

BRAC schools Giving the

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CHILDREN who learn together, learn to live together'. This principle holds true in BRAC's schools all over the country. As we near Class 3, Dattapara 2 of a BRAC primary school in Tongi, Babul, a little boy of 11, rushes out to greet us. Though speech and hearing impaired, he is able to make himself understood. With the help of gestures, he conveys his wish to get news about David Donaldson, a popular BRAC intern who was recently in Bangladesh from the US. It is easy for the BRAC staff to figure out what he is trying to say because he gesticulates to show white skin and point upwards to depict a tall person. He is able to write his name and spell a few words

Sanjida, (Class 2, age 12, from Dattapara 1) also in a BRAC school in Tongi, is moderate to severely intellectually challenged. She has been in school for two years. She is very moody and is reluctant to write at the moment. When she first came, she would not listen to anyone. Now she listens and sits, which is quite an improvement from the time she first arrived. She chats a lot with her friends. BRAC staff and the other children in class encourage her.

Sazeda (12 years old, Class 2, Dattapara 2) is severely physically challenged. She has no arms, one leg and only a couple of toes. Despite her serious handicap, she can brush her teeth, sweep, write and thread a needle—all with her toes. Currently, she is carried to school by her cousin, Aduri, everyday. BRAC is thinking of giving her a wheel chair. Medical specialists have ruled out the option of an artificial limb because she operates with her one leg, which will not be possible with an artificial leg.

In a little over a year since it began, BRAC's Inclusive Education Unit (under the BRAC Education Programme) has been a remarkable case study in the keywords of disability empowerment, activity and participation. Many of the 14, 000 disabled children in the BRAC schools are able to write and dance, to the applause of their classmates. Take the case of Babul, the son of a brick puller. Though he can only call himself Babu, he dances enthusiastically with a friend to the tune of a well known song. BRAC staff think of getting him a hearing aid but first there is a need to assess whether the aid will benefit the young boy.

What is extraordinary about him is that he enrolled himself in the school.

There are many such case studies in BRAC's Inclusive Education Programme. But how cooperative is the community towards these physically or intellectually challenged children? Says Limia Dewan, Unit Manager, Inclusive Education Unit (BRAC Education Programme): "The community is very sensitive to the needs of these children. BRAC staff hold monthly parents' meetings where they are sensitised about disability."

As against integrated and special schools, BRAC has opted for inclusive education. Inclusive Education is an approach which addresses the needs of all learners in ordinary classroom situations, including learners with special needs, indigenous children, children with disabilities, girl children and poor children. The programme strives to create a classroom environment where educational needs are met irrespective of ability, gender, ethnicity or economic background. Having created programmes of inclusion for the above groups, BRAC's next task was to target the disabled.

This, in effect, means one classroom and one teacher who will address the needs of all children in the classroom. There are several benefits from this kind of education. First of all it addresses the needs of marginalised communities in rural areas. Secondly it provides cost-effective education and leads to greater interaction between children from various backgrounds, those who are marginalised and those who are not. Inclusive Education also does not require significant modifications to BRAC's existing Non Formal Primary Education and can be implemented quickly in the field due to BRAC's extensive network of field offices.

The types of disability addressed by this programme are physical (43 percent in Bangladesh in 1999), visual, (23 percent), hearing (21 percent), intellectual (8 percent) and multiple (5 percent).

"BRAC deals with a range of disabilities and seeks to create educational programmes for them," says Clara Rubincam, an intern at BRAC's Inclusive Education Unit.



Inclusive Education addresses the needs of all kinds of learners.