

Readership Survey: the Case of A Research Compendium in Bangla

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Readership Survey: the Case of A Research Compendium in Bangla

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Abstract

Nirjash, a research compendium in Bangla, is published primarily for BRAC field staff. After three years of its publication it was felt essential to conduct a readership survey on its usefulness, accessibility and readability. The study assessed the readership of this compendium among the BRAC field staff. Data were collected from 1,698 field staff of 103 BRAC area offices in 18 districts. Of the 1,698 respondents, 497 were interviewed and information from the rest (1,201) was obtained through postal questionnaires. Findings of the study revealed that 45% of the respondents were aware of *Nirjash* and of them 79% (604) had read it. A higher proportion of the field managers were aware of *Nirjash* (90%) while it was much lower (40%) for the programme organizers (PO). Among those who read it 48% found its language easy while only 7% found hard, and 93% reported to be benefited. On the contrary, nearly 2% did not like it while 40% and 58% viewed it as a very good and good to read respectively. Over the three years, readership increased by 26% compared to the survey of 1995. No field offices were found to have got all issues of the *Nirjash*. The study shows that there was a communication gap among the field managers and their staff and there was a problem in the distribution system.

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Background

BRAC's Research and Evaluation Division (RED), an independent unit within BRAC, provides necessary research support to BRAC programmes. RED conducts a wide range of research with a large multi-disciplinary team. Along with the rapid growth of BRAC programmes, the RED activities have also been growing steadily. As of December 1997, RED has produced 563 research reports. BRAC believes that research is an inseparable part of development.

BRAC wants to share the research results with its field staff. Accordingly decision was taken to publish these research results in a very simple and lucid language and in a summarized form in Bangla. *Nirjash* is a form of this kind. Each issue of the *Nirjash* contains summaries of some 25-30 selected research reports produced in a year.

Introduction

Nirjash, the research compendium in Bangla, has been published regularly since its launching in 1995. Five issues have so far been published and disseminated to its field staff. After a lapse of three years of its publication it has been felt essential to assess the readership of the *Nirjash* aiming at exploring how far the target audiences were aware of it. The Programme Assistants (PAs), recently abolished, Programme Organizer (POs), Area Managers (AM), Regional Managers (RM), and other field workers were among the target audiences. They remain always very busy with their field work. It is not always possible on their part to have easy access to these lengthy reports written in English due to time constraints. As such, *Nirjash* articles are made feature-type for their easy reading. Readership survey is very important to look into the effectiveness of *Nirjash* publication. It also might help enhance the quality of a publication in all respects.

Objectives

The study was undertaken to understand readers' views about *Nirjash*, their suggestions for further improvement, to know whether it reaches the target audiences, etc. To substantiate the research objectives data were collected on a variety of issues. This paper will focus only on the following issues:

- Awareness about *Nirjash*
- Readership among those who knew about *Nirjash*, and
- The utility of *Nirjash*.

Methodology

Data were collected from 1,698 field staff during February 1998 - September 1998, using structured questionnaires. We initially mailed 350 questionnaires to different field offices of BRAC and only 99 were received back. Later, the authors of this paper visited 103 Area Offices and had three group discussions with 82 Field Staff available in the office during the visit. The authors interviewed 497 staff face-to-face in groups at different offices. Information from the rest 1,201 came through messengers, courier service and by post. We left questionnaires in those offices where no staff members were available during that time. To ensure the quality of data, we gave them a briefing that nobody needs to give their identity. Everybody had the liberty to write whatever they thought of about the *Nirjash*. Those staff who had been appointed during the preceding six months were excluded from this study as we considered them as unaware.

Existing distribution System

BRAC has more than 550 field offices throughout Bangladesh, maintains a very good networking system through its 539 field offices throughout Bangladesh. About 51,442 staff members have been working for BRAC. As it is not possible to give one copy of the *Nirjash* to each and every one, it was decided to distribute only one copy of the publication to each field office with the expectation that the copy should be made available in the office for all field staff. The copies are distributed to area offices/team offices through the respective regional offices. PO accountants of the RM offices come to the head office every month. They are given *Nirjash* as many as the number of area offices are there under a respective RM office. The copies are distributed with a letter from the Director Research, BRAC which requests all concern to read it and let all other staff to read.

Limitations of the study

In most field offices, all POs were not available. In some offices, those who were available claimed that they even did not hear about this publication. So, opinion could not be gathered from them directly. Some of the respondents were afraid of giving negative opinion. More than 58 POs of Pabna sadar, Bera and Jhinaigati area offices claimed that they had never heard about this compendium although they joined BRAC for more than six months from the date of interview. It could be ideal if we could carry out a more in-depth interview of the people. But time constraints permitted us only to interview them in a group.

Results

Results of the survey showed that the majority (54.8%) of the respondents was unaware of the *Nirjash*. Of those who claimed to be aware, 79% had read it. The highest number of the readers was found among the managers. About 45% of the respondents (table:1) were aware of *Nirjash*. Among the total respondents 1,522 were programme organizers and only 124 were managers. About 87% of the managers claimed that they were aware of the *Nirjash*, while it was only 40% for the PCs.

Table. 1 Awareness about *Nirjash* among BRAC field staff

Category of staff	Aware	Not aware	Not stated	Total
Programme organizers	612 (40.21%)	910 (59.79%)	-	1522 (100%)
Field Managers	108 (87.09%)	15 (12.09%)	1	124 (100%)
Others	46 (88.46%)	6 (11.54%)	-	52 (100%)
Total	766 (45.1%)	931 (54.8%)	1 (.1%)	1698 (100%)

Of those who were aware about 79% read it. About 92% of the managers and 75% of their staff claimed that they had read it. About 8% of the managers who were aware of it reported that they did not read it, and 25% of their staff did not.

**Table. 2 Distribution of readers by category of staff
(Access to *Nirjash*)**

Category of staff	Read	Do not read	Total
Programme organizers	462 (75.49%)	150 (24.51%)	612 (100%)
Field Managers	99 (91.66%)	9 (8.33%)	108 (100%)
Others	41 (93.18%)	3 (6.81%)	44 (100%)
Total	604 (78.85%)	162 (21.15%)	766 (100%)

About 56% of the managers, and 57% of their staff could not read the *Nirjash* as they did not get it. While 33% and 30% of the managers and their staff respectively could not read due to their time constraints (Table. 3). Only 3% of the PCs did not like it, and none of the managers reported their dislikings.

Table: 3 Reasons for not reading *Nirjash*

Category of staff	Not get	No time	Not like	Hard	Not stated	Total
Programme Organizer	86 (57%)	46 (30.9%)	4 (2.5%)	4 (3.1%)	10 (6.2%)	150 (100%)
Managers	5 (55.5%)	3 (33.3%)	-	1 (11.1%)	-	9 (100%)
Others	2 (66.6%)	1	-	-	-	
Total	93 (57.4%)	50 (30.8%)	4 (2.4%)	5 (3.2%)	10 (6.2%)	162 (100%)

Question asked for this was why do you not read *Nirjash*? Only 1% of the POs found it as 'not good', while 32% of them and 5% of the managers respectively viewed it as good (Table 4). Of the total readers, 40% and 58% viewed it as very good and good respectively.

Table. 4 How did the readers feel to read

Category of staff	Very good	Good	Not good	Not stated
Programme organizers	195 (32.28%)	257 (42.54%)	5 (1%)	5
Field managers	31 (5.13%)	67 (11%)	-	1
Others	18 (2.98%)	24 (3.97%)	1 (2%)	-
Total	244 (40%)	348 (57.6%)	6 (1%)	6 (1%)

Table 5 shows the distribution of opinions about the benefit of reading the *Nirjash*. Its readers were asked whether they were benefited by reading it or not. Most (93%) of them reported that they were benefited but very few opined negatively.

Table. 5 Opinion on the utility of *Nirjash*

Category of staff	Yes	NO	Not stated
Programme organizers	425 (70.36%)	20 (3.3%)	17 (2.8%)
Managers	94 (15.56%)	4 (1%)	1
Others	41 (6.7%)	2 (.5%)	-
Total	560 (92.7%)	26 (4.5%)	18 (.16%)

Question asked: are you benefited to read it?

Discussion

The Research and Evaluation Division (RED) of BRAC has been publishing *Nirjash*, a research compendium in Bangla, since the last four years primarily for its field staff. It has been felt essential to undertake a readership survey of this publication for its further improvement. Findings show that majority of the respondents were not at all aware of *Nirjash*. About 79% of those who were aware had read. About 87% of the managers were found to be aware of *Nirjash* while it was only 40% for their staff (PO), which indicate that there was information gap between the managers and the POs. The majority (57%) of the staff who was aware had not read this because they did not get copies of them. This happened because of the defective distribution system. The quality of publication was not found significantly related to the accessibility of the respondents.

Conclusion and recommendations

The *Nirjash* works as a media of disseminating research results to the field level staff. This study assessed the readership of this compendium among BRAC field staff. Of the total respondents, only 36% were found to have read it, although readership increased by 26% compared to the survey of 1995. After five issues of its publication, no field offices were found to have got all the issues of the *Nirjash*. A very good distribution system should be developed, so that its availability of it at all the field offices could be ensured.

Communication gap between the managers and the POs must be minimized. It should be made clear to the POs that they are the primary target group of this publication. The *Nirjash* should be kept available in the office, not at the manager's residence or inside his almirah or drawer. And after all the POs should be given a short period of leisure so that they can read it. Thus the objectives of publishing it could be fulfilled.

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**International Labor Migration and Women's Status
of the Left Behind: The Case of Bangladesh**

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