

SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL REASONS
FOR DROPOUT OF NPPE URBAN CHILDREN
(AN EXPLORATORY STUDY)

AHSAN H. QUAZI
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Research and Evaluation Division
BRAC
66 Mohakhali C/A, Dhaka 1212

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1.0 INTRODUCTIONIntroduction

Education either formal or non-formal has been recognized as a cornerstone of economic and social development. Now more than ever before in history, education has become even more crucial to the development process as accelerated technological change and new organization of production transform the world economy. Information more than machines or labour alone is the bases of new sources of wealth. Development in all its forms economic, social, and cultural especially in terms of Bangladesh will depend increasingly on knowledge - intensive industries, agriculture, and services. Education is a key to developing that knowledge which is so essential to adjust to rapid changes.

For developing countries educational investment will be one of the most important factors contributing to economic growth. Increased education of parents especially mothers has an important impact on child health and reduced fertility at all levels of economic development.

Evidence shows that investment in education and training of the labour force plays a crucial role in economic development. For example education contributes to the physical productivity of workers and farmers. Also women's education has a long-term effect on economic development and quality of life. And at last education

has a positive effect in poverty alleviation.

So far we have extensively discussed the value of education and the contribution of education to economic and social development. Let us now briefly look into the present education scenario in Bangladesh.

Bangladesh has one of the world's lowest literacy rates where only 35.6% of the population is literate for those 15 years and older. Over 85% of the rural women cannot read or write. About 40% of the primary school age population never attend school, and among those who enroll in school around 70% drop out before they reach the fifth grade, and most of the left outs are girls.

Most Bangladeshis today live from basic agriculture. But life in the next century will be much more demanding. Tomorrow's citizens in both rural and urban areas will work much more in industry and services, often learning and relearning new skills and techniques throughout their working lives.

This rejection of schooling is not entirely due to weakness in the education system. For many children the basic problem is poverty. Their families are trapped in a vicious intergenerational cycle of deprivation and ignorance. Parents who themselves had no education generally fail to appreciate the necessity of regular school attendance and can offer their children little help with their

studies. Uneducated children grow into illiterate adults and thus the cycle is repeated.

With this disastrous education scenario in mind, in 1985 BRAC initiated a primary education program. Which emerged as an important supplement to the formal education system. BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) program was designed at first only for children 8-10 years of age, it focused almost exclusively on children from the poorest families. From 1988, the program expanded into a new category of school for older children 11-16 years of age. The NFPE was never intended as an alternative or a substitute for the formal primary education provided by government schools. It was and will continue to be complementary and supplementary, aimed at educating drop-outs and non-starters from the country's poorest families.

The model behind this program is very innovative. Its curriculum is suitable for a rural population. An important feature is the community involvement through regular parent-teacher meetings. The schools have small classes, extra curricular activities which is good for child's basic education. A major factor is that the class hours are flexible, leaving the children time to help their families in income generating activities. Girls are an important focus of this program.

The basic objectives of this program are : 1) help rural and urban

children achieve basic literacy and social awareness; 2) encourage students to participate in extra curricular activities such as physical exercise, singing, dancing, drawing, crafts and games, as well as story book reading, all of which attract higher attendance in BRAC schools.

NFPE activities are not solely restricted to the rural areas. BRAC has set up 10 schools on a pilot basis in the Khilgaon slum area of Dhaka in 1990. These schools follow the NFPE curriculum and methodology, though certain modifications had to be made to accommodate the program to the urban atmosphere. The demand for these schools has led to the replication of the program in other urban slum areas.

At present there are 190 schools operating in five different slums of Dhaka: Khilgaon, Agargaon, Taltola, Nandipara, and Dhalpur. There are about 5320 students enrolled in these schools. Out of them 70 percent are female. The age of these children are a little higher than their rural counterparts; it ranges from 9-11 years of age. There is only one area office operating for all the schools in the urban slums which is located in Maghbazar, and it is headed by an area manager with the support of 8 program organizer and 2 program assistant. School time is generally set in the morning; so that NFPE can encourage higher attendance; because during the day most children are involved in income generating activities.

2.0 OBJECTIVES

OBJECTIVE

To understand the objective of this paper, one must first understand the role of sustainability, the concept, program sustainability, and what will and will not make the NFPE urban program sustainable. The issue of program sustainability is related to institutional viability and the viability of the program beneficiaries. The institutional viability is measured by how viable its ability to deliver services on a sustained basis.

It is very important to have sustainable education program to make a viable nation building effort. Given the growing complexities and challenges of human survival, especially in the developing world, the widening of the gap between the haves and the have nots, the limited access of most of the potential users to up-to-date technological advantages, the increasing incompatibility between the perceived and the actual development benefits, the declining world resources vis-a-vis the slow return from the renewable technological initiatives, and other related factors.

I believe that a sustainable education program is not only a timely and appropriate development initiative but also fits very well with the BRAC operational goals of sustainable human development. The multi-dimensional effects of education on the human development process have made it a viable premise of people-centred development. So it is clear that development of desired

sustainability is necessary for people-centred development process.

It is important that we understand the major obstacles in front of a sustainable education program. It is believed that dropout of children from schools is one of the most important if not the most important barrier to the sustainability of the education program. The researchers has recently observed that the dropout rate in NFPE seems to have increased. In the case of BRAC urban schools dropout is the most critical problem to its sustainability. BRAC has taken it as a challenge to keep the dropout rate to a minimum.

This paper will primarily focus on the causes behind the high dropout rate in BRAC urban schools. It is clear that to minimize the dropout rate, we must first understand the basic reasons behind such dropouts. It is also clear that socio-economic characteristics of these children attending BRAC schools is where the problem seems to lie. Therefore we must explore the socio-economic characteristics of these children; before we can find a cure to this disease.

That is primarily what this paper will try to achieve; which is to analyze the socio-economic reasons that leads a child in urban schools to dropout. May be then we can find a cure to this disease; and clear all the obstacles to the sustainability of the program.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

Methodology

It is important to make it clear that this will be a qualitative study rather than a quantitative study. Therefore the methodology of the study will represent a qualitative perspective.

Out of the existing 190 BRAC urban schools, 10 were looked at in particular; the selection was done at random. Two schools per slum was selected out of 5 slums in the greater Dhaka area. From each school 2 drop out students were selected for the study. Putting the number of students studied at 20 (cases). Drop outs in the first quarter of the academic year and first year of schooling were given preference over those in other quarters and years. A study of these students allowed me to look at these children both in terms of why they dropped out and their environment at home, and the bastis (slum) in which they live in.

Here are some of the steps followed in my research.

- 1) Interviews with NFPE urban Program Organizers to get an introduction of the different slums and trace NFPE's urban experience.
- 2) Interviews with the dropped out children, to find out location of their homes, average family size, primary occupations and education level in each family and labour commitment of the children.

- 3) Observation of parents-teacher meetings. Focus group discussions were also conducted with parents to gain insights into their attitudes towards education and perspectives on social issues (marriage, dowry, etc.).
- 4) I attended a one-day refresher course conducted by NFPE for the teachers of the urban schools. This helped me to understand the teachers in terms of their enthusiasm, and sensitivity to the issue of drop outs.
- 5) Visits to the homes of the 20 students in the study. As a result I was able to observe the main basti areas. Informal discussions were held with the available parent in each household using a checklist as a guide. Many times such conversations gave rise to group discussions as other people joined in.
- 6) I also held group discussions with few dropped out children to get to know them better and to understand how they structure their daily lives. And to find out the main socio-economic reasons for dropping out of NFPE.
- 7) I also held informal talks with the mullahs in each basti to get a different perspective on their attitudes toward education of girls, social issues and the drop out issue of urban children in general.
- 8) Literature review of relevant sources which gave me both quantitative and qualitative information on bastis and urban education.

4. LIMITATION

Although the main focus of my report was to find out the socio-economic reasons behind the drop out of urban children from NPPE schools; I was limited by the fact that many of the children and their parents had moved to other parts of Dhaka or their village homes from their respective bastis. However, I have tried to complement my findings from those people I could get hold of. And general information from other studies on urban bastis.

An important short coming was that I was not able to make frequent trips to the bastis at night which is the time when it is possible to find most family members at home and in a relaxed state of mind I could have had more in depth interviews with the parents at that time.

The sample size was deliberately kept small to enable me to build rapport with parents and the dropped out children. This is only the second study on urban issue conducted by BRAC. Therefore, this study should be treated as exploratory. So it is important in future to conduct more investigation on this issue.

5.0 FINDINGS

There are many socio-economic reasons why a poor child drops out of school. In this report I shall discuss few of the socio-economic

reasons why a child drops out, which are relevant in an urban context.

Economics of poverty seems to be the main cause behind the drop out in urban schools. My study has shown that economic need is the strongest criterion for drop out. A child's labour is invaluable in a basti and parents can ill afford to part with their child for long period of time. They are concerned about the opportunity cost of losing their child's working contribution.

In a poverty stricken socio-economic milieu, the phenomenon of dropping out from school should necessarily be caused predominantly by economic and allied factors. Factors such as heavy household work. Because many women are decreed or left destitutes at the death of their husbands and become guardians of their children through force of circumstances. Either they have no male relations to claim guardianship or, more usually, none wish to become responsible for the care of the widow and children. Such children rarely have a chance for education for they begin at an early age to help in maintaining the family. For children's work is usually vital to family survival, and it is more so the case in an urban context. Some of the families can not adequately feed their children and hence the question of education does not arise at all.

In a poverty stricken basti where restrictive child labour laws cannot be fully enforced, children often tend to be subjected to

rigorous physical labour. In fact many of the children in my study are compelled by the necessity of circumstances to remain engaged in income generating physical labour in supporting their families. Although physical labour by itself may not be bad, subjugation of the growing child to labours work is bound to adversely affect its education.

While most of the male dropouts earn some money, only few of the females have this opportunity. Cultural conditions generating a higher demand for boys than for girls in the labour market, are forcing the girls to a situation of extreme poverty and dependence. The participation rate of girls in income generating activities is relatively small cultural conditions tend to prevent many of them from being involved in such activities. A lot of the girls are involved in family occupation or cottage industry were they get the opportunity for engaging in income generating activities. The average earning is usually high in such specific occupation. But on the other hand, cultural conditions offer a larger opportunity to boys for different types of work i.e ricksha pulling. In many cases both boys and girls are involved in the same occupation i.e household servant. But these latter occupations traditionally generate low income, because the supply of such manpower in the labour market is quite high in comparison with their demand. A Dhaka child can earn 40 to 50 taka per day just by scavenging for waste paper.

In the recent years, female drop-outs from BRAC urban schools have found employment in the new garment industry. Because of its fast growing rate, the industry is attracting young urban girls to drop out of school; because it offers a relatively high income from the traditional work. The industry has drawn heavily from the urban basti population in general. But working in this industry brings major problems for young girls, for example since most of the garment workers have to work late in the night trying to keep schedules, their security is endangered by threats of abduction and assaults. The economic situation is such that these unfortunate groups of earning children are obviously engaged in trying to earn their bread through very cruel and rigorous physical labour. So the thought of education is sometimes out of the question.,

Lack of motivation from parents towards education is a major social factor, that many times leads a child to drop out of school. Because of the lack of educational awareness of parents in backward societies.

In general, the illiterate and disadvantaged parents do not feel encouraged to send their children to school since they are not much aware about its usefulness. I found that there is a strong connection between the educational status of the family and their attitudes toward the children's education; therefore the lower the education status of the family; it is likely to find a negative attitude towards education in general.

I have found in my study, that the heads of the households do not want to let the educational career of their children continue. In many cases attitudes of the heads of households do not appear to differ depending on the sex of the child. They do not feel that education can change the lives of poor people, so they do not encourage the children to study.

The underprivileged parents of the urban society suffer from extreme poverty. So sometimes their attitude toward education is a reflection of their economic condition. Therefore most parents, instead of sending their children to school prefer to engage them in some sort of income oriented work. Fathers themselves encourage their children to be involved in any kind of job for handful of rice or for petty earning.

Urban children are invaluable to their parents in an urban setting. Although child labour is prevalent in rural society, in an urban setting where supportive structures are considerably weakened, parents lean heavily on children to keep the family running. During an average day, a child has to help the mother with domestic chores which are much more time consuming and far flung than in the village, e.g. collecting water, washing clothes. If both parent's work, the child guards the house and tends siblings. In case of sickness, the child had to substitute for the mother in all households duties. Without children's help it is impossible to live in a basti, everybody has to look after their own household.

Most importantly, a child's labour has hard economic value in cities, either as a full time worker in different industries or as casual laborers such as paper picker, brick breaker etc. There are those who are hard pressed enough to rely on their children's inputs to survive. They work in garment factories, metal workshop, mills etc., and contribute substantially to the household economy. This need forces the parents to encourage their children to work, and not to attend school.

In case of girls, the motivational factor was even less. In many cases parents felt the positive benefits of education, but did not feel these extended to girls. A father felt that it was bad for his esteem to be educating daughters over his son. Parents do not feel that there is any use of educating their daughters since it is the convention that the girls will ultimately leave their parental home after marriage. They believe that education for girls was of little importance beyond giving them self confidence in married life.

So it is clear that if the society is not free from prejudices and the new values are not established, the country can not solve the drop out problem. As long as the basic needs of the poor families are unfulfilled they will never feel encouraged to send their daughters to school and allow them to continue.

Gender base is a major social problem in our society, that sometimes leads a girl child to drop out of school. So it is

important that we understand society's attitude towards girls in general. Because many of the dropped out girls in my study left school for this particular reason.

Traditionally, a woman in Bangladesh derives her status from her family. Her role includes maintenance of her family as a social institution and as an economic entity. Most importantly, through child bearing and child rearing, she ensures the existence of succeeding generations. Women have been responsible for domestic work, which is perceived as their contribution for maintaining the family as an economic unit. Most of Bangladesh has a traditional patriarchal society which is based on class and gender divisions. Class mobility allows movement between rich and poor, but the division of social space and are difference in behavioral norms between men and women are rigidly maintained. The family, which constitutes the basic unit of social control, sets the norms for male and female roles.

Throughout the ages, the predominant patrilineal system has given high value to sons as potential providers and perpetuators of family names. They receive preferential treatment and access to education, better nutrition and health care. Women, on the other hand, are viewed mainly in their reproductive roles and are given subsidiary status as economically dependent liabilities and the causes of non-productive expenditures. Gender discrimination starts at birth. According to predominant local customs, birth of a boy is

announced by loud "AZAN" whereas the azan is whispered in the new born girl's ear. In the naming ceremony, two goats are sacrificed for a boy and one for a girl.

Most society has dictated that daughters are temporary member of their natal homes. Their value is articulated in connection with marriage exchange. As non-productive members of the family, traditionally daughters have had little access to education, especially in the poor families. Scarce resources are invested in the sons as potential providers. Parents are reluctant to send the daughters to school because they fear for the daughters' safety, as chastity and the reputation of the unmarried girl are crucial factors which many determine her value in the eyes of potential husbands and in-law. Girls are viewed as potential mothers and homemakers. Priority is given to their training in domestic chores rather than to their right to education. They are generally perceived as mother and wives and not as equal working partners. Men are usually engaged in productive activities outside and accordingly educated and trained. Women have to look after the household chores for which no such skill development training or education is thought to be essential.

Another factor is Purdah. Purdah often obstacles female education in urban areas. It is due to such tradition many of the minor girls are confined within their houses. The girls in the urban basti are traditional in their beliefs. Forced as they are to move publically

to take showers, get water, use latrines, they still hold on to the notion of purdah and private space. In some cases, the purdah had retracted from the physical to the mental, but is still expressed as an ideal. If no purdah can be maintained at all, small acts such as teaching young girls the Koran or keeping a strict eye on them, become assertions of restoring purdah.

It is clear that these traditional views had discouraged many young urban girls from attending school. I found this to be an issue behind drop-outs in my study.

Another important factor behind school dropout of girls; is that parents fear for their children's security. The ambiguity of parents towards education arise directly from the social environment of the bastis. There is always fear of random violence, kidnapping and sexual harassment in the basti. Children are warned repeatedly to stay within safe parameters. In some cases BRAC schools were outside what is considered as safe parameters. Parents' fears for security is more so in the case of young girls. In a busy commercial settling such as an urban basti, with a strong undercurrent of illegal activities, parents fear young girls will be raped or tempted to turn bad. One has to be careful to keep the reputation of one's daughters intact for their marriages, especially with the prejudices around. Parents of boys said they would never marry their sons to city bred girls because they have the reputation of being too smart and wanting to watch cinemas all

the time.

Sometimes mothers quit their jobs to stay and watch over their daughters. Or else parents put them in jobs where they can be kept off the streets. As a domestic help in a rich house or as workers in the garment factories. Most prefer to give their daughters off in marriage at an early age to avoid any chances of sexual abuse and tainted reputation. The ideal age according to the parents seems to be 12 years. Although they knew well girls ought to get married later, because in their opinion, marriage and pregnancy at a young age are damaging to girls, health and mental state. Despite this insight, most feel compelled by their circumstances to consider early marriages for their daughters. Consequently, most parents feel that education is worthless for a daughter. A few parents felt that some education would help the girl to be a good wife or daughter-in-law. Parents are not convinced how education is integrally tied with the future of their children and the wide variety of opportunities, which exist for an educated person.

I have found in my study that some of the drop outs can be explained, because of the migratory nature of the urban dwellers. Urban studies have shown that urban families are, by and large, not rooted in their respective bastis. Urban families move from their respective bastis due to threat of eviction from the respective landlords or the government, increasing violence or in most cases improving economic status. They move in search of better employment

opportunities not just in search of jobs. For example besides lateral changes, there are distinct patterns of economic mobility. Several heads of families that I met had started as rickshaw pullers, moved up by buying their own rickshaw, subsequently to rent out to others or else changing to a more profitable occupation, like owning a shop or mess. They move from their small shacks into more spacious surrounding or to tin houses. Sometimes even move back to their village house, because they found better agricultural work. Although realistically there is a limit to what they can achieve; people are taking steps to improve on their existing quality of life. So this is a factor that sometimes leads a child to drop out of school; because he or she has to move along with their respective heads of the family. There is also the case of forced migration, when the government demolishes a basti, then the families have to move.

Irrelevant curriculum sometimes is an additional factor, not a major one, to a child dropping out of school. Although some of the curriculum in BRAC urban schools have been matched to the urban context; images still focus the rural environment. The recommendations on health and hygiene stem from the expectation that water and space are within one's access; which is not the case in an urban basti. This sometimes explain the children's disengagement from the text relating to their environment. Therefore the children are less motivated to attend school. And it leads to negative attitudes towards education.

Another additional factor is bullying in school. It was a small reason given to me by the parents for withdrawing their children from school; but along with other major factor such as economics. I have observed that there is a high degree of striking among children and bullying of young, shy or new children not from the same area as the rest. Some parents told me that they were very upset at the teacher's inability to stop these sorts of incidence. But it was never given to me as the prime factor behind the drop out of a children. One can call this a discouraging factor.

6.0 CONCLUSION

In conclusion I would like to say, that education is the mainstay of national development. Since the beginning of human civilization education has been playing an effective role in social development. Man is the principal architect of development activities of a nation and education provides maximum support to make him perfect through flourishing a balanced combination of his personality and inherent qualities.

Self determination is strengthened and moral value is awakened through education. It is essential to educate all for the sake of an overall development of a country. At least, practical education at the primary level should be given to all. Education is a commitment in national development. It establishes a close network of relationship with other development activities of the country.

Education helps both male and female to play an active role in the uninterrupted pace of developmental program of the country.

Therefore, for a developing country like ours; it is essential to ensure a sustainable education program for all the children. And try to solve the problems that hamper this sustainability; with special emphasis on girls education. Because it is undeniable that women's education plays a positive and effective role in national building in the long run. It has a long term impact on the family as well as on the society. If education can create opportunity for all women it would be able to emancipate them and prepare and encourage them for a better living. It is due to illiteracy that a large portion of human resource could not make any substantive contribution in the development of the country. A uneducated women can not do much for the country. Rather, they remain socially dependent on the males.

By making education compulsory and universal, you will create a prospective future for women. So in conclusion if universal primary education is implemented successfully, then the women population of Bangladesh will be able to make positive contribution in development of the society. Therefore it is important that we explore and investigate, and at the same time come up with solutions for the obstacles found in my study; if we want to sustain his education program of BRAC.

I wish to conclude with some general recommendations:

7.0 Recommendations

- 1) Take on more program organizers to help the followup on schools and students.
- 2) Provide more motorbikes to increase PO mobility.
- 3) Investigate the employment opportunities both locally and city wide to generate information for the motivational package for children.
- 4) Emphasize security both in classes and with parents. Teach road sense and methods to stay safe. Place schools tactically so its students are from its immediate surroundings.
- 5) Utilize the potential of the parents teachers meetings to build community feeling among the people. Open statements of common problems and general discussions on education and its practical impact can forge the community feeling needed to keep these schools viable.
- 6) Organize student body into groups and give them responsibilities to ensure attendance, convince parents, support one another.
- 7) Make violence a topic of discussion. Let children explore why they hit each other and what ways can fights be resolved.
- 8) Program organizers should emphasize the value of education to the parents of the children.
- 9) Program organizers should also discuss gender issues with the parents and their children when ever they have a chance.

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