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# **Improvements in the quality of primary education in Bangladesh, 1990 - 2002**

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**IMPROVEMENTS IN THE QUALITY OF PRIMARY EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH  
1990-2002  
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***Paper Overview:*** The aim of this paper is to explore attempts at quality improvements in the provision of primary education in Bangladesh through the different interventions that have been attempted by the Government of Bangladesh (GOB), some of them in collaboration with international donors. In addition, the paper also presents a widely acknowledged quality program in primary education provided to very poor children by the NGO BRAC as only one illustration of the kinds of quality programs being provided to children in Bangladesh. ECCE and literacy program history is also discussed although briefly. The paper ends with a look towards the future of quality primary education in Bangladesh and recommendations for successful future programming through a look at the lessons learned from the country's past experience. As an addition, succinct summaries of the country's experiences in both ECCE and literacy programs are discussed in the last two sections of the paper.

## ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AUEO	Assistant Upazila Education Officer
BEOC	Basic Education for Older Children
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DNFE	Directorate of Non Formal Education
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
EMIS	Education Management Information Systems
FEP	Food for Education Program
FIVDB	Friends in Village Development
GEP	General Education Project
GPS	Government Primary School
INFEP	Integrated Non Formal Education Program
MOPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MWTL	“Multiple Ways of Teaching and Learning”
NFE	Non formal Education
NAPE	National Academy for Primary Education
PMED	Primary Mass Education Division
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
PTI	Primary Teacher Training Institute
RNGPS	Registered Non Government Primary School
SMC	School Management Committee
TLM	Total Literacy Movement
UEO	Upazila Education Officer
URC	Upazila Resource Center
WCEFA	World Conference on Education for All

## LIST OF TABLES

- TABLE 1: PUBLIC SPENDING ON PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE 1990s
- TABLE 2: EXPENDITURE ON PRIMARY AND MASS EDUCATION BY THE GOB AND FROM FOREIGN AID (in millions of taka)
- TABLE 3: PROJECTS UNDER PEDP I (DONOR FUNDED)
- TABLE 4: PROJECTS UNDER PEDP I (GOB FUNDED)
- TABLE 5: QUALITY ACHIEVEMENTS OF PEDP I (By Project)
- TABLE 6: CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE NGO PRIMARY SCHOOLING INTERVENTIONS
- TABLE 7: ADULT LITERACY RATES IN BANGLADESH 1970-2000

## Introduction

Bangladesh has come a long way since independence in 1971 at which time per capita income was well below US\$100. In the last thirty years, per capita income has grown from \$100 to \$380. Social indicators such as infant mortality, fertility rates, life expectancy, and access to safe drinking water have also improved remarkably. Bangladesh has had by far the most successful population program among the world's 20 poorest countries. The population growth rate has fallen from over 3 per cent per year in the 1970s to less than 2 per cent in the 1990s. Bangladesh has achieved impressive results in the 1990s in increasing the child immunization rate from 10 to 70 per cent. Nevertheless, poverty continues to be pervasive with nearly half of the country's 130 million people living below the poverty line. This represents the highest incidence of poverty in South Asia and the third highest number of poor people living in a single country after India and China. These challenges are magnified by a population density of roughly 800 people per square kilometer—one of the highest in the world. Despite these daunting odds, the country has made great strides in the provision of primary and girls education.

Since 1971, the political thrust behind educational policy has been towards increased access to basic education for the masses, with an emphasis on better opportunities for the rural poor and females and for greater functional relevance of schooling at all levels of the system. Educational expansion however, remained erratic throughout the first two decades of independence and only began to take place in the mid to late 1980s. This situation mirrors the global arena of donor funded educational development during the time which was dominated by “bricks and mortar” educational projects. In 1990, the World Conference Education for All (WCEFA) was a watershed event that changed the face of educational development in Bangladesh. Bangladesh was an enthusiastic signatory to the WCEFA framework in 1990 and its participation and pledges to the global accord, coupled with the advent of democratic rule in the country in 1991 (first time since 1973), served as catalysts to education expansion at a scale not witnessed previously. While most of Bangladeshi social life remains highly politicized, the issue of achievement of the EFA goals, since the advent of democracy, has remained an uncontested domain despite three changes in regime from 1990 to the present day. Public spending on education increased as a proportion of GDP from 0.9 per cent (1973-80) to 2.2 per cent (1997-8). Education was also increasingly high priority, rising from about 9 per cent of total spending in the First FYP (1973-80) to 16 per cent (1995-6). Even within the social sectors, the share of development spending on education increased faster than on other sector during the expansionary surge of the 1990s (see Table 1).

Much of education policy and practice in the 1990s has been based on the 1990 Primary Education Compulsory Act which was passed in Parliament in 1993. The Act committed that:

- No child be deprived of education for lack of teacher, learning materials and adequate space;
- No child be subject to disparities of access to primary education arising from gender, income, family, cultural or ethnic differences and geographic remoteness;
- There would be quality and relevance of primary education by intensifying efforts to improve learning content and materials and to carry out necessary reforms in the primary

education system.

As part of this policy thrust, a separate ministry-level division, the Primary Mass Education Division (PMED) which at the time worked directly under the Prime Minister's office and dealt with both primary education and NFE, was established in 1992. The PMED has today been uplifted into the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME). Since 1991, primary education has been free for all children in government run schools and education for girls is free up to grade VIII (lower secondary school) in rural areas. In addition, textbooks at the primary level are free for students in all government and registered non government schools. Moreover, there has been in place since 1993, a scholarship program for girls in rural secondary schools. This also includes financial incentives to schools in the form of grants based on the number of girls that are enrolled. There was also until 2002, A Food for Education Program (FEP) that provided food rations to 20 per cent of poor primary school aged children in specifically targeted rural areas. And lastly, the decade since the WCEFA has seen a proliferation of NGO run primary education programs and NGO schools now claim 8.5 per cent of all primary enrollments in the country.

Due to the policies and programs described above, Bangladesh has achieved a phenomenal amount in the past ten years; especially in terms of access. Perhaps most noteworthy is the fact that there is gender parity in both primary and secondary sub sectors. In 1961, just 3.4 million students had been enrolled in primary schools. By 1978, there were about 8 million primary school students in a population of 85 million.<sup>1</sup> By 1997 the number had doubled to about 16.3 million while the population increased to 118 million. The child population aged 6-10 years and the total enrollments in primary schools both peaked in 1998 and are now falling slowly. In 2000, over 17.6 million children were being educated in formal primary schools, 48.9 per cent of them girls; and, the Gross Enrollment Rate (GER) had reached 96 percent. However, the quality of education has not kept pace with the expansion in schooling. Students' attendance rates are low (62%) and teacher absenteeism is high. Moreover, much of both the primary and secondary school curriculum needs renewal and teacher student contact time is low.<sup>2</sup>

***Challenges and Strengths:*** The system is characterized by weak management at all levels. The highly centralized management of education inhibits district, upazila (administrative distinctions in the state) and school initiatives in providing quality education. There is also limited transparency in the allocation and use of resources, compounded by an ineffective system of accountability of teachers to students, guardians and head teachers, of head teachers to supervisors and school management committees (SMC); and of school management to government. Finally, ineffective monitoring and evaluation provide little empirical basis for policy formulation and planning. All of these together result in low achievements as well as low passing and completion rates. Only 56 per cent of all children from the ages of 11 to 19, complete grade V.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>World Bank, Bangladesh: Education and Training Sector Memorandum 2 (Washington D.C., June 1978), 21, Report no. 2037-BD

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank and Asian Development Bank, Public Expenditure Review (2003), 52.

<sup>3</sup> BIDS, Household Income and Expenditure Survey, 2000.

Also of particular note is the lack of progress in the increase of literacy rates despite programs in Non Formal Education (NFE) from 1992 onwards and a national program in NFE encompassing two different modes of literacy delivery - center based approach (CBA) and campaign based which took place from roughly 1995 to 2002 (See Section on Literacy Programs). There remains a lack of consensus on what the actual rate of literacy in Bangladesh is and it is beginning to be widely acknowledged that the GOB rate of 62 percent is somewhat wide off the marker. It is quite likely that the rate of literacy (substantiated by independent studies) is nearer to 42 per cent. The lack of consensus on data is a reoccurring theme that plagues Bangladesh's education planners and policy makers and an issue that is yet to be addressed systematically. However, independent studies have increasingly focused on the issue of accurate statistics with the ultimate hope that a stronger emphasis on this issue will bring home to GOB the need for more accuracy in this area.

It is important to mention that the GOB does recognize the challenges faced in the education sector, most prominent of which is the lack of educational quality and has attempted to address them throughout the decade of the 1990s. This will be the focus of this paper. The greatest strength of education in Bangladesh is the consistently high level of national commitment and consensus on the priority of primary education. As a result of this commitment and the programs it spawned, Bangladesh has achieved one of the largest centralized systems of primary education in the world. In the five years between 1992 and 1997 the number of primary schools burgeoned by more than half from 50,300 to 77,600 and enrollments increased by 41 per cent.<sup>4</sup> This was possible mainly due to multi shift schools in three roomed schools and an increased number of teachers hired.

It is also important to note the contribution of homegrown Bangladeshi NGOs such as BRAC, Friends in Village Development (FIVDB) and Dhaka Ahsania Mission (DAM) to name only three, in the provision of quality primary education to disadvantaged populations. The majority of Bangladesh NGOs did not implement programs in primary education until the mid 1980s but since then the sector has grown to cover approximately two million children in the primary age group.<sup>5</sup> Of laudatory note are the low drop outs, high completion rates, high levels of student attainment and alternative forms of teaching and learning that have been found in some of the larger NGO run primary education programs.

The expansion in primary education was able to take place due to a marriage of the benefits of centralized policy-making with pluralist provision. While no significant devolution of power over education policy and planning took place, the GOB has been able to periodically encourage (or to refrain from discouraging) a diversity of providers a large number of which have been NGOs. The diversity of education providers has not in most cases resulted in effective choice of provider, and the benefits of plural provision appear to have come through some learning across and (more controversially) competition between systems. In addition, groups not reached by the main system have been drawn in by more specialist providers of localized NGOs, with some then being enabled to enter the mainstream state system. Non-state provision was countenanced

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<sup>4</sup> World Bank Sector Review, 2000.

<sup>5</sup> World Bank, Public Expenditure Review, 2003.

without causing the state to lose apparent control of the overall direction and character of the expansion.

### **Attempts at Quality**

As discussed previously, Bangladesh has pursued an aggressive policy in the provision of access to quality education for primary school aged children including girls' through numerous interventions, some of which have been donor supported. Of note is the Primary Education Program I, 1997 to 2003 (PEDP I) which was made up of 27 projects (11 of which were co funded by donors) and focused on "the improvement of the quality and efficiency of the school system while continuing to improve equitable access to schools in those areas that are still underserved"<sup>6</sup> (See Table 3 and 4 in Annex 2). Plus, the follow-up, Primary Education Program II (PEDP II) which is an almost sub sector approach with a pool fund of donors and GOB that will begin implementation in July of 2004. The PEDP II is designed based on the country's EFA goals and is a six year program that aims to learn from the experiences of PEDP I.<sup>7</sup> "Fundamental to the PEDP II is the concept of a coordinated and integrated sub sector approach, assisted by multiple donors, but run by the GOB through MOPME and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), with the fundamental aim of improving the quality of the primary education provision for all children in Bangladesh."<sup>8</sup> The discussion below is a presentation of the various quality interventions since 1990, attempted in Bangladesh by the GOB and one NGO - BRAC.<sup>9</sup>

***Curriculum Improvement, free textbooks and learning materials:*** A new series of text books and teachers guidebooks was prepared and introduced in phases from 1992 to 1996. A competency based and life skills oriented curriculum was developed in 1999 based on the 52 competencies introduced at the primary level in Bangladesh in 1992. (The findings of an independent study on how much of these competencies is reflected in national curriculum and textbooks as well as the overall performance of students in cognitive competencies will be discussed further below). Primary school students who fall within the public sector (i.e. not NGO run schools) receive free textbooks. A proportion of students also receive free stationary and schools receive "school kits" and "teacher kits" containing learning materials. Under the new interventions designed for the sub sector in PEDP II, all Government Primary Schools (GPS), Registered Non Government Primary Schools (RNGPS)<sup>10</sup> and community schools will be given

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<sup>6</sup> The World Bank. PEDP I Project Appraisal Document, 1998.

<sup>7</sup> The program is an almost sub sector wide approach because it does not encompass the NGO sector of primary schools but only those schools that fall under the ambit of the public sector.

<sup>8</sup> PEDP II Macro Plan, 1.

<sup>9</sup> BRAC's Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program is a tested model of quality primary education in Bangladesh and is presented here only as an illustration of a quality education program. There are numerous quality programs in primary education that is provided by NGOs in Bangladesh but it was beyond the scope of this paper to present all of these.

<sup>10</sup> GPS are government schools and RNGPS are schools that were started privately by communities or philanthropic individuals that are now registered by the GOB and therefore receive subventions from the state in the form of teacher salaries and free text books.

a basic package of teaching aids and core and supplementary reading and learning materials. All teachers will be provided with relevant curriculum documents, teachers guides etc. The total cost of this package will be US\$133,800 for the five year program. Furthermore, the GOB is committed to ensure that all children have free texts available from the first day of every school year. This renewed commitment is especially important given that in several parts of Bangladesh certain years have seen the late delivery of textbooks to students, sometimes several months after the new school year has begun.

***Increase in instructional time:*** Most GPS and RNGPS in Bangladesh run on two shifts in order to accommodate the burgeoning number of students. Instructional time thus, is very low, one of the lowest in the world. Contact hours for grades I and II are 595 hours and 883 hours for grades III to V. The GOB's policy has been to eliminate multiple shifts in phases. Through efforts within the larger PEDP I program, 2,000 GPS have been converted into single shift schools. In these schools, contact hours for grades I and II are 863 hours and for grades III to V are 1537 hours. It is envisaged that in the future all schools will run in single shifts. In addition, teacher absenteeism is high due to a variety of reasons from sickness to in-service training to moonlighting. Under the new PEDP II, a pool of "supply teachers" will be created in order to fill temporary vacancies and thus lessen teacher absenteeism.

***Improvements in Teacher Training:*** There are 54 Primary Training Institutes (PTIs) that dot the country and offer a one year certificate course C-in-Ed for primary school teachers of government and RNGPS. Most primary school teachers are not trained before entering service and remain untrained for a large period of their working lives. Under PEDP I, there was an attempt under two separate projects, one funded by IDA and other by NORAD to rectify this situation. Under the IDA loan, some 26,000 teachers from RNGPS received C-in-Ed training and under the NORAD funded project, the target was 27,271 primary teachers but it was only achieved half way. The project experience shows that there is a lack of interest amongst teachers to receive training and most PTIs are understaffed with a large number of seats vacant. In a direct response to this, the GOB has made C-in-Ed training compulsory to all untrained RNGPS teachers and improved the allowance allotted to them during training. But the quality and relevance of the C-in-Ed curriculum and the lack of interest amongst staff to work in PTIs other than those in urban areas which causes almost one third of the PTI posts to be vacant remains a deterrent to quality improvements.

Under PEDP II, a newly designed system of initial pre-service teacher training is being developed which will include both theory and practice and involve regular periods of supervised practicum in schools. The National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) will develop this new training course and its assessment and design and carry out specialist training required for PTI instructors.

***In-service training of teachers and other field level officials:*** Teachers of primary schools are trained on-the-job through bi-monthly "sub-cluster" training programs. 20-30 primary schools make a cluster and a sub-cluster is made up of 4-5 primary schools. Assistant Upazila Officers (AUOs) are responsible for conducting in service sub-cluster training.<sup>11</sup> NAPE is the apex

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<sup>11</sup> The upazila is the administrative level closest to the school and the community.

institution that among other responsibilities, trains PTI staff and officials at various levels. Under PEDP II, it is envisaged that five days needs based in-service training will be provided every two year to all teachers through Upazila Resources Centers (URC) which were built under PEDP I. URCs were meant to serve the in-service training needs of primary school teachers through sub-cluster training that provided regular professional and technical support to teachers for quality teaching and learning practices. Only about 20 percent of the planned purpose-built URCs were constructed under the various PEDP I projects and thus the role URCs can play in local quality improvement system is yet to be seen. URCs are still considered a viable option however, and under PEDP II, the plan is to complete the construction of URCs and to build the capacity of these institutions to make them more effective.

***Intensive District Approach (IDEAL):*** The IDEAL is a project focused solely on quality improvement in primary education and first began in one district in Bangladesh. It is based on the “Multiple Ways of Teaching and Learning” (MWTL) approach, spear headed by UNICEF, globally and local planning and management – both are supported by community involvement and aggressive social mobilization. The project has so far been implemented in 32 upazilas and has three main components: sub national planning; management and monitoring; school quality and social mobilization and communication. The project has focused on mapping and planning activities at the lower levels of school, union, upazila and district; improving teaching and learning practices, classroom ambiances and professional support system to teachers. The MWTL is based on the theory that children have multiple intelligences and thus each child learns differently from the next. This is the core classroom innovation that is the project’s drive to improve teaching-learning methods replacing the didactic mode of teaching pedagogy with a more flexible strategy in the classroom. Classrooms are also reorganized in IDEAL schools, to make them suitable for the MWTL approach. The project’s main lesson learned so far has been the need to bring about behavioral change amongst teachers in order for the successful implementation of the MWTL approach.

***Assessment of Learning:*** A GOB survey on the achievement level of students of grade IV revealed that about half of the students were able to demonstrate minimum levels of competencies. In addition, Assessment of Basic Competency (ABC) tests were administered to children aged 11-12 to evaluate achievement level against curriculum competencies. The level was also below 50 percent. In order for there to be more efficient and effective collection of data on student achievements, a national assessment for grades III and V was also undertaken on a sample basis. There is no data in Bangladesh that shows changing levels of competencies over time. The independent studies conducted have each used different methods of judging competency and achievement rates in students. Of note however, are an earlier World Bank study conducted in 1998/99 and the Education Watch study of 2000. The World Bank study of 1998/99, looked at literacy levels by defining literacy in terms of the achievement of a minimal level of performance in the four basic areas of reading, writing, written mathematics and oral mathematics.<sup>12</sup> The minimum performance levels were developed with the help of educators, employers, and civil servants. The highest level in each area was defined in terms of basic skills necessary for a person to function at a minimal level of competence in the society. A series of

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<sup>12</sup> Vincent Greaney, Shahidur Khandker and Mahmudul Alam, Bangladesh: Assessing Basic Learning Skills, UPL published for the World Bank, 1999.

short tests were administered to a randomly selected sample of 5,200 individuals in rural Bangladesh. Results show that as many as 20 per cent failed to master the lowest achievement levels in any of the basic skills while as few as 10 per cent achieved the minimum competency level in each area. Roughly one third of those who had completed primary school achieved the minimum competency level in all four basic skill areas. This study supports that of Education Watch which was conducted roughly two years later.

*Education Watch* is an independent source of evaluation in the education sector in Bangladesh which has increasingly since its inception in 1998, been regarded as an independent and reliable source of information, looked at student achievements based on competencies established by the GOB. The results of the Education Watch study differ markedly from that of the GOB survey mentioned above. In their second report “Education Watch 2000, A question of quality”, the achievement of fifth grade students and teachers education in both the public and non public sphere of primary education was studied. The standard used for the study of quality in this report was the GOB’s 53 competencies which it has formulated as the terminal competencies that would serve as markers for quality assessment. The findings of the study were that less than 4 percent of the students are literate according to the 3Rs concept: Bangla, English and Math. When excluding English the ration improved to 9 percent. Application and analysis levels were found to be the poorest. Overall the promotion rate in primary schools is 87 percent and the completion rate, 76 percent which belie the fact that neither class promotion nor completion is related to student achievement. The survey also found that in terms of the 53 competencies being reflected in the national curricula and textbooks, 19 were reflected “excellently,” 21 “fairly well,” 8 “well,” and 5 “satisfactorily” in the textbooks of grades I to V. On the other hand, in the teachers’ guides 36 competencies were reflected “excellently,” 10 “fairly well,” 4 “well,” and 3 “satisfactorily.” None of the competencies were found “poorly” reflected in the source materials.

**Management Reforms:** Schools were nationalized in 1973 in Bangladesh and thus the management of schools from teacher salary and textbook production and distribution to curriculum development has been the responsibility of the central government. This has been a particularly heavy responsibility given that Bangladesh has almost 19 million primary school aged children, 80,000 primary level institutions, 11 different kinds of primary schools, making it one of the largest centralized systems in the world. The GOB has however in recent times, recognized the need to devolve power to the local levels in order to make schools more responsive to local conditions.

Under the DFID funded Effective Schools through Enhanced Education Management (ESTEEM), a project under the PEDP I family of projects, school management training and decentralization of Education Management Information Systems (EMIS) were undertaken. Head teachers in the past, came to their posts with no specific training or on the job support. Under ESTEEM, a system of reinforced training for head teachers was undertaken – initially in about 9,000 selected “focus” schools that are most isolated and disadvantaged. Under this program, head teachers first receive along with their supervisors, the Assistant Upazila Education Officers (AEUOs), a six day course with a focus on management of people, management of resources and management of the curriculum. This was followed by a phased program of three more short courses of two day duration each at sites close to the selected “focus” schools. This training is provided by the AUEOs who have undergone a parallel program of teacher training in academic

supervision. Finally, head teachers, along with all members of their school management committees, have a joint two day course on social mobilization for primary education, again taught by the supervisors. Considerable time was also spent during the duration of this project in developing training materials for all the field management training.

While statistical data on schools is collected and processed annually, ESTEEM sought to enhance the availability of quality information on primary education through a phased process of decentralization of initial data processing and analysis. In time, it is hoped that schools and districts will be connected by a Wide Area Network to the DPE headquarters.

***Improved Inspection and Supervision:*** Strong attempts have been made to improve inspection and supervision of schools. Under the ESTEEM project, as mentioned above, training was given to Upazila Education Officers (UEOs) and AUEOs who are in charge of performing routine inspection of schools. But, much still needs to be done especially given the fact that neither UEOs nor AUEOs have the capacity to actually impart academic supervision and support to schools and their teachers. These GOB employees serve as are school inspectors rather than support for teachers. Since 1997, the PMED has required that every school send at least 20 percent of their students for the grade V national Scholarship Examination which serves as a proxy for national assessment of student achievement. Furthermore, every school is required to submit quarterly performance reports jointly prepared by the head teacher and the chair person of the SMC but these too are hardly signs of improved teaching and learning since they focus on student and teacher attendance. Although, it can be said that this particular measure may have increased school and community accountability somewhat to the center. However, it has so far done little to increase the school's accountability to the community.

Under PEDP II the plan is to devolve more authority and accountability at the school level which requires the strengthening of upazila capacity. The capacity of upazila staff will be enhanced through the implementing regular training programs at district level for all AUEOs during the first year of PEDP II implementation (2004). Based on this training, upazila staff will be able to:

- Support Head Teachers, School Management Committees (SMC) and communities to develop School Level Improvement Plans (SLIPS), and in the use of proposed school support funds.
- Provide academic help and supervision to schools and teachers;
- Implement a supportive inspection system to aid schools in planning and development;
- Support sub cluster training in coordination with URCs
- Develop Upazila Primary Education Plans (UPEP) which will be based on the SLIPS but incorporate annual and medium-term goals and activities for progress towards universal, quality primary education within the upazila.

***Primary School Performance Monitoring Project (PSPMP):*** The development of a model for accurate monitoring of teaching and learning practices at the classroom level was undertaken in 1998, under a technical assistance project of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) with the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE). PSMP applied the monitoring model following the Craig-Heneveld Framework and its long term objective was the quality improvement of primary school teaching in Bangladesh. The project consisted of several factors including supportive inputs from outside the school, creating an enabling environment, improving school climate and

strengthening teaching and learning processes. The field level activities included observation of classroom activities, video recording of class room activities, interviews with teachers, parents and school management committees, observation of school facilities and records and the administration of achievement tests. The key findings include that the mean learning achievement in the core content of primary education is 33 percent. Among the four subjects, the average scores were higher in Bangla and Social Studies and lowest in mathematics. It was also found that the performance of students from government schools was higher than that of those from non government schools.<sup>13</sup>

The evaluation of this project found that the TA concentrated on the setting up of the system and was weak on the actual evaluation and use of the data collected through the monitoring aspects of the project. One of the major components of PEDP II will be the strengthening of monitoring and evaluation at all levels of primary education so that practice can inform future policy.

***Raised Community Awareness:*** A successful aspect of efforts in primary education in Bangladesh since the 1990s, along side the increase in enrollment rates has been the heightened awareness amongst households on the need to send their children to school. The GOB has been successful in raising awareness through campaigns and incentive measures such as Food for Education (FEP) and the Primary Stipend Program. Just as importantly, NGO programs in income generation, legal rights and micro credit have also helped in raising awareness and in increasing the demand for education. Today, all education interventions in the country put a strong emphasis on the pivotal role communities can and do play in the provision of sustainable quality education programs. The main community body through which this is emphasized are the School Management Committees (SMCs) which are made up of local political leaders (one of whom has to be a woman), parents and local elite and the Parents Teachers Associations (PTAs) which function at some level in most primary schools. Under PEDP II, a process of community mobilization to increase community awareness of their role in supporting, monitoring and advocating quality standards and improvements in their schools will be undertaken.

### **BRAC'S Primary Education Programs**

The strengths of BRAC's NFPE program is presented here as an example of a quality primary education program in Bangladesh. There are several NGOs that provide quality primary education and the following discussion of BRAC's strengths is meant to be an illustration of the kinds of NGO led quality interventions that are in practice in Bangladesh today. (Please See Table 6 for a brief comparison of three NGO programs including BRAC's). As can be seen in the table, all of these institutions have similar programs in terms of expected outcomes, class size, teacher preparation and support in the field and use not only government textbooks but also supplementary materials to facilitate learning. It should also be noted that the many quality interventions discussed below do not exist in GOB run schools partly because of the scale of GOB's programs – 19 million primary aged school children as opposed to the 2 million that attend NGO run schools. How to go to scale and in what time frame, on some of the interventions that seem to work for NGO programs such as both pre service and in service training for teachers, is an issue of further study that could benefit the public school system.

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<sup>13</sup> These are non government community schools and not NGO schools.

BRAC's NFPE program began in 1985 as a three year program for children between the ages of 8 and 10 years of age who had never enrolled in any school or who had dropped out from formal schools. In 1998, this model was expanded to a four year program which covers the primary curriculum for grades 1 to 5. In addition, The Basic Education for Older Children program opened in 1987. These run for three years and cater to the basic educational needs of 11 to 14 year old children. All of the BRAC schools are provided with books and other materials free of charge. Most BRAC schools are bamboo or mud-walled, one roomed village structures with a thatch or tin roof, and a minimum floor. The school house is usually rented by BRAC for a nominal sum and situated close to the homes of the students. In light of the fact that the focus of this paper is quality, we continue here with a summary presentation of the quality strengths of BRAC's primary education programs.

**Quality Assurance:** There is a quality assurance system both for the development of curriculum and the production of materials as well as for the training and professional support teachers in the classroom which does not exist in the public school system. There is a process of material development that involves: (i) curriculum analysis and research; (ii) production and piloting, and (iii) dissemination and feedback. Materials are constantly reviewed and subject to change as feedback are obtained from the field. Initial teacher preparation is short lasting 12 days but the system of ongoing support is well organized with supervision from program organizers on a weekly basis. Trainers and master trainers are especially prepared for the task of assisting the teachers, the Quality Assurance Specialist are there and are in charge of validating the teaching materials produced, providing feedback about their use in the field and the organization of refresher courses as well as other activities.

**Pedagogy:** The pedagogical outlook that guides both the production of materials, the preparation of teachers, and the structure of the teaching delivery system are another key strength of the NFPE program. In general terms, BRAC's delivery system is described as activities based and as developing life and thinking skills in the children they teach and aimed at reducing gender biases.

**Student Achievement:** A 1999 study of 720 randomly selected children attending BRAC and government schools together with children who never attended school, shows a positive impact of BRAC schooling on their cognitive achievement. In fact, of the four components of basic education, BRAC children did significantly better in life skills and writing than their peers in formal schools and performed equally to them in reading and numeracy.

### **Lessons Learned**

**GOB commitment and ownership:** There is sufficient evidence as discussed above to show that quality has been a priority of the GOB, local NGOs and donors working in the education arena in Bangladesh. The evidence also suggests however, that despite this commitment, quality improvements did not take place as envisaged. For example, PEDP I was meant to be a comprehensive program but was bogged down by the inaccuracy in the sequencing and prioritization of crucial quality interventions due to a lack of coordination and collaboration

between donor agencies as well as between donor agencies and the GOB. The GOB was also at the time, unwilling to embark on a sub sector program but instead, preferred individual projects. The success and long-term sustainability of a sub-sector program aimed at quality depends on government's strong commitment, ownership, and effective coordination of different activities under any sub sector program. In future, it is important that all programs are sequenced correctly and are coordinated in order to avoid overlapping and duplication of efforts.

***Accurate Database:*** It should also be mentioned that part of the problem with quality achievements in education in Bangladesh is the fact that there has not been sufficient public debate within the country on what actually constitutes quality despite wide ranging measures as discussed above, to improve the overall quality of education. In a 2000 Education Sector Review authored by the World Bank and endorsed by the GOB, quality was defined as “levels of student achievement that meet defined minimum standards.” But there are variations on the definitions of this minimum standards hampered by the lack of verifiable data characterized by the large gaps between GOB statistics and that of homegrown, independent research groups in the country. This is clearly illustrated in this paper where the discussion of assessment of student learning was explained by both measurement of minimal levels of achievement and competencies by three different research projects in different times between 1998 and 2002 and all of them with different results. The GOB's commitment to systematic data collection and utilization of data for continuous monitoring and evaluation of the system and for timely policy intervention is fundamental for improvements in education quality and over all system efficiency. This is going to be addressed in PEDP II, albeit in a modest scale.

***Organization and management:*** The new organizational framework to be set up (under PEDP II) should ensure decentralization and adaptation to local realities. The GOB's DPE-Division-District-Upazila chain of command threatens to be stretched to its capacity but will be the pivotal structure between central and school level. A stronger relationship between schools and the local community represented through SMCs should smoothen the functioning of schools. A key here is external monitoring of school administration and teaching and learning processes in the classroom. In this regard, partnership between civil society and NGOs with the state's management functionaries can be crucial. This however, has shown little success in recent years as GOB does not recognize the non public sector as partners. This remains a challenge in the program to come.

***Inclusion of non public sector:*** It is important to point out that the GOB's PEDP II does not include interventions for schools that fall outside the ambit of the public sector. There remains 3 million children who are out of school and more than two million who attend NGO schools. In light of the government's commitment to its people and its EFA goals, it is crucial that GOB looks at ways to supplement PEDP II by providing quality education programs for these children. This too is a challenge for future programming in primary education that needs to be recognized by the GOB.

***Quality Inputs:*** Another major part of PEDP II is the provision of adequate equipment and teaching materials which will contribute to increasing completion and retention rates. The increased number of trained teachers too will have a positive impact by augmenting the availability of teachers to implement renewed teaching methods. The in-service and pre service

training of teachers can be a positive effect because there is a plan to increase the capacity of PTIs and review the curriculum based on participative methods. In addition, stronger motivation of teachers is targeted through improved career plans, salary increases and supplementary funding for innovative projects in the classroom. In this regard, training institutions such as NAPE and PTIs should be given appropriate discretionary powers for their management and academic development to encourage innovations and development of quality improvement interventions. Moreover, to ensure quality and effective management of the staff development and teacher training activities, the roles and responsibilities of all the institutions involved (MoPME, DPE, NAPE, PTI, URC, school etc.) should be clearly identified and made transparent to the public.

In short, it can be generally concluded that there have been a range of interventions designed to improve the quality of inputs (See Table 5 in Annexes) but the quality of learning and learning outcomes, as represented by 62% attendance rates, 56% completion of grade V, and the Education Watch 2000 findings point to modest gains in actually retention of students. On a positive note however, evidence suggests that the plans for increasing the quality of primary education from 2003 to 2008 are well formulated and based on the reality of what can be done in the Bangladesh context. The challenge lies (as has historically been the case in Bangladesh) not in the design but in the implementation of these far reaching measures. For this to take place, the most important ingredients are political commitment and the inclusion of different partnerships of NGO, civil society and local communities.

### **Early Childhood Care and Education**

At the government level, there is yet to be a clearly defined concept of Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE). Based on a concept of ECCE as support for children along with their parents and caregivers through education and health, the MoPME and Health Ministry and a few NGOs have undertaken sporadic work for pre-school aged children. But their holistic development has not been addressed by the GOB. However, pre school activities for the age group of 4-5 years do exist in practice, despite the benefit of a well articulated government position in this sub sector. No systematic studies have been conducted in this field in Bangladesh although increasingly, NGOs involved in primary education are looking at ways to increase the provision of ECCD.

The Integrated Non Formal Education Program (INFEP) began ECCE programs in 1993 in 69 thanas implemented by NGOs with the support of government and UNICEF. The main objective of this program was to prepare children in poor, rural households for primary schooling. The curriculum was designed to develop the children's sensory, language and cognitive skills. The teachers were trained in child-centered activity-based teaching-learning methods. Although evaluation of the ECCE program in INFEP has received "mixed reviews," the GOB acknowledged it as having been a catalyst in increasing primary school enrollments.

Currently, about two million children out of a total 9 million in the age group 3-5 years in 2000, attended pre school classes. Among these, over one million children attended 42,000 "baby" or infant classes attached to primary schools. Close to 500,000 children attended about 9,000 private nurseries and kindergartens in the urban areas. Some 12,000 *maktabs* and *madrasahs* also have preschool classes and serve an average of 25 children in each. Less than 50,000 children are

enrolled in 1,875 neighborhood centers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Access to pre school classes is determined by parent's interest and willingness to pay for this service. Even baby classes that are attached to certain government primary schools are managed by the community and the SMC with financial contributions and fees paid by the parents. The private, most English medium kindergartens are affordable to only households in the higher income brackets. Some NGOs such as BRAC have started pre primary classes as feeders into government schools or into their own primary education programs.

### **Adult literacy**

The provision of mass education which includes adult literacy programs has been laid down as a fundamental right in the Bangladeshi constitution. In the years between 1971 to 1990 interventions in literacy remained largely piecemeal and on the whole, rhetorical. After the WCEFA, there was an added emphasis on NFE which included out of school literacy programs for adults and adolescents and there was subsequently an increase in donor funding for state sponsored programs in NFE. But, the successes of the programs remain highly questionable. From 1997 to 2002, four separate projects implemented under the Directorate of Non Formal Education (DNFE), three of them donor funded and one of them funded entirely by the GOB were implemented. The first three project NFE 1, 2 and 3, used the center based approach and targeted illiterates from the ages of 11 to 24. The main feature of the CBA was the use of local NGOs as contractors who imparted literacy on the ground. These three programs have had limited success due mainly to the lack of sustainable post literacy and continuing education schemes and the politicization of NGO selection. NFE 4 was a campaign approach called the Total Literacy Movement (TLM) and was a program administered by the District authorities. The successes of the TLM are also highly questionable because the GOB tended to use enrollment figures in the TLM programs as evidence of numbers made literate with no evaluation or verification of whether or not females and males enrolled in the programs had actually learned to read and write. There was also a lack of consensus on the definition of functional literacy and the government administration tended to rely on the signing of ones' name as proof of literacy. Today there are two Post Literacy and Continuing Education programs being implemented in the country but these have not been designed based on the lessons learned from previous projects and are characterized by a lack of commitment on the part of the present political regime. The lack of commitment on the part of the present government has to do with the lack of success in the previous nation wide NFE programs and the costs associated with such failure. But it can also be said that the lack of commitment for NFE today in Bangladesh also has to do with the fact that the NFE programs are identified with the previous political regime. While UPE has remained an uncontested field politically, clearly the same cannot be said for NFE.

Ultimately, as mentioned previously, there has been little success in attempts made by the GOB to increase the literacy of the population which from 1971 to 2000 has only seen a 18 percent increase which illustrates the acute need for programs in NFE that actually reach target groups. (Please See Table 5 in Annexes )

## ANNEXES

**TABLE 1: PUBLIC SPENDING ON PRIMARY EDUCATION IN THE 1990s**

Year	public expenditure in millions of taka		public expenditure on primary	
	on education	on primary education	as % of total public expenditure on education	as % of GDP
1990	13288	6180	47	0.8
1991	14944	7324	49	0.9
1992	19089	10150	53	1.1
1993	22674	11579	51	1.2
1994	37608	14765	39	1.4
1995	35263	17238	49	1.5
1996	35226	17400	49	1.3
1997	38473	18041	47	1.3
1998	41788	18296	44	1.2
1999	47190	20161	43	1.2*
2000	51450	22175	43	1.2*

Source: Government of Bangladesh 1999

\* using forecast GDP figures

**TABLE 2: EXPENDITURE ON PRIMARY AND MASS EDUCATION BY THE GOB AND FROM FOREIGN AID (in millions of taka)**

year	Government of Bangladesh	Foreign Aid*	Total
1990-1	5974	1397	7372
1991-2	7186	3134	10320
1992-3	8249	3401	11650
1993-4	11589	3375	14964
1994-5	14307	3281	17588
1995-6	14562	3156	17718
1996-7	15570	3073	18643
1997-8	17626	1687	19313
1998-9	19008	2763	21770

Source: Government of Bangladesh  
1999

\* Excludes aid to NGO education projects, for which  
aggregate data is unavailable

**TABLE 3: PROJECTS UNDER PEDP I (DONOR FUNDED)<sup>14</sup>**

<b>PEDP I PROJECTS DONOR FUNDED</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>COMPONENTS</b>
SPESP (ADB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To create equitable access to schooling for primary age children</li> <li>- To improve the quality of education at the primary level</li> <li>-To strengthen the management capacity of primary education from the directorate to the Upazila/Thana level</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civil works</li> <li>-Training</li> <li>-Textbooks</li> <li>-Teaching aids</li> <li>-Research studies</li> <li>-Social mobilization</li> </ul>
IDA PEDP	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Improve school quality and increase system efficiency</li> <li>- Strengthen institutional and management capacity to deliver primary education.</li> <li>- Ensure universal coverage and equitable access to quality primary schooling.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Civil works</li> <li>-Block grants to schools</li> <li>-Teacher development</li> <li>-Improving teaching and learning</li> <li>-Strengthening NAPE and NCTB</li> <li>-Strengthen institutional capacity (national, district, Upazila/Thana and -school level)</li> <li>-IDEAL in 15 districts</li> <li>-Social Mobilization</li> </ul>
ESTEEM (DFID)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Strengthening the management capacity of the primary education sector at all levels.</li> <li>- Strengthening planning capacity of DPE, CPEIMU, MOPME, and Planning Commission.</li> <li>- Improvement of quality education through improving school management and teacher classroom practice.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Management Development</li> <li>-Education Planning</li> <li>-EMIS</li> <li>-M&amp;E</li> <li>-Finance and Accounts</li> <li>-Academic Supervision</li> <li>-Policy Research</li> <li>-Social Mobilization</li> </ul>
German Cyclone Shelter (Germany KFW)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To construct the dilapidated government primary schools as primary school cum cyclone shelters.</li> <li>- To supply necessary furniture and black boards to</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrastructure Development</li> <li>- Furniture</li> <li>- Early warning equipment</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup> All tables based on information gleaned from the Directorate of Primary Education, Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Government of Bangladesh. Annual Review Documents 1999 – 2003.

	<p>the constructed primary schools.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To supply necessary early warning equipment to the constructed primary school.</li> </ul>	
CPEP (German Technical Assistance)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To rehabilitate selected government primary schools and construct new community primary schools in unschooled areas.</li> <li>- To establish URCs and</li> <li>- To supply equipment to UEOs and URCs/Model Primary Schools and furniture to schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrastructure Development</li> <li>-Teaching aid</li> <li>-Subvention of community teachers</li> </ul>
PEDPQI (NORAD)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To strengthen NAPE.</li> <li>- To improve the training of teachers.</li> <li>- To strengthen the institutional network of DPE with emphasis on local level.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- C-in-Ed training to teachers from RNGPS</li> <li>- Sub-cluster training and leaflets development</li> <li>- Training/NAPE/Local/International</li> <li>-Upgrading C-in-Ed Curriculum</li> <li>-Upazila Resource Center (URC)</li> </ul>
IDEAL (UNICEF)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establish/strengthen capacity for local level planning and monitoring of primary education.</li> <li>- Improve overall quality of primary education through improved teacher training.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Local level planning</li> <li>- Learning material development and supply</li> <li>- Establishing URCs</li> <li>- Satellite Schools</li> <li>- Social mobilization</li> </ul>
ISLAMIC DEVELOPMENT BANK (IDB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To reconstruct 200 GPS.</li> <li>- To supply necessary furniture in reconstructed schools.</li> <li>- To ensure an educational environment to the reconstructed schools.</li> <li>- To expand primary education in the rural areas.</li> </ul>	<p>Construction of schools Furniture</p>

**TABLE 4: PROJECTS UNDER PEDP I (GOB Funded)**

<b>PEDP I PROJECTS GOB FUNDED</b>	<b>OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>COMPONENTS</b>
Reconstruction and renovation project of GPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To reconstruct and renovate dilapidated GPS and provide furniture.</li> <li>- To make provisions for construction of sanitary latrines and sinking of tube wells.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civil works: new primary schools in rural and urban areas; additional classrooms; latrines and tube wells; furniture</li> </ul>
Development of RNGPS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Reconstruction of 4000 and repair 1000 selected registered non government primary schools in the country.</li> <li>- Supply furniture and construct latrines and provide tube-wells.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civil works</li> <li>- Furniture procurement</li> </ul>
Establishment of Satellite Schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- To facilitate primary education to all children of primary age group of remote, unschooled areas and education for rural girls.</li> <li>- To increase equitable access to primary education for rural girls.</li> <li>To relieve the increasing pressure of high enrollment in Class I and II on GPS.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Establishment of satellite schools</li> <li>-Teacher training</li> </ul>
Expansion of cub scouting in primary schools, Phase II	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase number of cub scouts in primary schools.</li> <li>- Provide modern scouting training.</li> <li>- Involve Cub Scout leadership in social mobilization.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Civil works</li> <li>-Training</li> <li>-Extension of Cub scouting activities</li> </ul>
Structural reorganization and adjustment of facilities in GPS in Dhaka metropolitan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To reduce disparity between government and private schools in Dhaka.</li> <li>To make structural adjustment to create congenial environment for primary school students in city schools.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Infrastructure development</li> <li>- Furniture</li> <li>- Teaching materials</li> </ul>
Establishment of PTI in Barguna	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Establish a PTI in Barguna for imparting training to primary school teachers in the southern region.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Civil works</li> </ul>
Stipends for primary education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase enrollment rate of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Access incentives</li> </ul>

	<p>primary school age children of poor families.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Increase the attendance rate</li> <li>- Reduce drop outs</li> <li>- Enhance equity</li> <li>- Enhance quality</li> </ul>	
School Performance Monitoring Project (SPMP)	<p>Develop model of accurate monitoring of classroom teaching practices and student performance.</p> <p>To provide annual report to government on the status of classroom performance.</p> <p>Develop local capacity for monitoring classroom performance.</p>	- Monitoring
Food for Education Project (FEP)	<p>Increase in enrollment and attendance rates, reduce drop-outs and improve quality standards by providing food assistance to children in selected educationally and economically backward Unions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Distribution of food</li> <li>- Training</li> </ul>

**TABLE 5: QUALITY ACHIEVEMENTS OF PEDP I (By Project)**

<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>COMPONENT</b>	<b>TARGET</b>	<b>ACHIEVEMENT</b>	<b>% OF TARGET ACHIEVED</b>
PEDPQI [NAPE and PTIs]	Training of PTI Instructors on revised C-in-Ed Curriculum	336	394	117%
	Training of PTI instructors on M&E	648	450	69.4%
	Orientation training for head teachers on Model Schools	481	475	98.6%
	Special English Language Course for Experimental School/PTI teachers	106	106	100%
	Foundation Training	300	350	116.7%
	C-in-Ed training to RNGP	27,271	13,568	50.1%
IDEAL [URC]	Basic and refresher training		32 IDEAL Districts	
	Subject based training on English for primary school teachers		18500	
ESTEEM	Academic supervision training		725 AUEOs	
	Upgrading C-in-Ed Curriculum	75,000	85,000	113.30%
IDB	Supply of teaching materials to newly constructed schools	198	198	100%
NORAD	Equipment	840	140	16.70%
	Supply of learning materials	1 million 80,000 students	716,000	66.30%

	Supply of paper for text books	6094.86 metric tons	2591.83 mt	42.5%
IDEAL	Learning materials and supply	6 million 70,882 sets	6 million 632,275 sets	109.2%
ADB	Preservation kits		82.072 packets	
	SRM package	100,000 packets	100,000 packets	100%
	Stationary for poor children in 3 hill track districts	220,560	220,560	100%
IDA	Paper	22150 mt	22150 mt	100%
	Training of RNGPS teachers	52,500	26,000	

**TABLE 6: CHARACTERISTICS OF THREE NGO PRIMARY SCHOOLING INTERVENTIONS**

<b>INSTITUTION</b>	<b>EXPECTED OUTCOME</b>	<b>CLAS SIZE</b>	<b>TEACHER PREPARATION</b>	<b>TEACHER SUPPORT</b>	<b>MATERIAL</b>	<b>COMPL. RATES</b>	<b>TRAS RATE SECO</b>
BRAC	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade national competencies	30-33	12 days initial + induction	Weekly supervision and refresher courses	Market & BRAC texts, teacher guides & supplement. Materials	93.3% (2002)	95.3% (1999-2002)
FIVDB	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade national competencies	30	One month (used to be 9 days)	Weekly supervision; monthly cluster professional meetings	Market textbooks & intuitively developed supplement. Materials	85% (2001)	63% (2001)
PROSHIKA	5 <sup>th</sup> Grade national competencies	30	3 weeks	Weekly supervision + 4 day annual in-service	Market texts & intuitively developed supplement. materials	90%	65%

**TABLE 7: ADULT LITERACY RATES IN BANGLADESH 1970-2000<sup>15</sup>**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Independent Source</b>	<b>GoB Source</b>
<b>1970</b>	24%	21.5%
<b>1975</b>	27%	..
<b>1980</b>	29%	19.7/22% <sup>16</sup>
<b>1985</b>	32%	..
<b>1990</b>	35%	35%
<b>1995</b>	38%	47%
<b>1997</b>	39%	..
<b>2000</b>	42%	64%

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<sup>15</sup> Source: The World Bank “Regional Education Database for South Asia Countries” 2000; CAMPE, 2002; and the GoB: Education Policy 1974, Second FYP, Third FYP and NPA 1993.

<sup>16</sup> GoB data on literacy is spotty and contradictory. In the Second FYP it is stated as being 22% but the Third FYP states that it was 19.7 per cent in 1981.

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