adapted in newly initiated houses, but few areas are not barrier free. Little more adaptation like space of the room, wide door and windows etc. could be more accessible and friendly for children with special needs. There is a lacking of appropriate teaching and learning materials to promote education of learners with special needs.
- BRAC has incorporated provision for many of the required services in its program budget like human resource development, adaptation of infrastructure, material development etc, but more areas are required to be supplemented like expert care services, disability aid support, referral support for prevention of severe effect and curative service.

Together in Education

A Conceptual Framework for Children with Special Needs



Inclusion Process:

Critical Issues:

BRAC's initiative towards education focuses on poor and disadvantaged children. The target group with special needs consist of young girls, indigenous children, and disabled children. These children are commonly excluded from mainstream society. Accordingly, they do not spontaneously involve themselves with formal education.

The current initiatives of BRAC NFPE are directed to meet the needs of all children with particular focus on children with special needs. Because of the variation in type and degree of disability, it is a complex and difficult process to identify and classify the needs of each individual learner to build capacity. There are four major types of considering disabilities: physical, visual, speech & hearing and intellectual. Additionally, these impairments are categorized into three levels of degree: mild, moderate and severe. Many children have more than one disability, further complicating the accommodation process.

Many people in Bangladesh hold a negative attitude towards people with disability, viewing them as inactive, worthless members of society. Any resources spent for people with disability are resources wasted in the mind of the common Bengali. Because of such attitudes, disabled people find it difficult to cope with an unfriendly social environment.

In most communities, there are limited services available for children with disabilities. Lack of infrastructure and special services foster an inaccessible environment for children with disability. Many disabled children that wish to attend schools cannot. Those disabled children that do attend schools often have difficulty with comfortable, consistent access to school facilities.

Most of the BRAC NFPE teachers have a standard eight to SSC education. The teacher selected to initiate a school operates the school with the same children enrolled for a continued period of four years. It limits new enrollment into this school during this period. It is also not ensured that the same school will operate at the same locality for a second four-year cycle. These pose as limits to quality education and sustainability.

The goal of inclusive education is to make the learning environment accessible for all children regardless of their ethnicity, gender and special needs.

Goal Statement:

The goal of the conceptual framework is to "create an educational environment for all children regardless of their ethnicity, gender and special needs that would ensure their cognitive development, personal development and social integration."

Capacity building for Inclusion

To address the motto of 'Education for All' the BRAC NFPE set-up needs to ensure the inclusion of children with special needs, covering all disabilities and degrees. Interventions should be made with systematic efforts to achieve a level of capacity to ensure an optimum number of children with special needs. Capacity in the areas of (1) human resource development, (2) facility creation, and (3) ensuring teaching, learning materials and tools would determine the range, number, type and degree of disability of the ;children included in the BRAC NFPE centers.

1. Human Resource Development (*Preparing staff members for optimum inclusion*)

This is aimed at preparing concerned staff members of BRAC to facilitate the process for optimum inclusion of children with special needs at BRAC NFPE centers. Systematic training and follow-up will enrich the knowledge and skills for the inclusion of learners with special needs. Concerned management staff members, master trainers, monitoring and evaluation staffs, and teachers in NFPE centers can be provided with training incorporated with BRAC's existing training packages. A comprehensive training module will be required for systematic conduction of training.

The knowledge and skills attained from these human resource development initiatives would enable the concerned teachers and staff members to properly identify children with special needs and assess their type and degree of impairment with their educational and special needs services. This would ensure effective placement of the learners with special needs in their inclusive learning environment.

2. Creation of facilities (*Creating infrastructure for special needs services*)

Adaptation of centers and provision of special needs services will allow effective inclusion of learners with special needs. It would minimize many of the barriers that these children would normally encounter in a regular NFPE centre. Such facilities and infrastructure would also increase the rate of attendance, while minimizing dropout rates.

The environment in and around the school will need to be 'disability friendly'. It can be expected that learners with different types and levels of disabilities will be included into the BRAC NFPE centers. Many of them would require special needs services like, therapy, assistive devices, different aids & appliances, Braille, sign language, treatment, etc. If these areas are not considered and provisions are not made, it would severely affect the education of the children with special needs. Capacity developed within the BRAC structure would enable provision of such services to the enrolled children with special needs. Availability of information for cases that can not be served with in the BRAC set-up would allow referral for appropriate services.

Establishment of facilities for children with special needs at BRAC NFPE centers would minimize extensively the gaps that normally result among non-disabled children and disabled children as a cause of their individual disabilities. This would lay the foundation for equal learning opportunities.

3. Ensuring teaching, learning materials and tools (*For optimum learning*)

The educational learning needs and techniques vary among children with special needs. Disability-sensitive NFPE curriculum with specific instructions and guidance on teaching children with special needs would assist the teachers of NFPE Centers. Performance assessment guidance for children with special needs would allow proper and justified assessment. The children with disability would require different learning materials like Braille, abacus, large prints, etc. Follow-up and monitoring tools would ensure proper guidance and support.

These materials could be collected, some may require adaptation and in a few cases new materials may require development. Presence of such capacity in the centers and children with special needs utilizing them would allow optimizing capacity and easier learning.

Inclusion of Children with Disabilities: Mild, Moderate Severe (Optimum possible)

Different factors need to be addressed before progressing towards total inclusion of all children with special needs. These are an assessment of requirements: availability of skilled human resources, development of infra-structural facilities, development of teaching and learning materials, and preparation of families and communities. If these are not addressed, the objectives behind the inclusion of children with disabilities will be virtually impossible to achieve. Considering the magnitude of BRAC's NFPE program and set-up, addressing all needs related to all children with disabilities might be overwhelming. BRAC NFPE has considered these factors and has already initiated a program that is addressed to include children with mild and moderate disability. In correspondence with BRAC's existing intention to gradually include all children with disabilities, BRAC could consider capacity development programs spread over certain duration of time.

If the suggested range of capacity is attained with the requirements addressed, it is expected that an optimum number of children with special needs would have the opportunity to attain primary education. This would not only educate the disabled youth, but also the community and other children on the potentialities of the children with special needs. It would also immensely contribute in removing negative attitudes and building a much friendlier environment for children with disabilities.

Referral to Higher Education (Formal mainstream schools)

Inclusion of children with special needs into the BRAC NFPE centers should not be the only aim of BRAC, but it should consider regarding the continued education of the children with disabilities who would complete up to standard five. Steps must be taken to work with the possible institutions in the areas where the children with disabilities could enroll and continue their education after completing NFPE with BRAC.

Recommendations

Introduction:

BRAC has earned wide recognition for education as a literary initiative to include children under difficult circumstances into the education process. Opportunities were brought to the children by BRAC from urban and rural areas of Bangladesh. Over the years, children from the most underprivileged groups were included into BRAC's education programs. Until very recently, the children with special needs were largely left out. BRAC had been considering undertaking steps to allow the inclusion and participation of the children with special needs into their educational programs. In the year 2003, a policy decision was taken by BRAC to start the inclusion of these children in the education programs. Certain prerequisite interventions like the training of staff members, infrastructure modifications, etc were made. But these initiatives are still not always appropriate or adequate with regard to the situation on the field.

These sets of recommendations have been developed out of a thorough study, participatory workshops, extensive interviews with staff members in the field, interactions with the children with special needs, their parents, the community as well as the feedback of the study team members.

BRAC has already successfully included most of the underprivileged groups, excluding children with special needs. Hence, these recommendations only focus on the systematic inclusion of children with special needs into their existing education structures.

The recommendations have taken into account BRAC's existing resources, capacity development potentialities, available human resources, set-ups, etc. The recommendations are not over ambitious, but rather are realistic and attainable if systematically addressed. It is expected that these recommendations would contribute towards BRAC in setting up a more realistic, effective and efficient inclusion process for children with special needs that would ultimately bring benefits to their lives.

Policy Development:

The existing inclusion policy of BRAC does not cover all the required areas. The policy needs to be more comprehensive in order to provide a systematic guideline for the promotion and execution of practices at different levels.

1. The existing policy should be reviewed and modified. It should include national conceptual framework, the guiding principles for promotion and execution of inclusion practices at various levels.
2. Specific policies could be developed on screening, assessment and placement of children with special needs.
3. A policy could be developed on capacity development including, human resources, infrastructure, systemic set-up, etc.
4. Optimum number of Children with severe to profound levels of disabilities should also be considered for inclusion into education where feasible. Capacity of both human resources and infrastructure can be gradually attained for their systematic inclusion.
5. A policy decision should be taken to ensure the participation of at least one family member in the school management committee from the family members of the children with special needs.

6. It should be a policy matter to create opportunities and access to special needs services like therapy, assistive devices & aids, communication, etc to facilitate equal educational opportunities and optimum level of learning for children with special needs.

Meeting the Conditions for Inclusion of disabled learners into the Classrooms:

BRAC has taken steps to attain the necessary conditions that would facilitate the education of the children with special needs included into its NFPE. In the new education centres certain modifications have been made. Based on the requirements and needs, there should be a few more areas considered.

1. The room size of the future education centre should be more spacious, the entrance should be wide and accessible for wheel chair users.
2. The schoolroom should be more ventilated and airy in order to make it friendlier for low vision people.
3. The entrance for a few of the BRAC centres is placed at a high level, which creates a hindrance particularly for wheelchair users. There should be a provision to introduce a ramp (can be made of mud) for wheel chair users.
4. The approach path should be accessible for visually impaired and physically disabled learners.

School Management:

BRAC education centres has existing school management committees. There is a certain level of sensitization among the members, but it can be enriched further for their effective contribution with regard to education of children with special needs. Steps must be taken to include family members of children with disabilities in the school management committees.

1. There should be a systematic mechanism to sensitize the members of the school management committee on disability-concerned issues related to the education of children with special needs.
2. One family member from the family of children with special needs should be in the school management committee.
3. A specific agenda on disability-concerned issues on education of children with special needs should be kept in the meetings of the School Management Committee.

Creating Education Environment:

BRAC has established an adaptable and harmonious education environment for learners with special needs in its education set up. A simple modification and adaptation can make the environment more friendly for the learners with disabilities.

1. BRAC should develop capacity in the areas of human resources, facilities, and teaching, learning materials and tools to create an educational environment that would facilitate equal opportunity and lead to optimum inclusion.
2. The education centres should be adapted to be 'disability friendly'.

3. The surroundings of the education centres should be non-threatening and 'disability friendly'. Access to the school should be easy for the children with special needs.
4. Teachers should be trained in appropriate areas to allow them to teach children with special needs, especially those with speech & hearing problem and visual problems.
5. Children with low vision should have necessary aids; they should be given large print texts.
6. Equal opportunities should be created to allow maximum participation for all children with special needs in the co-curriculum activities.
7. An individual education plan should exist in regard to the type and degree of disability.

Sensitization and Awareness Raising:

Sensitization and Awareness Raising are key factors for the inclusion of learners with special needs. As a precondition of inclusion, the community must be sensitized in order to create an understanding environment free of harassment towards disabled children. Positive attitudes must be encouraged to eliminate any negative stereotypes and social stigmas.

1. A comprehensive sensitization action plan should be drawn up, focusing on the awareness activities that would be required prior to including children with special needs and also after their inclusion.
2. Sensitization at the community level should be aimed at the children with special needs, their peers, their parents, the community members, etc. At least all who has or will have contact with the education centre would need to be targeted.
3. Disability issues should be a regular agenda for discussion in the teacher-parent meetings and the meeting of the SMC.
4. Sensitization should also be planned for BRAC staff members from central to area offices.
5. Concerned staff members should be trained to carry out sensitization activities.
6. Necessary sensitization materials should be collected and distributed accordingly.

Creating Facilities and Support Services:

BRAC has currently enrolled children with mild and moderate level disabilities. Although most do not currently need special needs services, a countable number of them require them. In the process of inclusion, BRAC should consider preparing the education structure gradually to accommodate severe and profound levels of disability, which require certain facilities and support services.

1. BRAC should consider developing its capacity to provide special needs services to children with special needs in the form of therapy, assistive devices & aids, sign language, Braille, counseling, etc.
2. BRAC could easily acquire these capacities by training its staff members and initiating such services from its structured Regional Offices.
3. Strong referral links should be created for specialized services.

Human Resource Development and Teachers' Training:

BRAC strategically initiated human resource development at various level. There is an absence of comprehensive human resource development plans for acquiring and upgrading skills & knowledge of teachers on teaching learners with special needs in inclusive environments.

1. A comprehensive Human Resource Development Plan should be designed to develop the capacity of BRAC education program facilitating the education of children with special needs.
2. BEP head quarterstaff, Regional Managers, Master Trainers, Quality Assurance Specialist, Monitoring and Evaluation staffs, the teachers and all concerned should be brought under this Human Resource Development Plan.
3. A comprehensive training module will be required for the systematic conduction of training.
4. Training contents can be incorporated with BRAC's existing training packages like basic courses, refreshers courses, etc.
5. Teachers should be trained to gain skills to manage learners with special needs even with mild and moderate disabilities.
6. Teachers should also be trained to gain adequate knowledge on teaching aids and skills on facilities required for disabled learners.
7. Regular refresher training courses should also be organized.

Development Curriculum and Teaching Materials:

BRAC education program follows the existing curriculum with no adaptation to address the needs of children with special needs. A Disability-sensitive curriculum is required with specific instructions and guidance on teaching children with special needs

1. Disability-sensitive education curriculum with specific instructions and guidance on teaching children with special needs should be developed to assist the teachers of NFPE Centres.
2. Performance assessment guidance for children with special needs is required to allow proper and justified assessment.
3. The children with special needs due to their disability would require different learning materials, like Braille, abacus, large prints, etc. These should be made available.
4. Follow-up and monitoring tools are required to ensure proper guidance and support at the individual level of children with special needs enrolled at the NFPE Centres of BRAC.

Screening, Assessment and Placement Policy

Screening and assessment of children with disability is essential for inclusion in education. BRAC education program should have adequate skills and mechanisms to assess the level of disability among the identified children prior to inclusion.

1. A complete policy with directives should exist on screening, assessment and policy.

2. Adequate skills and mechanism to assess the level of disability among the identified children should be developed.
3. The teachers should be trained on this area and there should be set indicators to mark eligible factors for enrolling children with special needs.
4. After placement tools should exist to determine disabled children's individual lesson plans.

Educational Evaluation Process

The BRAC education program has not yet introduced special measures to adapt an evaluation strategy, addressing the issues of learners with special needs.

1. Learning the evaluation process for children with special needs should be different from other children. This will depend on the type and level of disability.
2. In some cases the objective and process of evaluation can differ, particularly for the intellectually disabled learners.

Referral for continued education beyond BRAC

After completion of BRAC education, learners with special needs should be integrated into mainstream higher educational opportunities within BRAC or at Government or private schools.

1. Policy decisions should be made, regarding the education of children with special needs after completing their four years of education.
2. These children with special needs should be included into higher educational opportunities within BRAC or at Government or private schools.
3. Necessary advocacy and policy-level work should be done at the concerned sectors for the potential schools to be inclusive and to accept and enroll the children with special needs who have completed education at BRAC's education centres.
4. BRAC should play the pivotal role in informing these schools, regarding the capacity that they would need to acquire to effectively teach the children with special needs.
5. BRAC should cooperate and support these schools in building their capacity.

Inclusive education as a Development Approach

Inclusive education is a developmental approach seeking to address the learning needs of all children, youth and adults with a specific focus on those who are vulnerable to marginalisation and exclusion.

The Definition:

Inclusive education means that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff.

The principle:

Inclusion involves all kinds of practices that are ultimately practices of good teaching. What good teachers do is to think thoughtfully about children and develop ways to reach all children.

The principle of inclusive education was adopted at the World Conference on Special Needs Education : Access and Quality (Salamanca, Spain, 1994) and was restated at the World Education Forum (Dakar, Senegal, 2000).

Nine Golden Rules of Inclusive Education Dealing with Children with Special Needs:

1. Including all pupils
2. Communication
3. Managing classrooms
4. Lesson planning
5. Individual plans
6. Individual help
7. Assistive aids
8. Managing behavior
9. Working together

(Adapted from Understanding and Responding to the Children's Needs of Inclusive Classroom, UNESCO)

Conditions that facilitates promoting inclusive environment in education

1. Policy Issues:

Organizational policy is a prerequisite for the creation of inclusive environment to support systematic enrollment of learners with special needs. The policy should include directions and guideline for each of the concerned actors and stakeholders. Complementary rules and procedures in support of the policy will strengthen the promotion of an inclusive environment in the education set-up

2. Conditions for Inclusion into the Classrooms:

The classroom should have enough natural light, the entrance should be adjusted for children with disabilities. Teachers should always face hearing-impaired learners when speaking, standing with his face in good light. For low vision learners, the teacher should take care of appropriate lighting by control of natural light or use of table lamp if electricity is available. The board should be visible.

There should be a minimum of two doors and six windows in a classroom. The size of the doors should be big enough to allow a physically impaired learner wheel chair access. The blackboard should be placed in front of students and slightly above eye level.

The floor of the classroom should be properly finished, plain, or flat. The floor should also have good contrast so the low vision learners can find anything easily on the floor.

There should be a cloth, jute mat (Chot), or carpet on the floor to absorb extra noise, which will help the hearing impaired learners to hear the teacher properly.

3. School Management:

There should be organizational policy to provide education to the disabled learners, defined policy guideline to enroll the learners with disabilities in school, as well as the involvement of parents of disabled learners in the school management process.

The school management authority must have a positive attitude towards the education of learners with disabilities.

There should be provision to encourage and recognize learners with disabilities for their extraordinary performance in education and extra-curricular activities.

4. Education Environment:

All non-disabled learners should be cooperative and helpful with disabled learners. Teachers should give proper attention to all the children, including disabled learners.

There should be an Individual Education Plan for each disabled learner indicating the goal, activities, achieved goals and performances of the learner.

The non-disabled learners should accept the disabled learners as their peers and friends. The attitude of non-disabled learners should be positive to accept disabled classmates.

Teachers should have positive attitude to accept the disabled learners in the classroom.

Teachers should take extra care and give proper attention with patience to the disabled learners as well as other non-disabled learners. They should aware of the students' difficulties and give extra help within the class.

Teachers should gain knowledge on speech therapy to help the learners with hearing impairments and speech problems. The learners with hearing impairments should learn how to use sign language, lip reading, etc. The learners with hearing impairments should be allowed a flexible timetable, which will enable them to practice their skill of sign language, lip reading, and using a communication board.

Learners with visual impairments should be allowed a flexible timetable, which will enable them to practice their skill on reading and writing in Braille.

The low vision learners should get large print materials as fits their needs. Large prints should be appropriate in size for the learners. They should get a reading stand and typo scope for reading and writing properly.

There should be a proper school routine for all the students in the class, which should be flexible for learners with disabilities.

There should be enough scope for every disabled learner to enhance his or her abilities through working and participating in classroom activities and cultural programs and sports.

The learners with disabilities should get similar opportunities to participate in classroom activities like cleaning the blackboard, bringing the attendance register book, being the class captain, etc.

There should be good opportunities for the learners with disabilities to take part in different leisure activities like dramas and role-play acting in the schools to expose their creativity. The playtime and other extra-curricular activities should be adapted for the learners with disabilities.

The running track can be adapted by lining the track with a long rope and two stamps. A visually impaired student can easily follow the track and participate in the running race. The hearing impaired learner can participate in cultural activities by playing musical instruments or preparing the stage.

5. Awareness Raising:

The attitude of parents of non-disabled and disabled learners and the community should be supportive of the inclusive education system.

Teachers can create awareness on inclusive education with parent-teacher meetings, in the classroom, and through community meetings.

6. Facilities and Support Services:

Learners with disabilities should be seated in a position suitable for seeing the blackboard and teacher demonstrations. They should also be able to hear any commentary.

The visually impaired or low vision learners should be placed in the front of the room, near the blackboard, near the teacher and beside window. There should be enough space for the movement of the physically impaired learners with wheel chair or crutches. The hearing impaired learner should be placed in front of the room and near to the teacher. There should be access for the teacher to reach each student in class.

The edges of chair/ table etc. should be round shaped or blunt, safe for children with disabilities. The furniture, doors and windows should be colour contrasted and matte finished. The switches of fans, lights points should be color contrasted for visually impaired children. The electric wires and switch boards should be safe and identified with different color contrast.

The classroom should be quiet, calm and background noise should be controlled. The surrounding area of the classroom should be free from extra sound or noise.

Hearing impaired learners should sit near to teacher to see the face of teacher clearly. Hearing impaired children should see the lips of teacher for lip reading.

The physically disabled learners should be placed near to door because so that they can easily move in the classroom and go outside.

7. Teachers' Skills and Knowledge:

Teachers should have training to facilitate inclusive education, especially on how to teach and cope with the learners with special needs.

Teachers should have skills on reading and writing in Braille as well as the use of abacus and Taylor frame for mathematics for visually impaired learners.

Teachers should have training on how to develop and use large print materials, make typoscopes and read stands for low vision learners.

Teachers should have training in sign language to communicate with the learners with hearing impairment and speech problems.

Teachers should also be trained in lip-reading methods to communicate with the hearing impaired learners and to teach them the method of lip reading.

Teachers should speak clearly and loudly for hearing impaired and visually impaired learners. The language of the teacher should be easy to understand. Teachers should clean the blackboard properly before rewriting.

Teachers should simultaneously write and speak for the learners with disabilities. The handwritings of teachers should be clear enough for the learners with disabilities to understand. The teachers should write boldly on the board for the visually impaired learners or low vision.

Teachers should keep an individual action plan for each of the learners with disabilities mentioning the general and specific goals, activities and achievements.

8. Curriculum and Teaching Materials:

The curriculum (teaching strategies and teaching methods) should be flexible for learners with disabilities.

There should be appropriate learning materials and equipments for the learners with disabilities. Realistic learning materials and educational aids should be used in classroom activities. The material and equipment addressing the special needs of learners with disabilities should be introduced. The learners' working area should be adequate for the organization of learning materials and special equipment. The learning material should be user-friendly in terms of contrast between print and paper, layout, print size, communication board, picture board, alphabet cards, tactile aids and models etc.

9. Screening, Assessment and Placement Policy

The learners with disabilities should be screened and assessed through the criteria of their difficulties, potentialities, impairments, inability and capability to have education. Teachers should be involved in the process of screening as well as in assessing the learners with disabilities.

The age of enrolling learners with disabilities in school should be considered. Types of impairment should be considered to enroll learners with disabilities in school.

Degree or level of impairment should be considered to enroll the learners with disabilities in school. Gender should also be considered to enroll the learners with disabilities in school.

10. Educational Evaluation Process

The time for the examination or class tests should be flexible for learners with visual impairment or low vision, hearing impairment or physical impairment (Hand amputee, Cerebral palsy etc.). There should be provision for scribes or writers for the visually impaired learners. There should be viva system for the visually impaired learners.

A reference of a good practice of Inclusive Education: Underprivileged Children's Education Program (UCEP):

UCEP had been operating small-scale education programs all over the country for the underprivileged children for many years. However, recently they decided to initiate an inclusive education program in its educational institutes. The Chittagong center was selected as the pilot project. Even though the inclusive school had been initiated only in January 2002, yet the level of achievement that it has attained so far, in such a short time, is noteworthy. Starting with a baseline survey in the area, they got their teachers and central staff trained in Disability issues. The community was prepared for this initiative. Children with disabilities and their parents were motivated; other children in the school had also been sensitized. They brought in changes in the school infrastructure and classrooms to some extent. Lighting was enhanced; carpets were brought in to reduce distortion of sound. Toilets were made accessible to wheelchair users. The curriculum, assessment process & learning methods had been simplified to facilitate the education of the children with disabilities. Extracurricular activities had been selected carefully that allowed the children with disabilities to participate in cultural and sports activities with the non-disabled children. The school also catered facilities to address the other needs of the children with disabilities like medication, assistive devices and linking with other organizations that provide specialized essential services. The school maintains strong networking with different organizations working on disability issues.

The school has a total of 710 learners out of which 14% (99) are children with disabilities. 60% of the children with disabilities are male. Among all the enrolled children with disabilities the highest are from the physically disabled at 62%. The intellectually disabled and the speech and hearing impaired constitute the lowest at 9% each.

The teachers of the school are well conscious of the rights of children with disabilities to acquire education. They have exhibited positive attitude towards the children with disabilities. With time they have developed a special bond with the children with disabilities.

The school has taken initiatives to develop the capacity of its teachers on 'teaching students with disabilities. The teachers have received basic training on inclusive education and also received orientation on multi-disability. Beyond this training the teachers have not yet precisely received any specific training on areas like Braille, sign language or other forms of communication.

The school recognizes the diversity of learning needs of its students with disabilities. Special steps are taken to ensure flexibility of the followed curriculum of the different classes, but simultaneously it is ensured that it is not beyond the main framework of the curriculum.

All the learning materials used by the school for education of children are considerate of diversity, bias and discrimination free. The learning materials are available free of charge to all the students.

The school includes children with disabilities of different types and degrees. The learning capabilities of each of these children vary from child to child. The teachers are using different child center approaches to facilitate the learning process of these children with disabilities. Considering the individual needs of the children the teachers provide additional care and assistance where and when required. Different learning methods are used such as group learning, peer tutoring, activity-based teaching, role-play etc.

The school has the intention to provide specialized services, such as occupational therapy, physical therapy, counseling, hearing services, speech therapy, crisis management, mobility services, vision services, etc. but there are limited scopes. The school as an institute does not have such capacities. But it takes the best of efforts to link the children with disabilities of the school to organizations providing such services. But the demand is much more in terms of what can be met. The school is also working to provide medical services to the children with disabilities.

The school has been able to create an environment that facilitates positive treatment for all. Previously there were little scopes of interactions between the children with no disability and the children with disabilities. This allowed the growth of an attitude that they were different. There was also a prevalent attitude of sympathy. But this barrier has been overcome through the scope of interaction while coming to the school and also within the school. The children with disabilities are actively mixing and socializing with all other children of the school. They are also participating with all the children of the school in various games and sports to facilitate socialization and interaction. The school also takes initiatives for organizing extracurricular activities including plays, dramas and other cultural activities. Different cultural competitions are also organized. The children with disabilities are encouraged and facilitated to participate in such activities. Such initiatives are facilitating in exposing the latent qualities of the children with disabilities and at the same time, are also influencing in the development of their innovativeness and creativity.

Case Studies:

Beyond the Centre:

BRAC Non Formal Education centre has included two disabled children and have successfully integrated them with other non-disabled children in Raypur, a remote village of Chandina Thana. One of them is mildly hearing impaired and the other is partially sighted (one-eyed). Mothers of both the children are happy that they find their son and daughter enjoying the school and new friends. The teacher who runs the centre was a little tense in the beginning, not confident in her ability to accommodate the students. Now, she is totally comfortable and confident with the situation. The community were sensitized on attitudes toward the disabled in an attempt to reduce the bad feelings usually held. The disabled students are quite happy in the school environment.

One comment of the parents of these disabled children was that no one teased their sons and daughters. They found a change of attitude of people towards their disabled children. Parents used to hide their children because of social threat, but now they feel relaxed due to the changed attitude.

Twins Develop Self-Confidence in a BRAC School:

Keya and Holy are twin sisters and victims of severe physical disability. The medical causes of this disability are still unknown to Keya and Holy's parents who superstitiously believe that the "Kharap Badash" (evil wind) is somehow responsible for their condition. Holy can not move at all, while Keya has limited motion in her legs. The two sisters were fortunate to be born into a family with financial security. Their parents set up a BRAC school using an empty room in their home. Their mother was a teacher at first, but she could not continue because of the needs of her daughters. Their father works in a local NGO. Both of the daughters study in class three at Gupinpur BRAC school. "Enrollment to BRAC school has brought many changes in my daughters", sighs their father. Before enrollment, life was monotonous for their daughters. They were prone to frequent outbursts, venting their frustrations and suffering, disturbing their mother. When BRAC started school in 2002, there was no such provision included in BRAC's education policy to enroll disabled children. Because of the family's involvement in the BRAC program, the daughters were included on the basis of a special consideration. Although the young girls are physically handicapped, their intellectual capacity is quite sound.

Whereas the twins were feeling helpless before their opportunity at education, now they have an uplifted sense of confidence and self-worth. Through their interactions with their teacher and classmates, they have a sense of belonging in a group. Their studies have been going well, according to their teacher who found them to be quite good students. They have also adjusted with their fellow students, participating in games and other activities. Their major obstacle is communication, which could be easily overcome if proper devices were provided to the twins. The teacher has been helpful and attentive to the twins' needs. Her mother is pleased, saying, "They love school so much that they don't even not allow me to go to my father's house in fear of missing class the next day. I do not know what BRAC has taken from me but it has given me the best my life could ever offer me." The time at school has eased tensions at home. No longer do the girls complain about the dullness of their days. They are now cooperative and more responsible when at home. Their family life has received unforeseen benefits since the involvement in the BRAC school.

Jesmin's Struggle for Communication and Understanding:

"She does not need to study in a classroom. You only let her sit amongst the other children with her books," pleaded Jesmin's mother to a BRAC school teacher. Jesmin, a thirteen year-old girl, is victim to severe hearing and speech impairment. She can not talk, and is only embarrassed when she attempts even a word. She becomes very frustrated when she finds people do not understand her. When Jesmin saw how her brother was studying in a BRAC school, she became inspired to follow his lead and pursue an education. Her mother did not support the idea, but after much convincing by Jesmin and her brother, their mother approached the class teacher to discuss Jesmin's possible enrollment.

Jesmin's persistence paid off and the teacher felt compelled to enroll her in the BRAC education centre. The teacher was concerned about how she would get along with her disability, especially when students in the class ridiculed about her unclear speech. The teasing she receive from her peers hurt, and Jesmin began to react badly to her classmates, often disturbing them. Although the teacher gave her full support, Jesmin faced a large obstacle in making friendships and staying optimistic.

After the initial turbulence of getting settled into the class, the teacher addressed the students in an effort to bridge the gap of understanding between Jesmin and her peers. In addition, the teacher spoke with the parents of students to make them aware of the difficulties facing the class. The class teacher finds Jesmin slow in study, but extremely sound in other matters. After some of the issues were addressed, the teacher has observed positive behavioral changes in Jesmin. The teacher

voiced a desire to learn sign language to be more successful in communicating with children with special needs.

Her peers have adjusted to Jesmin's limitations, and are more sympathetic to her struggles. This has been a notable social accomplishment. Although she has struggled academically, school has brought Jesmin out of her house and into the community. Social inclusion is just as valuable as education, and Jesmin is the better for it.

Two Boys with Hearing Impairment Teach a Community to care about Disability:

"The BRAC school has helped to change the orthodoxy perception, conventional insight, and traditional understanding of many people's mindset regarding disability particularly in rural areas", says one of BRAC teacher in the Chor Algi area, adding, "the ascertained myth and a rigid belief on such a principle that any interaction with a disabled children can have an adverse effect on a non-disabled children is losing its long perceived notion among people gradually." BRAC started its classes in 2003 with 33 non-disabled children, but newly introduced provision of BRAC demands the recruitment of disabled children. The recruitment process only turned up two hearing impaired children in that locality. It took an enormous effort to convince their parents to send their children to the NFPE centre. The teacher of the NFPE centre was reluctant to take responsibility for teaching disabled children, confessing, "Initially, I was not very much optimistic about the learning capacity of these disabled children as well as my own ability. Since I had never encountered such an experience to deal with this sort of problem and more importantly, both of these children had difficulties in talking." In the beginning, when the children were enrolled, they were isolated, shying away from the group. As time passed, the situation changed, and they are more confident and have more friends. The children used to call them "Boba" (deaf), but now they consider them as equal friends. Their success in the school inspired parents of other disabled children to seek education for their sons and daughters. When parents of non-disabled children learned that their sons and daughters had disabled friends, they became more accepting of disability. Attitudes were changed in the community.

Sharmin puts her Mother at Ease:

Sharmin, a seven year-old girl with low vision and speech difficulty, studies in Chandina BRAC school. The origin of her disability is unknown, and medical treatment is inaccessible due to Sharmin's state of poverty, so there is a degree of mystery about her specific condition. Her father is a rickshaw puller while her mother works as a maid. When BRAC launched its school in the area, Sharmin urged her mother to enroll her in the school. Sharmin shows keen interest in study, but it is song and dance that she most enjoys. "She loves singing but can not make it do so for a prolonged period," lamented her mother, adding, "when she starts singing the first stanza comes out easily, but the song gradually declines, her voice wanes away." Her mother feels relaxed to send her school. Sharmin's mother feels at ease, sending her daughter to school. She was extremely worried about her future, and now there is a glimpse of hope for her daughters independence.

I will buy a CD Player for my boy Although I Cannot buy Food for him:

Shahjahan, an 8 year-old boy of Borunatail village in Magura, is the only son of his parents. His legs are paralysed and he is bound to a wheelchair.

Shahjahan is always smiling, which attracted many of his relatives and neighbors. He was identified by BRAC and included in a BRAC education centre. The teacher had dialogue with the school children, parents and community people regarding the issue of disability. This created a positive environment to receive Shahjahan. Shahjahan feels comfortable to join the school and eager to attend class regularly. BRAC education conducts co-curriculum activities during classes in which everyone participate.

Most of the co-curriculum activities involve physical movement, which limits Shahjahan's participation. But Shahjahan can sing and he loves song.

Shahjahan's father is a poor rickshaw puller with very limited earning. His mother is a housewife. Both are extremely happy that their child is enjoying the company of others at the school.

They are extremely frustrated that Shahjahan can not take part in co-curriculum activities due to his physical limitations. He can participate in singing, and has a nice voice. He has a desire to learn songs, so his family seeks to buy him a CD player. His voice may be an important factor in his social inclusion, boosting his self-confidence. Shahjahan's parents started savings to buy a CD so that he can learn to sing.

Conclusion:

The initiatives of BRAC in opening the door for children with disabilities into non-formal education must be appreciated and acknowledged. This policy decision has created opportunities for the millions of out of education children with disabilities for education and progress towards development. BRAC is considered as the largest NGO in the world, and it is possible only by BRAC to create a significant impact in the rate of education for the children with disabilities.

At present more than 6,000 children with disabilities have been included into BRAC Education Program. More will enroll with time. But at the same time it is important for BRAC to be systematic and methodical in their inclusion process considering the special requirements of the children with disabilities. The study provides directions and a conceptual framework focusing on three pillars of capacity development including human resource development, creation of facilities and ensuring teaching, learning materials and tools. If these issues are addressed and capacity created it can be expected that effective and sustained inclusion will occur, if not, there would be the threat of negative results and impacts.

The right to education is equal for all citizens including the children with disabilities regardless of the type and degree of disability. It is appreciable at one hand that BRAC is including the children with mild and moderate disabilities but at the same time it is expected that BRAC would also consider with the buildup of capacity the inclusion of children with severe and profound disability as much as possible.

END
