Laws & Policies, Existing Interventions and Scope of Scalability to Prevent School Dropouts: Situation Analysis of Bangladesh

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Acronyms

BALIKA – Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents

BASE – Bielefeld Academic Search Engine

BBS – Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics

BNFE – Bureau of Non-Formal Education

BRP – Bhasantek Rehabilitation Project

COVID – Coronavirus disease

CPEMU – Compulsory Primary Education Monitoring Unit

DCHR – Development of Children at High Risk

DPE – Directorate of Primary Education

FFE – Food for Education

FSP – Female Secondary School Stipend Project

GA – Grant and Allowance

GAGE - Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence

GEP – Girls' Education Program

GOB – Government of Bangladesh

ICT – Information and Communication Technologies

IMED – Implementation Monitoring and Evaluation Division

INGO – International Non-Governmental Organization

LP – The Literacy Program

MOE – Ministry of Education

NEP – National Educational Policy

NFE – Non-Formal Education

NFPE – The Non-Formal Primary Education

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NPA – National Plan of Action

NSPDL – North South Property Development Limited

OOSC – Out-Of-School Children

PEDP – Primary Education Development Programme

PESP – Primary Education Stipend Programme

PLCEHD – Post Literacy and Continuing Education for Human Development Project

PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

ROSC – Reaching Out of School Children

SC – Scheduled Castes

SCEP – Slum Children Education Project

SEDP – Secondary Education Development Programme

SEQAEP – Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project

SMCDP – Slum Mother & Children Development Project

SFP – School Feeding Programme

SMC – School Managing Committees

ST – Scheduled Tribes

TEC – Training-cum-Education Centre for Destitute Girl Children Project

TQI – Teaching Quality Improvement

UNICEF – United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund

WFP – World Food Programme

YIC – Youth Information Centres

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Executive Summary

Bangladesh has over 160 million population and 40% of the population is made up of more than 64 million children. Despite efforts to enhance access to education in Bangladesh, over seven-tenths of out-of-school children (OOSC) – many children between the ages of lower and upper secondary — are not enrolled in school. Children who live in Dhaka and Chattogram make up about half of all children who drop out of school, and among them, most are urban dwellers. Bangladesh's persistent rise in school dropout rates has pushed the country back into a broad range of social issues, such as child labour, child marriage and drug abuse.

In Bangladesh, COVID-related school closures began on March 17, 2020, and have continued into 2021, affecting close to one million teachers and 38 million students. As UNICEF reported, almost 37 million children were at risk with their education in 2021. Bangladesh's persistent rise in school dropout rates has pushed the country back into a broad range of social issues, such as child labour, child marriage and drug abuse. The pandemic-induced protracted school closures have also contributed to an enormous increase in the country's school dropout rate.

With the aim to support this large number of OOSC for inclusive access to education and a better learning environment for better learning outcomes, this project first identifies OOSC and children who are at risk of dropping out, analyzes their characteristics across groups of children and the barriers that lead to their exclusion, and in doing so, identify, promote, and implement reforms that address the exclusion. These complex issues need to be addressed from a multi-sectoral perspective. We need to find and analyze the existing programs and policies first.

The purpose of this report is to identify existing interventions and policies for out-of-school children (OOSC) and to make recommendations for cost-effective interventions for OOSC and children at risk. The crucial objective of this report is to conduct a comparative analysis of existing interventions and the effectiveness of those programs. This situation analysis report will give an overview of OOSC-related policies and interventions, which will assist policymakers and other stakeholders in developing more effective interventions to lower school dropout rates.

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Methodology

The report is split into three sections: systematic review, non-systematic approach, and empirical findings. The first section focuses on existing laws and policies by the government regarding education at primary and lower secondary level retrieved from the non-systematic approach. Then, the report analyzes some interventions by government, NGOs, INGOs regarding school dropout prevention and identifying students who are at risk of dropouts. The second section is systematic review where studies from 2000 – 2022 included a variety of sources, primarily electronic databases. We searched from four databases: BASE, JSTOR, Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar. Then selected studies and reports were screened for further review upon setting specific criteria to be included in the review. A total of 16 papers were included for the final review. A synthesis based on these papers were prepared where we mainly identified several interventions regarding school dropouts like girl stipend program, school feeding, cash transfer, preventing child marriage and skill development program. For the final part, the study collected data from some urban slum areas from Dhaka city using qualitative data collection methods. Data were primarily collected through observation, in-depth interviews (IDI) and Key informant Interviews (KII). Collected data have been analyzed thematically by focusing on certain aspects like socio demographic aspect, school facilities, gender dynamics, accessibility etc.

A. Existing Laws and Policies

Initially, the report focuses on policies and interventions by the government regarding primary and lower secondary education. To expand inclusive education for all, several policies and laws were formed and enacted in different times. National Education Policy, 2010; Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990; Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013; and Non-formal Education Act, 2014 are four important laws and policies which have been either formed and enacted or under process.

National Education Policy, 2010 is the guiding instrument to run Bangladesh's education system. NEP 2010 is the first education policy to govern the nation's extensive educational system, which enrolls over 23 million children alone in elementary and secondary level schools. The policy regarding prevention of school dropouts focuses on attaining technical skills at lower secondary level, stipend for girls and meritorious students, creating and joyful environment in class, extra-curricular activities, mid-day meal program, female-friendly school environment, inclusive infrastructure, and arrangement of special education.

Primary Education (Compulsory) Act was enacted in 1990, which mandated that all children regardless of their identity or socio-economic background will be admitted to primary schools and will be provided with equal quality primary education. After 30 years of implementing the law, Bangladesh has achieved almost 100% enrollment and gender parity in primary schools. However, the dropout rate is still remarkably high. Around 17% to 20% of children who got enrolled in grade one drop out of school before passing grade five.

Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act was enacted in 2013. This law mandated that children with all types of disabilities will get barrier-free access to inclusive education at all levels of educational institutions. This law ensured that institutions would modify their infrastructure and provide reasonable accommodations to ensure accessibility to all types of children with disabilities.

According to the Non-formal Education Act, 2014, the government will provide non-formal primary education for children who are 8 to 14 years old and adults up to 18 years can be enrolled for non-formal secondary education. According to this law, the government will set up learning facilities in all the Upazilas where these students will be trained in ICT skills, communication skills and other technical skills which have demanded in the job market. This law provides a special focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and women in these training programs.

However, all these laws and policies had several gaps and limitations, such as administrative delay, no legal bounds, requiring further extension, inadequate enforcement of the law etc.

B. Different Programs to Prevent School Dropouts

Different government and non-government organizations run several intervention programs keeping aligned with the government laws and policies. Approaches to bring children into school and prevent school dropouts are of many forms, this includes grassroots lobbying and awareness campaigns for the importance of schooling, political declaration for universal access to education, and many interventions. A few crucial governments and non-government interventions and programs are the followings:

Government Interventions

- The right to implement practical measures for developing a system of universal education and providing free and required education to all children was recognized by the Bangladeshi Constitution.
- Food for Education Program was launched by the Government of Bangladesh in 1993. The program aimed at developing long-term human capital through education, by providing a free monthly ration of rice or wheat to poor families if their children attend primary school.
- The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) is the primary stakeholder and the World Food Program (WFP) under government intervention launched the School Feeding Program (SFP) in chronically food insecure areas of Bangladesh. Under this program, nutrient-fortified biscuits are distributed to all children in the intervention schools.
- Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC) combines both supply and demand side interventions - (i) a school-only Grant in selected 23 Upazilas and (ii) a school Grant plus an Education Allowance to students in the remaining selected 37 Upazilas. The project targeted children aged 7-14 who were left out of the formal primary education system

Non-Government Interventions

- To help increase the enrolment and retention of girls in secondary schools, the Female Stipend Program (FSP) was created in 1982 in Bangladesh. This program (FSP), sought to help keep adolescent girls in secondary school to delay their marriage and motherhood.
- The vision of the Strategy is that 'every child learns'. In support of this vision, the Strategy adopts the following three goals: (1) equitable access to learning opportunities; (2) improved

learning and skills for all; and (3) improved learning and protection for children in emergency and fragile contexts. (unicef.org)

- Since pre-primary is not considered a stage of education in Bangladesh, none of the two ministries of education1 is responsible to oversee pre-primary education in Bangladesh. BRAC pre-primary programme operates a one-year course using three self-prepared textbooks and one teacher guide. The schools are situated either at the premises of primary schools (government or registered non-government) or away from the school premises.

Besides these interventions, there are other educational programs have been implemented by the government and other stakeholders, such as: developing the infrastructures, preparing colourful classrooms, running stipend Programmes, enhancing accessibility for the disabled by installing ramps, organizing training for teachers on disability and inclusive education, training school teachers to provide counselling services to their students, enhancing institutional capacity and making necessary reforms by providing in-service training to school teachers and headmasters under PEDP, SEDP, SEQAEP and TQI projects to ensure inclusive education, expansion of co-curricular activities and ICT integration in all types of schools etc., are some of the interventions running in different government schools. However, these interventions still have some gaps that are not allowing all students to get along with inclusive education. Scaling these consisting interventions from different dimensions can be a solution to this grave issue.

C. Findings from the Field Observation

Findings show that dropout tendency in the study areas was found staggeringly high. Many students, male and female, were found to drop out even before completing primary education. From our field observation, we found that financial barriers, lack of awareness among parents regarding the necessity of education above all, child marriage, child labour, migration, and inaccessibility were the prominent factors leading to dropouts. Among these, the financial barrier was the most prominent one which was worsened more due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Learning loss caused by Covid-19 appeared as another crucial issue behind school dropouts and placing students at risk of dropouts along with increasing child marriage.

Conclusion

The report suggests adoption of appropriate policies and interventions for preventing school dropout and identifying children at risk. Some of the interventions that are already adopted by government like special incentives for impoverished students, stipend, awareness for stopping child marriage, building gender sensitive infrastructure, preventing child labor, creating accessible facilities for person with special needs, providing training for capacity building of the teachers, designing flexible curriculum, providing smartphones and internet connection for poor students and families, school feeding program, and designing quality control mechanism needs to be re-enacted or scaled up based on appropriate measures. Especially, an ICT based interventions for mitigating the learning loss and building capacity of the teachers are necessary beside raising awareness among the communities.

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Introduction

A Brief Portrayal of the Current Dropout Situation

Education has always been a critical tool for developing a country's generation to reach its maximum potential. The world's economies and workforces are developing in terms of multi-functionality, both globally and regionally. Education serves as the primary catalyst in this scenario and contributes to the country's other benefits. Global and national economies, health, gender parity, life expectancy, and gross national wealth - all are related to a country's education system. However, internationally, school dropout rates are high, rendering a large proportion of the population unable to enter the global and national labour markets. 430 million students in South Asia face educational disadvantages at all levels due to school closures during COVID-19 (UNICEF, 2020). As a result, an additional ten million girls are at risk of underage marriage. UNICEF warns on International Women's Day that school closures, economic stress, service interruptions, and parental deaths from a pandemic raise the risk of child marriage for the most vulnerable girls (UNICEF, 2021). Additionally, UNICEF estimates that South Asia still needs to enroll 30 million (UIS, 2019) children who are not enrolled in school.

All over the world, millions of children finish their primary education without acquiring the necessary skills of literacy and numeracy while many students drop out of school at a very early age. Though the school enrolment rate increased globally over the years, South Asian countries are yet to reach the height of many developed countries. The rate of out-of-school children (OOSC) fell from 35 million to 13 million in South Asia and the rate of girls dropping out was dropped by 59% (Dundar et al. 2014). Before the Covid pandemic, UNICEF (2019) reported that more than 35 million children are not attending pre-primary education. After the pandemic, UNICEF 2021 (2021) reports that only 69% have access to early childhood education. As many South Asian countries have similar social and economic problems, the school dropout rate is high due to the identical causes (Khan et al. 2017).

In Bangladesh, nearly seven out of ten out-of-school children e.g., 4.6 million children between the age of lower secondary and upper secondary—are not enrolled in school (BBS, 2020). Only 29% of children finish higher secondary school, while 65% of children finish lower secondary education. The proportion of children who finish a level of schooling is influenced by regional and socioeconomic differences. Nearly half of the students who do not finish each level of education are children who live in Dhaka and Chattogram (BBS, 2020).

Bangladesh is among the nations that will soon contribute the most to the global urban population as the world quickly turns urban. One of the countries with the highest population density in the world is Bangladesh. She has a population of 160 million, 53 million of which reside in the urban areas. Approximately 40% of them are children (UNICEF, 2017). As per the 2022 census, a total of 52,009,072 people live in urban areas (Dhaka Tribune, 27 July 2022).

An analysis of household surveys shows that a total of 27 million children between the ages of 5 to 13 are out of school in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka (UNICEF, 2014). An ongoing longitudinal survey of Bangladesh Gender and Adolescence Global Evidence (GAGE)

has found that only 15% of students in slums and low-income settlements in Dhaka reported that, their formal school was not providing any support during closures, and just 23% of students had contacted with a teacher in the last seven days (Oakley et al., 2020). Besides, the study has found that 91% of students want to return to school when the pandemic ends and schools reopen, and only 4% of students were worried about dropping out of school as a result of the pandemic crisis (Oakley et al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, COVID-related school closures began on March 17, 2020, and have continued into 2021, affecting close to one million teachers and 38 million students (World Bank, 2021). As UNICEF reported, almost 37 million children were at risk with their education in 2021. Bangladesh's persistent rise in school dropout rates has pushed the country back into a broad range of social issues, such as child labor, child marriage and drug abuse. The pandemic-induced protracted school closures have also contributed to an enormous increase in the country's school dropout rate (The Daily Sun, 21 July 2022).

Since education is one of the fundamental human rights guaranteed by the constitution, understanding the status of out-of-school children is essential to support them in gaining access to education. It needs to have a nuanced understanding of who they are. Where do they live? And why are they not in school? The answers to these questions aren't simple and demand new and innovative measures to reach the OOSC group. Moreover, these children are often from the hardest-to-reach groups that face multiple complex and overlapping barriers to schooling. With the aim to support OOSC for inclusive access to education and a better learning environment for better learning outcomes, this review first identifies OOSC and children who are at risk of dropping out, analyses their characteristics across groups of children and the barriers that lead to their exclusion, and in doing so, identify, promote, and implement reforms that address the exclusion. The complex issues need to be addressed from a multi-sectoral perspective.

The report proceeds as follows: the first section portrays the condition of OOSC in context of Bangladesh and South Asia. The next section describes methodology of the study which is split into three sections. Third section of the report focuses on the existing laws and policies regarding primary and lower-secondary education along with listing major interventions regarding OOSC in Bangladesh by government and non-government agencies. Fourth section of the report discusses synthesis the findings from the literature using a systematic review approach. The next section discusses findings from selected schools based on field observation and secondary review. The final section summarizes the report. The report concludes with providing some recommendations based on the evidential and empirical findings.

Objectives of the Report

The purpose of this report is to identify existing interventions and policies for out-of-school children (OOSC) and to make recommendations for cost-effective scalable interventions for OOSC and children at risk. The review's initial objective is to present a comparative analysis of existing programs and interventions and their effects on assuring school participation in a variety of areas. Additionally, the review will aid in the development of routes for the interventions' scalability. Numerous student characteristics (e.g., gender, age group, and other parameters) were

examined. This is because certain initiatives may be less beneficial for a particular demographic. Finally, this report provides an overview of OOSC-related policies and interventions, which will assist policymakers and other stakeholders in developing more effective interventions to lower school dropout rates.

Methodology

This study followed a mixed-method approach that included systematic review, non-systematic approach, and field observation. In terms of both systematic and non-systematic approach, this report accumulated the existing laws and policies, interventions, and conducted studies that evaluated or narrated the interventions.

Non-Systematic Approach

Laws & Policies: Existing government policies and laws for primary and secondary education development was collected from the government websites. Newspaper articles were also referred in this regard to explain the success and gaps in these policies and laws. National Education Policy, 2010; Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990; Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013; and Non-formal Education Act, 2014 are four important laws and policies which was included in this study and, have been either formed and enacted or under process since the beginning of the current government's reigning period.

Government & Non-government Interventions: Previously and currently implemented interventions in different schools, localities and nationwide were included in this study. 30 of such interventions were listed aligning with the government policies and laws. The aims and impacts of these interventions were explored to identify the necessity of scaling.

Systematic Review

Systematic review was conducted to include the interventional studies from the scholarly databases setting the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Systematic Search

Searches were conducted for published and unpublished studies based on the criteria mentioned before. The studies from 2000 - 2022 included a variety of sources, primarily electronic databases. Four databases: BASE, JSTOR, Semantic Scholar and Google Scholar were searched for the relevant studies. Also, references provided in the eligible studies for locating relevant reports were screened. The search yielded a total of 1,529,585 results of which 519 reported on eligible studies. Then through abstracts screening and upon availability of full texts, 25 publications were identified for synthesis.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Literatures that met the set criteria, were included for review. Studies that included at least one or more than one school-based intervention program specially designed for primary and lower secondary levels of schooling were included to review by passing three inclusion criteria. The three inclusion criteria were- firstly, interventions that were found affiliated with psychological, educational, or behavioral prevention of dropouts, broadly defined, involved actions performed with the expectation which showed beneficial effects on a focused population, especially on students from lower-income families; Secondly, researches that investigated outcomes for an intervention directed toward school-aged children and youth, defined as those expected to attend 1st grade to 8th grade primary and lower secondary schools, or the equivalent in countries with a

different grade structure, corresponding to approximate ages 5-14 years old, and; Thirdly, studies that used an experimental or quasi-experimental design were included for review. Specifically, it involved a comparison of treatment and control areas to which students were: (1) randomly assigned; (2) non-randomly assigned but matched on pre-tests, risk factors, and/or relevant demographic characteristics. Finally, Eligible studies that were found relatively modern that could be applicable to contemporary students, were added. Therefore, the date of publication or reporting of the study was set from 2000 or later. Eligible studies that were published in relevant language and conducted in Bangladesh were included if they met all other eligibility criteria.

Data Extraction Process

Abstracts and/or titles for all search hits from the bibliographic databases and eliminated any clearly irrelevant study reports and retrieved full-text versions of all remaining reports that were not explicitly ineligible, were reviewed. Then after thorough screening 16 full-text reported to make final eligibility decisions for each report.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed after extracting data from the selected literature using a matrix table. At the first, similar types of intervention from literature were identified, and then the findings were extracted through thematic analysis.

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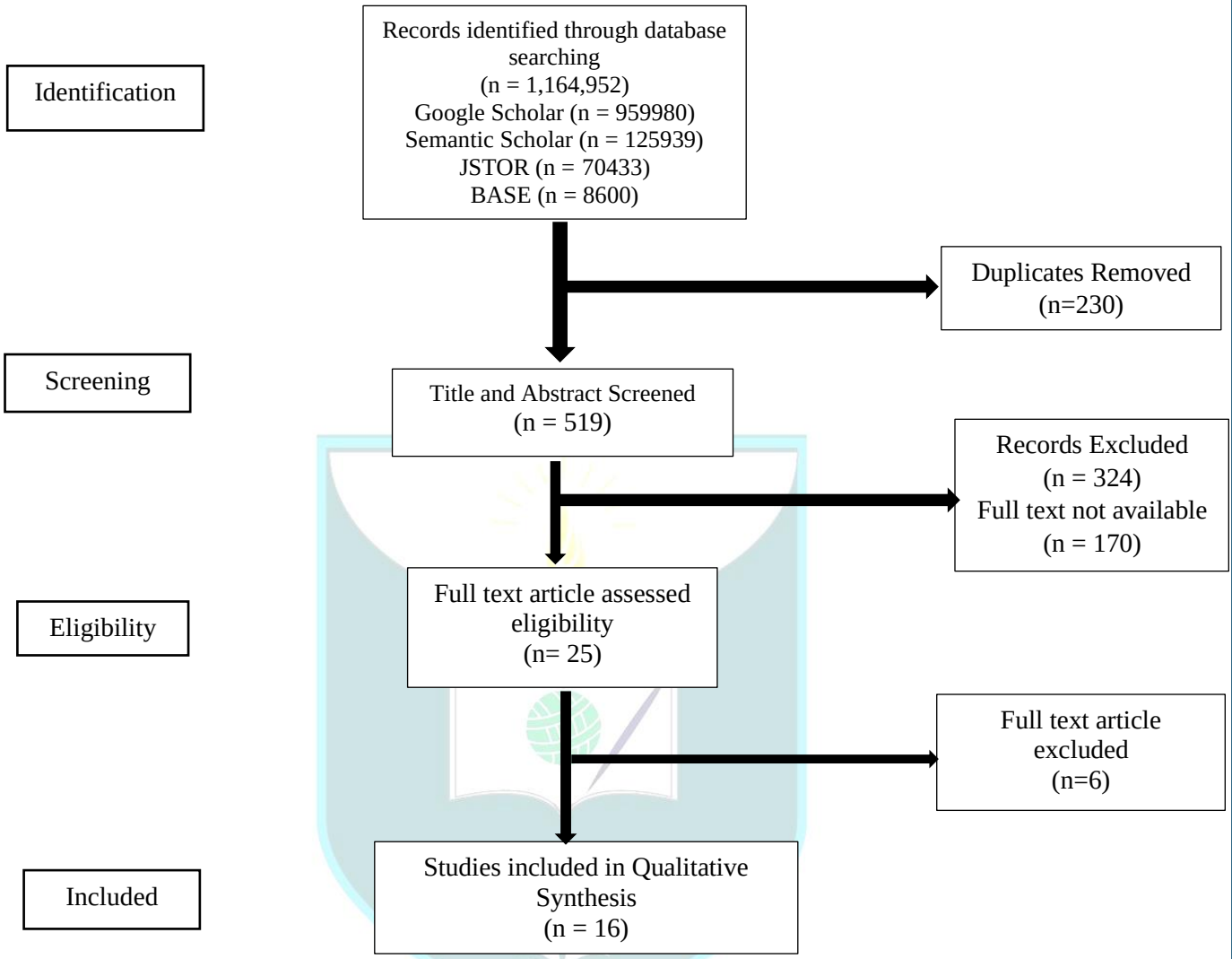

Figure 1: Prisma Chart

Field Observation

The study collected data from some urban slum areas from Dhaka city using qualitative data collection methods, primarily through field observation. In addition, data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDI) and Key informant Interviews (KII). Collected data have been analyzed thematically by focusing on certain aspects like, sociodemographic aspects, school facilities, gender dynamics, accessibility etc.

Findings

Analysis of Existing Laws and Policies

Immediately after the birth of Bangladesh, the then government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, formed the National Education Commission on September 24, 1971, headed by eminent academician Professor Dr Qudrat-e-Khuda (Khaleduzzaman, 2020). From then on Bangladesh government has formulated various policies and laws to ensure education for its citizens. Bangladesh's constitution has also recognised that the state is responsible to deliver uniform, mass-oriented and universal education to all citizens and deliver free and compulsory education to all children up to a stage that will be determined by the law. Besides, the Bangladesh government has ratified several international conventions that also establish state obligations for ensuring education for all its citizens.

In this section of the paper, policies and laws that recognise the right to education has been reviewed to analyse what provisions are there to prevent dropouts and how far these provisions have materialised.

National Education Policy, 2010

National Education Policy, 2010 (NEP, 2010) is the guiding instrument to run Bangladesh's education system. Although the national education commission was formed in 1972 and the commission submitted its report in 1974 which was supposed to be the first education policy of the country, the report was shelved forever soon after the assassination of the then President Sheikh Mujibur Rahman. From 1975 to 2010, Bangladesh got four more fresh education commission reports, however, none of those reports was passed in the parliament and implemented as education policy. With each phase of regime change, education commission reports commissioned by the outgoing regime had to accept the same fate as the first education commission report of Bangladesh. As a result, NEP 2010 is the first education policy to guide the country's massive education system where more than 23 million children are enrolled just in primary and secondary level institutions (Chandan, 2016).

NEP 2010 is divided into 28 chapters which talk about almost all aspects of Bangladesh's education system. Discussions on dropout prevention of primary and secondary level students can be found in the chapters on primary education, secondary education, special education, women's education and students' admission. Some of the key recommendations of NEP 2010 to prevent dropout are discussed below:

Extending primary education up to grade eight

One of the most significant of these steps is extending primary level classes from grade five to grade eight. The policy suggested extending primary education up to grade eight so that students

acquire some basic technical skills after completing primary education. These skills will make them eligible to get admitted to technical and vocational education. Again, if the students cannot continue after primary education due to some unforeseen adverse circumstances, still they can do some basic jobs to earn their livelihood. However, due to infrastructural and manpower shortages and bureaucratic tangles, the government still could not implement this step,

Expanding the stipend programme

The policy recommended expanding the stipend programme for primary-level students. Under the existing stipend programme, primary school students receive a one-time allowance of 1000 taka to buy school dresses and other learning equipment and a 150 taka monthly stipend. Secondary school students (from grade six to twelve) of marginalised families get a monthly stipend that ranges from 1200 BDT to 2400 BDT depending on their grade. However, the selection process of stipend recipients is not efficient and transparent (Schurmann, 2009). It has been reported that many students in impoverished areas do not get the stipend whereas students of solvent families are being selected for the stipend (Schurmann, 2009).

Creating a joyful environment in the classroom

NEP 2010 also emphasises creating a joyful learning environment in the classroom. For this purpose, the policy suggests abolishing corporal punishment and focuses on co-curricular activities such as games, sports and cultural activities. Many pre-primary level classrooms in government primary institutions have been painted colourfully to create a welcoming environment for children.

Midday Meal in the Schools

The policy recommended providing nutritious lunch for primary school students to promote school retention and to ensure balanced nutrition for school children. The midday meal programme was supposed to be launched in the primary schools of 250 Upazilas where students were to be provided with a plate of khichuri (a dish of rice, lentils and vegetable) as lunch. However, in June 2021, the programme was cancelled and the prime minister suggested providing school children with milk, banana and boiled eggs instead of lunch (Desh Rupantor, 2nd June 2021).

Addressing the drop-out rate of female students

The policy recommended covering all female students up to grade twelve under the stipend programme to prevent early dropouts. The provision of special stipends has been suggested for meritorious female students. Ensuring female-friendly school environments by building safe and clean toilets and common rooms for girls has been recommended in the policy. NEP recommended steps to include more female students in vocational and technical education.

Primary education in mother tongue

There are around three million indigenous people living in Bangladesh whose mother tongue is not Bengali. Their children face a language barrier when they go to primary schools and are forced to study Bengali textbooks taught by Bengali-speaking teachers. To remove this barrier, NEP 2010

instructs that all children will get primary education in their own mother tongue. For this purpose, NEP 2010 recommended printing textbooks in indigenous languages and training teachers from indigenous communities so that they can deliver lessons properly.

Inclusion of children with disabilities

NEP 2010 has recommended including children with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions by providing accessible infrastructure in the schools. A special focus has been given to building accessible toilets and ramps in the school buildings for children with disabilities. NEP recommended training teachers about inclusive and special education practices in the Primary Teachers Training Institute. However, for children with severe and multiple disabilities, the provision of special education has also been recommended in the NEP 2010.

Policies and practices regarding Gender equality and Social Inclusion

The Constitution of Bangladesh has ensured the participation of every child irrespective of any background without making any discrimination. Article 28(3) of the constitution mentions the inclusion of every child in educational institutions:

> [Article 28 (3)]: No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs [MoLJPA], 2000:5).

In addition, Article 17 (a) mentions free and compulsory education for all at the primary level.

> [Article 17 (a)]…establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law".

National Education Policy 2010 has three objectives that mention the provision of inclusive education for marginalized and disadvantaged people:

> 22: Bringing all socio-economically disadvantaged children into education including street children;
>
> 23: Ensuring the scopes of development of cultural and linguistic characteristics of all the indigenous [and ethnic groups in Bangladesh];
>
> 24: Ensuring the rights of all children with disabilities. (Ministry of Education, 2010: 1-2).

On October 9, 2013, Bangladesh passed the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Act. This Act repealed the 2001 Disability Welfare Act and replaced it with a rights-based approach to PWDs. Bangladesh took a significant step toward protecting its citizens by enacting RPPDA. Article 9 of the UNCRPD emphasized the right of people with disabilities to participate independently in all aspects of life and to have access to all public infrastructure, transportation, information, and communications. CRPD (article 24) serves as the benchmark by which to assess the development of inclusive education for students with disabilities. Schools in the study areas have shown lack of disable friendly infrastructure. One school has a disability corner equipped with some instruments for person with special needs arranged by Center for Disability in Development (CDD). Other schools have a small number of disable students who hardly get any special support provisioned by the RPPDA and constitution. Government and related stakeholders

need to work extensively for ensuring access to education for disable students in primary and lower-secondary level.

Gaps in the Policy

The biggest limitation of NEP 2010 is that the government is not legally bound to implement its recommendations. A fully-fledged law called, The Education Act, based on this policy was supposed to be enacted in 2013 and a draft law was also formulated in that year. However, the draft law was suspended for further revision as soon as it was completed. The final revision of the draft law was done in 2016, however, it has not been passed yet. As a result, most of the recommendations of the NEP 2010 to prevent drop out such as the extension of primary education up to grade eight, midday meal, and inclusive education for children with disabilities exist only in the paper (Prothom Alo, 26th October 2021).

Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990

Enacted in 1990, this law mandated that all children regardless of their identity or socio-economic background will be admitted to primary schools and will be provided with equal quality primary education. A monitoring body called Compulsory Primary Education Monitoring Unit (CPEMU) has been formed under the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) to oversee the enforcement of the law. CPEMU collaborates with the school headmasters, Upazila primary education officers and local government representatives to ensure that no child between six to ten years of age is left out of the school. According to the law, a monitoring committee has also been formed in every union council headed by the chairman of the union council which sends a list of children excluded from primary school to the Upazila administration. The Upazila administration along with Upazila primary education office is responsible to take immediate action to include all children in the primary schools and sanction penalties to any individual or organisation who creates obstacles in this regard.

Long overdue reforms

Bangladesh government passed the law in 1990 followed by its participation at the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 and as a symbol of its commitment towards the New Delhi Declaration on Education. The Bangladesh government is also a signatory to the Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989. Due to these international commitments, the Bangladesh government was committed to ensuring 95% enrollment in primary schools and 60% primary school completion rate and reducing the dropout rate to a minimum level within 2000. Through this law, the government fixed the level of primary education up to grade five and made education up to grade five compulsory for all children. The law started to be enforced in 1992 (Ahmed et al, 2010).

After 30 years of implementing the law, Bangladesh has achieved almost 100% enrollment and gender parity in primary schools. However, the dropout rate is still remarkably high. Around 17% to 20% of children who got enrolled in grade one drop out of school before passing grade five. According to various reports, the recent pandemic may increase the dropout rate in the years to

come. Poverty, disability and lack of awareness are some of the biggest reasons behind this dropout rate. Although government primary schools are completely free for all children, the quality of education is not satisfactory there due to a lack of manpower and shortage of resources (UNICEF, 2021).

As a result, families prefer to admit their children to non-government schools which are quite expensive. Again, children have to sit for three exams annually and a public exam at the end of grade five which makes this tier of education highly competitive. To make good scores in these competitive exams, families invest a lot of money to purchase guide books and hire private tutors which increases the cost of education manifold. As a result, many children from impoverished families cannot cope with this competition and get dropped out before completing the cycle. Very recently, the government has decided to cancel the primary education completion exam from 2023.

On the other hand, primary schools are still inaccessible to children with disabilities. Reports have shown that most children with physical disabilities are allowed to get admitted to primary schools. Children with intellectual disabilities and sensory impairments are mostly rejected on the ground of their disability despite the law. Studies suggest that teachers, although they are sympathetic to children with disabilities, do not think that it is possible to teach them to non-disabled students in the same classroom. According to UNICEF, only 6% of children with disabilities can complete the primary education cycle (UNICEF, 2021). Due to these limitations, experts have been demanding reform of the law for a long time.

Extending primary schools up to grade eight, prohibiting guidebooks and abolishing exams in primary grades, ensuring equal quality primary education for all and ensuring barrier-free inclusive primary education for children with disabilities are some of the key issues that need to be addressed by this law.

Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013

Enacted in 2013, this law mandated that children with all types of disabilities will get barrier-free access to inclusive education at all levels of educational institutions. This law classified disability into 12 types and as mandated in this law, the government has been running a national survey to identify persons with disabilities according to these 12 categories. This law ensured that institutions will modify their infrastructure and provide reasonable accommodations to ensure accessibility to all types of children with disabilities.

The government will design accessible vocational and technical programmes for children with disabilities. However, this law also has a provision to provide institutionalised or non-institutionalised special education for children with severe and multiple disabilities. This law is the first legislation which guaranteed inclusive education for children with disabilities and which established providing accessibility and reasonable accommodation as a legally binding responsibility for educational institutions.

Committees have been formed in all the districts led by the district administration involving persons with disabilities to ensure enforcement of the law. The National Coordination Committee is responsible to supervise the tasks of the district committees and maintain coordination between different ministries to implement the law.

Enforcement remains inadequate

Although the law is widely appreciated for legal recognition of equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities, enforcement of the law still remains a far cry. The district-level committees and national coordination committees remain largely inactive. The national coordination committee so far has held only 2 meetings regarding the enforcement of the law. As a result, coordination between different ministries and government agencies to implement the law is very poor.

Non-formal Education Act, 2014

Although Bangladesh has achieved almost 100 percent enrolment in primary school, the dropout rate is still remarkably high. According to UNICEF, 17% of children cannot complete primary education and around 37-40% of students cannot complete their secondary education (UNICEF, 2021). Most of these students drop out when they reach eighth grade. To provide a second chance in education for these huge numbers of children, the government passed the NFE Act in 2014. According to this law, the government will provide non-formal primary education for children who are 8 to 14 years old and adults up to 18 years can be enrolled for non-formal secondary education.

This education will be complementary to what is taught in formal educational institutions. Special vocational and technical programmes will be arranged for these students as well. According to this law, the government will set up learning facilities in all the Upazilas where these students will be trained in ICT skills, communication skills and other technical skills which have been demanded in the job market. This law provides a special focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and women in these training programmes.

Lack of capacity to enforce the law

Enforcement of this law entirely depends on the Bureau of Non-Formal Education, an undermanned and under-resourced office under the ministry of primary and mass education. The bureau is currently running with half manpower and several of its projects remain suspended due to a lack of funds. There are also allegations of corruption in selecting NGOs, recruiting officials, teachers and facilitators against the bureau while implementing several non-formal education programmes. Most of the high-ranking officials of BNFE are Bangladesh Civil Service officers who lack training on different issues of non-formal education (Chandan, 2021).

Table 1: Analysis of Existing Laws and Policies

Policy	Year	Objectives	Laws and Policies	Gaps
National Education Policy, 2010	2010	i) Improve the teaching technique ii) Eliminate teacher shortages iii) Achieve Education for All (EFA) goals	● Extending primary education up to grade eight, so students acquire some basic technical skills after completing primary education. These skills will make them eligible to get admitted to technical and vocational education. ● Increasing the stipend programs for primary school children to purchase school uniforms and other learning materials. ● Creating a joyful environment in the classroom by abolishing corporal punishment and focusing on co-curricular activities such as games, sports and cultural activities to create a welcoming environment for children. ● Continuing Mid-day Meal in the Schools to promote retention and ensure balanced nutrition for school children. ● Addressing the dropout rate of female students by covering all female students up to grade twelve under the stipend program to prevent early dropouts, ensuring female-friendly school environments by building safe and clean toilets and inclusion into vocational/technical programs. ● Ensuring primary education in their mother tongue by printing textbooks in indigenous	The draft law was suspended for further revision as soon as it was completed. The final revision of the draft law was done in 2016, but, it has not been passed yet. As a result, most of the recommendations of the NEP 2010 to prevent drop out such as the extension of primary education up to grade eight, midday meal, and inclusive education for children with disabilities exist only in the paper

			languages and training teachers from indigenous communities so that they can deliver lessons properly ● Including children with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions by providing accessible infrastructure in the schools and providing training for the teachers about inclusive and special education practices in the Primary Teachers Training Institute.	
Primary Education (Compulsory) Act, 1990	1990	Making Primary education and education committee obligatory to reduce dropout rate	All children regardless of their identity or socio-economic background will be admitted to primary schools and will be provided with equal quality primary education.	The dropout rate is still remarkably high. Around 17% to 20% of children who got enrolled in grade one drop-out of school before passing grade five.
Persons with Disabilities Rights and Protection Act, 2013	2013	Providing persons with disabilities the opportunity to lead their lives like other people without facing any obstacles.	This law provides accessible vocational and technical programmes for children with disabilities. It also has a provision to provide institutionalised or non-institutionalised special education for children with severe and multiple disabilities.	The district-level committees and national coordination committees remain largely inactive. The national coordination committee so far has held only 2 meetings regarding the enforcement of the law. As a result, coordination between different ministries and government agencies to implement the law is very poor.

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Non-formal Education Act, 2014	2014	Providing education for the children who are deprived of formal education due to dropouts or older persons who could not get formal education within their age of 14	Arranging special vocational and technical programmes for the students is one main objectives of the law. According to this law, the government will set up learning facilities in all the Upazilas where these students will be trained in ICT skills, communication skills and other technical skills which have been demanded in the job market. This law provides a special focus on the inclusion of persons with disabilities and women in these training programmes.	Lack of training and manpower, administrative delay, and corruption in the selection of the NGOs are some identified gaps in the implementation of this law.

Analysis of Different Programmes to Prevent School Dropouts

For these analyses we reviewed project documents of 22 dropout prevention programmes implemented by the Bangladesh government, NGOs and INGOs. Through this review, we have identified the specific interventions of the programmes that were designed and planned to prevent dropout. In this section, we shall examine these interventions and reflect on how far those tasks were effective to prevent dropout.

Infrastructure Construction

Government programmes invested a huge amount of resources in construction projects with the aim to prevent dropouts. Under Primary Education Development Programme 2 and 3 and under Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project, classrooms, toilets and tubewells were constructed in more than 300 schools all over the country. The goal behind this infrastructural development was to create a suitable learning environment in the classrooms and make school buildings' gender and disability inclusive. At present, 100 percent of the primary schools have colourfully painted pre-primary level classrooms (DPE, 2015).

However, many students are not getting the benefit from these investments as many of the tube wells and toilets have become non-functional within two to three years of construction. The length and width of the classrooms as recommended by DPE were also not followed in many places. In several districts such as Bhola, Sirajganj, and Kurigram which lie on the bank of the mighty rivers, recently constructed school buildings were completely destroyed by the flash floods and river erosion (IMED, 2013).

However, special emphasis on infrastructure construction has been maintained in PEDP-3, PEDP-4 and SEDP. In these programmes, special attention was given to repairing damaged school

buildings and constructing new school buildings in the Chattogram Hill Tracts area where there was no school building before (Ninnes et. al, 2015).

NGOs have also invested in school infrastructure to prevent dropouts but in an alternative way. For instance, in flood and erosion-prone areas, NGOs have come up with floating schools and portable school buildings. Several NGOs have improvised large boats as classrooms where students can participate in all types of academic activities. In char areas which are highly vulnerable to river erosion, several NGOs have constructed portable school buildings with bamboo, lightweight corrugated sheets and pipes which can be shifted from one place to another easily in case of erosion threats (Ahmed et al, 2016).

Such innovations have remarkably improved school access in several districts. However, initiatives of these NGOs were limited only to the project areas and their sustainability depends on the flow of funds from the donors (Ahmed et al, 2016).

Stipend Programmes

Every year the Bangladesh government spends billions of dollars as stipends to prevent school dropouts. In the latest budget, around 50 billion US$ has been allocated to provide stipends only to primary-level students. Again, over a million secondary-level students receive performance-based stipends. Secondary-level female students from impoverished districts receive special stipends from the government (Ministry of Finance, 2021).

Thanks to these initiatives, enrolment in all levels of education have increased compared to the previous years. Gender parity has been achieved at the primary level. The enrollment and completion rate of female students has also increased steadily in the last five years. According to several reports, ongoing stipend programmes are a key factor behind these improvements (Ahmed et al, 2010).

A major shortcoming of the stipend programmes is the arbitrary selection of stipend recipients and delay in disbursement. Although stipend programmes are aimed at encouraging students who are vulnerable to dropouts, students from solvent families also get stipends. While awarding performance-based stipends, only exam scores are taken into consideration. Performance in co-curricular activities and community services are not taken into consideration. As a result, many deserving students remain excluded from the stipend programme (DPE, 2013).

Disbursement of stipends has also become a complicated process. Recently, the government has taken the initiative to disburse the stipend through mobile financial services. Many families who are not familiar with the process and do not have the access to devices could not receive the fund. It has been reported that at least 1.4 billion takas of stipend money had to be returned to the government coffers as students or their guardians could not draw the fund (The Daily Amar Din, 6th March 2021). Again, frequent transfer of project directors also contributes to the bureaucratic tangles due to which disbursement of stipends gets delayed every year. Due to these loopholes,

such massive stipend programmes are failing to make an impact worthy of the resources invested in them.

Enhancing Accessibility

The government and NGOs have taken several initiatives to make schools accessible to students with disabilities. The government under PEDP and SEQAEP programmes have installed ramps in all the school buildings to make the buildings accessible for wheelchair users. National Academy for Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disabilities is providing short-term in-service training for teachers about disability and inclusive education (Mojid, 2015).

Various NGOs and INGOs have collaborated with the government to make primary school buildings and classrooms accessible to children with disabilities. In spite of these initiatives, education remains largely inaccessible to students with disabilities. Although ramps have been installed in all the school buildings, these ramps were installed only on the ground floor due to which the building does not become fully accessible to children with disabilities.

Again, the government's projects to ensure accessibility is largely focused for children with physical disabilities. Children with other types of disabilities such as visual or hearing impairment, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum disorders or deaf-blind children cannot continue their education due to inaccessible infrastructure, non-flexible curriculum, inaccessible textbooks, lack of trained teachers, lack of need-based resources and lack of reasonable accommodation. As a result, the dropout and non-enrolment rates among children with disabilities are still alarmingly high (UNICEF, 2021).

On the other hand, children from indigenous communities also get dropped out at an alarming 60 per cent due to accessibility issues (Ninnes et al, 2015). Under Strengthening Basic Education in the Chittagong Hill Tracts Project and PEDP-3, the government has taken initiative to ensure primary education in the mother tongue for the children of indigenous communities. However, textbooks have been translated into only five indigenous languages. The number of trained teachers who are fluent in indigenous languages is also very poor (Ninnes et al, 2015: Ahmed et al, 2010). Again, the number of school buildings in the remote hilly areas is also very inadequate. Children have to travel long, unsafe jungle-covered roads to reach school. Different NGOs have established schools in remote indigenous villages, however, they are also severely suffering from a shortage of resources. Due to the absence of textbooks, flexible curriculum and shortage of trained teachers, these NGO-operated schools are struggling to make an impact. As a consequence, the dropout and non-enrolment rate, particularly among female children, is very high in indigenous communities.

Mentoring and Counselling

While mentoring and counselling are universally recognised as important tools to prevent, the ongoing government projects are largely devoid of this important component. Studies suggest that

school-based counselling for students with disabilities and their caregivers can reduce the dropout rate significantly. However, there is no position of a professional counsellor or psychologist in government-run schools. Very few non-government schools recruit counsellors or educational psychologists to provide counselling services to their students.

Some NGOs have trained school-teachers to provide counselling services to their students. However, teachers have reported that they can rarely apply their skills for the betterment of their students. Most government schools do not have adequate numbers of teachers and this lack of manpower means all the teachers are overburdened with academic and administrative work which gives them little time to focus on activities like mentoring and counselling. In 2020, the government decided to launch a project to recruit psychologists in all types of educational institutions. However, no visible step has been taken yet in this regard.

Strengthening Institutional Capacity and Reforms

Much of the programmes to prevent dropouts are directed to enhance institutional capacity and make necessary reforms. For instance, the government is providing in-service training to school teachers and headmasters under PEDP, SEDP, SEQAEP and TQI projects to ensure inclusive education, expansion of co-curricular activities and ICT integration in all types of schools. Members of school managing committees (SMC) are also receiving training as they play an important role in school administration (Mojid, 2015). It has been reported that in almost all the primary schools and in most secondary schools SMC meetings are arranged on a regular basis. Several projects were taken by the government and NGOs to form an effective parent-teacher association in schools. Parent-teacher associations are playing an important role in mobilising community resources including financial assistance to keep the school running. Such associations also create a space for constructive interaction between teachers and parents which can also reduce the possibility of dropouts (Ahmed et al, 2010).

While the teachers, SMC members are getting training in an increasing number, how far the obtained lessons are being applied still remains a question. The existing capacity-building programmes are focused mostly on ICT integration and inclusive practices which cannot cover all subjects that are taught in schools (DPE, 2013, 2015). As a result, most senior teachers and headmasters who are on the verge of retirement get this training, on the other hand, subject teachers who actually conduct more classes and have a longer service tenure cannot participate in these training sessions. As a result, lessons obtained from the in-service training are rarely reflected in the classrooms. Training sessions for SMC members also need to be increased. Under PEDP-3 and SEQAEP, only 50 per cent of the SMC members received training. School inspection and monitoring need to be increased to ensure that the lessons learnt from the training programmes are being applied in the classroom. So far, the quality and quantity of school inspections are extremely insufficient. At present, school inspections are done arbitrarily by Upazila and the district administration. School inspections are rarely done by professionals who are trained in pedagogy and methodical supervision (Ahmed et al, 2010). Also, there is no plan from the institutional side

about how the knowledge and skills gained from the training sessions will be applied in the classroom and school administration. As a result, the effect of the ongoing training programmes conducted by the government agencies and NGOs on dropout prevention remains unclear.

Government and Non-government Interventions

Approaches to bring children into school and prevent school dropouts are of many forms, this includes grassroots lobbying and awareness campaigns for the importance of schooling, political declaration for universal access to education, interventions such as school fees abolition, and/or pro-poor education financing frameworks, to mention a few. Despite these endeavours, a large number of children face education exclusion and await the opportunity to access and participate in schooling. In Bangladesh, a wide range of interventions regarding dropout prevention have been put in place from time to time. For instance, Education for All: National Plan of Action [NPA II], 2nd Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II), Third Primary Education Development Program, Food for Education Program, Ananda School, Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC), Sustainable Non-formal Education Program, Education program (Mojar School), Conditional Cash Transfer scheme, the Stipend for Primary Students (PESP), School Feeding in Poverty-prone Areas, Girls' Education Program (GEP), Slum Mother & Children Development Project (SMCDP) Dhaka, Slum Children Education Project (SCEP), Training-cum-Education Centre for Destitute Girl Children Project (TEC), The Female Secondary School Stipend Project (FSP), The Literacy Program (LP), The Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) model (PEDP-3) etc.

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Table 2: Govt. and Non-govt. Interventions

SL	Title of Intervention	Type of intervention (Govt./ NGO/ private etc.)	Mode of incentive Provided (Monetary stipends/ School Meals/ other Tangible Benefits)	Coverage (nationwide/ district/ upazila)	Primary Beneficiary (students/ Parents/ ...)	Key indicators/ Aims/ Objectives	Key Impact(s)	Policy
1.	Free textbook distribution till 10th grade	Ministry of Education (MoE)	Study Materials	Nationwide	Govt. School Students from grade 1-10	1.Quality books for all students 2.Books printed in different ethnic languages and brails to promote inclusivity in education	1.Cut down the dropout rates to a large extent removing the financial barrier in buying books 2.Promotes inclusive education for all and make education accessible	National Education Policy 2010
2.	Granting stipends to extremely Poor Students	Government of Bangladesh	Monetary	Nationwide	Students from grade 1-10	1.Decrease in dropout rate 2.Ensure access to education for all	Significantly decreased the dropout rate. However, the selection of students is not always non-biased, which causes distortion.	National Education Policy 2010
3.	Reaching out of school Children (ROSC) program (2004 – 2014) (Now: ROSC II)	Government of Bangladesh, Ministry of primary and mass education with the support from International Development Association (IDA)	Monetary & Education Materials	Nationwide (63,601 govt Primary Schools), covers 148 upazilas, 11 City corporation Slums)	Students (aged 8-14 years)	1. Verify eligibility and selection processes for the establishment of learning centers, staffing, and pupil enrolment 2. Strengthen the capacity of Center Management Committees (CMC) and parents to supervise and assess performance of the learning centers	1.Established schools didn't meet the community needs. 2.School management and monitoring were weak in most cases. 3.Coordination issue arose among the implementing partners	Primary Education Act

4.	Project Pathshala - Sci-Tech Based Skill Development Program (2016-till date)	Kolpojontro Foundation	Other tangible Benefits	Nationwide	Marginal students and students of madrasah and religious institutions	1. Opening Pathshala at school to train 180 children a day 2. Arranging regular sessions on computer learning 3. Economic-rehabilitation support for the prospectus students	1. Technical training for students 2. Helps to reduce the dropout rate of girls	Non Formal Education 2014

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5.	Urban slum children Education program under ROSC II (2017-2020)	Government of Bangladesh, through Engaging 10 NGOs	Other tangible benefits	Urban areas	Urban slum Children, target 50,000	1.Community Mobilization 2. School Compound establishment and operating 3. Teachers Training 4. Coordination with stakeholders	1.Supporting students and learning centers with education allowance and grants 2.Building private –public partnership for more effective management of learning centers (LCs) 3.Enhancing women's empowerment to participate in the decision-making process as regards to LC establishment and management 4.Establishing and strengthening the capacity of structures and mechanism for local level planning, management and monitoring of primary education delivered by the ROSC project with the participation of the wider community. 5.Introducing intensive teacher training for the professional development of teachers for improved Teaching and learning skills.	Primary Education Act

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6.	Female secondary Stipend programme (1994-till date)	BACE	Monetary	Nationwide	Female Students from Secondary Education	1. Increase girls' enrolment in secondary school and retain them in secondary education 2. Assist them in passing the SSC examination to enhance their employment opportunities as primary school teachers, extension workers, health and family planning workers and NGO workers 3.Delay girls' marriage.	Due to the inadequacy of data from FSP, no impact could be evaluated. The information in the system is not enough to track the students who received the stipend.	Primary Education Act
7.	School feeding programs in Poverty stricken area (2001- till date)	Government of Bangladesh	Food	3 million school children in 15,700 schools in 93 upazilas of 29 districts of Bangladesh	Financially constrained students	1.Increase enrolment and attendance rates of primary school students in food-insecure areas 2.Improve health and learning ability of primary school children by reducing micronutrient deficiencies; 3.Enhance the government's capacity to implement the school feeding programme efficiently and effectively.	The support of fortified biscuits contributes to a more positive learning environment. Moreover, it acts as an additional incentive for parents to keep their children in school.	Primary Education Act

8.	Bridge School Programme	BRAC	Community involvement and Mobilisation	2,500 schools in 36 districts Comprised of One Locally-recruited Teacher and no More than 24 Students	60,000 vulnerable and disadvantaged OOSC	1. Enrolling OOSC who have dropped out of formal primary school 2. Ensuring retention and the completion of the primary cycle of enrolled students and 3. Providing quality primary education that engenders holistic development	1.Reduced gender gaps and promoted gender inclusive education 2.Increased pass rate of 99.83% in 2016 by providing a second chance of accessing education.	National Education Policy
9.	2nd Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP-II)	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangible Benefits	Nationwide	Students of Primary education	1.Improve the quality of teaching and learning, and raise student achievement; 2.Increase access to schooling for the disadvantaged; 3.strengthen planning and management of primary education, including establishing a national monitoring and evaluation system for primary education.	1. The schools have been achieving remarkable performances in terms of enrolment, cycle completion and also transition from grade V to grade VI. 2. Almost hundred (94%) percent of the parents reported that the SMC meetings are held as per schedule, and about two thirds (67%) of the parents confirmed about their attendance in the SMC meetings, which is also evidence of high-level support of the community for primary education.	Primary (Compulsory)Education Act
10.	Third Primary Education Development Project (2011-2017)	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangible Benefits	Nationwide	Students from Primary education	1.enroll all primary school-age children in the primary level educational institutions and complete primary cycle;	With high relevance and, fair efficiency and effectiveness, PEDP 3 had a successful impact on changing the conventional teaching method that makes the classroom environment sound for the students.	Primary (Compulsory)Education Act

						2.reduce social disparities in terms of access to education, 3.acquire grade-wise and subject-wise expected learning outcomes or competencies in the classrooms; 4.improve quality of teaching learning environment in the primary schools 5.ensure child friendly learning to all children for pre-primary through grade 5; 6.improve the measurement of student learning; 7.provide learning materials to all children of primary schools; 8.make provision for need-based infrastructure development; 9.decentralize more planning functions to the Upazila and school levels; and involve parents and community to give support to their children's education		

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11.	Education for All: National Plan of Action [NPA II] (2003-2015)	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Students from Primary education	1.Improve the attractiveness of teaching 2.Eliminate teacher shortages 3.Achieve Education for All (EFA) goals.		Primary Education (Compulsory) Act
12.	2nd chance Education (PDEP-4), Non-formal Education Primary School (2017-till date)	Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE), NGOs	Monetary	Nationwide	Students	Forming Learning Centers to make education accessible for all	332 schools in Dhaka to reach their goals and 15,307 learners have been taught and among them 9,690 are mainstreamed through getting admission in govt. Primary schools.	Primary Education (Compulsory) Act
13.	Food for Education Program (1993-2002)	Government of Bangladesh	Meals	Nationwide	Students	Increase primary school enrolment, promote attendance, reduce dropout rates, and enhance the quality of education.	The functioning of the current private-dealer-based food grain distribution system of the FFE program is not satisfactory	Primary (Compulsory)Education Act
14.	Post Literacy and Continuing Education for Human Development Project (PLCEHD)-2 (2008-2012)	Government of Bangladesh	Monetary	Nationwide	Students	1. to include about 1.6 million neo-literates in post literacy programs to consolidate, maintain and upgrade the literacy skills they have acquired previously; 2.to help in developing their life pattern by increasing their income through providing technical skills training; to eliminate gender disparity and establish social equitability	The program received enrolment of 1,200,000 learners in 7,147 centers in 209 Upazillas of 29 districts. 94.5% of the learners have already graduated from the project, and 38% are involved in income-generating activities (igas) either through self-employment or through linkage with other employment providers	Primary (Compulsory)Education Act

						expediting women empowerment; 3.to involve the target population in a life-long educational process and to develop them as enlightened and productive citizens; to prepare a long-term planning for human resource development; and 4.to strengthen the capacity of agencies involved in non-formal education in order to strengthen literacy and continuing education programs and to make it more effective;		
15.	Sustainable Non-formal Education Program (2013-continued)	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Adult students	Providing second chances to the dropouts	Increased school retention rate	National Education Policy

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16.	National School Meal Program 2019 (2023-2028)	Government of Bangladesh	Meals	Nationwide	Students	1.Increase attendance, retention and the primary school completion rate of children in poverty prone areas of Bangladesh; 2. Improve consumption of nutrient-dense foods among primary school children; 3.Increase market participation of smallholder farmers with quality and diversified products.	Significant impact on reducing number of non-attendees, by approaching towards the zero-hunger goal	National Education Policy
17.	The Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) model (1985-till date)	BRAC	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Students	Providing second chances and promoting education for all	Starting with 22 schools in 1985, BRAC now operates over 47,000 schools of various categories covering different age/social groups (pre-primary schools, primary schools, adolescent primary schools, and ethnic schools), all over Bangladesh.	-
18.	মজার ইশকুল; Mojar School (2013-till date)	Odommo Bangladesh Foundation	Monetary/Meals	Dhaka	Students	Nutrition – Education – Technology	With their 2 permanent schools and 4 open-sky schools, they make a path of education for street children which is about 2000 children in a week.	Non Formal Education Act

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19.	Conditional cash transfer scheme, the Stipend for Primary Students (PESP) (2003-till date)	Government of Bangladesh	Monetary	Nationwide	Students	Increase the number of enrolment and decrease the dropout rate	Bangladesh's primary school enrolment has increased from 80 per cent in 2000 to 98 per cent in 2015.	Primary Education (Compulsory) Act
20.	The Literacy Program (LP)	NGO/Room to Read	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Students	Developing the habit and skills of reading at the early age	After launching the programs in Bangladesh, literacy education improved at primary schools across the country. In 2019, Room to Read Bangladesh conducted an assessment of early-grade children we support in Government Primary Schools.	
21.	Girls' Education Program (GEP) (2015-till date)	NGO/Room to Read	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Students	Supporting girls to complete secondary education with necessary skills	In the year 2019, The pass rate in SSC among their Program participants was 96.11% with the national rate being 82.20%. In HSC, our pass rate was 79.53% - higher than the national rate 73.93%.	Non Formal Education Act

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22.	Basic Education to Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children (2nd Phase) (2004-2012)	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Working and out-of-school poor children	Cover 93 percent of the Urban out of school children aged 10-14 years	A total of 6,635 Learnings Centers have been opened of which 1,990 are in stage 1, 1,309 in stage 2, 2,071 in stage 3 and 1,265 in stage 4. All these lcs are now functional and will Complete five cycle course in November 2009 (stage 1), November 2010 (stage 2), July 2011 (Stage 3) and October 2011 (stage 4). The number of students benefited from this are as of June 2009 was 158,811 of which 93,848 girls and 64,963 Boys	Primary Education (Compulsory) Act
23.	Development of Children at High Risk (DCHR) Project, Dhaka. (2020-2022)	NGO	Other tangible benefits	Nationwide	Students	1.Pre-school education, follow-up and mainstreaming education 2.Establish and running Drop-in-Centers for both street children and domestic child workers 3.Night shelter for homeless street children (30 boys & 60 girls) with 3 times food 4.Education, awareness and vocational training 5.Learning and Recreation Centre (LRC) for working children. 6.Health Service	Creation of several shelter homes, learning and recreation centres, and pre-schools in the slums of Dhaka city.	Non-Formal Education Act

						7.Psycho-social Counselling 8.Policy advocacy and local level advocacy for (Policy makers, GO-NGO, employers, guardians, community, media (etc.)		
24.	Happy Home for the Deprived and Vulnerable Adolescents Girls in Dhaka City (2006-2016)	NGO	Other tangible benefits	Mohammadpur, Lalbagh, Sutrapur, Mughda, Karwanbazar of DCC.	Adolescent girls	1.Provide the girls shelter, improved health, and their well-being through providing education and recreation 2.Vocational training for girls for a secured future.	150 street adolescent girls at night through 5 nos. Of Drop-in-Centres (DIC) in five different locations	
25.	Slum Children Education Project (SCEP) (2004-2005)	NGO	Other tangible benefits	Different slums of Mohammadpur, Dhaka City.	Students	1. Eradication of illiteracy from the slum children 2. Provide knowledge among the target group to have a healthful life by practicing hygienic flood and water, and also establish a good sanitation and hygienic atmosphere in the slum area 3.Sub-technical knowledge should be provided to the target group to		

						enable them to work individually in mechanical discipline in factories and industries including garments		
26.	Slum Mother & Children Development Project (SMCDP), Dhaka	NGO	Other tangible benefits	Dhaka City: Beribadh, Shekhertek, Adabor, Ring Road, Bijli Mohalla Slums	Parents, Children			
27.	Training-cum-Education Centre for Destitute Girl Children Project (TEC)	NGO	Other tangible benefits	Mohammadpur, Dhaka.	Street Children	1.To provide daytime shelter with facilities of toilet, bath washing and cooking to 60 no's of destitute girls working on the street per year 2.To provide basic education and vocational training, nutritional and health care support to 60 nos destitute girls working on the street per year 3.To create awareness among them about their life and work situation and stimulate in them the motivation of self-protection 4.To continue follow-up linkage with these girls after completion		

						of one year through their integration with development activities of the organization.		
28	Sheikh Rasel Digital Lab	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangible benefits	Whole Bangladesh	School students and Youths	• To establish specialized computer labs in educational institutions of all the districts to speed up the expansion of computer education, quality education, job opportunity, employment skills and develop language competency. • To establish local cyber center by providing internet connectivity in the selected institutions. • To promote and inspire multimedia education in PSC, SSC & HSC level by providing state-of-the-art computer facilities. • To create IT enabled language learning facility to promote language	Transfer of technology and capacity building of educational institutions have been achieved by establishing 4176 well-equipped computer. A greater awareness has been created for the best use of ICT through seminars The project has speeded up the expansion of ICT in education VASA GURU Software & Language Training labs have contributed to create decent job & employment generation in broad & abroad; Teachers are enabled to teach the students and ensured the quality of education	

						dependent freelancing, outsourcing and inculcate other employable skill. • To build a large ICT skilled work-force and equip them with adequate skills so that they can access in global market for decent work.		
29	Edu Hub	Government of Bangladesh	Other tangibale benefits	Whole Bangladesh	Primary, Secondary and Higher secondary students	• to promote online learning for primary and high school student (Class 1 to 12). ✓ They offer various educational contents on subjects like science, math, ICT and English. A website have been prepared where contents are available on four dimensions of learning: 1. Ghore Boshe Sikhi, 2. Amar Ghor Amar School, 3. Ghore Boshe Karigari Sikkha, and 4. Amar Ghor Amar Madrasah.		

Systematic Review Findings

Food for Education

Food for Education Program was launched by the Government of Bangladesh in 1993. The program aimed at developing long-term human capital through education, by providing a free monthly ration of rice or wheat to poor families if their children attend primary school. The performance of the FFE program shows that it has largely fulfilled its objectives to increase school enrollment, promote school attendance and prevent dropouts. Nonetheless, the FFE program is not satisfactory when it comes to the quality of education (Ahmed & Del Ninno, 2002).

The Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the World Food Program (WFP) launched the School Feeding Program (SFP) in chronically food insecure areas of Bangladesh. Under this program, nutrient-fortified biscuits are distributed to all children in the intervention schools. The School Feeding Programs aimed to provide meals or snacks to reduce short-term hunger in the classroom so that the students can concentrate and learn better and to attract children to school and have them attended regularly (Akhter & Ahmed, 2004).

Cash Transfer

The Shomvob project taken by the Government of Bangladesh aimed to improve both education and nutrition outcomes of young children by conditional cash transfer to very poor households with children aged 0 to 36 months or 6-15 years old school-going children. The intervention resulted in improvement of nutrition and ensure better education, increased parental involvement and awareness about education. The results however do not find a significant impact on the incidence of stunting and underweight (Ferre, 2014).

Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC)

Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC) is a unique and innovative project that has been implemented by the Government of Bangladesh since early 2005. It combines both supply and demand side interventions - (i) a school-only Grant (G) in selected 23 Upazilas and (ii) a school Grant plus an Education Allowance to students (GA) in the remaining selected 37 Upazilas. The project targeted children aged 7-14 who were left out of the formal primary education system (Sarr, Dang, Chaudhury, Parajuli, Asadullah, 2010).

Stipend program

To help increase the enrolment and retention of girls in secondary schools, the Female Stipend Program (FSP) was created in 1982 in Bangladesh. This program (FSP), sought to help keep adolescent girls in secondary school to delay their marriage and motherhood. The pilot FSP yielded positive results: girls' secondary enrolments increased from an average of 7.9% to 14% in some project areas and dropout rates fell from 14.7% to 3.5% (Haq & Haq, 1998:93). Although this

program has increased the rate of school enrollment and decreased the dropout rate, project outcome is rated moderately satisfactory because of several gaps (Raynor, 2006).

At the beginning of the program, only girls received the stipend. Boys have also been receiving this since 2015. At least 14 million primary students are now receiving government stipends (South Asia Monitor, August 04, 2022).

Preventing Early Marriage and Pregnancy

Child marriage is a fundamental violation of human rights. South Asia alone accounted for almost half of the total number of child marriages that have occurred globally. Early marriage often leads to school drop-out, early pregnancy, maternal morbidity, and mortality etc. Youth information centres (YIC) as an intervention strategy and exposure to mass media, showed an effect in reducing early marriage, early pregnancy, and improved school retention. Peer education conducted through the YIC has proved to be an effective model (Mehra, Sarkar, Sreenath, Behera, Mehra, 2018).

Skill Development for Delaying Marriage

The practice of child marriage is mostly influenced by community norms and beliefs, household poverty, and a lack of individual opportunities for girls and women. Child marriage also leads to high maternal mortality and increased total fertility. However, in Bangladesh, efforts to prevent child marriage have focused on the enforcement of laws and policies, but little research exists on what approaches work best to delay marriage and why. BALIKA (Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents) is a 4-year experimental study, conducted in three districts (Khulna, Satkhira, and Narail) to understand whether skills-building approaches to empower girls can delay marriage in Bangladesh communities. The project implemented a randomised controlled trial involving more than 9,000 girls aged 12–18 in 72 intervention communities and 24 control communities within these three districts. The program had an all over impact on reducing the prevalence of child marriage (<18) as well as improving education, well-being and health (Amin, Ahmed, Saha, Hossain, Haque, 2016).

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Table 3: Synthesis of the Intervention Programs

Program Type	Intervention/ Program Name	Implemented by	Target group	Objective	Outcome	Impact/Strengths	Gaps
Food for Education	Shomvob	Government of Bangladesh	Children aged between 1-15 years old	To improve both education and nutrition outcomes of young children by conditional cash transfer.	◆ Improved nutrition ◆ Ensured better education ◆ Increased parental involvement Increased awareness about education.	Involved mothers, improved the household consumption pattern.	No significant impact on the incidence of stunting and underweight.
	Food for Education (FFE)	Government of Bangladesh and WFP	Low-income households with children attending primary school.	To increase school enrollment, promoting school attendance, prevent dropout, and improve the quality of education.	Largely successful to- ◆ Increase school enrollment ◆ Promote school attendance Prevent dropouts	Addresses long-term poverty and development of human resources as well as short-term needs for increased access to food.	1. Many no poor households are included in the study. 2. The functioning of the current private-dealer-based food grain distribution system of the FFE program is not satisfactory The quality of education remains a problem.
	School Feeding Program (SFP)	Government of Bangladesh (GOB) and the	Children from poor households	To diminish hunger in the classroom as well as to promote	◆ Gross school enrollment raised by 14.2%	Significant positive impact on child nutritional status and	Academic achievement has proved disappointing,

		World Food Program (WFP)		school enrollment and retention rates.	◆ Probability of dropping out of school by 7.5% ◆ School attendance of participating students increased by 1.34 days a month, which is 6 percent of total school days a month. Improved diet and nutritional status of children.	learning, as well as interesting policy implications.	especially in primary schools. Widespread undernutrition in Bangladesh remains a critical barrier to children's learning.
Stipend Program	Female Stipend Program (FSP)	Government of Bangladesh	Adolescent girls in secondary school.	Objective 1: Enrolment and Retention Parity Objective 2: Delayed Marriage and Fertility Control Objective 3: Employment / Income Generation Objective 4: Equality /Empowerment	◆ Girls' secondary enrolments increased from an average of 7.9% to 14% in some project areas and dropout rates fell from 14.7% to 3.5% ◆ Girls' net primary enrolment had risen to nearly 86% by 2002/3 ◆ 9.3% of stipend girls left school to get married,	FSP has clearly had impact in terms of increasing girls' enrolment. Also, it has been widely- acclaimed as a model for achieving gender parity of enrolment.	Little is known of FSP's impact beyond access to schools. FSP is expensive and almost certainly comes at the expense of other desirable development objectives such as poverty alleviation no special activities to help very poor girls stay in school once they enroll.

				Objective 6: Poverty Alleviation	a drop from 12.3% in 1994		
	Multi-component intervention conducted in the Youth Information Centres (such as exposure to-peer educators/ leaders access to media life-skills education)		Males and females from Uttar Pradesh & Bihar, aged 10-24years	Increasing the minimum age of marriage, delaying the first pregnancy, and increasing years of schooling as a pathway to delaying marriages.	More female participation Reduced early marriage, early pregnancy and improved school retention.	Multi-pronged intervention that focuses on early marriage, early pregnancy, and school retention	Did not have a strong baseline, to compare its results with the endline survey.
	BALIKA (Bangladeshi Association for Life Skills, Income, and Knowledge for Adolescents)	Collaboration between communities in rural Bangladesh, international NGOs, and the Dutch government.	Girls aged 12–18years in 3 districts (Khulna, Satkhira, and Narail)	To engage communities by working with local institutions and supportive adults to create a favorable environment to invest in girls	· More likely to be attending school. · 20% more likely to have improved mathematical skills if they received education support and gender-rights awareness training. · One-third more likely to be earning an income if they received gender-rights awareness or livelihoods-skills training.	In addition to delaying child marriage, the evaluation studied the impact of its three intervention approaches on a range of other indicators that affect education, health, and social outcomes later in life.	
	Samata	Indian Govt., with STRIVE research	13-16year old SC/ST girls in primary	To address normative and structural	○ one-fourth had not completed	Samata intervention had no overall	Additional research is under way to understand more

		programme consortium, a UKAid-funded programme of research and action	schools (7th standard) in two districts (Vijaypura and Bagalkote) in Karnataka state.	factors hypothesized to encourage school dropout and early marriage.	○ secondary school ○ one in ten reported being married, these are lower than expected based on district-level data available before the trial, with no difference between these, or other schooling or sexual and reproductive outcomes.	impact. It was associated with improvements in secondary school enrollment and completion among SC/ST adolescent girls in one district but did not impact on child marriage outcomes.	the impact of the Samata intervention.
	Reaching Out of School Children (ROSC)	Government of Bangladesh	Children aged 7-14 years who were left out of the formal primary education system, especially those from disadvantaged areas and groups.	Improving Access to Quality Education, Communication and Social Awareness, Project Management and Institutional Strengthening, Monitoring, Evaluation and Research	◆ The overall enrolment rates in these villages increased from 7% to 21% Girls consistently have higher enrolment rates than boys both in the baseline and follow-up surveys.	The ROSC project appear to have a strong and positive impact on enrolment rates for the primary school age population ROSC schools are particularly beneficial for girls.	Although positive, but the impacts are relatively low. The general stipend provided in the government primary schools may have weakened the impact of ROSC.

Table 4: Number of Schools, Students and Teachers in Dhaka District

District Name	Institute Type	Management	Institution		Number of Teacher			Number of Student		
			Total	Girl	Total	Female	% Of Female	Total	Girl	% Of Girl
Dhaka	Junior Secondary School	Private	106	5	1727	937	54.26	28587	15009	52.50
		Total:	106	5	1727	937	54.26	28587	15009	52.50
	Secondary School	Private	457	47	10237	4556	44.51	307971	163878	53.21
		Public	37	7	1122	671	59.80	34792	15737	45.23
		Total:	494	54	11359	5227	46.02	342763	179615	52.40
	School and College (School Section)	Private	165	23	7400	3825	51.69	240957	125689	52.16
		Public	15	2	482	222	46.06	19824	7960	40.15
		Total:	180	25	7882	4047	51.34	260781	133649	51.25
	Govt. Primary	Public	67	0	469	308	65.67	23742	13447	56.64
		Total:	67	0	469	308	65.67	23742	13447	56.64
	District Total:	Private	728	75	19364	9318	48.12	577515	304576	52.74
		Public	52	9	1604	893	55.67	54616	23697	43.39
		Govt. Primary	67	0	469	308	65.67	23742	13447	56.64
		Total:	847	84	20968	10211	48.70	655873	341720	52.10

The current population of Dhaka city in 2022 is 22,478,000, a 3.39% increase from 2021. Around 3.5 percent of the population migrates internally every year. There are 3963 schools in total in Dhaka Division and 847 schools in Dhaka district (BANBEIS, 2020). Dhaka has 3,394 slums (1,639 in DNCC & 1,755 in DSCC) inhabited by approximately more than 6 lakhs people (The Daily Star, 2019).

Empirical Findings

Socio-economic characteristics of the study areas

To assess how far the policies and projects are effective in preventing the dropout rate of school children, we studied three schools in three densely populated, impoverished parts of Dhaka. We also conducted social audits in two slums to learn about how school children are benefitting from the policies and programmes.

Most of the selected areas in this study are situated in urban centres and are congested with overcrowded settlements with no proper infrastructure and amenities. These slums are mostly unplanned and do not have access to regular amenities necessary for living. One of the slums located at Alotpar, Goriber Bazar, Kajla, Jatrabari with approximately more than 1000 households. Most of the people living here are lower-class people with no basic education and work as a labourer in the fish wholesale market, vegetable wholesale market, factories, Garments, and Rickshaw Puller. Another study area is Boro Moghbazar situated beside the Moghbazar rail line, Gabtola, Moghbazar. The housing pattern of this area has changed in recent years with the establishment of many new buildings and roads. As found from interviews, the area was considered a slum due to its previous state and now its landscape might confuse people about whether it can be called a slum. The area is densely populated with 5-6 families living on a single floor of a building. People are mostly small businessmen, day labourers, rickshaw pullers, factory workers and garments workers. Duaripara is situated in Mirpur area of Dhaka north city corporation with more than 1000 houses. Most of the people are day labourers or small businessmen. Many women are employed as housemaids at various residences in the neighbourhood. Another slum is situated in Bhasantek area of Mirpur thana, Dhaka North. This slum is beset with many issues including continuous threat of eviction. A project was initiated by the GoB to ensure affordable housing in slums of Dhaka city named Bhasantek Rehabilitation Project (BRP) with the support of North South Property Development Limited (NSPDL). However, the project failed to serve the impoverished slum dwellers.

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Table 5: School-Based Information from Field

	Dhaka South City Corporation (DSCC)				Dhaka North City Corporation (DNCC)			
Community/Area name	**Boro Moghbazar (Railway Slum) Ward No: 35,36**		**Kajlarpar (Kajlar par Slum) Ward No: 63**		**West Bhashantek slum area Ward No:15**		**Duaripara Slum Area Ward No:6**	
Total household (approx.)	4000		3000		4000		2000	
Number of school-age children in the selected areas(approx.)	1000-1500		1500-2000		1500-2000		1000-1200	
School Name	Boro Moghbazar Govt. Primary School	Shahnoori Model High School (MPO)	Kajlarpar Govt. Primary School	Kajlarpar High School (MPO)	Poshchim Bhashantek Government Primary School	Bangladesh Muktijoddha High School	Rupnagar Government Secondary School	21 No. Pallabi Govt. Primary School
Distance between School and Community	Less than 1 KM	Less than 1 KM	Less than 1 KM	Less than 1 KM	Less the 1 KM	Less than 1 KM	Near to 1 KM	More 1 KM
Socio-economic background of students	90% of students belong from Under Privileged families	20% of students belong from Under Privileged families	90% of students belong from Under Privileged families	88% of students belong from Under Privileged families	90% of students belong from Under Privileged families	40% of students belong from Under Privileged families	80% of students belong from Under Privileged families	30% of students belong from Under Privileged families
# (total) of students	Prior to COVID-19: 410 students, After COVID-19: 505 students.	Prior to COVID-19: 403 students, After COVID-19: 373 students.	Prior to COVID-19: 720 students,	Prior to COVID-19: 900 After COVID-	Prior to COVID-19: 430 students After Covid-19: 423 students	Prior to COVID-19: 220 (Grade 1 – 5) 470 (Grade 6-10)	After Covid-19: 423 students	After Covid-19: 423 students

			After COVID-19: 700 students.	19: 800 students		After COVID-19: 200 (Grade 1- 5) 240 (Grade 6-8)		
Number of Working Children	Not specified	None	Not Specified	10% (most of the male students)	Not Specified	Around 10 students (most of the male students)	17 students of grade 9 and grade 10	None
# of Teachers	18	9	8	14	5	17	25	19
Class hour	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins	50 mins
Conducts Parents-teachers meeting	Once every three months	Once every three months	Once every three months	Twice Every six months	Once every three months	Annually	Twice Every six months	Once every three months
Any intervention (GO/NGO/INGO)	1) School Feeding Program: Meal facilities like feeding biscuits were available for students before COVID-19 lockdowns. 2) Government Stipend facilities for Grade 1 to Grade 8	1)School Feeding Program: Meal facilities like feeding biscuits were available for students before COVID-19 lockdowns. 2) Government Stipend facilities for Grade 1 to Grade 5	1. School Feeding Program: Meal facilities like feeding biscuits were available for students before COVID-19 lockdowns. 2. Government Stipend facilities for Grade 1 to Grade 5	Sekh Rasel ICT Lab by Governme nt	Government Stipend facilities for Grade 1 to Grade 5	None	None	None

			3.Room to Read: They are providing support to read in Bangla. They are helping students to read and write our mother tongue properly. They are providing schooling stationaries for students of class 1 & 2, books for library, taking extra classes and encouraging students to take participation on different kinds of cultural activities.					
Classroom Infrastructure	2 stored Building	2 stored Building	2 stored Building	2 stored Building	2 stored Building	2 stored Building	6-storied building	3-storied building

Ramp Available	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
ICT Lab/Classroom available	Yes	Yes	No but they have Multimedia classroom materials available	Yes	No	Yes	3 lab rooms	No but they have Multimedia classroom materials available
Separate washroom for Boys & Girls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Female-friendly washroom- Pad disposal facility	No	Yes	No	No	No	No	Yes	No
Playground available	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Extra-Curricular Activities in the School	No Statement	They arranged an annual sports day before Covid	Regular assemblies and annual sports days	Regular assemblies and annual sports days	Regular assemblies and annual sports days	Regular assemblies and annual sports days	Regular assemblies, sports programs, and cultural programs are arranged.	Regular assemblies, sports programs, and cultural programs are arranged

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Absenteeism, and Dropout Scenario

Absenteeism and dropout are quite inseparable in terms of definition. However, according to UNICEF's report on Monitoring Education Participation (2016), on of the indicators of absenteeism and dropout was adopted to analyze the primary situation of the selected 08 schools. To identify the absentees and dropouts, three thresholds were set based on the registered 6 months' attendance of the students. For grade one to eight, the attendance books were checked and attendance of last 6 months were copied for analysis. Following that step, last 6 months' total attendance was compared to the total school days. Students who were absent for 90%-100% of the school days, were counted as drop out. In terms of absenteeism, it was divided into two categories- frequent absenteeism and severe absenteeism. Students who were absent for 10%-20% of the school days, were counted as frequent absentees, and students who were absent for 20%-90% of the time fell under the category of severe absenteeism.

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The following table records the total number of dropouts and absentees of 8 schools for the last 6 months-

Table 6: Absenteeism and Dropout Scenario in the Selected Schools

Data of Students for Last 6 months (March'22-August'22)	Total Students	Boy	Girl	Total in Primary School	Grade 1	Grade 2	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Total in Secondary School	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8
Total Enrolled Students	2887	1269 **(44.0%)**	1618 **(56.0%)**	1735 **(60.0%)**	253	357	411	383	331	1152 **(40.0%)**	409	379	364
Dropouts	348	166 **(47.7%)**	182 **(52.3%)**	279 **(80.2%)**	29	44	64	77	65	69 **(19.8%)**	16	24	29
Total Absentees	2146	902 **(42.0%)**	1244 **(58%)**	1207 **(56.2%)**	168	272	306	259	202	939 **(43.8%)**	505	333	257
Severe Absentees	1569	664 **(42.3%)**	905 **(57.7%)**	912 **(58.1%)**	135	209	223	195	150	657 **(41.9%)**	223	247	187
Frequent Absentees	577	238 **(41.3%)**	339 **(58.7%)**	295 **(51.1%)**	33	63	83	64	52	282 **(48.9%)**	126	86	70

In the four selected areas, among 2887 students of primary and secondary schools, more than 12% were found dropout. Whereas the dropout percentage was higher among the primary students (13%) in comparison to the secondary students (6.0%). In terms of absenteeism, across the total student body of grade one to eight, more than 74% were absent for about a month or more during those 6 months classes. However, in this case the higher absenteeism was found among the secondary students (more than 80%) in comparison to the primary students (around 60%).

Cases from Community and Schools

From the community-level visit to the schools under selected area, we have found several cases on absenteeism. Head teachers, class teachers and subject teachers shared their insights on their students.

Parental Roles

The role of parents in decreasing absenteeism cannot be overthrown at all because parents can act to change their children's mind. They can encourage their children to go to school if they are made aware about their children's studies, parent-teacher meetings, exams etc. We learnt about a boy named **Asif** (13) from Duaripara, who gets ready and leaves for school every morning, but most of the days, he does not attend the classes. He does not even come to school, instead he roams around the areas outside school. His family has good financial conditions, but his parents are just not bothered about the fact that their son is missing classes. They are aware of this fact but not of the irreparable damage their son is going to suffer.

In lower and lower-middle class households, sometimes both father and mother are working. So, the elder child has to stay home to look after their younger siblings. We learnt that 30-40% students on average remains absent weekly, stated by the class teachers. Parents, who are mostly day laborers and garments workers are really not aware or bothered whether their children are going to school on a regular basis. They do not follow up with child's studies or exams, which is also responsible for the high rate of absenteeism, leading students to drop out from school. In addition to that, working parents require their elder children to look after the younger siblings. **Jui,** from Kajlar Par is an 18-year-old girl. She has two siblings. Her older sibling is married off and she takes care of her younger sibling. She dropped out of school before the pandemic to look after the household chores. Her father is a tea stall owner, and her mother works in a light bulb factory.

One of the teachers from Duaripara – Rupnagar Govt. Secondary School pointed out the fact that, considering the location of the school, maximum students come from lower income households and their parents are not that much educated. The children from these households hear their parents arguing, quarrelling in bad languages, from which they learn abusive words and inconsiderate behaviors. These traits are reflected when they are in classroom - they do not know how to maintain the environment of a classroom or act accordingly.

Familial Issues

Family affairs such as death of parents, separation or divorce can severely affect a child's mind. **Fahim** (14), a student of class 6/7comes from a broken family. His parents got separated and it affected him deeply. Affected by a mental trauma at such an early age, he has comparatively lower attendance and less concentration in class. His disinterest towards attending classes, missing schools are not only adding to his miseries, but his moral education has also been compromised by this trauma, which was stated by his teacher.

Another boy **Shuvo** (13) was noted to frequently miss school because of familial issues. His father's untimely death put his family in a severe financial crisis. The rising tension in the family, the grief made him lose interest in everything. His food intake and sleep pattern were disturbed. The constant mental stress, change in eating and sleeping started to make him fall in sick

frequently. As a result, his school performance got weaker day by day and his attendance in class drastically fell.

Financial Situation

Financial crisis is also falling heavy upon parents after Covid-19. **Shorna,** who lives in Kajlar Par, is approximately 30 years old. She is a housewife. She has two children who are studying well at Madrasas. She is less interested to send her children to school due to her religious view and the extra charges such as private tuition fees, and no daycare facilities. She believes that schooling is costly. **Tabassum,** also from the same area, studied till class 3. She does not have a father and her mother works in a factory. She is 12 years old. She used to study at the BRAC School. Due to the financial obligation, she had to drop off the schooling. In Boro Moghbazar area there is only one MPO School named Shahnoori Model High School which is adjoint to the railway lines and slum area of Moghbazar. According to the guardian's statement lack of the government high schools in this area, the students of middle-income families have no other choices and face difficulties to get enrollment.
Jesmin Begum is about 45 years old. She is a stay- at home mother. She lives at 4 no. office tek, Talimghor mor. She described about the school going children. She said the most of children go to Vasantek Govt. Primary school and Bangladesh Muktijodha High School. Even she said, the students of this areas have to pay high tuition fee which is one of the reason most of the girls and boys of age 12 -15 years old after COVID-19 school closer, are engaged with work and left school. And she added that if there are trainings to facilitate mothers to increase the earning, that can play role in reducing the dropout rate in this area.

Child marriage

Child marriage has increased since the COVID-19 period. From our visit to a regular school named Boro Moghbazar Primary School, we found that 4-6 girls who were between only 13-15 years old got married during the school closer due to COVID-19 Pandemic. 5 of them eventually dropped off from their respective classes due to irregular attendance and other familial factors.

Probable reasons of school dropout

Dropout tendency in the study areas was found staggeringly high. Many students, male and female, were found to drop out even before completing primary education. Many children admitted that they never went to school, and they were completely illiterate. Through our study, we identified several factors responsible for such a bleak scenario:

Poverty

Poverty is found to be the most common reason behind early dropout. Although primary education is free for all children, the cost of guidebooks, other educational materials and transportation costs prove to be too high for most of the families living in slum areas. Struggling to cope with rising inflation and high living expenditure in Dhaka, the families prefer sending their children to work and earn over sending them to schools.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further deteriorated the situation. All the schools have reported that some of their students left the school during the pandemic. Many families have lost jobs and sold all of their assets to bear the cost of medical treatment. These families are becoming new-poor as they fail to cope with the post-pandemic inflation and massive unemployment. We talked with many families in the study areas who have recently become unemployed and are leading their lives by taking loans at high-interest rates. None of these families got any cash incentive from the government and if they do not get a job in the near future, they will become homeless and destitute. In such a desperate situation, these families are being forced to send their children to work and earn instead of sending them to school.

Lack of awareness among parents

Many parents think that madrasa education is better for their children than mainstream schools. In madrasas, which are religious schools, children are taught the teachings of Islam according to their own curriculum. Most of these madrasas offer free-of-cost education, free-of-cost living quarters and food for students. These institutions are not monitored by the government and they do not follow the national curriculum. Impoverished families, most of whom are very religious, choose madrasas for their children's education due to the high cost of education and safety of their children. After completing their education in madrasas, these children often get involved in various low pay jobs and they are very less likely to return to mainstream schools after studying madrasas.

Again, parents often think that sending their children to school is a very costly and rewardless enterprise. As completing primary or secondary education offers no good job, the parents often send their children to different types of workshops where they learn technical skills such as welding, car repairing, electrical repairing etc. Many ultra-poor families send their children to work in the brick fields during the dry season where they get a better salary in exchange for very hard work under brutal, semi-slavery conditions. Extreme poverty and difficult living conditions in Dhaka made urban poor parents unaware of the significance of formal education.

Child Marriage

One of the major reasons behind the early dropout of female students is child marriage. It has been observed that parents are marrying off their daughters between 13 to 16 years of age due to poverty. Once married, most of the female children have to look for jobs in the RMG factories or as housemaids as they are required to support their family by earning money instead of spending money for their education. All the schools have reported that they have lost as many as 50 per cent of their female students due to child marriage in the last two years of the pandemic. Families and members of the SMC opined that post-pandemic inflation and income loss created extreme vulnerability and a growing sense of insecurity due to which they are marrying off their daughters at an early age and sending their sons to the workplace instead of schools.

Child Labour

Due to the growing availability of child labour, businesses in the impoverished parts of Dhaka is recruiting a huge number of child workers for cheap labour. They often recruit them just for three square meals and no pay at all. As the children are getting food and payments in some cases, many families are sending their children to workplaces instead of educational institutions.

Migration

Many families living in the slum areas migrate to rural areas during the harvesting and sowing seasons to work as agricultural labourers. Again, they also frequently change their locations from one slum to another depending on income opportunities and living expenditure of the locality. Due to the frequent movement of families, students have to leave school and they become at the risk of dropping out if they cannot get admitted to a suitable and affordable school at their new address.

Accessibility

Students are also getting dropped out due to accessibility issues. According to families, schools are located quite far away from their homes. Children have to cross busy roads and highways and sometimes use crowded public transport. Due to fear of accidents, parents often feel reluctant to send their children to school.

During the pandemic, school authorities continued academic activities through online classes. Many students did not have access to smartphones and the internet and they could not participate in the online classes and thus could not submit final assignments which were essential to get promoted to the next grade. According to students, teachers and family members of the schools of the study areas, around 50 per cent of students could submit their assignments in time. Absenteeism in online classes forced many students to leave school or repeat the same grade. The students who are repeating in the same grade are still at the risk of dropout.

Actors, Roles, and Agency in Public Education System

We have identified teachers, parents, leaders of education, students, service providers (promoters), and the local municipal government as major stakeholders, users, and beneficiaries of the public education system at the local level. These actors each play a specific part in the system. Based on their roles, we grouped them in the education system governance, such as Mayors, Ward Councillors, Thana Education Officers on the government side. Teachers and headteachers serve as the school-level actors at the same time. The students, teachers, academic staff, parents of enrolled students, and the community at large are the main beneficiaries from this system.

The promoters of this system include federal government at the national level, education officers in Thana Education Office, Ward Councils at the local level. The MPO enlisted schools are run by the government where they bear the salary of the teachers. Furthermore, INGOs and NGOs provide

financial support and other human resources for these schools in addition to the government-level assistance.

On the Issues of Access, Inclusion, Equity, Gender dynamics

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) focuses on delivering equal rights, opportunities, and mainstream services to all citizens rather than welfare to the needy. The approach also recognizes formal and informal institutions and, embedded in these institutions, power relations that disempower women, the poor, the vulnerable and the excluded. GESI is a concept that addresses unequal power relations experienced by people on the grounds of gender, wealth, ability, location, caste/ethnicity, language and agency, or a combination of these dimensions. It focuses on the need for action to re-balance these power relations, reduce disparities and ensure equal rights, opportunities and respect for all individuals regardless of their social identity (UNWOMEN, 2017).

The marginalized population who resides in the lowest socioeconomic tiers of society of these 4 areas, are educated in the eight selected schools in the city of Dhaka. It takes the cooperation of many stakeholders, including school teachers, the school management committee, and the education authorities, to ensure the inclusion of the underprivileged population, children with disabilities, minority groups, and transgender people. Additionally, the institution needs qualified teachers, with an appropriate balance of male and female teachers. There are enough female teachers in the majority of the schools in the selected areas. However, schools lack gender-sensitive infrastructures and accessibility for people with disabilities. Infrastructures in public schools are frequently crowded and not very accessible to people with disabilities. For the recruitment of female teachers, the Bangladeshi government uses a quota system. Because of this, the four chosen areas have a sizable proportion of female teachers. Three of the eight selected schools' heads of school are female. In terms of male or female school leaders, the performance of the school does not significantly differ. However, we have analyzed GESI in three layers following:

Students at school

By building accessible infrastructure in the schools, NEP 2010 advises including students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions. NEP suggested that the Primary Teachers Training Institute instruct teachers about inclusive and special education techniques. However, the NEP 2010 also suggests that special education be made available to children who have severe and multiple disabilities.

To reduce dropout rates, government programs made significant financial investments in construction projects. Classrooms, toilets, and tube wells were built in more than 300 schools around the nation as part of the Primary Education Development Programme 2 and 3 and the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project. The purpose of this improved infrastructure was to make school buildings gender and disability accessible and to establish a favorable learning environment in the classrooms.

There are some schools without a canteen. To purchase a tiffin, students must leave the school, which is not safe. When it is necessary to accommodate a big number of children, schoolrooms are relatively small. The teacher's room lacks both basic amenities and appropriate workspaces.

Students at community

In contrast to many other school regions, certain schools are usually found in crowded slum areas where there are few facilities. Two of the schools are located on busy roadways, making the setting noisy and crowded. For children, crossing the street and walking to school are particularly difficult tasks.

Early dropout is reported to be most frequently caused by poverty. Despite the fact that all children receive free primary education, most slum families find the expense of textbooks, other educational supplies, and transportation to be unaffordable. Families in Dhaka are struggling to pay for a high standard of living and rising inflation, so they opt to send their kids to work instead of school.

Parents usually think that sending their children to school is an expensive and worthless endeavor. Due to the lack of decent employment opportunities after completing basic or secondary education, parents frequently send their children to various workshops where they can learn technical skills like welding, vehicle repairing, electrical repairing, etc. Child marriage is a significant factor in the early dropout of female students. Due to poverty, parents have been seen to marry off their daughters while they are between the ages of 13 and 16. Once married, the majority of female children are forced to look for work as housemaids or in RMG factories because they must provide for their families by earning money rather than spending money on their studies.

Impact of Covid-19

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, schools were shuttered starting from March 2020. After that, schools were closed until September 2021 with little to no academic activity. When the outbreak lessens, the ministry of education announced that assignments would be given to students in place of exams. In order to turn in their homework and advance to the next session, students arrived at school wearing appropriate health measures. The government originally used TV to implement a new teaching strategy. Lesson broadcasts for students in grades six through nine have begun on Sangsad TV. It broadcast classes five days a week from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm in an effort to stop learning loss. "My school at my home" was the project's name. Many schools videotape lessons and post the recordings to the student's social media accounts. In addition, the school launched a Facebook page and holds live classes there, as reported by the teachers. For widespread availability, several classes were also published on YouTube.

Following the switch to online teaching programs, issues for children with disabilities have increased, including digital exclusion and the possibility of falling behind because of a lack of suitable assistive technology. This technique also caused techno divisions among the male and female teachers, as in our country perspective women are lagged behind in technological competency.

Gender dynamics & social inclusion

Government of Bangladesh has quota system for recruitment of female teachers. That is why there are a good number of female teachers in the four selected areas. Among 8 selected school, three of the headteachers are female. The performance of school doesn't much vary in terms of male or female heads at the school. The number of students at the classroom till class 8 varies at different schools. Some schools reported to have more girl students than boys. The number of girls students decrease after class 8 as the teachers responded due to early marriage, household responsibilities, social barriers, and reluctance of students.

Women in STEM in School Scenario:

In all the 8 schools, number of female teachers has outgrown the number of male teachers. But, in most of the schools where there are male and female teachers, female teachers are less included in teaching the science, mathematics, or ICT. Socially existed technological disparities and lack of training may have contributed as factors here.

Table 7: Female Teachers in STEM

School Name	Total Teachers	Total Female Teachers	Total Science Teachers	Total Female Teachers in Science	Total Mathematics Teachers	Total Female Teachers in Mathematics	Total ICT Teachers	Total Female Teachers in ICT
Rupnagar Govt. Secondary School	19	17 (89%)	04	04 (100%)	02	00	06	06 (100%)
21 no Pallabi Govt. Primary School	18	18 (100%)	05	05(100%)	04	04 (100%)	N/A	N/A
Boro Moghbazar Govt. Primary School	13	12 (92%)	06	05 (83%)	04	03 (75%)	N/A	N/A
Kajlarpar Govt. Primary School	11	09 (82%)	04	04 (100%)	04	04 (100%)	N/A	N/A
Kajlarpar High School	18	09 (50%0	03	02 (67%)	03	00	02	01 (50%)
Bangladesh Muktijuddha	17	07 (41%)	09	03 (33%)	06	03 (50%)	03	01 (33%)

Govt. High School								
Poshchim Bhasantek Govt. primary School	06	05 (83%)	03	03 (100%)	02	02 (100%)	N/A	N/A

Disability Dynamics & Social Inclusion

Among 8 schools, disable students with physical and mental disabilities were found in 5 schools. Those students are mostly irregular. Some just attend the schools for the public exams. However, in terms of disability friendly environment, the schools face infrastructural gap, gap of special trainings on disable friendly teaching technique for the students, and lack of logistics.

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Table 8: Facilities for Disabled Students in The Selected Schools

School name	Number of disabled students	Ramp	Brail	Disable friendly entrance	Disable friendly lift	Disable friendly toilet	Arrangement for sign language	Arrangement for interpretation	Simplified information for disable students
Kajlarpar Govt. primary School	6	Not available	Available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Kajlarpar High School	3	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Bhasantek Govt. Primary School	2	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Bangladesh Muktijoddha High School	0	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Boro Moghbazar Govt. Primary School	0	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Shahnoori Model High School	4	Not available	Not available	Available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
21 no. Pallabi Govt. Primary School	2	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available
Rupnagar Govt. High School	0	Available	Not available	Available	Available	Not available	Not available	Not available	Not available

Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this report was to identify existing interventions and policies for out-of-school children (OOSC), visit fields and portray the actual scenario, and to make recommendations for cost-effective interventions for OOSC and children at risk. The report included reviews of existing major laws and policies of education, listed major interventions regarding school dropouts at primary and lower-secondary school level. In doing so, the report synthesized findings from secondary reports, articles and other sources in regard to school dropouts in Bangladesh to identify the major interventions with major outcome. The report also included empirical evidence from selected schools in urban slums in Dhaka City.

Since education is one of the fundamental human rights guaranteed by the constitution, understanding the status of out-of-school children is essential to support them in gaining access to education. Despite the fact that, Bangladesh purports to have improved access to education, there are still a substantial number of children who are not in school, and lowering this number remains a tough challenge. Because the adoption of major policies and programs aimed at out-of-school children is still not a top priority. Additionally, due to insufficient institutional capacities at the decentralized level, sub-national authorities are unable to spend the necessary time and resources to include the most disadvantaged children in the educational system or to present a persuasive investment rationale. Dropout tendency in the study areas was found to be staggeringly high. Many students, male and female, were found to drop out even before completing primary education. From our field observation, we found that financial barriers, lack of awareness among parents regarding the necessity of education above all, child marriage, child labor, migration, and inaccessibility were the prominent factors leading to dropouts. Among these, the financial barrier was the most prominent one which was worsened more due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Furthermore, COVID-19 caused a huge learning loss for the impoverished students of primary and lower secondary level because of prolonged shutdown and school closures. Such learning loss could not be recovered yet as we found from the field. Such loss can be mitigated with an innovative measure with the co-operation of government and non-governmental interventions. As the government has already come up with some innovative teaching and learning methods amid Covid-19 pandemic, some of these measures can be considered for scaling up in order to reap the benefits for the students.

In our field observation, we tried to see observe the gender dynamics in schools and the community. We found that the number of girl students decrease after class eight due to early marriage, household responsibilities, social barriers, and reluctance of students. Schools have a good number of female teachers and some of the schools have female headteachers too. Girl children of primary class usually enjoy the same treatment as of boy except a few exemptions. Many families become reluctant to continue education after primary level considering the cost of the education and social condition, they are in. Many of the government programs regarding girl education found to effective to increase school retention rate and spread awareness among parents.

Among other measures for improving school retention rate developing the infrastructures, preparing colorful classrooms, running stipend programs, enhancing accessibility for the disabled by installing ramps, organizing training for teachers on disability and inclusive education, training

school teachers to provide counselling services to their students, enhancing institutional capacity and making necessary reforms by providing in-service training to school teachers and headmasters under PEDP, SEDP, SEQAEP and TQI projects to ensure inclusive education, expansion of co-curricular activities and ICT integration in all types of schools etc., are some of the interventions running in different government schools. The installation of ICT lab, digital classroom, and use of video conferencing are some of the measures being implemented by the government under different projects and programs. The widespread use of ICT in education can be helpful for the students to attain skills and education necessary to meet the challenges of 21st century.

However, many of the interventions mentioned in this report still have some gaps that are not allowing all students to get along with inclusive education. Based on the previous exposure regarding school dropouts and students at risk, it was found that due to COVID-19 a huge learning loss is still existing there and students are not being able to keep hold on to mitigating this loss. ICT-based interventions can be helpful for both students and teachers to make teaching and learning more effective and interesting. The government of Bangladesh formulated National ICT Policy in 2009 in order to make Digital Bangladesh by 2021.

Additionally, conducting community awareness campaigns on education, parental responsibilities, and the dissemination of information about education programs will make parents aware of their children's educational opportunities. To mitigate the learning loss and to bring students back to school can only be highly fueled up if parents and community are aware of the necessity.

Recommendations

Analyzing the situation of existing laws and policies, interventions or programs, and the real-life scenario from the explored study areas we have come up with a couple of recommendations that may scale up the current programs and prevent dropouts more effectively.

1) Special incentives should be given to impoverished families who have school-going children so that they do not engage their children in income-generating activities
2) Stipend programmes should be expanded to cover the maximum number of students in need, Selection criteria should be made rational, and steps must be taken to ensure that only deserving candidates get the stipends.
3) Procedure to draw the stipend funds should be made user-friendly and accessible so that people from all walks of life can receive the fund smoothly.
4) Child marriage must be prevented at all costs. Stricter enforcement of the law has to be ensured and awareness-raising campaigns in the slums and rural areas should be conducted on regular basis to make parents aware of the consequences of child marriage.
5) Female students should be granted special stipends to encourage them to continue their education.
6) School infrastructure should be gender sensitive to ensure the retention of female students.
7) Law regarding child labour and hazardous jobs should be enforced strictly to ensure that no child is left out of school due to child labour.

8) School infrastructures must be made accessible to children with all types of disabilities. Where accessibility cannot be ensured instantly, the provision of reasonable accommodations should be ensured.
9) Training sessions need to be arranged for teachers, school staff and SMC members about inclusive education and reasonable accommodation.
10) Sign language interpreters, Braille instructors and educational counsellors should be recruited from all types of educational institutions.
11) Flexible curriculum and individualized education plan should be ensured for students with disabilities
12) Students from impoverished families should be given smartphones and internet packages from the government in case the government decides to shift to online classes again due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
13) Monitoring committees under CPEMU need to be more active and reports about the enrollment of children from migrant families should be sent to the local government and Upazila administration.
14) Parent teacher associations need to be activated in all schools and meetings of parent-teacher associations should be arranged regularly.
15) School feeding programmes such as mid-day-meal should be relaunched
16) Quality non-formal education equipped with vocational training should be arranged for dropped-out children. Non-formal and vocational programmes should be accessible to female students and students with disabilities

Scope of Scalability and Planned Interventions

During COVID-19, prolonged school closure resulted in a huge learning gap among students. As a result, students were less interactive and could not focus on their studies. Therefore, ICT-based digital content can foster greater understanding, make learners more interested, and mitigate learning loss. All primary schools in treatment and control areas have multimedia classrooms with materials available, including a laptop and projector, and all secondary schools have ICT labs. Although the government have provided the schools with ICT labs, these schools lack the proper environment, training and practice to make the proper use of those. Team SAIST will run capacity-building training for teachers on how to make ICT-based reading materials. So that, later on, they can make their own reading materials to use in their ICT lab for teaching purposes and can continue teaching through contents.

In our study, we will focus on GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) by identifying marginalized, abject poor, women, disabled children, and children with special needs to ensure no one is left behind. The research will engage at least 40% women and marginalized people in the planning process and provide extra support to those groups to ensure equity in scaling up ICT-based education interventions. To ensure the optimality in the policy and scaling process is widely

addressed the GESI framework will include students at school, students at community, impact of COVID- 19, policies and practices regarding gender equality and social inclusion. This will be guided by GESI tools. As part of the scaling process, all documents for internal and external use will include non-sexist terms and expressions, and we will avoid biased, discriminatory or demeaning interpretations and norms.

The initial field visits to the study area and the empirical findings provided insights into the possibility of an ICT-based approach to teaching and learning. As well as assessing the effectiveness ICT based learning in a research setting, the team will also consider how to sustain their effectiveness on a broader scale within the government system. The Teachers of the treatment area will be encouraged to teach in an interactive and creative way with ICT based contents. It is expected that children who receive the interventions will show reduced absenteeism, improved learning capability, and a lower dropout rate. It will be easy for teachers to control the students within the classroom. As a result, students will become more attentive in class. Parents and community members will be more cooperative and aware of students' educational and learning gaps through the awareness program. We will identify a scalable policy based on the learnings and results from the process. Incorporating this policy into decision-making will make it sustainable and easier to implement in the future.

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Annex.A

Photos from field

Picture 1: Entrance of a school in Mirpur, Dhaka. This school has been selected as a treatment area. A community adjacent to the school has also been visited which is a slum and most of the student belongs from underprevilized families.

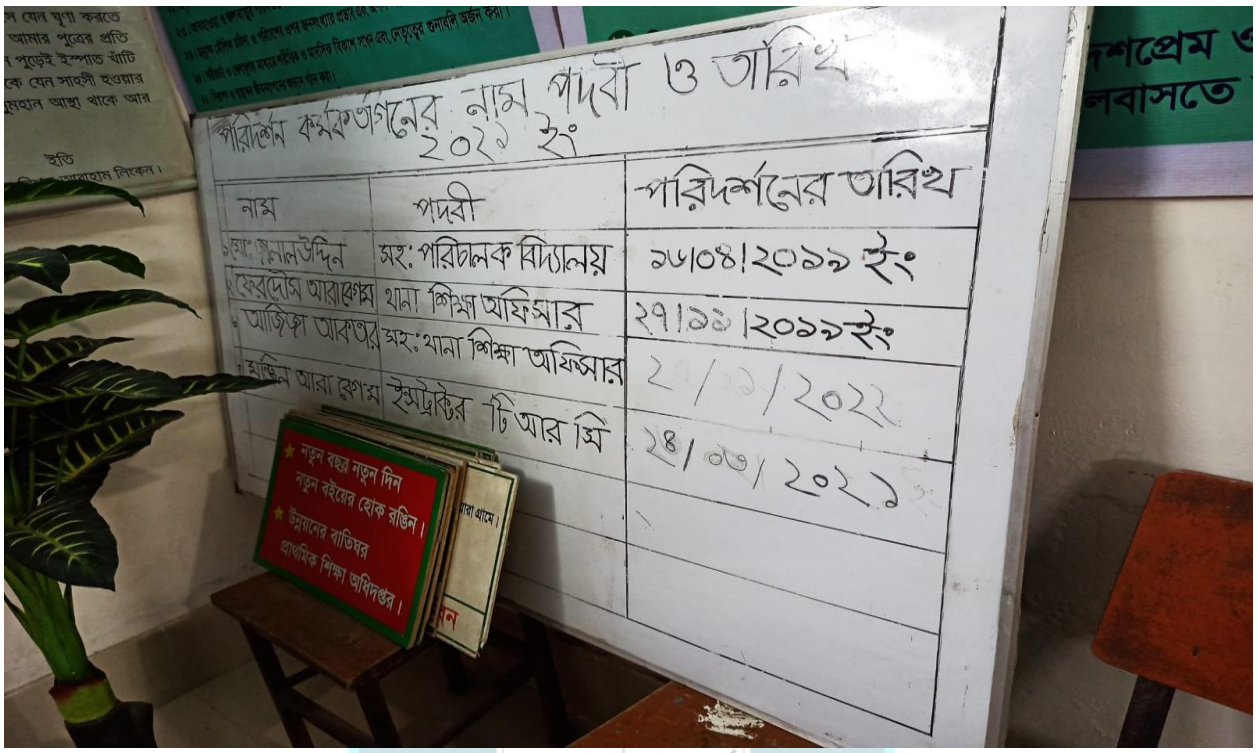
Picture 2: A still picture of Bhasantek slum situated in Mirpur, Dhaka city. The slum is located near the school. A lot of children from this slum go to Paschim Vasantek school.

Picture 3: Inside of a classroom in a primary school. Most of the governemnt school have such sitting arrnagement where three students sit in a single table. Boys and girls have separate corner to sit.

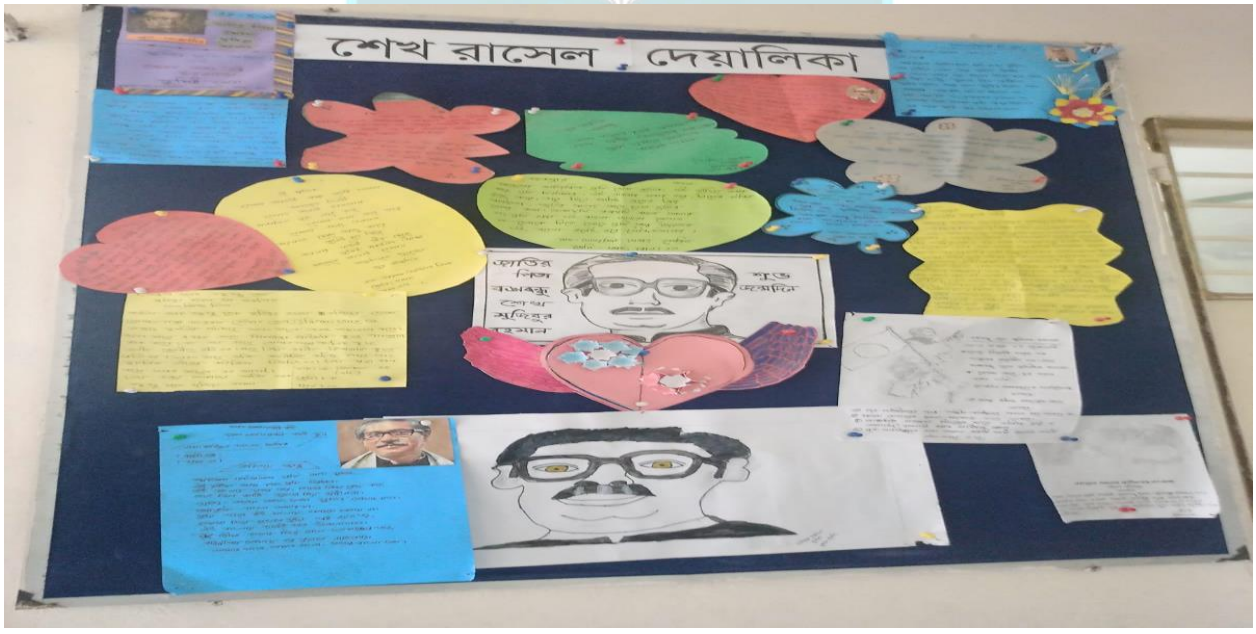
Picture 4: School's infrastructures in Dhaka Uddan area.

Picture 5: One of the team members of SAIST discussing with the community members regarding the

Picture 6: One of the Research Assistants visiting Kazlar par community in Jatrabari, Dhaka.



Picture 7: Monitoring committee members' name in Bhasantek Govt. Primary School.



Picture 8: Extra-curricular activity in Rupnagar Govt. High School

Annex. B

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) Framework

The Gender Equality and Social Inclusion (GESI) focuses on delivering equal rights, opportunities, and mainstream services to all citizens rather than welfare to the needy. The approach also recognizes formal and informal institutions and, embedded in these institutions, power relations that disempower women, the poor, the vulnerable and the excluded. GESI is a concept that addresses unequal power relations experienced by people on the grounds of gender, wealth, ability, location, caste/ethnicity, language and agency, or a combination of these dimensions. It focuses on the need for action to re-balance these power relations, reduce disparities and ensure equal rights, opportunities and respect for all individuals regardless of their social identity (UNWOMEN, 2017).

The marginalized population who resides in the lowest socioeconomic tiers of society of these 4 areas, are educated in the eight selected schools in the city of Dhaka. It takes the cooperation of many stakeholders, including school teachers, the school management committee, and the education authorities, to ensure the inclusion of the underprivileged population, children with disabilities, minority groups, and transgender people. Additionally, the institution needs qualified teachers, with an appropriate balance of male and female teachers. There are enough female teachers in the majority of the schools in the selected areas. However, schools lack gender-sensitive infrastructures and accessibility for people with disabilities. Infrastructures in public schools are frequently crowded and not very accessible to people with disabilities. For the recruitment of female teachers, the Bangladeshi government uses a quota system. Because of this, the four chosen areas have a sizable proportion of female teachers. Three of the eight selected schools' heads of school are female. In terms of male or female school leaders, the performance of the school does not significantly differ. However, we have analyzed GESI in four layers following:

1. Students at school:

By building accessible infrastructure in the schools, NEP 2010 advises including students with disabilities in mainstream educational institutions. NEP suggested that the Primary Teachers Training Institute instruct teachers about inclusive and special education techniques. However, the NEP 2010 also suggests that special education be made available to children who have severe and multiple disabilities.

To reduce dropout rates, government programs made significant financial investments in construction projects. Classrooms, toilets, and tube wells were built in more than 300 schools around the nation as part of the Primary Education Development Programme 2 and 3 and the Secondary Education Quality and Access Enhancement Project. The purpose of this improved infrastructure was to make school buildings gender and disability accessible and to establish a favorable learning environment in the classrooms.

There are some schools without a canteen. To purchase a tiffin, students must leave the school, which is not safe. When it is necessary to accommodate a big number of children, schoolrooms are relatively small. The teacher's room lacks both basic amenities and appropriate workspaces.

2. Students at community

In contrast to many other school regions, certain schools are usually found in crowded slum areas where there are few facilities. Two of the schools are located on busy roadways, making the setting noisy and crowded. For children, crossing the street and walking to school are particularly difficult tasks.

Early dropout is reported to be most frequently caused by poverty. Despite the fact that all children receive free primary education, most slum families find the expense of textbooks, other educational supplies, and transportation to be unaffordable. Families in Dhaka are struggling to pay for a high standard of living and rising inflation, so they opt to send their kids to work instead of school.

Parents usually think that sending their children to school is an expensive and worthless endeavor. Due to the lack of decent employment opportunities after completing basic or secondary education, parents frequently send their children to various workshops where they can learn technical skills like welding, vehicle repairing, electrical repairing, etc. Child marriage is a significant factor in the early dropout of female students. Due to poverty, parents have been seen to marry off their daughters while they are between the ages of 13 and 16. Once married, the majority of female children are forced to look for work as housemaids or in RMG factories because they must provide for their families by earning money rather than spending money on their studies.

3. Impact of Covid-19

Due to the coronavirus outbreak, schools were shuttered starting from March 2020. After that, schools were closed until September 2021 with little to no academic activity. When the outbreak lessens, the ministry of education announced that assignments would be given to students in place of exams. In order to turn in their homework and advance to the next session, students arrived at school wearing appropriate health measures. The government originally used TV to implement a new teaching strategy. Lesson broadcasts for students in grades six through nine have begun on Sangsad TV. It broadcast classes five days a week from 9:00 am to 12:00 pm in an effort to stop learning loss. "My school at my home" was the project's name. Many schools videotape lessons and post the recordings to the student's social media accounts. In addition, the school launched a Facebook page and holds live classes there, as reported by the teachers. For widespread availability, several classes were also published on YouTube.

Following the switch to online teaching programs, issues for children with disabilities have increased, including digital exclusion and the possibility of falling behind because of a lack of suitable assistive technology. This technique also caused techno divisions among the male and female teachers, as in our country perspective women are lagged behind in technological competency.

4. Policies and practices regarding Gender equality and Social Inclusion

The Constitution of Bangladesh has ensured the participation of every child irrespective of any background without making any discrimination. Article 28(3) of the constitution mentions the inclusion of every child in educational institutions:

> [Article 28 (3)]: No citizen shall, on grounds only of religion, race, caste, sex or place of birth be subjected to any disability, liability, restriction or condition with regard to access to any place of public entertainment or resort, or admission to any educational institution (Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs [MoLJPA], 2000:5).

In addition, Article 17 (a) mentions free and compulsory education for all at the primary level.

> [Article 17 (a)]…establishing a uniform, mass-oriented and universal system of education and extending free and compulsory education to all children to such stage as may be determined by law".

National Education Policy 2010 has three objectives that mention the provision of inclusive education for marginalized and disadvantaged people:

> 22: Bringing all socio-economically disadvantaged children into education including street children;
>
> 23: Ensuring the scopes of development of cultural and linguistic characteristics of all the indigenous [and ethnic groups in Bangladesh];
>
> 24: Ensuring the rights of all children with disabilities. (Ministry of Education, 2010: 1-2).

On October 9, 2013, Bangladesh passed the Rights and Protection of Persons with Disability Act. This Act repealed the 2001 Disability Welfare Act and replaced it with a rights-based approach to PWDs. Bangladesh took a significant step toward protecting its citizens by enacting RPPDA. Article 9 of the UNCRPD emphasized the right of people with disabilities to participate independently in all aspects of life and to have access to all public infrastructure, transportation, information, and communications. CRPD (article 24) serves as the benchmark by which to assess the development of inclusive education for students with disabilities. Schools in the study areas have shown lack of disable friendly infrastructure. One school has a disability corner equipped with some instruments for person with special needs arranged by Center for Disability in Development (CDD). Other schools have a small number of disable students who hardly get any special support provisioned by the RPPDA and constitution. Government and related stakeholders need to work extensively for ensuring access to education for disable students in primary and lower-secondary level.

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Annex. C

Scaling Framework

Keeping scaling science in mind this project intends to work on increasing the teacher's capacity and ensuring inclusive access to education of the students of selected areas providing ICT based intervention. This section will explain the scaling up process based on the indicators and criteria set up by IDRC and KIX.

Here the scaling framework is split into 3 sections: 1. ***Framing*** (selecting the research topic, focus, and questions), 2. ***Doing*** (data collection, analysis/synthesis, and interpretation), 3. ***Sharing*** (communicating research results).

Potential opportunities that might grow the impact of this research:

During the framing and design phases of the project, the research team considered possible scaling opportunities within selected schools. Based on the previous exposure of the research team regarding school dropouts and students at risk, it was found that ICT-based interventions can be helpful for both students and teachers to make teaching and learning more effective and interesting. The government of Bangladesh formulated National ICT Policy in 2009 in order to make Digital Bangladesh by 2021. Additionally, conducting community awareness campaigns on education, parental responsibilities, and the dissemination of information about education programs will make parents aware of their children's educational opportunities. The research question addresses key concerns during COVID-19 by planners, policymakers, government officials, and teachers about learning gaps and absenteeism. Researchers and team members of SAIST identified the key stakeholders and contacted district and local level of education officials, community leaders, teachers, and parents of students to ensure their support in the scaling process.

***Doing*:**

Description of optimal scale

During COVID-19, prolonged school closure resulted in a huge learning gap among students. As a result, students were less interactive and could not focus on their studies. Therefore, ICT-based digital content can foster greater understanding, make learners more interested, and mitigate learning loss. All primary schools in treatment and control areas have multimedia classrooms with materials available, including a laptop and projector, and all secondary schools have ICT labs. Although the government have provided the schools with ICT labs, these schools lack the proper environment, training and practice to make the proper use of those. Team SAIST will run capacity-building training for teachers on how to make ICT-based reading materials. So that, later on, they can make their own reading materials to use in their ICT lab for teaching purposes and can continue teaching through contents.

Gender Equality and Social Inclusion

In our research, we will focus on GESI (Gender Equality and Social Inclusion) by identifying marginalized, abject poor, women, disabled children, and children with special needs to ensure no one is left behind. The research will engage at least 40% women and marginalized people in the

planning process and provide extra support to those groups to ensure equity in scaling up ICT-based education interventions. To ensure the optimality in the policy and scaling process is widely addressed the GESI framework will include students at school, students at community, impact of COVID- 19, policies and practices regarding gender equality and social inclusion. This will be guided by GESI tools following: Tool 1: GESI Responsive markers, Tool 2: Data Gathering, Analysis and Disaggregated data tool, Tool 3: Budgeting for GESI, Tool 5: Do no harm, Tool 7: GESI sensitive communication tools.

As part of the scaling process, all documents for internal and external use will include non-sexist terms and expressions, and we will avoid biased, discriminatory or demeaning interpretations and norms.

Involving stakeholders

Using attendance records, household mapping, surveys, KII, focus groups, interviews, workshops, advocacy, training, awareness programs, campaigns, and meetings, data enumerators will collect data and generate evidence of the need for scaling the programs. Teachers, students, parents, community leaders, and local NGOs will be involved through meetings and awareness programs. In order to maximize the results, we will also use the modules of government and non-profit organizations.

Key moments for learning and adaptation:

The initial field visits to the study area and the empirical findings provided insights into the possibility of an ICT-based approach to teaching and learning. As well as assessing the effectiveness ICT based learning in a research setting, the team will also consider how to sustain their effectiveness on a broader scale within the government system. The Teachers of the treatment area will be encouraged to teach in an interactive and creative way with ICT based contents. It is expected that children who receive the interventions will show reduced absenteeism, improved learning capability, and a lower dropout rate. It will be easy for teachers to control the students within the classroom. As a result, students will become more attentive in class. Parents and community members will be more cooperative and aware of students' educational and learning gaps. We will identify a scalable policy based on the learnings and results from the process. Incorporating this policy into decision-making will make it sustainable and easier to implement in the future.

***Sharing*:**

Strategies to facilitate participation and contribution to the intended impacts

Participation of local authorities, community members and teachers is essential to ensure sustainability and effectiveness of scaling. The outcomes will be shared through workshops, awareness programs, and government meetings.

Particular findings or aspects of the analysis for stakeholders beyond targeted group

If content-based learning proves to be effective, it can be adapted to other slums or schools. Moreover, we will take a forward-looking approach and exchange information, so that the work we do does not end here and will suggest to incorporate as a policy.

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