



# The contribution of BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings to social inclusion in Afghanistan

## Country briefing

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### Key messages

- It is crucial that skills training programmes establish and enforce mechanisms for quality control and monitoring and evaluation in order to maximise teaching and learning outcomes for marginalised groups.
- Skills training programmes need to conduct market and economic studies to identify the types of skills and sectoral areas in which excluded individuals can successfully generate an income.
- Training interventions must incorporate institutional arrangements to facilitate access to start-up capital, productive assets and markets for excluded groups.
- Programmes must be designed based on social and institutional analysis of complex, contextualised and nuanced facets of social and gender relations.
- Labour interventions – even if well designed – have a limited sectoral remit and may not tackle all contextual and structural issues that foster exclusion. They must be supported with broader policy initiatives and reforms.



**Increasing attention has recently been given to the role labour programmes can play beyond the economic sphere, highlighting the importance of understanding and tackling the multidimensional nature of poverty. This research used a social exclusion lens to analyse the effects of BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women.**

Years of war, insecurity and instability in Afghanistan have left the country with minimum infrastructure and serious economic, social and political challenges. Women have tended to endure particular hardship owing to increased violence, denial of their rights and lack of opportunities (Moradian, 2013), and experience intersecting exclusions. Serious inequalities remain between men and women in accessing labour market and income-generating opportunities. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the female (above age 15) labour force participation rate in 2011 was 16% compared with 77% for men.<sup>1</sup>

Gender is a key factor affecting access to resources, services and opportunities and thus mediating access to employment. Women are more disadvantaged than men in terms of their ability to receive skills and education, access productive resources and assets and work outside their homes. Women's literacy is one of the lowest among developing countries (IRA, 2010: 24). In rural areas, where more than 70% of the population resides, an estimated 90% of women and 63% of men are illiterate (MoE, 2012). Women tend to have restricted access to capital and markets (Ganesh et al., 2013). They are often the first targets for threats and violence in times of conflict and insurgency (HRW, 2010), which, along with existing gender norms and practices, constrain women's mobility, with impacts on their access to education, health care and employment.

Over the past decade, the Afghan government and the international community have identified job creation for young people and youth empowerment as paramount issues to address if Afghanistan is to move towards stability. A number of development

interventions seek to promote women's and young women's access to the labour market and economic empowerment.

## Research objectives and methodology

This research examined the impacts of BRAC's life skills education training and livelihoods training in Kabul and Parwan provinces in Afghanistan. BRAC implemented the training as part of its Girls' Education Project (GEP) between 2007 and 2011, with financial support from the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). The project established adolescent reading centres (ARCs) for females aged 15-20 years and who had primary-level education but could not continue. The ARC programme ran in Kabul communities from March to June 2011 and in Parwan from June to August 2011.

**Figure 1: Karbul and Parwan provinces**



The research set out to establish the extent to which provision of life skills education training and livelihoods training to young women enabled them to engage in the labour market and earn an income. It also examined whether the intervention generated other effects, more specifically if it promoted empowerment as well as affecting social relations and interaction with authorities.

<sup>1</sup> <http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SL.TLF.CACT.FE.ZS>

### Box 1: BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings

Participants of the adolescent reading centres (ARCs) had the opportunity to receive two types of training, on life skills and on livelihoods. The life skills education training was a five-day course discussing general and reproductive health and children's and women's rights. The livelihoods training was given for three months and offered skills intended to allow the participants to undertake income-generating activities and become economically reliant. It included modules on embroidery, bag making, tailoring, livestock raising and food processing.

The objective was to assess not only the effects of BRAC's intervention but also its effectiveness in promoting 'transformative' outcomes. The study was guided by the social exclusion framework, which emphasises the importance of assessing impacts of interventions on various dimensions of wellbeing and the extent they tackle drivers of poverty and vulnerability (Babajanian and Hagen-Zanker, 2012). The research thus hoped to understand whether the livelihoods training in particular was able to challenge the societal structures and processes restricting women's access to the labour market.

The research utilised a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative method used descriptive and propensity score matching (PSM) analyses to consider a range of outcomes by comparing relevance for beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries. In total, 364 respondents (each from a different household), with an even split between beneficiaries and non-beneficiaries, were interviewed in 13 villages. The qualitative approach involved 26 focus group discussions (FGDs) with 76 beneficiaries and 75 non-beneficiaries; and semi-structured in-depth interviews (IDIs) with 21 beneficiaries and 14 non-beneficiaries.

## Research findings

### Knowledge on health, literacy skills and rights awareness

Overall, the majority of the beneficiaries found the life skills education training useful. Its contribution to girls' knowledge on health, literacy skills and rights awareness appears to be among the key perceived benefits. The survey and qualitative data suggest a considerable share of beneficiaries have utilised their new knowledge of health, for example by seeing a doctor to address a health concern or improving personal/household hygiene practices.

*Yes, I have more knowledge about health and education and I have become aware of them. I use them in my daily life. For example, from the Health Module, I received more information about cleanliness [...] I got much information and now whenever I become sick I go to the clinic and take medicines (IDI with M in DA, Kabul).*

Qualitative information indicates that girls have used their literacy skills to help children in the household with homework.

*The Education Module was important for me; I learned how to read and write. Now I am very happy and I am teaching my small sister reading and writing (FGD participant F4 in KK, Parwan).*

### Use and application of livelihoods training

Tailoring was the most popular course in the livelihoods training, with 150 subscribers among our beneficiary respondents (of a total of 182). More than half of the beneficiaries reported obtaining new skills and a fifth said they had improved existing skills. Almost two-thirds of survey respondents said they were able to apply the knowledge gained from the training (Table 1). The most widespread application was the use of new skills for making clothes for personal use and for other family members.

**Table 1: Application of knowledge gained from the livelihoods training**

Application of knowledge gained	Number	% of 182
Applied knowledge gained from the programme	119	65.4
Type of application (multiple responses)		
Sewed clothes for herself	80	43.9
Started a business	23	12.6
Sewed clothes for herself and family	13	7.1
Used in existing business	3	1.6
Other	3	1.6

*We got so [many] benefits from this course, especially the economic aspect. The tailoring was so useful because we learned how to make a dress for ourselves and also for family members. When I am tailoring in my home, it means I save my father's money. So, it is a great help for my family in the economic sense (IDI with Z in KK, Parwan).*

A third of beneficiaries felt they did not gain much from the livelihoods training. Respondents in the qualitative assessment suggested the training did not enable them to acquire sufficient tailoring skills in order to make clothes for money. This was corroborated by other quantitative evidence from this research suggesting that more than 40% of all beneficiaries felt lack of skills prevented them from engaging in business in general.

*The duration of the course was only three months. We didn't learn properly. So it didn't help us to get a job and earn money (FGD participant F4 in KK, Parwan).*

### **Impact on business activity and access to economic opportunity**

Only a small share of all beneficiaries (13%, or 23 of 182) reported being able to utilise their skills in starting a business (Table 1). Qualitative interviews confirmed that some 19 participants in the livelihoods training were able to engage in business and earn an income. The results of the PSM analysis suggest that, while the livelihoods training appears to have had a small positive impact on the likelihood of working and on household income,

this is very small and did not demonstrate substantial difference in practice.

### **Social relations and interaction with authorities**

The life skills education training and the livelihoods training had a mostly positive effect on social relations, including relations with family and community members. They contributed to greater respect and appreciation by other family and community members and increased the social networks and social interaction of beneficiaries.

*Yes, they are encouraging me to learn and get an education and they are respecting me more than the past. Now, since I have been educated, my family asks me to give some ideas if they want to do something. It was not like this before the training (IDI with R in NB, Kabul).*

At the same time, some respondents reported increased tension and a negative attitude in their community. In some cases, this was thought to be driven by jealousy among girls ineligible for enrolment on the course, and in others by conservative attitudes of community members, who disapproved of the course content.

Participation in the trainings did not promote interaction with authorities: women in the study areas had no interaction with local authorities.

### **Explaining the intervention effects**

A key factor contributing to the limited income-generating outcomes of the livelihoods training related to its design and delivery. Respondents who did not engage in a tailoring business considered insufficient skills the primary reason for not being able to undertake income-generating activities after the training. Those who were engaged in business appeared to have a basic level of knowledge of tailoring before the course was introduced. The training enabled them to strengthen their skills and to become more proficient. Those who started the course without prior knowledge were not able to learn sufficient skills to make clothes for money. Beneficiary perceptions generated by the quantitative survey attest to the fact that the livelihoods training was not effective in fostering

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adequate skills. Some 43% of survey beneficiary respondents referred to lack of skills as one of the key reasons for not engaging in business in the previous 12 months. Given its home-based nature, the outcomes of the training were not affected by major constraints to female employment such as restricted mobility.

*I can say it's easy for women to have a job like tailoring in her house but not out of the home because people talk badly about her. Second, we have a bad tradition that women are not allowed to work outside of home. If any woman works outside, she would have a bad reputation in our community. That's why the men don't allow their wives or daughters to work outside. It's the men's idea that men should work for the family and earn money, but women's role is to stay and clean and take care of the house [and] that is enough for them (FGD participant Fr in NB, Kabul).*

Barriers to women's employment may be different depending on the specific sector and occupation. While this study sought to assess factors that affected the outcomes of BRAC's interventions in the specific areas of its focus, it also solicited evidence on general constraints and opportunities to female employment. Perceptions of young women about constraints to female employment more generally revealed that, besides knowledge and skills, ability to set up a business depends on a range of factors. Respondents indicated that education, access to financial capital and productive resources and restrictions on female mobility were the key barriers to female employment. While most of these factors present constraints to both men and women, they appear to be more limiting for women.

*Most women of our community are very poor, they haven't that much money to start their small business, starting a business needs money and skill (FGD participant F4 in KK, Parwan).*

## Conclusions

In order to promote access to jobs and income for women, policy interventions must not only deliver effective teaching and learning outcomes but also tackle social, economic and institutional factors that result in unequal access and multiple deprivations. This involves identifying and recognising drivers of exclusion that affect women's ability to take advantage of economic opportunities in specific sectors or occupations. Some of these drivers can be addressed through design and institutional arrangements of labour market interventions; others require long-term commitment and broader policy engagement.

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This country briefing is part of a wider research project that assessed the effectiveness and relevance of social protection and labour programmes in promoting social inclusion in South Asia. The research was undertaken in collaboration with partner organisations in four countries, examining BRAC's life skills education and livelihoods trainings for young women in Afghanistan, the Chars Livelihoods Programme and the Vulnerable Group Development Programme in Bangladesh, India's National Health Insurance Programme (RSBY) in Maharashtra and Uttar Pradesh and the Child Grant in the Karnali region of Nepal. Reports and briefings for each country and a paper providing cross-country analysis and drawing out lessons of relevance for regional and international policy can be found at: [www.odi.org/sp-inclusion](http://www.odi.org/sp-inclusion).

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