

Opening New Schools under Current Admission Procedure: Problems and Options

[Final Report]

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Abstract

Using data from a representative cluster survey, the author concludes that the possibility to open new BRAC schools under current admission procedure would be difficult because of the lack of adequate number of children. Findings reveal that only 16.7 percent children aged 6-15 are out-of-school. Among them, the proportion of girls is less (13.9%) than boys (19.2%). Of the two models, BRAC will face more difficulty in getting students for NFPE than BOEC. The author suggests that the current admission policy be revised to include younger (<8 years) and boys, and the children of socioeconomically better off sections of the community.

Executive Summary

Introduction

It is now believed that the preconditions for taking off the primary education in Bangladesh have largely been fulfilled. More children are now in school than ever. Various types of schools are in operation. As a result, the primary education in Bangladesh has entered into a new phase while. It is felt that opening additional schools in some areas may be difficult. More success in fertility reduction and rural-urban migration may make opening new schools more difficult in coming years.

Will BRAC be able to open a large number of new schools in coming years? Is there adequate number of children to be enrolled in BRAC schools? These are the concerns expressed by BRAC's education program management in recent months. In this report, we have focused on two issues: first, the *availability of children* to be enrolled in both types of BRAC schools in September 1998 is assessed; and second, if the adequate children are not available, *alternatives to current admission procedure* in BRAC schools are proposed.

Data and Method

The approach adopted in this study was sample cluster (village) survey. The unit of analysis has been the cluster. The study covers 120 clusters located in 60 thanas of Bangladesh where BRAC has planned to open new schools. The total household size was 12,109. One adult member, usually the housewife, was interviewed who provided necessary information for that household. The data were collected during June and early July of 1998.

Results

BRAC has to depend on only 16.7% children (aged between 6 and 15 years) for its new schools in September 1998. Among those, the proportion (and so the number) of girls is significantly less than boys, particularly for NFPE schools. The age and sex distribution of the out-of-school children is abnormal, much of which is the result of unequal emphasis in admitting children to some kinds of schools. The admission policy has only been gender biased but the age biased as well.

Not all children are eligible to be enrolled in BRAC schools. For example, BRAC not only prefers to recruit children of illiterate and poor households but also wants to ensure that 70% of students are girls. If BRAC continues to focus only on illiterate parents, a significant proportion of children will remain out-of-school. Similarly, a large number of children of relatively better off (non target) households

are not in school. They are not likely to be in BRAC schools unless the current admission procedure is modified to accept them

Opening new BRAC schools in coming months would be difficult if current admission procedure is followed. *If the age limits are relaxed, gender equity is practiced and the other conditions (parental literacy and socioeconomic condition) are ignored, the chance to open new schools will increase considerably. Reducing the class size may be another option.* It seems that imposing the condition of BRAC eligibility is an obstacle to open schools even with a small number of children. On the other hand, admitting only the children of illiterate mothers can continue as long as the age range is relaxed.

Conclusions and Implications

During the last decade, both the government and non-government organizations have been making efforts to raise literacy by expanding the school network particularly in rural areas. As a result, the school enrollment has increased significantly. More children are now in school than ever. Various types of schools are in operation. This study reveals that further expansion of education by opening additional schools may be difficult, as only a few children are out-of-school. The problem is expected to be more acute where out-migration is very high. Success in fertility reduction may have also played its role in squeezing the number of potential pupils for new schools.

One strategy to accommodate in scarcity situation might be to consider a wide school command area. Such an option may not be great for adolescent girls since distance to school (along with insecurity) may prevent regular attendance for many girls. However, densely populated villages with large number of households cover relatively smaller geographical area. For NFPE program may be accepted from the close proximity of the school and the boys should be recruited from distant households on the assumption that boys will be able to attend NFPE schools from the adjacent villages.

NFPE is and has always been the main school program while BEOC program receives less priority. *This study suggests shifting the focus on BEOC rather than NFPE for two reasons.* First, expanding BEOC program this year would be less difficult than NFPE as a larger proportion (and the number) of older girls are now available for BRAC schools. The chance to open the schools for BEOC program is much higher than NFPE program as the number of adolescents not in school is much higher among older than younger children. Secondly, the adolescents, particularly the girls from the poor and illiterate families are not expected to be in any kind of education program had they been enrolled in BRAC schools. Since no other organizations or agencies have any policy or program to take care of these traditionally ignored girls, they will remain illiterate for life.

The *Universal Primary Education* has always been mentioned as a national goal by the policy makers and governments. Unfortunately, like other sectors of social development, Bangladesh has achieved very little in raising literacy since its independence in 1971. During the last decade, both the government and non-government organizations have been making efforts to raise enrollment particularly in rural areas and especially among girls. As a result, the school enrollment has increased significantly¹. Bangladesh is committed to achieve basic education for at least 80 percent of school-age children by the year 2000. Expanding primary school system in remote rural areas is considered an important step to achieve that goal. A mass education program (MEP) has been launched by the government to that end. Among the non-government organizations (NGOs), BRAC is playing a major role in educating the rural poor children along with its micro credit based poverty alleviation programs.

THE BACKDROP

Credit based income generating program has been the main thrust of all development activities of BRAC. However, BRAC always believed that credit program alone can do little without human resources development inputs in it. Educating BRAC program participants and their children, in both formal and informal means, has remained the core component of all BRAC programs. BRAC gained experience in implementing education projects in 1970s. But it was only 1985 when BRAC initiated its new kind of education program for the children of the rural poor primarily in respond to the demand of its credit group members. BRAC began its new initiative with a pilot project in selected villages in Manikganj district adopting local needs in the curriculum. The students of BRAC schools are children who have never enrolled into or dropped out from the formal school system because of poverty or impediments to mobility². BRAC operates two types of schools: i) Non Formal Primary Education (NFPE) model is for children between 8 and 10 years of age; and ii) Basic Education for Older Children (BEOC) model is for adolescents between 11 and 14 years of age. Each school has 30-33 students of whom 70% or more are girls. According to an estimate², the number of schools in operation has been over 34,000 with nearly 1.2 million students in December 1997. In addition, BRAC has planned to open about 10,000 new schools this year.

It is now believed that the preconditions for taking off the primary education in Bangladesh have largely been fulfilled. More children are now in school than ever. Various types of schools are in operation. As a result, the primary education in Bangladesh has entered into a new phase while, at the same time, it is felt that opening additional schools in some areas may be difficult, as only a few children now are out-of-school. Trends in fertility reduction and rural-urban migration may make opening new schools more difficult in coming years.

Will BRAC be able to open a large number of new schools? Is there adequate number of children to be enrolled in BRAC schools? These are the concerns expressed by the field managers of BRAC programs in recent months. BRAC's education program management has expressed its desire to assess the difficulties in getting children to new BRAC schools. In this study, we have focused on two issues: first, the *availability of children* to be enrolled in both types of BRAC schools in September 1998 is assessed. Second, in case of unavailability of the adequate children, *alternatives to current admission procedure* in BRAC schools are proposed.

DATA AND METHOD

The approach adopted in this study was sample cluster (village) survey. All clusters were considered to be included in the sample since the survey was designed to be representative of the education program of BRAC. At the beginning, a list of all teams, organized by region, was collected from the MIS of the program. The sample teams were drawn from the lists following the systematic random sampling technique. In step two, the list of the unions (with name of villages) in each team was collected from the team offices. Two unions were drawn at random from the list of each team. In step three, a sample village (cluster) was selected at random from each study union. Finally, the sample households were drawn at random in each selected village. Where the adequate number of households were not found, another village was selected at random from the adjacent villages. The process was repeated until the required number of sample households was surveyed. The process of choosing the samples, thus, involved the following steps: i) team selection from the MIS; ii) union selection from the union list available in teams; iii) cluster (village) selection from the list given by the team offices; and iv) household selection in the cluster by following systematic random sampling technique.

The unit of analysis of this study has been the cluster. Attempt has been made to keep the cluster size minimum. If 10% error is allowed and the 95% confidence limit is considered, the minimum sample cluster size required is 96. Following the same principle, the required household sample size in each cluster is 96. In our case, an inflated 100 households in each cluster and 120 clusters in total were chosen. Table 1 shows that the survey covers 120 clusters located in 60 teams (and thanas) and 38 districts of Bangladesh. The total household size was 12,109. The total number of children (aged 6 and 15) enumerated is 17,152. One adult member in each household, usually the housewife, was interviewed who provided necessary information for that household. The data were collected during June through early July of 1998.

Table 1. Distribution of samples by strata

Strata	Sample size
District	38
Team (Thana)	60
Cluster	120
Households	12109
Children (6-15)	17152

RESULTS

a. Profile of Potential Students

The enrollment rate, estimated in this study, is the proportion of persons who are registered as regular students in any kind of educational institution at the time of survey. According to that estimate, the school enrollment rate among children aged between 6 and 15 years is 83.3 in the study villages. The remaining 16.7% children are those to be enrolled in BRAC schools in September 1998. Table 2 presents the distribution of these potential children by their age and sex. The proportion (and so the number), not in school, is significantly higher among male (19.2%) than female (13.9%) children. The sex variation of out-of-school children by age also shows similar picture. The variation is more prominent in ages 9 through 11. It should be noted that only 9.3% of the eligible female children are available for NFPE program while 15% of male children are available for the same. Similarly, the availability of girls (10.3%) is much less than boys (16.6%) for the BEOC program. The pattern of distribution of the out-of-school children is abnormal, much of which is a reflection of unequal emphasis in admitting children to some kinds of schools. The admission policy has only been gender biased but the age biased as well.

Table 2. Percent of children (6-15) not currently in school by age and sex

Age	Sex		All
	Male	Female	
6	32.6	30.2	31.4
7	23.8	18.3	21.1
8	13.9	10.3	12.1
9	14.4	8.7	11.5
10	16.6	8.7	12.9
11	15.8	8.2	12.2
12	16.2	10.1	13.3
13	17.8	11.9	14.9
14	16.9	11.8	14.5
15	22.5	18.6	20.7
<i>Only NFPE</i>	15.0	9.3	12.2
<i>Only BEOC</i>	16.6	10.3	13.6
Old area	16.8	11.9	14.5
New area	31.8	23.0	27.1
Total	19.2	13.9	16.7
N	8936	8216	17152

Not all children are eligible to be enrolled in BRAC schools. BRAC follows a guideline in admitting children to both NFPE and BOEC models of school based on age and sex of children, parental education and socioeconomic status. For example, BRAC not only prefers to recruit children of illiterate and poor households but wants to ensure that 70% of students are girls. Table 3 indicates that if BRAC continues to focus only on the children of illiterate parents, a significant proportion of children (24%), currently not in school, will remain out-of-touch by BRAC and for that matter by any school program. Similarly, many children of relatively better off (non target) households (44.6%) are out-of-school. It is clear, therefore, that a large number of children in the study villages are not in any kind of school. They are not likely to be in BRAC schools unless the current admission procedure is modified to accept them.

Table 3. Percent of children (6-15) not currently in school by parental factors

Parental Factors	Sex		All
	Male	Female	
Parental Education			
Both illiterate	74.7	77.8	75.9
At least one illiterate	18.8	15.9	17.6
Both literate	6.5	6.3	6.4
Socioeconomic Status			
BRAC eligible	56.4	53.7	55.4
Non target	43.6	46.3	44.6

Differential admission procedure by region is also thought a plausible policy in this transition phase of primary education in Bangladesh. The proportion of eligible children are differentiated by district in Table 4. Only 5 out of 38 districts are identified where 30% or more children are out-of-school. Only one district is found to have a very high proportion of out-of-children children. Data indicate that a regional admission procedure approach is not required as the regional variation generally is not very large and significant.

Table 4. Percent of children (6-15) not in school by district

Name of Districts	Sex		All
	Male	Female	
Comilla	7.7	4.9	6.5
Pabna	10.9	7.3	9.2
Barisal	8.8	9.9	9.4
Narsingdi	13.3	6.9	10.2
Manikganj	16.2	14.4	15.2
Dhaka	14.8	14.0	14.4
Gopalganj	24.2	16.1	20.4
Patuakhali	25.2	16.0	20.6
Barguna	25.0	24.2	24.6
Pirojpur	16.9	11.3	13.9
Bhola	27.0	21.9	24.5
Chandpur	18.8	11.1	15.1
Brahmanbaria	32.0	18.7	25.6
Hobiganj	25.1	24.3	24.8
Mymensingh	31.2	18.4	25.1
Tangail	23.4	18.7	21.0
Gazipur	17.3	20.3	18.7
Sherpur	28.0	16.4	22.3
Jamalpur	29.9	22.4	26.3
Bogra	17.7	14.8	16.4
Rajshahi	13.8	6.7	10.4
Chapai Nawabganj	31.1	13.1	22.3
Natore	19.3	12.7	16.4
Joypurhat	22.1	15.8	19.1
Kushtia	23.9	14.6	19.7
Jhenaidah	23.2	14.3	18.9
Dinajpur	25.6	17.3	21.5
Rangpur	32.3	23.5	28.0
Sirajgonj	24.0	20.0	22.3
Jessore	15.3	13.4	14.4
Sathkhira	27.2	19.4	23.7
Magura	10.2	10.7	10.4
Bandarban	21.0	22.2	21.9
Gaibandha	36.9	22.1	30.2
Chittagong	44.6	24.5	35.2
Netrokona	42.8	28.0	35.9
Kurigram	37.2	37.9	37.5
Cox's Bazar	63.8	62.9	63.3

b. Scarcity Estimates

The scarcity of potential children for BRAC school in a cluster (a school command area consisting generally 200-300 households) is a situation where at least 30 children are not found available who meet the admission criteria of BRAC school. BRAC has two models for two different age groups. Thus, the condition of scarcity estimates varies accordingly. In this section, we have estimated the availability of students separately for both NFPE and BEOC models. In each model, the scarcity is estimated for two (200 and 300 households) different size of clusters.

Table 5. Estimated number of children (aged 6-15) not in school per 100 households by parental factors

Parental Factors	Sex		All
	Male	Female	
All	14	10	24
Parental Education			
Both illiterate	11	6	17
At least one illiterate	3	2	5
Both literate	0	2	2
Socioeconomic Status			
BRAC eligible	8	5	13
Non target	6	5	11

In Table 5, the distribution of the number of potential students per 100 households by demographic and socioeconomic factors is presented. We can expect to get 6 girls between ages 6 and 15 who are from illiterate parents. If we go for BRAC eligible only, we end up with only 5 girls. If we extrapolate these figures for larger school command areas, it seems that opening new BRAC schools would be difficult.

Table 6. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 200 households) available to open new NFPE schools considering the student size as 32

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	8 - 10	30 : 70	NC	NC	5
2	8 - 10	NC	NC	NC	7
3	7 - 10	NC	NC	NC	14
4	6 - 10	NC	NC	NC	61
5	6 - 10	NC	NC	Target	27
6	6 - 10	50 : 50	NC	NC	19
7	6 - 12	50 : 50	NC	NC	41
8	6 - 12	50 : 50	Mother	NC	33

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.

BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.

NC: Not considered.

Table 6 presents the estimates of the scarcity of students in NFPE model schools where student size is considered 32 and school command area covers 200 households. If current practice of gender disparity (30:70) continues, the program will have to limit its school in only 5% of the villages. It is also clear that BRAC will be able to open schools in only 5 to 7% of the villages (or clusters) if the official age limits of admission is rigidly followed (Options 1 and 2). However, studies indicated that the age limits were not always in practice³⁴. If the age limits are relaxed and the other conditions are not considered or ignored, the possibility to open new schools increases significantly (Options 3 and 4). When the children of BRAC eligible households is considered only, the chance will reduce to 27%. In options 6 through 8, the number of both boys and girls in the schools are considered equal. If age range is considered from 6 through 12, about 41% of the villages can be the host of a BRAC school when parents' literacy and BRAC eligibility are ignored or not considered (Option 7). If the parents' literacy condition is added to it, the chance will reduce to only 33%.

Table 7. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 200 households) available to open new NFPE schools considering the student size as 26

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	6 - 10	NC	NC	Target	19
2	6 - 10	50 : 50	Both	NC	25
3	6 - 10	NC	Both	NC	31
4	6 - 10	50 : 50	NC	NC	39
5	6 - 12	50 : 50	NC	Target	25
6	6 - 12	50 : 50	Mother	NC	51
7	6 - 12	50 : 50	NC	NC	56

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.

BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.

NC: Not considered.

If the class size of the NFPE model is reduced to 26, the chance in opening schools increases significantly. Table 7 presents a series of options under various conditions. It seems that imposing the condition of BRAC eligibility is an obstacle to open schools even with a small number of children. If only the children of illiterate mothers are considered, the chance to open new schools is good (51%) if the age range is relaxed (Option 6). If age range is considered from 6 to 10 (excluding 11-12 children) in NFPE model, the chance to open schools will become 39% when other conditions are not considered or ignored.

Table 8. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 300 households) available to open new NFPE schools considering the student size as 32

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	8 - 10	30 : 70	NC	NC	23
2	7 - 10	NC	NC	NC	33
3	6 - 10	NC	NC	NC	78
4	6 - 10	30 : 70	NC	NC	30
5	6 - 10	NC	One	NC	68
6	6 - 10	NC	NC	Target	27
7	6 - 10	NC	Both	NC	42
8	6 - 10	50 : 50	NC	NC	60
9	6 - 10	50 : 50	One	NC	45

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.
BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.
NC: Not considered.

One strategy to accommodate in scarcity situation might be to consider a wide school command area with 300 households on the assumption that boys will be able to attend NFPE schools from the adjacent or even distant villages. Table 8 shows the estimated proportion of clusters for new (32-student size) NFPE schools under various conditions. Option 1 reassures that if the current age range (8-10) is rigidly followed, only 15% clusters will be able to host for new NFPE schools. If the younger children are systematically added, the chance increases as high as 78% (Option 3) when sex distribution, parental literacy and socioeconomic factors are ignored. Even if the gender equity (50:50) is preserved (Option 8), the chance becomes as high as 60%.

Table 9. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 200 households) available to open new BEOC schools considering the student size as 32

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	11 - 14	30 : 70	NC	NC	5
2	11 - 14	50 : 50	NC	NC	18
3	11 - 14	NC	NC	NC	29
4	11 - 15	50 : 50	NC	NC	42
5	11 - 16	50 : 50	One	NC	58
6	11 - 16	NC	NC	Target	17
7	11 - 16	NC	NC	NC	87
8	11 - 16	50 : 50	NC	NC	72

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.
 BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.
 NC: Not considered.

We have seen earlier that the chance to open the schools for BEOC program is much higher than NFPE program as the number of adolescents not in school is much higher among older than younger children. In Table 9, estimated proportions are presented for BEOC models under various settings. If the official sex ratio (30:70) is maintained, the chance will be less than 30% when other conditions are ignored (Options 1-3). The possibility keeps increasing when older children are considered eligible. However, if focused on the children of poor households, the chance is estimated to be only 17%. If older children are also considered as potential students and the gender equity is maintained in admitting children, the possibility to open new BEOC schools would be as high as 72% (Option 8).

Table 10. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 200 households) available to open new BEOC schools considering the student size as 26

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	11 - 14	NC	NC	NC	48
2	11 - 14	NC	One	NC	35
3	11 - 14	NC	NC	Target	5
4	11 - 15	50 : 50	NC	NC	55
5	11 - 16	50 : 50	NC	NC	87

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.

BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.

NC: Not considered.

A smaller number of class size may be considered as an alternative to the current admission procedure. Table 10 presents a few options where cluster size is considered 200 households and the class size is 26. If the parents' literacy and the socioeconomic condition are considered as obstacle to enroll, BRAC management will be in a better position to open schools in most of the proposed areas.

Table 11. Estimated proportion of clusters (with 300 households) available to open new BEOC schools considering the student size as 32

Option number	Age range (Lo - Hi)	Sex ratio (M : F)	Parents' literacy	BRAC eligibility	School to open (% cluster)
1	11 - 14	30 : 70	NC	NC	18
2	11 - 14	50 : 50	NC	NC	40
3	11 - 14	NC	NC	NC	68
4	11 - 15	30 : 70	NC	NC	35
5	11 - 15	50 : 50	NC	NC	65
6	11 - 16	30 : 70	One	NC	80
7	11 - 16	30 : 70	NC	NC	88
8	11 - 16	50 : 50	NC	Target	30

Parents' literacy: Either parent or both are illiterate.

BRAC eligibility: BRAC target or better-off households.

NC: Not considered.

Like the formal school system, a wider school command area for adolescent girls may not be very good proposition since the distance to school (along with insecurity) prevents regular attendance for many girls. However, densely populated clusters with large number of households may spread over relatively smaller geographical area. In Table 11, estimated proportions are provided considering cluster size as 300 households. It appears that when 14-15 year old adolescents are also considered and the children of relatively well-off households are accepted in BEOC schools, BRAC will face less difficulty in opening new schools in coming months.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

During the last decade, both the government and non-government organizations have been making efforts to raise literacy by expanding the school network particularly in rural areas. As a result, the school enrollment has increased significantly. More children are now in school than ever. Various types of schools are in operation. This process is expected to have far reaching effect in educational scenario in Bangladesh. At the same time, further expansion of education by opening additional schools may be difficult, as only a few children are out-of-school. The problem is expected to be more acute where out-migration is very high as a consequence of poverty, unemployment and natural disasters. Success in fertility reduction may have also played its role in squeezing the number of potential pupils for new schools.

One of the major findings of this study is that BRAC will have to depend on only 16.7% children (aged between 6 and 15 years) for its new schools in September 1998. Among the out-of-school children, the proportion (and so the number) of girls is significantly less than boys, particularly in ages 9 through 11, who are the targets for NFPE schools. The availability of girls is less than boys for the BEOC schools also. The age and sex distribution of the out-of-school children is found abnormal, much of which is the result of unequal emphasis in admitting children to some kinds of schools. The admission policy has only been gender biased but the age biased as well.

Not all children are eligible to be enrolled in BRAC schools. For example, BRAC not only prefers to recruit children of illiterate and poor households but also wants to ensure that 70% of students are girls. If BRAC continues to focus only on illiterate parents, a significant proportion of children will remain out-of-school. Similarly, a large number of children of relatively better off (non target) households are not in school. They are not likely to be in BRAC schools unless the current admission procedure is modified to accept them.

Opening new BRAC schools in coming months would be difficult if current admission procedure is followed. If the age limits are relaxed, gender equity is practiced and the other conditions (parental literacy and socioeconomic condition) are ignored, the chance to open new schools will increase considerably. A smaller size of students (about 26) may be an alternative. It seems that imposing the condition of BRAC eligibility is an obstacle to open schools even with a small number of children. On the other hand, admitting only the children of illiterate mothers can continue as long as the age range is relaxed.

One strategy to accommodate in scarcity situation might be to consider a wide school command area. Such an option may not be great for adolescent girls since distance to school (along with insecurity) may prevent regular attendance for many girls. However, densely populated villages with large number

of households cover relatively smaller geographical area. For NFPE program, girls may be accepted from the close proximity of the school and the boys should be recruited from distant households on the assumption that boys will be able to attend NFPE schools from the adjacent villages.

NFPE is and has always been the main school program while BEOC program receives less priority. This study suggests shifting the focus on BEOC rather than NFPE for two reasons. First, expanding BEOC program this year would be less difficult than NFPE as a larger proportion (and the number) of older girls are now available for BRAC schools. Secondly, the adolescents, particularly the girls from the poor and illiterate families are not expected to be in education program if they are not enrolled in BRAC schools. Since no other organizations or agencies have any policy or program to take care of these girls, they will remain illiterate for life.

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