

Education Analytics Service (EAS)

Non-State Actors in Basic Education:

Bangladesh Case Study

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List of Acronyms

ADB	Asian Development Bank
ASC	Annual School Census
BRAC	(formerly) Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GPS	Government Primary School
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NGO	Non-Government Organisation
PEDP	Primary Education Development Plan
RNGPS	Registered Non-Government Primary School
ROSC	Reaching Out-of-School Children
SLIP	School Level Improvement Plan
SMC	School Management Committee
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Science and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1 Introduction

Over the last two decades, sustained efforts by the international community have led to considerable growth in access to education for children across the globe, particularly in low income countries. Between 1990 and 2011, the World Bank reported an increase in the net enrolment rate in low-income countries from 55 percent to 80 percent, and an increase in the primary school completion rate from 46 percent to 68 percent (World Bank, 2014). These gains have been a result of increased investments by donors and domestic governments in the education sector, backed by more effective education policies. However, despite this positive trend, 60 million primary school children in developing countries remain out of school and many of those who attend school are not achieving the minimum standards in literacy and numeracy (Steer, 2015). In order to close this gap, UNESCO estimates that the cost of delivering good quality universal education from pre-school to junior secondary school by 2030 in low-income countries will be approximately \$10.6 billion, which is more than four times the current levels of commitments by international donors at \$2.3 billion (Steer, 2015).

The pressure will be predominantly on donors and domestic governments to fill the fiscal gap. However, there is a mix of non-state actors (including religious and charitable organisations, private foundations, and for-profit and not-for-profit providers) already active in the education sector who provide an additional source of finance in the education sector. The growth in private education providers over the last two decades is thought to have contributed to the increase in access to primary education in developing countries, where the percentage of students attending private primary schools has doubled from 11 to 22 percent (World Bank, 2014).

While the scale of private contribution to education and its impact is not clear, the growing presence of non-state actors in the education sector is becoming an important issue for donors and governments. Much debate centers on education as a human right, where education is seen as a public good and should be the responsibility of the state. The provision of private education raises concerns over issues of equity, quality and ownership. On the other hand, other commentators see the increasing role of non-state actors in education service delivery as an opportunity to increase access and quality through improved interactions between government and the private sector. Recent studies have shown that some countries have been successful in providing equitable access to quality education for all children (both in public and private schools) by increasing oversight and coordination with the private sector, underpinned by a strong regulatory environment (World Bank, 2014).

1.1 Typologies of state and non-state actors

Studies looking at the role of non-state actors in education is complicated by the complexity of interaction between public and private providers, including funding arrangements, oversight, ownership and management. For example, many non-state providers are publically funded, while some are not funded by the state but fall under the management of the government ministry of education. There are private schools that are not-for-profit and those that charge a fee. In addition, the provision of formal versus non-formal schooling further blurs the distinction between what is public and what is private. For example, both the

government and the private sector offer non-formal schooling to children in rural and marginalized areas.¹

Given the lack of clarity around the role of state and non-state actors, Steer et al. (2015) offers a framework based on a continuum of provision and financing (Figure 1). Instead of classifying schools on an 'either/or' dichotomy, they found it more useful to identify the types of schools based on the varying degrees of relationship with the state and the financial incentive of the provider (for profit/not for profit). They therefore, propose eight different categories of schools based on a combination of three separate criteria: fee paying/non-fee paying; state/non-state financed; state/non-state provided. State provision is defined by the level of management and oversight by the state, from schools that are fully state-run (e.g. government school) to those that are partially-administered by the state (e.g. community schools). School financing varies according to the type of arrangement with the state, ranging from fully-funded schools to those that receive partial support in the form of subsidized teacher salaries, infrastructure or land. In recent years, there is a growing number of schools that are funded by the private sector, for example through impact bonds, philanthropic funds or private investments. These schools are further divided based on whether they are driven by social or financial gains.

This case study will refer to Steer's typology as a starting point in assessing role and impact of non-state providers in Bangladesh.

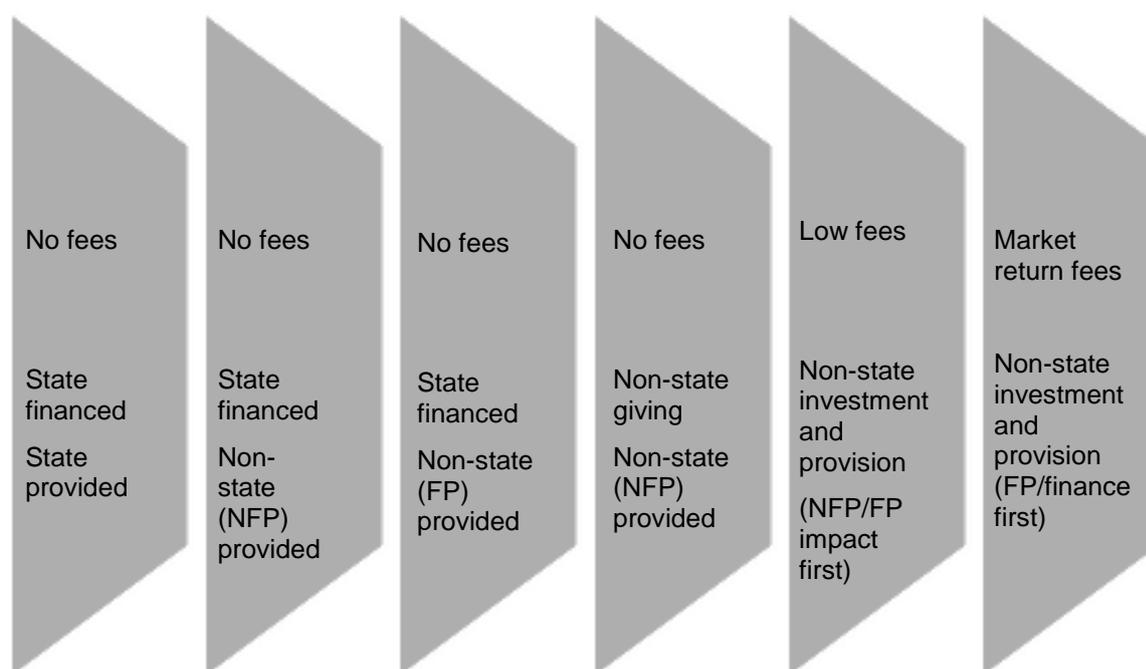


Figure 1: Steer's Typology of State and Non-state actors on a Continuum

Adapted from Steer et al., (2015)

¹ 'Formal education' refers to traditional schooling, often implemented by the government but can also be provided by non-state actors; 'non-formal' education is used to describe education activities (usually part-time) implemented by a range of providers including NGOs, community groups and faith-based organisations. Both formal and non-formal education programs can be funded by the state or from private sources.

2 Education context in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has seen impressive gains in the education sector over the last two decades, supported by strong national policies and effective education programs. To date, Bangladesh has achieved over 90% net enrolment for primary school aged children and its schools have achieved gender parity (Steer, 2014). Some observers have noted that this achievement in the education sector has been even more impressive given the challenging political and fiscal environment in Bangladesh over the last two decades (Steer, 2014).

However, the rapid expansion in the education sector, which provided greater access for primary school children in Bangladesh, did not translate into a better quality education and poor and vulnerable students continue to be left out or left behind in the public education system (Sommers, 2010). Data suggests that more than 25 percent of primary-age students drop out before completing primary school and 10-12 percent repeat each year (Steer, 2014). The number of out-of-school children is also high, at 16 percent of all the primary-school-age population (Steer, 2014). This figure is almost three times for children from poor households (Steer, 2014).

Recognising this gap, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has shifted its focus from access to quality through an introduction of a policy in 2013 to nationalize more than 26,000 non-government schools under its management in an attempt to streamline service delivery and quality (Steer, 2014). But with just 2.4 percent of GDP expenditure on education, Bangladesh remains on the bottom tier of government spending for education globally, with a declining allocation to primary education and pre-primary education in favour of secondary education (MoFAN, 2011)². Even a commitment by the government to increase education spending to 2.8 percent of GDP is unlikely to be enough to address persistent issues in quality and equitable access. Given the fiscal constraints of the government and reduced donor funding to the sector (notably, withdrawal from the Netherlands), the GoB will need to look at different ways of financing the education sector from non-traditional sources.

3 State and Non-state Actors in Education in Bangladesh

Bangladesh has a long tradition of non-state providers in education, whose contribution to growth in the education sector is significant. While the majority of primary school children are currently served by the public system, many, particularly those from rural and marginalized communities are served by non-state providers.

Bangladesh has a complex system of education providers and funding sources including those funded by the government; private fee charging schools; non-formal schools; and religious schools (Sommers, 2013). The 2012 Annual Primary School Census (ASC) reported 13 types of education providers in Bangladesh (GoB-MoPME, 2012). Seven of these are managed by the Directorate of Primary Education (e.g. Government Primary Schools and Registered Non-Government Primary schools), and six are managed by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (e.g. Experimental and Community schools) and the Ministry of Education (e.g. primary and high madrasas). Based on Steer's typology, it is not clear in the census data what type of educational provision or financing is provided by the government to the 13 schools under its management.

To date, Bangladesh has more than 100,000 public and private schools providing both formal and non-formal education (Steer, 2014). Of all primary and pre-primary students who attend school, the majority (78 percent) are in the formal education system through two types of schools Government Primary Schools (GPS) and Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS) which were nationalized under the formal education system in

² The Education for All target is for countries to spend 6% of GDP on education expenditure.

2013 (Steer, 2014). The data on primary-school aged children attending non-formal schools is unclear, but the estimate is roughly 9 percent (Sommers, 2013). The statistics for Quomi madrassas³ is even more unreliable, with estimates ranging between hundreds of thousands to a million children (mostly boys) attending (Sommers, 2013). There is also an increasing number of private schools not captured in the 2012 ASC. A separate study estimated an increase in the number of enrolments in low-cost private schools from four percent in 2007 to 9.4 percent in 2011 (Sommers, 2013).

The lack of official information on these and other education providers reveal an incomplete picture of the education system in Bangladesh, however, data from a 2009 study (cited in Sommers, 2013) is useful in understanding the distribution of rural primary school students. The authors found that 57 percent of rural primary school students attended government schools, 20 percent at registered non-government primary schools, one percent at community schools, 10 percent at non-formal schools, three percent at private schools and eight percent at Aliya madrassas (Sommers, 2013).

A stock take of recent literature on non-state education providers identified eight types of primary schools in Bangladesh, described below. Table 1 classifies the eight types of primary schools based on Steer's typology.

Table 1: State and non-state providers in Bangladesh based on Steer's typology

		Provision	
		State	Non-state
Finance	State	Government Primary Schools Registered Non-government Primary Schools	Community schools Aliya Madrassas
	Non-state	Reaching Out-of-School Children	BRAC Quomi Madrassas Low-cost Private Schools (low fees)

3.1 Government Primary School

In 2012, the ASC reported that there were 37,672 Government Primary Schools (GPS) in Bangladesh, which represented the largest number of primary schools (36 percent) in the country. These schools served approximately 10.7 million students, or 57 percent of all students enrolled in primary school. Students attending GPS are usually from a predetermined catchment area, although students from outside the area are sometimes allowed to enroll (Sommers, 2010). Historically, GPS covered classes from grade one to five, however, in 2011, the government rolled out pre-primary classes for five year old students in all government schools. In 2012, approximately 50 percent of pre-school children were enrolled, and in 2013 the Department of Primary Education estimated this figure had increased to 67 percent (UNESCO, 2015).

Government Primary Schools are funded by the state and administered by the Directorate of Primary Education. Available data show that public spending per student was second highest for GPS, behind spending on primary grades attached to high madrassas, but double that of RNGPS (MoFA, 2011). These schools receive funding from various

³ Quomi and Aliya madrassas offer an Islamic-based curriculum. Aliya madrassas are registered with the government and are regulated by the Bangladesh Madrassa Education Board, while Quomi madrassas are unregistered and unregulated.

government sources including the Primary Education Development Project (PEDP I, II and III), which is a joint initiative of the GoB and a consortium of bilateral and multilateral donors. The program funds infrastructure development, teacher training, books and student learning measures (Sommers, 2010). Other government funding for GPS include the School-Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) administered by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) which provides teaching aids and sporting materials. In addition, government schools are eligible to receive infrastructure funding from the Local Government Engineering Department.

Students go to school for free and receive standardised textbooks distributed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board. However, families are responsible for other educational costs such as examination fees, school supplies and uniforms (Sommers, 2010). For those from poor rural households, the government provides a stipend of Tk. 100/month under the Primary Education Stipend Program (Sommers, 2010).

All teachers and school administrators are government employees with full public servant benefits (Sommers, 2010). Available data indicates that GPS teachers are paid better than RNGPS teachers (MoFAN, 2011). Bangladesh does not have a systematic pre-service teacher training program, so teachers are hired based on their performance on a standardized written and oral exam (Sommers, 2010). Once they enter the public service, teachers receive basic in-service and subject-based training at the Upazila Resource Centre one to three times a year (Sommers, 2010). Teachers in GPS are more likely to have the minimum qualifications (high school completion plus one year of teacher training) than teachers at RNGPS, 80 percent versus 75 percent respectively (UNESCO, 2015). Teacher absenteeism and lateness is a concern, with recent surveys reporting an absenteeism rate of 16 percent for GPS and 11 percent of RNGPS on any given day (MoFA, 2011). Up to 47 percent of teachers in GPS are late at any one time compared to 50 percent in RNGPS (UNESCO, 2015).

Student assessments are conducted three times annually at each grade level, and a terminal exam is administered at the end of Grade 5 before students can graduate to secondary school (Sommers, 2010). The ASC reported the overall primary school completion rate was 73.8 percent and a 97.35 percent pass rate in 2012 (UNESCO, 2015). The government also administers the National Student Assessment to measure student learning outcomes at grade three and grade five in Bangla and mathematics. Results revealed that GPS students performed better than students from other government-funded schools such as RNGPS, but not compared to students from non-formal schools such as BRAC schools (MoFAN, 2011).

3.2 Registered Non-Government Primary Schools

Traditionally, Registered Non-Government Primary Schools (RNGPS) were established privately or by communities. However, in 2013, all RNGPS became nationalized into the formal education system and received government funding and oversight as a result. This policy was largely seen as an attempt by the GoB to fast-track enrolment to meet education for all goals (Sommers, 2013). Official statistics show that RNGPS represented the second largest (21 percent) number of government-funded primary schools serving over four million (22 percent) primary schools students in Bangladesh (ASC, 2012).

While RNGPS receives government funding, it is much lower than GPS, and is mostly in the form of subventions for teachers (MoFAN, 2011). The government covers 90 percent of teacher salaries and teacher training at the Primary Training Institute (Sommers, 2013). Unlike GPS teachers, RNGPS teachers are government employees but not considered civil servants with the attached benefits (Sommers, 2013). The ratio of male to female teachers has not reached parity in RNGPS, where only 34 percent are female (MoFAN, 2011). Teachers in RNGPS are also less likely to have the minimum qualification compared to their GPS counterparts (UNESCO, 2015).

Teachers are hired at the upazila, rather than district level by the local School Management Committee (SMC). The SMC is made up of mostly parents and local community members and serves an administrative function, mostly in the selection of teachers and approval of teacher pay and leave requests, but the the upazila education office has overarching responsibility in this process (Sommers, 2013). The formation of SMCs was part of the government's effort to decentralise education administration to the local level to increase local accountability and oversight for primary education services. This resulted in the proliferation of SMCs in GPS and RNGPS (up to 99% of all GPS and RNGPS had an SMC) and an increased level of SMC engagement due to improved government training under the School Level Improvement Plan. However, their effectiveness in decision-making and oversight in school management is still questionable (MoFAN, 2011). In some schools, this reflected the limited number of times SMCs met, while in others, SMCs have reportedly mis-targeted the allocation of student stipends choosing to maximize the number of children receiving payments rather than the poorest 40 percent of households in their catchment area (MoFAN, 2011).

Students who attend RNGPS do not pay tuition fees and receive free government textbooks. Similar to students in GPS, RNGPS students from rural and marginalized households are also eligible for a stipend from the government. Interestingly, a report in 2006 by Oxford Policy Management revealed that one in six households had to pay to receive their stipend and 46 percent said that they had to make an informal payment to get a stipend card (MoFAN, 2011). This was reported to be more common in RNGPS than GPS (MoFAN, 2011). Students at RNGPS are also subjected to the same assessment process as their GPS counterparts. Reports on learning outcomes suggest that students in RNGPS lag behind those in GPS (UNESCO, 2015).

3.3 Community Schools

Community schools are owned by the community and receive some funding from the state. Typically, the community donates the land and initial start up costs, the government then provides additional financing for building costs and the hire of a local teacher. As such, these schools are often referred to as 'third tier' government funded schools where there is minimal government financial support and oversight (Sommers, 2013). According to the ASC, there were 1,605 community schools in Bangladesh in 2012, serving close to 260,000 students, which is less than 1.5 percent of all primary school students (ASC, 2012).

Community schools are often established in poor rural areas, underserved by the government with very little resources. Teachers are employed by the government, but are not classified as civil servants. They are the least well-paid of all teachers in government-funded schools. Teachers in community schools are also less qualified, where just under half are trained (Steer, 2014).

Similar to other government-funded schools, students at community schools receive government issued textbooks and do not pay tuition fees. Students from vulnerable households are also eligible to receive a government stipend (MoFAN, 2011). There is no data in the available literature on student learning outcomes for community schools.

3.4 BRAC Schools

BRAC schools are a well-established system that provides non-formal basic education to out-of-school children since 1985 (MoFAN, 2011). According to the 2012 ASC, BRAC is the largest NGO provider of non-formal education in the country, serving over 270,000 (1.4 percent) primary school students in over 10,000 (10 percent) schools. However, BRAC reports a much higher figure of over 31,000 schools and almost one million students (BRAC, n.d). Interestingly, it has been observed that BRAC has been finding it difficult to identify sufficiently large groups of 8-10 year old out of school children, which could indicate that children are increasingly attending government-funded schools or increasingly finding their way into the madrassa system (MoFAN, 2011).

BRAC schools target poor marginalized areas that are underserved by the public education system, by providing education to poor students who have dropped out of school, ethnic minorities, and children who are vulnerable or excluded from the formal education system due to special needs and other reasons (Sommers, 2010). Priority is also given to girls, who make up 65 percent of students in BRAC schools (Sommers, 2010).

BRAC schools do not receive financial support from the government and is primarily funded by international donors. Most of the schools are managed by the NGO directly, while others are managed by smaller local NGOs in collaboration with BRAC (Sommers, 2010). Supervisory staff from regional BRAC offices has regular oversight of the schools, and each school has a parent-teacher committee that monitors the schools daily activities (Sommers, 2010). BRAC schools generally follow the national curriculum and use government textbooks supplemented by BRAC created learning materials (Sommers, 2010). BRAC schools have single classrooms often in a rented house, run over one session a day in the morning and offer a four year primary education program (MoFAN, 2011). As such, these schools have low operating costs and are generally more efficient than GPS and RNGPS, with per student costs ranging between US\$21-31 per child per year compared to US\$42 for GPS students (MoFAN, 2011).

Teachers are typically locally hired women who have a minimum of 10 years schooling. BRAC provides pre-service training which consists of a two-week course, and monthly training courses for all teachers (Sommers, 2010). BRAC teachers receive a monthly salary of Tk 1,500, which is similar to that of private school teachers but less than their government-funded counterparts (Sommers, 2010). While BRAC teachers are less qualified than their GPS counterparts, they are perceived to be better teachers due to several factors: they receive monthly training to update their skills, they are well supported by BRAC, they are from the same community as their students and therefore more accountable to students' families, and they are more motivated because of their status as teachers in the community (Dang, 2011).

BRAC schools have a remarkable low drop out and high completion rate. This is in part due to flexibility in the school calendar, which is set in collaboration with local communities to respond to seasonal demand when children may need to help around the house or in the fields, especially during harvest time (Sommers, 2010). In 2011, BRAC students achieved a pass rate of 99.83 percent in the Primary Education Termination exam compared to the national average of 97.26 percent (Sommers, 2010). Around 98 percent of BRAC primary school students transfer to secondary school (BRAC, n.d). Despite this rate, there is some concern that students from BRAC schools may find it difficult to adjust and transition to the formal education system. One study in 2007 found that once in secondary school, BRAC students do not appear to have a learning advantage over students educated in other schools (Dang, 2011). BRAC has established a pre-primary program in recent years, where it works closely with the government to ensure children who complete pre-primary education at a BRAC school gain admission to GPS or RNGPS. Each year, 99 percent of pre-primary school students transfer to government primary schools (BRAC, n.d).

Since 1985, the BRAC system has proven to be a cost effective model of education provision in terms of its scale and reach, by providing non-formal education that takes less time and achieves greater learning outcomes. This is due to its innovative delivery of basic education services in rural and out of reach communities, based on small classroom sizes, learner-centred teaching methods, flexible school calendar, local teachers who are well-supported and accountable to their community, and a feedback mechanism that ensure students understand the lessons before moving on (Sommers, 2010).

3.5 Reaching Out-of-School Children

In 2005, the Government of Bangladesh established the Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC) project and brought it under the formal school system based on the successful

BRAC model. Similar to BRAC schools, the ROSC project target rural disadvantaged children who would not normally have access to formal government schools. Since that time, ROSC expanded to 15,000 schools, serving 549,000 children (UNESCO, 2015). In 2012, the ASC reported that there were less than 6,000 ROSC centres educating 174,000 students or less than one percent of all primary school enrolments (ASC, 2012).

ROSC schools are funded by the World Bank (\$60 million) and administered by the Department of Primary Education. However, a Centre Management Committee conducts the daily management of the school including establishment of the school, hiring of teachers, service providers and utilisation of educational grants (Dang, 2011). ROSC schools have one teacher in a single classroom of around 30 children, which suggests these schools would have a lower operating cost per student than GPS. ROSC teachers are paid six times less than their GPS counterparts (Dang, 2011). Similar to students in government-funded schools, ROSC students receive a stipend based on school enrolment and performance. In 2012, students from ROSC schools achieved a pass rate of 73 percent in the national primary school examination, which is less than students from other government-funded schools and BRAC schools (UNESCO, 2015).

A study by Dang et al. (2011) found ROSC schools increased enrolment in ROSC areas and students in ROSC schools perform as well as non-ROSC schools in raising test scores. They also found that the presence of ROSC schools may increase the efficiency of non-ROSC schools in the same areas due to increased competition for student enrolment (Dang, 2011).

3.6 Private Schools⁴

Private schools in Bangladesh are highly diverse and unregulated by the government. As of 2010, all private schools are expected to teach the national curriculum and as such receive free textbooks from the government (Sommers, 2013). A national study in 2011 estimated private schools accounted for about 9.4 percent of total primary school enrollment (Steer, 2014). Private schools are thought to be rapidly expanding in urban and semi-urban areas where there have been increases in the population growth rate. The establishment of these schools have filled the gaps where government have been slow to build new schools, thus contributing to the enrolment rate in these areas (Steer, 2014). Most of the private schools in urban areas are English medium schools, while low-fee charging schools in rural areas are more likely to be Bangla medium schools (Sommers, 2013).

Private schools are generally found to be comparatively more expensive than other non-state provided schools, attract children of educated parents and do not show any significant difference in outcomes (Steer, 2014). Anecdotal evidence suggests parents were more likely to send boys than girls to private schools due to the perception that boys will look after their parents in later life (Sommers, 2010). Parents also felt that private schools were more accountable because their salaries were being paid by private tuition fees (Sommers, 2010). Teachers in private schools are generally paid low salaries which is comparable to teachers in BRAC schools (Sommers, 2010). Therefore, many supplement their income with private tutoring or other work (Sommers, 2010).

A case study of private schools in Dimla upazila by Sommers (2013) reported that the oldest private school there was borne out of a need to establish a quality education for local civil servants because the quality of the local government school was too low. The local council donated land and a former government building, while other influential members of the community (including a former national minister) donated funds for the establishment of the school. While the growth of private schools in urban and semi-urban areas seems to fill a

⁴ There is no clear distinction in the available literature between private schools and low-cost private schools, although private schools in rural areas are often referred to as low-cost private schools.

gap where government services are lacking, this example illustrates that the demand for private schools in rural areas is due to a perceived lack of quality in government schools.

3.7 Aliya Madrassas⁵

The Madrassa Education Board was established in 1979 within the Ministry of Education to oversee the integration of madrassas into the formal education system in an effort to improve education quality delivered by madrassas (Sommers, 2013). Aliya madrassas are 'reformed' madrassas registered with the government and as such receive some financial support in terms of textbooks and teachers salaries. In 2012, the ASC reported that there were just over 2,000 stand-alone primary madrassas operating across Bangladesh, serving over 280,000 (1.5 percent) students; and 4,800 primary grades attached to high madrassas serving over 762,000 or roughly four percent of all primary school students (ASC, 2012). The reform of these madrassas has been seen as an opportunity to expand access to education for girls. Almost half of the students enrolled at these madrassas are girls, however, there is still a gender disparity in the proportion of female teachers which is 16.9 percent in stand-alone primary madrassas and 12.9 percent in primary madrassas attached to high madrassas (ASC, 2012). All students attending Aliya madrassas have the opportunity to attend GPS and RNGPS in their catchment area. However, anecdotal evidence from a recent case study revealed that one reason why families tend to send their children to madrassas is so that they could learn about Islam (Sommers, 2013).

Teachers in Aliya madrassas do not receive any training from the government, although their salaries are subsidized at the same level as RNGPS teachers (Sommers, 2013). Aliya students do not receive the monthly stipend from the government, but rely on private donations from the community, particularly those who are poor or orphaned (Sommers, 2013). As with other government-funded schools, textbooks are provided by the government for all secular subjects, while the Madrassa Education Board provides religious textbooks (Sommers, 2013). All Aliya primary students sit the national terminal examination inline with their government counterparts. Several studies have found that Aliya madrassas typically attract lower performing students, and those who graduate from madrassas score significantly lower in secondary school than their peers from secular institutions (Sommers, 2013).

3.8 Quomi Madrassas

Unlike Aliya madrassas, Quomi madrassas are unreformed and unregistered, therefore, they operate outside the formal education system with virtually no government oversight. There are no official statistics on Quomi madrassas and the number of Quomi madrassas operating in Bangladesh is largely unknown with estimates ranging from 5,230 to 66,300 (Sommers, 2013). The Quomi Madrassa Board, which represents some madrassas, report the number to be around 15,530 (Sommers, 2013). One study estimated that Quomi madrassas account for only 1.9 percent of all primary school enrolments in 2009 (cited in Sommers, 2013). Ninety-one percent of students are boys, mostly from poor families or orphaned, and up to 90 percent of teachers are male (Sommers, 2013).

Up to 85 percent of Quomi madrassas are residential, offering free food and board to its students (Sommers, 2013). Funding is provided by the community and other domestic or foreign sources (Sommers, 2013). Twice a year, students collect donations of rice and money from the community and use this to pay for teachers' salaries, which is around Tk. 2900/month (Sommers, 2013). The Quomi Madrassa Board has an oversight function, which includes annual audits, textbook production and limited teacher training (Sommers, 2013).

⁵ In some studies, Aliya madrassas are also classified as Ebtedayee madrassas at the primary level. The ASC collects data on both Ebtedayee madrassas and primary grades attached to High School madrassas.

Students who attend these institutions are not separated into grade levels, but follow one of three subject-based streams: Quran memorization; Arabic language and; Islamic rules (Sommers, 2013). Instruction is based on rote learning and classes run all day from 4am until 9:30pm, interspersed with time for prayer and other study (Sommers, 2013). There is no existing data in the available literature on student learning outcomes at Quomi madrassas. However, given that Quomi madrassas primarily focus on a religious-based education, it is possible that Quomi students do not graduate with the knowledge and skills similar to those from secular institutions.

4 Policy Considerations

Bangladesh has made considerable efforts in improving education access and quality over the last two decades, which has led to remarkable growth in the number of students enrolled in primary schools. However, the education system is still out of reach of many children, despite a strong presence of NGO and non-formal schools filling the gap in rural and marginalized areas, and challenges remain in achieving better education outcomes. These quality and equity challenges are complicated by a complex system of multi-tiered state and non-state funded education providers, which have varying degrees of funding support and oversight from the government. There has been some success in regulating the diverse system of education providers through strong policy initiatives and funding commitments by the government, such as the nationalization of Registered Non-Government Primary Schools in 2013, increasing the qualification of teachers to a certificate level, and introduction of a national curriculum.

It is recognised that current financial commitments by the GoB is unable to meet the demands for improved education equity and quality. There is an opportunity for the government to capitalize on the strong networks of non-state providers in Bangladesh to improve education service delivery that is more effective and efficient. According to an ADB-UNICEF (2011) report on public-private partnerships in education for the poor, the state can successfully work with the private sector by implementing well-designed policy and regulatory frameworks to support and monitor service provisions by non-state actors. This case study identified various conditions that can foster effective public-private partnerships in better education service delivery, particularly for the poor.

Strong legal and regulatory frameworks set up and implemented by the government can encourage participation by the private sector and help control the quality of education service delivery by non-state providers. In Bangladesh, strong policy frameworks have been implemented to bring RNGPS into the formal system, as well as encourage the registration of Aliya madrassas. In this way, the government has used incentive-based regulation to improve delivery standards of schools outside the government system by providing support such as teacher salaries and training, free government textbooks, student stipends and infrastructure funding.

Decentralisation of education funding and management is important for better education service delivery through improved local accountability and control of delivery standards. For example, funding through stipends that is administered at the community level with oversight by the local education office is disbursed more quickly, is better targeted to meet the needs of those who are most vulnerable, and has less of a chance for leakage due to increased accountability to the community. Evidence from BRAC schools also suggests that an active and engaged community can have a significant impact on student attendance and learning

outcomes. Similarly, an effective School Management Committee, which oversees the daily management of the school, provides greater control over quality standards such as the hiring of teachers.

Innovation by non-state actors can help improve quality and learning outcomes. This is supported by findings by the ADB and UNICEF in their report on public-private partnerships in education. While government schools adopt a rote learning approach, BRAC schools use teaching methods that are learner-centred and integrate song, dance and rhyme. BRAC also produces its own supplementary curriculum and learning materials to support a “joyful classroom” environment. Student assessments are structured in a way that provides feedback to teachers on student progress that ensures students understand a lesson before moving on. BRAC graduates achieve better results than their GPS and RNGPS counterparts. The BRAC model also works well because it supports a flexible schedule that is responsive to the seasons, where students may be required to help in the home or in the field. This approach has contributed to the low drop out and high completion rates for BRAC students.

Locally-hired teachers also contribute to improved learning outcomes. Teachers in BRAC schools who are hired from within their own communities, report feeling motivated and empowered due to their status in the community. Teacher satisfaction reduces the likelihood of teacher absenteeism and leads to better teacher-student engagement (BRAC teachers reportedly do not use corporal punishment like their counterparts in GPS and RNGPS). Teachers who are hired locally are also more accountable to parents for their children's learning.

NGO and non-formal schools are more cost effective than state-funded schools. BRAC schools are taught in single classroom, often in a rented house, offering an accelerated four year primary school program. While schools such as BRAC and the ROSC project have been able to fill the gap where government schools cannot meet the demand for education, particularly in rural and marginalized areas, it is not a sustainable solution. It is still up to the government to ensure policies and adequate funding is in place to provide basic education that is affordable and high quality. A study by Steer et al. (2014) found that even though the GoB adopts a pro-poor policy in the allocation of resources, this has not translated into more equitable or quality education for vulnerable children. They suggested several measure to address this including an increase in public spending on education, decentralisation of financing to the local level and reform of the current stipend program to encourage better student performance.

Strong NGO-government collaboration can lead to better outcomes for students from non-state funded schools, particularly those from non-formal institutions. While there is a need for the government to encourage greater integration of non-government funded schools into the formal education system through more effective policies and practices, the onus is also on non-state actors to ensure their students are recognised with the same educational qualifications and educational outcomes as those in publically funded schools, particularly for those who graduate from non-formal institutions. BRAC has been proactive in engaging with the government to ensure their students who complete an accelerated four-year primary program are adequately trained to undertake the Year 5 terminal examination in order to transfer into government high schools. The NGO has also signed an agreement with the government for pre-primary students in BRAC schools to be guaranteed a place in a GPS once they graduate. There are other opportunities for collaboration, one of which is the

sharing of innovative practices which BRAC has been so successful in implementing in its schools.

Shared and transparent data is necessary for improving accountability in the education system. This case study has found that data on non-state providers in the Bangladesh education system is unreliable and incomplete and where official statistics do exist, it is often contradicted by other independent studies. Quality data that is collected and shared publically can be used to make better assessments about education spending and learning outcomes and inform future policy interventions. This will require close cooperation between government ministries, the Madrassa Education Board and the NGO sector.

5 Conclusion

This case study has found that while non-state providers have been able to fill a gap to help meet demand in the education sector, the responsibility falls on the Government of Bangladesh to implement a sound policy framework backed by sustained financial commitments to ensure quality standards of delivery in education for all children. There is a need for greater collaboration between the government, Madrassa system, NGO and private providers in the education sector to overcome the challenges of providing equitable access and quality in education.

There is much to be learned from the health sector in Bangladesh where there is evidence of strong government-NGO coordination in the delivery of public health services (Wild, 2012). The government has oversight over the coordination and regulation of NGO activities with government policies. This in turn led to greater alignment of services provided by NGOs and the government to ensure resources were allocated where they were needed most (Wild, 2012). Similarly, greater coordination at the local level between the government and NGOs, particularly in areas where the government has limited capacity, has allowed innovative pilot programs to be scaled up with government funding (Wild, 2012).

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