OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Its potential for hard-to-reach children and children in conflict and disaster areas

BANGLADESH and SRI LANKA
Country Studies

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and
UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TERMINOLOGY

The terminology in the literature is confusing and often inconsistent. The definitions we will be working with are as follows:

Open learning is any organized educational approach or activity which takes as its starting point an analysis of the needs of the intended group(s) of learners and then seeks in its policies and practices to design the programme in ways that minimize any barriers to learning in terms of either access, or of time and place, pace, method of study, curriculum content or any combination of these. Open learning, therefore, is not so much a particular type of education but rather a set of open qualities, which may exist to a greater or lesser extent in any form of education or training.

Distance education is an organized educational programme, often accredited, where the learner is at a geographical and/or time distance from the learning provider – the educational institution and tutors – and where all or much of the communication between teachers and learners is conducted through electronic or print mediums. To overcome the physical distance and build in interaction, the provider may try to use the two-way potential of, for example, mailed assignment marking, emails, telephone, tele- and video-conferencing, call-in radio or TV, as well as pre-recorded video or audio materials. It may also build in face-to-face components such as bringing dispersed students in for occasional tutored group meetings at a study centre or summer school. Conversely, the central provider can send travelling tutors to the learners or enter into agreements for locally-provided support (e.g. by a formal or community school, or university). An example would be a programme, offered by a national open university, providing initial teacher training at a distance to unqualified school-based teachers. The programme allows the teacher to remain *in situ*, and the chance to experiment with new practices in their immediate classrooms.

The term **ODL** or **open and distance learning** is frequently used as an umbrella term to cover educational approaches that reach learners in places that are convenient or accessible to them, provide learning resources for them, or enable them to qualify without attending school or college in person, or open up new opportunities for keeping up to date no matter where or when they want to study. While understandable, the conflation of the terms can be confusing and in this report we will substitute open learning as the umbrella term, with distance education as one type of open learning.

Basic education – definitions of basic education vary with South Asian countries in terms of the duration and language used to describe the initial stages of formal education. However, most work on the assumption that the formal school system is the delivery mechanism for basic education. Provision for groups who face barriers to accessing the formal system tend to be vague in terms of state commitment and 'alternative' content. We adopt here a UNESCO definition (UNESCO, 2007[1]), which explicitly recognizes the rights of a wider basic education constituency, which can, through discrimination (the different treatment of a group without justification) and exclusion (where groups are unable to access basic education) be prevented from realizing this

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[1] http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001802/180253e.pdf (accessed 14 July 2009).

right. For example, basic education should be guaranteed to a person without explicit reference to their age. The UNESCO definition also refers to 'equivalent basic education' for young people and adults who did not have the opportunity to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age. The term 'equivalent' was chosen rather than 'comparable', 'similar' or 'alternative' as it places 'emphasis on the results and objectives of education rather than the methods used to achieve them' (*ibid.*, p.7). Groups will remain marginalized without equivalent basic education qualifications, which are widely recognized by parents, employers and government. The UNESCO definition is also a future-oriented approach to basic education. It provides a framework, which reminds governments of the obligations they need to work towards.

Basic education

For the purposes of this definition, basic education covers notions such as fundamental, elementary and primary/secondary education. It is guaranteed to everyone without any discrimination or exclusion based notably on gender, ethnicity, nationality or origin, social, economic or physical condition, language, religion, political or other opinion, or belonging to a minority.

Beyond pre-school education, the duration of which can be fixed by the State, basic education consists of at least nine years and progressively extends to 12 years. Basic education is free and compulsory without any discrimination or exclusion.

Equivalent basic education is offered for youth and adults who did not have the opportunity or possibility to receive and complete basic education at the appropriate age.

Basic education prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacies, and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life.

Basic education is directed to the full development of the human personality. It develops the capability for comprehension and critical thinking, and it inculcates the respect for human rights and values, notably, human dignity, solidarity, tolerance, democratic citizenship and a sense of justice and equity.

The State guarantees the right to basic education of good quality based on minimum standards, applicable to all forms of education, and provided by qualified teachers, as well as effective management along with a system of implementation and assessment.

Basic education is provided in the mother tongue, at least in its initial stages, while respecting the requirements/needs of multilingualism.

In those States where basic education is also provided by private schools, the State ensures that such schools respect fully the objectives and content as mentioned in the present definition.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF MAIN REPORT

Despite the impressive rise of enrolment levels in formal schooling, a significant number of hard-to-reach children in South Asian countries continue to have no or limited access to basic education. Barriers to their participation are partly a question of school supply, partly of school quality and partly, for some of them, the inappropriate and inflexible nature of the formal school model itself.

The scale and diversity of their needs can only be met by a diversity of provision and multiple providers, both formal and non-formal. Some provision needs to be small-scale, targeted NGO approaches for particular groups (e.g. seasonal migrant workers), other provision needs to address large-scale general access issues (e.g. schooling in remote areas or second chance provision for older children).

Beyond just access, there is also the need for a life-cycle approach to provision so that these children have progression routes *through* levels and *between* different providers, as well as access to formal or equivalent qualifications. All this implies far more coordinated and joined-up planning than the *ad hoc*, second-best non-formal provision characteristic of the 1980s and 1990s. A coordinated approach, however, challenges old dualities – non-formal education (NFE) v formal, state v non-state – and leads to practical considerations about:

- how best to manage a range of learning opportunities
- how to divide responsibilities between the state and other partners, between national and decentralized levels
- how to facilitate transitions and negotiate articulation between the formal and non-formal sectors
- where to manage accreditation.

Used judiciously, open and distance learning (ODL) can make a strong contribution to strategic planning. One non-negotiable starting point for its use, however, is recognition that children need to learn in a social environment: ODL is not a substitute for direct teaching and face-to-face contact with other children, teachers and carers. Given the right policy and infrastructural framework, ODL can support five areas in basic education, including educational provision in conflict and disaster areas:

- providing para-formal or alternative schooling systems
- supporting successful transition to, and performance within, formal schools
- raising quality by providing ready-made educational resources (formal or non-formal)
- providing networks and training for intermediaries (e.g. teachers, broadcasters, mentors)
- providing communication for development (C4D) strategies (e.g. health, school readiness advocacy).

Any comprehensive and cohesive strategy could usefully employ all of these. Emerging as particularly valuable among them, however, are NFE schooling approaches that integrate closely to the formal system. These either provide a *bridge* to the formal system or operate as a more

flexible NFE *substitution* for formal provision but which nevertheless provide a route to formal or equivalent qualifications. Three ODL approaches in particular emerge:

1 *Community school initiatives* (e.g. BRAC in Bangladesh and other similar INGO + MOE + local community partnerships in South Asia)
2 *Open schools* (e.g. the National Institute for Open Schooling [the Open Basic Education programmes, NIOS], India and Open School, Sri Lanka)
3 *Feeder programmes* which link NFE to formal provision (e.g. MVF, India).

Each introduces flexible, open qualities, which remove barriers to participation in basic education for hard-to-reach children and operate (or could operate) at scale. BRAC, for example, has demonstrated that well-developed management systems with centrally-produced, high quality, open learning curriculum resources (for teachers and learners), regular teacher training in child-centred pedagogy and community ownership can result in impressive completion, achievement and transfer rates in under-resourced rural areas.

NIOS has shown that investment in an open schooling framework, based on open learning resources (for teachers and learners), a national delivery system and an external route to national qualifications and examinations, make it possible for:

● other non-formal providers to set up, use and adapt the materials
● schooling to be re-started quickly in emergency zones
● cross-border refugees or the children of families working overseas to continue accessing their own national education in a different country
● formal schools to benefit (from the resources).

MVF's feeder programmes provide a second-chance route back to formal schools and a way out of child labour.

The way that BRAC, NIOS and MVF have all not only diversified their provision (for a wide variety of hard-to-reach groups) but have also become apex organizations (supporting other providers with expertise, training, networking and ready-made resources), provides planners with existing models and infrastructures which could contribute towards developing more coordinated, joined-up basic education provision which reduces duplication of effort.

Given the teacher shortages in the area, ODL could also play a significant role in providing the means for developing a lifelong learning approach to teacher support and training. With careful advance planning, ODL could also play a role in conflict and disaster areas. Teachers and radio broadcasters with training for emergency situations could develop a bank of ready-made educational resources which could be deployed at different stages of emergencies to provide children with immediate educational continuity, whether informal or formal, for example, open-source resources mapped against the national curriculum for students or teachers and radio programmes (ECCE, psycho-social family or child-to-child approaches, and more structured educational programmes).

In summary

ODL provides a means of overcoming certain barriers in basic education: of enabling access to national qualifications outside formal schools, of overcoming geographical barriers (such as radio broadcasting in disaster zones, mountainous regions and small island states), of training large numbers of teachers *in situ* (distance education). It also offers the potential to deliver better value for money, particularly with the economies of scale that can be achieved in high population South Asian countries.

The report makes five recommendations:

1   Educational planners could re-examine the statistical, analytical and conceptual basis from which they work in relation to these groups of hard-to-reach children.
2   Educational planning needs to be built on a comprehensive mapping and evaluation of current provision in terms of its scale and effectiveness. However, a fine balance needs to be achieved between the creation of enabling frameworks (which facilitate inclusiveness and coherence for the learner) and over-bureaucratic frameworks (which drive the NFE sector away from the formal system).
3   Governments need to accept the importance of alternative and flexible routes to access formal qualifications, and to actively establish such a route, which is built on a system of credit accumulation and transfer. This on its own will have a significant impact on opening up access for hard-to-reach groups, and has the potential to provide a route to recognized qualifications for NGOs and other NFE providers.
4   More attention needs to be paid to the potential of ODL in supporting teachers and other intermediaries involved in basic education.
5   Research should be commissioned to ascertain how existing ODL resources and infrastructures, e.g. from Open Schools, could be used in advance planning for conflict and emergency situations.

These recommendations are followed by suggestions for future research in this area.

INTRODUCTION TO
THIS VOLUME

This research study, commissioned by the UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia, explores the potential of open and distance learning (ODL) in basic education for hard-to-reach children and children in conflict or disaster contexts who cannot access or complete a cycle of basic education. There is a focus on specific ODL approaches providing access to recognized educational achievement. These approaches attempt to address the concern that non-formal and alternative programmes imply second best with little currency within the formal education sector and with employers. Such equity-based programmes raise big policy implications as they blur the normally rather rigid distinctions between formal and non-formal approaches.

For ease of use, the study has been published in two volumes. The first volume provides an overview, with recommendations, of how ODL approaches can help hard-to-reach children achieve basic education. The present volume is companion to this, and puts together the two country studies of Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, and thus provides in-depth analysis more specific to policy makers and implementers in those countries.

The country studies are based on a combination of desk research and fieldwork, and were necessarily shaped and limited by the time available for the research and the ability to access reliable, up-to-date information. However, in the process of carrying out the research, we learned that there is a wealth of innovative and successful initiatives that will repay serious evaluation. We have tried to give an indication of their range and diversity but we know that we have only scratched the surface of possibilities, and there is an absence of good international cross-cultural research in this area. We believe that we have been able to offer some evidence that traditional 'formal' models can be adapted to provide learning gains for the poorest and most disadvantaged young people.

Research methodology
Our research combined in-depth fieldwork with desk-study reviews. We sought advice, information and direct inputs to the research from a range of stakeholders: informed educational experts working in the field of education for hard-to-reach children and those in conflict and emergency situations and users (children, parents, teachers, employers). The process had the following stages:

● Initial identification of conceptual framework and research questions through discussion (with the research team, UNICEF, informed experts, in-country experts and documentary analysis).
● Fieldwork by visiting researchers in close collaboration with in-country UNICEF colleagues. The fieldwork included interviews with various stakeholders, including NGOs, government organizations, children, teachers, parents, employers and experts in the field of hard-to-reach children and those in conflict and emergency areas.
● Ongoing review of literature and discussions to inform the conceptual framework and to add to the data on policy and practice. Literature included theoretical papers, national and agency policy documents, local and comparative research reports, unpublished and other grey literature and toolkits and other practical resources.
● Specially commissioned contributions from experts in the fields of conflict and emergency, policy and planning, funding and costing and the South Asian overview.

A more detailed account of the methodology appears at the end of the main report as an Annex.

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BANGLADESH COUNTRY STUDY

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ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

BEHTRUWC	Basic Education for Hard-to-Reach Urban Working Children
BOU	Bangladesh Open University
BRAC	Now simply called 'BRAC', but originally 'Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee'
BUIED	BRAC University Institute of Educational Development
CAMPE	Campaign for Popular Education
C4D	Communication for Development
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CMES	Centre for Mass Education and Science
COL	Commonwealth of Learning
DAM	Dhaka Ahsania Mission
DPE	Department of Primary Education
EEC	Education for Ethnic Children
EFA	Education for All
EiA	English in Action
FBO	Faith-Based Organization
FIVDB	Friends in Village Development, Bangladesh
GoB	Government of Bangladesh
GPS	Government Primary School
HSC	Higher Secondary Certificate
IGVE	Integrated General and Vocational Education (UCEP)
JSC	Junior Secondary Certificate
MDG	Millennium Development Goal
MoE	Ministry of Education
MOPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MOWCA	Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs
ODL	Open and Distance Learning
OVC	Orphans and Vulnerable Children
PACE	Post-basic and Continuing Education (BRAC)
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
RNGPS	Recognized Non-Government Primary School
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia (UNICEF)
ROSC	Reaching Out-of-School Children
SSC	Secondary School Certificate
UCEP	Underprivileged Children's Education Programme
VTI	Vocational and Technical Institute

BANGLADESH COUNTRY STUDY AND FIELDWORK

1

1.1 Introduction

Bangladesh was chosen as one of the two countries in South Asia in which to undertake fieldwork for this UNICEF Regional Office for South Asia (ROSA) project. The account which follows is based on information gathered and this fieldwork, which was carried out in a three-week visit in February/March 2009. Inevitably, what follows is an analysis based on a selective exploration of the initiatives, projects and the work of organizations engaged in open and distance learning (ODL).

1.2 The focus

The fieldwork in Bangladesh has focused on the existing and potential use of ODL in meeting the needs of diverse groups of hard-to-reach children in situations where they cannot access or cannot complete a cycle of basic education.

In the country study of Bangladesh, we have been looking at the situation of children who are hard to reach because they live in geographically remote regions, children who are hard to reach because they come from an ethnic minority, children living in urban slums, the children of migrant workers, working children (urban and rural, including seasonal employment), hard-to-reach girls, and children trying to access education in times of emergency and disaster.

'Hard to reach' is a complex issue and such groupings as those above are not necessarily distinct, cannot do more than suggest typologies and are by no means defining of the children involved. There are many overlaps – working children may be living in slums; girls may be from an ethnic minority. The practicalities of our field study, say, in particular rural or urban settings, meant that at times we were working with broader groups and asking questions which probed the interweaving of several vulnerabilities. Within the framework of this whole study, specific attention needs to be paid to the official figure of 9.2% of the relevant age population who do not enrol at all in primary school as well as the 49.3% who drop out of school between Grades 1 and 5 (DPE, 2009). Never-enrolled children in the age group 6 to 11 could amount to 1.7 million children according to Ahmed *et al.* (2007) and although there is now a government initiative, Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC), targeting these children, the particular characteristics of this large group are, by nature of their lack of visibility, difficult to adequately define. This makes these children some of the hardest to reach.

This country study focuses on initiatives that have some elements of open or distance learning, which are meeting, or have the potential to meet, the educational needs of one or more of these groups given above, and which may have the capacity to operate at a large enough scale.

In keeping with the typology of the overall study, the following areas were considered as categories of ODL which could support basic education, including during times of conflict and disaster:

1   providing alternative school systems and programmes
2   supporting successful transition to, and performance within, formal schools
3   raising the quality of and enriching basic education by bringing in new educational resources
4   providing networks and training for personnel with responsibilities in basic education (e.g. teachers, broadcasters, inspectors, teacher educators)
5   providing communication for development (C4D) strategies.

Each of these ODL uses can play an important role in basic education, and any comprehensive and cohesive policy framework for these target groups should include all of them but the first two are involved in direct provision of schooling. The study of Bangladesh focuses on all initiatives in categories 1 to 5, as Bangladesh was the main location of our field study, although, as will be seen, there was a preponderance of initiatives in some of the categories and relatively little in others.

BASIC EDUCATION 2

2.1 The system and provision

Bangladesh has a system of compulsory education, which runs from Grade 1 to Grade 5, with the official age of entry into Grade 1 at 6 and exit at 10. A two-year pre-primary programme is becoming increasingly established. Non-compulsory state education begins at Junior Secondary level, which runs for three years from age 11 to 13, and admission is based on an entrance exam at individual school level. Upper Secondary lasts for two years to age 15, at the end of which students take the Secondary School Certificate (SSC); there is also a vocational SSC offered through the Vocational Training Institutes (VTIs). After two more years, students can take the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC); again there is a vocational HSC offered by the VTIs/Polytechnics. The school year begins in January.

Figure 1 The education system in Bangladesh

Age	Grade													
26+														
25+	XX				Ph D (Engr)	Ph D (Medical)								
24+	XIX		Ph. D	PostMBBS Dipl					ph D in Edu.				
23+	XVIII	M. Phil		M. phil (Medical)									
22+	XVII	MA/MSc/MCom/MSS/MBA	LLM	MBBS BDS	MSc (Engr)	MSc (Agr)	MBA	M. Ed & MA (Edn)		MA (LSC)			
21+	XVI	Bachelor (Hons)	Masters (Prel)	LLB (Hons)	BSc. Eng BSc. Agr BSc. Text BSc. Leath	BSc. Eng	BSc. (Tech Edn)	B.Ed & Dip. Ed	BP ED	Dip. (LSc)	Kamil		
20+	XV		Bachelor (Pass)					BBA			Fazil		
19+	XIV												
18+	XIII				Diploma (Engr)					Diploma in Nursing			
17+	XII	Secondary	Examination	HSC		HSC Vocational	C in Edu	C in Agri	Diploma in Comm		Alim		
16+	XI		Higher Secondary Education										
15+	X		Examination	SSC	TRADE Certificate/ SSV Vocational	ARTISAN COURSE e.g. CERAMICS							
14+	IX	Secondary	Secondary Education								Dakhil		
13+	VIII		JUNIOR SECONDARY EDUCATION										
12+	VII												
11+	VI												
10+	V	PRIMARY EDUCATION									Ebtedayee		
9+	IV												
8+	III												
7+	II												
6+	I												
5+		PRE–PRIMARY EDUCATION											
4+													
3+													

Source: MOE (2006)

To cope with high student numbers and lack of resources, the majority of primary schools (about 90%) operate a double shift system. In theory, primary schools are supposed to be open for 242 days a year, with a target of 900 hours' tuition over that period. However, schools with double shifts tend to reduce the time per shift, and a 2005 study cited in the 2009 Department of Primary Education (DPE) annual sector report[2] indicated that primary schools were open for only 228 days on average, and that the average timetabled hours in double-shift schools was only three hours. In practice this meant that Grades 1–2 had only two hours of lessons each day the school was open, and Grades 3–5 had three and a half hours. That is, in a school open for the average of 228 days a year, children in Grades 1–2 timetabled for two hours a day would only have 456 hours of schooling over the year, and those in Grades 3–5 with three and a half hours a day would have 798 hours. These low figures, coupled with high absence rates for both teachers and children, means that many children are getting far fewer contact hours than the target of 900 hours a year, and this may go some way to help explain the high repetition and dropout rates discussed in the next section.

In parallel to the mainstream of formal state-funded education, there is Madrasa: an Islamic system of education. There are five stages of the madrasa education system with five-year Ebtedayee, five-year Dakhil, two-year Alim, two-year Fazil and two-year Kamil courses. In addition to subjects such as Arabic, Islamic History, the Koran, the Hadith and Fica, the government-recognized madrasas cover all the subjects in the national curriculum as a condition of government recognition and support. Students sit for the examinations set by the Madrasa Education Board after completing courses of each level except Ebtedayee, and in theory, the students can transfer freely between Madrasa and state schools.

There are two types of madrasa in Bangladesh. The Aliyah Madrasas were formed by the government in the early 1980s in a move to 'modernize' the curriculum. They have a curriculum similar to the formal system, and are recognized by the government as 'equivalent' to formal schools. The majority are co-educational, but with fewer girls than boys overall. 90% of the teachers' salaries are paid by the state, the government supports other costs such as building and furniture, and the institutions are under state supervision. At primary level, nearly 2 million children are registered in Aliyah Madrasas (DPE, 2009). The Quomi Madrasas, focusing mainly on religious education, are not recognized by the government, and share no single curriculum. Because of this, it is difficult to provide a picture of the education they provide. However, a recent newspaper article indicates that the Quomi Madrasas are scheduled to become recognized under the pending new National Education Policy (bdnews24, 2009). They tend to be single-sex, and cater mainly for boys (Asahullah, 2007; Ahmed, 2009).

2.1.1 Numbers

The Government of Bangladesh organizes a large state-funded primary school system. The figures given below are those compiled by the DPE (Directorate of Primary Education) annual sector report (DPE, 2009:10).

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2   Note that we have used this document as our main source of government data on primary schools, but refer to this report for a range of other data estimates.

Table 1 Table of primary schools by type, teacher and enrolment, 2008

	# Schools	# Teachers	# Students
1. Government primary schools (GPS)	37,672	182,899	9,537,571
2. Registered non-government primary schools (RNGPS)	20,083	76,875	3,472,799
3. Experimental schools	54	221	10,346
4. Community schools	3,263	8,772	388,051
5. Non-registered non-government primary schools	966	2,460	99,564
6. Kindergartens	2,987	16,980	226,187
7. NGO schools	408	763	25,872
8. Primary sections of secondary schools	1,139	13,021	270,790
9. Ebtedayee madrasas	6,726	28,227	919,065
10. Primary sections of dakhil, alim, fazil and kamil madrasas	8,920	35,707	1,051,360
Total	**82,218**	**365,925**	**16,001,605**

Ten types of school are recognized within the formal system. Government primary schools are owned and managed by the government with the support of a local school management committee. Registered non-government primary schools, satellite and community schools are managed by the local community with government support. Non-registered non-government primary schools and Ebtedayees are managed by their communities. The first seven types of school are under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MOPME – about 86% in terms of total enrolment), and the remaining three come under the Ministry of Education (MoE) (DPE, 2009). Numbers in this table are not gender disaggregated, but other data in the report shows that girls now slightly outnumber boys in all primary grades. The figures include over-age primary school students. The overall gross enrolment rate for 2008 is given as 97.6% – an increase from 93.7% in 2005 – and the net enrolment is 90.8%.

Repetition rates

Grade 1 = 11.3%
Grade 2 = 11.0%
Grade 3 = 14.5%
Grade 4 = 13.7%
Grade 5 = 5.2%

Source: DPE (2009)

There are high repetition rates – see box – and it takes an estimated average input of about 8.6 years for a child to complete the five years of primary school. Between 2005 and 2008 there is little evidence that promotion rates have improved. Linked to high repetition is absenteeism. For 2008, student absenteeism is reported to be about 19%, but the same DPE document cites other surveys in 2005 with estimates as high as 36% in GPS and 44% in RNGPS. It also cites 2005 data indicating that 16% of GPS teachers and 11% of RNGPS teachers were absent on any given day (DPE, 2009).

The 2006, 2007 and 2008 school data revealed general improvements across a number of indicators. Noted improvements were in GER and NER overall rates (due to increases in female enrolment), reduction in teacher:pupil ratio, decline in student absenteeism, and decline in the Grade 5 repetition rate. However, due to constraints with regard to availability of some data for 2007 and 2008, it is difficult to note overall progress in areas such as transition from primary Grade 5 to secondary school; primary education expenditure per pupil; and the educational achievement of students. Although the data are checked, cross-checked and signed at different levels within the Government of Bangladesh (GoB), there is scope for errors in reporting. Concerned about the issue, the DPE has requested UNICEF to assist them to undertake a limited data validation sample survey in order to test the accuracy of the findings of previous two years. The validation of school census data was underway at the time of writing.

Out-of-school children in the slums of Sylhet

2.1.2 Never-enrolled and dropout

There is no estimate of out-of-school children in the 2009 DPE survey, but the number of un-enrolled primary children aged 6–10 was estimated in the Education For All (EFA) Mid-Decade Assessment to be 2,201,194 (UNICEF, 2008). There are concerns that this is a serious underestimate, although figures on the never-enrolled and those who drop out are a matter of contention. In the National Plan of Action II (MOPME, 2003), figures of the net un-enrolled and those who drop out are added together to give a total of 5.83 million children to be targeted because they are out of primary school. However, even this larger figure would seem to be an underestimate. Elsewhere in the same document, the 'non-formal basic education target population, dropouts and un-enrolled ages between 6 and 14 years' is estimated for the year 2000 to be 12.83 million (MOPME, 2003). This figure, although nine years out-of-date, is significant because it gives a sense of the scale of the need for alternative forms of primary education and lower secondary education.

The government acknowledges the concerns over proper estimates of the numbers involved in its National Action Plan II, referring to the problems of:

1   an absence of birth registration
2   data on school-age children from multiple and mismatching sources
3   non-collation of the enrolment data between government and non-government as well as formal and non-formal schools/sub-sectors not being collated
4   double and multiple enrolment (involving government primary schools, non-government schools and NGO NFE learning centres) which inflates the figure and shows reduced dropout rates
5   confusion caused by different sources of information and results of different types of sample surveys.

More recent data indicates that for those who have at some stage registered in a primary school, the survival rate to Grade 5 for girls is given as 57% for girls, and 53% for boys (DPE, 2009), indicating that nearly half of primary school students enrolled do not complete their primary education. The same DPE report shows that the dropout rate is particularly high after the first year of school and at the end of Grade 4. Between 2005 and 2008, there appears to have been a slight reduction in dropout rates in the first three years, but an increase in Grades 4 and 5. However, the much lower dropout rate in Grade 5 suggests that if parents manage to keep their children in school up to Grade 4, those children have a good chance of completing primary education.

Figure 2 Dropout rate, 2005–2008 (DPE, 2009)

Also of note is that the school enrolment survey organized by DPE is taken once a year before the end of March and so any changes in numbers, especially those of students dropping out later in the school year, cannot be recorded: the students stay on the register.
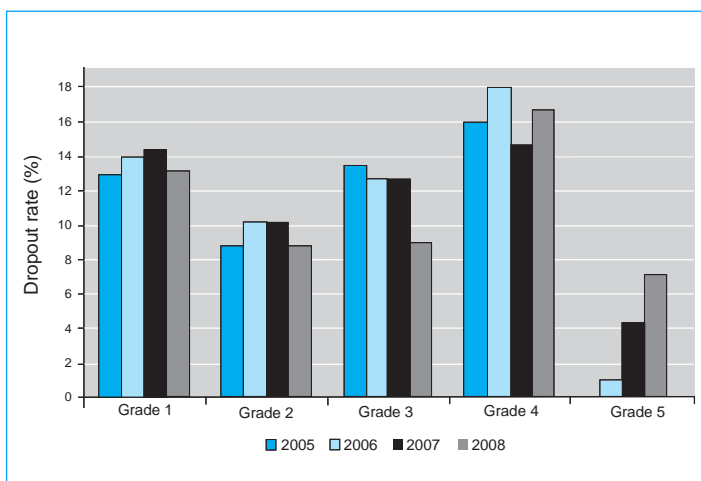
What the official figures of enrolment in Table 1 do not acknowledge is the work of development partners and NGOs in providing alternative forms of primary education. To give one example, the NGO BRAC[3] runs 32,000 primary schools for 984,440 children (BRAC, 2008). These do not appear on the DPE table of enrolment above partly because BRAC's one-roomed single-teacher schools do not fit the specification for a recognized primary school. A project such as the Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC), organized by the Bureau of Non-Formal Education under MOPME is another example of primary-level education which does not appear in official DPE statistics. The issue of recognition of non-formal education programmes and open learning and distance initiatives is a matter treated at greater length later in this report.

2.1.3 Vulnerability

Governments and NGOs have classified never-enrolled and dropout children in an overarching 'vulnerable' category, predominantly made up of the following groups of children:

- working children
- children living on the streets
- children from extremely poor families in very remote areas, especially where there is domestic conflict
- orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs) both in orphanages and those neither cared for by family nor institutions
- children of migrating families
- children of plantation/estate workers
- children from marginalized urban communities such as the children of sex workers
- child prostitutes
- children and youth in vagrant homes, juvenile detention centres, correction centres and jails
- children with drug or alcohol problems, or from families with drug or alcohol problems
- children of families who belong to an ethnic minority
- children of families whose ethnic group constitutes an extreme minority in the school catchment area
- children at risk of trafficking
- child brides and girls engaged to be married at a young age
- girls who have delivered babies outside of marriage, conceived through rape, prostitution, or relationship
- pupils whose schools are destroyed or damaged by emergency, natural disaster or conflict.

In all but the last of these 'groups' of children (above), most are constantly vulnerable, regardless of the presence or absence of emergency. Situations of natural disaster – for example cyclones and floods – pose additional educational challenges to all children, both those who are in school or some form of alternative, as well as those who are not.

Vulnerable children may have very different patterns of enrolment, attendance and dropout, and these patterns have implications for the design of initiatives that meet their needs. The following lists the most common patterns:

- those who never enrol
- those who enrol, persist for five years, but attend rarely
- those who enrol attend rarely and drop out early

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[3]   There is a focus on BRAC throughout this report. Although the para-formal BRAC Education Programme has already been widely documented elsewhere, we feel it is important to include elements of it here because it is somehow managing to reach so many of the children that the state system fails to reach.

- those whose absences/disruptions are short, possibly only once, and are caused by external events
- those who enrol late (possibly one or more years later than would have been appropriate) and need to catch up with their peers
- those who have to repeat a year
- those who enrol at Grade 1, drop out for a long period (possibly more than a year), then wish to re-enter school to catch up with their peers
- those whose education is repeatedly disrupted, by domestic events, natural disaster or conflict situations
- those who drop out after reintegration into school, but do not wish to come back.

All of the factors in this section have influenced the search for, or analysis of, open and distance initiatives that directly related to the five categories (see Section 1.2) which have the potential to be appropriate to ODL in such situations.

2.2 Population overview

Bangladesh is the seventh most populous country in the world and is among the most densely populated countries. Recent (2005–2007) estimates of Bangladesh's population range from 142 to 159 million, with a land area of 144,000 square kilometres. It is listed among the 'Next Eleven' emerging economies with high economic potential (Eghbal, 2008). Geographically, the country straddles the Ganges–Brahmaputra Delta and is subject to annual monsoon floods and cyclones. The majority of the population are rural, living on subsistence farming, and unemployment is officially estimated at 30%. The majority ethnic group are the Bengali people, comprising 98% of the population and the official and most widely-used language is Bangla. Minorities include Bihari migrants and indigenous tribal groups, with thirteen tribal groups located in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the most populous of which are the Chakmas. The Chittagong region has been a location of ethnic tension since the inception of Bangladesh. The largest tribal groups outside the Hill Tracts are the Santhals and the Garos (Achiks). There are also Kaibartta, Mundas, Oraons and Zomi ethnic groups. Other marginalized groups include the inhabitants of the *haor* (freshwater) wetlands, those in the *char* coastal regions (large, temporary sandbanks) and those working in the tea plantations. These groups are often in geographically hard-to-reach areas.

2.3 Challenges

Below is a summary of some of the main challenges in providing basic education for all. Poverty heads the list because it impacts on all the other challenges, and affects the greatest number of people.

2.3.1 Poverty
Despite the fact that Bangladesh moved into UNDP's 'medium development' country category in 2003 (UNDP, 2003) and has had a long period of sustained economic growth, poverty is a major factor in many people's lives. In Bangladesh, an estimated 40% of households are classified as poor, and 25% as very poor (MOPME, 2008, citing the 2005 HIES). Poverty is one of the major reasons for children not attending school in Bangladesh.

According to UNDP, Millennium Development Goal (MDG) poverty line measures covering the period 1990–2003 show that 36% of the Bangladeshi population live on an income of less than US$1 a day and 82.8% on US$2 or less a day (UNDP, 2005). Applying the ratio of primary

school age population in the total population (14%), the number of children of primary school age in the population characterized as the extreme poor in 2004 was between 3.9 and 5.3 million (Ahmed *et al*., 2007). Children from families with a 'deficit' food security status have more than five times the chance of dropping out than children in the 'surplus' category (Ahmed *et al*., 2007).

Although primary education is officially free, the indirect and opportunity costs are simply too high for many families. While most children apparently start school, the survival rates indicate the financial obstacles to children completing primary education. The 'additional' costs – including resources such as pens, notebooks, and the cost of uniforms, transport, and 'answer' books can be prohibitive. Children can be withdrawn to help supplement the family income, or to free someone (usually the mother) from domestic work in order for the parent to take up paid work. There are suggestions (Ahmed *et al*., 2007) that the significant number of households headed by a single female parent may be particularly vulnerable. Children are much likelier to be out of school if they come from families which are the poorest in the community in terms of housing, access to electricity, and where the parents have not themselves been educated.

The poor in Bangladesh have also been further hit by recent, very rapid rises in the prices of foodstuffs, which has also had an impact on school enrolments (Davies *et al*., 2009). In 2008 Bangladesh suffered the effects of near double-digit inflation with increases in oil and gas products of between 30% and 100%. Rice doubled in price and Bangladesh banned exports of its own rice crop to try and ensure supplies for its own people. The price rise in rice was in part one of the effects of the flooding from Cyclone Sidr in late 2007, and an example of the cumulative and multi-layering negative effects of poverty. In addition, it has recently been reported in the press that Malaysia is going to revoke or freeze the work permits of thousands of Bangladeshi workers (Sindh and Sarma, 2009), and Saudi Arabia has stopped recruiting workers from Bangladesh (Morris, 2009). This will have a serious impact of remittances coming into the country.

Between 70% and 80% of the population of Bangladesh is rural and the children of poor rural families have particular obstacles which impede their progress through primary education. Schools are just not close enough to where they live. In the especially remote regions, even information is scant, but the Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) (Jahan and Choudhury, 2005) and Ahmed *et al*. (2007) report in the haor and char areas and in the CHT there is a complete absence of schools or a complete inaccessibility of schools because of their distance from where children live. In the tea gardens only one quarter of the communities speak Bangla as a first language and only 10% are Muslim. This means that many opportunities for development, which are open to the ethnic and religious majority, are closed to them. And for the rural poor, almost every year many people in Bangladesh suffer from food shortages – the *monga* period in the northern regions is a cyclical phenomenon of poverty and hunger, resulting in people migrating to urban areas to find work. Poverty and migration both have an impact on the education of the poorest children affected by *monga* (Davies *et al*., 2009).

In urban areas, particularly through the migration from the countryside, the poor, along with their children, are most likely to be undocumented and invisible to authorities. 'Invisible' children include those without an identity because they are never registered and therefore deprived of an education. These children are likely to be without parental care (orphans, those in detention, street children), and exploited in child labour in the sex trade and private domestic service (UNICEF, 2006). The children of the poor in urban slums, estimated to be 40% of the population of Dhaka, suffer lower attendance rates and educational achievement overall. As more people seek refuge in cities, more children become invisible and the problems grow (Davies *et al*, 2009).

Bangladesh's commitment to eliminating user fees, along with cash stipends to support poor girls, resulted in a rise in girls' gross primary enrolment ratio from 64% to 98% between 1990 and 2000. Increasing government efforts include in 1990 the elimination of school fees for girls in Grades 6–8, and a secondary school stipend for girls (Mathieu, 2006). For primary children, a Food for Education programme was introduced in 2000 alongside a stipend programme, and these two programmes have become the Primary Education Stipend Project for the whole of Bangladesh. However, although the programme is aimed at the poorest 40% of pupils enrolled in primary school in rural areas, there are concerns about whether it is the poorest families who are actually benefiting. Certainly in our discussions with families living in slum conditions in Sylhet town, or in rural Sylhet Division, there was general ignorance of the stipends. CAMPE (Jahan and Choudhury, 2005) and the World Bank advocate a thorough re-evaluation, with the World Bank maintaining that targeting the stipend to the urban poor and to indigenous groups would help Bangladesh achieve its EFA targets.

2.3.2 Gender

It is quite common to see or hear claims that Bangladesh has achieved MDG3 (e.g. LCG Bangladesh, 2005; *Bangladesh Journal*, 2007; World Bank, 2008). What this usually means is that Bangladesh has achieved parity of enrolment at primary level, and in this Bangladesh has been remarkably successful. There are also claims that there is parity of enrolment at secondary level. However, there is not parity of enrolment at upper secondary or tertiary levels, and not parity of achievements or outcomes. Other MDG3 indicators such as the share of women in wage employment in the non-agricultural sector, or the proportion of seats held by women in national parliament, are rarely referred to. The goal of empowerment and equality of women has not been met. But there has certainly been an increase in girls' share of enrolments. Perhaps the most significant reason for the increase in the retention of girls is financial support to families, particularly in the form of the female secondary stipend programme, introduced nationwide in 1994 and resulting in girls' enrolment at lower secondary levels being (slightly) higher than boys from 2000 onwards. Various writers attribute girls' increased enrolment at primary level at least in part to the secondary stipend programme, and at least one source credits it with having helped increase boys' enrolment, with parents being unlikely to send their daughters to school but not their sons (cited in Raynor and Wesson, 2006). However, with more girls staying in school longer, there is increasing concern for the retention of boys.

Below is a brief review of the main gender concerns for both girls and boys.

Issues mainly affecting girls

For girls from poor families, there is the risk of withdrawal from school for paid work, or perhaps more often for unpaid domestic work, releasing the mother for other work. This focus on domestic work is also part of the culture, and is seen a very important part of a girl's informal education and preparation for becoming a wife and mother. The onset of puberty can often trigger withdrawal from school because of the perceived need to prepare the girl for her life as a woman, because of her being seen as of an age to accept more domestic responsibility, because of the increasing risks of sexual harassment in or around (on the way to/from) school, or because of inadequate hygiene provision or sanitation facilities during menstruation. In addition, although the official minimum age for the marriage of girls is 18, child marriage is still common. (In our fieldwork for example, a mother admitted to an engagement for her 10-year-old daughter.) Bangladesh has one of the highest rates of under-age marriage for girls in the world, with an estimated 52.5% girls married before the age of 15 (World Vision, 2008).

In school, girls are likely to either get the 'wrong' sort of attention (teasing/harassment, humiliation), or not enough attention from the teacher. Figure 3 gives a picture of quite typical classroom interaction in Bangladesh.

This is from a Grade 9 maths lesson (Kassem *et al.*, 2003) in a rural school in Dhaka Division, in which the (male) teacher mostly stood in the position indicated, directing his body and language and attention towards the boys. Although there are equal numbers of girls and boys in the class, girls are cramped three to a desk in one third of the available space; boys are two to a desk in two thirds of the space. The vertical bars represent instances of interaction with the teacher. Only one girl in the class spoke; most boys spoke at least once, with several engaging in multiple interactions. All monitoring by the teacher – indicated by the green lines – (except for one girl) was done with the boys. That is, in this class at least, boys have twice the space and almost all the attention.

Figure 3 Typical classroom interaction in Bangladesh
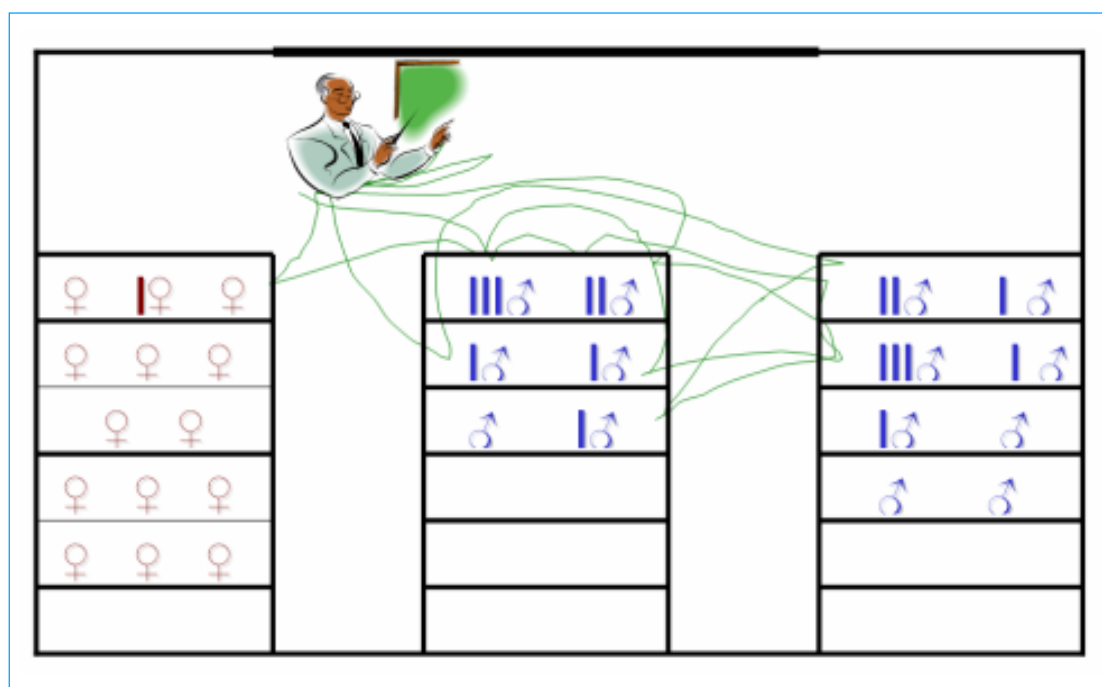
Related to this is concern for the educational achievement and educational outcomes of girls. More girls than boys leave school before they are able to get any recognized qualification, girls are more likely to be channelled into low-status humanities courses, and of those girls who are able to stay up to Grade 10 (the first public examination stage) 2006 exam figures[4] show that girls are less likely than boys to be enrolled for the exam, and less likely to pass, with girls being only about 45% of those who pass (Exam data source: based on BISE, 2006). One reason for girls' underachievement post-puberty could be lack of appropriate facilities in schools for menstrual hygiene management. A recent small-scale qualitative study carried out by ROSA showed that temporary exclusion during menstruation because of lack of appropriate toilet facilities or places to dispose of pads or wash cloths was common amongst girls. This could lead to girls missing 30–40 days a year of schooling. Another qualitative study has adolescent girls detailing their avoidance of school at such times. One girl was not only unable to change her cloth at school, but she was also so frightened of having to deal with bleeding at school that she simply did not go when she thought her period was due. Such matters are not spoken of in the formal education system, but may be discussed informally if there is a woman teacher. In schools where there is

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[4] There is evidence that the gender gap may have closed somewhat in more recent years, but we have not been able to source enough gender-disaggregated data to make the same comparison for 2007–2009.

Figure 4 SSC entries and results, 2006

% girls: 46.89 (% of those who were entered), 45.19 (% of those who passed)
% boys: 53.11 (% of those who were entered), 54.81 (% of those who passed)

■ % of those who were entered   ■ % of those who passed

no woman teacher to talk to, girls may feel forced to lie. Another girl said that if she had to go home to change her cloth and there was no woman to get permission from, she would tell the male teacher she had a headache (Raynor, 2007). In what could be seen as a tacit acceptance of the fact that girls might not attend school during menstruation, one condition of the girls' secondary stipend is that girls must have a minimum attendance rate of 75% (Raynor and Wesson, 2006). This low academic requirement happens to equate to permissible absence of up to one week in four.

Issues mainly affecting boys

For boys, there are other gender concerns. They are more likely than girls to be withdrawn from school to take part in income-generating activities or paid work. From Class 6 onwards – the start of junior secondary school – most girls are eligible for a stipend. The female secondary stipend programme has been running nationwide since 1994, and has been largely responsible for the increase in enrolment of girls at secondary level, and has been seen as an incentive to parents to allow girls to complete primary education. As yet, boys are not part of the scheme, although there is talk of extending this programme to boys from poor families. Because secondary education is not free, it is a financial burden, which weighs heavily against the possible financial opportunities for boys.

In school, boys are more likely to be subjected to both corporal and humiliating punishment, seem to be more likely than girls to question the relevance and value of the education they are receiving, and are more likely than girls to withdraw themselves from school.

2.3.3 Natural disaster

The main violence that threatens Bangladesh comes from the sea in the form of tidal surges, cyclones and flooding. With global warming, cyclones and flooding are increasing in intensity. Five more metres of sea level will cause Bangladesh to disappear (Davies *et al.*, 2009).

In the last 10 years there has been significant flooding – in 1998, 2004 and 2007. In addition, there is the regular flooding that is counted as part of normal life in Bangladesh. Because flooding is more or less predictable (but not the extent of the flood), the DPE has made provision for flexible school calendars where needed, so that schools can close during floods, and open again when floods have receded, and in theory children do not lose out on schooling. In 2008 alone, thousands of people were made homeless by the floods. Erosion of riverbanks results in loss of homes and other assets for those living on the rivers. Flooding typically results in damage to or loss of the subsistence

A child in the Dhaka floods, 2004

crop and the family priority will be to salvage and to replant, otherwise the damaging effects on income can last a generation (APIT, 2008). This means that while schools may only be closed for a short while, children's absence from school can become permanent. For those living on the river *chars*, life is unpredictable: if the river changes course, islands disappear. A similar situation occurs near the coast where coastal *chars* are subject to the same regular loss of homes and livelihoods. In addition, the wetlands or *haors* may be waterlogged for six months of the year, affecting people's livelihoods and their ability to move around (Davies *et al.*, 2009).

Cyclones have a significant impact on all sectors of the community directly hit by them, but it is the poorest families that lose their homes and their livestock. In the worst-hit areas, schools are destroyed, sanitation and water supplies are severely affected and livelihood opportunities reduced. Children are orphaned and many families made homeless (Davies *et al.*, 2009). Women are more at risk than men in times of disaster; for example in a cyclone, even if a warning is issued, many women die while waiting for their relatives to return home and accompany them to a safe place (cited in Davies *et al.*, 2009). Girl children are not necessarily more greatly affected than boys as girls look after other children and the household while boys forage for food. Teenage girls are more greatly affected, however, since as there is little seclusion in the storm shelters, security becomes a significant issue. Some girls are sent to a safe place at night to ensure their security, but the tendency to give girls to marriage after disasters is based on the premise of 'one less mouth to feed' (Mathieu, 2006). Education is low on the list or priorities for families suffering dislocation from cyclones and flooding. The poorest children often are the last to return to school, since they are occupied scavenging for fish and other food or looking after other children and animals, or too hungry to make school a priority.

On 25 May 2009, Cyclone Aila hit coastal districts of eastern India and western Bangladesh. Full assessments of the disaster have yet to be made, but an initial UNICEF assessment on 4 June confirmed that – among other things – many children had had their schooling affected. In the six hardest-hit districts, 354 schools were reported to be fully damaged and over 2500 partially damaged. Books, materials and furniture had been washed away. The government has been mobilizing the distribution of textbooks, while UNICEF has been supporting the creation of temporary learning centres and the supply of teaching and learning materials. Some schools were reportedly being used as temporary shelters (Anwar, 2009).

2.3.4 Ethnic minority groups

The 2% minority population translates into up to 3 million citizens not having Bengali as their mother tongue, with very little formal provision for mother-tongue education. There are conflicts and political tensions evident in Bangladesh. Hindu minorities have suffered persecution, and tensions remain between the Bengali majority and the ethnic minorities in the CHT; the army has a significant presence in the area. Minorities in the CHT, who have their own languages and culture, are marginalized in terms of provision of all services, including education. The government school of several classrooms and at least four teachers is not relevant in these areas, where communities are small and communication between villages difficult, making it difficult for

Out-of-school children in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

teachers to get to the schools. There are too few qualified teachers who speak the minority languages. For children in the area without provision for education, a large number of faith-based organizations (FBOs) or NGOs run small schools, but these are typically only funded for three to five years. More recently, BRAC has been making sustained provision for initial education to be delivered through the mother tongue. However, the linguistic and ethnic minorities are still disadvantaged, and few achieve high levels of education, making it difficult to find teachers who can deliver mother-tongue education. In addition, ethnically Bengali teachers are reluctant to be posted to areas such as the CHT. The literacy rate for ethnic minority children in the CHT is only 25% (Jahan and Choudhury, 2005). Migration is also common, due to slash and burn agriculture, disasters such as landslides, and plagues of rats, resulting in often permanent disruption in education (Davies *et al.*, 2009).

Elsewhere, for example in the tea plantations in Sylhet division, the children are beholden to the tea plantation owners for the freedom to go to school (for example as to whether a school is in easy distance) and many of them are in paid work on the tea estates. They live in enclaves: communities of workers who were brought over from India, who speak different languages from the Bangla majority and who are Hindu rather than Muslim. While their employers are responsible for providing schools, the single school may be located on the other side of the plantation and offer only a Bangla-medium education. And there is little motivation for education: 'the childcare centre and the school are mere transit stations in the life of a child who will "graduate" to become another plantation worker' (Navamukundam, 2001).

However, in the Sylhet tea garden area (as in other areas, such as the CHT), BRAC is currently operating its Indigenous Students Programme, filling some of the gaps left by the government and the tea garden owners, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2 BRAC ISP schools in tea garden areas

District	# Tea gardens	Tea gardens with schools	Total # BRAC schools	# Students			# Teachers		
				M	F	ALL	M	F	ALL
Hobiganj	23	20	151	1,732	2,416	4,148	25	126	151
Moulovi Bazaar	92	81	376	3,818	5,977	9,795	41	335	376
Sylhet	25	20	64	672	880	1,552	13	51	64
Total	**140**	**121**	**591**	**6,222**	**9,273**	**15,495**	**79**	**512**	**591**

Source: Data provided by the local BRAC office

2.3.5 Isolated/hard-to-reach areas

There are large parts of the country that are geographically isolated or otherwise hard to reach. The CHT in the east and parts of Sylhet Division in the north-east are hilly, have few roads, and are therefore isolated to some extent. Conversely, low-lying parts of the country such as the haor regions and char areas may only be isolated at certain times of the year. Much of Bangladesh is deltaic, with major rivers such as the Ganges/Padma and Brahmaputra/Jamuna emptying into the Bay of Bengal, along with many other more minor rivers. The haor regions – mainly in the north of the country, particularly the Sylhet Division – flood for months at a time each year. Pressure on land, and the fact that the flooding makes the land particularly fertile, means that large numbers of people live and do agricultural work in these areas, with homes on built-up parcels of land. When the agricultural land is flooded, although boats are available, they are largely used for fishing and other work, and access to schools can be difficult. The char regions are a feature of the delta area, where land emerges or submerges according to river and tidal

patterns. Again because of pressure on land and because the rivers bring nutrients to the land, char areas become inhabited as they emerge, and have many temporary and semi-permanent structures. However, there are few sealed roads, and the char areas are often cut off from the mainland all or part of the year. Teachers in these areas are often from the mainland, and when the water rises, are unable to reach the schools.

2.3.6 Children with special needs

Children in the earlier categories have their own special needs (financial, gender, linguistic and so on), but this section relates to those that have disabilities of some sort. A disability combined with other special needs can further deepen the disadvantage. Taking gender as an example, latest government figures (DPE, 2009) indicate that about 77,500 children with disabilities were registered in recognized primary schools (an increase of 70% between 2005 and 2008). However, despite the fact that overall primary enrolment numbers show girls to be slightly in the majority, when it comes to disabilities there are significantly more boys than girls, and with the gender gap perhaps widening over the reporting period. It is interesting to note that this gender issue is not commented on in the DPE document. Possible reasons for similar gender disparities in Tanzania are discussed in a DFID-funded study on equity in education by Raynor *et al.*, (2007), and tentative explanations include both in-school and out-of-school factors. Girls with disability may be more vulnerable than boys – for example, more open to sexual abuse – and therefore parents may be more inclined to keep disabled daughters at home in order to protect them. In school, the recorded number of girls with disabilities may be low because cultural and social practices make it more difficult to identify those girls who do not have a visible disability. In classrooms in which boys are more actively encouraged to participate, and with girls being assigned a more silent 'observer' status (see the example of classroom interaction in the 'gender' section above), it could be difficult to detect whether a girl has a speech, hearing, visual or learning impairment.

Figure 5 Number of children with disabilities enrolled in formal primary schools, 2005–2008
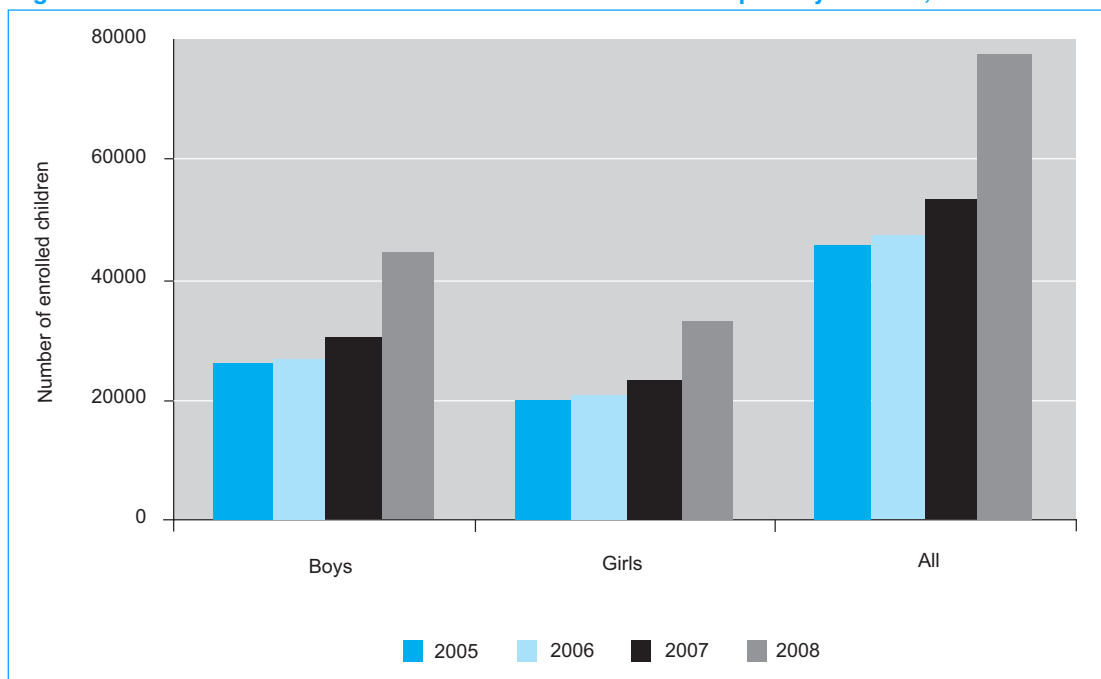
Source: DPE (2009:36)

If we take the government estimate of 17.8 million children of official primary school age, and the World Health Organization estimate of approximately 10% of any population having a disability of some kind, then one can estimate that there are over 1.5 million children with disabilities in Bangladesh. Some of these are undoubtedly in school but not recorded or recognized as having special needs (for example, those with a mild vision or hearing impairment), but it also seems clear that there is a disproportionately large number of children with special needs out of school. The recent rapid rise in the number of recorded children with disabilities enrolled in primary schools is positive, but it is not clear whether this trend is because headteachers are more effectively identifying the children with disabilities, or whether more such children are being attracted to schools. Given that children with disabilities almost certainly make up a disproportionately large percentage of out-of-school children, it is clear that much more needs to be done to identify and provide appropriate education for these children.

While there are many small NGOs or charities working with such children in Bangladesh, we are not able to estimate the numbers of children accommodated by them. The only large-scale initiative that we know of taking an active stance in this area is BRAC, which by July 2008 had over 48,000 children with mild to moderate special needs in their schools (BRAC, 2008).[5] Children are provided with assistive devices, treatment or operations as required, the teachers are given training in dealing with the special needs, the physical environment is modified as appropriate, and there is an awareness-raising programme in the communities. The policy is to have at least one child with disability in each school, maximum five, with that school making such provision as is required to meet their special needs. The Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (UCEP) also makes special provision for students with special needs, with an estimated 6.2% of their students having a disability of some sort.[6]

2.3.7 Marginalized communities

There are some communities who, for a variety of reasons, are marginalized. For example, there are 'colonies' of certain groups such as the 'Sweepers' colony' in Dhaka, with mainly low status Hindus. Another example are the Muslim Biharis who migrated to Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) after the partition of India in 1947. There are also large groups of sex workers, sometimes living in something akin to a colony. The children as well as the adults in such groups are stigmatized, and often do not attend formal schools.

2.4 Government priorities

Bangladesh is unusual in South Asia in having only five years of compulsory education. For other countries in South Asia (Sri Lanka, for example), education is compulsory to the end of lower secondary school. However, there are ambitions in Bangladesh to extend the age of compulsory schooling to the end of Grade 8, and this would bring Bangladesh's provision more into accord with the rights-based definition set out by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2007) and cited in the main body of this report.

> *Beyond pre-school education, the duration of which can be fixed by the State, basic education consists of at least 9 years and progressively extends to 12 years. Basic education is free and compulsory without any discrimination or exclusion.*

There are many reasons for extending compulsory education in terms of providing children and young people with the means to become active members of the civil society, to be able to participate fully in public life and to acquire skills, which will help them to find remunerative employment.

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[5] Gender-disaggregated data not included.

[6] Discussion with UCEP staff, February 2003.

Basic education prepares the learner for further education, for an active life and citizenship. It meets basic learning needs including learning to learn, the acquisition of numeracy, literacies, and scientific and technological knowledge as applied to daily life.

Education to the end of Lower Secondary level provides economic outcomes in terms of a national return on the investment in the individual. In Bangladesh, there is a strong interest in providing links between Lower Secondary education to vocational options at SSC and HSC level or of being better able to move into vocational employment after completing Grade 8.

Plans to extend compulsory education were referred to in our meetings in Dhaka with government officials and also indirectly announced at a recent workshop in Dhaka, when it was stated that a new education policy would be drawn up soon, in line with the Shamsul Alam education policy adopted in 2002 (bdnews24, 2009). In this 2002 policy, the move to eight years of basic education was put forward. However, this would need vast resourcing in a country which is still struggling to provide full coverage of primary education, and there was no suggestion in our discussions with government that any extension to compulsory education is likely in the short term.

The impetus in government, rather, is still to improve the provision of primary schooling in terms of enrolment rates and the quality of education, and to meet UPE EFA and MDG targets. It is important not to underestimate the scale of the task and the costs of extending compulsory education to the end of Lower Secondary level.

The 2008 EFA Mid Decade Assessment presents some specific aims on the part of the Government of Bangladesh:
1 providing improved access to primary education through provision of integral early childhood classrooms in primary schools and better access for ethnic minorities, and those with disabilities
2 providing a reliable database of primary age children and eliminating discrepancies
3 working with NGOs and CBOs to provide primary education closer to where children live
4 improving attendance, retention and completion of the cycle of primary education
5 reducing class size to 40 by 2010
6 improving the quality of the curriculum and resources in primary level education
7 introducing a public examination at the end of Grade 5 and a Primary School Certificate (PSC) for successful completion
8 improving coordination of formal and non-formal education and providing oversight of all education programmes, not just those organized by government.

The scale of these aims is ambitious given the numbers of children in Bangladesh and the estimate given earlier in this report of between 5 million and 12 million 6–14 years olds who have not completed primary education.

The Government of Bangladesh (MOPME) through its Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) II framework set out its plans for the years 2004–2009 for the development of primary education. Criticisms of PEDP II are of its sole focus on the formal system of education (and excluding Madrasa education) and its concomitant lack of inclusion of plans for the children deprived of access to formal education due to poverty and other reasons currently not addressed well by the formal school.

The third phase of PEDP is approaching, although there are few if any unequivocal signs of any change in government strategy, but there is evidence of collaborative activity between government and development partners. We analyse some examples of this in the following section, alongside other initiatives, which, in various ways, meet the needs of several of the groups of hard-to-reach children.

3 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS, GO AND NGO INVOLVEMENT

In assessing the success or otherwise of particular programmes and the work of specific organizations for meeting the needs of hard-to-reach children, it is important to stress the extent of collaboration among various government organizations, non-government organizations and development partners, and the complexity of some of the arrangements underpinning particular projects. CAMPE, the umbrella organization of NGOs with interests in education, lists more than 700 (CAMPE, 2004). Typical arrangements for a project may include full or majority funding by development partners or by government, training carried out by two or three collaborating NGOs and the programme of teaching and learning implemented by several more NGOs in their own learning centres or in spaces owned by other organizations. Alternative schooling may have short- or long-term funding and NGOs may have significant or little autonomy with regard to the programme.

We list in Table 3 below, and in tables further on in the report, the development partners whose work we have visited, discussed with them and investigated, and whose projects have interested us. It should be noted, however, that there are many other non-government organizations in Bangladesh, as indicated by the over-700 member organizations registered with CAMPE. We give an analysis of the projects under the categories we are using for ODL and in terms of the analytical frameworks, detailed later in this study, which we are using to define successful initiatives.

Table 3 Development partners' involvement in the five areas of open and distance learning (examples)

Area of activity	Programme/Development partners
Providing alternative school systems and programmes	Aparajeyo Bangladesh: Terre des Hommes BEHTRUWC: BNFE, CIDA, SIDA, UNICEF BNFE/CIDA/SIDA/UNICEF (BEHTRUWC), BRAC BEP: CIDA, DFID, Netherlands, NORAD, NOVIB CMES: SIDA, SDC FIVDB: DFID, SCF UK, USAID Islamic Relief: DFID JSC: BOU, CAMPE, COL ROSC: DPE, IDA, SDC UCEP: DFID, DANIDA, SDC, SCF Sweden-Denmark

Supporting successful transition to, and performance within, formal schools	Aparajeyo Bangladesh: Terre des Hommes BRAC (including PACE, secondary): CIDA, DFID, Netherlands, NORAD, NOVIB DAM: UNESCO FIVDB: DFID, SCF UK, USAID ROSC: DPE, IDA, SDC UCEP (SSC) : DFID, DANIDA, SDC, SCF Sweden-Denmark
Raising the quality and enriching basic education by bringing in new educational resources	BRAC EEC: Norway CMES: SIDA, SDC DAM: UNESCO EiA: DFID/UKOU/BMB JSC: CAMPE, BOU, COL, CAMPE
Providing networks and training for personnel with responsibilities in basic education	BRAC: CIDA, DFID, Netherlands, NORAD, NOVIB CAMPE: SDC, Netherlands, Novib
Providing communication for development (C4D) strategies.	EiA: DFID/UKOU/BMB

The first three of these areas are discussed in more detail in the three sub-sections below. This is followed by a brief analysis of the provision and facilitation of education in emergencies in Bangladesh (but see the *Sri Lanka Country Report* for a much more detailed discussion of education in emergencies).

3.1 Alternative schooling systems

Here we review some of the alternative programmes available in Bangladesh, starting with two government-supported initiatives, and then moving on to non-government programmes – many of which are providing something equivalent to the primary national curriculum and beyond, and many offering what can be regarded as 'national curriculum *plus*', in that they offer more than the formal system (e.g. life skills and livelihood skills).

3.1.1 Basic Education for Hard to Reach Urban Working Children (BEHTRUWC)

Organized by the Bureau of Non-Formal Education (BNFE), with project aid from CIDA, SIDA and UNICEF, and 10 partner NGOs (Dhaka Ahsania Mission, GSS, CEDAR, VARD, Annesha, Surovi, BDSC, UDP, Catalyst, SPK) this is one of the few government programmes to provide alternative schooling, and it targets urban working children in the 10–14 age group who have missed out on primary education. This is acknowledgement of the low educational achievements of poor urban children relative to poor rural children, and is a programme which acknowledges the migration of families into urban settings in search of paid work. The aim is to give the children basic literacy and numeracy allied to

Meeting with parents and children at a BEHTRUWC school in Badda

vocational training in a trade or livelihood skill and then assist them into jobs or self-employment. The success of the programme is in terms of its relatively large scale with 6646 learning centres for 200,000 urban working children and its geographical spread across all the major cities of Bangladesh. The estimated cost is US$36 per student per year.

The advantages of scale, however, are up against the disadvantages of a lack of full equivalence of learning outcomes in this programme with the formal system. It seems a missed opportunity for a government-organized project not to have successfully lobbied for full, official recognition of the education provided by its own programme. One complication is that the project is framed as providing equivalence only to Grade 3 in most subjects (this may be due to the lack of partner-organization teachers able to teach subjects such as English and maths beyond that level), although it does go to Grade 5 in Bangla. It would appear that the programme is based on the assumption that the education provided through BEHTRUWC is all that a child will get; although theoretically, with permission from the DPE, a 'graduate' could enter the formal system at Grade 4, this is not a target of the programme. However, our discussions with students and parents at one of the schools indicated that most had dreams of continuing their education, and many had (probably unrealistic) ambitions of taking up professions such as medicine or education. It is therefore imperative that BNFE works with other ministries to open up a route for BEHTRUWC graduates into the formal system, as well as organizing bridging courses into alternative forms of post-basic education.

3.1.2 Reaching Out-of-School Children (ROSC)
The ROSC project is organized within DPE and financed by the World Bank and SDC. Like the BEHTRUWC project, it is a government programme which addresses gaps which cannot be filled within PEDP II, as PEDP II operates solely within the formal system. ROSC aims to identify children who are not yet in school, focusing on both urban and rural areas (with a special remit to focus on remote areas) with low enrolment and a high incidence of poverty. However, CAMPE (Jahan and Choudhury, 2005) suggests that ROSC is targeting the urban poor to the relative neglect of children living in isolated localities and ethnic minority areas in Chittagong and the tea gardens. Nevertheless, the ROSC target is ambitious: half a million children in 14,000 Learning Centres operated by two networks of schools, the Sishu Kallyan schools and the Ananda Schools (Learning Centres). A particular feature of the project is that it provides stipends for children who participate, of US$11 to US14 per annum depending on the grade of the student. This is relatively unusual in alternative schooling but is similar to the primary and secondary stipends offered by government within the formal system.

The ROSC project aims for an outcome where 80% of learners can transfer into the formal system at Grade 4 or 70% can move into Lower Secondary after completing the ROSC Grade 5. Like BEHTRUWC, its success must be measured partly in terms of scale and the potential to scale up such an initiative. It is certainly successful in terms of building in equivalence, where, unlike BEHTRUWC, learners can transfer into the formal system. Another measure of success should be the capacity of the programme to reach the hardest to reach. As ROSC by definition involves working in the local community to identify out-of-school children and a specific component of the project is that of mobilizing the community, then some measure of targeting those who have never enrolled in school would be expected. However, it is not clear how many new primary learners it expects to enrol. Neither is it clear at this juncture what mechanisms there are for the evaluation of ROSC in terms of it meeting its target numbers.

ROSC in some ways legitimizes the work of NGOs engaged in non-formal approaches, as it resembles previously established non-formal provision. For example, elements of ROSC bear striking similarities to the ways that BRAC organizes some of its provision. This being so, there

does not appear to be any significant collaboration on this project between government and the NGOs who have pioneered successful primary programmes (Ahmed *et al.*, 2007) and this must be regarded as a missed opportunity.

3.1.3 Underprivileged Children's Education Programme (UCEP)

UCEP aims to provide a high quality intensive catch-up primary and lower secondary education for overage primary school children, who combine their participation in UCEP with part-time or full-time work. The fact that UCEP schools are located in or close to the poor neighbourhoods where their students live ensures that UCEP staff maintain close links with the communities they serve, links which include home visits to parents to inhibit dropout from their programmes.

Like BEHTRUWC, the emphasis is on both academic and vocational education, but unlike BEHTRUWC the programme covers all the years of primary and lower secondary school. The UCEP Integrated General and Vocational Education (IGVE) graduate has the chance to move on into a UCEP Technical School. Another advantage is that after following an (abridged) National Curriculum, UCEP IGVE graduates can rejoin mainstream education. In addition, the National Technical Education Board accredits UCEP's technical-vocational training.

The success of UCEP is based on a much greater investment in each student. It costs US$130 a year for each student in IGVE and US$330 a year for each student in the Technical School, more than twice the cost for the government equivalent. The facilities, particularly at the Technical Schools, are excellent, and the teaching staff at both IGVE and TE level are highly qualified.

Girls and boys studying motor mechanics at UCEP

UCEP can build on a long history: it has been in operation since 1972 and has experienced slow and steady growth while refining its model of education. It is now going through a period of marked expansion, with the help of major funding from a consortium of donors (DANIDA, SDC, SCSD and principally DFID) and, for example, has recently opened new Technical Schools in Sylhet, Jatrabari and Barisal, and a Hotel Management School in Sylhet.

However, its programmes only currently cover 32,000 children and it has only recently begun to offer SSC (its first graduates were in 2007), although it is about to scale up coverage to approximately 50,000. Nevertheless, this means that it is operating at a relatively modest scale and its capacity to address the scale of the need for education among poor urban working children is as yet not possible to gauge. It is also highly selective in choosing applicants for both IGVE and for its Technical Schools. One measure of greater inclusiveness might be its capacity to improve the transition rate from its own IGVE to its own TE; another would be to improve the transition rate into mainstream SSC and HSC (rather, say, than its Grade 8 students moving into the world of work). The gender balance in the schools is 50:50, although girls are clustered in trades traditionally accepted as suitable for females, such as textiles, and there is a preponderance of boys in trades such as auto mechanics. UCEP argues that market forces are at play here – what is the point of providing training for a girl when employers would not give her a job?

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, UCEP is providing an exciting set of programmes and would benefit from scaled-up funding.

3.1.4 Junior Secondary Certificate pilot programme

The small pilot of 2000 students in 40 learning centres has generated a lot of interest, because it offers a solution to the conundrum of providing an open and distance approach to junior secondary education (up to the equivalent of Grade 8). It is run by Bangladesh Open University (BOU) in partnership with CAMPE, with assistance from the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), and funding from The Royal Netherlands Embassy and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation. The programme offers seven core junior secondary subjects, and three vocational courses from a possible range of 30, covering ten subject areas (Rahman, 2007). It is available potentially without limit of geography to the primary school graduates from formal and alternative schools who want to continue their education. It should be stressed that this is a small pilot programme, as yet unproven. However, we highlight it here as an initiative that – if the design is right – has powerful potential for hard-to-reach children. If it were successful, it would solve some of the problems of a lack of easy transition between alternative primary and formal secondary schooling, particularly for working children and for those for whom daily travel to school is an issue. It also is a programme which bridges the gap between primary education and programmes such as those already established by BOU Open School, which start at Grade 9.

▲
JSC BOU students at a weekend class, Dhaka

Distance learning is still underdeveloped in Bangladesh and even at BOU there are calls to make distance learning more effective (Akhter, 2004). Distance learning is rare in Bangladesh and not easily accepted by local populations, particularly in more remote areas. Blended learning approaches depend crucially on the specific mix of face-to-face learning with the distance element, and the quality of the materials – particularly materials which deal with how to learn – are critical to the success of distance approaches. Credibility of the qualification is also an issue with most distance learning organizations (the UK Open University, for example, still deals with lingering prejudice over the worth of its HE provision), and so the fact that this Junior Secondary Certificate (JSC) programme is being validated by the BOU is a matter to take into consideration. BOU offers a large HSC programme (72,000 students) and SSC programme (120,000 students) so in terms of its capacity as an organization, it is capable of working at scale, and it has the advantage of years of experience in the writing and organizing of secondary level programmes. However, there is a lack of secured funding for the JSC beyond 2010.

The programme is intended to be mainly self-access study, but with weekly 'meetings' in which students have the opportunity to discuss issues or problems with a tutor. The word 'mentoring' was used in several of the discussions held during the fieldwork. However, the concept of self-directed ODL is somewhat alien in Bangladesh, with both teachers and students only being familiar with a traditional teacher-led approach, and in both a formal evaluation of programme progress (discussion at BOU) and in our own observation of one of these meetings, this was what was seen, with the only discussions being with the class as a whole (36 out of 60 were

present). Students we spoke to expressed concern about covering all the material with only this weekly session, and seemed not to have been equipped with the necessary skills to effectively direct their own learning outside of the formal sessions. Although the programme is still only a pilot, it seems clear that lessons can be learned about effective approaches to ODL. The students interviewed have already found one informal way around 'problems' by identifying those in the group who were good at – for example – maths, and working through problems with them after class. One student who identified himself as being 'good at maths' said he was happy to do this because it helped consolidate his own understanding.

There are gender issues to be considered in a programme such as this. The group we visited had 60 students registered: 12 female and 48 male. Eight female and 28 male students were present on the day, and during a 25-minute period of class observation, only the males spoke. In interviews afterwards (a group of four: two male and two female), the girls said they were able to 'learn by listening', and that they were put off asking or answering questions by the presence of so many boys. But they were more vocal about other obstacles to their learning, such as being released from household chores to attend classes or to do homework, and the costs of transport to the centre (most of the males were engaged in some sort of income-generating activities, and so money was not such an issue with them).

One concern shared by many currently involved in the JSC has been that junior secondary students are not old enough or mature enough to be left largely to study on their own, with guidance sessions only every one or two weeks. While figures for the whole pilot were not available, the programme may not currently be reaching many children of school age. In the group we met, there was one student aged 12, one 13, and another 14. The majority were over 18 years old, an indication that this approach may be more suited, or more attractive, to older learners.

The interest of BRAC (discussed in our meeting with top officials from BRAC University Institute of Educational Development, BUIED) could potentially move this programme more quickly from its current small-scale interest to one which can operate across the whole country within a sophisticated infrastructure of community-based education which is firmly established and widely accepted. For example, if both BOU and BUIED – along with CAMPE – were committed to scaling up the programme, it could run in both BOU/CAMPE and BRAC centres. In 2007, BRAC had 1569 Gonokendros (union libraries) in rural areas to help people maintain their literacy skills, and to promote reading opportunities for all (BRAC, n.d.). The infrastructure already exists in large part.

At present, as we understand it, BUIED has applied to join the BOU programme and wishes to run a 1000-student pilot. The suggestion is that, if successful, it could then move quickly to a much greater scale. At present BUIED's involvement is still at the planning stage. However, if BRAC were to get involved soon on a large enough scale, this could quickly change perceptions of acceptability and perhaps also of equivalence, and also address some of the concerns about perceptions of distance learning mentioned above. The BOU pilot currently offers a possible transition into the BOU SSC and HSC (and all the students we spoke to aspired to at least SSC). Although BRAC operates an alternative education system, it seems to have the capacity to negotiate easy transitions into the formal system – for example, with its current pattern of transitions from BRAC primary into government-funded secondary schools. Should it choose to take up the BOU JSC (or to create its own separate version) then it is possible to see more straightforward equivalence with formal junior secondary programmes.

However, to be successful as a scaled-up model, attention needs to be paid to the selection and training of tutors for a younger age group and the development of materials that are better

designed to facilitate learning in younger learners. In addition, there need to be good community-level networks to help identify and support those from the younger age groups who might benefit from this form of educational provision, and to ensure that the provision is equally accessible to girls. We would expect BUIED to conduct a detailed feasibility study before embarking on such a project, and to identify the necessary steps to be taken to make it a workable, scaled-up model.

3.1.5 Friends in Village Development, Bangladesh (FIVDB)

FIVDB has been active in primary education in poor and remote rural areas since 1985, operating mainly in Sylhet Division. Like BRAC, it targets very specific locations to fill gaps in the provision of government-recognized primary schools and opens schools only when there is sufficient community interest and willingness to donate land and funds. Building costs are kept to a minimum through the use of a standard model of schoolhouse and 110 schools have been built (341 teachers and almost 16,000 pupils have been reached, according to data provided at FIVDB's Sylhet Office) with DFID support. Its projects focus on the quality of education and innovation in methods. Its active learning methodology is a programme to improve the quality of primary education through children's active engagement in their own learning; NCTB materials are used and are enriched through additional resources. There is a maximum of 30 students per class and the cost compares favourably with other provision. Fieldwork discussions with FIVDB staff gave an estimate of current costs per student as $US42 per year, but another source states $19 per annum and $115 for the whole course of five-year primary education (Ahmed *et al.*, 2007). Their completion rate is estimated to be about 78% – far higher than in state schools.

Checking work at an FIVDB school, Sylhet

Janet Raynor

Table 4 Data from FIVDB's current Hard-to-Reach programme (second phase)

Stage	Education Centres	Students	Teachers	Supervisors	Venues
1st	85	2,125	68	8	48
2nd	40	1,000	36	4	25
3rd	77	1,925	73	8	58
4th	43	1,075	31	4	30
Total	**245**	**6,125**	**208**	**24**	**161**

Source: Data provided at FIVDB's Sylhet Office

FIVDB has also pioneered a programme called SUCCEED (with funding from USAID), which promotes innovation equity and inclusion through early childhood and primary programmes, and change through advocacy. SUCCEED currently operates at 360 pre-schools with 8046 children. FIVDB has also implemented the Hard-to-Reach programme of the BNFE (with support from UNICEF) in 100 centres in urban slums for working children and, again in collaboration with UNICEF, started the Urban Slum Children Education Programme in 2004. With this programme, 200 learning centres with 30 children each are operating in Dhaka.

3.1.6 CMES Livelihood Education for Brick Chippers

This small-scale programme (now closed, but with aspects included in BEHTRUWC) run by the NGO Centre for Mass Education and Science (CMES) has elements that are potentially useful for

non-formal models. It started in 2001, was supported by UNICEF, and the aim was to offer alternative livelihood opportunities to children/adolescents working in a hazardous form of child labour: brick chipping. Brick chippers are a common sight in many parts of Bangladesh – because there is very little natural rock in the country but abundant amounts of clay, baked bricks are broken into small pieces to provide the hard-core materials needed in the construction industry. The work is undertaken by day labourers and their children (sometimes as young as eight), very often recent migrants to a city (CMES, 2003). Through close contact with the local community and brick-chipping yards, parents were persuaded to allow their children to attend the courses, offered in the early morning to enable the children to continue working for the rest of the day where necessary. Basic education classes were provided to enable them to read and write, and keep accounts (addressing the reality of the situation, no attempt was made to achieve equivalence with the formal education system), along with life skills and livelihood skills such as sweet making, candle making, photography, dressmaking, block printing and dyeing. Students were encouraged to sell their products whilst training, using the profit to buy more materials, or save for bigger purchases such as a sewing machine.

A former brick-chipper, now earning a living through tailoring and embroidery

Although the programme has closed, we were able to speak to some of the graduates of the programme (five young women aged 18–21), who all gave strong testimony to the effectiveness of the programme. All are now earning far more than they could possibly have done as brick-chippers (tailoring, sewing, embroidery, making and selling sweets and cakes), and had far better working conditions. One had married at 18 and set up home independently with her husband on the strength of their combined earnings. All particularly stressed the importance of the 'gender' component of the programme, in which they learned their rights, and became able to speak out to parents and the community about issues that concerned them.

3.1.7 Islamic Relief (Vocational)

Islamic Relief offers vocational training and life skills education to disadvantaged young people in urban slum areas (orphans, street children, and those whose families have migrated to Dhaka – e.g. in the aftermath of Cyclone Sidr). Unlike UCEP, they accept students with no educational background, and place them in training groups according to their existing level of competencies – for example, only those who are already literate are enrolled in courses requiring a degree of literacy. There are other courses available for those who are not literate, including basic literacy classes. The aim is to provide them with useable skills in a short time (three to six months, depending on the course) so that they can quickly start earning. However, to comply with laws on child labour, they only enrol those who are aged 15 or above.

3.2 Support for successful transition to and performance within formal schools

3.2.1 BRAC – primary and secondary

Our interest in BRAC here is its success in its transition rates into government-funded secondary schools in Bangladesh. To date 3.80 million children have graduated from their primary schools and that is a course completion rate of 93%. And of those, 3.54 million children (66% of whom are girls) have made the transition to formal schools. BRAC uses its own textbooks up to Grade 3 and then NCTB textbooks for Grade 4 and Grade 5. This facilitates the move back into the formal

'Attendance indicators' at a BRAC school

system. BRAC prides itself on its teacher training and it also maintains links with the formal system at primary level through some small-scale training of teachers from mainstream primary schools. At a much larger scale and at secondary level, BRAC is working with more than 2000 of the 18,000 secondary schools in Bangladesh, providing more than 17,000 teachers with teacher training and giving management training to more than 4000 headteachers and assistant headteachers. BRAC has also set up a peer-mentoring programme at secondary level, and a volunteer 'private tuition' programme targeting students in Grades VI–VIII. For schools with computers, they have also produced interactive self-access materials (CD-based) in core subjects, aimed at improving teachers' classroom skills and giving students a better grasp of difficult concepts by providing useful visualizations, and making lessons more interesting (BRAC, 2009). It presents this training as an example of working collaboratively with the Government of Bangladesh. Nevertheless, the Government continues not to officially recognize BRAC as a provider of education.

3.2.2 Aparajeyo Bangladesh (AB)

Aparajeyo-Bangladesh is an NGO that has been operating in Dhaka since 1976, focusing on child rights, especially for children living in slum areas. It later expanded to work with children living on the city's streets. It is supported by Terre des Hommes (Italy), the European Commission, UNICEF, and a number of other development partners. Although operating only on a small scale (four Slum Community-Based Education Centres serving 1282 children), it makes it possible for the mothers to obtain employment outside the slum community by providing pre-school activities and primary and Grade VI classes. This was the only programme we encountered that bridged the gap between primary and the first year of secondary education, and it has an impressively high transition rate to formal secondary schools in Grade VII – close contact with target secondary schools ensures that there is no question of acceptability or equivalence. Children who do well academically and are able to continue their education are sponsored by Aparajeyo to attend formal schools up to Grade X/SSC, with 50% of their tuition fees paid, plus coaching and educational materials (Aparajeyo Bangladesh, 2007). In addition to following the national curriculum, the students are also given life skills and vocational training. The Grade VI students we spoke to in depth (two girls aged 10 and 11, and two boys both aged 13) were confident and articulate, and all had their scholastic careers sensibly mapped out. Having broken the secondary barrier, they were all determined to continue their education.

Children at an Aparajeyo 'slum' school, Dhaka

3.2.3 UCEP

As mentioned in Section 3.1, graduates from the 48 IGVE schools (equivalent to Grade VIII) are able to rejoin mainstream education, and since 2007 UCEP has entered students for the national SSC Vocational exam, with 217 successful candidates initially, and far higher numbers expected in future.

3.3 Bringing in new educational resources

Most of the programmes in the previous subsections in some way raise the quality and enrich basic education by bringing in new educational resources. For example, CMES has developed 'My Lab' – a science and technology kit box containing simple and familiar tools and materials; BRAC uses its own materials in the early primary years, and has been producing some materials in minority group languages; both UCEP and Islamic Relief offer a range of resources for technical and vocational education; and the pilot JSC programme has attempted to develop materials based on the national curriculum for Grades VI, VII and VIII that are suitable for distance learning. In this section, we focus on a project not previously discussed: English in Action (EiA).

3.3.1 The English in Action Project

Our interest in this project is that it is the only one to make significant use of technology. In general, references to ICT were marked by their absence during our discussions, and it is easy to see why, given the lack of basic infrastructure (electricity, computers, mobile phones) among the children and the parents we talked to. However, this project's use of technology is based on its long implementation time, and corresponding assumptions about how infrastructure will develop even in the poorest and most remote areas of Bangladesh.

EiA is a nine-year programme targeted for introduction into formal primary education and secondary education, although in its current pilot phase its partners in Bangladesh are the NGOs BRAC, FIVDB and UCEP. The aim of the nine-year programme is to equip up to 30 million Bangladeshis with improved skills in the English language, by means of (among much else) high-impact English courses for primary and secondary schooling using mobile phone technologies and iPod players to provide language support in the classroom. This will coordinate with TV programmes highlighting the importance of English in the Bangladesh context and promote a greater understanding of the UK; and there will be a continuously innovative series of IT initiatives. EiA is also seen as a vehicle for poverty reduction, and in particular for the transformation of the lives of poor girls and women in Bangladesh. It is currently in its pilot phase (2008–2011); the scaling-up phase is expected to run from 2011–2014, and the institutionalization phase from 2014–2017 (EiA, 2009).

At primary level, the approach is to provide audio/iPod materials and equipment for use in class (9 million students), and at secondary level to include ICT-based staff development for secondary teachers. The UK Open University is involved both in the development of the materials for improving English language teaching and in the development, using open and distance methods, of the overall quality of classroom teaching among those involved in the project. The continued airing of successful radio and TV programmes is planned as contributing to a changed perception towards learning English, and an English Language Teaching policy for the Government of Bangladesh is planned in order to institutionalize the project within the government and civil society education systems. The goal is a feasible and functional model of effective English language teaching through media and outreach, adopted by the government system, private sector and civil society. However, the impact of such an ambitious project will not be measurable for several years.

3.4 The facilitation and provision of education in emergencies

Because Bangladesh is a country prone to natural disaster, there is no particular initiative or organization that we would want to highlight as uniquely focused on educational provision in time of disaster and emergency. A Comprehensive Disaster Management programme is used

to coordinate government, NGO, private sector and community deployment according to national priorities, and community risk reduction programming needs. Many of the development partners and NGOs include disaster-preparedness in their activities, with the help of which, educational resources will be included and schools will be reopened as quickly as possible. UNICEF is the Inter-Agency Standing Committee cluster lead with the Save the Children Alliance; their in-country lead in education in emergencies is a result of this mandate.

Table 5 Initiatives specific to an emergency

	Purpose/type of initiative	Examples of activity and partner
1	Initiatives to rebuild, repair, create new schools, etc.	Action Aid, BRAC, Shidulai Swanivar Sangstha
2	Initiatives that deliver emergency education in the total absence of formal schools, non-formal alternatives or any short-term replacements.	School in a Box (UNICEF)
3	Initiatives to ensure children's safety on the way to school and their freedom of movement.	DAM (Disaster Preparedness)
4	Initiatives designed to address children's physical, psychosocial and life-skill needs.	Children's clubs, etc. (UNICEF) Psychosocial modules
5	Initiatives that support 'schools', government teachers, non-formal alternatives and non-formal facilitators when they have regrouped/reformed in temporary accommodation.	BRAC
6	Initiatives to help children in schools or non-formal alternatives keep up with their schoolwork, when factors prevent them from getting to schools or centres for short periods.	Shidulai Swanivar Sangstha
7	Initiatives that encourage children back to school or non-formal centre after conflict-related absences,	Islamic Relief, Anondo Biddaloy

BRAC, for example, has an organized monitoring system to identify which schools are affected by an emergency. Project staff then visit the children from these schools in the shelters to see how they are and to encourage them to return to school after the emergency. After Cyclone Sidr, BRAC produced the largest disaster relief programme of any NGO, short term in providing food and shelter, medium term in decontaminating water supplies and long term in writing off microfinance loans and rebuilding all the infrastructure, including the schools.

With particular reference to post-emergency situations, a number of NGOs were involved in setting up 'safe spaces', under the coordination of UNICEF, after Cyclone Sidr in 2007. These were centres where children could go while parents were occupied with rebuilding their lives. Children in these centres received food, played games, drew pictures and talked about the disaster. The schools eventually put pressure on the NGOs to close the centres, but materials were sent to the schools to encourage more child-friendly approaches. Reports suggest, however, that those who had previously dropped out from school did not return, although no hard data exists to support this (Davies *et al.*, 2009). Islamic Relief has funded a small project to deal with the psychosocial trauma of the after-effects of Cyclone Sidr.

A longer-term solution for the delivery of education is to build only schools that can survive flooding, in other words, schools that can float. One charity, Shidulai Swanivar Sangstha, or 'Self Reliance', is doing this by building schools on boats. Work has also begun on building schools on tall concrete stilts, which could also act as shelters and rescue points.

Government and non-governmental agencies are working to increase hazard awareness in the school curriculum. For example, the book *For Life – Disaster Preparedness in Bangladesh*, authored by a series of NGOs, covers such topics as the importance of community meetings, making portable clay stoves for shelters, making bamboo bridges, bamboo shelves for high storage, and first aid. Once educated in hazard awareness, children can be educational agents of change, as the Child-to-Child programmes have demonstrated (Davies *et al.*, 2009).

ANALYSIS OF INITIATIVES 4

4.1 Analytic frameworks

Any open/distance learning initiative needs to be broad-based: with an overall holistic approach to the learning and a clear vision of the endpoint for the learner. An initiative cannot just be a set of materials. There should be considerable attention addressed to, at least, the following elements:

a. national equivalence, recognition and certification
b. blended learning, ensuring the right balance, with locally appropriate use of any 'distance' element (including home study) and regular face-to-face contact
c. flexibility in meeting the needs of the learners, particularly in the negotiation of when and how learning takes place
d. community participation to ensure support for the learning
e. quality materials, which have been locally developed (which have 'approaches to learning' and instructions for using the materials built in)
f. high attention to the detail of how the teaching and learning will take place
g. inclusion of appropriate mechanisms for situational analysis, monitoring and evaluation
h. high participation/collaboration throughout the cycle of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
i. thorough initial training of mediators, facilitators, teachers
j. regular professional development, with frequent face-to-face meetings among staff (e.g. once a month)
k. reasoned, justifiable choice of mediator/facilitators, teachers
l. attention to the motivation and accountability of facilitators
m. capacity within the programme for further development and for linking to other programmes.

Two tabular frameworks were developed to facilitate a brief and accessible assessment of the various initiatives explored throughout this study. The first, in Table 6, covers some elements of good ODL initiatives, as listed above. The initiatives are listed by row, whilst the components are listed by column. A tick indicates that there appears to be evidence that the initiative has paid attention to the component in question, a cross indicates that there appears to be no evidence, whilst a question mark indicates that the component is there, but there is no way of assessing the quality of that component.

4.2 Review of components within each initiative

Table 6 Tabulation of the attention to specified components within relevant interventions

	Equivalence: recognized and/or certified	Blended learning, frequent F2F	Quality materials, locally developed	Good teaching and learning arrangements	Mechanisms for situational analysis and ongoing M&E	Community participation in all aspects	Reasoned choice of mediators/teachers	Good initial training for mediators/teachers	Regular professional development	Attention paid to teacher's/ mediators' motivation	Attention paid to teacher's/ mediators' accountability
'Ideal' initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aparajeyo	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BEHTRUWC	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BRAC EEC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BRAC transition to secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CMES	✗	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
DAM	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
EiA	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
FIVDB	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
ILO	✗	?	?	✓	✓	?	✓	?	?	?	?
Islamic Relief	✗	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
Junior Secondary Certificate BOUC/AMPE	✓	?	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
ROSC	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	?	?	?	?
UCEP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Table 7 below assesses the suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability of the various initiatives. The components are again listed by row, the areas to be assessed by column. Here, a tick indicates agreement with the statement in the column, a cross disagreement, and a question mark indicates that the researchers did not have enough information to make a decision.

4.3 Review of suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability

Table 7 Tabulation of the suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability of relevant interventions

	Suitable for target audience?	Acceptable to MOPME/BSE	Acceptable to provincial offices?	Acceptable to learners?	Acceptable to parents?	Acceptable to Secondary/HE/ employers?	Is the initiative sustainable?	Is there genuine possibility of scaling up?	Is there the potential for transferability?
'Ideal' initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Aparajeyo	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
BEHTRUWC	?	✓	?	✓	✓	✗	?	✓	✓
BRAC EEC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
BRAC transition to secondary	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
CMES	✓	?	?	✓	✓	?	?	?	✓
DAM	✓	n.a.	?	✓	✓	✓	?	✗	✓
EiA	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓
FIVDB	✓	?	?	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓
ILO	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✗	?	?	✓
Islamic Relief	✓	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗	?	✓	✓
Junior Secondary Certificate BOUC/AMPE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
ROSC	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
UCEP	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.4 Equivalence, quality, community, scale and sustainability

We would identify the BOU Open School Junior Secondary Certificate pilot and UCEP's junior secondary, technical education and SSC programmes as the ODL initiatives, among the many other which we have seen, which seem most promising in terms of their current potential for scalability and which offer routes of progression for hard-to-reach learners (while UCEP programmes are well established, the BOU JSC is yet to be proven, but certainly has potential). Both offer qualifications at lower secondary level and this is a relatively neglected level of education but an area marked for future development in education in Bangladesh. Aparajeyo's model of offering a basic education that includes the equivalent of the first year of secondary schooling appears to be an effective way of bridging the gap between primary and secondary, and would be fairly easily replicable by other non-formal education providers. In terms of scale, Aparajeyo might not be able to or want to scale up, but other providers might, using this model.

Government plans for increasing the years of compulsory schooling will mean that lower secondary education will increasingly become the expectation for all learners. The BOU Open School JSC is an extremely small-scale pilot and as it is not currently clear whether funding for it will continue after 2010, it does not fulfil the criterion of sustainability. However, we have hypothesized that the programme could run at a much larger scale. BOU Open School is by itself capable of running JSC at the large scale at which its runs its SSC and HSC programmes. If BRAC were to become involved, and join forces, the potential is there for a programme at significant scale. It is partly the potential of the JSC to be inclusive, and to provide a flexible curriculum of junior secondary education at relatively low cost, which makes this an exciting prospect. If the JSC, as a distance learning initiative, could be offered in community centres across Bangladesh, it would provide a realistic means of progression for hard-to-reach children.

UCEP is a very different kind of a project: selective and relatively expensive. Arguably though, its accelerated primary and lower secondary education, its low dropout rate and its high success in progression to the SSC and beyond, give the programmes value for money in comparison with parallel programmes. UCEP is providing an education which can transform the future of hard-to-reach children. The conundrum for UCEP, as with all programmes of high quality based on a certain scale, is whether a large increase in scale would lead to any compromises in quality. But the apparent strength of the organization, of its programmes, its tight management structures and its years of success in transforming hard-to-reach children into young people who can move into respected skilled national and international employment – 32,505 job placements since 1991, and 109 employed overseas since 2003 (UCEP, 2009) – suggest that the UCEP programmes could benefit many more than are currently able to enjoy them.

5 CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Over the past decade Bangladesh has made great progress in terms of MDG and EFA, particularly in increased initial enrolment. PEDP II, with its focus on developing formal primary education, has set the parameters for government policy over the past six years. Along with significant achievements in the development of primary education, the focus on formal school has entailed an inevitable degree of neglect of non-formal education on the government's part. The number of hard-to-reach children not enrolling or dropping out of the formal system suggests the potential benefits of a more inclusive and flexible approach.

The Government of Bangladesh is moving towards PEDP III, and presumably there are now opportunities for new strategies, and to redress the balance between the formal and non-formal. Given the general dissatisfaction with the quality of formal primary education, perhaps the time is right to look at what positive elements of open learning, such as some of those reviewed in this study, can be included in the formal system. As many of the children we spoke to had experience of both systems, having previously dropped out of formal school, and were very able to articulate why they preferred their current school (e.g. life skills education, skills training, appropriate learning materials, closeness to home, time and duration of sessions, small classes, friendly and supportive teachers), building similar elements into the formal system could help alleviate the very high dropout rate from state-recognized schools.

However, it is clear that there will continue to be a strong need for open and flexible learning. Simply declaring education to be free and compulsory is not enough: there has to be provision for those who, for whatever reason, cannot access the formal system. What is needed is a clear policy and related strategies for reaching these hard-to-reach groups of children, and appropriate equity measures to ensure that every child's rights to, in and through education are met. This entails joined-up thinking with all key players involved, including MoE, MOPME, BNFE, Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MOWCA), CAMPE, and leading players such as BRAC and UCEP who have found some of the solutions to some of the most pernicious problems. This is not to say that no current policy exists, or no planning, or that there is no coordination between the various bodies, but that the massive scale of the need for alternative routes through basic education demands much more coherence.

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A N N E X

FIELDWORK VISITS IN BANGLADESH

Jane Cullen, Janet Raynor and Nahid Jabeen conducted three weeks of fieldwork in Bangladesh from February 14 to March 8. The table below details the visits and interviews made. These interviews and visits were conducted in Dhaka, in Gazipur, in Badda, in Srimangal and in Sylhet.

Organization	Who	When
Bangladesh Open University	Dr. Md. Ali Noor Rahman, Dean, Open School Mizanur Rahman, Coordinator 6-8 pilot	Feb 22
GOB Bureau of Non-Formal Education	Rezaul Quader, Director General Ibrahim Khalil, Director, Admin and Finance Fahmida, Implementation of training	Feb 19
GOB Directorate of Primary Education	Shymol Kanti Ghosh, Director General Sajeda Begum, Assistant Director, MIS	Feb 26
GOB Madrasa Education Board	Professor Md. Yousuf, Chairman	March 3
GOB Ministry of Establishment	Mohammed Iqbal	Feb 22
GOB MOPME	Shamima Ahmed, Deputy Secretary	Feb 18
GOB NCTB	Ziaul Hassan, Member-Primary (in-charge) Ziaul Hasan, Senior specialist, primary Prof. Haspia Bashirullah, Member (Curriculum)	Feb 18
GOB ROSC	Master Trainers	March 4
GOB ROSC	A N S Habibur Rahman, Consultant, Management Development and Training Dr AKM Khairul Alam, Consultant, Education Management and Quality	March 4
ILO	Ross Alan Hatton, Skills Training for Underprivileged Advisor Md. Mohiuzzaman, Programme Officer, TVET Reform Project	March 2
NGO Action Aid	S A Hasan Al Farooque, Theme Leader, Education and DRRS Project Manager	March 1
NGO Aparajeyo-Bangladesh	Wahida Banu, Director Programmes M.A. Hannnan, Programme Coordinator	March 3
NGO Aparajeyo-Bangladesh	Two C6 girls, 2 boys	March 3
NGO BRAC	Dr Safiqul Islam, Director, BRAC Education Programme	Feb 17
NGO BRAC	Limia Dewan, Unit Manager, Children with Special Needs	Feb 19
NGO BRAC	Topon Da, ethnic minorities	Feb 19
NGO BRAC BUIED	Manzoor Ahmed (Dr.), Senior Advisor	Feb 17
NGO BRAC BUIED	Erum Marium, Director	Feb 27
NGO BRAC Srimangal	BRAC staff – Rajesh, Sardar (?) – ethnic minorities, Anwar, Illias, Mahadip (?) – Area Manager	Feb 23
NGO BRAC Srimangal	BRAC schools – Grades 2 and 5 Discussions with groups of children and parents	Feb 24

NGO CAMPE	Tapan Kumar Das, Program Manager	Feb 19
	S M Ashraf Abir, CEO, Multimedia Content and Communications	
NGO CMES	Dr. Muhammad Ibrahim, Executive Director	Feb 23
NGO CMES Gabtoli	S M Aulad Hossain, Programme Manager (BCP)	March 4
	Four girls, graduates of the programme	
NGO Dhaka Ahsania Mission	M Ehsanur Rahman, Executive Director	Feb 18
NGO FIVDB Maulvi Bazaar	FGDs with children from classes 2 and 5	Feb 23
	Nazmul Islam, Team Leader	
	Tahmina Begum, School Supervisor	
	Yasim Uddin, School Supervisor	
NGO FIVDB Sylhet	Shirin Akhter, Programme Coordinator, child education programme	Feb 24
	Samik Shaheed Jahan, Associate Director	
NGO Islamic Relief	Engr Md Rezaul Mustafa, Programme Manager - VTEP	March 5
	Nurul Amin Bagmer, Head of Programmes	
	Dr Md Saydul Alom, Programme Manager, Health and Orphan Programmes	
	Syed Shahwanaz Ali, Disaster Preparedness Expert	
	Syed Md Aftab Alam, Programme Coordinator	
	Humanitarian and DRR	
NGO Islamic Relief	Students of Vocational and Technical Education Programme, Jatrabari	March 5
NGO UCEP Dhaka	Brig. Gen. Aftab Uddin Ahmad, Executive Director	Feb 23
	Mahbub ul Huda, Divisional Coordinator	
	Students in the technical college	
NGO UCEP Sylhet	Engr. Mohammad Guljar Hossain Divisional Coordinator a.n.other	Feb 25
NGO UCEP Sylhet	Class 5 children at Integrated School	Feb 25
Notre Dame School	Staff of the JSC programme and Notre Dame Literacy School	March 6
Notre Dame School / Bangladesh	Mirza Delwar, CAMPE	March 6
Open University JSC / CAMPE	Ufrazra Tripura (JSC Supervisor, Dhaka)	
	Jharna Miriam (Head Tutor)	
	Students enrolled in pilot Junior Secondary distance education project	
Project: BEHTRUWC / FIVDB, Badda	12 in-school children, 5 out of school. 9 mothers	March 2
Project: Chars Livelihood Programme	Julian Francis, Programme and Implementation Advisor	March 5
Project: English in Action	Marc van der Stouwe, BMB Team Leader	March 4
	Pieter Feenstra, Deputy Team Leader	
Slum area, Sylhet	Parents and children	Feb 25
UNESCO	Abdur Rafique, National Programme Officer	Feb 17
UNICEF	Nabendra Dahal, Chief, Education Section	Feb 16
	Hassan Ali Mohamed, Education Officer	
	Shamima Siddiky, Project Officer, Education (hard to reach)	
	Fahmida Shabnam, Education Officer (emergencies)	
	Dr M G Mostafa, Senior Project Officer	
UNICEF	Rafiqul Islam Sathy, Education Officer,	Feb 19
UNICEF	Hassan Ali Mohamed, Education Officer	March 1
UNICEF	Fahmida Shabnam, Education Officer	March 1
UNICEF	Shamim Ahmed, consultant (madrasa)	March 1
UNICEF	Shamima Siddiky, Project Officer, Education	March 1
UNICEF	Shamima Siddiky, Project Officer, Education	March 5
	Christine De Agostini, Education Manager	

OPEN AND DISTANCE LEARNING FOR BASIC EDUCATION IN SOUTH ASIA

Its potential for hard-to-reach children and children in conflict and disaster areas

SRI LANKA COUNTRY STUDY

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
C4D	Communication for Development
CCHA	Consultative Committee for Humanitarian Affairs
CHAP	Common Humanitarian Action Plan
CLC	Computer Learning Centre
CRC	Computer Resource Centre
CWDs	Children with Disabilities
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
ECD	Early Childhood Development
EFA	Education for All
GTZ	Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit
IASC	Inter-Agency Standing Committee, UNOCHA
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
ICT4D	Information and Communication Technologies for Development
iDMC	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INEE	Inter-agency Network for Education in Emergencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
LRS	Learning Resource Space
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
MDA	Mid Decade Assessment
MoE	Ministry of Education
NFE	Non-Formal Education
NGO	Non-Government Organization
NIE	National Institute of Education
OUSL	Open University of Sri Lanka
OVC	Orphaned and Vulnerable Children
ROSA	Regional Office for South Asia
ROSC	Reaching Out-of-School Children
SCiSL	Save the Children in Sri Lanka
TLC	Temporary Learning Centre
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UNOCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
VIC	Village Information Centres

SRI LANKA COUNTRY STUDY AND FIELDWORK

1.1 Introduction

In this project, Sri Lanka was chosen as one of the two countries in South Asia in which to undertake fieldwork. The account which follows is based on fieldwork carried out during a four-day visit in March 2009, and a further six-day visit in May 2009.

1.2 The focus

The fieldwork in Sri Lanka focused specifically on the existing and potential use of open and distance learning in situations of conflict and post-conflict.

There has been considerable exploration of the conditions and parameters for successful educational responses in times of conflict, exemplified in the work of the Inter-Agency Network for Education in Emergencies (INEE) and the iterative development of their 'Minimum Standards'. There are fewer comprehensive analyses of open and distance learning in such contexts. Davies *et al.*, in a recent UNICEF study on Disaster Risk Reduction in South Asia, state that there is minimal flexible and alternative provision in Sri Lanka for children whose needs are not met by the existing school system (Davies *et al.*, 2009: Sri Lanka section).

Building on this, the present case study focused on initiatives that had some open or distance element, and were meeting, or had the potential to meet, the educational needs of all children who have been, or might be, affected by conflict or post-conflict. Within this, specific attention was paid to the 10% of the relevant age population who do not enrol in Grade 1, and the (as yet undefined) percentage who drop out of school between Grades 1 and 9 (estimates range from 5% to 22%).

There was a commitment to focus on the needs of a small minority of children (possibly 3% of the Grade 1-age population) who do not enrol in school and whose needs might not be met by the formal government schools, but time and information limitations rendered this an area for follow-up study.

In keeping with the typology of the overall study, the following areas were considered as categories of open and distance learning:

1 providing alternative school systems and programmes
2 supporting successful transition to, and performance within, formal schools
3 raising the quality and enriching basic education by bringing in new educational resources
4 providing networks and training for personnel with responsibilities in basic education (e.g. teachers, broadcasters, inspectors, teacher educators)
5 providing communication for development (C4D) strategies.

The study did not focus on *all* initiatives in categories 1 to 5, but on those that were either directly related to conflict or post-conflict or had the potential to be appropriate.

The study was particularly concerned with initiatives that were operating in, or might be appropriate for, the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

2 BASIC EDUCATION

2.1 The system and provision

Sri Lanka has nine years of compulsory education, the first five in the primary stage, from Grade 1 to Grade 5 (from age 5 to 9/10), and the next in the Junior Secondary stage, from Grade 6 to Grade 9 (from age 10 to 14). Senior Secondary schooling lasts for two years, from Grade 10 to Grade 11, and culminates with 'O' Level exams. 'A' levels are taken in Grade 13, after two years of college level education. The National Education Commission is now pushing for the ratification of its 2003 proposal that compulsory education be extended to 11 years, from Grade 1 to Grade 11, or age 5 to age 16. Whilst enrolment in pre-school is not compulsory, the expansion of an Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) system is one of the government's highest priorities (MoE, 2008).

Table 1 Number of schools by grade covered

G1–5	G1–8	G1–11	G1–13	G6–11	G6–13	Total
2,486	490	4,199	2,213	27	299	**9,714**

Most government schools have classes from Grade 1, whilst a minority start from Grade 6. Table 1 outlines the different grade-coverage of Sri Lanka's government schools (MoE, 2008:64).

In addition to government schools, there are private schools, 'specified schools', religious institutions and 'international' schools. Private schools are fee-levying and non-fee-levying, and the category includes NGO schools, including secular schools run by faith-based organizations. Non-fee-levying private schools receive government grants for teacher salaries. 'Specified schools' include government-run remand-type institutions (for 'delinquent' children), and Special Schools for Children with Disabilities (CWDs). The religious institutions are monastic schools, or Pirivenas, for training Buddhist priests (MoE, 2008:10). The final category is English-medium, fee-paying 'international schools', which are neither approved by, nor registered with, government. Government statistics include data from all institutions except international schools.

There is a government-run non-formal education programme with Functional Literacy Centres intended to 'mop up' children who have not enrolled in the first nine years of formal schooling, both primary and junior secondary stages. Vocational and technical training courses run parallel with Senior Secondary and college level formal provision. Community Learning Centres provide continuing educational opportunities for youth and adult literacy programmes.

Table 2 lists the institutions by the above categories, their numbers and the number of learners, where given in the Mid Decade Assessment (MDA – MoE, 2008:10). Apparently, the MDA does not provide the number of institutions for 'delinquent' children, or the numbers of learners in private, specified or international schools. It does suggest that 2% of the relevant age group may be enrolled in international schools (MoE, 2008:66).

Table 2 Learning institutions by category, and learner numbers

School type	Institutions	Learners
Government schools, spanning Grades 1 to 13	9,714	3,836,550
Non-fee-levying private schools	40	
Fee-levying private schools	29	
Specified Schools: Institutions for 'delinquent' children		
Specified Schools: Special schools	24	
International schools (2% of Total School Population)	1200	88,438
Buddhist 'Pirivenas'	653	54,899
Non-Formal Education Centres	461	8,739
Total	11,121	3,988,626

2.2 Enrolment, persistence and exclusion

2.2.1 Numbers

Despite the gaps in Sri Lanka's population and educational statistics, existing data from the Ministry's MDA and other government statements acknowledge problems with enrolment and retention. The MDA states that in 2005, Sri Lanka's primary net enrolment rate was 89% at Grade 1 (MoE, 2008:66), the survival rate to the end of Grade 5 was 98.6% (MoE, 2008:70), and the transition rate from primary to secondary school, at Grade 6, was 92% for boys and 95% for girls (MoE, 2008:71). The secondary school net enrolment rate, at Grade 6, was 90% (MoE, 2008:67); no secondary survival rate is given, but the transition rate from junior to senior secondary school at Grade 10 was 98% for boys and 99% for girls (MoE, 2008:71). Simple presentation of these figures suggests that approximately 10% of all appropriately-aged children might not enrol in Grade 1, and that an additional 6% may drop out after completion of Grade 5, leaving approximately 16% of the appropriately-aged population out of school. Despite this, however, the secondary net enrolment rate is presented as back up to 90%, and the rate for transition for senior secondary as up to almost 100%.

The report authors are at constant pains to repeatedly emphasize the statistical problems that undermine the robustness of their statistics (MoE, 2008:70) and these statistics were regularly contested during the fieldwork, even within the government. Because our focus in this study is on particular areas of the country, national averages have a limited applicability. Further, the disruptive nature of conflict to ordered activities such as record-keeping and the decades-long duration of this conflict suggest particular unreliabilities in statistics attributed to the north and east of the country. For example, estimates of the dropout between entry at Grade 1 and the end of compulsory schooling (after Grade 9) ranged from 5% to 22%. One respondent said that the government position is that 98% of eligible children enrol in Grade 1. Of these, 96% to 97% complete Grade 5. Of those who progress, nearly 18% drop out before the end of Grade 10. Of those who have not dropped out, but go on to sit their 'O' Level exams, 63% fail, with pass rates in the north-east estimated at only 31–32% (World Bank, 2005).

2.2.2 Vulnerability

Governments and NGOs have classified never-enrolled and dropout children in an overarching 'vulnerable' category, predominantly made up of the following groups of children:

● those with disabilities (CWDs); mine-injuries or extreme ill-health
● children of plantation/estate workers

- children from extremely poor families in very remote areas, especially where there is domestic conflict
- street and working children
- orphans and vulnerable children (OVCs)[7] both in orphanages and those neither cared for by family nor institutions
- children of migrating families
- children from 'aboriginal' Veddah communities (MoE, 2008:62)
- children and youths in Remand Homes, Detention Centres and Certified Schools (either through arrest or birth)
- children with drug or alcohol problems, or from families with drug or alcohol problems
- children of families whose ethnic group constitutes an extreme minority in the school catchment area
- girls who have delivered babies outside of marriage, conceived through rape, prostitution, temporary marriage (often to Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam [LTTE] combatants) or relationship
- pupils whose schools are destroyed or damaged by natural disaster or conflict.

Gender is not emphasized as a major determinant of a Sri Lankan child's persistence through the first 9 years of schooling, and the lack of reliable data on minority population, particularly Tamil and Muslim, means that we do not know how gender plays out across the educational choices of all social groups.

These first 11 'groups' of children (above) are constantly vulnerable, regardless of the presence or absence of emergency. Situations of natural disaster (most notably the tsunami) and conflict or post-conflict pose additional educational challenges to all children, both those who are in school or some form of alternative, as well as those who are not. In such situations, even if school or alternatives are available and attractive, children may not enrol, or attend, because they are:

- afraid of violence and abuse, either on the way to or at their learning spaces
- afraid of harassment at checkpoints, or they are unable to pass checkpoints
- afraid of landmines
- afraid of being recruited as child soldiers
- already child soldiers, perhaps abducted with, or from, their families in night raids.

All of these situations need to be borne in mind in the conceptualization and design of any initiative.

Vulnerable children have very different patterns of enrolment, attendance and dropout, and these patterns have implications for the design of initiatives that are intended to meet their needs. The following lists the most common patterns:

- those who never enrol
- those who enrol, persist for nine years, but attend rarely
- those who enrol, attend rarely and drop out early
- those whose absences/disruptions are short, possibly only once, and are caused by external events
- those who enrol late (possibly one or more years later than would have been appropriate), and need to catch up with their peers

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[7] This category of OVC needs further explanation, but, in addition to the commonly recognized groups, it includes babies outside of marriage, including those conceived through rape, (temporary) marriage to LTTE combatants, prostitution.

- those who enrol at Grade 1, drop out for a long period (possibly more than a year), then wish to re-enter school to catch up with their peers
- those whose education is repeatedly disrupted, by domestic events, natural disaster or conflict situations
- those who drop out after reintegration into school, but do not wish to come back.

The last group of vulnerable children, those who drop out after reintegration into school, but do not wish to come back, is the hardest group to reach and retain. The Ministry of Education and development partners are concluding that the numbers in this last group may be far larger than assumed, and fundamentally significant for the achievement of EFA goals. There are currently no nation-wide systems for the identification of never-enrolled children, and this is particularly problematic where it may be needed most: the northern conflict areas. Current priorities focus on obtaining deeper knowledge and understanding of the situation.

Whatever the exact numbers, however, and whatever the exact distribution of excluded children to causes of exclusion, government and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (iDMC) figures bring us to similar conclusions. The government's MDA suggests, by inference, that there may have been about 433,354 out-of-school children in 2005/2006.[8] The iDMC report states that 300,000 children had been affected by conflict by August 2008. In situations of conflict or post-conflict, the educational requirements of all children often include:

- safety, physical and psychosocial responses, including medical care, therapy and counselling, opportunities to be distracted, play, enjoy themselves, meet friends, heal, learn vital life skills and learn what they would be, were they in school or its alternative
- catch-up (or bridge courses) after severely delayed enrolment
- catch-up (or bridge courses) after long absence
- catch-up after a single, relatively short absence
- catch-up after repeated short absences
- support to succeed academically
- opportunities to obtain end-of-year certificates, or their equivalent
- opportunities to obtain 'O' and 'A' levels.

'Vulnerable children' are considerably more vulnerable if they are not enrolled in school or any alternative provision. In times of conflict or post-conflict, this vulnerability is terrifyingly magnified, as the pre-school, school or alternative centre is often the hub for re-grouping, mobilizing or sustaining children in conflict situations, new camps or settlement areas.

What the preceding series of lists aims to show is that for a particular child, the vulnerability caused by conflict may be overlaid on other vulnerabilities, which together provide serious impediments to their progress in education. A child trying to overcome these obstacles in situations of conflict may have well-grounded fears about getting to and from school. And on arrival at school the needs of one particular child may be different – in some very complex ways – to those of another equally vulnerable child in the same class. Those needs typically concern social and emotional well-being as well as academic learning, and altogether there need to be highly attuned and flexible responses by those organizing education if such a child is to hope to succeed. A depressing fact, in line, for example, with an estimated dropout rate of 22% at the end of Grade 9, and a low percentage of success for those taking 'O' Levels (30–32% pass rate) in the conflict areas of the north and east, is that the best result possible at present for students could be managing to attend school until they are old enough to leave.

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[8] This is calculated by taking the total enrolled school population of 3,988,626 (see Table 2) as 90% of the potential school population. The total school-age population would be 4,333,542: 10% would be 433,354.

All of the factors in this section have influenced the search for, or analysis of, open and distance initiatives that directly related to conflict or post-conflict or have the potential to be appropriate in such situations.

2.3 Population and conflict data overview

In 2006, the population of Sri Lanka was estimated at almost 20 million (MoE, 2008). In 2009, the iDMC put the total at 21 million (iDMC, 2008:1). The 2001 Census records 82% of the population as Sinhalese, 9.4% as Tamils and the remaining 7.9% as Muslims and 'others'. It reported 76.7% as Buddhist, 8.5% Muslim, 7.7% Hindus and 7% Christians. (These figures need to be read with caution, however, as explained below.)

By August 2008 the Sri Lankan civil war had led to 70,000 deaths and the displacement of over one million people (iDMC, 2008:3). At 1 April 2009, there may have been a minimum of 550,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) with possibly an additional 140,000 trapped within the conflict area (Agence France Presse, 2009). By August 2008, iDMC estimated that the lives of over 300,000 children had been affected (iDMC, 2008:8).

2.4 Challenges

The first task, understanding the numbers of conflict-displaced people in Sri Lanka, is in itself challenging. This difficulty is initially caused by the long history of internal conflict, the two major causes of displacement (conflict and tsunami) and the cross-over between the two, and the complex, often repeated movements of displaced people.

This complex pattern of displacement is aggravated by the fact that there is an acute lack of robust data for the conflict-affected areas in the north: the most recent national census to include the north was conducted in 1981. In addition, there are no systematically maintained databases of the child population at national or provincial level, and thus no child-specific data, much less such data disaggregated by age, gender and administrative locality (Social Science Research Council, 2006:8).

The 2008 Ministry of Education *Education for All: Mid Decade Assessment* gives the national population estimate from the 2001 census, and the ethnicity and religious ratios, with the proviso that the ratios may be skewed by lack of data from seven of the 25 districts: in effect, 28% of the sample (MoE, 2008:1). These seven districts are predominantly populated by Tamils, so data on one of the acknowledged ethnic and religious groups is missing from all national statistics. The inclusion of this data in any educational assessment might radically change Sri Lanka's profile.

In the absence of this data, this study assumed a 'margin of error' around national educational and child statistics. This lack of data specificity did not, however, cause considerable difficulties for the study, as (i) it was more qualitative than quantitative, and (ii) it accepted that the situation is extreme and that possibly 300,000 children may be affected by conflict and associated factors.

CONFLICT AND DISPLACEMENT

3

3.1 Conflict

The civil war between the government and Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) started in 1983 and has been fought primarily in the north and north-east of the country. The ceasefire agreement of 2002 ended in January 2008, and by December, *TIME* magazine described the year's conflict as 'deadlier than Afghanistan' (Fitzpatrick, 2008). In May 2009, the government of Sri Lanka declared the war to be at an end.

From January to May 2009, from the time of the government's capture of the *de facto* LTTE capital Kilinochchi to the time that the war officially ended, violence and atrocities in the Vanni area in Mullaittivu District escalated exponentially, with security and displacement situations critical. The map in Figure 1 highlights the northern conflict zone (a small section of which is now referred to as 'the Vanni'). By June 2009, UNOCHA figures showed 280,580 IDPs currently in the Vanni, almost all of them (260,082) in camps in Vavuniya.

Figure 1 Conflict area

3.2 Displacement

Displacement is the most significant cause of conflict-related educational disruption in Sri Lanka. Displacement can entail any of the following: movement within a conflict area; movement from a conflict area to a camp or resettlement area; return home after the immediate emergency; relocation to another camp or resettlement area, and repeated displacement from the new area, for numerous reasons. Many experiences of disruption and displacement are not single events, but a number of random forced migrations, which may display no coherent pattern of movement, may consist of temporary stops each lasting only a few weeks and might altogether last for months, years or even decades.

UNHCR estimates that in 2005 there were over 158,000 people in 515 camps and centres over 18 districts, in six of Sri Lanka's nine provinces. By June 2009 there were over 280,000 displaced persons from the LTTE-controlled area in the Vanni in the last stages of the fighting.

Not all displaced people live in camps or centres, or far from their home areas: some live on the streets, others with relatives, whilst a few find new accommodation. Of those who live in camps, some are in very temporary immediate relief/transit camps, with no freedom of movement; others are in 'temporary' IDP camps, either with or without freedom of movement; still others are in permanent IDP camps, again either with or without freedom of movement; whilst the rest are in

resettlement villages. In 2008, the Special Representative of the Secretary General on IDPs identified the following six IDP situations:

1   170,000 returnees of the 220,000 who were displaced from their home areas in Trincomalee and Batticaloa between April 2006 and March 2007.
2   those who have remained displaced since 2006–2007 from their homes in Trincomalee and Batticaloa, as their areas of origin have been designated High Security Zones, or are waiting to be de-mined
3   those displaced in 2007–2008 from Mannar and Jaffna in the Northern Province
4   those displaced inside the LTTE-controlled Vanni area
5   those displaced for up to 17 years in Puttalam, Jaffna, Mannar and Vavuniya
6   those displaced by natural disasters, particularly the 2004 tsunami (iDMC, 2008:4,5).

Drawing on these insights, the study identified the following time/place-related 'sites of conflict or displacement' important for children caught up in conflict:

- immediate: immediately at the outbreak/resumption/intensification of conflict, at the site of conflict
- ongoing: at the site of ongoing, sustained conflict, when families continue to live in their home areas
- short term: at the site of first displacement (short term may be repeated with a further displacement)
- medium or long term: at IDP camps, with no freedom of movement outside the camp
- medium or long term: at IDP camps, with freedom of movement outside the camp (e.g. to attend a 'host' school)
- long term: in resettlement villages/in their home areas.

The factors necessary for the success of any educational initiative will in some ways be determined by the different conditions and histories of each of these settings. The danger of such a list of settings however is that it may suggest a possible coherence of provision and a progression of support which, in fact, it is not possible to provide. From the point of view of an individual child caught up in conflict, the period of displacement may in fact be a bewildering series of re-locations with each successive re-location promising some stability, some settling down, but subsequently disrupted again by further forced movement at short notice. The route navigated through displacement by an individual child may in fact be extraordinarily fragmented.

3.3 'Serial displacement'

One particular aspect of displacement which appears under-reported is the overall effect of serial displacement on the education of children. We would suggest from our field study that the effect of serial disruption to children's education is much more than cumulative. For a child, each placement in a new location may have lasted only a few weeks before a subsequent move, and the family, if indeed still all together, may be on the move for several months overall. In our fieldwork in the Batticaloa and the Trincomalee districts of Sri Lanka, we heard the same story from parents and carers, who had been moved on time after time for periods of up to one year or more. Given the numbers of children needing support, the volatility of the situation in these districts – particularly at the height of the local conflicts in 2006 and 2007 – and the necessary sharing of humanitarian support across government departments and different aid agencies, there would have been great difficulties in providing holistic long-term support for each child in such a situation. So, for the conflict-affected child in Trincomalee and Batticaloa districts, our field study would suggest there were a series of short-term make-do classes using whatever provision (for example volunteer teachers) and resources could be gathered together.

When the child and their family were moved again (often with no notice), similar short-term, make-do schooling would be set up in the new location.

A series of short-term accommodations of displacement meant, according to the parents we spoke to, that their children lost up to a year or more of any kind of schooling. Even when families were settled in particular IDP camps, (and 'being settled' would be something that only became apparent after a certain amount of time had elapsed), schooling was fragmented, with children first in school in the camp (being taught typically by a mixture of qualified and volunteer teachers) and then taking classes using the premises of local schools after the local children had finished for the day. Again, according to the parents, by this stage many of the children found it difficult to resume their schooling and were stigmatized as a group. Where resettlement and a movement back to the

Volunteer teachers

In a secondary school in the Muttur division of Trincomalee District, four volunteer teachers who are about to start teaching the catch-up class talk of their experiences of education in times of conflict. They are all experienced volunteer teachers with three out of the four having worked at this school since the late 1990s. All have worked as teachers in the IDP camps during the two years when the school was closed and the local population moved from one location to another. The volunteers held evening classes teaching all kinds of subjects, usually with no resources. They describe working with a group of 10 to 15 students under one light – the size of the group determined by how far the beam of the light can shine. The aid-agency-sponsored catch-up classes are an opportunity for them to earn money for a few months from their teaching, but it seems unlikely that this experience will lead to any longer-term paid employment as a teacher. All four would like to become qualified but to be taken on as a government teacher is very competitive: one of them has had five government interviews and not been successful.

home village has now taken place, our field study suggests a general pattern where only a proportion of children have returned to their original school: in our field study examples of both primary and secondary schools the proportion was between 40% and 80%. Attendance at all of the schools we visited was also low, in some cases with more than 20% of the children not in

The mothers' story

In Batticaloa District, a group of 10 mothers living in a small community near the primary school speak of the difficulties of conflict, displacement and resettlement. During the time when the area in which they lived was under the control of the LTTE Tamil Tigers, the local cadre would threaten to take two children from each house, so early marriage was a solution to this danger. When the fighting between the Tamil Tigers and the Sri Lankan government forces reached their settlement in 2006, they were displaced and the school was closed for more than one and a half years, opening again in April 2008. Out of the 83 children displaced, 58 have come back, with most of the rest said to be still living in the area they were displaced to, although one or two are thought to have dropped out. They have come back to a school which has no fencing and no water supply. Sanitation is a serious problem, particularly for the girls and the women teachers. The canal is nearby but the mothers say the water is no good because it has been polluted by fertilizers for the rice fields. Aid agencies provided a water tank but this, again according to the mothers, has been stolen by the local brick-chipping factory. There is a heavy military presence in the whole province, and this is particularly marked in the local area. Movement in the area is controlled and severely restricted. There is a military checkpoint in sight of the school. The mothers say that military personnel have come to their houses in the early evening to check to see if the children are doing their homework, and have beaten children who are not taking their studies seriously. They also maintain that children have had to show their exercise books at the checkpoint and have been hit if the marks are not high enough.

school on the day of the visit. It is clear that there is little robust accounting for the children who have not returned to their original community and that, though some children are undoubtedly being accommodated in other schools, a proportion have dropped out. It seems likely as well that the serial disruption to these children's education and the consequent sheer amount of school missed is an important factor in subsequent non-attendance even if they are officially back in school.

3.4 Government priorities

Government priorities for new educational interventions firmly enshrine the formal system, and its improvement, as the primary site for the achievement of education for all, with non-mainstream options *only* for exceptional cases for whom the formal system is proven to be inappropriate. Nevertheless, one government initiative, Open School, does seem to have been inaugurated to provide alternative means for students achieving an equivalent education to that offered within school.

However, interview data suggested that the government's priorities are to develop initiatives to (i) identify and enrol the majority of the 'vulnerable' children into formal schools; (ii) provide open alternatives for those whose needs will not be met by the formal system, (iii) keep all children in school (presently for nine years, soon to be increased to 11 years), and (iv) enhance all learners' achievements at every stage.

The 2008 EFA Mid Decade Assessment presents the government's six priorities:

1 Expanding Early Childhood Care and Education
2 Providing Free and Compulsory Basic Education for All
3 Promoting Life Skills and Lifelong Learning
4 Improving Adult Literacy
5 Achieving Gender Parity and Equality
6 Enhancing Educational Quality (MoE, 2008:viii,ix).

Discussion with officials within the Ministry of Education (MoE) EFA Monitoring Unit reaffirmed these priorities, stressing how they had emerged out of considerable collaborative work. Discussion focused on the Ministry's commitment to the second priority, that of achieving free and compulsory basic education for all, which was closely tied up with the sixth, the enhancement of educational quality. There are three main challenges: the first is that a significant number of children are dropping out before they complete nine years of basic education; the second is that an equally significant number are not achieving desired learning competencies; and the third is the educational disruption caused by conflict and natural disasters. Areas have been identified for further input, strengthening or research, processes which would, in themselves, assist in the production of 'sound and robust' policies and plans. These areas were the issues of: never enrolled; dropouts; emergency responses; learning achievement; non-formal education; inclusive and special education; NIE Open Schools, and the issue of the availability, quality and reliability of all educational statistics.

Added to this are the following areas where support is currently, or would be, welcomed:

● further ECCE development; health and education linkages; training for midwives
● inclusive education policy development and finalization, assistance in the development of broad-based Inclusive education responses; support in addressing knowledge and practice

gaps (not just physical, but also psychosocial, etc.); assessment/screening tools to assess children with disabilities
- capacity building to prepare the EFA team for the 2010 Assessment
- the development of mechanisms to enable closer MoE/NIE collaboration.

For the Non-Formal, Continuing and Special Education Unit, they identified priorities in the following areas:

- overall capacity development for the Ministry in Non-Formal Education
- capacity development in integrated community development
- the development of initiatives and responses for street children
- broad-based support for inclusive education, and hopefully some restructuring of the Ministry so that 'Inclusive Education' is back within the mainstream, no longer in the Non-Formal and Continuing Education Unit, as it had been under the 'Special Education' paradigm
- development of modern, equipped and attractive vocational education centres, with Information and Communications Technology (ICT) facilities, and the negotiation of better pay packages and settlements for vocational instructors
- the provision of books and material for the conflict areas
- further development of home/school modules.

All made reference to the modalities and processes of working with development partners and the pressing Ministry need for the development of (i) a comprehensive, integrated education sector plan *with all players* and (ii) greater elaboration of the roles of *all partners* within this wider plan. All applauded the change in government:partner relationships, from parallel activity to greater collaboration. In the past, development partners had prepared their plans in isolation, and the Ministry accepted (or sometimes rejected) them: they are now encouraged to discuss and negotiate their plans in accordance with Ministry priorities and needs.

Both the EFA Monitoring Unit and the NFE Unit have UNICEF-funded consultants on 12-month placements: one for Inclusive Education and one for Non-Formal, Continuing and Special Education. The successful negotiation of these two posts seemed to reflect the new nature of government: development partner collaboration.

4 DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS

4.1 Education clusters (IASC of UNOCHA)

There are numerous agencies, INGOs, NGOs and civil society groups working in the Sri Lankan education sector. The most significant feature of this work is that humanitarian agencies and NGOs work together as an 'Education Cluster' of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee (IASC) of the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA). This Education Cluster operates within the framework of Sri Lanka's Common Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP), and feeds into the Consultative Committee for Humanitarian Affairs (CCHA), through the CCHA sub-group on education. UNICEF and Save the Children in Sri Lanka (SCiSL) co-lead the Sri Lankan National Cluster,[9] working in close collaboration. Typically, the Cluster members work primarily on supply-oriented, emergency and post-emergency 'response/reactionary' activities, rather than strategic ones, and in child protection, children's clubs, psychosocial care and ECCE.

All international development partners (IDPs) and NGOs (INGOs) working are encouraged to (i) develop their annual work-plans in communication with government, and (ii) have them approved by government before they start work. Of all Education Cluster members, only four (GTZ, Plan International, SCiSL and UNICEF) have official agreements and work-plans signed by the government. These four are therefore the highest-profile actors within the education sector. As of March 2009, GTZ, Plan International, SCiSL and UNICEF were also the main international partners working on the more strategic, demand-side issues addressing educational processes and quality.

The deeper analysis in this study focuses on the work of some of these four organizations, alongside that of the Sri Lankan government, parastatals and NGOs. Table 3 lists the six arenas of open and distance learning, indicating which of the four main partners are involved in each area. The sixth category 'Facilitating and providing education in times of emergency' is not directly addressed, as this is the overarching focus for the Sri Lankan case study.

Table 3 Development partners' involvement in the six areas of open and distance learning

	Area of activity: where it is relevant for conflict/post-conflict	Development partner
1	Alternative schooling systems	GTZ (Open School) Sarvodaya?
2a	Support for successful transition to formal schools	Plan, SCiSL, Unicef
2b	Support for successful performance within formal schools	GTZ, SCiSL, UNICEF
3	Provision of ready-made educational resources	UNICEF, SCiSL
4	Provision of networking and training opportunities for intermediaries	GTZ, Plan, SCiSL, UNICEF
5	Provision of communication for development (C4D) strategies	? (see below)

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[9] UNICEF and Save the Children also co-lead the Global Education Cluster.

On initial exploration, it did not appear that any of the four approved partners were active in the provision of communication for development strategies. However, a Sri Lankan NGO, Sarvodaya, an established NGO with a strong community base, and the high-tech 'ICT4D Movement' are developing initiatives in this area and these are reported on later.

4.2 Areas of activity

The following tables outline the areas of activity that are significant for this study. The left-hand columns indicate the area, whilst the right-hand columns indicate the activity and the implementing and/or partner agencies. Table 4 outlines pre-emergency and ongoing initiatives that have relevance for situations of conflict and post-conflict. It also indicates the open and distance learning category to which each initiative relates. Table 5 details initiatives which are not specific to any single 'site' of disruption or displacement (see Section 2.2 'Displacement' for an explanation of these sites).

Table 4 Pre-emergency and ongoing initiatives, with relevance for conflict (and related ODL category)

	Area of intervention/initiative	Example of development partner's work
1	Policy Dialogue and Development	IASC Education Cluster and associated work UNICEF Consultants: MoE 'Implants' for Inclusive Education and Non-Formal and Inclusive Education GTZ office located in MoE
2	Support for data, statistics and systems. Development of systems, etc. for child tracking, identification of never-enrolled and dropouts	EFA UNIT: capacity building in data collection, processing and analysis (UNESCO) Compulsory Education Committees MoE School Attendance Committees MoE School Monitoring Committees MoE UNICEF e.g. surveys/research on dropout
3	Review and redrafting of curriculum, materials and textbooks (ODL Cat 4)	Focus on equity, understanding, second language and social cohesion Focus on levels, competencies and flexibility Focus on 'reduced' versions to enable catch-up Condensed/Concise syllabus – east and north (government-organized) Modified Curriculum (SCiSL)
4	Constant, on-going, reform of education system to meet all children's needs and keep them in (ODL Cat 2)	Child Friendly Schools SCiSL, UNICEF Remedial Teaching GTZ
5	Initiatives to develop social cohesion, understanding, peace, etc.	Social Cohesion, Peace and Value Education, Second National Language GTZ
	Supporting successful transition to schools, through ECCD (ODL Cat 2)	Development and strengthening of ECCD system Plan, SCiSL, Sarvodaya
6	Teachers' Initial Training and Continuous Professional Development. (ODL Cat 4)	Plan, GTZ, SCiSL, UNICEF
7	Parallel provision/alternative schooling for the (perhaps) 3% of children who may probably never enrol in the formal system. (ODL Cat 1)	Non-Formal Education: MoE Special Schools: NGOs/MoE Open Schools: NIE/GTZ Specified Schools: correctional centres MoE

	Area of intervention/initiative	Example of development partner's work
8	Preparatory activities in conflict areas, refugee-host areas, and with officials at MoE and parastatals, at provincial, zonal and district levels (ODL Cat 4)	Initiatives that anticipate or prepare children, communities, schools or government officials and departments for conflict. Training in provision of psychosocial support, counselling, etc. Provision for displaced teachers' payment thro new schools (UNICEF and MoE) Preparing alternative schools or learning spaces within host area, for the time when their schools become temporary IDP centres Risk Reduction GTZ
	Providing C4D strategies (ODL Cat 5)	Kothmale Community Radio Project, Sri Lanka Sarvodaya and ICT4D Fusion e-BIT programme of the University of Colombo School of Computing (UCSC)

Table 5 Initiatives that are not specific to any single site of conflict or displacement

	Purpose/type of initiative	Examples of activity and partner
1	Initiatives to rebuild, repair, de-mine schools, etc.	Repair of furniture (UNICEF) Build new primary/lower secondary school (USAID)
2	Initiatives that deliver emergency education in the total absence of formal schools, non-formal alternatives or any short-term replacements	School in a Box (UNICEF) Resource packs for primary/secondary Home–School modules
3	Initiatives to ensure children's safety on the way to school and their freedom of movement through checkpoints	e.g. transport provision (organized locally)
4	Initiatives designed to address children's physical, psycho-social and life-skill needs	Children's clubs, etc. Psychosocial modules
5	Initiatives that support 'schools', government teachers, non-formal alternatives and non-formal facilitators when they have regrouped/reformed in conflict areas, camps or resettlement villages	Psychosocial packages and activities (UNICEF) Training of volunteers to acts as teachers in Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs)
6	Initiatives to help children in schools or non-formal alternatives keep up with their schoolwork, when conflict-related factors prevent them from getting to schools or centres for short periods	Condensed/concise curriculum/syllabus Modified curriculum Catch-up education Home-school modules
7	Initiatives that encourage children back to school or non-formal centre after conflict-related absences	Catch-up education NFE, NIE. UNICEF, SCiSL,

In the next section we analyse some of these initiatives, under the broad headings of 'emergency education', that is: a short-term response to children caught up in conflict; 'catch-up education which would be a medium-term response; and 'alternative education' which would constitute a long-term response.

ANALYSIS OF CONFLICT-RELATED INITIATIVES

5

5.1 Analysis of selected interventions

5.1.1 Emergency education

The most well-known education resource for allocation in an emergency situation is the teacher's emergency pack, the 'school in a box'. Thousands of these kits have been deployed and used in times of emergency. Initial humanitarian response to any disaster has to address people's lack of basic facilities such as shelter, water, sanitation and food and 'school in a box' addresses these same kinds of needs – a tangible resource for physical and practical support. School in a Box has been used extensively in Sri Lanka post-tsunami and has been regularly deployed in the conflict situations. On the day of the field visit to Trincomalee, for example, the plan was to send out 19 schools in a box to augment other resources in three Temporary Learning Centres (TLCs) being set up to accommodate 1500 students.

As a basic piece of kit, it has wide application in that it can be used in any teaching and learning situation and across all age groups. As a kit, the school in a box provides the basic necessities for setting up a classroom and is designed to cover the first 72 hours of any emergency situation. But it does not of itself provide teaching and learning: this also necessitates, among much else, curriculum materials and teachers. School in a box is designed to be used with a 'locally developed teaching guide and curriculum' which means resourcing at a much more localized level than is required to provide the quite generic equipment in the school in a box. Providing appropriate local curriculum materials, say in local languages, also necessitates a high degree of forward planning, both in terms of the logistics of getting the right materials to the right places, and in the longer-term, the resourcing and the development of the materials.

The development of age-appropriate materials is potentially quite a major undertaking and might be deemed a more medium-term response. Even if the emergency is being measured in days, then providing materials for a sound and balanced education for each grade level, or perhaps across two grade levels, is a significant task. Added to this is the fact that as any teaching guide and curriculum may well have to be mediated by volunteers rather than qualified and experienced teachers, it will need to be written with this in mind. So providing a school in a box may not always be the simple response it first appears. Developing the specific complementary resources, being able to deploy them in the quantities necessary, and finding sufficient adults able to teach is always likely to be problematic in times of conflict.

Another initiative designed as an emergency response (and also to be used as a medium-term response) is the 'Home–School programme'. This is a programme being developed by the MoE and NIE to support children in conflict-affected areas in situations where security issues mean that they cannot attend school. The Home–School modules are designed to provide learning for children in Grades 1–5 (though similar modules for children in lower secondary school are under discussion). The aim of the programme is to 'enable children to continue to follow the

school curriculum and to attain the required level of learning achievement despite being unable to attend school on a daily basis'. The fact that they are being developed by NIE, the institute responsible for the development of all curriculum materials in the formal system of education, ensures that the modules follow the national curriculum for these grade levels.

The modules cover mathematics and first language Sinhalese and Tamil, each with its own booklet of materials. The idea of the likely learning situation is that children would be allocated to a group of children who live close to one another and would gather in the home of one of the group. The person leading the learning, a 'mediator', would be a parent or young adult who has had a secondary education and so would be able to support the children working on the modules. There would be a teacher, a 'facilitator', rotating among the various groups offering help and guidance.

A relatively small-scale two-month pilot of the Grade 1 and Grade 2 materials began in March 2009 while the Grade 3–5 materials were still under development. It is already apparent how useful this Home–School programme is proving to be. Notwithstanding the fact that the analysis of the pilot had not been finalized, it was felt that these materials offered a sufficiently high quality emergency response for them to be sent to Vavuniya during April/May 2009 to be used by some of the thousands of displaced children who had fled the fighting in Mullaittivu District.

Potential drawbacks to the ways that these materials have been developed are that each booklet is designed to cover both Grade 1 and Grade 2. It is not altogether clear whether in fact it is possible to pitch materials which are not too hard for children from the younger grade or too easy for children from the older grade. Also, and in common with other materials development in Sri Lanka (for example see Open School below), it appears to have been significantly easier to develop modules in Sinhalese than in Tamil. The Grade 1/Grade 2 mathematics booklet for example was available only in Sinhalese at the time of the pilot and it was unclear how long it would take before a Tamil version was ready. This is a potentially serious drawback for use by children affected by the conflict, as they are much likelier to be Tamil-speaking than Sinhalese.

These Home–School modules are for use in an emergency but can clearly, from the number of modules included, also be used consecutively in the medium-term situation where children cannot attend school for days or even weeks at a time. However, each module is, presumably, a once-only experience for the child and the ideal scenario in which they would be used is one where the child is in a stable group of home learners with everyone remaining in the same physical location with an adult who can pick up the threads of mediating the group each time there is a block on attending school. The serial disruption described earlier, with a child dislocated repeatedly, would mean that following the modules with group after group of different learners would undoubtedly be more difficult. It is not clear that there is enough material for the needs of the learner who may not be able to attend a formal school for several months. And finally, it is not clear at present whether this programme offers accreditation for children, as we have described earlier, who might be out of school and on the move for periods of more than one year.

5.1.2 Catch-Up Education (CUE)
The CUE programmes are the responsibility of Zonal Education Authorities and Provincial Education Authorities, and development partners provide significant financial support and technical assistance. UNICEF, Save the Children and many other NGOs participate in such programmes. CUE is designed to support a wide variety of children, including those who are not attending school as well as those who are in school but who require support to reach the required levels of their peers. A typical CUE class is a multigrade class run separately to the others in the school, either during school hours or outside them, and conducted by specially trained teachers (or volunteers) adopting group-based and child-centred teaching methods. Catch-up education is a well-known intervention in Sri Lanka

and has been used extensively by UNICEF, GTZ and other national and international NGOs in the north and east over a number of years.

For children caught up in the conflict but where they have been resettled in schools, catch-up is seen as providing a final return to normalcy, a 'getting back on track'. However, it is acknowledged that to date there has been little analysis of the effects on children of their participation in these classes, nor whether in fact they do reintegrate successfully back into the formal system. Where children are in catch-up classes during school time, they are necessarily missing out on the classes being taken by their peers.

The situation in Trincomalee District and in particular Batticaloa District is one where thousands of children have been returning to their former schools as resettlement takes place. These districts were the centre of fighting in 2006 and 2007 and the large numbers of the population displaced have been returning during 2008. In some cases, schools were only re-opened in late 2008 or at the beginning of 2009. Some schooling is still taking place in Learning Resource Spaces (LRSs) while a school is being repaired or a new school being built. The fieldwork visits to the two districts provided key opportunities to explore how catch-up education is perceived in practice.

One feature immediately apparent during the fieldwork visits in May 2009 was that catch-up education is dependent on the funding provided by the development partners and the arrangements for the teaching and learning have to fit around the practicalities of organizing the programme once funding levels had been agreed. In each zone visited, it was suggested that more schools wanted to participate in the catch-up education than the funding allowed. Further, the catch-up programme was only just about to begin in May, though the school year had begun in January, again because of the practicalities of securing funding and only then being able to make arrangements.

However, a complication within some of the schools we visited was that it appeared that they were already running some sort of remedial class and the children who would be starting catch-up were already separated out from their peers. Notwithstanding the fact that the development partners offer bespoke materials and training for these classes, this would make CUE less of a discrete programme and more of a different title to a kind of support which is already understood by the schools to be needed for some of their students. A further complication which became apparent is that in practice it is difficult to separate out the idea of catch-up classes from the idea of remedial classes, i.e. classes to help those children who might well always have difficulty in keeping up, including children with special needs or those with specific learning difficulties.

It would also appear from the field study that standards in terms of external benchmarks (e.g. the results of the Grade 5 scholarship exam) are hard to reach for many of the children in the schools we visited. Promotion to the next grade would appear to be automatic if the child has been in school. The need to repeat a year seemed to correspond more regularly to non-attendance (after three months' absence a red line is drawn in the register) rather than a child not attaining a particular level. So, catch-up class may in some cases be a metaphor for the class taken by groups in the school who have the most difficulties with their learning. If this is so, this is a conflation of many different kinds of learning need.

In Sri Lanka, perhaps more than in other South Asian countries, education is age-specific. Students are stigmatized by repeating a year and/or being separated out from their peers. A recurring theme in our conversation with children during the field visits was their concern about being a separate group: one extremely shy young girl asked, in front of her headteacher and a large group of teachers and parents, not to be put in the catch-up group.

Another kind of catch-up offered through Ministry of Education-organized non-formal education for hard-to-reach children includes classes such as basic literacy classes. These are offered out of school hours to school-age children with the aim of reintegrating them back into the formal education system. These classes are also available at local NFE centres, for young people aged 14+ who have dropped out of school. Basic literacy classes do not have any accreditation of their own. The national provision of non-formal education is the responsibility of the NFE Unit of the Ministry of Education, though implementation is organized at provincial level and all nine provinces and their provincial education departments have NFE sections and officers. However, for those large numbers of conflict-affected children and young people who would benefit from basic literacy classes (i.e. a significant proportion of all school-age children displaced during the last decade or so), there is not the necessary funding, infrastructure and personnel in the north and east to address the scale of the need. For example, sufficient NFE personnel are needed to identify the children out of school, and those who have never enrolled or dropped out, then send them to schools, literacy centres or NFE centres. At present the north and east lack a large number of NFE centres. Precisely because of the conditions caused by the conflict, there is little or no support for education from the local communities, for example through the village committees which monitor school attendance and supervision and which support programmes of non-formal education.

There are proposals within the NFE, albeit at a very preliminary stage, to provide nationally a complete second chance education, with classes up to 'O' Level and with nationally-recognized certification. However, these preliminary discussions also suggest that NFE is positioning itself to focus on those outside the compulsory school age and that current NFE provision for school-age children could change to become the sole responsibility of schools, carried out in school hours.

Altogether, catch-up education provides a valuable means for some children of re-integrating into mainstream education after the disruption caused by conflict. However, what was designed as a medium-term solution appears to be being used to address the long-term learning problems of students as well as some shortcomings in the quality of provision of inclusive education in the formal system.

5.1.3 Alternative education
Alternative education could provide a long-term response to the difficulties of children caught up in conflict. Alternative education is marginalized in Sri Lanka and the solutions to concerns about the formal system are generally thought best positioned from within the formal system itself. However, the government of Sri Lanka has, through the establishment of the Department of Open School, acknowledged that there is a range of learners whose needs are not currently being met.

Open School in Sri Lanka was inaugurated in 2005 and began its programmes in 2007, with significant continued funding from GTZ. It offers courses which have equivalency in terms of end-of -year accreditation, to Grades 6–11 in the formal system. Because it has so recently come into existence (and just as the Home–School programme above), it is still in the process of developing materials, particularly in Tamil and particularly at the higher levels. For this reason at least, it would not necessarily be entirely straightforward in practice for an Open School 'graduate' to bridge the gap from completing Level 3 (the equivalent of completing Year 11) and successfully take 'O' Level examinations, and supplementary materials are being developed by Open School for that purpose. Open School has significant funding from the German development partner GTZ, and current Open School plans seem highly dependent on continued funding from development partners. This is put forward as one of the reasons why the Open School is at present operating on such a modest scale.

The fact that Open School is targeted at students aged 15+ in a sense should make it outside the remit of this study, as the cycle of basic education ends at the age of 14. The reason Open School gives for targeting 15+ is that primary education is very successful and that it is at lower secondary level, Grades 6 onwards and particularly at Grades 9 and 10, that students start to drop out in large numbers. Open School then represents a second chance for those who have passed the age of lower secondary schooling. However, from the field study at the Open School centre at Teachers College Puttalam in North-West Sri Lanka, it is apparent that Open School is attracting a wider age range than this and that, at least at that centre, there is a significant number of younger students. Existing or prospective student ages range from 4 to 21, with primary age students being set up with alternative learning materials to the official Open School ones, and by arrangement with the zonal director of education.

Open School has so far been targeted at several kinds of marginalized groups of young people. Those include Muslim children who have been brought up in fundamentalist communities and attend religious schools which do not recognize the formal system of schooling; children of Veddah communities (groups which are said to be indigenous to Sri Lanka and which predate the Sinhalese and Tamil communities), children of plantation workers, young people and adults in prison and in correctional centres, and young people and adults who have been caught up in the armed conflict in the north and east.

Until now there has been no specific large-scale push to cater for those caught up in the conflict, although the centres in and around Puttalam are catering to a number of IDPs from Jaffna and Mannar. There are as yet no open school centres in Batticaloa, Trincomalee or anywhere in Vavuniya. However, as areas in the east become more settled, there are plans to try to open new centres which would cater for more IDPs. An awareness-raising visit is planned to Trincomalee in June 2009.

Open School is operating at a small scale at present. Current student numbers are approximately 1400, spread across the 13 regional centres currently in operation. Its national aim is to open at least five new centres a year and as indicated previously, suggestions are that any large-scale future growth may be hampered by limitations on funding. That said, the field study in Puttalam indicated a very high demand for what Open School has to offer. Centre 11, based at the Teacher Centre Puttalam, is ostensibly one of the 13 regional centres, but it is actually already running five sub-centres and is in the process of setting up five more. So from this one centre, there are more than 500 students already in class with another 200–300 students waiting to be allocated and approximately 35 tutors/resource persons already working. The experience of this one centre suggests that with the right conditions, the expansion of Open School could accelerate quickly.

5.1.4 Alternative education: potential opportunities for collaboration – NIE Open School and Sarvodaya

Overall, the study did not identify any current large-scale initiatives in Sri Lanka that combined (i) a focus on children excluded from basic education, (ii) a 'distance' element, (iii) the use of information and communications technology and (iv) extensive rural outreach. There were, however, two significant initiatives that, when taken together, covered all four elements: the Open School initiative of the National Institute of Education described above and the Fusion Project of Sarvodaya and the ICT4D Movement. The first is developing open and distance approaches for the 'upper' stage of basic education, and the second is developing a national network of information and communication centres, growing out of Sarvodaya's grassroots presence in over 50% of Sri Lanka's villages.

The NIE Open School presents a robust, locally-developed ODL model but with a modest organization and materials almost exclusively in printed form, with some use made of audio cassettes. Sarvodaya, on the other hand, is well-established and vast: dating from 1958, it is reportedly Sri Lanka's largest people's self-help development movement (Ariyaratne, 2008). By 2009, it had a staff of 1500, with a network of 15,000 villages, 34 district offices, 345 divisional units, 10 Development Education Institutes and plans for the establishment of a Rural University. It works to empower communities through self-help and self-reliance, focusing on political, economic, legal, technological, social and spiritual empowerment. Critically, all interventions are ideally determined by village priorities. Its work encompasses many areas, including, but not exclusively, economic development and micro-credit; rural development; community health and sanitation; women's development, welfare services for vulnerable children and adults; disaster management; humanitarian relief and reconstruction; peace-building; information and communications; socio-cultural interventions; pre-school education; advocacy and lobbying, including developing children's advocacy on education (see ipsnews.net/srilanka/sri_0209.shtml, accessed 14 July 2009).

There does not seem to be a major engagement with either adult literacy as a stand-alone intervention, or the provision of alternative basic education. Development Education Centres act as hubs for all educational interventions supporting village development, rather than individual development. It is clear, however, that Sarvodaya's involvement in basic education is increasing.

Their fieldwork in areas of conflict or post-conflict has illustrated that children's education is a priority of all disrupted communities and that re-establishment of the community is a prerequisite for even the possibility of success in any school or education-focused initiative. Sarvodaya, members of the UNOCHA IASC education clusters, started their work in 42 resettlement villages with efforts aimed at the re-establishment of community, agriculture, culture and inter-generational support, followed by encouraging cooperation between teachers and parents and finally by identifying and supporting children in catch-up activities. Many children had missed the first two years of primary schooling, and had to effectively cover three years' education in one year, enabling them to enter Class 4 at the appropriate stage. These situations placed considerable demand on teachers, who felt disempowered and unable to respond effectively. Sarvodaya is now investigating this situation, assessing how it might best respond.

There is one feature of Sarvodaya's work that combines with their increasing involvement in basic education to make exploration of their potential contribution so pertinent to this study. It is their Fusion Project, the 'largest, most established and best known' NGO ICT4D initiative in the country (Kapadia, 2005:13).

As of September 2008, Sarvodaya supported 121 Village Information Centres (VICs), 31 Sarvodaya district telecentres and over 400 telecentres (nanasalas) of the government's ICT Agency (see www.fusion.lk/?p=67, accessed 14 July 2009). Figure A1.1 in Annex 1 illustrates the relationships between Sarvodaya, rural communities, VICs and telecentres.

The district telecentres are computer centres with full services and connectivity, the hub for both information that is passed onto VICs and support and training for the VICs. The VICs start as community libraries and resource centres and although adults are perceived as their primary audience, they are increasingly used by children to complete school tasks. Some have developed laboratories for school-related projects, whilst others have obtained computers, or even Internet connectivity, transforming them into 'Simple Village Telecentres' (see www.fusion.lk/?cat=16, accessed 14 July 2009). An illustration is included as Annex 1.

Sarvodaya's established grassroots presence, their successful community-development record, their expertise in and expanding network of information and communication centres and their growing interest in responding to the needs of children whose education has been disrupted by conflict or disaster combine to present a strong foundation for the exploitation of open and distance approaches for excluded children.

The numerous catch-up, remedial and home–school initiatives, were they to be documented and widely available, may be of immediate relevance for Sarvodaya's expanding educational focus in the resettlement villages. Beyond this extension of current activities, however, the most exciting potential synergy could be between Sarvodaya's Fusion initiative and the NIE Open School model. The NIE initiative currently offers the only provision for conflict-affected children that can be completely outside of the formal school system and exploits a distance element; it would be an obvious starting point for debate and further exploration.

Emerging uses of technology

In one of the education zones in Batticaloa District, there is a Computer Resource Centre (CRC) for training teachers in the use of ICT (one of 100 nationwide). The CRC is on the same site as a secondary school, and the school itself has a computer learning centre (CLC) which has 20 computers installed and the specialist furniture in place, and at May 2009 is on the point of opening its doors. It is one of the eight schools in the zone and among 1000 schools in Sri Lanka set up with ICT through a project organized by the Ministry of Education and funded by the Asian Development Bank. Besides paying for the computer hardware and all the equipment and furniture for each computer suite, ADB are funding four years of the maintenance costs of these centres. In a primary school in the same education zone, there is a computer corner – with three computers and a flat-screen TV set up in a room – with space for a whole primary class to sit on the floor, get occasional use of the computer (two to each machine) and be shown how to operate the machine by the teacher on the large screen of the TV.

The development of the use of ICT for teaching and learning appears to be taking place in small steps and, as yet, firmly within the formal school system. In this CRC there are 28 computers and 10 printers to provide staff development for teachers in the 84 schools in the zone. The only software is Virtual Basic and Microsoft Office, even for the primary children. In the CRC, for the teachers there is only one computer connected to the Internet and none in the CLCs and the primary school computer corner. There are difficulties with the ADSL connectivity as well as concerns about its cost. But training for teachers is taking place every week, with teachers from nine schools attending each Friday. In addition, within the zone there is ICT provision which was donated after the 2004 tsunami and which is designed to bring ICT-based teaching and learning to remote rural areas and communities which lack electricity. The Italian Civil Protection Agency donated a mobile computer laboratory which is housed within a large van and which consists of eight laptops and a monitor. It is not clear how much this is being used in the zone (it was locked up when we saw it and no-one had the key to open it), although this is not the only example of mobile learning and there is a World Vision-funded mobile science laboratory in a neighbouring zone.

There appears to be some access to this technology for those outside the formal school system. Once the CLC is opened, it is said that 'school leavers' will have access to the computers at weekends, though they will have to pay for the use. However, no one seems sure what that cost will be and it does not appear that these centres will automatically or easily be available to the wider local community.

5.2 Analytic frameworks

Any open and distance learning initiative needs to be broad-based: a total package, and not just a set of materials. There should be considerable attention addressed to, at least, the following elements:

- national equivalence, recognition and certification
- blended learning, ensuring the right balance, with locally appropriate use of the 'distance' element and regular face-to-face contact
- quality materials, which have been developed locally (which have 'approaches to learning' and instructions for using the materials built in)
- high attention to the detail of how the teaching and learning will take place
- inclusion of appropriate mechanisms for situational analysis, monitoring and evaluation
- high participation/collaboration throughout the cycle of design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation
- thorough initial training of mediators and facilitators
- regular professional development, with frequent face-to-face meetings (e.g. once a month)
- reasoned, justifiable choice of mediators/facilitators
- attention to the motivation and accountability of facilitators.

Two tabular frameworks were developed to facilitate a brief and accessible assessment of the various initiatives explored throughout this study. The first, in Table 6, covers some elements of good open and distance learning initiatives, as listed above. The initiatives are listed by row, whilst the components are listed by column. A tick indicates that there appears to be evidence that the initiative has paid attention to the component in question, a cross indicates that there appears to be no evidence, whilst a question mark indicates that it the component is there, but there is no way of assessing the quality of that component.

Table 7 assesses the suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability of the various initiatives. The components are again listed by row, the areas to be assessed by column. Here, a tick indicates agreement with the statement in the column, a cross disagreement, and a question mark indicates that the researchers did not have enough information to make a decision.

5.3 Review of components within each initiative

Table 6 Tabulation of the attention to specified components within relevant interventions

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K
		Equivalence: recognized and certified	Blended learning, frequent F2F	Quality materials, locally developed	Good teaching and learning arrangements	Mechanisms for situational analysis and ongoing M&E	Community participation in all aspects	Reasoned choice of mediators	Good initial training for mediators	Regular professional development	Attention paid to mediators' motivation	Attention paid to mediators' accountability
*	'Ideal' initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	Catch-up and Access and Retention: SCiSL	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	Catch-up: UNICEF	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	Fusion: Sarvodaya and ICT4D	X	✓	?	✓	?	✓	✓	?	?	✓	?
4	Home-School modules: UNICEF	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
5	Literacy/NFE centres: MoE, NFE	X	✓	✓	✓	✓	X	✓	✓	✓	?	✓
6	Open Schools: NIE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
7	School in a Box: UNICEF	?	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓	X	?	?

5.4 Review of suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability

Table 7 Tabulation of the suitability, acceptability, sustainability and scalability of relevant interventions

		A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I
		Suitable for target audience?	Acceptable to MoE?	Acceptable to provincial offices?	Acceptable to learners?	Acceptable to parents?	Acceptable to FE/HE/ employers?	Is the initiative sustainable?	Is there genuine possibility of up-scaling?	Is there the potential for transferability?
*	'Ideal' initiative	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
1	Catch-up and Access and Retention: SCiSL	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
2	Catch-up: UNICEF	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓
3	Fusion: Sarvodaya and ICT4D	✓	?	?	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓
4	Home–School modules: UNICEF	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	✓	✓
5	Literacy/NFE centres: MoE, NFE	X	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓	✓	✓
6	Open Schools: NIE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	?	?	✓
7	School in a Box: UNICEF	✓	✓	✓	?	✓	?	✓	✓	✓

It is not necessarily straightforward to compare initiatives in this way as they are addressing the needs of learners in very different situations (the tables are perhaps easier to 'read' when applied to initiatives in more stable times). But this is precisely the difficulty that conflict imposes.

6 | CONCRETE NEXT STEPS

It is apparent that education still occupies too low a priority in times of conflict and the importance of the continuity of education is not altogether well-understood. While development partners, NGOs and government are working to provide valuable educational support in confused and uncertain situations, there is an inevitable tendency to focus on short-term responses rather than an overall plan for long-term educational needs. The repeated dislocation of children means that, inevitably, they experience a series of short-term or medium-term responses designed for the group rather than a long-term plan which addresses their unique situation and individual needs.

The effects of conflict on education are complex and long-term, and displacement continues to affect large numbers of children in areas which are supposedly recovering from the effects of conflict. Education is affected when areas are not seen as safe and where there is an intrusive military presence. Difficulties in a return to normalcy are compounded when children are attending schools which still show evidence of severe physical damage or are still housed in temporary sheds. Learning is affected by the long-term lack of access to clean water and toilet facilities. It remains difficult to recruit sufficient teachers, particularly in specialist subjects such as English, mathematics and science.

There is a lack of official recognition of the numbers of children who are unaccounted for when schools have been re-opened: they may be in school elsewhere but a significant proportion may well have dropped out. A lack of robust data and the fragmentation caused by repeated movements of people makes this a concern difficult to address, but it is likely to be a long-term issue for Sri Lanka. The effects of conflict may well also give rise to poorer attendance and longer periods of absenteeism.

Programmes of catch-up, both in school and out of school are providing valuable support to some learners. However, it is difficult in practice to separate out catch-up from the more general support needs of students. It is also not clear, in multigrade catch-up classes, how catch-up works across grades. Altogether there are some concerns about how catch-up is meeting individual learner needs.

A long-term approach to recovery from the disruptive effects of conflict would suggest that the provision of alternative routes to accreditation and alternative methods of teaching and learning would be welcome. Though there are discussions in Ministry circles along these lines, the Government of Sri Lanka in general appears reluctant to embrace alternatives from outside the formal education system: there is a sense throughout that the formal system can supply all educational needs for school-age children. Although Open School is a government department, it is being run on a small scale and only because of funding from a development partner.

With the decades-long conflict apparently over, there are real opportunities for Sri Lanka to address the needs of the thousands of children and young people who have been affected by the conflict. However, challenges persist. There is news (BBC, 2009), for example, that the army in Sri Lanka is going to increase during peacetime, suggesting that IDP camps and resettlement areas with a military presence are likely for an extended period. There are also signs that the large amounts of funding which poured into Sri Lanka after the 2004 tsunami are now drying up. SCiSL, for example, announced significant cutbacks in operations and staff in 2009. This is a reminder that the work of international development partners is often at the mercy of decisions made thousands of miles from the places they affect. The overall plan must be to further develop the skills and expertise of Sri Lankans to meet the needs of children affected by conflict.

> **A visit from the army**
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> The army, in the shape of the Colonel and his aide, arrived unannounced at the school we were visiting. We joined the teaching staff as they gathered round him, putting aside our interviews with the children. He spoke only in English, and most of the Tamil-speaking teachers would not have easily understood him. His talk was directed to us, the white foreign women, and he spoke of the need to coordinate help for the school. He knew what help was needed – a proper water supply, toilet and washing facilities and a fence around the school. He spoke of ways that the army could help – by supplying books and trying to get three buses a day to help the teachers get to the school and get home. Our companion, the local education officer for UNICEF, invited the Colonel to the next cluster meeting.

The need to build local capacity was something highlighted in many of the key discussions with Sri Lankans, and especially those who are Tamil-speaking. In terms of the specifics of this conflict, there are serious political conversations needed to address matters such as the chronic shortage of Tamil-speakers in key areas such as the development and writing of curriculum materials. The shortage of teachers in the conflict-affected areas in IDP camps and temporary learning centres where volunteers are drafted in to fill the gaps, and in resettlement schools where Tamil-speaking mathematics, science and English teachers are in chronically short supply, is an issue to be urgently addressed with government. The argument that Sri Lanka has a sufficient number of teachers is, from our field study, simply not a tenable one. It does not make a difference to Tamil-speaking children affected by conflict that there are sufficient Sinhalese-speaking teachers living at the other end of the country. Issues such as the use of volunteer teachers in schools have provoked strong reaction from qualified teachers worried about their future, but the scale of need in the north and east suggests that some local solutions need to be urgently sought.

Further, there is an urgent need for everyone involved in developing policy in Sri Lanka to endorse and embrace alternative long-term approaches to achieving basic education. A major reason for highlighting the work of Open School and Sarvodaya is that they are in-country organizations which, as such, are able to formulate long-term policies which are owned by the citizens of Sri Lanka. There is a clear potential in Open School, in continued partnerships with other organizations, to meet the complex needs of those affected by conflict. One necessity might be to help Open School to lower its age-requirement and develop materials for a younger age-group, because although it has primary-age students, these are outside its official age-remit. Both Open School and Sarvodaya are organizations which are benefiting from, and would benefit further from, increased funding from development partners. We have highlighted in this report the fact that Open School's funding is from one development partner and is currently subject to short-term decision-making, in that it has been funded on the basis of a three-year period. For an organization like Open School to make a difference, it would need to benefit from both a significant expansion of funds and a commitment of 5–10 years for that funding.

7 | CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The complexity of all the issues of affecting educational provision and stability in times of conflict/post-conflict necessitates the development of a deeper multi-faceted analytic framework. The following dimensions might be considered for inclusion in this analytic framework:

- Government's long-term conflict/post-conflict strategy, addressing the immediate, the medium and the long term
- development partners' areas of both expertise and preferred intervention
- a timeline for types of response: first 6–8 weeks, medium term, long term
- the sites of reaction/response/intervention
- responsibilities of involved actors: e.g. government, development partners, CBOs, FBO, civil society, communities, children, etc.
- beneficiary children's profiles, requirements and potential numbers (both previously enrolled and non-enrolled children)
- the elements of appropriate, locally-owned, capacity-building ODL interventions
- an overview of suitability, acceptability (to all), sustainability, scale-ability and transferability.

Ideally, the framework should be developed in-country, collaboratively, and lead from or into the articulation of a conflict/post-conflict strategy, addressing the immediate, the medium and the long term.

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ANNEX1

SARVODAYA

Figure A1.1 The Fusion Project: Sarvodaya and ICT4D
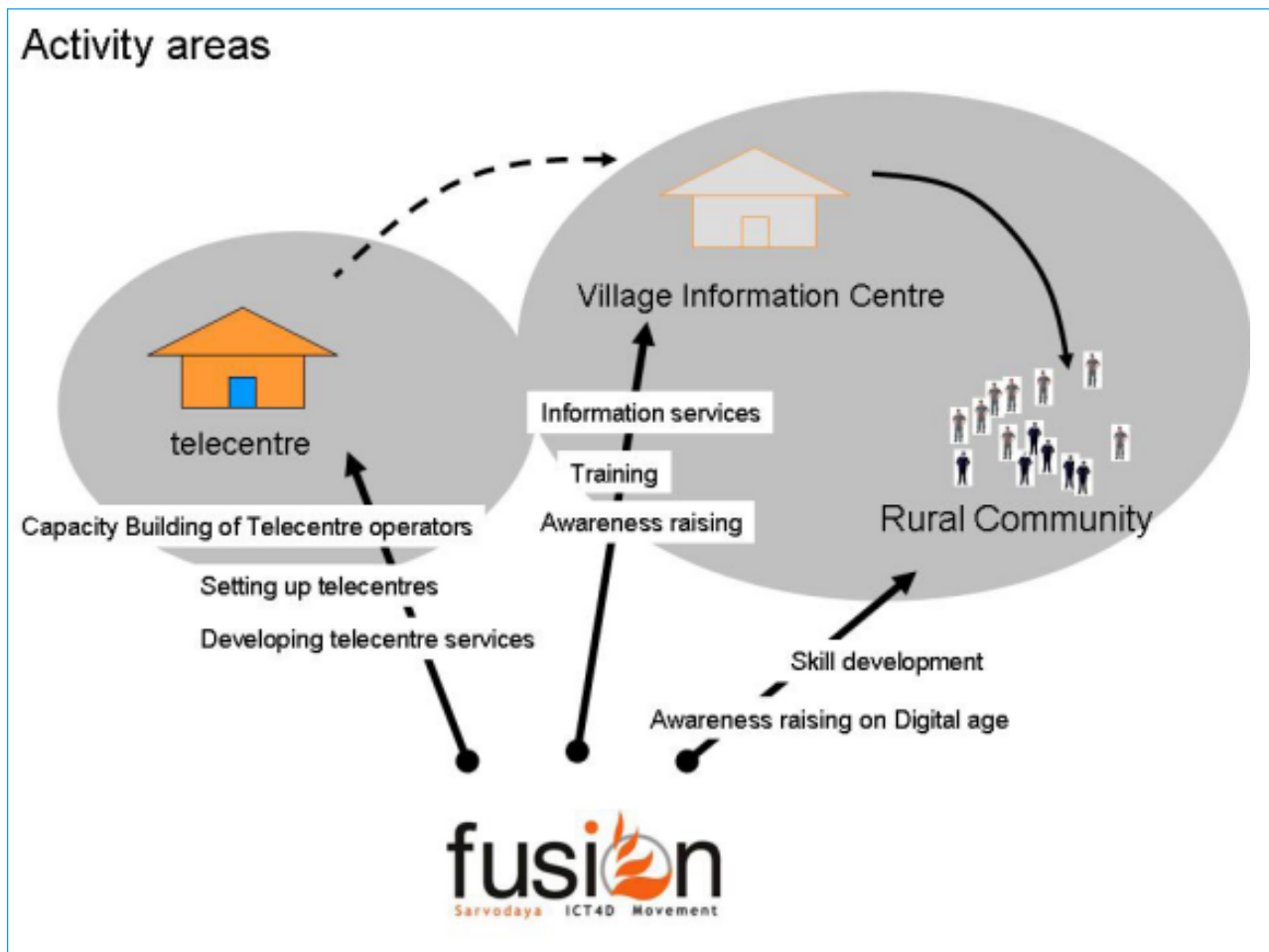
FIELDWORK

ANNEX2

Jane Cullen and Elspeth Page conducted four days of fieldwork in Sri Lanka, from 3 to 6 March 2009. Table A2.1 details the visits and interviews made during the first visit. These visits were conducted in Colombo, with Government, parastatals, international development partners and one Sri Lankan NGO.

Table A2.1 March fieldwork

Organization	Department	Name	Designation
3.3.09			
UNICEF	Education	Ms Ita Sheehy	Chief, Education
UNICEF/MoE	Education	Ms Jacqui Mattingley	Inclusive Education
UNICEF	Education	Ms Sonia Gomez	Teacher Development
UNICEF	Education	Mr A Sriskandarajah	Ed in emergencies
UNICEF/IRC/MoE	Education (Intn'l Refugee Com)	Dr Matthew Griffiths	NFE
4.3.09			
SCiSL	Education	Mr Jamie Williams	Head of Education
MoE	UNICEF Liaison Unit	Mrs Ranjinie Jayawardana	UNICEF consultant to MoE
MoE	EFA Monitoring Unit	Ms Lalani Wijesekara	Deputy Director, EFA Unit
MoE	Guidance and Counselling Unit	Mr Premasiri	Head, GandCU
		Mr Saneer	MJ Programme Officer
MoE	NF, Continuing and Special Education	Mr H P N Lakshman	Director, NFE Unit
		Ms Nayani	Development Assistant
		Ms Priyanka	Project Officer (NFE)
		Ms Wijesuriya	Ad'nl Director, NFE Unit
5.3.09			
CENWOR	NA	Prof Swarna Jayaweera	Joint coordinators
	NA	Prof Chandra Gunawardena	DEMP, MoHE
NIE	Dept of ECD and Primary Education	Dr Suranimala Lekamge	Director
		Dr KADP Sarathchandra	Chief Project Officer
		Mr/Dr Chandana	
MoE	UNICEF liaison	Dr/Mrs Ranjinie Jayawardana	UNICEF consultant to MoE
MoE/GTZ	ESC, DRM and PC	Mr S Muralitharan	National Adviser
MoE	EFA Monitoring Unit	Ms Badra Withanage	Director, EFA Unit

Organization	Department	Name	Designation
6.3.09			
NIE (EP)	Dept of Open School, Fac of EFA	Dr (Mrs) Nanda Wanniarachchi	Director
Sarvodya (EP)	Early Childhood Dev Unit	Ms Amara Amarasinghe	Adviser
UNICEF (EP)	Security	Mr Moise Halafu	Chief of Operations
	Education	Ms Naoko Imoto	Prog Officer
	Education	Ms Madonna James	
Uni of Colombo (EP)	Dept of Ed Psych, Faculty of Ed	Dr Manjula Vithanapathirana	Senior Lecturer
UNICEF/MoE (EP)	Education/NFE	Dr Matthew Griffiths	See above
UNICEF/MoE (JC)	Global Towers: Home/Sch Wkshp	Dr Matthew Griffiths	See above
Open University (JC)	NA	Dr (Ms) G D Lekamge	Dean
NEC (JC)	NA	Dr GB Gunawardana	Vice Chairman

Jane Cullen returned for a follow-up visit for six days of fieldwork which were carried out between May 10 and May 16 2009. Table A2.2 details the visits, meetings and interviews made during the second visit. These visits were conducted primarily in Trincomalee and Batticaloa with a separate trip to Puttalam to see the work of Open School.

Table A2.2 May fieldwork

Organization	Department	Name	Designation
MoE	Paddiruppu, Batticaloa	Mrs Pavallakanthan	Director, Education Zone
MoE	Paddiruppu, Batticaloa	Mr Sundarahajan	Divisional Education Officer
MoE	Kalkudah, Batticaloa	Mrs Chakkaravarthy	Director, Education Zone
MoE	Muttur, Trincomalee	Mr Zakariya	Director, Education Zone
MoE	Muttur, Trincomalee	Mr Gmanendram	Service Adviser/English and Zone coordinator
MoE	Chenaiyoor Central College, Muttur East	Mr Ratnasinghe	Headteacher
MoE	Vipulandha Vidiyala, Muttur East	Mr Ambigaypagan	Headteacher
MoE	Kalimagal Hindu College	Mr Thevanrajah	Headteacher
MoE	Pulipainthakal, GTMS, Kalkudah		Headteacher and staff
MoE	Poolakkadu GTMS, Kalkudah		Headteacher and staff
MoE	Tharavai Sri Kalaivani Vidayala, Kalkudah		Headteacher and staff
MoE	Kirankulam Vinayagar Vidayala, Paddiruppu		Headteacher and staff
MoE	Thethaththivu MV, Paddiruppu		Headteacher and staff
Open School	Dept of Open School, Fac of EFA	Dr (Mrs) Nanda Wanniarachchi	Director
Open School	N/A	Mr Nawas	Senior Tutor, Puttalam
Open School	N/A	Mr A. M. Nijam	Senior Tutor, Kolpitya
Open School	N/A	Mr M A Wahid	Consultant, Open School/NIE
Open School	N/A	Mr Jinna	Administrator, Puttalam
UNICEF Batticaloa	N/A	Mr Asad Rahman	Head of Station
UNICEF Batticaloa	Education	Mr Nifal Alawdeen	Education Officer
UNICEF Trincomalee	N/A	Ms Joyce Gachiri	Head of Station
UNICEF Trincomalee	Education	Mr Kalimuthu Kulenrdra	Education Officer
UNICEF Colombo	Education	Ms Ita Sheehy	Chief, Education
UNICEF Colombo	Education	Ms Jennifer Sutherland	Catch-up Education
UNICEF/IRC/MoE	Education (Intn'l Refugee Com)	Dr Matthew Griffiths	NFE