

Disabled a New Lease of Life



Sajeda (extreme left) can go to school now despite her severe disability.

"The focus is holistic. Instead of just providing education through the BRAC schools, there is an emphasis on providing employment opportunities for disabled adults in the BRAC Programme Offices. The programme also emphasises on networking, targeting, advocacy and assistive devices such as wheelchairs, crutches, ramps and glasses anything that will help the disabled to either overcome their disability or increase their mobility." Currently BRAC has 35 disabled computer operators in its 44 regions and hopes to expand that number in future years as more qualified disabled adults strive to enter the mainstream.

The crux of BRAC's Inclusive Education Unit is the training of its head office and field staff. After extensive training, 25 of the field staff were promoted to become Core Master Trainers and, with the help of head office staff, have trained approximately 500 master trainers in the principles of inclusive education and disability management.

These trainers are equipped to train all staff and teachers in disability management and devices to assist the disabled. Among those who have received training from CDD is Rezaul Mazid, Materials Development Specialist

in BRAC's Education Programme. "In the course of the training, I learnt how to provide aiding devices to disabled students" he says. "In turn I taught the teachers how to instruct them. In some schools, for example, we adapted blackboards with a coloured frame (for the visually disabled), worked out seating arrangements near the teacher for the hearing impaired and steps to enter the classroom for the physically challenged."

There have been studies to gauge the success of BRAC's Inclusive Education Unit. For one, a baseline study revealed the number of disabled children in BRAC schools had leapt up from 6,500 students previously to 14,000 such students after the awareness programmes.

Says Reza, "Some mildly disabled children who did not attend classes regularly began to come when we provided them with wheelchairs. Earlier they did not

have such aides to come to school."

The other major challenge the staff had to face was changing the mindset of some of the families of these kids. BRAC staff have found that though many households have TVs and possibly DVD players they remain in the dark about their children's disability.

It has been a formidable task for BRAC to target physically and intellectually impaired children in its programme for Children with Disability. Says Limia, "We faced difficulties with the intellectually disabled because they cannot memorise. As a new programme, we are still learning how best to accommodate children with intellectual disabilities in our classrooms. But the school helps these children in terms of socialisation; they can sing and do everything except intellectual activities."

In a little over a year since it began, BRAC's programme of inclusive education has gone a long way. Given BRAC's standing as a well respected NGO committed to the marginalised section, physically and mentally impaired children will get much needed educational support so that they can be empowered members of the community and country.