



Sightsavers

Sightsavers' Inclusive Education Work in Bangladesh



**Summary of a scoping study
2010**

Sightsavers works with partners to eliminate avoidable blindness and promote equality of opportunity for disabled people in the developing world.

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Sightsavers is also known as The Royal Commonwealth Society for the Blind.

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Abbreviations

ABC	Assistance for Blind Children
BEKAS	Basic Education Kit to Access in School
BVIPS	Bangladesh Visually Impaired Peoples Society
CBR	Community-based rehabilitation
CDD	Centre for Disability in Development
CSID	Centre for Services and Information on Disability
DSS	Department of Social Services
GIEP	Government Integrated Education Programme
GPS	Government Primary Schools
ICT	Information and communication technology
MoE	Ministry of Education
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
MoSW	Ministry of Social Welfare
NAPE	National Academy for Primary Education
NDP	National Development Programme
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
PRAIE	Promoting Rights and Access to Inclusive Education
RDSS	Rangpur Shamajik Unnayan Sangstha
RNGPS	Registered Non-Government Primary Schools
VICTAR	Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching And Research

Introduction

Sightsavers has been supporting eye care organisations and service providers in Bangladesh since 1973. Its rehabilitation programme started in 1999, initially providing a comprehensive package of eye treatment, surgery and rehabilitation. In the last few years, this has evolved into a full-scale community-based rehabilitation (CBR) programme, incorporating activities to empower people with visual impairment and other disabilities to recognise and fight for their rights and to make informed choices about their lives.

The Bangladesh Country Office, until 2011, supported six NGO partners to implement the CBR programme, with an increasing focus on including people with different types of disabilities. The NGOs are moving towards sustainable community development through building the capacities of self-help groups and community volunteers, and strengthening links with the local government. The ultimate aim is to ensure inclusion of women, men, girls and boys with disabilities in socio-economic activities along with all community members.

One key component of the CBR work has been the promotion of inclusive education.

This summary

This summary document uses several sources of information (primarily a scoping study carried out by VICTAR, University of Birmingham,¹ for Sightsavers) to provide a brief overview of Sightsavers' work on inclusive education in Bangladesh. This document is not intended to be a detailed analysis of activities and impact. It provides development practitioners with a reader-friendly document that highlights some of the key lessons that have been recorded in more detailed reports. The document offers experiences and best practices that can be built on or expanded, and learning about several aspects of the work that need to be improved.

¹ Visual Impairment Centre for Teaching and Research, University of Birmingham, UK

The inclusive education context in Bangladesh

Government policy

The Government of Bangladesh has started moving towards inclusive education by enrolling children with disabilities in primary and secondary schools. A national children's survey in January 2010 showed that each district records the total number of children with disabilities attending school, although this does not specify the number of children who are visually impaired or blind, for whom most schools still remain unprepared.

Under the country's Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) Phase-II (2001), efforts were made to promote inclusive education practices in primary schools, targeting children with mild impairments, and to improve the school infrastructure by, for instance, building short-distanced ramps, (although many of the ramps constructed probably do not meet the standard gradient requirement). However, an overwhelming number of children with visual impairment (particularly blind children), children with speech and hearing impairment, and those with learning difficulties remain out of school. From 2011, under the next phase of PEDP II (known as Programme III), the Government is planning to enrol all school-aged children with disabilities in primary schools.

The Government is also revisiting the curriculum and strengthening teacher training. The Teaching Quality Improvement initiative, operating under the Ministry of Education (MoE) is interested in developing schools' capacity to address the learning needs of children with visual impairment, both blind and low vision, in mainstream education settings through improving teacher training modules.

The new Education Policy of 2010 has a chapter on Education for Children with Disabilities, which highlights the provision of education services for these learners in mainstream education. Specialised education services will be provided if a child cannot join regular school because of the complexity of his/her needs. The policy indicates that education for children with disabilities should now be the responsibility of the two education ministries; the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and the MoE. MoPME periodically conducts a nationwide survey of school-aged children, and both ministries plan to introduce inclusive education in every school. The policy further states that special educational materials and textbooks should be available at low or no cost, and highlights the need for curriculum revision and for featuring inclusive and special education and disability issues in teacher training curricula.

Inter-ministerial issues

A key challenge has been that the mandate for educating children with disabilities currently falls under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), even though a higher number of children with disabilities are now being educated in schools under the MoE and the MoPME, rather than in MoSW programmes. However, none of these three ministries alone has the capacity to address all the educational needs of children with disabilities. Currently, only a very limited number of mainstream schools are able to accommodate children with visual, speech, hearing and intellectual impairments.



Supporting children to use Braille in a regular classroom

Government Integrated Education Programme

The Government Integrated Education Programme (GIEP) of DSS has resource centres and personnel stationed at hostels located near the compound of selected schools operating under the MoE. These staff operate under DSS's remit. Students with visual impairment live in DSS hostels but attend mainstream classes with regular teachers who have had no training on Braille-based reading, writing and performance assessment, etc. The GIEP plans to have one such resourced primary and one secondary school in each district. However, this system cannot meet the needs of all children with disabilities in the district. The maximum capacity of GIEP with its 'residential focus' is only

640 for the whole country (i.e. 10 children with visual impairment per district), and it is only for 'boys with visual impairment'.

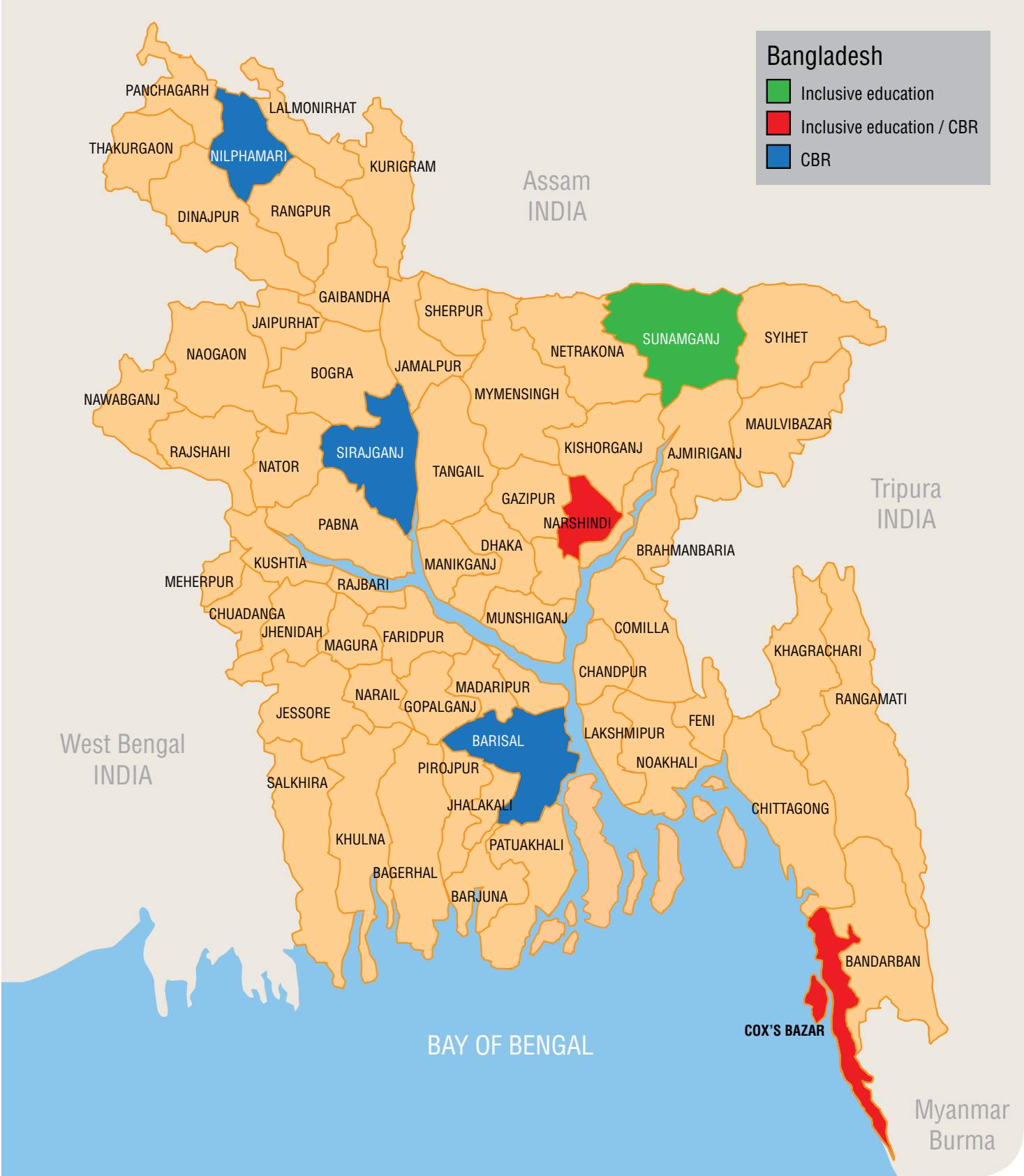
At the moment GIEP operates no hostels for girls with visual impairment. At one resource centre visited during Sightsavers' scoping visit, girls were travelling long distances to attend, because of the lack of accommodation for them. Such conditions inevitably risk impacting on visually impaired girls' enrolment and attendance at the schools where GIEP operates. If schools within their communities were able to support the needs of learners with visual impairment and other disabilities, a far greater proportion of children, both boys and girls, would benefit from an education.

Sightsavers' work on inclusive education in Bangladesh

Summary of key activities

Programme/ activities	Partner organisation	Key facts
Education programme in Narshingdi District	Assistance for Blind Children (ABC)	<p>Started in 2006 in partnership with the Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) and field-based partners such as Assistance for Blind Children (ABC) and Gram Bikash Sangstha. The programme is now being implemented with ABC in Narshingdi.</p> <p>Supports 76 children with disabilities (including 30 blind and 16 low vision children) in 35 schools (includes 31 government-run primary schools and 4 government-supported registered primary schools).</p> <p>31 teachers (including 10 female teachers), 56 district-based primary teacher training instructors and 19 district-based Assistant Upazila (sub-district) Education Officers trained on inclusive education and basic Braille.</p> <p>One computer resource centre has been established at a school to introduce children with disabilities, particularly blindness, to computers and information and communication technology (ICT). This is helping to raise awareness among community members about blind/low vision children's ability to use computer/ICT for education, skill development and independence.</p>
Education programme in Sunamganj	Voluntary Association for Rural Developments	<p>Started in 2009.</p> <p>Supports 57 children with disabilities (including 37 blind, 12 low vision children) in 26 government primary schools (GPS) and 6 registered non-government primary schools (RNGPS) and 10 madrasahs (Islamic religious schools).</p> <p>35 teachers trained on inclusive education and basic Braille.</p> <p>One ICT centre established recently.</p>
CBR programme in Cox's Bazar	Cox's Bazar Baitush Sharaf (CBBS)	<p>Started in late 2007.</p> <p>Supports 423 children with disabilities (including 32 blind and 105 low vision children) in 42 schools (includes 34 GPS and 8 RNGPS schools, run with support from government).</p> <p>39 teachers and Primary Teacher Training Institute instructors trained on inclusive education and Braille.</p>
Government Integrated Education Programme (GIEP)	MoSW, mainstream primary and secondary schools mainly under the MoE and (some) under MoPME	<p>Currently 370 children with visual impairment in 36 districts.</p> <p>The hostels are only for boys, not girls.</p> <p>58 resource teachers and/or house parents/teachers trained on inclusive education and Mathematics for blind students, organised by Sightsavers.</p>
Teacher training in various places	3 local NGOs through their CBR programmes made contributions: Centre for Services and Information on Disability (CSID), Rangpur Shamajik Unnayan Sangstha (RDSS), and National Development Programme (NDP)	<p>19 teachers trained on inclusive education and Braille by CSID in Barisal district.</p> <p>10 teachers trained on inclusive education and Braille by RDSS in Nilphamari district.</p> <p>9 teachers trained on inclusive education and Braille by NDP in Sirajganj district.</p>

Location of inclusive education and CBR initiatives supported by Sightsavers



Ideas to expand or learn from

Much of Sightsavers' work is carried out through supporting partner organisations. This document does not describe in detail all of the work of the partners, but looks at some of the key activities they are doing in relation to making education more inclusive for children with disabilities.

Basic Education Kit to Access in School (BEKAS)

Details of the initiative

Centre for Disability in Development (CDD) developed the BEKAS in 2008, as a readily available set of teaching and learning materials to help schools promote Education for All, and in particular increase the educational inclusion of children with disabilities. After a few modifications and field testing, the kits were sent to 200 primary schools in Rajshahi and Rangpur Divisions, under the project 'Promoting Rights and Access to Inclusive Education', supported by the UK Department for International Development and Leonard Cheshire Disability. A total of 16 rehabilitation workers have been trained in how to use the materials contained in the kits.

The kits are designed to help teachers develop new education materials and make lessons more inclusive and child-centred. This is primarily with a view to improving educational access and participation for children with disabilities in mainstream schools (though of course improved teaching and learning methodologies can help all children to participate and achieve more).

The kit is a wooden box containing 27 teaching and learning materials and toys for supporting children with

visual, hearing, intellectual and physical impairments. The materials include:

- alphabet blocks in Bangla and English
- books of rhymes
- ten story books with colourful pictures
- booklets on
 - Sign Language in Bangla
 - maintaining and using a hearing aid
 - primary information about different disabilities and conditions
- a set of materials to teach children who are blind
 - Braille alphabet chart
 - Braille cube to form words
 - abacus
 - geometry set
 - Taylor frame (Mathematics teaching aid) and dice
 - Braille frame and stylus
- equipment for children with low vision
 - reading stand
 - handheld magnifier
 - stand magnifier
 - telescope
 - writing guide
 - envelope guide
 - signature guide
- range of materials to help with all children's linguistic, social and emotional development.



“Students with visual impairment are now learning to read and write in Braille.”

Benefits and challenges

Although BEKAS is offering a potentially good way of building teachers' capacity around inclusion, currently only one box is distributed to each school under the project, so not all teachers in the schools have access to the materials. Those who do have access to the kits currently need more guidance on how to get the maximum benefit from using the materials with all children.

Nevertheless, children with visual impairment and low vision are already using a range of the materials – e.g. Taylor board, Braille alphabet books and textbooks, optical and non-optical devices – at school and at home under Sightsavers' CBR and education projects. Teachers and project staff provide guidance. Students with visual impairment are now learning to read and write in Braille, while those with low vision are using devices to help them read and write.

To find out more, in December 2010 CDD sent out a questionnaire to 80 schools on a random sample basis, and 75 schools responded. Encouragingly, 89% of the schools found the kit useful for all children in the school, including children with disabilities. CDD also carried out consultations with teachers and school authorities to find out how the materials are being used to support children's learning. Here are a few of the comments made by school staff:

“Students can learn through fun and games using the materials.”

“The BEKAS box also allowed all children to learn together, increasing understanding and friendship among children with/without disabilities. It contributed in developing positive attitudes towards children with disabilities by peers.”

“It was effective to teach the shapes of different items to the visually impaired and low vision children; they could hold it in their hands, feel the shape and learn. Other children also learned about the different objects and colours.”

“Materials that use bright colour contrast have proven to be very effective for the low vision students.”

“They improved their functional capacity and motor ability (gross motor and fine motor) of their hands and fingers, which in turn contributed into their studies. The writing skills of children with/without disabilities have improved by using Velcro stand, Knob Puzzle, Round Stick, and other items provided in the box.”

“The Braille slate, stylus and materials help the students with visual impairment to learn and write.”

“The Sign Language materials of BEKAS box helps all the children to learn sign letters, it develops students' creativity in communication through use of Bangla sign letters, and it helps to develop easy communication between teachers and speech and hearing impaired students.”

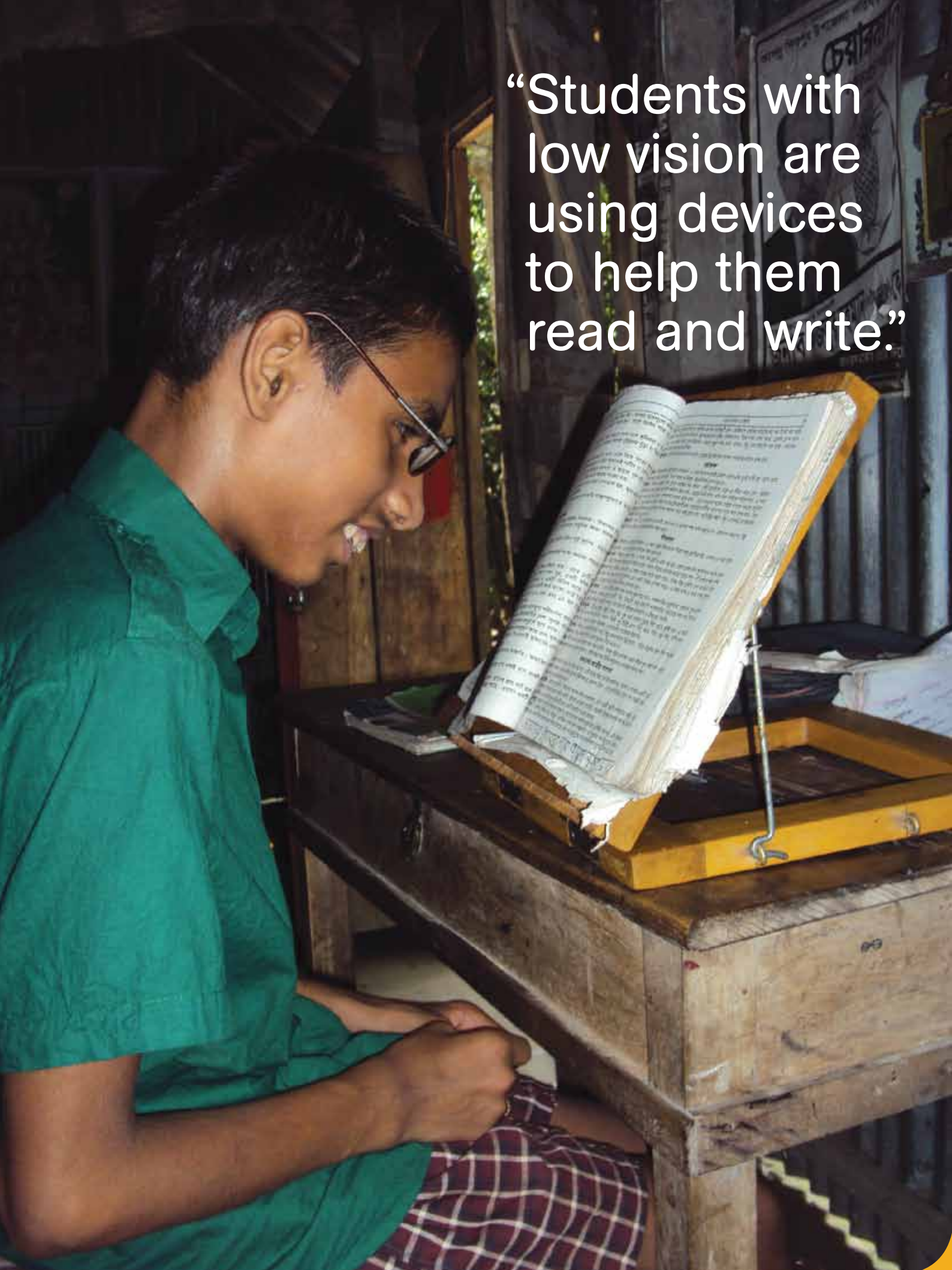
“The Government Education Officers visiting the school show a lot of interest in the BEKAS box and appreciate it.”

Future directions

As yet there is relatively little information about the impact of these kits. Possible actions for Sightsavers and CDD to redress this gap include:

- Sightsavers and CDD could visit one or two schools where there are children with visual impairment, and evaluate how the materials for these children are being used in the class and explore how the programme can be scaled up to more schools.
- A small study could also help to identify how the materials can be used more effectively with all children in the class, not just those with disabilities. This could be an opportunity to document case studies for further sharing of lessons learned, or even an opportunity to engage teachers in some action research.
- Some simple tests could be developed that teachers can use with the materials to help them assess children's learning needs and progress.

“Students with low vision are using devices to help them read and write.”



A pupil with low vision using a reading stand at home (Narshingdi District)

Teacher training

Details of the initiatives

CDD provides training to teachers so that they can carry out vision assessments with children to find out if they have low vision. As part of this training the teachers also learn about suggesting appropriate low vision devices for children, and about developing clearly printed and/or high contrast teaching/ learning and other materials that can be used at home and at school.

CDD also offers a 10-day course for teachers which covers: disability issues, supporting learners with various impairments, assessing visual impairments, Braille and tactile learning, Sign Language, assistive devices, adaptations for accessibility, classroom management (with a focus on learners with visual impairment), behaviour management, exam assessments, and more. A six-day refresher course is also available which adds various extra topics.

ABC is another Sightsavers project partner. ABC has received training and support from Sightsavers on inclusive education. ABC is working with existing schools in the community to introduce inclusive education into schools focusing on disability, particularly visual impairment. It works with school communities to raise awareness of disability issues, identify children, and support their enrolment in school. ABC actively refers teachers in schools with visually impaired pupils for training with CDD. These teachers have pre-service teaching qualifications but no prior training on special needs or inclusive education focusing on disability, including blindness.

Benefits and challenges

Teachers in regular schools who have taken the CDD training have expressed increased confidence in teaching children with disabilities, including those with visual impairment. However, they have also commented that they would like more ongoing in-service training and specialist support from visiting specialist teachers who could help children with Braille tuition and basic Mathematics skills. Teachers have found learning Braille difficult, and say they would like to have more training so they can support their students better.

CDD's training, focusing on helping teachers to include learners with visual impairment in their mainstream classes, is not part of the teacher training curricula for government training institutes/ colleges, and does not provide a recognised qualification. This currently potentially limits its reach and sustainability. Teachers would like to see this sort of training become more of a formal part of their pre-service and in-service training, and they think more teachers would then be motivated to learn about inclusive education.

Despite the challenges, some teachers are moving forward with more inclusive practices, as the following case studies illustrate.

Case study of a teacher in Narshingdi

Mr Md Saidur Rahman received training on inclusive education and Braille from CDD, supported by Sightsavers. In his school, there are two children with visual impairment and two with physical impairment. Saidur teaches a range of subjects to a regular class which includes the children with impairments, while other teachers cover the remaining subjects. Although other teachers know about inclusive education, they have not received specific Braille training. Saidur, therefore, undertakes to support the children with visual impairment with reading and writing. Sometimes he does this in his regular classes, and sometimes he gives them extra help outside lessons. He makes tactile teaching materials (using rice, lentils, cotton, seeds, paper and string), ensures they sit in a suitable place

in the classroom, and makes full use of the resources from ABC and Sightsavers (such as Braille alphabet books).

In addition to the work in class, Saidur has discussed issues around educating children with visual impairment in parent-teacher meetings and in school management committee meetings. He is also supporting the parents of children with visual impairment to learn Braille, and is even doing community and education authority awareness-raising work around inclusive education.

Saidur Rahman receives support from an education staff member in the project who offers suggestions about Braille, teaching and learning processes, and adapting the school and classroom environment.



Tactile learning materials made by teachers

Case study of a head teacher in Narshingdi

Mr M.A. Based Mia is a head teacher who received 10 days of inclusive education training – again with a focus on supporting children with visual impairment – from CDD. Two children with visual impairment are currently included in his school. He had initially refused to enrol them, but after the training he welcomed them, adapting materials and using the approaches he had learned through the training. He has even made tactile materials for parents to use with their visually impaired children at home, to help them with developing pre-Braille skills.

Future directions

CDD's training could be further improved through introducing a stronger focus on child-centred teaching and learning.

The sort of inclusive education training offered by CDD will only start to bring significant benefits to teachers and their pupils if it is integrated into core teacher training and support systems being offered by the government for primary and secondary education, with teachers receiving recognised awards for completing the courses. As the country is moving towards an early childhood development programme, it will also be necessary to ensure this is inclusive of disability issue. Sightsavers, with its partner organisations such as Bangladesh Visually Impaired Peoples Society (BVIPS) and CDD, is already playing a role in advocating for improved teacher training. There is a need for greater collaboration in advocating with the government to increase its ownership of teachers training on inclusive education. Sightsavers is potentially one organisation for such collaboration.

Similarly, support is also required for the teacher training institutions to improve their curricula, particularly in the area of visual impairment, and perhaps support the development of a manual for mainstream teachers that focuses on teaching children with visual impairment and children who are blind. With its extensive engagement in inclusive education, with well-tested partners, Sightsavers could design a programme that includes improved levels of collaboration and sharing between teachers, so they feel more supported and less isolated when dealing with new inclusion challenges.

A particular challenge in areas supported by Sightsavers seems to be the effective teaching of Mathematics to blind and visually impaired students.

There is scope to advocate for more investigation and improved consensus around how Maths is introduced to blind learners and the resources and approaches teachers and support workers should use.

A self-help group in Narshingdi District has developed 'Braille champions' who can support children's reading. These champions could be used to provide advice and training to teachers in regular schools. One way forward might be to develop a job description for them, and where necessary provide them with training on how to teach Braille from scratch to children who are blind.

Sightsavers and its partner BVIPS are also exploring a partnership with the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE) to address teacher training in inclusive education and the adaptation of national curricula for all learners with disabilities. NAPE is an autonomous body under the MoPME.



Using a reading frame at home

Education staff in the community

Details of the initiative

Education staff in the community (including field staff and selected members of self-help groups), from Sightsavers' partners' CBR and inclusive education programmes, help to encourage parents to send their children with visual impairment to school. Education staff have received training on how to identify children with visual loss using a chart, and can make referrals to the local clinics. They are not necessarily qualified teachers, but have been trained to support visually impaired and other children, school teachers, members of disabled peoples' self-help groups, and even interested parents of blind and visually impaired children in the community. In some cases blind adults with relevant experience and skills are being trained in Braille and inclusive education to transfer the skills to blind and visually impaired children in the community.

The education staff are provided with a bicycle to visit communities and conduct initial screening of children with visual problems and refer them to the local eye clinic. Once children have been assessed and treated at the clinic, the education staff working in the community make regular visits to the children at their schools and homes. Education staff support teachers, providing them with advice on how to include children who are blind and have low vision in their classes. They also help to ensure that these children access appropriate learning materials and equipment. Education staff and CBR staff are also trained to help blind children to develop literacy skills so that they can access the curriculum and participate in all school activities.

Benefits and challenges

Two 10-year-olds – Shaninoor and Sadek – are in Grade 3 of a regular school. They can read Bangla Braille well and participate in learning activities.

Two of their teachers (the head and a class teacher) have received 10 days of introductory training in inclusive education and teaching blind children from CDD. Although the children felt generally comfortable at school, there was still some teasing from other children. They also felt their teachers were not very effective at teaching them Mathematics using the Taylor frame, and one child was receiving private tuition to support their reading.

They receive visits twice a week from the education staff. This support worker is a blind man working for ABC who is not a formally trained teacher but a competent Braille reader. He has helped the children to use Braille well enough to access curriculum books, though he struggles to support their Mathematics learning. He would also like to know more about using more interactive and interesting curriculum activities.

The scoping work by Sightsavers suggests that there may be poor record keeping by the education staff and regular teachers, in relation to the learning needs and progress of these learners. Also, teachers do not always sufficiently practise the Braille skills that the education staff help them with, and which they need when teaching children with visual impairment in class.

“Students support each other in inclusive schools.”



Developing orientation and mobility skills, with help from friends

Future directions

Education staff in the community could develop children’s Braille literacy skills further by being supported to set up a functional Braille literacy programme to increase the opportunities for blind children to access Braille and for educators to regularly record their progress. This comprises teaching children words and phrases that they commonly use and are interested in learning to read and write. Education staff in the community can gradually develop word banks of words that are meaningful to children.

Every child’s Braille efficiency in both Bangla and English is being recorded and monitored by the education staff in the community. The child’s capacity to read, write alphabets, words and sentences (in Bangla and English) is tracked. This must be done quarterly, but sometimes it is done earlier too. A different case study is collected every month by the education staff and their supervisor to show the child’s progress. There may, however, be a need for more structured tests to measure Braille readers’ skills (e.g. reading speed, accuracy, comprehension). Sightsavers could make these available and support the training of education staff (and teachers) in their use. Mainstreaming of this monitoring could be achieved by involving and building the capacity of the government’s district-based and upazila (sub-district) based education officials.

More recent initiatives have focused on adapting and monitoring the accessibility of school infrastructure. Educational materials such as handwriting frames, Taylor Frames and low vision devices are being monitored and replaced by the education staff in the community with the respective class teachers. Some teachers are pro-active about taking such issues to the school management committees, but the project still needs to encourage monitoring by the government supervisory staff who visits schools regularly.

Sightsavers organised training on inclusive education for the district-based primary teacher training instructors in Narshingdi District in 2011. This training offered an opportunity to advocate on disability and the importance of sending all children to school. Such initiatives need regular monitoring. Perhaps one of the more pressing next steps is for education staff and selected teachers from the school to receive more specific training on developing pre-Braille skills, and teaching basic literacy and basic Mathematics, as part of regular teacher training being delivered by the government. While the education staff in the community are not taking over the role of teacher, they often require more fundamental teaching skills than they currently have in order to deliver the basic learning support that children need before they can engage effectively in the teaching offered by their class teachers.

Linking CBR and inclusive education

Details of the initiative

CBR or social inclusion programmes can play a crucial role in raising family and community awareness, and thus helping an inclusive education initiative to be successful. A school-based programme, without a CBR/ social inclusion component, may not be enough. Sightsavers' inclusive education work, therefore, is very closely linked with its CBR work.

The Narshingdi Inclusive Education Programme (where Sightsavers supports 76 children at 35 schools) is managed under the CBR programme run through ABC. The CBR programme has enabled the development of good school-community links, which have led to an increase in the numbers of children who are blind and have low vision attending their local school.

Benefits and challenges

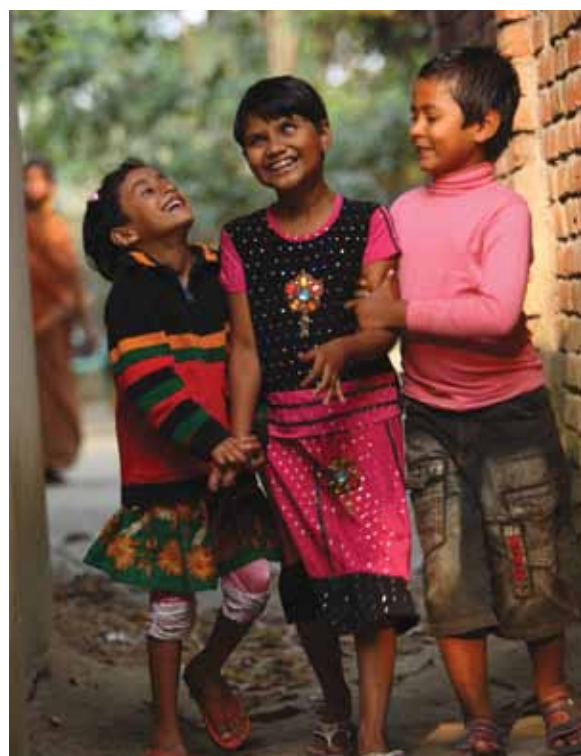
The strong presence of CBR work has brought various benefits to the efforts to develop more inclusive education. For instance:

- the education staff in the community have a CBR background and thus already have good relationships with community members
- disability awareness-raising work done by the CBR programme has led to more children with visual impairment and other disabilities being identified and referred for eye care treatment (e.g. cataract operations; spectacles) and for placement into their local mainstream schools

- self-help group members received training from the CBR programme enabling them to contribute to the development of inclusive education and better support to children learning Braille.

Future directions

The strong links between the inclusive education and CBR work obviously need to be maintained. Beyond that, Sightsavers' experiences could be very helpful to other organisations in other countries who perhaps have not managed to weave together CBR and inclusive education, but still see them as distinct and separate projects. Documenting the experiences of the inclusive education/ CBR relationship – from the perspectives of the various experts and stakeholders involved – could offer a unique learning opportunity for others.



Friends are important in inclusive education

