

# **Textbook Distribution Programme of BRAC: Problems and Issues**

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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

While an impressive number of BRAC school graduates have been entering into the formal schools, the larger proportions of BRAC graduates have remained out-of-school because of the inability of their parents to bear educational expenses of their children. One of the major items is the cost of buying books. It was felt that if textbooks are provided to poor children in the high schools, the enrollment rates among the poor children would significantly raised.

Keeping that in view, NFPE decided in early 1997 that the poor students of grades VI and IX would be given textbooks in selected areas where NFPE has its programmes. The preference will be given to girls and BRAC graduates. It was also decided that the *Gonokendra Pathagar* (Union-based BRAC initiated library) would be used as the distributing outlet of the textbooks to the eligible students of the community. Each selected book recipient is expected to pay a user fee (Taka 50 for grade IV and Taka 70 for grade IX) for the use of one full set of textbook for a year. After one year, the users are expected to refund the books to the respective libraries. The objective of the study has been to evaluate the textbook distribution project. The study focuses on i) whether the textbooks were distributed as planned; ii) what problems the NFPE management has encountered, if any; and iii) whether targeted students received textbooks.

## Data and Method

Two sources are considered appropriate in designing the data collection of the study. These are: i) the library as the distribution outlet and ii) the readers as the users of textbooks. All libraries established in 1997 or before were included in the sample frame. The sample libraries are selected at random since the study was designed to be representative of the textbook distribution programme of NFPE. The information from the key informants was collected by using a checklist. The respondents were the sample librarians, the committee members and the readers present in the library during the visit. The study covers 38 libraries located in 38 NFPE teams in 20 districts of Bangladesh. The total number of book recipients in those libraries was 580.

## Key Findings and Implications

The textbook distribution project of BRAC appears to play an important role in keeping many poor children in schools. The profile of the textbook recipients shows that their parents were largely illiterate and poor. A large proportion of the recipients were landless and about half had only marginal amount of land with the mean amount of land had been only 84 decimals. Important findings and recommendations are summarised below.

1. Only a smaller group of BRAC graduates received textbooks indicating that a very few BRAC school graduates has been enrolled in higher grades in schools. Girls were given preference over boys. As most of BRAC graduates who continue in high schools are not the children of poor households, *it was felt that the preference for the BRAC school graduate should be dropped.*
2. In many cases, the distribution was carried out by the NFPE teams itself and not by the libraries or its committees. In other cases, it was reported that the committee has inappropriately distributed textbooks. *It is, therefore, suggested that such complain should be verified by the librarians or NFPE team members.*
3. The libraries or NFPE teams take much longer time then expected to distribute books. *It is suggested that the team offices be permitted to buy books from the local shops and distribute them immediately.* Inadequate supply of textbooks is a common problem that already created credibility problem of the *Gonokendra Pathagar* among the community.
4. The demand for humanities textbooks was higher than science and commerce groups. In many cases, the sets are incomplete. Grammar books and guidebooks for some children should also be provided. The selection of books should be made based on the requirements of textbooks from the field.
5. The used books found were in good condition and could be re-cycled. Still, it is suggested that the textbooks should not be recycled. The distribution of recycled books often creates problems as the students express their unhappiness to accept used books. Recycling does not create an image of NFPE as an unbiased provider of textbooks even among the poor.
6. Charging user fees was unequal among the NFPE teams and libraries. In many cases, the students had to pay more user fees than expected. Charging the same user fees for both new and

used books seems unfair. The rates were not affordable to many parents. *It is, thus, expected that the user fees should be reduced to affordable levels.*

7. The *Gonokendra Pathagar* should be used as the only channel to distribute textbooks in its catchment villages. *The librarians should be re-oriented about the programme and to play the key role in selecting the recipients.*

The textbook distribution to the poor is well received by the community. The demand of the expansion of this project is very high and, thus, NFPE management should not only continue and expand this project but also put considerable inputs in improving the project.

## INTRODUCTION

Education programme of BRAC has long been trying to improve literacy by raising and sustaining enrollment among children of the poor households in the villages. BRAC has expanded its non-formal primary education (NFPE) since 1990s. As a result, nearly 1.2 million children have been in BRAC school each year (BRAC, 1997). A number of these BRAC school graduates have been entering into the formal schools although the larger proportions of BRAC graduates have remained out-of-school because their parents were unable to bear educational expenses of their children. One of the major areas of continuing the education of their children is the cost of buying books. The government has been providing textbooks for the poor children up to grade V. BRAC and other NGOs also provide free books for its students. BRAC has been getting impression from the field management of NFPE that a significant proportion of BRAC school graduates could continue their studies had they were provided support from BRAC. It was felt that if textbooks are provided to poor children in high schools, the enrollment and retention rates among the poor children would significantly raised.

Keeping that in view, it has been decided by BRAC in early 1997 that the poor students of grades VI and IX will be given textbooks in selected areas where NFPE has its programmes (Memo. 1997). A criterion for selecting eligible students who would receive textbooks from BRAC has also been set up. It was decided that that the textbooks would be distributed to poor students for one year to those who would enroll in grades IV and IX. Among the eligible students, preference will be given to those who are girls and graduated from BRAC schools. The second preference will go to boys of BRAC school graduates. Then, the leftover books will be distributed among the eligible female children of the members of Rural Development Programme (RDP) of BRAC. Finally, the leftover books can be distributed to any female students of poor households of the community.

It was also decided that the *Gonokendra Pathagar* would be used as the distributing outlet of the textbooks to the appropriate persons. The potential recipients or eligible students would be asked to apply for free textbooks to the librarian of the *Gonokendra Pathagar*. There will be a three-member committee who will administer the textbook distribution activities. The members are relevant Team-in-charge or Area Manager of NFPE, one member from the library committee or trustee board and the Head Master of the school as president of the committee. Each selected recipient will pay a user fee (Taka 50 for grade IV and Taka 70 for grade IX) for the use of one full set of textbook for a year. After one year, they are expected to refund the books to the respective libraries.

The objective of the study has been to evaluate the textbook distribution project. The study focuses on i) whether the textbooks were distributed as planned; ii) what problems the NFPE management has encountered, if any; and iii) whether targeted students received textbooks.

## DATA AND METHOD

The study design is based on one-shot survey of the recipients of the textbooks and interviews with key informants of the relevant persons in the community. Two sources are considered appropriate in designing the data collection of the study. These are: i) the library as the distribution outlet and ii) the recipients as the end recipients of textbook. All libraries established before 1998 were included in the sampling frame. The sample libraries are selected at random since the study was designed to be representative of the textbook distribution programme of NFPE. The information from the key informants was collected by using a checklist. The respondents were the librarians the committee members and the readers present in the library during the visit.

According to the source of NFPE, a total of 208 libraries were in operation during the design of this study in January 1999. Of these libraries, ---- had the responsibility of distributing the textbooks in addition to their used tasks. Thus, all --- libraries were considered to be included in the sample. The unit of analysis of this study has been the library. The sample size is determined in this study by following the statistical approach of selecting a minimum of 30 units (libraries) at random when the characteristics of the units are considered homogeneous. To be on the safe side, the sample size planned to inflate to 40 libraries considering the possibility of not succeeding in collecting information from some sampled libraries.

According to NFPE source, a total of 40 students was expected to receive textbooks in 1998. Twenty students grade VI and the twenty students of grade IX should receive textbooks. It was decided that 10 recipients from each grade should be selected at random in each library area. Thus the sample size was expected to be  $(40*20)=800$  book recipients if total.

A list of all libraries was collected from the MIS of NFPE program. Among the list, only those libraries that distributed textbooks in 1998 were taken to be included in the sample libraries. The sample libraries were drawn from the lists following the systematic random sampling technique. In the second step, the list of the recipients of textbooks (with the name of father and village) in each library catchment villages was collected from the libraries. The recipient list was categorised in to grades VI and IX. Then, an attempt has been made to select 10 book recipients from each grade were drawn at random from the list. Table 1 shows that the study covers 38 libraries located in 38 NFPE teams and 20 districts of Bangladesh. The remaining two libraries were not available. The total number of book recipients was only 580. The problem has been that in many library areas only a few sets of textbooks were distributed.

Table 1. Distribution of sample libraries by strata

Strata	Sample size
District	20
Team	38
Library	38
Recipient	580

## MAJOR FINDINGS

### a. *Profile of the recipients*

The percent distribution of textbook recipients by the type of school they attended and sex according to NFPE program documents is shown in Table 2. A total of 548 students of both grades (VI and IX) were given textbooks in the catchment areas of a total of 37 libraries.

Table 2. Profile of recipients of textbooks according to NFPE documents

Type of school	Sex		All
	Male	Female	
Grade VI			
BRAC school	3.0	8.5	11.5
Other school	11.7	11.5	29.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>26.0</b>	<b>40.7</b>
Grade IX			
BRAC school	1.6	3.8	5.4
Other school	26.8	27.0	53.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>28.4</b>	<b>30.8</b>	<b>59.2</b>
<b>All</b>	<b>43.1</b>	<b>56.8</b>	<b>99.9</b>

It is not known why the recipients of textbooks were much higher among the students of grade IX (59%) than grade VI (41%) while it was expected that the recipients of books would be equal in both

grades. Although BRAC school graduates were given preference in getting books, the share of BRAC graduates in receiving textbooks was smaller compared to other school graduates and insignificant among the recipients of grade IX. This indicates that only a small proportion of BRAC school graduates was enrolled in higher grades in schools. The preference of girls over boys is reflected in the data although the sex variation in receiving textbooks in grade IX was insignificant.

Table 3. Percent of textbook recipients by background characteristics

Background characteristics	Grade		All
	Six	Nine	
<b>School attended</b>			
NFPE	38.2	11.5	23.4
BEOC	3.1	3.1	3.1
Others	58.7	85.4	73.4
<b>RDP</b>			
Member	20.8	18.1	19.3
Non-member	79.2	81.9	80.7
N	259	321	580

Table 3 shows that slightly more than a quarter of all recipients were ex-BRAC school students. Among the six graders, about 41% graduated from BRAC schools while only 15% of BRAC school graduates received textbooks among the recipients of grade IX. Nearly a fifth of the recipients were the children of the members of RDP. Again, the proportion the children of RDP was more among the sixth than ninth graders.

Table 4. Percent of textbook recipients by age and sex in both grades

Demographic factors	Six	Grade	
		Six	Nine
<b>Age</b>			
10-11	47.5	0.3	
12-13	43.2	22.1	
14-15	8.5	65.1	
16-17	0.8	12.5	
Mean age	11.7	14.3	
<b>Sex</b>			
Male	36.3	47.7	
Female	63.7	52.3	



Age and sex variation of the book recipients for both grades are presented in Table 4. Most of the recipients of grade VI were 13 years old or younger with an average age of 11.7 years. On the other hand, nearly two-third of the ninth graders were aged 14-15 years and the remaining were older at the time of receiving their textbooks. The mean age of them has been 14.3 years. In both grades, the recipients were largely girls. While nearly two-thirds were female in grade VI, the gap was much narrower in grade IX.

Table 5. Percent of textbook recipients by education of parents in both grades

Education of parents	Grade		All
	Six	Nine	
<b>Mother's education</b>			
No school	66.7	53.4	59.3
I - V	25.0	32.6	29.2
VI +	8.3	14.1	11.5
Mean	1.7	2.4	2.1
<b>Father's education</b>			
No school	44.1	38.8	41.2
I - V	27.2	21.5	24.0
VI +	28.7	39.7	34.9
Mean	3.7	4.6	4.2

Table 5 indicates that the parents of the textbook recipients were largely illiterate as about 59% of the mothers and 41% of the father had no schooling. The mean years of schooling had been 2.1 and 4.2 years respectively. When the educational status of the parents between the students of grade VI and grade IX was compared, it appears that the parents of sixth grader were less educated than the parents of ninth graders.

Table 6. Percent of textbook recipients by socio-economic status in both grades

Socioeconomic condition	Grade		All
	Six	Nine	
<b>Land owned</b>			
Landless	46.7	32.1	38.6
1 - 199 d	45.2	54.5	50.3
200 + d	8.1	13.4	11.0
Mean	65.9	98.2	83.8
<b>Occupation of father</b>			
Labour	28.6	15.6	21.5
Agriculture	43.2	42.9	43.0
Petty business	17.0	21.5	19.4
Large business	0.8	5.9	3.6
Service (Low)	6.6	10.4	8.7
Service (High)	3.7	3.8	3.8
<b>Housing condition</b>			
Poor	78.0	65.4	71.0
Moderate	18.1	24.9	21.9
Rich	3.9	9.7	7.1
N	259	321	580

Nearly 39% of the book recipients were landless and about half had only marginal amount (<2 acres) of land (Table 6). The mean amount of land had been only 84 decimals. The parents of ninth graders were relatively better-off than the parents of sixth graders. The occupational distribution of the father of textbook recipients indicated that most of them were involved in agriculture, petty business or in labour sectors. As expected, only a small proportion of the children of large business had received textbooks from NFPE. Housing condition reflects the socio-economic condition of the household. About 71% of the book recipients were very poor. The proportion was much higher among the sixth (76%) than ninth (65.4%) graders.

***b. Library as the provider***

Of the 38 libraries visited, 27 have textbook distribution committees. Among the 27 committees, 21 were formed according to the procedure prescribed by NFPE programme (Memo, 1997). There are several reasons of not forming distribution committees. In many cases, the task of book distribution was

carried out by the team office itself and the librarian of the area was not aware that textbook distribution programme exists. In some cases, the librarians were informed later and the responsibility was not handed over to the library or its committee. It seems that the concept of textbook distribution through *Gonokendra Pathagar* has not evolved or accepted as a routine activity of NFPE although it is felt that library network with a property form book distribution committee can be an appropriate and very effective channel for the distribution of textbooks.

*c. Extent of demand of books*

Table 7 shows that about 81.6% of the textbooks recipients of grade IX were able to buy their textbooks in the preceding year (at grade VIII) where as 9.7% bought some of their books and nearly 8.7% had to procure from other sources. Unlike our belief, more girls than boys were able to buy their textbooks. The BRAC school graduates were better able to buy books than other school graduates. The ability to buy books was significantly less among the recipients of target than non-target households. Assuming that the problems experienced in procuring books during the preceding year would have been the same in the following year, the textbook distribution programme of BRAC appears to play an important role in reducing constraints in buying or procuring textbooks in grade IX.

Table 7. Type of procuring textbooks by the students of grade IX while at grade VIII

Recipients of books	Procuring Textbook by		
	Buying all books	Partially Buying	Other Source
All recipients	81.6	9.7	8.7
Sex			
Male	79.1	10.5	10.5
Female	83.9	8.9	7.1
Graduate			
BRAC	89.4	6.4	4.3
Non-BRAC	80.3	10.2	9.5
Status			
Target	75.3	13.5	11.2
Non-target	84.1	8.2	7.8
N	262	31	28

The demand of textbooks in the study areas is very high. A total of 548 students in both grades received books while 852 students applied for the textbooks. The mean number of applicants was about 25 although, in some libraries, the number of applications exceeded 50. There are however, no application to receive textbooks was found in 4 out of 37 libraries. The reason was that the books were not distributed through libraries but by some members of the NFPE team. In addition of the formal applications, a number of eligible students expressed their interest to receive books from BRAC. According to the library sources, additional 529 students in 28 different library areas (i.e., on average 20 students) requested to get books during 1998.

The need of increasing the number of recipients of textbooks was recognised by most of the committee members and persons familiar with this project. The issue of increased demand was discussed with key informants. Considering the limitation of NFPE in increasing the coverage of distribution, it was felt that an increase of about 40 recipients in each library area would meet the purpose in this year.

#### *d. Recycling used books*

Only a third (35.1%) of the textbook recipients of grade VI refunded all books to the library while nearly half (48.6%) never returned any book they borrowed from BRAC (Table 4). About 16.2% of the recipients refunded a part of the books they received. The mean number of books returned was 4.28 out of a total of 9 books for each recipient. The tendency to refund books is much higher among the girls than boys although more boys than girls returned all of their books. BRAC school graduates are less likely to refund books than non-BRAC graduates. Similarly, the tendency to refund books was higher among the children of non-target than target households.

Only a part of the used books can be re-cycled. In some places, used books along with new books were distributed among the students of grade VI indicating that textbooks were distributed earlier year. The practice of some user fees charged for both new and used books seems unfair. While the amount of user fees can not afford many parents and requested to reduce its in many instances, the students were over charged. In some cases, user fees were charged again in the next year when the recipients were promoted from grade IX to X. Finally, it seems that the community is not adequately informed that BRAC has a textbook distribution project for the poor students in the community.

Table 10. Position in the class when promoted after annual examination

Class Position	When Promoted to	
	Class VII	Class X
1st	0.4	3.7
2nd	---	3.1
3rd	1.9	2.8
4th	1.5	2.8
5th	1.2	2.8
6th	1.5	0.9
7th	1.5	2.5
8th	0.8	0.9
9th	2.3	1.9
10th	1.9	0.9
N	108	152

The position of the textbook recipients when promoted to the next grade is shown in Table 10. Those who promoted to grade X did much better than those promoted to grade VII. While it is difficult to draw any conclusion about their performance, the data at least show the distribution of textbook recipients in by their performance in the last annual examination.

*f. Utilisation of fees*

The book recipients were expected to pay a user fee for each set of books and return their books to the library after one year.

Table 11. Percent of textbook recipients by the library membership and fees

Library factors	Grade		
	Six	Nine	All
Gonokendra Library			
Member (Real)	46.3	62.9	55.5
Member (in paper)	40.9	33.3	36.7
Non-member	12.7	3.7	7.8
Amount of fees paid			
Less	2.3	6.9	---
Exact	59.8	46.7	56.6
More	37.9	46.4	---
Mean amount	56.0	85.0	72.0

--- Not calculated.

Table 11 shows that about 55.5% of the recipients were the real members of the Gonokendra Pathagar and nearly 37% were listed as member after selecting them as book recipients. They were members in paper and never used library to read books or newspapers. The proportion of real member was much higher among the ninth (62.9%) than sixth (46.3%) graders. The collection of user fees varied widely by the NFPE teams and libraries. Table 5 indicates that nearly 38% of the sixth graders and 46.4% of ninth graders had to pay more user fees than expected. The mean amount had been Taka 56 and Taka 85 respectively. On the other hand, paying less than expected was also not uncommon in some areas.

Table 7 indicates that about 57% of recipients paid exact amount of fees as decided by NFPE (Memo, 1997). While Taka 50 was required to pay for a set of books for class VI, nearly 38% of the recipients had to pay more than the specified amount. The mean amount has been Taka 56. Similarly, more than 46% of the recipients of books of class IX paid more money than required and the mean amount was Taka 85. When investigated the reason of over charging user fees, it has been found out that in many cases, the textbook recipients were forced to become members of the library and pay membership dues for one year. As have seen earlier that about 38% of the members of Gonokendra Pathagar were not regular members and most of them visited the Pathagar only once to receive textbooks from the Pathagar. The User fees were deposited to the NFPE team offices.

*g. Problems and issues*

The textbook distribution through *Gonokendra Pathagar* is as innovative and experimental project of BRAC and, therefore it is expected that the library management as well as NFPE staff in the field will face various problems in implementing this project. The investigators of this study have attempted to identify those problems by discussing with key informants such as the librarians, the committee members, school teachers NFPE officials and concern persons in the locality. The most frequently reported problem has been that the providers (libraries or NFPE teams) start distributing books when it is too late.

Table 12. Cumulative waiting time (in month) in procuring textbooks during grade VII by socio-economic status of recipients

Month	Status		All
	Target	Non-target	
January	23.6	28.0	26.8
February	44.9	52.1	50.2
March	64.0	75.4	72.3
April	78.6	86.6	88.1
May	96.6	95.2	95.6
June	100	100	100
July +	3.4	4.7	4.4
N	89	232	321

This is reflected in Table 12. As the academic session begins in January, it is expected that the students of grade IX would receive their textbooks as they did receive their books during grade VIII has there been no book distribution project. Data show that only 26.8% students received their textbooks in January while they were in grade VIII. By February, 50.2% and by March 72.3% students received their book and so on. It is important to note that a significant proportion of students were not able to procure books in the first couple of months in their academic session. As expected, the problem in receiving textbooks has more acute among the children of target than non-target households.

Although NFPE team took the responsibility of distributing the textbooks, an impression has been created that either they do not have time to perform the job or are not interested in doing it. The

libraries and the field staff of NFPE have nothing to do about this problem and probably the problem is beyond control of NFPE management in Dhaka if the books are not available in the market. One option the NFPE management can think of is to permit the team offices to buy books from the local markets by themselves and distribute them immediately. This will reduce the time required to procure books in Dhaka and shipping these to respective team offices and ultimately to libraries.

The second major problem has been the lack of supply of adequate set (or number) of textbooks from the NFPE team office. This problem arises not only because the demand of textbook has been very high but because the team offices has provided too little (two or three sets in some cases) books for distribution while it was announced that 40 sets of textbooks would be distributed. This issue has created credibility problem of the Gonokendra Pathagar among the locality.

There are a number of other problems emerged often in frequently from the discussion with key informants. Inappropriate selection of textbooks for grade LX is one of those. The demand was reported much more for humanities textbooks than others such as science and commerce groups. In many cases, the sets are incomplete i.e. some important books are found missing. It is, therefore recommended that the selection of books should be made based on the requisition of textbooks from the field.

In a number of cases, the problem lies within the book distribution committee. The librarians are not a member of the committee and not adequately informed about the book distribution system. The committee rarely meets or follows the instruction of NFPE in selecting the recipients. The committee members have their own personal interest and it is reported that in a number of cases, the librarians were forced to distribute textbooks to students who could not be eligible to be the recipients according to the selection procedure. It is, therefore, suggested that the selection criteria should be strictly followed and the eligibility of the applicants should be verified by the librarian or NFPE team members. In some cases, the librarians had to distribute books to the students of grade X.

While discussing with the key informants of the community, a number of important suggestions have come out. The most relevant has been the selection criterion. It was felt that the preference for the BRAC school graduate should be dropped because most of BRAC graduates who continue in high schools are not the children of poor households. The preference should rather be given to poor and meritorious students of the community.

The list of textbooks should be broadened to include Grammar books and guidebooks or notebooks for some children. Also, NFPE should think of including stationaries such as exercise book, pencils, etc. in the list as a large number of parents could not afford to buy those stationaries needed. Also, after promoting to the next grade, they should be given books again for the new grade.

The textbooks should not be recycled. The distribution of recycled books often creates problems as the students express their unhappiness to accept used books. Recycling does not create an image of NFPE as an unbiased provider of textbooks even among the poor. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the user fees should be reduced to affordable levels.



## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The textbook distribution project of BRAC appears to play an important role in keeping many poor children in schools. The profile of the textbook recipients shows that their parents were largely illiterate and poor. A large proportion of the recipients were landless and about half had only marginal amount of land with the mean amount of land had been only 84 decimals.

Only a smaller group of BRAC graduates received textbooks indicating that a very few BRAC school graduates has been enrolled in higher grades in schools. Girls were given preference over boys. As most of BRAC graduates who continue in high schools are not the children of poor households, it was felt that the preference for the BRAC school graduate should be dropped.

In many cases, the distribution was carried out by the NFPE teams itself and not by the libraries or its committees. In other cases, it was reported that the committee has inappropriately distributed textbooks. It is, therefore, suggested that such complain should be verified by the librarians or NFPE team members.

The libraries or NFPE teams take much longer time then expected to distribute books. It is suggested that the team offices be permitted to buy books from the local shops and distribute them immediately. Inadequate supply of textbooks is a common problem that already created credibility problem of the Gonokendra Pathagar among the community.

The demand for humanities textbooks was higher than science and commerce groups. In many cases, the sets are incomplete. Grammar books and guidebooks for some children should also be provided. The selection of books should be made based on the requirements of textbooks from the field.

The used books found were in good condition and could be re-cycled. Still, it is suggested that the textbooks should not be recycled. The distribution of recycled books often creates problems as the students express their unhappiness to accept used books. Recycling does not create an image of NFPE as an unbiased provider of textbooks even among the poor.

Charging user fees was unequal among the NFPE teams and libraries. In many cases, the students had to pay more user fees than expected. Charging the same user fees for both new and used books seems unfair. The rates were not affordable to many parents. It is, thus, expected that the user fees should be reduced to affordable levels.

The Gonokendra Pathagar should be used as the only channel to distribute textbooks in its catchment villages. The librarians should be re-oriented about the programme and to play the key role in selecting the recipients.

The textbook distribution to the poor is well received by the community. The demand of the expansion of this project is very high and, thus, NFPE management should not only continue and expand this project but also put considerable inputs in improving the project.

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