

## *Reaching the Unreached Case Studies*

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## **Bangladesh**

Basic Education for  
Hard to Reach  
Urban Children

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## *Bangladesh*

### Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children

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### **Centre Management Committee**

*Halima, Sari Vendor, Employer, CMC Member, Parent*

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## Preface

In 1999, with the support of the Department for International Development (DFID), UNICEF's Programme Division embarked on an ambitious project to help strengthen human rights based programming in the organization. Part of this effort involved the development of more effective programming that would address the exclusion of the world's poorest and most disadvantaged children from the fulfilment of their rights. The first stage of work included an effort to identify and learn from projects supported by UNICEF that were already assisting some of the hardest to reach children in the world. A study of Annual Reports helped to reveal about one hundred such projects. Questionnaires concerning lessons learned from these experiences were sent to country offices and about forty responses were written up as Case Descriptions.

In the next phase, five UNICEF field experiences were selected for more detailed study. The five were selected for their geographic diversity, the range of topics covered, and, in some cases, because they came from countries or regions that were themselves "unreached" in the sense that they rarely received much attention. Some of the projects had been in existence for many years, while others were much more recent. The projects included:

- ❖ India: Convergent Community Action in the states of Bihar and Jharkhand (CCA)
- ❖ Papua New Guinea: Community Based Best Practices for Child Survival and Development
- ❖ Bangladesh: Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children
- ❖ Sudan: Education for the Children of Nomads

A fifth case study focused on a project that had been unsuccessful in fulfilling its objectives. This case study is referred to as Country X: Village Based Child Care Support.

In addition, an overall "Lessons Learned" was prepared which analyzes common and different experiences between the five projects. The five case studies and "Lessons Learned" comprise a set that will be the subject of discussion and development of training and programme activities in UNICEF. It is intended that the case studies will be published.

The consultant who prepared the case studies travelled to each of the countries, and received considerable support from local UNICEF Country Offices, government counterparts and allied NGOs.

## Lessons Learned

**Bold strategies to draw attention to neglected populations.** The Hard to Reach project struck out into new territory in trying to establish ways for children engaged in hazardous labour to gain access to education. The donors moved in this direction initially without substantial government recognition of its importance. When the project began, working children were regarded as hard to reach by education primarily because of the attitudes of their parents and employers. However, it emerged that working children were also hard to reach because the education system has not regarded them as potential clients, and because their communities did not think their education was necessary. They were hard to reach because investment flows were against them as well as attitudes. Despite many difficulties, the boldness of the project has contributed to increasing awareness in government and in sections of the community, that all children – even the poorest and most disadvantaged working children – have education rights that must be addressed.

**Clarity over roles, responsibilities and qualifications.** One of the key shortcomings of the project involved a lack of clarity in the identification of areas where working children lived and where NGOs should be assigned, lack of clarity over the qualifications needed by NGOs and of the respective responsibilities of the teachers, supervisors, Centre Management Committees and programme officers in the Directorate of Non-Formal Education.

**Identifying and utilizing dedicated volunteer teachers.** An important contribution of the project has been the demonstration that numbers of students, retired teachers and unemployed or under-employed professional can be enlisted as volunteers who will run or supervise the learning centres. These individuals should be recognized as front-line community mobilizers, whose task include mobilizing communities to ensure all children fulfil their right to education. Support needs to include quality training and support for teachers and supervisors to include child development, gender, rights, and persuasive methods for working with guardians and employers.

**Establishing community teams and “knowing the community.”** The project worked best where effective and experienced NGOs were enlisted to run projects in communities where they already possessed strong ties. The NGOs provided the bridge between government and communities. If they were well established they had less difficulty in developing more effective Centre Management Committees. An even stronger identification of the “community team” – including the NGO, supervisor, teacher, CMC members and local government – is envisaged for the next

round of the project. The aim is to have the Hard to Reach centres truly wedded to the fabric of communities, and not apparently imposed from outside. An effective community team dedicated to recruiting working children would also be better equipped to ensure that learning centres are located in the most appropriate areas.

**Modular, multi-grade flexible teaching and learning strategies** The success of the centres was related to their adaptation to the lifestyles of working children, accepting the “learn and earn” approach and providing two hours of schooling daily rather than a full school day. The learning centre curriculum was reported to allow the students to learn more quickly than the curricula used in other schools. It emerged that the learning centres needed even more flexibility to respond to the realities of working children’s lives. To this end the two-year session was broken into three eight-month modules that would allow working children more time to complete the course.

**Developing strong and sustained communications support to change opinions** Ensuring the effectiveness of the centres, particularly the enrolment of working children, required sustained communications support within communities and within the wider society. The ultimate aim of such communications had to be a shift in attitudes that would ensure acceptance of children’s rights to education. There needed to be greater parental and community demand for school access.

**Effective monitoring and the value of formative evaluations.** Sharing of experience among teachers, NGOs, government officials connected with the project was useful but clearer methods for channelling results into the project needed to be established. A ‘bottleneck’ in the response of government was created because key management decisions were taken at a high level and were difficult to challenge. Ultimately the problems highlighted in the formative evaluation were essential for mobilizing change in decisions that had inhibited project progress.

**Responding to the Community Response** The project showed that at times communities will respond to a project initiative in unanticipated ways, and in a sense “make it their own.” In this case, non-working children turned up in the Hard to Reach centres either because those centres were more convenient or because, for the first time perhaps, some parents realized that their children should be in school. These were important lessons not relevant perhaps to the situation of working children, yet were useful in highlighting the difficulties of access to education of children living in urban slums.

## Introduction

### Aims and Organization

The Basic Education for Hard To Reach Urban Children project aims to serve harshly exploited working children. It was top-down by design, but with good reason. It confronted widespread beliefs that denial of education for children in deeply impoverished families was an unavoidable fact of life. Such children were (and still are) expected to work, often in circumstances that are hazardous to their health and well-being. Thus education for working children was not a priority of families, communities or government. The Hard to Reach project was an attempt to achieve an ambitious breakthrough in establishing recognition of the rights of working children. By providing hundreds of thousands of working children with access to two hours schooling daily, the project hoped to lay a foundation that would ultimately allow children to break out of the most hazardous forms of labour. By keeping costs low, it was hoped that the project would be sustainable and have potential for widespread replication.

The Hard to Reach project was designed to provide 351,000 working children with two years of schooling in six divisional headquarters by December 2000. Later, the project was extended up to June 2003. UNICEF gave technical support for the project, which drew funds from DFID, SIDA, UNICEF and the Government of Bangladesh. From the start, all parties accepted that it would be impossible at this stage to abolish child labour in Bangladesh so the project adopted a “learn and earn” approach.

The project called for Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) to sub-contract NGOs to establish thousands of learning centres in areas where large numbers of working children lived or worked. Each centre was based in a small room that was used for a two-hour daily class for thirty children. (Some rooms were used to run several shifts of classes during the day.) The NGOs were responsible for conducting a baseline survey of child workers in the communities where they were assigned. Teachers were then to identify and enrol thirty working children to come

#### **Investment in the Hard to Reach Project (1997-2003)**

<i>DFID</i>	<i>US\$7 million</i>
<i>SIDA</i>	<i>US\$ 5 million</i>
<i>UNICEF</i>	
<i>(From Regular and Other Resources)</i>	<i>US\$5 million</i>

*with additional resources provided by the Government of Bangladesh*

to the learning centre for the daily two-hour class. Teachers were expected to maintain close relations with families and employers of their students. If children dropped out of the Hard to Reach class or attended infrequently, teachers were expected to persuade parents and employers to encourage the child's return.

Supervisors were assigned to support the work of about fifteen teachers and the centres they operated. They were to assist teachers in identifying appropriate accommodation for the learning centre and in negotiating leases with landlords. They were also to assist teachers in maintaining student attendance and in establishing Centre Management Committees (CMC) of parents and representatives of the local community that would help in running the school.

The CMCs were set up to help enrol students, to ensure regular attendance of the children, teachers and supervisors and to serve as a link between the centres and local authorities.

The teachers and supervisors received twelve days training in the use of the enhanced curriculum specifically developed for the project. This was jointly developed by the DNFE, teachers and NGOs with experience in non-formal education, and was geared for young people who were

<b>Cost Per Learner</b> (24 months)		working and aged 8 to 14 years who had little or no previous school experience. It covered basic elements of the Grade 1 to 3 curriculum and included additional material on Bangladesh history and culture, health, hygiene and other life skills.
<b>1 teacher @ Tk800 /month</b>	<b>Tk 19,200</b>	Teachers received an honorarium of Tk 800 per month (about \$14) and supervisors Tk 1,200 per month (about \$21) plus a travel allowance of Tk 300 per month. The costs of coordination were to be carried by the NGOs themselves.
<b>1 Supervisor (1/15) @ Tk1500/month</b>	<b>Tk 2,400</b>	
<b>Centre Rent @ Tk500/month</b>	<b>Tk 12,000</b>	
<b>Training and Materials</b>	<b>Tk 4,853</b>	
<b>Supplies for Learners</b>	<b>Tk 7,328</b>	
<b>Centre Operation @ Tk400/month</b>	<b>Tk 9,600</b>	
<b>Social Mobilization (one time)</b>	<b>Tk 200</b>	
<b>Total Cost of Centre</b>	<b>Tk 55,581</b>	
<b>Cost per learner</b>	<b>Tk 1,853</b>	
	<b>(US\$ 34)</b>	
<b>Total budget cost</b>	<b>Tk 743.06 million</b>	

## Working Children

The project faced a formidable challenge yet was also timely and able to benefit from slowly increasing awareness that reliance on child labour was a problem for Bangladesh.

By 1996 there were an estimated 6.6 million working children less than 14 years old in Bangladesh. About 42% of these were girls and about 36% lived in urban areas.<sup>1</sup> They were engaged in at least 300 forms of work of which 49 have been identified as hazardous to their physical and mental well-being.<sup>2</sup> Hazardous jobs are not only those that expose children to risks of injury or abuse, as is the case for children who are tempo helpers, domestics, waste pickers, brick chippers, and workers in tea stalls and auto-repair workshops. Hazardous work also includes jobs where children labour for ten hours or more in grudgingly repetitive manufacturing activities – making shoes and caps, weaving and embroidering. It includes work that places burdens on children that are far beyond their years, as when children as young as ten are left in charge of younger siblings for hours every day while their parents work.

According to the 1995-96 Child Labour Survey, only 36% of working children receive any pay. Unpaid workers, 58% boys and 71% girls, are mainly family helpers and apprentices in farms and factories. In 1995-96 the average income was Tk 478 per month (about \$6). Domestic servants usually earned less and often nothing at all.

A recent opinion survey of employers of child domestics in Dhaka and Chittagong showed that most children worked for about 16 hours a day. A survey of 10,000 households showed that 90% of domestics were girls aged 9 to 16 years old and half of these were illiterate. According to CLS, 89% of working children surveyed had received no education.<sup>3</sup>

Until the mid-1990s, there was little awareness in Bangladesh that there was anything wrong with the role children played in the workforce. It was considered the inevitable fate of the poorest families that their children would have to contribute to the household economy. The parents of working children, were often illiterate and unschooled, had little awareness of the value of education, and made virtually no demand for the education rights of their children to be fulfilled. Attendance at primary school had been compulsory since 1993 but it was tacitly accepted by the government that the poorest children would not attend.

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<sup>1</sup> National Plan of Action for Children (1998) MOWCA, p-9

<sup>2</sup> ILO-UNICEF Rapid Assessment, 1995

<sup>3</sup> Data quoted in GOB/UNICEF Master Plan of Operations, 2001-2005

Limited access to government primary schools in the poorest urban slum areas may have been influenced by this assumption. Schools were generally located some distance from the places where the poorest children lived. Low access to primary education was also a result of the relentless drift of the rural poor to city slums and a burgeoning population of children in need of schools that urban authorities had apparently been unable to match. Indeed, most slum areas were not recognized as legitimate settlements and therefore were not included in urban planning processes.

By 1995, the garment industry of Bangladesh was booming. Factories were springing up all over Dhaka and many of these employed young children who earned minute wages for excessively long hours of labour. In the same year, however, the Harkins Bill, proposed in the US Senate, prohibited the import to the USA of any items manufactured by children. Although it was never passed, the proposed legislation sent shockwaves through the garment industry in Bangladesh and ultimately led to a landmark Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the garment manufacturers, UNICEF and ILO. Under this Memorandum, special schools operated by NGOs (BRAC and GSS MOU) were set up for former child workers in the garment industry. Over the next four years more than 9,000 children were enrolled.

Preparation of UNICEF's 1996-2001 Country Programme was undertaken against this backdrop of increasing awareness of the deprivations of working children. It became clear that the new country programme had to include an initiative to serve and promote their rights. Since 1994, UNICEF had been negotiating with the Directorate of Non-Formal Education for the establishment of an education project for unserved children living in urban slums. In the new country programme, this project, Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Children, became a pilot scheme specifically designed to serve working children.

## Project Progress

Since 1997, more than five thousand learning centres have been opened in small rooms in the slums of Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal and Sylhet, and by 2001, more than 200,000 children had enrolled for the daily two-hour session in basic education.

In 2000, a formative evaluation<sup>4</sup> of the project was conducted which aimed to identify strengths, weaknesses and to indicate areas where

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<sup>4</sup> DNFE/UNICEF (2000) Formative Evaluation of BEHTRUC conducted by Uniconsult International.

improvement was necessary. Several important achievements were highlighted.

- ❖ By 2001, at least 70,000 working children who otherwise had no access to education had enrolled in the centres.
- ❖ The establishment of thousands of community-based learning centres and the work of thousands of Centre Management Committees was helping to provoke greater awareness of the rights of children to education.
- ❖ Many of the more experienced NGOs working with the project reported positive results in terms of the proportion of working children in their classrooms, retention of students and learning outcomes.
- ❖ The project helped to generate awareness in government that working children have a right to education and deserve special consideration.
- ❖ The project highlighted problems in the inadequacy of educational provision in poor urban areas.
- ❖ For thousands of working children, the Centres provided a safe place to learn, play and mix with their peers.

The evaluation also indicated some areas of concern. In particular,

- ❖ While 45% of children in the centres were working and an additional 25% were engaged in household work, a large proportion of students were not “working children.”
- ❖ Between a quarter and a third of students dropped out of the learning centres before completing the course and attendance was irregular for many students.
- ❖ The pressure on teachers to maintain a class size of thirty had led them to replace dropouts with other students, but those who joined the course late could not catch up with the lessons. Replacement students were often non-working.
- ❖ Many considered the training for teachers and supervisors inadequate.

- ❖ More than 140 NGOs had been sub-contracted by the Primary and Mass Education Division to run learning centres. The quality of service they provided was highly variable and the number of NGOs involved was too great.
- ❖ Many of the centres were over-crowded, with poor ventilation and lighting – amounting to a poor quality learning environment.
- ❖ There was no system for monitoring performance of the learning centres or mechanisms that would allow adjustment as problems arose.
- ❖ Among other management problems: the DNFE programme officer for Dhaka was overwhelmed with work, being responsible for overseeing more than 2,000 centres. Learning materials developed for the project arrived late and the community-based Centre Management Committee meetings were often poorly attended.
- ❖ There were several fund flow problems. Salary and rent payments for the centres were sometimes late. Each learning centre was also supposed to receive Tk400 per month to support additional operating costs. In practice, the NGOs tended to keep this money (explaining that they received no funding to support coordination.)
- ❖ Achievement tests of students suggested that only half of those who had attended the centres for more than 16 months were significantly benefiting.

The learning centres aimed to promote the idea that working children were entitled to education. In the course of the case study it emerged that in some instances the centres could also be seen as endorsing the opposite – that children should work as well as attend school. Disturbingly, the case study team encountered one teacher who had begun converting non-working children attending her centre into working children.

From the start of the project there was an impressive transparency (according to all parties) about its shortcomings. UNICEF, DFID, SIDA and DNFE regularly and frankly aired their concerns. The formative evaluation was undertaken to help guide the project in making improvements and has been helpful in motivating effective changes that are beginning to show positive results. These include moves to increase the number of working children attending the centres, to reduce drop out,

to improve the quality of education, to ensure selection of properly qualified NGOs and to improve monitoring.

## Methodology and Constraints on the Case Study

The author spent one week in Dhaka, and held interviews with groups of working children, parents, teachers, supervisors, members of the CMCs, representatives of NGOs, with Lutfur Rahman, Project Director of the Hard to Reach project in the Directorate of Non Formal Education, donor representatives and UNICEF staff. Field visits and interviews included four Hard to Reach learning centres and visits to the place of work and residence of two working children. The author was provided with project documents extending over several years, which are listed in the Bibliography. Statistical data used in the case study is drawn from the Formative Evaluation conducted in 2000.<sup>5</sup>

The learning centres selected for field visits, and all the interviews with project staff, working children, teachers and Centre Management Committee members focused on those who were making positive contributions to the project or were gaining significantly from it. The author did not have sufficient time to compare these experiences first-hand with those of learning centres that were less successful. There was also insufficient time for the author to visit learning centres in cities other than Dhaka.

Some of the interview participants felt that they had not been given sufficient time to prepare constructive contributions to the case study. It is hoped that sharing early drafts will allow project partners and participants to ensure their views are properly and constructively represented.

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<sup>5</sup> DNFE/UNICEF (2000) Formative Evaluation of BEHTRUC conducted by Uniconsult International.

## The Children

### Sumy, domestic worker, age 11

My mother found me a job as a domestic worker when I was 7 or 8 years old. She didn't have any choice. There was nowhere for us to go. My father had died when I was one year old and the families had been arguing ever since about who would take care of us. My mother's parents could do nothing because my uncles' wives objected. For a while my father's family took us in. I started going to school with my cousins, but I didn't live the same way as them. I had to wash their clothes and clean for them.



When my cousins had puffed rice and milk for breakfast, I ate the leftovers of the meal from the night before. There was never enough to eat anyway. One of my cousins was about three years old and I wasn't much older but I had to look after her. Once I was carrying her and fell. My aunts beat me for being careless, but I was just a child myself.

I used to say to my mother, "Why did my father have to die! Why did this have to happen to me! If my father was alive we would have food and clothes and our lives would be completely different!"

"It is our fate," my mother would say, "don't complain." And then she would cry, so I stopped complaining because it made her so sad and life was hard enough anyway.

When I was about seven years old and we were almost starving my mother told me we were going to live in Dhaka city. "You will have to leave school," she told me, "but we will have a better life." I felt bad about not going to school anymore but I didn't tell anyone.

In Dhaka, we went to stay with my mother's sister but we still had to work for everything. My cousin was the same age as me but she was a city girl and went to the government primary school while I had to stay at home and clean. She looked down on me. My aunt couldn't support both of us anyway so eventually my mother found me a job with an elderly couple. We stay together here in a small room but then she goes to work for her sister while I work here. I clean the apartment, wash clothes and work in the kitchen. I begin at dawn and work until night, seven days a

week. They pay me Tk 500 (about \$10) per month, which they give to my mother. They feed me three times a day and give me clothes that used to belong to my employer's grandchildren.

They are not bad people. They don't hit me but sometimes they shout if they don't like my work. They call me, "you child of a pig!" and it makes me cry because why would they insult my father like that? He is dead and can do nothing. I do not argue with them though because if I did they might throw us out.

At first I had no time off. They would not let me set foot outside the house. I told them, "Look, you have to let me play sometimes." They didn't like it but eventually they let me go out and I made some friends like Sharmi who lives in the apartment downstairs. I have told her my whole life story and she said, "What can you do, it is your fate. I have a father and so my life is different."

There were some children on the street that used to refuse to play with me because I didn't go to school. I always wished I could go back. I'd only had one or two years of education and I had forgotten nearly everything. But one day some friends told me about the Hard to Reach school. They said this was a special school for working children because you only had to go for two hours a day. I went home and told my employer and asked her if I could go. She made some enquiries and finally she agreed.

*Mohammed said that a servant must be treated as a child of God, yet we do not treat our domestic servants well. Many people believe it is perfectly acceptable to have a child as a servant, even from the age of eight or nine, and never think about whether this child is being cared for properly or if they are receiving an education. These are the attitudes we have to change.*

I made all the arrangements myself. I went with my friends to meet the teacher. I told

**Lutfur Rahman,  
Project Director, DNFE**

her I was a domestic worker. She gave me a test to see what I knew already. Then she agreed to admit me and wrote my name in the register. She explained that the school would run for two hours a day, six days a week for two years. I learned how to read, how to do some mathematics, about my country and about the Bangla language. I learned how to keep myself clean and I made many friends. My mother and employer both noticed that I became much happier because I was going to school. I wish I could continue but now the two years are almost finished and it seems impossible for me to go to the government school because that takes up too many hours. If I could enroll in another Hard to Reach school I would.

My mother has suffered very much in her life but I understand her pain so I think I can help her. My dream is to be able to tell her she doesn't have to worry any more because I will look after her. If I could go to school it might help.

### Abdul Kalam, 12 years, Weaver

A few weeks ago, one of the weavers in our factory wanted someone to write his name. He asked one of the other boys but that boy didn't know how. I overheard them talking and I told the man, "I can write your name."

He was very surprised. He gave me the paper and pen and I wrote his name. He went around the factory showing it to people and saying, "See! My name has been written by Abdul Kalam!"

I learned to write at the Hard to Reach school. I go there every morning at 8am for two hours, and then I go to work from 10.30am to 10pm but I get a break for lunch in the afternoon. My employer lets me go for lessons because my younger brother goes to work in my place during those two hours. Then when I return to work, my brother goes for lessons at another Hard to Reach centre. The rest of the day he works as a cap maker. He presses the button and pin into the centre of the cap and he got this job from the teacher at the Hard to Reach school. Before this he was doing nothing. He used to spend all his time playing marbles.

I weave two saris a week and earn Tk 1200 (about \$24). It is a good job and I feel proud when I complete a sari. I hold it up and admire it myself. But I feel despair because I hear that these weaving workshops might be pulled down. I came to the learning centre because if I lose my job as a weaver I think that being able to read and write could help me get another job. If not I might have to be a cap maker like my younger brother. He only earns about Tk 200 a week.

After I finish the two-year course at the learning centre I would like to go to the government school. I don't know how I would find the time but maybe my brother and I could continue sharing the work and sharing going to school.



### Momtaz, 11 years, cap maker

"There are five in my family. We live in one room and have a large bed where we all sleep, a television set and two sewing machines. At first we only had one sewing machine for my mother but two years ago they bought another machine for me and my mother taught me how to use it. At first I was very excited about

working the machine but then it got boring because I work at it a lot. I go to the Hard to Reach centre first thing in the morning then I go home and start stitching. I have a break for lunch, then I bathe and play with my brother and stitch again until the evening. “

Her father explains, “We came from Mymensingh ten years ago because there was such hardship in the village. I learned how to make the caps and Momtaz’s mother went to work in the garment factory. She got paid 500Tk a month at first as a helper but then earned 1400Tk as a machine operator. She stayed there until we started having a family but then she stayed home with the children and I took a loan to buy a machine so that she could make caps. I buy the materials and take the caps to sell. I don’t know what the profit is, I don’t know how to figure things. I cannot read or write. Momtaz’s mother knows how to write her name.”



Her mother says, “I used to know when I worked at the garment factory because I had to sign all the time but now I have got out of the habit and I think I’ve forgotten.”

Her father continues, “We have to make a lot of caps to make ends meet.” (We did the math with him and worked out that the family makes only Tk 1 per cap.)

“We talked before about sending Momtaz to school but the government school is too expensive. When we found out about the Hard to Reach centre, Momtaz’s mother went to speak to the teacher and got her admitted. A lot of positive things have come out of it. She shares the things she has learned with us. If there’s anything I can’t read or can’t understand I ask Momtaz, she usually knows the answer. She talks very well. I’ve seen the way other kids are and how they talk to the elders. Momtaz is different since she went to the school. She uses good language. She treats people with more respect.”

Momtaz says, “Before I sometimes felt bad when I was with friends who could read but now I can read as well, even quite difficult words. There is no end to what we can learn. I would like to speak English. I see other children doing it and I know I could do it too if I get the chance.”

### **Anwar, Age 13, Weaver**

In the Bangla language there are three ways of talking to people depending on their age but before I went to the Hard to Reach school I didn't know what they were. I used bad language all the time. And I didn't keep clean. I couldn't write my name.

I work as a weaver, making saris. I've been working at the factory for 2 years, from 8am to 9pm. It was my idea to get a job. I was hanging out on the street and knew other children who were working and they told me that this workshop was taking on new people, so I followed them and asked for a job. Then I went home and told my parents. I get Tk250 per week, which I give to my parents.

The supervisor of the Hard to Reach school came to our workshop to talk to the employer to ask him to release the children for education. I decided on my own that I wanted to go. The teacher didn't speak to my parents. I told them what I was going to do. These days I take my lunch at 2pm and go the Hard to Reach school from 3 to 5pm, and then I go back to work.



### **Suman, 12 years, Fish seller**

Most of the children who come to my Hard to Reach school make incense sticks. They wrap the cloth around the end of the stick and send it to the factory where they add the scent. Some make more than a hundred stick a day but a lot of them also find time to go to two different Hard to Reach schools in one day. They go to another place in the morning and then they come to this one in the afternoon. They learn the same things at both schools.

I only go to one centre because in the morning I sell fish in the market. I got that job after I was in the market one day and a man beat me up really badly. He punched and kicked me because he didn't want me hanging around



*Children standing outside their Hard to Reach centre, located in a small back room of a crowded residential block*

**the market but I was there because I wanted to get a job. One of the fish sellers felt sorry for me and he asked if I wanted a job.**

**I told my parents and they didn't like it. "It's a dirty job" they said, "You'll come home smelling of fish." But I told them I had to have a job. I didn't want to be a vagabond with nothing to do. I told them I would sell fish until something better comes along.**

**I work with the fish seller from 8am until lunch and then after school I go back and sometimes work until midnight. I know a lot about fish now, about catfish and shrimp and hilsha and shing...all the different types and what all of them cost**

**The Hard to Reach school taught me a lot. Before I couldn't count the money but now I can count the notes and if someone gives me a 100 Taka note I know how to give the right change...if I give back 80Tk to him then I have 20Tk left.**

**I play games whenever there is a strike. Then I go and see my friends and we have fun.**

## Working and Non-Working Children

The majority of children attending the Hard to Reach centres were working, but relatively few of these were engaged in hazardous labour. The 2000 evaluation<sup>6</sup> suggests that about a third of all boys and just over a fifth of all girls attending the Hard to Reach centres were not working. A further 15% of boys, and 38% of girls reported that they worked at home. The evaluation did not consider this latter group to be "working children" but did not differentiate either between children who merely performed household chores and others who were put in charge of the household for many hours each day while their parents were working.

The evaluation suggested that only 3% of children in the centres were engaged in absolute hazardous labour, exposed to the risk of physical injury. Many more children (around 20%) attending the centres were at risk because of the hours they worked or because of the risk of exposure to physical and emotional abuse, as in the case of domestic workers.

A study of students of the Hard to Reach centres who were engaged in hazardous occupations showed that 20% had suffered injury as a result of their employment. Most worked excessively long hours – and average of

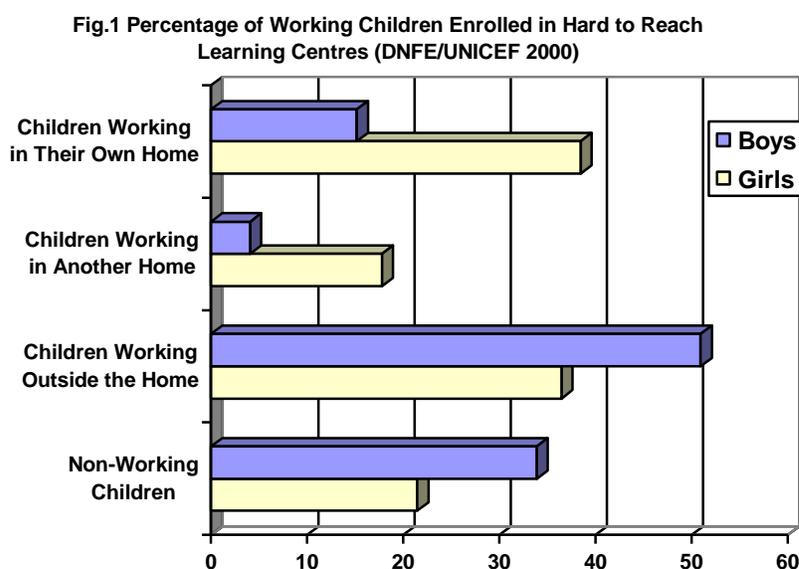
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<sup>6</sup> DNFE/UNICEF (2000) Formative Evaluation of BEHTRUC conducted by Uniconsult International

63 hours per week – and they tended to be highly mobile, creating further difficulties in maintaining regular attendance.<sup>7</sup>

### **Shoma, about 9 years, houseworker**

**My mother works in the factory from 6am to about 9pm. While she is gone, I look after my two younger sisters and do all the washing, bathing, cooking. My mother agreed I could come to the Hard to Reach school for two hours and during that time my younger sister, (about 7 years old) looks after the baby. When I go home my sister goes to another Hard to Reach school.**



It appears that between 20 and 40% of children who enrolled in the learning centres were non-working. In some cases, the high proportion of non-working children was related to the absence of a needs assessment at the start of the project. As a result, some NGOs were contracted to establish learning centres in neighbourhoods where there were apparently few working children. Mostly, however, the number of non-working children in the centres seemed to be due to inadequate consultation with communities and poor social mobilization around the rights of working children. (In the budget, a one-time only payment of Tk200 (less than \$4) was all that was made available for social mobilization!)

<sup>7</sup> UNICEF (undated) A Summary Report of A Situation Assessment of Children Engaged in Hazardous Occupations in Six Cities of Bangladesh

Case study interviews suggested that members of the Centre Management Committees (who primarily saw their role in terms of enrolling students) were more eager to enrol non-working children for the Hard to Reach schools. Several CMC members clearly felt that children who were “hanging around” in the street represented a far greater risk to community stability and were more in need of education than those who were hard at work.

A baseline study of learners in Hard to Reach centres of six cities<sup>8</sup> suggested that most of the working children lived in households with a monthly income of around Tk1000-2000. The children themselves earned between Tk.215 to Tk.717, suggesting they were major contributors to the household economy. More than 72% had never been to school before. The level of their contributions to household incomes was a key factor in determining whether they were able to maintain regular attendance at the centres.

**Fig. 2 Characteristics of Students 8-14 years Working Outside Their Home (DNFE/UNICEF 2000)**

<b>Who found your job?</b>	<b>Parents</b>	<b>70%</b>
	<b>Self</b>	<b>25%</b>
<b>How long do you work?</b>	<b>More than 5 hours</b>	<b>51%</b>
	<b>More than 9 hours</b>	<b>9%</b>
<b>When did you begin work?</b>	<b>19 months ago (ave.)</b>	
<b>Recent migrants to the city</b>		<b>80%</b>
<b>Illiteracy among parents</b>	<b>Fathers</b>	<b>62%</b>
	<b>Mothers</b>	<b>80%</b>
<b>Illiteracy in general population</b>	<b>Men</b>	<b>40%</b>
	<b>Women</b>	<b>58%</b>

**Some domestics and teashop workers labour only for food and a place to sleep. Others earn as little as Tk3 per day (less than \$0.2c) or as much as Tk50 per day (just less than \$1.00). Some children working long hours as weavers earn as much as Tk 1200 per week. The majority of working children live at home and hand over their entire earnings to their families. In some cases, children as young as 12 years are the primary wage earners in families.**

<sup>8</sup> UNICEF (undated) Report on the Baseline Survey on the Learners of the BEHTRUC Project

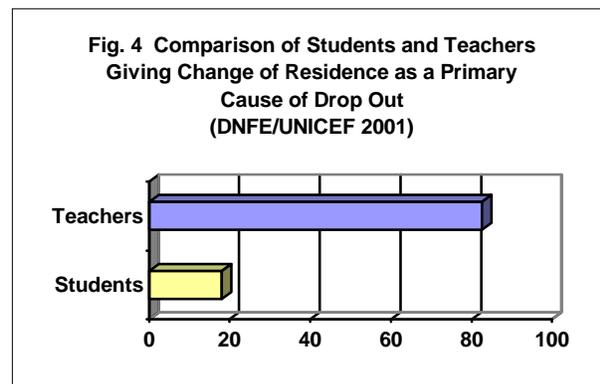
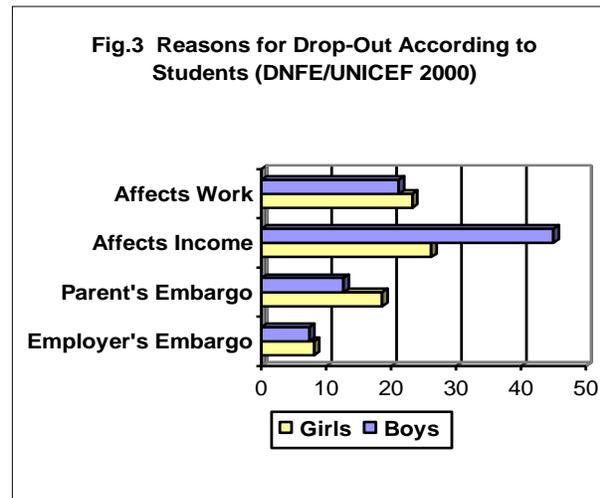
## Drop-Outs

Children who dropped out said the primary reasons were economic. More than 88% reported that they dropped out because of an embargo by their parents or employer, because it affected their income or affected their work. (Fig 3)

Teachers reported that more than 80% of student drop out was due to change of residence, but less than 20% of students gave this as a deciding factor. (Fig.4) The discrepancy in responses between the teachers and students may have been due to children who had moved away being unavailable to the evaluation team. On the other hand, it might be that teachers and CMC members did not vigorously pursue working children who dropped out. It was perhaps easier to give the excuse that the children had “left the neighbourhood” and replace them with other learners. Possibly this was related to the heavy work burden on teachers and supervisors, and/or the inclination of CMC members towards enrolling any children who were out of school, whether they were working or not.

More than 80% of students who dropped out said they were unhappy about being unable to complete the course and over 90% said they would return if they had the chance. Combined with the reasons students gave for dropping out, this suggests a need for heavy emphasis on social mobilization against child labour. Over 50% of those who dropped out did so in the first eight months.

The project has introduced a system whereby each child receives a certificate on satisfactory completion of each eight-month phase of the course. The approach allows greater flexibility for children who are highly mobile and may need to attend more than one centre to complete the course.



## Replacement Learners

Teachers were supposed to ensure that the roll of thirty children was maintained throughout the two-year duration of the course. The rule was intended to encourage teachers to maintain close contacts with parents and employers so that working children would attend for the entire programme. But to keep up the numbers teachers and CMC members often replaced dropouts with other learners. Since they entered the programme late, the replacement learners often had difficulty keeping up with the lessons. And, since the teachers had received only 12 days training, they were not equipped to cope with a multi-grade class, especially when the teaching “day” was only two hours long.

In future, students will not be permitted to join the Hard to Reach class more than one month after the start of each eight-month session. After one month, the names of all students are to be posted on laminated card and displayed. If more than fifteen students drop out of the class, the class will be merged with another.

**We won't get married before we are 18 because we know if we have children before we are 18 it could be dangerous. We learned this at the Hard to Reach centre. Of course our parents won't marry us before we are 18 because we will explain to them that it is dangerous. Those people who do marry their daughters when they are young simply don't understand the risks. If they did they wouldn't marry their daughters so young.**

**Kulsom, Age 14, embroiderer**

## Learning Achievements

Among children interviewed for this case study, being able to write their name, being able to address people using the correct Bangla phrasing and knowing how to keep themselves clean seemed to be impressive and empowering achievements. The evaluation suggests that the overall response of children to the centres was positive.

The evaluation tested achievements in basic reading, writing and numeracy. Learners who had attended the centre for less than 16 months had a mean score of 70% on a range of tests for that level. Those who had been attending for more than 16 months had a mean score of 64% on a set of higher-level tests. Given the problems that were known to be dogging the project – due to poor management, poor learning environment, inadequately trained teachers etc. – this result seemed too good to be true. On closer inspection it was revealed that the number of replacement learners skewed the performance level. In some cases, centres had been in operation for almost 2 years but the average attendance of pupils was far less. “We realized that we had to measure student progress based on the length of time a centre had been in operation,” reported James Jennings, Chief of Child Development and Education section in

UNICEF, “Not on the length of time a student had been attending.” By this standard, while the centres showed some promise, they were not yet bringing sufficient numbers of working children to a satisfactory level of literacy and numeracy.

However, overall, working children performed better in the achievement tests than non-working children. This may be due to their greater experience and because they tended to be older than non-working children.

### Attitudes

Focus group discussions held in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna revealed that working children had high expectations that education could transform their lives.<sup>9</sup> This was as true of working children who were not enrolled in any kind of school as it was of those who were. As a result of school, children said they would be able to get better jobs, be appreciated, be able to read letters and newspapers, and do accounts and, for welders, they would be able to “measure the length of things.”

The features of school life that working children most disliked were also very similar. They referred to beatings from teachers, being ridiculed by other students for not knowing the right answers and being teased or disturbed. Some students of the Hard to Reach centres also mentioned overcrowding, excessive heat and dirtiness as negative features of school.

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<sup>9</sup> UNICEF, 1999, Report on Focus Group Discussions with Working Children in Dhaka, Chittagong, Rajshahi and Khulna, Data Management Aid

## Teachers and Supervisors

### Farzana Begum Lucky, teacher, Ward 5, 11/B Mirpur - PROSHIKA

I thought it would be so easy – just a couple of hours teaching some little kids! I thought I would be able to fit it in with my studies with no problem. But now I know that this is one of the most challenging teaching jobs anywhere. I will feel terrible when I finish this job and have to leave these children.

### Selima Begum, Tekatuli, Ward 75 - FIVDB

The first day I opened the centre more than 45 children came. I didn't know what to do. Parents had sent their children along because they thought they were going to get food and a uniform. After a couple of days the extra kids dropped out and only the ones who had properly signed on showed up.

I had taught kindergarten and thought this would be the same just with older children. I was wrong. The kids didn't show up. I had to go out and find them and physically escort them to the centre. Everyone came late and left early. They didn't know how to be in a classroom. They didn't know how to learn. It took a long time, but now they understand. They come on time and we are learning together.

When I first started teaching at the Hard to Reach centre I couldn't stop thinking about it. I planned constantly what I was going to do the next day. I worried about how would I hold their attention, what I would do about this child or that if they had stopped coming. I thought about it so much that I even dreamed about it.

The teaching method is very simple, not like the formal school. We use a lot of pictures to help the children read. Children going through this system seem to learn more quickly. One of the government schoolteachers who is a member of our Centre Management Committee started luring my students away to join her school.

“Why are you taking my children,” I asked her.

She told me that our students learn very easily, very well.

### Syed Taurina Ali, Teacher, Wards 2 and 5, Surovi

There was one hotel boy who came to the school but he disappeared during Ramadan. I saw him in the street and asked what happened. He said he couldn't come any more because he had to be on the street at dusk every night to

sell iftar. As soon as the sun set everyone was buying, and if he came to the centre he would be too late. I spoke with the hotel owner and asked him to let the boy come back. At first the employer said no but I bargained with him and in the end he agreed as long as the child left the centre 30 minutes early.

There was another hotel boy who was taken out of the Hard to Reach centre by his parents. They sent him to work in a garment factory. I spoke to them: “Why did you send him there! Don’t you know terrible things can happen to a child who works in those places? They lock the doors and seal them in. There can be a fire and no one is able to get out.” The parents wouldn’t listen to me. They said they needed the money but about 20 days later there was a terrible fire in a factory in old Dhaka and people died. After that the parents came to see me. “We realize work in the garment factory is too hard,” they said, and asked me to take him back. It was difficult for him to catch up but he stayed after school everyday and studied hard.

When the girls reach 12 or 13 years old and begin developing they sometimes get harassed on their way to the centre. Men make nasty comments as they pass and the parents complain. Sometimes the CMC members can talk to people in the community to make it stop, but if it doesn’t the parents often end up sending the girl to live with her grandparents in the village. Whether she will get an education or not while she is there is not a priority.

Sometimes parents send younger kids with the children they have already enrolled. They say to me, “Just let the kid come along to get into the habit of coming to school and learning.” But others criticize us because we don’t give the children uniforms or food and because we use the same book for two years. They don’t understand the reasons why we are so different from the government schools. They think we cannot be teaching them properly.

It is a continual struggle to explain what we are doing and why but I never had any doubts about what I was trying to do. My father tells me that a teacher who imparts knowledge to a child will be remembered in that child’s prayers and will be blessed.

*Parents and children sometimes complain about the quality of the Hard to Reach centre because we have no desks, no chairs, no exams, no English language, and we don’t provide food. It would be a good idea if we at least gave a test at the end of every learning cycle. It would help convince the parents that their children really are learning.*

**Abdul Hashim, Supervisor  
Lalbagh, Ward 60 - ARBAN**

### **Nazmul Haque, Supervisor, Hazaribagh, Ward 18 - VARD**

One of our learners worked in a carton factory. During Ramadan he dropped out of the centre so I asked the teacher to go to the boy's home. The parents scolded the teacher for disturbing their Ramadan. "Don't you know that every time our son doesn't work the employer deducts money from his wages? If you can guarantee that money then he can come to your school." So the teacher and I both went to see the employer and we asked him to let the child go. We bargained and agreed to give up half an hour of school time, if the employer would release the child on full pay for the other hour and a half. The employer finally agreed.

I never used to think about what children were doing at all but now when I see them I stop and ask who they are, what are they doing and why are they not in school. I have become so famous for this that now some of the kids run away when they see me coming because they know I will ask about school. People never used to think that school was necessary for children like these. These are the attitudes we are trying to change.

### **Md. Wahiduzzaman Bablu, Supervisor, Mirpur Ward 18 - VARD**

I was closely observing one learner, a girl who was a very good student and had been studying at the centre for a year. Then I noticed she had stopped coming and asked the teacher what had happened. He said that she was a domestic helper and the family had prohibited her from coming back. He had been to the house but the employers had abused him. They said to him, "Who do you people think you are? She's not coming back! Get out of here!"

Soon after we heard that she had lost her job and she and her mother had returned to their village where they were in a very difficult situation.

It turned out that this girl had taken part in a child rights discussion and in one of the groups she had talked frankly about the way her employer physically abused her. Some other students from her Hard to Reach centre who were at the same meeting gossiped about what she had said, and word of this got back to the employer. The employer was angry with the girl, angry with everyone and in the end the girl lost her job.

We have to be very careful when we encourage children to speak out about their conditions of work. It can even be dangerous for them.

The capacity of teachers and supervisors to fulfil their responsibilities to the project was significantly inhibited by inadequate attention to community mobilization and advocacy. The primary problems reported by teachers related to issues of attendance, and of finding and keeping students (Fig.4). All of these are issues that could have been eased by greater attention to social mobilization, and by greater clarity of the project aims among teachers and members of the Centre Management Committees.

Teachers received a basic Tk 800 per month and supervisors a basic Tk.1,500. These honorariums were purposely low in order to protect the potential sustainability of the project. They were not supposed to be seen as “salaries.” Instead, participation was presented as an opportunity for those who had the benefit of education to give something back to the community. Yet more than half the teachers and around 40% of supervisors had no other source of income. Many of them used their own funds to purchase chalk and other supplies, and to provide tea during some CMC meetings. And, while they worked shorter hours some teachers and supervisors apparently earned less than some of the children attending the Hard to Reach centres.<sup>10</sup>

Almost two thirds of teachers possessed a Higher Secondary Certificate (Grade 12), which was regarded as the basic qualification. However, about 28% had only a regular Secondary School Certificate (Grade 10) and 8% were even less qualified. The low qualification of teachers, combined with the inexperience of so many of the NGOs could have been important factors in the poor operation of many centres. In particular, the teaching method was intended to be participatory and to build on the existing knowledge of the children. In practice, lack of experience and limited training meant that formal methods were most common.

Teachers and supervisors received 12 days training. While almost 90% of teachers considered this to be adequate, less than 50% of supervisors felt the same way. The supervisors had in fact received identical training to the teachers. In the future they will receive an additional 3 days training in supervision.

For supervisors, the main problem mentioned by more than 70% was the difficulty of getting around the centres they had to supervise. Each centre was supposed to be visited three times a week. With fifteen centres to

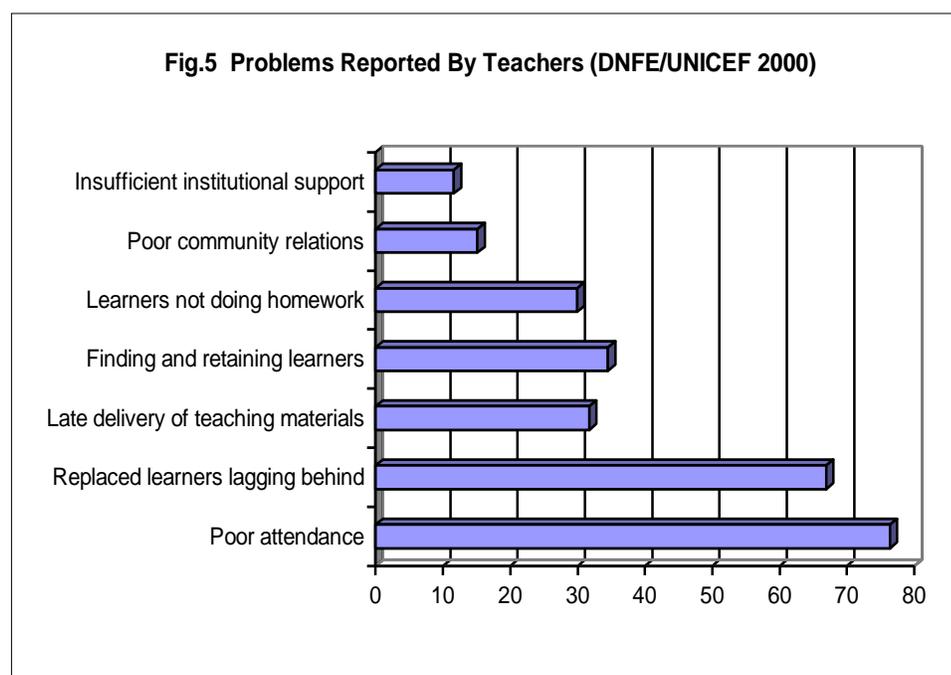
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<sup>10</sup> The evaluation does not appear to give data on the income of the children but at least two of the children interviewed for the case study reported that they earned in excess of Tk1000 per month. See Anwar and Abdul Kalam.

supervise, this meant that supervisors needed to visit nine centres every day. These sessions that were so brief he or she hardly had time to do more than check the log book. In practice, many supervisors visited centres less often.

A series of meetings of supervisors and teachers between 1998 and 2000 provided key insights into the functioning of the project.<sup>11</sup> Almost all the supervisors from Dhaka and Chittagong participated. The meetings revealed a high-level of teacher dropout or replacement, 18% in Dhaka and 13% in Chittagong. Teachers dropped out due to marriage, because they found a better job or due to the heavy work burden for low remuneration. The meetings revealed that the centres were sometimes disrupted by mastaans (hooligans) or by religious fundamentalists. In some cases, entire slums were cleared, the children evicted and the Hard to Reach centre forced to re-locate.

The meetings also revealed the problem of overlap in the areas assigned to different NGOs. In some cases they were trying to recruit students from the same families and students sometimes responded by signing up for more than one learning centre.



The problems of inadequate supervision, was evident in at least one learning centre where the teacher had begun converting non-working children into working children. She trained girls in embroidery and then,

<sup>11</sup> UNICEF, Education Section, 1998-2000 Consultative Meetings with Teachers and Supervisors of the BEHTRUC Project.

through their parents, provided them with work assignments. The same teacher found home-based work for boys as cap makers. It is possible that the teacher profited from these activities.

It was also apparent that some teachers coached students in the responses they should give to visitors and perhaps the supervisor. In some cases children who were not working were told to report that they were. Not only does this skew the results of any investigation but it also meant that the children were being encouraged to lie. Monitoring, good management, training and community mobilization could have helped to prevent such problems.

It was clear from the case study interviews that most teachers and supervisors had no idea what they were getting into when they agreed to take on those tasks. It was also evident that despite the huge challenges and frustrations, many found the experience deeply rewarding. All the teachers interviewed for the case study said, without hesitation, that they would continue the work and run another centre if they could.

## Centre Management Committees

### **Halima, vendor of saris and employer, CMC member and parent**

I have one son and four daughters, two of whom study at the Hard to Reach centre. My son is 20 years and working; my older daughter is looking for a husband and the youngest stays with me.

My middle daughters who are 10 and 12 years old go to my workshop from 8am to noon every day where they embroider shawls, then they go to the Hard to Reach centre and have lunch and return to the workshop from 5pm until 10pm or midnight depending how much work there is. Sixteen girls embroider at the workshop. As far as I know they all go to some kind of school for some of the day. If they miss work by going to school it doesn't matter because they can pick it up later.

The children react against it sometimes. They say they don't want to work and they don't want to go to school either, they just want to go out and play but we can't just let them sit around. If they are at school that is fine. If they are not at school then we send them to work. What we don't want is to see our children just hanging around in the street because that is when you get trouble.

I became a member of the CMC because I think education is very important. If I see a child playing in the street I stop and ask them, "What are you doing on the street? Why aren't you in school?" I tell other women I meet that it's important that our children don't miss out. Some people don't come to the CMC meetings because they say they're too busy or because they want to be served with tea. Those people don't really care about education. If everyone was committed to education in this country we wouldn't have the problems that we do.

This is all about us taking responsibility. Our children won't get educated at all unless we take responsibility for it. I like coming to the CMC meetings. We learn a lot from each other. When the 2 years is finished and we don't have the meetings any more I will miss them.

### **Latifa, housewife, parent**

I have 3 sons, 2 daughters. The oldest son drives a rickshaw, the middle son is in the village and the youngest son weaves saris. My older daughter, who is 12, works in a garment factory. My younger daughter who is 9 embroiders shawls at home. My 12 year old daughter used to go to school – she went as far as grade 2 but then her father became unemployed so she had to go out to work. She goes to the garment factory from 7am until 9 or 10pm and has a couple of hours break for lunch. As long as I can afford it I'll give education to her sister but if I can't afford

it, it's a different story. I'm interested in educating her but you can't always have what you want.

### **Al Amin, shoemaker, 12 years**

I make shoes in Mirpur at a small workshop owned by my uncle. I can make one pair of shoes in about two hours. I can make any kind of shoe if I have the design. I get Tk100 for 12 pairs

I used to live in Shreepur village. Our house was in a cluster of homes near the river. The land around was flat and full of mustard, corn and wheat. There were cows and goats and chickens. I knew all the kids living around there. My friends were Imdad, Jubaid, Rubel, Modina, Jashim and Habsa. We used to swim in the river and fish and sail in small boats. We used to have a lot of fun, but then my family got into difficulties over a loan. We tried selling our land and selling roshogolla, which are small sweet snacks, dipped in sugar but we couldn't make enough money. Eventually, my father sold a big tree on our land for Tk2000 and we used the money to bring him, my brother and me to Dhaka. My mother and all the other younger kids stayed at home.

I was so excited about coming to the city. I ran around telling all my friends. Hey! I'm going to Dhaka! But when the day came and we went to get the bus I looked back as long as I could. My mother was crying and I was crying too. I was 10 years old.

It took all day to reach the city and when I saw it I couldn't believe it. I never saw such big buildings, or so many cars and trucks and rickshaws. I asked my dad who lived in those high buildings and he said human beings like us lived there. I wanted to go to the top and look out but he said the security guard would stop us.



**Al Amin's uncle, employer and member of the Centre Management Committee**

**We stayed with my aunt for a while but then my dad found a job for me as a domestic servant. I didn't like it because it was women's work. My uncle had a shoemaking workshop where my brother was working. I begged to go and work there and finally they agreed – but my dad couldn't find any kind of work so he went back to Shreepur.**

**I worked every day nearly all day but then I heard about the Hard to Reach school and I really wanted to go. I started crying and crying. "I want to go I want to go." I wept so much that in the end my uncle agreed, "If he wants it so much then he should go."**

**His uncle says, "I am a member of the CMC. If I see children playing around in the street I stop and tell them "why don't you go to school." I also tell the parents that they are setting a bad example by letting their kids just hang around. It would be easier if we all sent our children to school.**

**"I see a lot of change in Al Amin since he started going to the Hard to Reach centre. He keeps himself clean. He wears sandals when he goes to the toilet. He clips his nails. Before he never used to bother about these things. He didn't even wash his hands before eating food.**

**"I went to grade 4 at school but my wife never did. She has been inspired by Al Amin though and now she is going to adult literacy classes and is learning to sign her name."**

The teacher and supervisor establish the Centre Management Committee (CMC). It may include parents, employers of child labour, landlords, teachers from the local government primary school and other respected community members, as well as the Hard to Reach centre teacher. The CMC is supposed to meet once a month and their responsibilities include ensuring regular attendance of the teacher, supervisor and students, and liaising with local authorities to support the smooth functioning of the centre. The CMC is also supposed to provide appropriate information on the running of the institution to the DNFE.

The evaluation found that about 61% of CMCs met once a month, a fifth every two months and just over 10% every three months. While most CMC members first learned of the Hard to Reach centre through the teacher, they generally promoted their own membership of the committee. More than 70% of CMC members regarded their primary responsibility as "finding students for the learning centre." It was apparent from case study interviews that CMC members did not give particular preference to the enrolment of working children for the centres.

Teachers were responsible for calling meetings of the CMC but attendance was often poor. “Some of them don’t care, “ one teacher said. “They say they are too busy for meetings and will sign anything just to be left alone.”

“When we have a CMC meeting,” said another teacher, “I spread a mat on the floor but they don’t like to sit there. ‘Why should we sit on the floor!’ they ask. ‘Hurry up!’ they tell me, ‘We don’t have time to sit here all day!’ If I provide tea and snacks they don’t complain so much but my NGO doesn’t always give me money for refreshments and I cannot keep paying for it out of my own pocket. It is not that they are hungry or thirsty. It is just that they feel insulted and disrespected if they are not given refreshments and if they don’t have chairs to sit on.”

Many of those interviewed for the case study felt that the effective mobilization of communities in support of the learning centres could only be secured through a sustained communications campaign and continual efforts to draw closer cooperation from local political leaders.

## Project Management

**Lutfur Rahman, Project Director, Directorate of Non-Formal Education, Ministry of Education, Government of Bangladesh.**

*This was a new programme for everyone, new for us, new for UNICEF, new for the NGOs. Right at the start we had some major difficulties because there was no needs assessment. We knew there were working children but we didn't know enough about their situation before we got started. As a result we sent some NGOs to open Hard to Reach centres in places where there were not enough working children. We should have selected better NGOs. We should have introduced better monitoring. We can look back now and see the mistakes that were made. There were reasons why things happened the way they did but the main reason was that all of it was new and we were trying something that was more complicated than we expected and under very difficult conditions.*

### Education for All

In 1993, the Directorate of Non-Formal Education (DNFE) was created in the Primary and Mass Education Division. It faced the enormous challenge of making non-formal education available to at least 20% of the school age population not attending school and expanding literacy and basic numeracy among nearly 50% of the adult population. It drew its mandate and inspiration from Education for All, and had the ambitious goal of reaching the majority of illiterate Bangladesh adults by 2006.

The Directorate was initially reluctant to take on the Hard to Reach scheme. The mass orientation of DNFE – to try to reach all illiterates – ran against the grain of the Hard to Reach project with its specific focus on working children. Also, while specific data was limited, there was clearly a general problem with education access in urban slum communities. At first the DNFE suggested that the Hard to Reach project might be more appropriate for the Ministry of Labour. Eventually, after the ambitious vocational training element of the project was removed, DNFE agreed to take on the scheme.

Because of DNFE's orientation towards Education for All, few eyebrows in the Directorate were raised when non-working children began showing up in the Hard to Reach learning centres. Certainly, the non-working children who enrolled were also very needy, but for DFID, SIDA and UNICEF, it represented a dilution and diversion of the project's basic

intent – which was to focus on the education of children living and working in extremely difficult circumstances, exposed to hazardous labour. It was obviously easier to get non-working children into the Hard to Reach learning centres than to get working children, since the latter often required lengthy negotiations with parents and employers. If non-working children were allowed to fill the spaces in the learning centres this meant that working children were being deprived.

In 2001, as the Hard to Reach project entered its final phase. With 4,935 centres operating, one of the keys to ensuring increased enrolment of working children lay in improving the quality of NGOs recruited to run the learning centres.

### Non-Governmental Organizations

According to the evaluation, a third of the NGOs surveyed had been established after 1990. Half of the NGOs had only recently begun working in the area of education – 26% in 1995-97 and 25% during 1998-99. Thus for a significant proportion of NGOs, the Hard to Reach project represented virtually their first experience in non-formal education. Yet even for NGOs that had many years experience in non-formal education, the project was extremely challenging.

The evaluation showed that more than half the NGOs were inefficient in recruiting and retaining working children to the centres. More than half the NGOs ran centres where performance of children in achievement tests was extremely low. Though the evaluation does not cross-reference the data it seems likely that the NGOs that were most inefficient were probably those with the least experience.

The NGOs sub-contracted to run the Hard to Reach learning centres were selected by the Subvention Committee. This is an inter-ministerial body, headed by the Secretary of the Primary and Mass Education Division. It was assisted by a six-member sub-committee led by the Director-General of DNFE. By 2001, the Subvention Committee had contracted 140 NGOs

### Issues Raised by NGO Representatives

- ❖ **Investment in two years education is wasted unless there is follow up because literacy skills will be lost.**
- ❖ **Teaching English in the Hard to Reach centres is important for attracting and retaining students.**
- ❖ **The curriculum needs increased emphasis on creative, cultural and environmental activities. Several of the more experienced NGOs added these elements to the curriculum in the centres they ran.**
- ❖ **We need to be able to let the children know what comes after the Hard to Reach course, to give advice on where to obtain vocational training.**
- ❖ **The value of the centre as a place where children are safe, can meet their friends, can learn and be children should not be underestimated.**
- ❖ **Teachers need to show love and affection for the children and should never use physical punishment**
- ❖ **Teachers need refresher courses and opportunities to meet and discuss issues related to running the centres.**

to run more than 5,000 learning centres. More than half of these NGOs ran the bare minimum of 15 centres each. It emerged that some of these NGOs had been established specifically for the project. Some of the directors of these NGOs had filial ties to high-ranking government officials. When it became clear that some of the NGOs were inappropriate for the project, it was difficult to take action because NGO selection had occurred at such a high level.

Some problems in the selection of NGOs stemmed from a lack of clarity in the guidelines. The brief for NGO selection suggested that preference should be given to NGOs with more than two years experience in non-formal education but it did not insist on these criteria. It suggested that NGOs should “have a successful program and/or (be) willing to work in one or more of the selected cities and Wards and should have a network of infrastructure in the operational/designated area or the ability to build/expand the same.” In other words, the NGO should “know the community” but it did not have to. It should possess infrastructure to support the learning centres, or had to be willing to create it. These criteria left the door wide open for virtually any NGO to qualify for acceptance.

It was clear early on to the partners and the DNFE that the number of NGOs involved in the project presented considerable problems. But, because of the absence of systematic monitoring, it was not until the 2000 evaluation results that they were able to persuade the authorities that changes had to be made.

## Monitoring

A programme officer was assigned by DNFE to each of the six cities covered by the Hard to Reach project. In Dhaka, for example, a single programme officer was responsible for monitoring the 3,700 learning centres opened by December 1999 that were being run by 102 different NGOs. It was an impossible task. The burden of work on the Dhaka officer was more than double the work burden on programme officers in other cities. (A second programme officer has now been assigned to Dhaka.)

In addition, staff assigned to the Hard to Reach project, did not receive support to cover transportation costs. If they visited a learning centre or one of the NGOs participating in the project, the programme officer had to pay transport costs out of their own pocket. In contrast, DNFE officials working with the big rural projects received per diem and travel expenses when visiting projects. The absence of any transport budget inhibited the capacity of programme officers in DNFE to perform an already formidable task.

### **Rajashree Gain, Programme Officer, DNFE Dhaka**

Some of the inexperienced NGOs did not pay their teachers and supervisors regularly or did not pay the rent for the centre on time. As a result, some landlords closed the centres, or the teachers and supervisors did not turn up for work. Even when they weren't paying the teachers their honorarium, some NGOs asked the teachers to pay the centre rent out of their own pockets. If I tried to follow up to get the NGOs to stick to their agreements, the NGOs often dragged their feet because they knew I was over-burdened and did not have time to follow up with every single complaint.

Despite all these problems, I still thought the project was worthwhile just for that 5 or 10% of centres that were really working well and making an amazing difference in the lives of those working children.

### Continuing Education

The first proposals for the Hard to Reach project included a vocational training element that might have helped children move into less hazardous occupations. However, the partners came to realize that this aspect was too ambitious for a project that was already trying to achieve so much. The course of study was therefore restricted to the basic grade one to three plus life skills curriculum. From the beginning, therefore, the project became incapable of fulfilling one of its original objectives – of trying to rescue children from hazardous labour. It could only hope to lay a foundation for such change. The DNFE thought that imparting literacy would be sufficient, but as children came close to completing the course, they began asking, “What happens next?”

The Government of Bangladesh responded by making scholarships available for 427 graduates of the Hard to Reach course so that they could enter the formal school system. They received Tk 400 per student per month “which was paid to the mothers, not to the fathers because they might spend the money on cigarettes or on getting another wife.” The Prime Minister personally presented the scholarships to the children and the event received excellent media coverage.

Several NGOs associated with the project report that a number of students have “graduated” from the learning centres into other non-formal schools or into government primary schools. For the majority of working children, however, that possibility has remained beyond reach. The possibility of providing stipends to all such children seems unsustainable. Possibilities for increasing vocational and other continuing education programmes may

open up in future, however, through cooperation with ILO, the World Bank and qualified NGOs.

## Sustainability

By 1997, when the first Hard to Reach learning centres were opened, the DNFE was already running three major mass literacy projects. Collectively these aimed to reach more than 30 million non-literates, aged 11 to 45, at a cost of Tk300-500 (about \$6-10) per person. The Government of Bangladesh was a major contributor to these projects – a sign of the government’s own conviction that the strategy worked, was affordable and sustainable, (although some external observers suggest the results of the mass literacy programmes have been “over-claimed.”)

In contrast, the government contributed less than 4% of the costs of the Hard to Reach project, which aimed to reach just over 350,000 children, at a cost of about Tk 1,852.70 (about \$34) per child – more than three times the cost per head of the mass literacy schemes, and only reaching a tiny fraction of the population. In many ways the schemes are not comparable because the Hard to Reach project was intending to impart more than basic literacy. Yet comparison was also unavoidable.



**The quality of the learning environment in the Hard to Reach centres varied greatly as is shown in the contrasting images of these two centres in Dhaka.**



In addition, the low budget for accommodation (Tk500 per month) meant that the learning environment in the Hard to Reach centres was far inferior to that of the government schools. According to the evaluation, the learning environment was “inadequate” in at least 50% of the learning centres.

As one UNICEF staff member put it, “These children are not stupid. They know that children who go to government schools sit on chairs, at tables, while they have to sit on the floor.” Parents were also aware of the difference, and members of the Centre Management Committees were also reported to be unhappy about coming to meetings at the centres where they had to sit on the floor.

The views of the Project Director at DNFE suggested that the poor quality of the learning environment was reason enough for regarding the project as unsustainable. “I hope,” he said, “that in a few years we will have none of these centres. What we really need are more flexible hours in the government primary schools. We need to make classes available to working children in the evenings.”

Other partners in the Hard to Reach project seemed to believe this unlikely and/or inappropriate for most working children, because the government primary schools were too far away and because they had “other enormous problems to contend with.”

Yet it appeared that some communities were also beginning to recognize the fundamental inequalities in the way education was being offered to different groups of children.

**If we can mobilize community support and encourage people in society to recognize the rights of working children to education, then we can put pressure on the public institutions to respond. If we make joyful programmes available to children, they will want to come. We need posters, leaflets, documentaries and much more publicity about this issue. We need the public to hear from these children and how important literacy is to them. If we have this pressure it will be much easier for us to respond effectively.**

**Lutfur Rahman, Project Director, Directorate of Non-Formal Education, Primary and Mass Education Division.**

## The Revised Project

The name of the “Hard to Reach” project says it all. We never expected this to be easy. We knew we were entering a learning process. We knew there would be setbacks and that we could not expect the same kind of return that we see in other kinds of investment in social development....One of the most outstanding dimensions of this project has been its transparency; the way that UNICEF, SIDA and DFID have worked together so openly. We have shared all the problems, all the difficulties and worked together to find the solutions... We have been frustrated at times and disturbed by some of the trends in the project, but if we can learn from these then we believe that this project can still work and effectively reach the children for whom it was intended.

### Comments from DFID, SIDA and UNICEF

Despite the many problems of the project, it is evident that it has the potential to promote lasting changes in the way communities view education for working children and in the lives of children engaged in hazardous labour.

The proposed next phase of the Hard to Reach project adopts a broad, integrated approach that responds to the lessons learned during the first five years of project operation. Starting from 2003, the scheme aims to enroll 200,000 working children in non-formal education, with 70% gaining the expected competencies for each of the three learning cycles and 30% of those enrolled graduating to other learning opportunities. At least 50% of those enrolled must be girls. Strenuous efforts will be made to ensure the recruitment and retention of working children, especially those hazarously employed. The project also aims to help shape effective programmes and policies influencing working children. Projected costs are US\$6.25 million per year for a total \$31.250 million over five years.

Programme strategies will:

- ❖ Promote a shift in social norms through social mobilization and communication initiatives undertaken with government, mass media, NGOs and others.

- ❖ Mobilize experienced NGOs to establish learning centres for working children, using multiple teaching and learning methods.
- ❖ The location of centres will be based on verifiable data including a situation assessment, mapping of working children and existing education facilities. The mapping exercises will involve community members, including children.
- ❖ Linkages with government departments, city corporations, NGOs, employers and parents will be broadened to promote integrated development of basic services, as well as quality education.
- ❖ Experienced NGOs and ILO will be sought as partners to establish continuing education opportunities.
- ❖ Experienced NGOs and others will be supported to develop innovative learning packages for working children that are interactive and child friendly.
- ❖ The capacity of the DNFE, NGOs, Centre management Committees and city corporations will be strengthened to ensure effective implementation of the project through training and study tours.

The project forms part of a broader programme strategy of building safe and stimulating learning environments for young children and quality primary education for all children that should result in 95% net enrolment and 80% completion of the 5-year cycle.

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Abdul Hashim, Lalbagh, Ward 60 (ARBAN)

### **Parents and CMC Members**

Saherun, embroiders long-shirts

Halima, vendor of saris

Halima, embroiders long-shirts

Latifa, housewife

Farida, housewife

Rokhsana, embroiders long-shirts

Sakhina, housewife

Nasima, embroiderer

Baby, housewife

Fatima, housewife

Shahida, housewife

Md. Muslim Raja, night guard

Md. Kadir Hossain, employer and CMC member  
Rina Begum, guardian

### **Children**

Sumon, 10, fish seller  
Nilufur, 12, non-working  
Md. Harun, 11, paan shop worker  
Lisa, 10, house worker  
Sharmin, 11, embroiderer  
Shokhi, 13, embroiderer  
Ina, 13, embroiderer  
Kabir, 11, cap-maker  
Salim, 9, weaver  
Shoma, 9, house worker  
Abul Kalam, 12, weaver  
Anwar Hossain, 13, weaver  
Kulsom, 14, embroiderer  
Sumy, 11, domestic helper  
Mamun, 12, paan shop worker  
Al Amin, 11, peanut vendor  
Sumy Akther, 14, domestic helper  
Momtaz, 11, cap maker  
Al Amin, 12, shoe maker

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