

FLOATING THE LIGHT OF EDUCATION IN HAOR

Innovative Solutions to Remove Barriers to Education



BRAC Education Programme | 2019



Strategic partnership arrangement – delivering real results together

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Foreword

Bangladesh has made remarkable progress in the field of education over the last two decades. The government has expanded pre-primary and primary schools among the most rural communities across the country, achieving 97% enrolment in primary schools, and gender parity, with more girls in primary and secondary schools than boys.

However, the dropout rate is still high and there remain several pockets in Bangladesh where large number of children are deprived of their right to education. The *haor* (wetland) regions possess unique geographical features that make it very difficult for children to access and complete their education.

These regions remain submerged for half of the year. The only reliable mode of transportation are boats. Parents find it increasingly difficult to invest in their children's education. Concerns are especially high for their daughters, knowing they must travel distances to the nearest school.

BRAC's boat schools were introduced because of a simple philosophy. If children cannot go to school, the schools would go to them. Since 2012, these boat schools have created access to education to more than 14,000 children. In 2017, it was named as one of the 100 innovative education projects across the world by the global education non-profit organization, HundrED.

This report explores the benefit of BRAC's boat schools on our students and the hard-to-reach communities living in the *haor* regions. These floating "schools of happiness" have had a far-reaching effect beyond its classrooms - from students developing their love for learning, to their teachers being seen as inspirational role models for young girls and boys living in these remote areas.

I would like to express my sincerest thanks to Professor Mahbuba Nasreen for exploring our initiative in such great depth.

On behalf of BRAC, I would like to acknowledge our partners, Educate A Child, the Department for International Development (DFID), UK and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), Australia, for their unwavering support for innovative solutions like the Boat school project and many other.



Safiqul Islam, PhD

Director, BRAC Education Programme

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Executive Summary

Boat school, a major and unique intervention by the BRAC Education Programme (BEP), in collaboration with Educate A Child and the UK Government and the Australian Government, is operating in different areas of Bangladesh. The project has been undertaken considering the vulnerable situation of the children residing in flood-prone, *haor* and *beel* areas where majority of the children are denied of their basic right to education due to several reasons, since 2012. The factors affecting children include geographical vulnerability, poverty, lesser educational institutions in the locality, lack of education and others. To address such problems, a model was developed where the idea is if you cannot go to school; let the school come to you. The mobility of the school is the unique benefit offered to the students who are too young to go to school alone when their area is inundated.

This study explored two independent *upazillas* (sub-districts) of Sunamganj district of Sylhet Division. The study team attempted to obtain qualitative data in terms of the outcome and impact of the intervention. The major findings of the study include effective and efficient functioning of the boat schools where the hindrance of flood no longer could limit students from obtaining education. The school as mentioned earlier went to them. The students learned their lessons in a very friendly environment. The school also imparted co-curricular knowledge and skills to students. They have learnt to sing, play games and make their stay at school cheerful and congenial. This study also observed that students of boat school have been quite successful in their endeavors. With a pass rate of 99 percent approximately every year, students are achieving brilliant results from boat school, instills belief and confidence in them. This program has also been a great support to the communities who are not economically solvent. It has been a great hand to those students, who without these boat schools would have been asked by their parents not to go to school. This intervention has a remarkable impact on the community where boat schools are operating and obviously the students- who are at the heart of this program. Parents have become much more aware about studies. Parents in those communities are now slowly but gradually understanding the importance of education. The children are very happy about such a nice initiative.

This intervention has been highly applauded and praised not only by the beneficiaries but also by the government officials and different organizations in those areas. However, it is a matter of great regret that few of the boat schools have been closed down due to lack of financial support. Community people and students have repeatedly requested to increase the number of boat schools where they are still functional. The study team finds the intervention is quite unique and productive in nature.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

BRAC Education Programme (BEP) introduced an innovative programme named Boat School in the most marginalized low lying *haor* areas of Bangladesh. This unique intervention has attempted to address the educational needs of the children in the vulnerable locations, with a special focus on girls. Due to inundation and waterlogging, children in those areas were being deprived of their educational right. Sometimes, the water stays up there for even six-seven months. There is no suitable place in that area to set up a school. The nearest school is quite far and few miles away and the only mode of transportation available there is boat. Parents of these children, who also struggle to meet up their both ends, feel apathetic about sending their children to school due to number of constraints. There is also a safety concern for the children, especially for the girls. Considering the challenges stated above, BRAC, the largest NGO initiated a simple but effective intervention in those areas. Since children cannot go to school, the school should come to the children- and that came in the form of a boat. The boat functions both as a school bus and classroom and allows children to continue education even when the life there is stagnant due to disaster. This study seeks to evaluate the impacts of the present project and attempt to overview different dynamics associated with this project.

1.2 Objectives the Study:

Broad Objective: To evaluate the impacts of the Boat School project.

Specific Objectives:

1. To understand the nature of vulnerability of the communities where the boat schools were/are in operation
2. To explore the overall functioning of the Boat Schools
3. To understand the impact of the schools on the children who have attended/are going to BRAC School
4. To understand the impact on the communities where boat project is operating/operated.
5. To identify the challenges of the project and way forward.

1.3 Methodology:

The methodology of the study was qualitative in nature. Primary data was collected through Focus Group Discussion (FGD), Key Informant Interview (KII), In-Depth-Interview and field level observation. A detailed checklist for FGD and KII was prepared which was instrumental in acquiring necessary information and to compare the situations of children during and prior to this intervention. A total of 4 FGDs and 6 KIIs were conducted. Among 4 FGDs, three were done with the community people in Jamlaganj and Tahirpur of which one was mixed, one was with women only, and the other one was with male only. Another FGD was conducted with the school children graduated from boat school. Of all the KIIs, 4 were done with the BRAC officials, which include people like Regional Manager, Program Organizer etc. A school teacher also provided information as a key informant. The last KII was done with a government official who currently the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Dakshin Sunamganj.

1.4 Study Location

Upazilla: Jamalganj and Tahirpur

District: Sunamganj

Chapter 2

About Boat School: A Contextual Discussion

BRAC Education Programme (BEP) undertook the innovative programme boat schools in the most marginalized low lying *haor* areas of Bangladesh. This unique intervention has attempted to address the educational needs of the children in those regions, with a special focus on girls. Due to inundation and waterlogging, children in *haor* areas were being deprived of their educational right. Often times, the water stays up there for even six to seven months. There is no suitable place in that area to set up a school. The nearest school is quite far and few miles away and the only mode of transportation available there is boat. Parents of these children, who also struggle to meet up their both ends, feel apathetic about sending their children to school due to number of constraints. Often, there is a safety concern for the kids especially for the girls. Considering all of the challenges stated above, BRAC, the largest NGO in the world, initiated a simple but effective intervention in those areas. Since children cannot go to school, the school should come to the children- and that came in the form of a boat.

BEP initiated Boat School Project almost nine years back. Such an innovative education model targeting the geographically isolated was implemented for the first time in Bangladesh at such a scale. In 2012, 250 schools started first cohort of non-formal primary schooling with 7,307 students while in 2014, 7274 students were enrolled in another 250 boat schools as the second cohort of the project. The objective of BRAC Boat School Project was to enrol 13,000 out of school children in primary schools. During the Life of Project (2012-2018), a number of 14,581 children got accessed to primary education through 500 boat schools (in 400 boats) in two separate cohorts. Among them, more than 99 percent students completed five-year primary schooling and successfully passed the national Primary Education Completion Examination in the year 2017 and 2018.

The geographical coverage of this intervention includes sixteen districts of Bangladesh where the geographical and geophysical characteristics of the areas became a barrier for its inhabitants specially school going children who are forced to sit back during monsoon. Before opening the schools, BRAC conducted a door-to-door survey in target areas to identify eligible children between the ages of 8 and 14. Children from poor and ultra - poor as well as to children with special needs are given priority to admission. A minimum of 26 students is generally required to open a school. The boat schools accept a gender ratio of 50:50 whereas the other BRAC schools maintain the ration of 60:40 girls to boys.

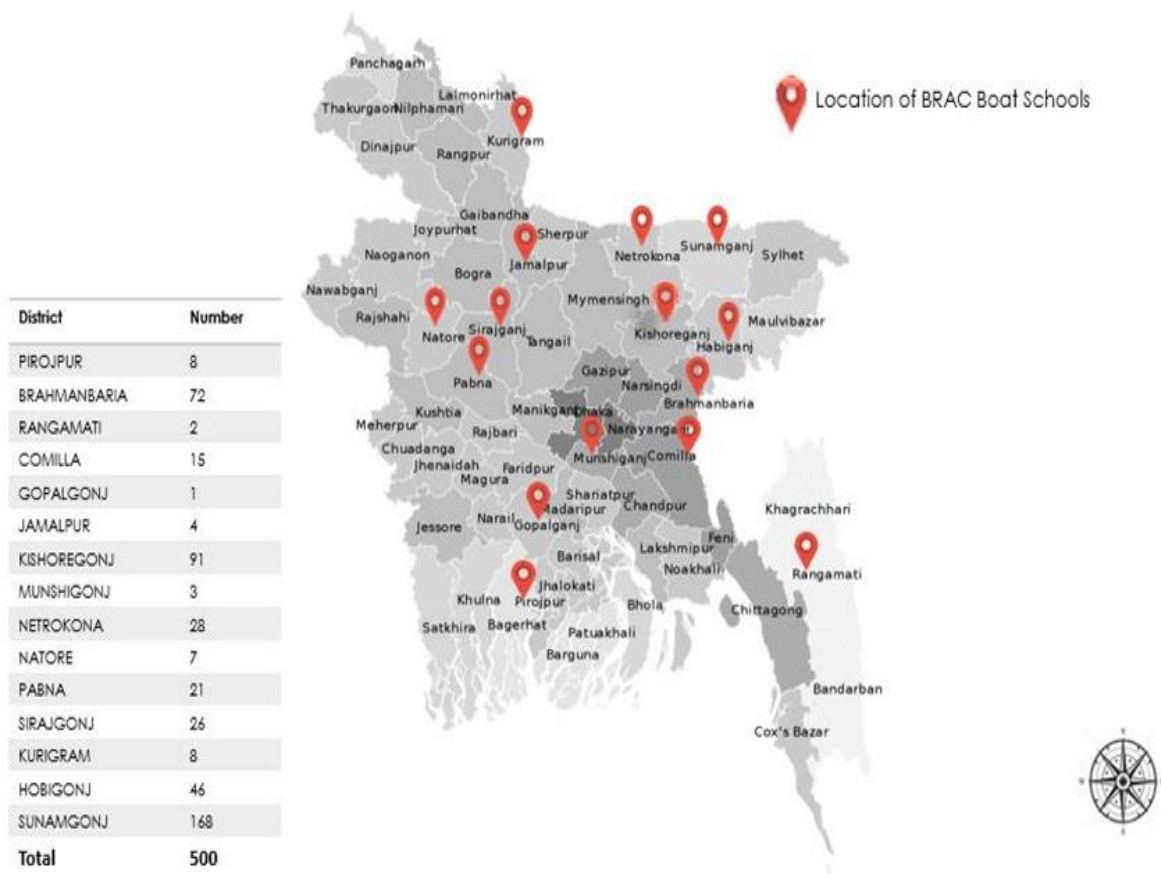


Figure 1: Location of Boat School

Table 1: Timeline of the Program

Year Number	Year	Number of Students enrolled	Gender Disaggregated Data
1	2013	7,307	Boys: 3,012 and Girls: 4,295
2	2014	14,581	Boys: 6,024 and Girls: 8,557
3	2015	14,486	Boys: 5,993 and Girls: 8,493
4	2016	13,909	Boys: 5,661 and Girls: 8,248
5	2017	13,589	Boys: 5,532 and Girls: 8,057
6	2018	6,437*	Boys: 2,567 and Girls: 3,870

* Cohort 1 (2013) already graduated by end of 2017. [Data source: BEP MIS]

Pass Rate and Results:

Students of Cohort 1 have completed grade V (five) in December 2017 and appeared PEC (Primary Education Certificate) Examination administered by Government of Bangladesh (GoB). The pass rate was 99.17%. This success rate is 3.99% higher than the national aggregate of 95.18%. Girls outperformed the boys in this examination (boys 98.60%, girls 99.51%). However, 47.9% of appeared students in PEC examination have attained the combined “A” (GPA 3.5 to GPA 5) and it is 2.72% behind the national aggregate of 50.63% but significantly higher than achievement by students in the Sylhet division. The difference between BRAC Boat School result and

aggregates have been shown as follows

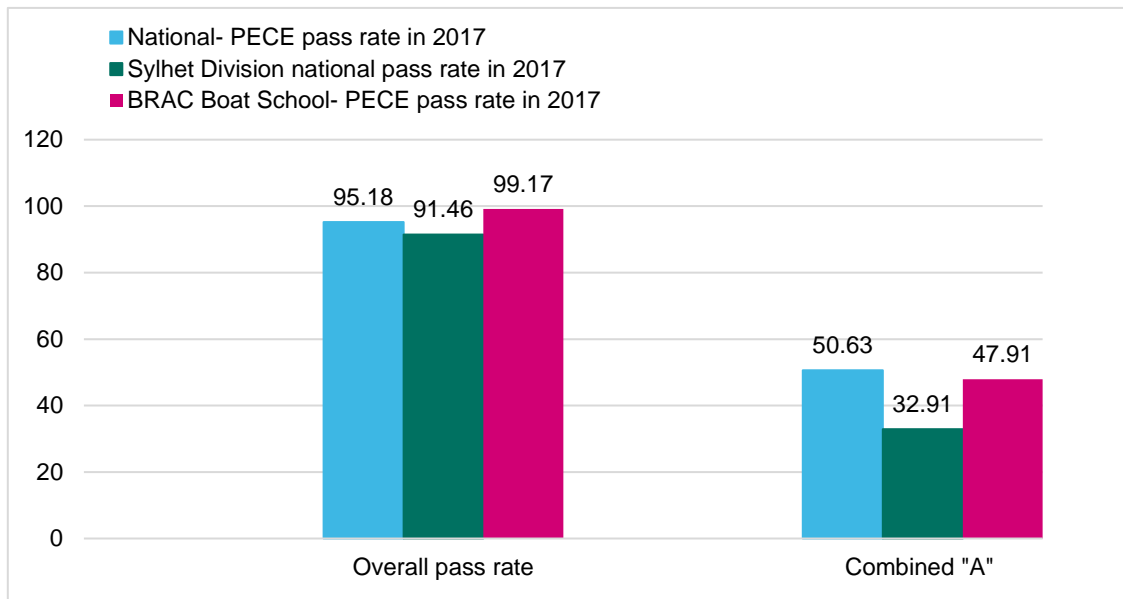


Figure 2: Pass Rate and Results of GoB & Boat School, 2017

Special training for teachers was arranged focusing on English and Mathematics in order to capable them to help the weak performing students and assist further to students who appeared in government examination (PECE).

Students of Cohort 2 appeared into PECE in November 2018 and successfully obtained 99.54% of passing rate, while the country's aggregate pass rate is 97.59%. Girls outperformed in the examination with the success rate of 99.66%, while 99.35% boys of BRAC boat school passed.

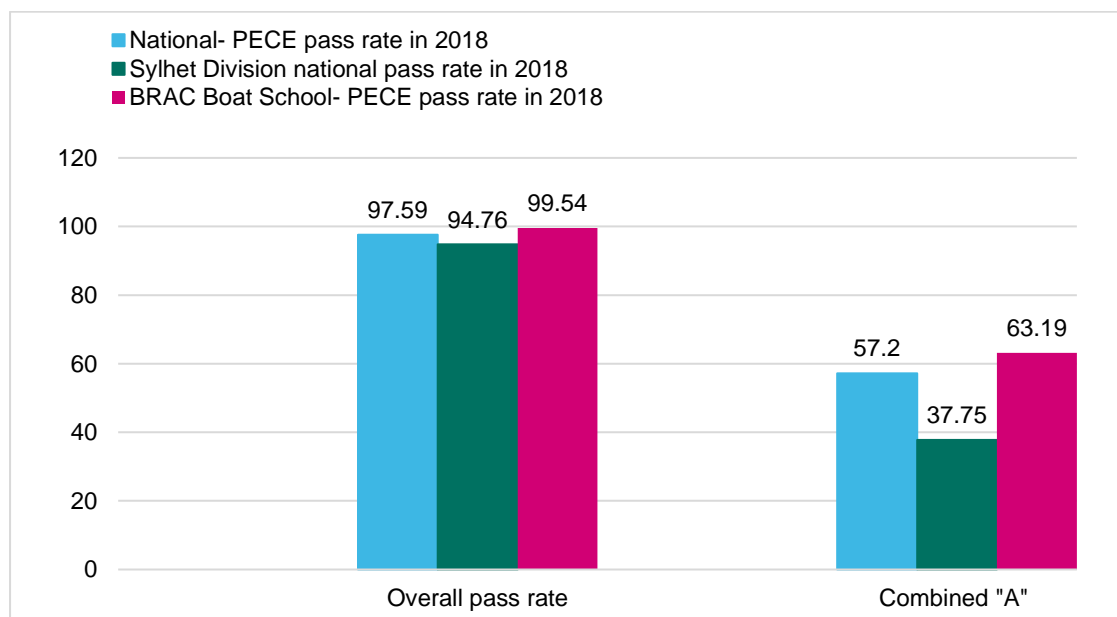


Figure 3: Pass Rate and Results of GoB & Boat School, 2018

In 2018, Government decided to hold Primary Education Completion Examination (PECE) with 100% of creative and competency-based questions in 2018. Teachers received training in all subjects of grade 5 in this endeavour. Earlier, in 2017, the Primary Education Completion (PEC) examination was held with 80% competency-base questions and 20% multiple choice questions (MCQs). National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), a government institution, trained 23 BRAC school supervisors and staff for developing their capabilities on creative questions. Later, the trained staff led several training sessions for rest of the staff and teachers to introduce them with the new question patterns.

Table 2 below is showing a comparison between the results of Boat Schools of both cohorts and national aggregate:

Table 2: Comparison between the results of Boat Schools and national cohort (2017-2018)

Year	School's type	Success /Passing rate of the students		
		Girls	Boys	Both
2018	National	97.68%	97.48%	97.59%
	Boat school	99.66%	99.35%	99.54%
2017	National	95.40%	94.93%	95.18%
	Boat school	99.51%	98.60%	99.17%

Although the achievements are remarkable, few challenges continue to exist of which drop out is a big challenge in boat school. During harvesting season, all the family members work in the fields including children. It is an issue to retention of these children in school that time. Therefore, classes that were missed by the students during the harvesting period that have been compensated in the post-harvest period through increasing contact hours (20-30 minutes each day) in consultation with the members of School Managing Committee, teachers and parents. In addition to that BRAC can help students to transfer into another BRAC primary school by issuing migration certificate. Other challenges include recruitment of qualified teachers, qualified staff, engaging community, maintenance of the boat etc.

Chapter 3

Exploring the Vulnerabilities of the Communities and the Children

3.1 Geographical Vulnerability of the Community

Haor areas, where the boat schools are located, remain under water for half of the year. This geographical trait has made the communities vulnerable since the mobility is largely restricted due to such vulnerability. Furthermore, sudden flash floods make people's lives even worse. Although, communities have their indigenous techniques of adapting with the adverse situations, they do suffer a lot and face difficulties during monsoon.

3.2 Socio-Economic Vulnerability of the Community:

Communities in *haor* areas are extremely marginalized and poverty stricken. They need to work hard to earn their livelihoods. The main occupations of the communities are fishermen, day laborer, boatman etc. From the FGD, it was learned that, the income of the families ranges from 6000-16000 BDT which by any means is a sign of desperation and poverty. No family can save from whatever they earn. More importantly, the people in the community often are forced to migrate. As mentioned earlier, that this is *haor* area, people tend to live in areas which are comparatively higher. It is difficult to find that higher lands in those areas and therefore the areas are densely populated. When those places exceed its capacity to accommodate people, they find out a higher land and migrate to those places. Rahmatpur community of Jamalganj Upazilla where a boat school was functioning and has been closed recently is the example of one such community. All of these contribute towards the socio-economic vulnerability of the people living in these areas.

3.3 Specific Vulnerability of the Children

Children are the worst victims of such geographical features. Their regular life is massively disrupted and violation of child rights, especially right to education, is common as they are unable to go to school. The primary school going children suffer the most. At the age of 6 or 8 they need to go to school by boat; even the school often goes under water, thus the school remains closed. They need assistance from parents/guardians to go to school. However, as men go to work to earn their daily life and cultural practices do not allow women to take their children to school, which ultimately results in dropouts. In some communities, schools are almost 2-3 kilometers away from their homes.

“How can you send your 6 years kid alone to school? It is not possible to send him alone. So, we have nothing to do.”

- “R1” (35), FGD Participant, Jamalganj

Chapter 4

Functioning of the Boat School

4.1 Non-monsoon period:

Boat schools follow a unique style of one teacher one batch policy where a batch of 30-35 students are enrolled from grade 1 and continue up to grade 5. Unlike other school, where it would take five years for a child to complete primary education, in boat schools children complete their primary school within four years. However, the physical contact hours remain the same, as times are higher than usual. All the regular subjects are taught by a teacher with a system of continuous assessment. Undoubtedly, the system has been proven successful since the results are extraordinary. Having a passing rate of more than 99 percent is extraordinary, especially for the children who are deprived of all the privileges a child from urban area usually receives. It is noteworthy that, the concerned officials of this project from BRAC has ensured that their boat school students are allowed to sit for the PECE (Primary Education Completion Examination), a government certified examination to recognize the completion of the primary education of an individual. One of the noticeable traits of this project is that it has got 100 percent female teachers for its schools. Earlier there were male teachers. But evaluation of the concerned officials suggests that female teachers tend to be more committed towards the children and female teachers have become inspirations for many of the young girls in the village. All the teachers are from the local communities which have two advantages: a) It is easy for her to come regularly and b) It creates a sense of ownership that it is her community and she should commit herself for the betterment of these underprivileged children.



Photo: Boat School at Vatijamalgar

4.2 Disaster/Monsoon Period

During the monsoon, the classes are not interrupted by rain or flood. Because, the children do not go to school, school comes to them. Often, due to extreme weather conditions, there is a delay in the regular hours due to safety concerns. During extreme weather conditions, two boatmen are deployed instead of one to control the boat smoothly. The life jackets and rings are regularly checked and kept ready in case of any emergency. The children got mid-day meals during disaster period.

“Will you believe if I tell you that, we probably could not cook food at home, could not come outside as our mobility was restricted by flood, but our children went to school every day despite whatever happened”

- “R2”, FGD Participant, Rahmatpur Village, Jamalganj, Sunamganj

4.3 Evaluation Method:

There is no such thing called frontbenchers and backbenchers in the boat school. The evaluation is done in a way so that it does not demotivate other students who are not performing well. There are mainly three types of assessment to evaluate the learning process continuously. Firstly, there are four (04) continuous assessments which are marked out of 50. Secondly, there are assessments after every lesson, so the teachers get immediate and regular feedback. Finally, weekly evaluation is carried out to observe the weekly progress.

4.4 Co-curricular and Extra Curricular Activities:

We often hear “Learning through Fun.” But learning is not fun for majority of the students now-a-days due to monotonous and routine classroom activities. BRAC actually made ‘Learning through Fun’ a reality through this boat school project. They learn to sing, dance, recite poems, decorate their boats etc. which makes their 6 hours stay at that school enjoyable and entertaining. They play different games between the classes.



Photo: Students showing their dance skills

4.5 Knowing outside the academic book:

Different child friendly books on climate change, pollution, social problems are provided to the children to know about the outer world and widen the domain of their knowledge. This is done also to raise awareness of the children from a very early age. A mini library has also been introduced in the boat school. From that mini library student can collect books on different issues or simple story books. The students grow up the habit of reading different books outside the regular academic books.

There are also different boards inside the school which are on correct spellings, indigenous materials etc. Such things also enhance the learning process of the children. The school has a science corner too.

4.6 Safety and Security Concerns

There are lifejackets and there are rings placed in the boat. There is a first aid box too. The boat is always kept in a safe place if the weather situation is extreme or turbulent.

“They are safer in school than home. We do not worry when they are at school”

- “F1” (32), a mother (FGD Participant, Tahirpur)



Photo: Life jackets and first aid box kept ready in a boat school

4.7 Student-Teacher Bond

The student teacher relationship in the school is extremely good. The students love their teacher and vice-versa. One of the teachers was describing how they have become an integral part of her life.

“I feel them as my children and not just students. I feel so happy when I see their results. The toughest time for me is when a batch leaves. I become happy when I see my former students are going to regular schools”

- “R3”, Teacher, Rahmatpur BRAC School

Similarly, the students are very obedient and loyal to their teachers and never say no to any request made by teachers. Sometimes, parents request teachers to make their children understand about certain things if they are not listening to them.

4.8 Additional care for children with weak performance:

A peer group is formed combining both good and weak performers so that they can easily learn from each other's strengths and weaknesses. Teachers also provide additional attention and give lessons for extra hours to the weak performed students in evaluation/tests.

4.9 Having a Trained Teacher:

The teachers of boat schools are regularly trained. A detailed plan is chalked out so that the execution becomes easier. The whole process is done under the supervision of experts and officials responsible for supervising the project. A very systematic method is followed which is modified after regular intervals. This training of the teachers augments their skills and allows them to teach more systematically and effectively.

4.10 Inclusiveness:

The boat school is a role model of inclusiveness. It has accommodated children with disabilities and has taught the other students to be respectful towards their fellow classmates who are different. For children with visual problem, yellow color was used in all four sides of the blackboard

“Education for everyone”

“RA” (16) was a physically challenged child. His two legs were paralyzed. He was given with a wheelchair from BRAC. All the students were very supportive of him. The classmates never taunted or mocked him. When the students were asked why you were so supportive, they replied that our teacher has told us that we should respect a person or classmate with disabilities or differences.

4.11 Adding a Gender Lens:

The target of each boat school is to enroll 60 percent girls. Due to numerous reasons, such as non-availability of girls or availability of boys, the concerned authority often keeps it 50 percent and therefore, the ratio of boys-girls is even in the schools.

In most instances a girl is assigned with the responsibility to lead a team of different teams at school. In the areas of socio-economic deprivation, gender equality and equity are a missing agenda. Adding such gender lens do not benefit and empower only the girls who are going to school but the community, since the boy for the first time get to witness how females can be leaders too.

For safety and security of the girl's different materials on child abuse or sexual assault has also been introduced catering towards the sensitive needs of the girls which will

be discussed elaborately in the next chapter. These materials were introduced at 2018 for protecting children from any sort of abuse or assault.

“Bringing the light of hope”

Boat schools have accommodated the most marginalized sect of children and have contributed towards their development. In the process of doing so, boat schools helped people who otherwise would have ended nowhere.

“S1” (12) is a heartwarming example of such wonderful work put up by BRAC. This kid lost his parents at an early age. The only guardian he had was his elder brother who was also struggling with poverty. This orphan lost all the hopes of getting education. But, hardly did he know, he would not only attain education, rather obtain it in some best possible ways. Boat School was the place which took all his pains away. He got friend, he enjoyed his time there, learnt his lessons. He completed his primary school with a grade of A-. Shahin said he can now use that certificate to get job. But he would want to continue education at any cost. He must go on to achieve everything he desires.

“M1” (35) is a widow who lost her husband eight years ago. She lives in Rahmatpur village of Jamalganj Upazilla in Sunamganj. She did not know what to do. She was helpless. Her child could not go to school as she did not have the ability to bear his expenses. Boat school, in 2013, took over the responsibility of her child. It was a big relief for her. Because she was very frustrated for not being able to send her child to school. Her son has recently passed grade 5 and now going to high school. She is earning so that her child can continue his education. She wants her child to obtain higher education now. Hope is a good thing and she now has got hopes!

Chapter 5

Impact of Boat School on the Children

5.1 School of Happiness

The school itself is a great attraction to the children. This is the school of happiness to them. The respondents of the FGD informed that, children are very enthusiastic about going to school. Such enthusiasm does not decrease rather increase with time. They enjoy their time at school. Despite all the constrains, all the odds, all the problems in the family, the time they spend in the school keeps them apart from all the hardships. This is like psychological healing for them.

"I never missed any class of boat school as it was very enjoyable to meet my friends every day and having fun while studying in a boat. As we live in a Haor area, it remains under water for half of the year and that time is very struggling for us. It was the only way we could pass some good times together and could study as well"

- "P1" (16), FGD Participant, Jamalganj



Photo: Science Corner, Bangla Words Corner and Moral Value Slogan Board

5.2 Enhances different skills of the children

Unlike other students, the children who are enrolled in the boat school are proactive and sharp. They can perform in front of a large audience. They communicate with others very well. Most importantly, their potential and hidden talents get recognized. They learn to work in a team. They learn to help each other. They learn to care for others, they learn to share with others and be friendly to each other. Moral values are instilled in them through classroom lectures, through books outside academic syllabus, through different group works they do. All of these contribute towards shaping her/him not only as a good student but a good human being.

“Students of BRAC boat school are different. They are very proactive and smart. Usually if you go to a primary school, the kids feel shy, most of them fail to speak properly. But when I visited BRAC school I was amazed to see how brilliantly they spoke to me, performed without any hesitation, any fear.”

-Upazilla Nirbahi Officer, Dakshin Sunamganj (Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) is the senior most executive officer at sub-district level for local government)

5.3 Agents of Social Change

Children are taking all their learning of the classroom to their homes. They are sharing this learning with their siblings, parents and relatives. They are trying to translate those learning into actions. They learn about *haor* areas, when they should travel and when they should not travel, how they should keep the environment clean are only few of the learning. The children have become the agents of social change.

Case Study of two siblings going to different schools

“AM” (30) is an inhabitant of Vatijamalgar village of Tahirpur Upazilla in Sunamganj. He has two school going children. One of them goes to the BRAC School other goes to the government primary school. He is extremely frustrated with the teaching of the government primary school. *“Since the number of participants in the government primary school is huge, teacher can hardly pay attention to all the students. But how could my daughter not writes her name properly and studies in class two? This is so frustrating.”* – “AM” shares his frustration about the poor condition of the government primary schools.

On the contrary, the other child studying in the BRAC boat school is doing very good. “AM” informed that her daughter is very attentive in her studies and regularly does her lessons in the afternoon. She gets up very early in the morning all by herself, takes her breakfast and then rushes to the school. *“My girl is very responsible; you can say self-made while she is only a student of fourth grade. I think this Boat School of BRAC has massively contributed to her being responsible and hardworking at such an early age.”*

He also added that her elder daughter shares all the stories, games learnt from boat school and all the lessons with her younger daughter and with them. He feels bad for her younger sister. If he could admit her younger daughter in the boat school too, her younger daughter would have been much better off!

5.4 Emotional Bonding

The children of the same batch feel emotionally connected. They become good friends over the long four years and spend time doing variety of activities together. They work in a team which makes their journey enjoyable and memorable. Since they are less in number, everyone gets to know each other well and a close, long lasting tie is created.

“We still try to meet. We miss our days at boat school.”

- “MM” (12), Ex-Student of Boat School, Jamalganj

5.5 Catering to the sensitive needs of the children:

Due to cultural practice of our society, even parents do not want to speak about menstrual hygiene to their children. In the boat schools, teachers speak to the girls about this separately. The mental health of the children is taken under consideration. The students are kept informed about their adolescence.

Another great initiative of this school is to make children aware about their private parts of the body and let them know about good touches and bad touches. Despite strong legal provisions to combat violence against women and girls, cases of sexual harassment in the country have not been reduced which is a concern of both government and concerned people. To protect and aware girls and boys about violence and sexual harassment, keeping them informed is necessary. The boat school has taken initiatives in this regard. Posters containing different messages are visible in boat school, which is self-explanatory. More importantly, they have a book called *Apon* which is a good read for the children of such age group to know about their certain physical and mental growth which often makes them vulnerable.



“Now I know what a bad touch and a good touch is. In the first place, I will scream if anyone touches my private parts of the body. Then I will try to get rid of the bad person and will surely tell my parents about the incident immediately”.

- “DA” (09), Student of Boat School, Tahirpur

Photo: Poster for raising awareness against sexual assault

5.6 Major accomplishments

The children of boat school have been showing their capacities in many ways. For example, last year 11 students of BRAC Boat School received scholarship in their primary school certificate examinations only in Jamalganj Upazilla. Children and guardian informed that never in their dream thought they would make it. I think it is difficult for us to comprehend why this achievement is extra-ordinary if a reader is not familiar about the areas where boat schools are operating. These are the schools where people have to live surrounded by water and frequently face disasters. Most of the people never attended school and even those go to school for the sake of going to school with no high ambition. Even the parents are not keen about making their children educated. No wonder, the literacy rate in Sunamganj is around 35-40 percent. The results in the local government and non-government schools are not satisfactory. A child whose family income is less than 10,000 BDT hardly receives any support from their families for education purpose. Purchasing copies, pens, pencils are even extra costs for his/her family, while they are struggling to offer good food to their children. There have been instances, where a male child is deployed in a work since his family was unable to earn their daily livelihoods. However, students of boat schools denied giving up and defying the odds only to prove how potential they are. Boat schools have surely brought justice to these young stars and their potentials.

Another success of boat school is that the dropout rate is extremely low. Children from a batch usually drop out if his/her family moves to a different place. In general, boat schools have retained its students and served them well.

The biggest achievement would be the passing rate of the school is almost cent percent, which is by any standard outstanding. Every individual associated with boat schools should be extremely proud of the statistics. The brilliant results and the extraordinary passing rate not only instill confidence but also inspire them to work harder. The unleashed potential makes the children believe that they too are capable of achieving good things if they want.

Chapter 6

Impact on the Community

6.1 Increased Awareness

Although the project was designed to educate the disenfranchised children, in the process, people in the communities where boat schools operate have increasingly become aware on different issues. This has happened not only because they are informed through their children but also due to school includes parents/guardians as important stakeholder in continuing their activities effectively. Parents'/guardians' meetings held regularly at school, which have made the community aware of the social problems such as dowry, early marriage, child trafficking etc.

6.2 Financial Support

In general, parents/guardians have to pay a minimum cost against expenditure of a primary school going child who goes to formal primary schools. The expenses presented below include other expenses such as they pay for private tuition fee for a child.

Table 3: The regular expenditure of a child going to Government/KG Schools

With Tuition		Without Tuition	
Requirements	Cost (BDT)	Requirements	Cost (BDT)
Transportation to School (Both ways)	750 (BDT 30/day)	Transportation to School (Both ways)	750 (BDT 30/day)
Logistics (Copies, Pens, Pencils etc.)	150	Logistics (Copies, Pens, Pencils etc.)	150
Misc.	100	Tuition Fee (Private Tutor)	300
		Transportation to Tuition (Both ways)	150
		Misc.	100
Total	1000	Total	1450

For a family whose monthly income is 8,000-10,000, spending 1000 or 1450 is big deal for them. For the students of Boat School this fee does not exist. More importantly, logistics from copies to pencil box even geometry is provided by the school to the students. Therefore, there is a hidden financial support as well.

6.3 Receiving Support from the Children

Students of the BRAC boat school are helping their parents by maintaining account of their expenditure or income. They are reading out different texts for them. They are informing their parents about the new things they learn in the school. The children are helping their parents and family in whatever capacity then can which is also useful for the community.

Our children now help us to calculate. We are not educated. But by the grace of Almighty my daughter and son are educated. They can count and help us in many ways. The best thing is that our girls will become educated mother.

- “A1” (44), FGD Participant, Rahmatpur Village, Jamalganj,
Sunamganj

Chapter 7

Challenges and Recommendations

7.1 Challenges

The main challenge of the project is that it is expensive for BRAC to run on its own. Maintenance cost, fuel cost, renovation cost etc. contribute towards it. Another challenge mentioned by the school operating group is the monitoring the operation of boat school during disasters. It becomes extremely risky for the students and mainly officials to travel to the locality. The human resource is also less which makes one person taking the charge of more than 8-9 schools.

7.2 Recommendations

7.2.1 An urge from the community people to reopen the school:

In every interaction with the community people the only recommendation they had was to either reopen the school where the school has been discontinued; to continue the activities in the area where it is still operating. Community people in some areas also requested to run another boat as there are many out of school children who are keen to join boat school.

“We feel sad that the boat school has been closed in our locality. We thought this would continue forever and our children won’t face any problem. Many of the children in our village cannot afford to go to regular school. Some of the parents cannot sort out what they would do now since the boat school has been closed.”

- “AK” (74), FGD Participant, Jamalganj

7.2.2 Recommendations by the Children

When the students were asked what could be improved in their school, they provided us with the following list:

- Tiffin/mid-day meal can be introduced
- Increasing sports instruments (e.g.; Bat, Ball. Racket, Carom, Chess, Ludo, Rope etc.)
- Increasing books of various topics in the mini library of the school.
- Increasing the number of swimming tube and life jacket to learn swimming and rescue students if any such accident happens.
- Increasing the number of boat school.

"I am studying in this school, but my seven-year-old younger brother could not come because of fewer numbers of boats. So, I want nothing but the same opportunity to reach each and every child of my community who are out of govt. schooling system due to our geographical location."

- "MA" (09), Vatijamalgar, Tahirpur

7.2.3 Recommendations of the Government Officials

The government officials recommended reopening all the boat schools at Shalla, Dhirai, Tahirpur etc. which are extremely vulnerable areas and beyond the reach of the government programs. Making at least some of the boat schools operational in those areas would be supplementary. They also recommended to work on the modules to make it even better and last but not the least increase funding on initiatives like this.

Chapter 8

Concluding Remarks

Boat schools are proven to be successful in terms of delivering education in the remote *haor* areas. These schools attempted to ensure that education is not a privilege rather a fundamental right and every child of this country are entitled to that right. Despite Government's commitment to provide education to all children, challenges remain due to multiple factors. In such circumstance, school like boat school has stepped up and became successful in imparting education for the poorest of the poor. However, unfortunately number of boat schools has considerably decreased. This was like a hope for many, especially people living under poverty line. Reopening boats in areas where the schools have been closed will surely bring back the happy faces of the community people. Taking lessons from the challenges faced; the boat schools may be newly designed.

Reference

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BRAC would like to acknowledge the support of the following organizations for the Boat School Project

EDUCATE A CHILD

A program of Education Above All, is a global initiative launched by Her Highness Sheikha Moza bint Nasser of Qatar, which aims to significantly reduce the numbers of children worldwide who are missing out on their right to education.

An estimated 64 million primary school-aged children in the world have no access to education, the vast majority of them live in extreme poverty. They include children affected by conflict and natural disasters, but also those in urban slums or remote rural areas.



STRATEGIC PARTNERS

The Strategic Partnership Arrangement (SPA) is a partnership between BRAC, the UK Government and the Australian Government, based on shared goals, clear results and mutual accountability. Since 2011, BRAC, the Department for International Development (DFID), and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) have been working together to tackle key development challenges more effectively, efficiently, and collaboratively.

The second phase of the SPA spans from 2016 to 2020, and supports BRAC's overarching strategy, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals. Core funding provided through the SPA helps BRAC deliver tangible results for people living in poverty in Bangladesh, while enabling it to strengthen its organisational systems and sustainability. The SPA partnership also seeks to influence development practices in Bangladesh and globally through shared learning and advocacy.

By engaging in partnership, DFID and DFAT hope to reduce the transaction costs of aid and facilitate greater focus on high-level outcomes rather than inputs. The provision of core funding enables BRAC to develop a flexible response to learning and a more holistic response to poverty reduction. This partnership also has a strong focus on innovation and advocacy in Bangladesh and beyond.



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