

# Operational Challenges in Providing Primary Education Services in Wetland (*Haor*) and Tea Garden Areas of Sylhet Division in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This report is based on a review of BRAC's programme on education specifically examine the challenges, coping strategies and the existing barriers to implementation of the BRAC Programme in eight marginalised *upazilas* of Sylhet Division. In 2011, BRAC selected these *upazilas* for extensive educational intervention because this consistently performed poorly in various development indicators, particularly in education. Also the socio-ecological characteristics of this region greatly hinder education progress. To get an in-depth understanding, the study employed a purely qualitative approach selecting five of the eight marginalised *upazilas* purposively where information were collected from multiple stakeholders.

The study revealed that finding proper school rooms as per preferred size, infrastructure and maintenance was a major challenge which directly influenced classroom teaching and learning. Finding educated and good quality teachers and low retention because of marriage, childbirth, migration, low incentives etc. were another huge challenge in both *haor* and tea garden areas. Providing proper training to teachers was also difficult for communication, financial and security related problems. The main reasons behind student absenteeism and dropout were seasonal work, extreme weather condition, cultural festivities and household chores. Time lags and inefficiency due to poor communication systems, and very little time for educational monitoring greatly hampered the quality of teaching-learning in schools. Recommendations for improvement of the existing situation included increased expenditure on school rooms, teacher's salaries and in-service teacher's trainings. To ensure proper, timely and adequate educational monitoring, reconsidering the workload per staff and deployment of a greater number of qualified, trained and better remuneration are recommended.

# Chapter 1. Introduction

Collective efforts by the government and non-government organisations have enabled development in various sectors in Bangladesh including education, health and employment. However, all sections of the population have not been able to reap the benefits of development. Inequality in socioeconomic outcomes exists in terms of geographical locations, ethnicity, gender and socio-occupational groups. UNICEF (2010) identified 80 *upazilas* in Bangladesh deprived of economic, health and education services because of geographical isolation. Sylhet was identified as the lowest performing region since the proportionate number of lowest performing *upazilas* was highest in the division. Delivering equitable public services is the primary challenge in these areas.

Sylhet division has three major physiographic landscapes – plain land covers 57.5%, wetland (*haor*) 30.2%, and tea-estate/hilly/forest area 12.5% (Nath *et al.* 2011). Habitants of *haor* areas are more vulnerable to frequent natural disasters, improper infrastructure, remoteness, landlessness, ecological degradation, inappropriate sanitation, deforestation, lack of educational institutions, communications problems, inadequate livelihoods opportunities and overall poor provision of services (Rahman, 2008). The tea-estates/hilly/forest areas face very similar challenges because of their unfavourable geographic location. Sylhet division has been consistently demonstrating poor performance in various development indicators. *Education Watch* studies showed that Sylhet division has been performing lower than the other divisions in various educational indicators such as school enrolment and completion rate at primary and secondary levels, literacy rate and girls' education (Nath and Chowdhury 2008, Nath *et al.* 2011).

Socio-ecological characteristics are often pointed out for hindering the educational progress in this region (Nath *et al.* 2011). The scenario is however, worse in tea-estates and *haor* areas than in the plain land. *Education Watch* study pointed out some major issues such as geography, lack of community awareness, educational facilities, teacher's irregular attendance, and management weakness as the barriers to progress (Nath 2013). Exclusive operational challenges are a serious concern in this region. This included requirement of additional time and resources and paying greater attention to socio-cultural constraints impeded by geographical exclusion, poverty and illiteracy. WHO (2005) showed that hard-to-reach areas posed particular challenges to the sustenance and expansion of service delivery in communities of Volta lake basin in Ghana. Communities in this area were cut off by water bodies and could not access basic social services such as health and education. Service delivery in the area was high, almost 30 times than in the mainland areas.

## 1.1 Background

In 1985, BRAC Education Programme started targeting the poorer section of the communities to expand education. They built non-formal schools with single classroom and single teacher from the community consisting of 30-33 students. Girl children and first generation learners got priority admitting to BRAC Primary Schools (BPS). These schools provided complete primary education cycle in four years. Quality of Education in these schools was better than the government and non-government primary schools (Nath 2012).

BRAC is deeply involved in the development of the underprivileged *upazilas* of Sylhet division. Many surveys and studies found that Sylhet was lagging behind the other divisions of Bangladesh in most development indicators in the areas of population, health and education (BBS 2011a, 2011b, 2011c; BBS and UNICEF 2010; BDHS 2012). It was also observed that, Sylhet division was much closer to the national average in pre-school attendance rate but was far behind the other divisions in primary and secondary attendance rates (BBS and UNICEF 2010). They also lagged behind in term of primary and secondary completion rates (Nath and Chowdhury 2009, Nath *et al.* 2011). Low performance of Sylhet division was also found in literacy status of the population. In 2012, UNICEF identified 80 'worst performing' or most deprived *upazilas* which were lagging far behind with regard of achieving MDG targets. Forty two per cent of these *upazilas* were from Sylhet division. Geographical targeting of education intervention was thus recommended.

BRAC Education Programme (BEP) has started working extensively in eight marginalised *upazilas*: Baniachang and Nabiganj from Habiganj district, Companiganj and Gowainghat from Sylhet district and Sulla and Bishwambarpur from Sunamganj district and Kamalganj and Juri from Moulvibazar district. The first six *upazilas* belong to UNICEF's list of the "most deprived *upazilas*" (Nath 2013). Primarily in 2011, these *upazilas* were selected for extensive educational intervention which was later extended to eight additional *upazilas*. Aiming to increase school enrolment and reduce the number of out-of-school children, in 2012-13, BRAC Education Programme (BEP) opened 1,019 primary and 959 pre-primary schools of its own and 166 primary schools under its education support programme in these eight *upazilas*. Number of students in these schools was approximately 64,320. These schools were opened in 866 villages; which was 47.6% of total villages in the *upazilas* (Nath *et al.* 2014). Along with increasing schools to enhance access to schools, BEP also considered a campaign programme along with Friends in Village Development Bangladesh (FIVDB) to increase enrolment and retention in government schools. However, it was not an easy task. The programme faced many hurdles in operating schools in these marginalised *upazilas*. Hurdles were related to staff recruitment and deployment, teacher and student retention and operational management.

## 1.2 Literature review

Globally millions of children are deprived of education simply because their parents are too poor to afford the costs of education. In addition to poverty, social and cultural barriers to education are acute. Girl's education, equal opportunities for ethnic minorities, opportunities for disabled children are denied widely. These disadvantages are rooted in "deeply ingrained social, economic and political processes, and unequal power relationships- and are sustained by political indifference." It is further reinforced by the interaction among poverty, gender, ethnicity and other characteristics (UNESCO 2010).

As observed in Northern Ghana school attendance rate was the lowest in the country (WHO Ghana, 2005). Distance to school, cost, seasonal labour demand, and early marriage in girls cases were the major barriers for education according to parents. Many children reached adulthood after a few years of schooling. To provide second chance of education to these children a non-government organisation initiated an innovative programme named School for life. The programme offered a 9 month long intensive literacy course for children aged 8-14 aiming to preparing them to reenter primary schools. Teaching schedule was designed to accommodate seasonal demand on children's time. The curriculum focused on making the education meaningful to rural

families. Students are taught in local language by locally appointed facilitators, many of whom were volunteers who received in service training. An evaluation on that programme in 2007 found that 90% of total student complete the course and 81% met third grade literacy and numeracy standard and 65% entered formal education system. School of life graduates in formal schools performed above the average in Mathematics and in English (UNESCO, 2010).

Many children in poor countries dropout of school before graduating and completion of primary school does not ensure acquiring basic academic skills. As in Malawi, the government adopted free primary education from user payment system in the mid 1990s. The huge government spending increased enrolment greatly but failed to maintain quality. It was found when parents used to pay for education the teachers were more accountable to them. As parents became reluctant on monitoring school activities regularly teacher performances gradually deteriorated. The country also could not take adequate preparations to face the increased enrolment because of late donor funding which resulted in overcrowding classroom and teacher shortage. However, in 1997 the government of Uganda doubled the share of recurrent government spending for primary education and used external aid to train new teachers, built classrooms and purchased teaching materials. Even after that existing high teacher-student and student-classroom ratios and inadequate materials caused educational quality to fall and net enrolment also declined. These two countries demonstrate that some obstacles on both the demand and the supply sides make education costly for the poor which results in discouraging enrolment. To maintain quality good planning, implementation, and monitoring are also necessary apart from solely increasing spending. (IMF 2004)

Apparently cost of education is one of the major reasons why demand for education is low. The poor families target for their basic needs like- food and shelter first. Opportunity cost of educating children is another challenge. Guardians and parents often prefer children to work to supplement household income, do household chores or take care of other family members rather going to schools. In AIDS afflicted African countries even free schooling was unaffordable for parents because children stayed home to take care of other family members. (IMF 2004)

In 1999 in the western rural China lacking of qualified teachers was the key problem to develop basic education. A large number of qualified teachers moved to developed or urban areas causing teacher shortage in poorer regions. This led to a teacher shortage specially teachers who could teach conventional subjects. As a result some courses listed in rural curriculums were no longer offered. It was also common to find teachers with no training or expertise teaching in rural schools. Another problem hindering the spread of basic education was the shortage of funding. Most of the rural people lived below the poverty line and there was not enough economic development to support local education. This funding deficiency caused a negative effect on teachers' working and living conditions. The heavy workloads, tight budgets, and poor transportation gave rural teachers little opportunity to attend training sessions, to undertake research activities, or to observe exemplary teachers using innovative methods in the classroom. Even their media regularly promoted teaching as a noble profession, few graduates were willing to work in the rural areas for lower pay and even lower social status. (McQuaide 2009)

In terms of inequality by gender and urban-rural area Bangladesh transformed quickly. Nevertheless, enrolment of the children living extreme poverty has been less impressive and the marginalisation of this group remains a barrier to universal primary education. Initiatives developed by non-government organisation reached over one million most

marginalised children prove that this barrier can be removed. Disadvantage in education is an obvious sign of social deprivation. It is also a cause and an effect of marginalisation in other aspects of life such as income, wealth and mobility and is a powerful transmitter of deprivation across generations. Marginalisation in education matters for a wide variety of reasons. Additional finance is essential to provide education services to marginalised groups. It takes more money to extend education services to the most disadvantaged than it costs to reach the better-off sections of the population. The hard-to-reach groups live in the most socially excluded regions and suffer chronic poverty and extreme gender disparities. Extending education programme to these groups and areas therefore, is most certain to raise per capita spending requirements. Extending education to children whose lives have been afflicted by poverty, hunger, low social and cultural capital and stigmatisation is likely to require supplementary teaching and additional teaching materials. Additional finance is therefore a reality (UNESCO 2010).

### **1.3 Livelihood of people in the study areas (*haors* and tea-estate)**

*Haors* are large floodplains that cover about 1.99 million hectares of land in the country's north-east region (BHWDB 2012). The inhabitants of these areas are frequently exposed to flooding, landslides and deforestation caused by flash flood and heavy rainfall. Infrastructural inadequacies and landscape vulnerabilities further intensify water management challenges, leading to increased sufferings of the people inhabiting the area. Inhabitants are also vulnerable to frequent natural disasters, poor sanitation, landlessness, ecological degradation, inadequate access to health, education and other basic service provisions (BHWDB 2012a).

Fisheries, fishing and water-based agricultural activities are the major sources of income for most of the *haor* population. They depend greatly on the water in the *haor* for their food, income and livelihood. While water sustains economic life in the region, it is also the cause of increased vulnerabilities for *haor* inhabitants. For these communities, water-logging and isolation become a part of life and access to education is less prioritised. Social deprivation, inequalities and poor economic condition resulting from spatial exclusion keep families in *haor* region from sending their children to school. Access to education is therefore a major problem in these areas.

The situation in the tea-gardens/hill-estates in Sylhet also paints a similar picture of exclusion and deprivation. The well-being of the inhabitants in the gardens is highly dependent on the ownership and management arrangements of the tea-gardens where they live. From literature it is evident that the communities in these gardens have been long deprived of access to government facilities such as health, sanitation and education. The women and children of these gardens are believed to be the most marginalised groups.

Occupational distribution of tea garden/ hilly area differs from plain land and *haor* areas. The tea garden/hilly area population are less likely to be involved in household work or in agriculture and are more likely to be day labourers (Nath 2013). Awareness of basic rights was also seen to be low in previous studies and the community reported their major problems to be the lack of adequate water and sanitation facilities, low wages of labour and the poor strength of the structures of their houses (Das and Islam 2006).

Due to mass illiteracy and low access to proper schools for several decades, parental awareness regarding children's education in these areas is low. Besides parental awareness, poverty is another major reason keeping garden children out of school. Children are needed at home for household chores, agricultural work or for cattle

rearing. In a UNICEF study that surveyed gardens owned by five different owners, it was found that the deprivation score assigned to this region was 1.57 times higher than the national score which suggested that the population here had fallen behind in education, under-5 nutrition, hygiene practices and other poverty indexes used by UNICEF (2010). These results suggested a cyclic deprivation that extended to the education of future generations.

#### **1.4 Study rationale**

Identification of programme operating challenges in marginalised *upazilas* of Sylhet division is important for policy formulation, programme planning and ensuring quality and timely delivery of services. Findings from this study will hopefully enable BEP to have a clearer view of the studied region's physical constraints and the challenges in working with the targeted communities. Moreover, the outcome of this research will have two broader goals: it will help us in understanding the initiatives under blanket coverage I and secondly, it will generate a list of recommendations from multiple stakeholders aimed at mitigating the existing challenges faced at the programme's supply-side.

#### **1.5 Research objectives**

The main aim of this study is to explore the challenges in operating education programme in selected marginalised *upazilas* of Sylhet division. Additionally, strategies considered in coping with the operational challenges, their implications in sustaining (and improving) programme quality, and consequences on children's learning has also been addressed. Following are the specific research objectives:

1. What are the challenges faced by various stakeholders (BEP staff, current and drop-out teachers, parents, drop-out students) in operating education programme?
2. How do these challenges affect children's educational attainment?
3. What are the strategies considered by the programme (at policy and field level) in mitigating these challenges?
4. How do the local staffs feel about their duties and responsibilities and also the additional support/facilities extended to them for smooth operations?
5. Recommended actions that can be taken to ensure quality services and make programme operations smoother in the studied areas.

## Chapter 2. Research methodology

This section of the report includes information on the research methods and techniques adopted, the instruments used, the sampling strategies followed, field level data collection procedures and analysis techniques. The strengths, limitations, ethical issues and implications of the study are also addressed.

### 2.1 Research strategy

This study employed a purely qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with the field level staff and teachers to identify the major challenges in the supply side. Secondly, students and parents were interviewed to understand the demand-side constraints. Additionally, the cases of purposively selected drop-out students and teachers were included to better capture the constraints and make room for various perspectives. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were arranged with parents to better understand the demand-side constraints. The Branch Managers, Area Managers and Regional Manager in the studied areas were interviewed to understand operational constraints and identify reasons behind the gap between policy and practice.

Data from this study thus came from four independent but highly related sources which included programme staff, teachers, parents and students. This helped capture perspectives and in data triangulation. Pre-tested checklists based on thematic issues were used for conducting the interviews and the FGDs. Moreover, to better understand the severity of the constraints in the study areas, the research team visited one area (Rajshahi) where BEP operations are exemplary and has comparatively significantly low operational challenges.

### *Population*

Two thousand forty-four schools (566 BPPS and 1478 BPS) are in operation with similar number of teachers in eight *upazilas* where the census was done in 2011. Number of total field staff is 223 (59 for BPPS and 164 for BPS). Of them 83 are project staff (PS), 48 field officers (FO), 54 programme organisers (PO), 38 branch managers (BM). The schools are clustered in branches. Each branch contains plain land along with *haor* area or tea-estates/hilly area/forest (BEP MIS March 2014)

### 2.2 Instruments

In-depth interviews, FGDs and informal observations were used to collect data for this study. Separate checklists were used depending on the purpose and the subjects. All checklists were pre-tested by research team prior to finalisation. Within the paradigm of the research design, triangulation of data was done to ensure consistency. Researcher's triangulation was done during data analysis to minimise bias and inconsistencies.

## 2.3 Sampling procedures

Sylhet region consists of three major landscapes: *haors*, tea-estates and plain land. In these three areas BEP operates its Blanket Coverage I initiative. Study areas were purposively selected to capture the regional variation and report on the exclusive operational challenges in the three different regions. Sampling was done to capture the changes by regional variation.

Five branches from five *upazilas* (Baniachang, Kamalganj, Juri, Bihwambarpur and Sulla) were purposively selected keeping in mind the three types of landscapes. Juri and Kamalganj were selected to give information on the hill/tea-garden criteria, Baniachang and Sulla from the *haor* criteria and Bishwambarpur from the plain land criteria.

Information was collected from Programme Staff and Branch Managers in each of the five selected branches. Later Area Managers and Regional Manager were further interviewed for additional information and triangulation. Current teachers (with teaching experience at BPS equal to or greater than one year) were interviewed. In addition, drop-out teachers (who taught for at least six months in BPS before resigning) were also interviewed. Drop-out students (who have not attended school from January-May 2015) and their parents were interviewed to better understand the reasons for discontinuation of education. Lastly, FGDs with parents of current BPS students at each of the five branches were arranged to generate data in a larger group.

**Table 2.3. Sample at a glance**

Technique	Respondent	Number
In-depth interviews	Area Manager, Branch Manager, Regional Manager	9 (3+5+1)
	Present BRAC Primary School Teachers	5
	BRAC Primary School Teachers (drop-out)	5
	BRAC Education Programme Field staff: Programme Officer/Field Officer/Junior Field Officer/Programme Staff	5
	Drop-out students (case study)	6
Focus-group discussion	Parents	5

## 2.4 Data collection, analysis and reporting

Trained field enumerators collected all information visiting the sampled areas. The research team provided a four-day training to the enumerators followed by a field test before starting of actual field work. Discussions and practice exercises were arranged for the enumerators as part of training.

Interviews were conducted at the respondent's natural setting. The researchers were present in the study areas for supervising all field activities. Post-enumeration checks were done.

## 2.5 Ethical issues

Participants were informed about the study prior to the actual interview. They were ensured that their participation is voluntary and that they could withdraw at any point. Verbal consent was taken from each participant before recording the interviews or taking photographs. Interviews were conducted at a location in agreement with the

participants and their families. Confidentiality about their identity was guaranteed. Fictive names have been used in the report and dissemination sessions that were conducted.

## **2.6 Strengths and limitations**

**This study has several strengths including the following:**

- Sylhet region consists of three major landscapes: *haors*, tea-estates and plain land. In these three areas BEP operates its Blanket Coverage I initiative. Studied areas were purposively selected to capture the regional variation and report on the exclusive operational challenges in the different regions. Sample captured the changes by regional variation
- The blanket coverage approach is an experimental and innovative approach of BRAC aimed at reaching out to the most marginalised groups. The initiative started as a pilot project and has the potential for expansion. However, authentic information is necessary for track recording, fine-tuning and for leading future directions of the programme- the study plays the unique role of fulfilling the needs of scientific documentation and generating a list of recommendations
- This is an in-depth study that identifies the exclusive operational challenges in running education programmes in marginalised *upazilas*. This will be particularly helpful for programme management particularly in reshaping their existing intervention policies
- The study gathered sideline information on the lives and livelihoods of *haor* and tea-garden communities. This information will briefly help in addressing the knowledge-gap about these communities and can serve as a reference for exclusive studies on the *haor* and tea-estate communities of Bangladesh
- Many of the findings from this study are generalisable and is representative of the eight and other marginalised *upazilas* across Bangladesh

**The following are some of the limitations of the study:**

- This study did not measure learning achievements or conduct structured classroom observations which is a key indicator of quality
- This study did not have a comprehensive approach to understanding the financing gap in operating education services in the study regions

## Chapter 3. Demand and supply-side challenges and coping strategies

In this chapter, the operational challenges and coping strategies in the sampled areas will be discussed at length. The information presented here comes from qualitative investigations with programme staff, teachers, students and parents.

### 3.1 Major operational constraints in tea-gardens/hill-estates and *haor* areas

It was found that operational challenges were faced during school establishment and in day-to-day operations after the schools were set up. The major constraints and coping strategies adopted to operate schools in both regions are discussed here.

#### A. Challenges from community and tea-garden management

The primary hurdle in setting-up schools in tea-estates began with non-cooperation and resistance from tea-garden management and the worker communities. Worker communities were manipulated by local leaders and the garden management to non-cooperate with BRAC in building schools inside the gardens. The underlying community perception was that the BRAC schools would be an unnecessary intervention and had the sole intention of preaching Christianity to young children. Programme staff also informed that since gardeners were illiterate and had no understanding of the world outside of the gardens, they were vulnerable to manipulation and dominance by the more “powerful” class, i.e. the garden authorities.

During the early phase of intervention in the tea-gardens/hill estates, garden management used the existing operations of GPS and garden-run schools as reasons for not according the proposal of BRAC to build schools in the gardens. They maintained that children could go to school if they wanted to: there were the government schools and the garden-run schools. Communities were manipulated accordingly. Moreover, according to one programme staff, “The workers could never imagine that their children could attend a school outside the confinements of the garden. They never even considered they could have a choice in choosing schools for their children.”

Power was evident in the relations between the workers and the employers in the gardens that presented deeper obstacles to intervention. The workers were stuck in a web of oppression and voicelessness that barred them from independent and proactive thinking. The workers lack of education, isolation and financial dependence on the garden for livelihood made them vulnerable to the wishes of their employers. Workers and subsequently their children were expected to spend entire lives working in the gardens. Their backwardness was manipulated for further oppression till it became a vicious cycle. Intervening in this context where problems and exclusion was so deep-rooted and structural proved to be a huge challenge.

In such a situation, meetings and rapport building with community people, *panchayat* members and local leaders were used as coping mechanisms by programme staff to persuade and initiate local support. A top-down and bottom-up approach were used in the right synthesis to generate support. Local leaders were convinced; simultaneously the community support was generated. Then the local leaders were used as ambassadors to talk to the communities about the perceived benefits of having more

schools and sending their children to those schools. The road to entry was rough but according to one programme staff, "Once one school was up and running, there was nothing stopping us! All the speculations were gradually silenced."

What the BRAC schools presented to the garden communities was a fully functional education model and a pragmatic solution to the problems of education marginalisation in the studied areas. Despite limited means and extreme operational challenges, learning was taking place inside the classrooms and the life stories of many children were rewritten. Findings show that once the communities had fully functional schools within their reach, the demand for BRAC schools increased and on the flipside, demand for GPS and garden-run schools declined drastically. Parents were enabled to make the distinction and one compassionately reported that, "Children enjoyed going to BRAC schools because learning was fun. The teachers adored and took good care of them. In GPS however, classes were not held regularly, Teachers did not come and there was none to look after the children."

The nature of the problems faced in day-to-day programme operations has changed since the initiation of blanket coverage initiative in the tea-gardens. Even though community resistance affected programme operations initially, that problem has been solved now. Community acceptance and support, mobilised through extensive networking and rapport building were found to be the core strengths of the programme's operational aspect. However, garden authorities continued to provide resistance. Garden management was reluctant to grant permission to BRAC for opening schools or expanding education services within the gardens. Sometimes, the teachers and owners of the house renting rooms to BRAC were questioned by garden authorities instilling fear and negativity. Programme staff also reported that in many gardens, BRAC could not open schools because of government funded schools under their Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC) project.

The following cases help capture the complexities. Case I explains a situation where garden management demonstrated resistance and schools could not be built as per the operational plan. Case II shows how community support overpowered the resistance from garden authorities that eventually resulted in successful implementation of operational plans.

*Case I:* All preparations were completed for the opening of two new schools in a garden area. There were sufficient number of children, available school rooms and qualified female teachers. However, just before the commencement of the schools, the manager of the garden informed the Programme Organiser (PO) that the management would not allow BRAC to build any more schools in his garden. The PO said the manager's reasoning was as follows: "Since 2003, BRAC has run many schools in the garden and as a result the schools under the authority of the garden management received very few students. Due to the small number of students, these garden-run schools could not be nationalised." The unsatisfactory number of students and delay in the process of nationalisation of schools under tea-garden management were shown as reasons for not permitting BRAC to open new schools in the garden.

Such instances were reported to be quite common in the studied areas. However, in this particular case, the community members were in support of BRAC. They demanded to the garden management to grant approval to start the BRAC schools so that garden children could have access to good quality education. When the manager asked the gardeners to send their children to the GPS and nearby ROSC school where they would also be monetarily incentivised, the communities said they did not need money but demanded that they be given the opportunity to send their children to BRAC schools. They also said, "the education in BPS is good, students from BRAC perform well in PSC

and later at JSC and SSC. This is all possible because of BRAC's contribution to advancing education among gardeners." (Case I: IDI:GF1).

*Case II:* In another garden area, a new BRAC school could not be opened due to extreme resistance from local leaders and government authorities. They complained that the GPS did not have students because of BRAC schools. BRAC staffs were asked to bring approval from *upazila* education office before they could build any more new schools. The powerful school management committee influenced local leaders. Local influential leaders tried to manipulate the gardeners and to build resistance against BRAC schools (IDI:GJ4).

The community members however, stood in support of BRAC schools. Overlooking the strong resistance from the garden management, the gardeners raised their voice in support of BRAC schools. The community expressed interest to admit their children to BRAC schools in pursuit of better quality education. They were less inclined to send their children to the government or the nearby Ananda School (ROSC project). After much persuasion by the gardeners, programme staff and influential local leaders, permission was finally granted for starting the new schools. However, many additional conditions were given to the programme staff by garden authorities. Ahead of starting any new school in the garden, the garden manager had to be informed about a number of things including: the exact spot where the school would be built, the house owner's details and teacher's details. (IDI:GC2)

Multiple stakeholders explained the reasons underlying such resistance of garden management saying that education was empowering the once illiterate gardeners, making them more aware of their rights. After seeking education, many youngsters were also leaving the gardens for higher education, better jobs and overall a better standard of life. When children were migrating out of the gardens, they also took their families along. This meant that the gardens were losing their existing workers as well as potential ones. The more people were getting educated, less and less they valued their work in the gardens. There was also increasing consciousness about exploitation. In conversation with community members and programme staff, it was found that the mass belief was that the tea-garden management had very little to gain from a more empowered and educated workforce; they lost out on cheap labour since education lead to out-migration from the gardens. Therefore, the garden management did not perceive facilitation of increasing access to education services as a profitable endeavor.

When BRAC first started working in *haor* like the tea garden areas some *hatis* did not welcome them easily as they were under the impression that BRAC was a religious institution that preaches Christianity and converts people. It was very frustrating for the programme staffs said one branch manager. The wealthier segment of the society was especially against the education and wanted the poor people to stay poor and serve them from generation to generation. People of these *hatis* were also incognizant who believed that studying only do not bring food. To mitigate this BRAC staffs tried to draw their attention on the fact that the rich people were sending their own children to Baniachong, Hobiganj or other places for better education and better future. They asked why they were not doing the same for their children and whether they wanted them to lead the same life they used to live. After much convincing attempts gradually parents opened up to the idea of educating their children.

### **B. School room and maintenance**

The issue of land-ownership and procurement was a complex one in the tea-gardens, further perpetuating the problems of finding proper school rooms. The gardeners had no house or land of their own. Garden management built houses and allocated spaces

for individual workers and their families. The houses that were built hardly had any additional space that could be rented out for schools. Finding school rooms that met the specifications of BEP regarding room area, ventilation, budget and terms of tenure remained a major operational challenge in the studied areas. All programme staff reported that finding proper school rooms was the biggest challenge for programme operations in the tea-gardens.

In the tea-gardens/hill-estates, there was acute scarcity of space. It was difficult to find proper school rooms to start classes. Either the house-owners had no extra rooms to rent out or in most cases, the rooms did not meet BEP's criteria for room selection. They were either too small or lacked proper ventilation. Programme staff reported that it was hard to find rooms bigger than 220-250 square feet although the BEP criterion for room selection was 288 sq ft.

When smaller rooms were available as potential school rooms, the next best option was to renovate the rooms to match BEP's criteria. The area of the rooms could be expanded by breaking a wall or two and rebuilding it. However, this process was not a very simple one. The worker's houses were built by tea-garden authorities and they had little willingness, authority or money to make modifications to the existing structure. Programme staff reported that it was exceedingly difficult to convince house owners to do restructuring so that the available rooms could meet BEP's standards. One Programme Organiser (PO) reported that to convince a house owner to restructure a room and rent it to BRAC, he had to go more than 10-12 times. The process of finding rooms and convincing owners to do minor renovations was found to be a complex and time-consuming task in the study areas.

Often school rooms as per the requirement could not be found. The second option of convincing the house owner to renovate and make the room bigger also failed. In cases where both option A and B did not work out, as an alternative solution, in the owner's space a low-cost school room was built. This process was however long and required permission from garden authorities and BRAC management. Sometimes however, schools had to be conducted in smaller school rooms because the other options could not be implemented.

The total amount allocated for each school room in the tea-gardens was fixed at BDT 14,400. Initially an amount ranging from Tk 5,000-10,000 was given to the owner in two instalments. The remaining amount was given to the owner over the course of 4 years. House-owners did not feel incentivised to rent rooms for such low rent. One programme staff reported that sometimes it was difficult to gain community trust because they believed, "more money for house rent was allocated by BRAC but the programme staff took a share." This caused problems in convincing house owners and gaining their trust. Moreover, limited budget lead to poor construction of school rooms.

It was difficult to find house as per the exact criteria; houses generally did not have 5 windows and were made of cheap materials. Even though, according to programme specifications, fiber tin had to be used to build the roof of the school rooms, this could not be done. Ceilings had to be made according to BEP requirements. However, due to monetary constraints, most of the school rooms did not have ceilings and used low quality tin for the roofs. As a result, most of the school rooms had weak infrastructure. They were made of cheap and degradable raw materials and lacked proper maintenance. The absence of proper ceilings made the classrooms too hot in summer and too cold in the winter. Moreover, because of lower quality roofs and walls, on rainy days, water seeped into the classrooms, making them damp. The floor mats and

teaching materials were often soaked in the rain as a result. Because the school rooms had no ceilings, the classrooms were reported to be very cold in the winter. Children did not have proper warm clothes and shivered inside the rooms, being unable to concentrate fully in classroom lessons.

The study areas were vulnerable to heavy rainfall, flooding and natural disasters. A significant number of school rooms were found to be moderately to severely affected by natural disasters. Some schools were severely damaged and the incidence of damage was found to be quite frequent in the studied areas. In many school rooms, the walls or roofs were broken down and needed considerable renovation. In one operational area, 7 schools (running Class 4 and Class 5) under one branch were damaged by heavy rainfall. Five schools under another were completely damaged and a few students were also injured. Books and teaching materials were soaked. The programme staff blamed the weak structure of the house as the main reason behind such high incidence of damages. They reported that the houses were made of cheap materials and as a result, the school rooms had to be renovated every 1-2 years. Moreover, they pointed out that since the areas were so prone to natural disasters, it was imperative to build strong structures that could withstand natural calamities.

Renovating damaged school rooms was an ordeal. Programme staff mentioned that no amount of annual budget was kept aside by the programme for maintenance of schools rooms. They pointed out that this caused severe problems when the schools were damaged. Schools needed repair work but there was no money available. Programme staff had to convince the home-owners to do the repair work but in a great majority of the cases, owners were reluctant to invest because they were too poor and saw no satisfactory returns on their investments. In cases where the house owners did not repair the school rooms, programme organisers collected donations from programme staff, students and community members to raise money for repair work. At times when money could not be raised, an alternate space had to be found.

Programme officers mentioned that damage to schools affected regular school activities. In either case, these damages, delays and uncertainties regarding the repair work of the school rooms negatively affected classroom teaching-learning. Classroom contact hours were reduced because classes had to be cancelled before the school rooms could be repaired. It took time to repair schools because there was no readily available fund. The greatest impact of this was on the Class 4 and Class 5 students according to programme organisers. As coping strategies, make-up classes and additional hours were scheduled. Nevertheless, continuity in regular classroom activities was affected in the process of school damages, repairing school rooms or finding new school rooms. Programme staff and management staff recommended that an annual fund should be kept aside for school maintenance and repairing.

Scarcity of classrooms was a major operational challenge in *haor* areas as well. In *haor* amount of habitable land is poor and so is number of houses. As a result meeting BEP's standard there was extremely hard and still it remains as a major challenge. Even if they managed to find classrooms they had multiple uses. One branch manager explained that at first most of the rented school rooms were the living rooms of the owners. At day time those were used as school rooms but after school were used as living room or even cowshed. From her experience a teacher described that their school house was used as a classroom by day and cowshed at night. In the morning the owner took out the cows, swept the floor but it remained smelly. The guardians feared that their children could get sick because of that unhygienic environment. The community people used to humiliate them as the teacher and students of broken school. Another problem was that

as there was no fence around the school after starting co-curricular activities people gathered all around them and that hampered school environment. The house owner directly told her, "I cannot repair the school. If you wish carry on with school or don't" on this issue. (IDI:HT2)

Repairing classrooms was another obstacle in this region. *Haor* areas are generally natural disaster prone areas. During monsoon storm is a very common phenomenon there which damage school houses severely every year. According to the contract owners would pay for damage repairing in the next four years it. However a BPS teacher revealed that people living there were too poor, not all of them even had houses to live in and the house owner was no exception. Therefore, most owners were financially unable to bear the cost of this sort of repairing. She gave an example of her own school where the old fence got damaged and they made temporary hay-made fence. She said that if that weak fence does not get mud coating immediately it would not last in the rain and the classroom would get soaked in water. She also added that once there were doors and windows in the room but none last. Cows, goats, hens and other animals and birds easily entered the classroom and spoiled it. Besides this blackboard and trunk of her school were also damaged.

Another teacher from a seriously damaged school informed that the house owner migrated after giving the room to BRAC. He was always unreachable when needed and also unwilling to pay for repairing. His logic was that BRAC had rented his house therefore they would do the mending. This room was repaired before but after the last storm neither programme nor the house owner was taking any initiative. To solve this problem the programme officer talked with the union *parishod* chairman and got permission to use his abandoned building as classroom. About this incident the branch manager said that it was a school of class five and the completion exam was only 7 months away. So, they found an alternative classroom as soon as possible.

The branch manager said that when house owners told BRAC to repair the school houses they tried to convince the elite class of the society by telling that it was established for them therefore, they should take care of it. But it did not work all the time. The community people often asked that BRAC being a very huge organisation, doing versatile works, why they can't repair one school. Why their students had to study in a broken house? For instance he gave an example of assembling money for repairing school building where they got BDT 1,200 from office, collected BDT 20 from each student, one staff gave BDT 500 taka and he himself gave BDT 1,000.

In another picture guardians were found paying house rent in addition to BRAC's usual rent money. The PO of the school explained that in one BPS after paying BDT 8,000 in first installment the owner refused to give the room and even wanted to give the money back because the guardians were refusing to pay any subscription for school rent. Then the PO got involved and set the range of subscription the guardians will pay and the owner finally agreed. To avoid this kind of situation both the PO and BM suggested that school rent should be made minimum BDT 20,000 considering the present context and BRAC should bear the repairing charges. The BM suggested that special permission for instant money allocation should be given for school repairing purpose. By doing so school room crisis can be met- he uttered.

### ***C. Teacher recruitment, training and retention***

The overall education status in the tea-gardens still lagged behind other areas in Sylhet division. Consequently, finding qualified teachers was found to be a major operational

challenge in the study areas. As per BEP policy, teachers who are married and have Higher Secondary School Certificate (HSC) degree is given first preference in recruitment. In case of unmarried teachers, they must be at least 18 years of age. It was found that when these criteria could not be met, candidates completing at least Class 8 were considered in the study areas. If no female teachers capable of teaching at the schools could be found from within the community or nearby areas, with approval from head office, male teachers were appointed. Implementation of these policies in teacher recruitment was seen to be followed in the study areas.

Programme staff however, reported that finding good quality unmarried teachers with a Secondary School Certificate (SSC) degree or higher was a huge constraint in the tea-gardens/hill-estates. Among 15 schools in one tea-garden for example, only three teachers were found who were both married and had a SSC degree (IDI:GC4). In the same garden, one male teacher was appointed in one school. In a nearby garden, there were 5 male teachers currently appointed. For these schools, no qualified female teachers could be found.

Students who continued education at or beyond the secondary level usually moved out of the gardens or were uninterested to teach at the schools for such low salary. However, senior management informed that the shortage of qualified female teachers was more acute a few years back compared to now. In one tea-garden prior to starting education service in the area, there were no potential female teachers with a SSC degree but that problem is long solved. Senior management staff mentioned that there has been a significant change in the number of available female teachers in the tea-gardens over the years. More and more graduates from BRAC schools were joining as teachers in the BPS. Findings from this study showed that many of the current teachers in the garden schools are ex-BRAC school students. So, there is reason to believe that hope exists.

Most of the teachers currently employed were found to be part-time students, enrolled at the higher secondary level or at the degree level. They taught and pursued their education at the same time. Programme staff mentioned that this was a problem because the teachers had to be on leave for things such as in-course, form fill-up, registration, examinations and other educational purpose. They had to be given leave sometimes for 2-3 days or for up to one to two weeks during examinations. This was problematic since finding alternate/proxy teachers was not always possible. However, in most cases, proxy teachers were appointed. In cases where substitute teachers were unavailable, schools had to remain closed for a few days. Even though this caused disruptions in classroom teaching-learning, there was hardly a permanent solution to this. However, when the teachers returned from leave, make-up classes were arranged to make-up for lost contact hours.

When teachers were newly appointed, they were given basic training. However, findings from this study showed that when there were unexpected dropouts and replaced teachers were brought in, it was not always possible to give them basic training prior to sending them to classrooms. However, as a coping method, the material was explained to the newly appointed teachers in refresher's training. Moreover, during classroom visits, the programme staff guided the teacher about things such as lesson plan, conducting lessons, etc. Additionally, she learnt by interacting, seeing and seeking help from her colleagues in nearby BRAC schools. An experienced teacher from a nearby school who received basic training was usually asked to help the new teacher.

Bringing all teachers for the monthly refresher's training was deemed a challenge by programme staff. Teachers usually had to commute long distances, sometimes 10-12 kilometres or higher to get to the branch office for refresher's training. The commute was time consuming, expensive and sometimes had security implications. However, programme staff single out the transportation expenses as the main reason why teachers from far away are reluctant to come for refresher's training.

For example, from Raski tea-garden, the branch office was 10-12 kilometres. The CNG fare was approximately BDT 100-150. Since the costs were not covered by BRAC, teachers could not afford to use motorised vehicles. Most of them walked to the venue which took about two hours. This commonly resulted in them coming for training one to two hours late. Moreover, since the commute was long, the training had to be finished early so that teachers could reach home safely before dusk.

Teachers were given BDT 30 for their transportation expense. However, this amount was not always adequate to cover the costs of travel and teachers often had to pay from their own pockets. Sometimes, teachers had to commute in CNGs which cost about BDT 100-150. They were not reimbursed for this. As a result, many teachers make excuses and do not come for refresher's training. They showed family problems or sickness as excuses for not coming. Staffs recommended that the transportation costs should be made actual instead of fixed and think that the opportunity to bill the actual amount of transportation expenses would ensure full participation in trainings.

Teacher retention was a huge concern in the tea-estates. Even though programme staff tried hard to appoint female and married teachers, more young female teachers were willing and suitable to take up the role of teachers in the BPS. Therefore, majority of teachers appointed were unmarried females. Female teachers usually dropped-out when they got married and moved out of the gardens. In the spring/monsoon season, a lot of ethnic teachers in the garden dropped-out because this was the marriage season in their communities. This caused disruption in classroom activities and in teacher's training. During data collection, it was reported that three teachers under one branch got married in the same month which caused disruption in training and classroom activities. Programme staff had to look for alternate teachers who could take up the jobs.

Teachers who remained in their positions did so mostly because of the respectability earned by the position. Additionally, the lack of better alternatives meant that some teachers stayed on regardless of the low pay. One teacher explained that the job had more than just monetary value to her, "even though it pays little, I keep working for the respect it brings me." Many teachers believe instead of sitting idle at home, teaching children who have been left out of formal schooling contributed to the improvement of the community which gave them satisfaction. Another teacher explained that many of her students who previously worked in the fields and roamed around in the gardens aimlessly have now passed their SSC examinations. The respect the students and their community gave her for being a teacher was of great value to her, "we bring children from the fields and the streets to the classroom. We teach them and are in the process of rewriting their lives. I feel happy being a part of it. That's why I do what I do." The programme has hence benefited from the social externalities of educating the children in these communities.

Teachers were also found to drop-out due to other reasons. Finding other jobs with greater pay was a reason for teachers leaving BRAC schools. After their experience and training at BRAC schools, they either got appointed as teachers in Anondo schools under the ROSC project or at other NGOs. Both these opportunities earned them a

higher salary. Programme staff believed the current salary for teachers at BDT 1,800-2,150 was too low and must be increased to BDT 3,500-4,000. Higher pay would ensure inflow of better quality teachers who would be willing to travel long distances. It would also improve teacher retention. Further reasons that presented challenges to the daily operation of schools were maternity leaves. Due to the limited number of teachers available to the programme for replacement, when teachers went on maternity leave, programme staff faced difficulties in running the schools. Teacher replacement and training were difficult under the resource constraints. Higher pay might mitigate that issue as teachers from neighbouring gardens or those who live further away may be able to travel to these schools to temporarily replace the teacher.

Simultaneously in *haor* area both educated women and women meeting BEP's minimum requirement was hard to find. Those who study no longer lived in these areas and those who lived were from wealthy families would never apply for a job worth BDT 2000-2100 including hard work like roaming around *hatis* to collect students. The PO told that on one hand competent teachers were hard to find in this area but on the other hand eligible candidates were not interested in this job because of low salary. He said that the education programme was barely running on given circumstances. When competent male candidates were found they also declined for low salary.

To cope up with this problem the minimum criteria for teacher recruitment was relaxed and sometimes girls who have passed class 8 were also appointed. By doing so teachers with weak subject based knowledge especially in mathematics and English were hired. One teacher who failed in her SSC exam and lived in the neighbouring *hati* expressed her reasons to work saying- "I am less educated and also gave up studying. With this proficiency I could not get a better job and I was sitting home idly. It was okay for me to join but the salary is too low. BRAC should think about increasing teacher salary." (IDI:TC2). The programme staffs tried to train them with a special focus on English and Mathematics. The BM said that they monitored every school for 2/3 days in a week. They also conducted some classes to help students doing well in exams.

Teacher dropout was another operational challenge found in the study areas. The most common reasons behind were marital migration and taking care of little children and family. Following are some cases of dropped out teachers enlightening the facts behind their termination.

*Case III:* A teacher who studied till class eight and worked in BRAC school for sixteen months explained her reasons to resign. She said, "I have two children, husband and family to look after. For them I chose to resign." Contact hour of grade IV was usually four hours per day but while joining she negotiated for teaching three hours per day and programme staffs agreed. But duration of class five was six hours per day and reaching out irregular students took another work. She was unable to spend seven hours a day for school. She also found the syllabus of class five difficult for her to teach. Considering all these facts she decided to leave her job. (IDI:TC2)

*Case IV:* Talking with a dropout teacher gave the inner picture of the situation. Mahmuda (fictitious name), a previous BRAC school teacher who worked for thirty-three months in BPS left her job to join Ananda School because the salary was higher there. Her educational qualification was B.A (degree). The Ananda school was 1.5 km away from her home where BPS was right beside her home. Still she decided to leave that job because attending regular refreshers training and official work was difficult in BPS where working in Ananda school was more flexible comparatively. She said if BRAC offers a minimum 4000 taka salary she might want to go back. She cleared the fact that she left that job only for salary reason. She said that she learned a lot of things from BRAC. She also added that the way BRAC teaches the children can help them build the primary

base of education. She liked the activities like *Deepshikha*, rhymes, poem recitation, group work, participatory learning and the good relationship with PO and receiving his advice etc. She wanted to take the national teacher registration test and be a teacher of high school in future. (IDI:ST4)

High dropout tendency was greatly hampering proper teachers' training. Like the tea-garden region a number of current teachers were found lacking basic training as they joined later in their schools. They also said that the refresher training was useful but very costly. They needed around BDT 175 for transportation while the office provided BDT 50. On training days they had to reach office before 8.30 in the morning. For that they started just after getting up from sleep. In dry season they used to travel some distance by local autos and the rest by walking and in rainy season they needed to go all the way by boat. With the help of limited office provided transport cost, teachers used to reserve a boat collectively for three days when the actual fare was BDT 1500-1800. The long commute was also very tiring for them and could not concentrate on the training properly. After reaching office they were offered snacks consist of one *samusa* and a cup of tea which was not enough after walking that much distance. The training ended at five o'clock in the evening which often led to returning home late.

#### ***D. Student admission, attendance and retention***

In the studied areas, prior to opening new schools, surveys were conducted to do a need assessment. From the surveys, a demand analysis was done based on which the decision to make schools was taken. Programme staff mentioned that it was difficult to find respondents for the survey since they went to work in the gardens very early in the morning and did not return before dusk. However, by changing the timing and schedule of the survey, it was possible to reach most respondents. Findings showed that students were admitted primarily based on demand and the school-going age of the children which were determined from results from the survey.

Findings showed that attendance in tea-garden schools were not affected due to transportation or communication problems. Typically schools were set up within close proximity to the majority of the students. The schools were found to be within one to two kilometres from majority of the students. The teacher and the students walked to school which took about a couple of minutes to a maximum of fifteen minutes. Slight problems occurred in the monsoon when the roads got muddy and children had to walk through the water and the mud to get to schools. Programme staff informed that with the exception of a few days, rainy weather was not a cause for prolonged low attendance in schools. Students showed up but were however, late on rainy days. Most did not have umbrellas so they waited for the rain to stop before they made the walks to school. On winter mornings however, fewer students came to class. The temperature drops drastically in the gardens and the biting cold was reported to affect class attendance. Students did not have adequate warm clothes and were less inclined to make the walk to school in the cold. To cope with this situation, in a few schools, BEP staff even donated warm clothes and blankets to many children.

Low parental awareness and non-cooperation were responsible for irregular school attendance for some children. Most parents usually went to work in the gardens very early in the morning. So, there was none at home to remind the children to go to school. Moreover, most parents did not inquire and verify if their child actually went to school in their absence. A significant number of cases were found where children wandered around and played games instead of coming to school for days. Teachers and

programme staff reported such problems to be common among a few children, especially among slow-learners who did not take an active interest in school activities. In most cases, parents were completely unaware of such occurrences before the teacher or the programme staff reported to them. Students also remained absent because their parents sometimes wanted them to help with household chores. When these children were brought back to class, it was difficult for them to cope up because they had already missed out on lessons due to their absence. Teachers reported these absences to hinder classroom activities and individual student's learning trajectories. However, parents do not understand the serious consequences of irregular class attendance on student's development.

Most of the children come from very poor households and do not eat a proper meal before coming to school. Since they are hungry, many children are inattentive in classes. Programme staffs believe that providing incentives such as giving food will incentivise children to come to school. Moreover, the government schools and ROSC schools against which BRAC is competing provides scholarships (*upabritti*), school uniforms and monetary assistance. In comparison what BRAC school provides is quality education only. There have been cases where parents have taken their children out of BRAC schools and put them in ROSC run schools. When asked, parents say, "What will we do with only education. We also need money." In the ROSC schools, the quality of education is very poor. However, the only reason why parents admit their children to these schools is because of the monetary incentive.

*Case V:* Low attendance and student dropout remained a challenge for a few schools. One garden school (currently a Class IV school) in a remote part of a tea-garden started with twenty-five students. During the time of data collection, the school had 17 students and even among those 17 students, a significant number remained absent. During the time of data collection, the school had a new teacher because the old one dropped due to marital reasons. Moreover, due to the great distance of the school from the branch office, there was poor supervision and monitoring of the school by the programme staff. It was found during data collection that the PO did not visit the school for a month. Just instances were reported to be quite common in the study areas.

When asked, the programme staff said the ex-teacher's incompetence was the main reason behind such poor performance of the school. The teacher was blamed for not reporting the problems of low student attendance to programme staff in due time. Later the programme management got to know about the problems from the student's guardians. Moreover, the (incompetent) teacher resigned because she was getting married. A new teacher was employed two months back. Field staff said students were probably still not as comfortable with the teacher, hence student attendance was irregular.

In the tea-garden area, the incidence of student drop-out was known to be the highest in Grades 4 and 5. Poverty remained one of the main causes of drop-out in the gardens. When children grew older, they were needed at home for household chores and for taking care of younger siblings, cattle rearing or taking care of the elderly. One programme staff mentioned that, "Girl children, usually when they were a little older were taken out of school when mothers gave birth to another baby who needed to be taken care of." In some cases, children left school to do income-generating work and financially support their families. Some worked in the gardens and cut grass, picked tea-leaves, etc. For per day's work in the garden, the child earned around Tk 35-40. Some children were also sent out of the garden to work as house-hold help, helpers at tea-stores, workshops, etc. Other than that, drop-outs happened when children migrated to other places with their families.

Case VI: Hridoy dropped out of school when he was in Grade III. His parents informed that they had three younger children to take care of and could not afford to send Hridoy to school. He was needed at home to take care of his younger siblings so that his mother could work longer in the gardens. He was needed to take his father's cows for grazing. By doing these chores, he was being useful for the family. When asked, Hridoy's parents said that with the meager income from working in the gardens, they could not support the family. His family saw no direct short-term outcomes in sending Hridoy to school, thus failing to encourage him to go back to school (IDI:FG3).

Parental awareness was low in the gardens, owing to generations of illiteracy and backwardness. Parents do not even know which grade their children are in or whether or not they go to school regularly or study at home. In the meetings, when they are told something regarding their child's education, they cannot understand the feedback half the time. Some parents also fail to understand the returns to education and question why they would send their children to schools on a regular basis. Programme organisers reported that when pressurised to send their children to school, some parents said that they would much rather send their children to work so that the family can be supported.

Case VII: Sagor Rai stopped coming to school for nearly 2.5 months. When the teacher went to know why he was not coming to school, she was informed that he was mentally ill and would not come to school. The teacher failed to persuade his family to send him back to school. Then after the programme staff went and talked to the father, he again said that his son was not mentally well. After much inquiry, he asked what the benefits were in sending his son to school. The programme staff convinced the father saying that if he completed his education successfully, he could have a job one day and could take care of the family. The family could move out of the garden and he did not need to work as a gardener anymore. After much persuasion, the father agreed to send Sagor back to school. Sagor has completed the Grade V completion examinations and is now studying at the Islampur High School.

The gardeners are mostly followers of Hinduism and are from various ethnic minority groups. Each group has its own set of cultural and religious festivities. The number of Pujas celebrated by gardeners is more than among other communities. This culture of festivities and celebrations was perceived by many to have a negative impact on children's education. When one festivity started, children did not come to school. They went on to celebrate with their families, friends and neighbours. Sometimes, the community also requested teachers and the programme staff for holidays for these celebrations. Even if holiday was given, students remained absent for up to 3-4 days after the holiday.

Opening schools and finding eligible school going children was comparatively easy in *haor* areas but keeping them till class five completion examination was difficult. They experienced 30-70% student dropout told the programme officer. He gave an example of a school where only 12 students were left in class five which started with 33 students. Migration worked as the main factor behind this. Since decent source of income lacks in these areas migration could not be stopped.

There was a huge tendency of involving children in seasonally available works in *haor*. At times of paddy harvesting children did not come to school but went to the fields to work with their parents. *Baishakh*- the paddy harvesting season is the unannounced vacation time in this region said one branch manager. Very few students come to school at that time; students fall behind in terms of lessons, some get married and some dropout. Again in rainy season they got busy in catching fish. Some parents worked in brickfields and took their children along with them. Some also worked as day labourers in stone collecting. According to the branch manager unawareness of parents was the

main reason of student dropout in this region. Parents used to think sending children to work in paddy fields were more profitable than sending them to school. Besides these some religious festivals also hindered education programme. From February to March in hindu majority *hatis* an event called '*keerton*' took place and classes hampered greatly in these months. To overcome this situation he suggested good teacher was a must who can attach students from a relatively more aware family. To complete course on time teachers were advised to give more pressure on students.

Communication became the major problem for students during rainy season. They no longer could travel from one *hati* to another timely because of water and lack of boats. Parents were also worried about their children riding in small boats during heavy water. However, when water level decreased and the bigger boats could no longer float another problem aroused. Students had no other way but walk to school in thick mud.

In some Muslim *hatis* girls education was a big problem at the beginning. Girls aged 11 or older of distant *hatis* were hard to enroll because of early marriage and security concerns on her way to school. Some girls were also sent to work as domestic workers in different cities.

The guardians of this area are unaware and possess a mindset about not going out to work means no livelihood. Branch Manager said every month they arranged a meeting with parents and guardians but still they did not send children regularly. Especially at the time of *Baishakh*-the paddy harvesting time, children work in fields with their parents. If they try to convince the parents they asked "Is only studying necessary, don't we need food?" He gave an example on how serious they become about cutting crops at that time of year. He saw one person died in one *hati* but until afternoon he was not buried because everyone was busy in paddy fields.

During *Baishakh* and rainy season least student appears in class because they are busy with harvesting or fishing if teacher goes home to call students, parents get really annoyed. Walking in their footsteps students also didn't want to come regularly. Guardians think migration and involvement in seasonal work do not influence education much. One guardian said in FGD that they cultivate only one crop in a year so they do not afford to lose any day at that time. They asked what harm might come by bunking 2/3 days in school. Another mother explained it as the rainy season was approaching soon the paddy field might get drowned. Son helping his father a little at that time seemed more logical and profitable to her. Similarly when children went fishing they earned around Tk. 500 per day but going to school bothers this money flow.

Following are the three different cases of dropout students. They usually dropout because of poverty, early marriage and unawareness of parents.

*Case VIII:* A student named Solayman (fictitious name) did every seasonal work such as- harvesting, fishing, family work etc. When his father was asked about his school admission he clearly said that he won't send his son to school. However, BRAC staffs tried to convince him saying that BRAC schools do not collect any tuition fees and they provide free books and other stationeries still his father was determined about not sending him school. He said, Solayman needs to stay at school till 3 o'clock in the afternoon, if he works at that time it will be more helpful for the family.

*Case IX:* Laila was thirteen years old and studying in class three when her parents married her off. The thought of attending PSC examination from her in law's house was somehow shameful to her. That is why she stopped going to school.

Case X: Shojol was studying in class three when he dropped out of school because of his father's second marriage. His father abandoned their family and started living with his new wife in a distant area therefore as the only male member of the family he had to start working. He worked at the *ghat*, paddy fields, sold ice-cream in bazaar. He said he wanted to go to school very badly but they would not have any food if he studied. Sometime people mock him saying BRAC School passed boat man or the BRAC School passed ice cream seller which he found very depressing. He had to take big responsibilities like marriage of elder sister and building new home on his little shoulders.

Most of the guardians in *haor* were uncertain about children's future study plan. In most cases the plan was 'as far as they can manage'. Only a few said they wanted to make their children a teacher, doctor or university graduate.

### ***E. Monitoring issues***

School supervision and monitoring was found to be a huge operational challenge in the studied areas. Monitoring and proper supervision was hindered by time constraints and long commutes through difficult travelling routes. For example, one programme staff's work areas were 12-14 kilometres from the branch office. Moreover, the schools in his designated cluster were all in different directions. Therefore, visiting one school took up one day's working hours. Moreover, certain routes become more inaccessible via cycles and motorbikes in the monsoon when roads are inundated.

When asked to comment on the major challenges faced during monitoring, one programme staff reported, "The biggest challenge for us is the distance we have to commute for school supervision and monitoring. All our fields are far way and in different directions; they don't fall on the same road. However, we are given bicycles for our travels. Cycling 12-14 kilometres is very difficult. In the summer, under the scorching sun, it's nearly impossible to cycle for such long hours. The heat causes dizziness and headaches. In such a tired state, it is nearly impossible to do educational monitoring. Last year in monsoon, I fell off a culvert and hurt myself. However, we cannot leave our cycles and take CNGs because office does not cover those expenses." (IDI: PF1)

Ideally, one school needs to be visited twice a week. However, in the gardens, some schools were visited once in every fifteen days and there were a few that could not be visited even once in a month. Staff reported that sometimes the monitoring schedules could not be maintained due to extreme weather conditions and other official commitments. For example, unexpected downpours and storms delayed monitoring since many unpaved roads become completely inaccessible when it rained. School visit schedules were also disrupted due to other reasons such as public holidays, meetings and trainings.

Staff to school ratio was found to be too high in the studied areas which lead to excess work load and unrealistic targets for field staff. Some field staff had as many as 22 schools under them which they were expected to monitor twice every week. Moreover, the schools were far away and the commutes were difficult and time-consuming. From top level management to the field staff, the necessity for more efficient staff was acknowledged. For ensuring better quality, the workload had to be reduced for a good number of field staff.

Every month, a couple of days were dedicated for refresher's training and so no monitoring work could be done on those days. Moreover, there were other official work such as reporting, self-training and weekly team meetings which took up a lot of time. One programme staff reported, "It is impossible to meet the targets, especially via

cycling. I have fallen ill and have high blood pressure because of excess physical labour and stress on a daily basis.” Senior management such as the area manager and branch managers are aware of excess workload on existing staff. Branch Managers have said, “The programme organisers (PS, PO, JPO) do not get enough time for proper monitoring. Sometimes they just look at lesson plans or only at certain core subjects such as English and Mathematics because of time constraint. They set priorities and try and visit the lower grades school more frequently. ”

When certain school visits have to be called off, Programme Staff coordinate among themselves and if their peers go to a nearby area, they ask them to visit the schools in that working area. Moreover, every month, the Branch Manager (BM) visits various schools in different areas. When he goes, requests are made to him for seeing a few identified schools.

There are school management committees consisting of six parents and one teacher who are supposed to help in school monitoring and supervision. The committee is supposed to oversee all school activities including teacher and student attendance. However, in the garden areas, most of the parents remained unavailable during the day time and therefore, they could not give time to the school. Since, the School Managing Committees were not very active, the locals who did not work long hours in the gardens, the *panchayat* committee members and local leaders were requested to look after the school, encouraging in them a sense of community, ownership and partnership.

Many senior programme staff mentioned that timely monitoring and observation could not be done because of the design of the programme itself. For example, they could not often comply by their field plans because programme was over-stressing them with responsibilities. For example, one branch manager reported, “From Monday, I was supposed to be on field visits. However, I could not go. I had to be in office and prepare reports. Moreover, some forms were sent yesterday that I also needed to prepare. The pressure was not so intense before. The workload has definitely multiplied. There is no definite schedule for report submissions or meetings; it keeps changing since priorities are not fixed! We receive calls every now and then for sending different reports. Sometimes even from midway to a field we have to come back because some reports are suddenly needed urgently. The Area Manager (AM), Quality control personnel for BPPS and BPS call me and responsibilities are diverted. There is hardly any time when I can sit and thoroughly focus on a school or do proper educational monitoring of a school.”

In *haor* regions meeting targets, maintaining school quality and proper monitoring were largely hampering from the very beginning of school establishment. The workload of official desk works, boat school budget, maintenance and rescue have emerged as new challenges in BPS school monitoring. Additionally, in IDP areas every staff needed to monitor three types of school (BPS, BPPS, Boat school) and both PO and FO were involved in refresher training of teachers. The staffs admitted that they cannot meet the targets of school monitoring. In addition to that communication problem stays and the expenses often exceed office provided allowance. The Programme Staffs (PS) visit more schools but they do not get allowances like the regular staffs. A programme officer told that in class five the schools needed to be monitored frequently. If there were three ways like- walking/ by boat/ by motor cycle of reaching a school, the office gave allowance for the cheapest way- by boat. As it was time consuming the PO went there by motorbike and bore the cost himself which he cannot put on bill later. In rainy season because of the bad condition of the road they often reach schools late. Again in summer after walking five kilometres or more, taking classes were tough for them.

To run the programme smoothly field level staffs need to take challenge- said one senior programme staff. He described his own experience after getting transferred in *haor* it took him 2/3 months to get used to the life style. He said that one need to be very patient while working with marginalised people. Here, the workload is twice than the other parts of the country- he said. They face different types of problems also. After going to a field if it rains they face huge difficulty to come back. He gave his own example where he injured himself while loading his motor cycle on boat and riding motor cycle on a rugged road.

One teacher urged if the school monitoring were more frequent the quality of education would automatically increase. But their supervisor came only once in a month and stayed for 30 minutes on an average. This time was too little for fruitful discussion on different matters, problem solving and suggestions for improvement. She suggested that supervisors needed to come to school at least once a week and spend at least 1.30 hours at school. Another teacher revealed that every month PO came and sat for 10-20 minutes in the school and then left. From the school register it was found that in May, 2015 PO came only three times.

Lack of skilled teacher was one constraint but lack of well trained staffs was an bigger issue in these areas. One BM told that when a teacher asked some subject related question and they could not answer it was the indicator that they needed better training.

#### ***F. Water and sanitation***

Water and sanitation situation in the tea-gardens was a huge problem. Most house owners with a very few exceptions could not afford to build sanitary latrines. From observations, it was seen that most children defecated in the open. In a few houses that had latrines, children used the latrines. However, the practice of using sandals and hand-washing was found to be minimal.

There is acute crisis of safe drinking water in the gardens. For every few clusters, there were wells or other water sources. Programme staff mentioned that the water in the wells were not safe for drinking. However, since there was no provision for boiling the water in the schools, children just drank what was available. Overall the provisions for toileting and drinking water was found to be very poor in the studied areas.

## **Chapter 4. Operational challenges and quality of education**

### **4.1 Recruitment of staff who lacked the competence to understand classroom dynamics, provide mentorship to teachers and do educational monitoring was a common observation**

In both the tea-gardens and *haors*, under the Branch Manager, Programme Organisers were recruited just like in other areas. Additionally, under the Programme Organisers, Field Officers (FO), Junior Field Officers (JFO) and Programme Staff (PS) were recruited. While, such additional posts were created to make programme operations smoother, this was noticed to hamper the quality of service delivery and the onus was noticed to lie greatly within the design of the programme.

The Fos, JFOs and PS were younger staff with less academic and professional expertise or trainings. The incentive packages offered to them from BRAC was also lower. However, the number of schools under them was the same as that of the PO. It was also found that these newly recruited staffs were not given adequate training that would fully enable them to do educational monitoring and give constructive feedback to the teachers. Many had to look after BPPS and BPS and which proved to be problematic because they overlooked the finer differences between pre-primary and primary education.

One Senior Branch Manager reported, “Some local HSC graduates have been employed and they have not been given proper orientation or training. Some of them cannot even solve division/fraction problems. They do not understand the fine details of classroom teaching and learning. As a result educational monitoring is hindered. Teachers don’t want to listen to these PS and hence the chain of command cannot be established. The teachers are convinced that the PS knows less than them and hence do not listen to him.”

For example, a teacher of a BPS in the same area was recruited as a PS. The people she was designated to supervise were her ex-peers who she received refresher’s training with. In cases such as these, the teachers made the assumption that they knew how much the PS knows and they did not regard him a ‘higher authority’ who could be in-charge of them. This proved to be highly problematic in programme operations since mutual respect and a chain of command could not be established. Instances were reported where teachers came and complained saying, “Please don’t send these PS to our schools. They don’t know what they are talking about so what will they teach us?”

Branch manager reported that hiring staff from among the community created conflicts. It was found that sometimes local staff used their power and network to manipulate and dictate terms with senior staff. Senior management advised that staff should not be recruited from the same communities.

### **4.2 Educational monitoring is hindered**

Findings from the study revealed that the school to staff ratio was too high, mostly due to staff shortages. There were too many schools under one programme staff which meant that they had excess workload and had to do prioritization in school visits. According to programme staff, these prioritisations were done based on a need assessment: schools with new teachers, poorly graded schools, low student attendance

and class five schools were said to be given first preference. However, qualitative investigation revealed that this was not always the case. Schools that required regular supervision and monitoring were often left out. Programme staff repeatedly reported that the targets given to them were too ambitious and impossible to achieve.

The quality and effectiveness of school supervision and monitoring was highly questionable in many schools. This was due to a number of reasons. Firstly, qualitative investigations showed that programme staff could not visit schools as per the ideal schedule of two visits per week. Secondly, when they did visit schools, proper educational monitoring was not happening. Proper and desired educational monitoring was hindered greatly due to time constraint, incompetence of programme staff in understanding the softer aspects of teaching-learning. Physical tiredness resulting from long commutes was also an issue. It is worth mentioning however, that in most cases proper school monitoring and visits could not be done due to unrealistic targets given to staff and not because staffs were overlooking their duties. All staff resonated that the targets they were given could not be met with the time and resources allocated to them. The branch managers and area managers were also aware and mentioned that the targets were unachievable due to staff shortages and ambitious targets for existing staff.

In the study areas, it was noticed that more time was spent in commuting to schools than in giving feedback to teachers to improve their capabilities. Sometimes, by the time the programme staff reached the schools, classes ended. In such situations, programme staff usually said a few words to the teacher, schemed through the lesson plan, gave some very general comments and left. These occurrences were reported to be quite common by programme staff. They mentioned that, "Due to the long commutes, only one school could be monitored. By the time we reached the second school, classes ended. So, we talked to the teacher, saw the lesson plan and left." As a reason, the supervision and monitoring process failed to contribute to improvements in classroom teaching and learning.

#### **4.3 Low salary limiting supply of good quality teachers**

Due to overall low educational status, there was a scarcity of well-qualified teachers in the study areas. The ones who have the required qualifications have other better alternatives. They can either choose to move out of the gardens or join ROSC schools or other NGOs for higher pay. Qualitative investigation from this study reveal that due to lower pay, many qualified females in the communities are not coming to schools as teachers. Most teachers said they did this job because they did not have better alternatives and did not want to sit idle at home. In the words of one PO, "The qualified teachers who come to teach in BRAC schools do so because of their good relations with us."

Compromising on the educational qualifications of teachers meant that the programme received a pool of teachers with a weak academic foundation. Their basic was so weak that even after a very intense basic training and monthly refresher's training, their ability to effectively manage a class or teach did not meet the required standards. Hence, low salary initially limited the supply of well-qualified teachers which had a direct negative impact on classroom teaching-learning. Programme staff reported that if the salary is increased to Tk 3500-4000, better quality teachers could be ensured since it would incentivize the more educated members in the community to opt for teaching at BRAC schools. Moreover, frequent teacher dropouts could be prevented if higher pay was ensured.

A number of teachers were found who were enrolled in different colleges/educational institutes and often took leave for attending examinations or classes. Finding proxy/substitute teachers for them was not always possible. In that case schools had to remain close for few days until the teacher became available again. This greatly affected regular school activity and created a gap in already slow learning process.

#### **4.4 Training time was too little for the teachers**

All teachers found the one-time basic training and monthly refresher's training to be immensely helpful. Many however, reported that the training time was too less. There was a lot of material to be covered and the allocated training schedules were a stretch for many teachers. Owing to their poor basics, many teachers could not grasp all the concepts and materials properly in such limited time. Most said they had difficulties particularly with English and Mathematics. In particular, teachers teaching Classes IV and V said that the one day's refresher's training was not enough for them. Many teachers were also found to leave the jobs after they were done with Class III. Most were scared they could not teach the materials in Class IV and V especially Mathematics and English.

Before teaching at a GPS, teachers received training for a period of 1-1.5 years. On the other hand, prior to teaching at a BPS, teachers received basic training for 15 days only. One major criticism the programme staff faced from communities was about the length of training for teachers at BRAC schools. People questioned what quality could be ensured in classrooms by training a HSC graduate for 15 days. Community members often asked the staff, "...how do you make the teacher a 'good' one by providing her training for 15 days?" They question the teacher's quality. Many teacher and staff think, the training time for teachers from these areas should be increased to one month.

Qualitative investigation revealed that during the monthly refresher's, training could not be conducted according to the desired schedule because of time lags. Most teachers had to make long commutes to reach the branch office which presented time lags, thus forcing the training time to be shorter. The time lags were much more on rainy and foggy/wintry days. Such time lags meant that the trainings could not be conducted as scheduled and some materials could only be briefly addressed.

However, it is worth mentioning that this problem prevailed not due to the negligence of the teachers or the BEP staff but more so due to the design/structure of the programme. Teachers were only given BDT 30 in tea-estate and 80-90 in *haor* (80 in dry season and 90 in rainy season) for their commutes, irrespective of the distance they had to travel. This amount was inadequate and so teachers mostly walked to the training venue, which added to more loss of time. Moreover, some teachers from far away made excuses and did not come for trainings because they were not paid enough. As a result, trainers and the staff had a difficult time organising these training schedules.

#### **4.5 Rapidly changing decisions is also a huge difficulty for the field staff**

Programme staff reported that rapidly changing decisions, supplementary guidelines and information made implementation harder and distracted them from being able to focus fully on more important issues such as school supervision and monitoring. Besides the bigger issues such as teacher recruitment and training, day-to-day operational issues such as student attendance and school maintenance, programme staff found it difficult to immediately respond to latest notices and circulars. Therefore, the gap between programme documentation and actually implementation was found to

be quite significant in the study areas. One staff reported that, "It is impossible to fully comply by programme standards and requirements due to the huge operational challenges and resource constraints."

When asked to comment on this issue, one branch manager reported, "*Poriportos* keep coming in. Just two weeks back, we received one notice saying that instead of holding parents day in every school, from the month of April-June, we need to arrange one parents day for every cluster, consisting of 4-5 schools. Parents and local influential leaders need to be invited ahead of time. Organising this is taking up so much time that other schools cannot be looked after. Such instances are common. Sometimes, in the middle of all this work, at night, I receive calls asking me to send my team to Maulvibazar for a meeting. In the midst of all this, the actual work could not be done."

#### **4.6 Limited resources and parental unawareness**

In the study regions, it was found that the school rooms were often of very poor quality and vulnerable to damages by heavy rainfall and extreme weather conditions, thus negatively affecting classroom teaching and learning.

Finding spare room for school was one challenge and meeting programme's standard was another. Even after managing some classrooms repairing it as another big obstacle. Most of the school houses in marginalised *upazilas* were reported to be damaged. Some had leaks in the roof, some lacked fence around and some were blown away by storm. Soaked classroom, books, blackboards made studying harder. The community people used to mock them sometimes because their poor school condition. According to parents students do not feel attached to schools like this and feel bad about the humiliation.

In marginalised areas literate parents and guardians were rare. These people were unable to understand the value of education. They were also very poor therefore did not let go any chance of earning some money. Sending children to work instead of school is very normal for them. Due to the poor economic condition, they concentrated hard on meeting the first basic need-food. Education came a long way after that. Watching them students also learned to neglect studying. As parents were illiterate they could not take care of children's education. Electric connection were also very limited that resulted in early ending of a day, going to bed early and skip evening study.

Almost all parents admitted in FGD that they never went to visit their child's school. They gave the full responsibility on the teacher and BRAC. Even when parents meeting was called very few parents usually came. This negligence and reluctance to education hampers quality education providing in so many ways.

## Chapter 5. Conclusion and recommendations

### 5.1 Conclusion

Confronting extreme resistance from community BRAC finally managed to enter the backward community of tea garden and *haor* area with their educational programmes. Meetings, discussions and rapport building with the local leaders, influential people and general village dwellers worked as a contributing factor to get local support. Multiple stakeholders explained the reasons underlying such resistance of garden management and elite society saying that education was empowering the once illiterate gardeners/community, making them more aware of their rights. After seeking education, many youngsters were also leaving the gardens for higher education, better jobs and overall a better standard of life especially in the garden.

The problem of finding proper school rooms still remains and programme is forced to relax its standard criteria for classroom as a coping mechanism. School damage due to seasonal storms and other natural calamities emerged as a new challenge in these regions largely affecting regular school activities. These damages, delays and uncertainties regarding the repair work of the school rooms negatively affected classroom teaching-learning. Classroom contact hours were reduced because classes had to be cancelled before the school rooms could be repaired or an alternate managed. It took time to repair schools because there was no readily available fund. The greatest impact of this was on the Class 4 and Class 5 students. As coping strategies, make-up classes and additional hours were scheduled. Nevertheless, continuity in regular classroom activities was affected in the process of school damages, repairing school rooms or finding new school rooms. Funds for maintenance of school rooms needs reconsideration.

Consequently, finding qualified teachers was found to be a major operational challenge in the studied areas. As per BEP policy, teachers who are married and have HSC degree is given first preference in recruitment. It was found that candidates completing at least Class 8 were considered and if no female teachers capable of teaching at the schools could be found from within the community or nearby areas, with approval from head office, male teachers were appointed in tea garden areas. In *haor*, however male persons did not seem interested in this work for low payment. Finding teachers and their retention is still an immense problem there. Students who continued education at or beyond the secondary level usually moved out of the area or were uninterested to teach at the schools for such low salary. Findings from this study showed that many of the current teachers in the garden schools are ex-BRAC school students. Senior management staff mentioned that there has been a significant change in the number of available female teachers in the tea-gardens over the years. Most of the teachers currently employed were found to be part-time students, enrolled at the higher secondary level or at the degree level. They taught and pursued their education at the same time. As a result they had to be on leave for things such as in-course, form fill-up, registration, examinations and other educational purpose. Female teachers usually dropped-out when they got married and moved out of the area. In the spring/monsoon season, a lot of ethnic teachers in the garden dropped-out because this was the marriage season in their communities.

Bringing all teachers for the monthly refresher's training was deemed a challenge by programme staff. Teachers usually had to commute long distances, sometimes 10-12

kilometers or higher to get to the branch office for refresher's training. The commute was time consuming, expensive and sometimes had security implications. However, the transportation expenses were found as the main reason why teachers from far away are reluctant to come for refresher's training. As a result, many teachers make excuses and do not come for refresher's training. They showed family problems or sickness as excuses for not coming.

Findings showed that students were admitted primarily based on demand and the school-going age of the children which were determined from results from the survey. Attendance in tea-garden schools were not affected due to transportation or communication problems. Students showed up but were however, late on rainy days. Most did not have umbrellas so they waited for the rain to stop before they made the walks to school. On winter mornings however, fewer students came to class. The temperature drops drastically in the gardens and the biting cold was reported to affect class attendance. Students did not have adequate warm clothes and were less inclined to make the walk to school in the cold. In *haor*, summer/*Baishakh*-the paddy harvesting time is considered as the unannounced vacation. Very few students came to school at that time; students fall behind in terms of lessons, some get married and some dropout. Again in rainy season they got busy in catching fish. Some parents worked in brickfields, stone collection and took their children along with them. Some also worked as day labourers in bazaars and river *ghats*. When these children were brought back to class, it was difficult for them to cope up because they had already missed out on lessons due to their absence. Low parental awareness and non-cooperation were responsible for irregular school attendance for some children. Students also remained absent because their parents sometimes wanted them to help with household chores.

Seasonal migration was found as the main factor behind student dropout in *haor*. Since decent source of income lacks in these areas migration could not be stopped. In the tea-gardens, the incidence of student drop-out was known to be the highest in Grades 4 and 5. Poverty remained one of the main causes of drop-out. When children grew older, they were needed at home for household chores and for taking care of younger siblings, cattle rearing or taking care of the elderly especially the girl children.

School supervision and monitoring was found to be a huge operational challenge in the studied areas. Monitoring and proper supervision was hindered by time constraints and long commutes through difficult travelling routes. Moreover, certain routes become more inaccessible via cycles and motorbikes in the monsoon when roads are inundated. Staff to school ratio was found to be too high in the studied areas which lead to excess work load and unrealistic targets for field staff. Moreover, the schools were far away and the commutes were difficult and time-consuming. From top level management to the field staff, the necessity for more efficient staff was acknowledged.

## **5.2. Recommendations**

This was a timely study that shed light on the crucial static and dynamic challenges faced by programme staff in the initiation and implementation phases. This study concludes that the comparative advantage and potential positive externalities of BEP's intervention in the study areas could be eroded if the operational architecture is not improved. Based on the findings from this in-depth study, a list of recommendations was generated to assist programme with future directions:

- Operational architecture and both the static and dynamic costs of programme operations need reconsideration so as not to compromise on the quality of BEP's service delivery
- Funding strategies need to be responsive to students' and schools' needs. An annual fund could be kept aside for school maintenance and repairing. Programme staff suggested that school rent should be made minimum BDT 20,000 considering the market price and the frequency of school damages. Special permission for instant money allocation could be given for school repairing purpose. Teacher's salary also need to be increased minimum BDT 3,500-4,000 to ensure quality.
- Proper, timely and adequate educational monitoring in all schools, especially the ones in the more excluded regions need to be ensured.
- To ensure quality, school-to-staff ratio could be reconsidered to minimise excessive workload on existing staff. Staff working at the school level need to be granted adequate time to rightly monitor the educational process instead of just looking at education in schools like a black box and checking for educational inputs and outputs only in a robotic fashion.
- Staff training (especially to newly recruited staff) and orientation towards education as a process must be ensured for any valuable school monitoring to be achieved.
- Weekly/monthly target for staff need to be assigned taking into consideration the geographical characteristics of respective operational areas, distances, means of transportation, time factors and travel allowance granted.
- Due to frequent teacher drop-out, basic training for all teachers in study areas could not be assured. The appointed teachers therefore, often lacked basic minimum requirements. This hence puts greater importance to the monthly refresher's training. The design, content, frequency and training hours in refreshers training for teachers need to get renewed concentration (the modules, duration of training, etc could be rethought).
- Greater incentives and motivation for teachers and locally appointed staff may help greatly in quality assurance. Monetary and non-monetary incentives to bring teachers for training must be increased. Transport allowance in this case can be made actual or increased so that costs are not a barrier to full participation in training. Increased salary and allowances like festival bonus, with pay maternity leave and work pressure wise transport cost can highly motivate the teachers to provide quality teaching in classroom. To get quality work from locally appointed staffs programme could think about making their job permanent based on skills and proficiency. Additionally, scope of taking part in BRAC advertisement, introducing risk allowance, transport allowance of non-confirmed staffs can motivate field staff.

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