



LEARNING BRIEF

Abot Kaalaman sa Pamilyang-Bangsamoro

BRAC Philippines, February 2025



INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW

The Abot Kaalaman sa Pamilyang-Bangsamoro (AKAP) programme **aims to provide equitable access to quality elementary education in school-less barangays**¹ of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), Philippines. AKAP is one of the education flagship programmes of the Ministry of Basic, Higher, and Technical Education (MBHTE) and is supported by the Australian Government through Education Pathways to Peace in Mindanao (Pathways) with BRAC Philippines and the Consortium of Bangsamoro Civil Society as implementing partners.

The programme has established 131 learning centres, covering 62 percent of the estimated 210 school-less barangays in the BARMM². Each centre is linked to a public school (referred by the programme as ‘catchment school’) operating within the geographic proximity of the school-less barangays and runs classes from kindergarten to Grade 3 (i.e. K to 3). By the end of the school year 2023-2024, the programme has reached 7,698 children (51 percent girls; 49 percent boys), of which at least 20 percent learners are from indigenous peoples’ (IP) communities and learners with special needs³.

BRAC, as an implementing partner, plays a critical role in building the knowledge, skills, and teaching practices of the learning facilitators who deliver lessons at AKAP learning centres.

HISTORY OF BRAC PHILIPPINES’ WORK IN EDUCATION

From 2012 to 2019, BRAC implemented the Alternative Delivery Model (ADM) for Education project in BARMM (then known as ARMM) under the Australia-Philippines Basic Education Assistance for Muslim Mindanao Programme. The ADM project focused on addressing the region’s high rates of out-of-school children, with 594 out of 2,419 barangays lacking government schools at the time. The project established learning centres in priority areas with a significant number of out-of-school children and inaccessible public schools.

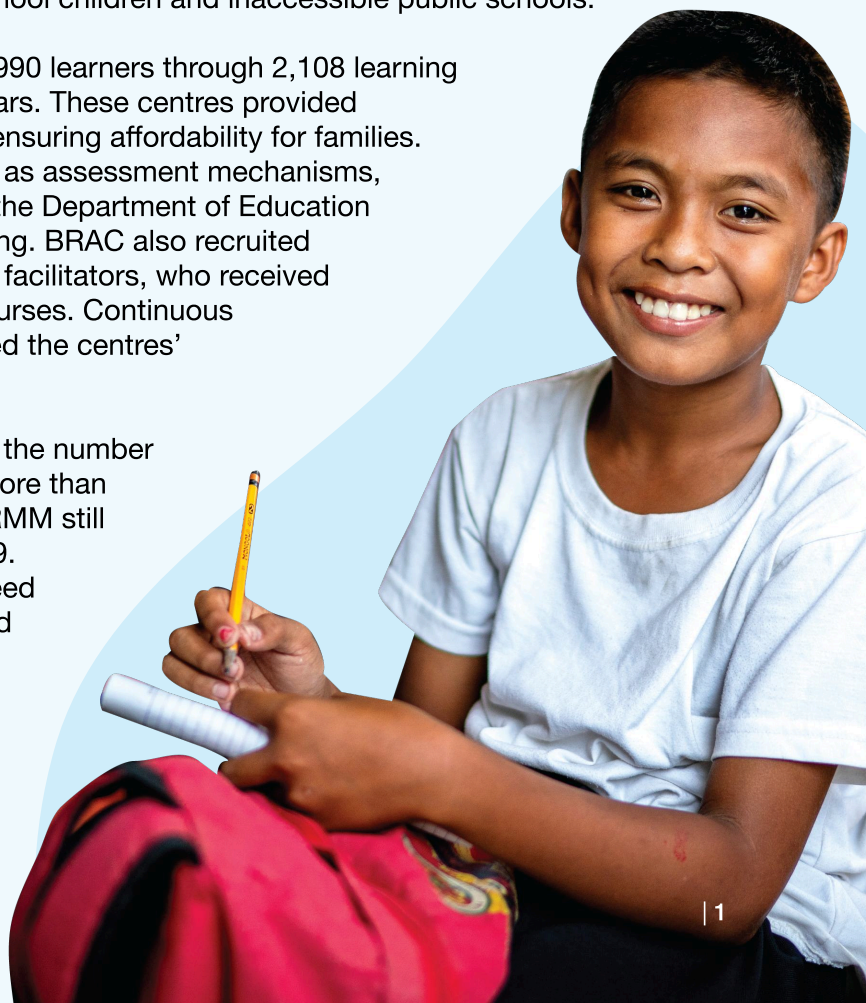
The ADM project delivered education to 65,990 learners through 2,108 learning centres across five provinces over seven years. These centres provided tuition-free education and school supplies, ensuring affordability for families. The teaching and learning materials, as well as assessment mechanisms, were aligned with the K to 12 curriculum of the Department of Education and contextualised for ARMM’s unique setting. BRAC also recruited and trained teachers, referred to as learning facilitators, who received pre-service training and regular refresher courses. Continuous monitoring by implementing partners ensured the centres’ effective operation.

While the ADM project significantly reduced the number of out-of-school children, gaps remained. More than 45,000 primary school-aged children in BARMM still lacked access to any learning facility in 2019. Barriers such as financial constraints, the need for children to support family livelihoods, and frequent uprooting due to security concerns—including armed conflict and family feuds (known locally as “rido”)—continued to disrupt children’s education.

¹ A barangay is a village, suburb, or other demarcated neighbourhood forming the most local level of government.

² Pathways (2024). Terms of reference.

³ Ibid.



Building on BRAC's experiences with the ADM project, the MBHTE recognised the need for a programme that would address the remaining gaps in education access and quality. The AKAP programme was designed to meet these needs by establishing learning centres in school-less barangays and placing them close to catchment areas with large numbers of school-aged children.

AKAP focuses on making education accessible and safe by offering tuition-free learning facilities with scholastic materials. The programme also engages community members and local government in the operations and management of the learning centers to ensure its upkeep and sustainability. By doing so, AKAP ensures that children from vulnerable and underserved communities have the opportunity to access quality education.

PURPOSE OF THE LEARNING BRIEF

This learning brief examines the programme's progress and identifies areas for improvement. It synthesises insights from the learning facilitators, parents of the children enrolled at the AKAP learning centres, members of the Barangay Local Government Unit (BLGU) and representatives from MBHTE, focusing on the following **learning questions**:

- 1 What approaches have been most effective in advancing AKAP's aim?
- 2 What improvements or changes could be made to enhance AKAP's impact?
- 3 How sustainable are AKAP's interventions beyond the project's lifespan?

METHODOLOGY

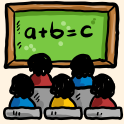
This learning brief is based on a qualitative approach, combining desk research, review of programme documents, and focus group discussions (FGDs). BRAC conducted FGDs from 5 to 10 June 2024, engaging a diverse group of 25 programme stakeholders, including parents, learning facilitators, and BLGU representatives. Of them, 11 participants were from the Teduray indigenous community.

Stakeholder group	Number of participants		
	Women	Men	Total
Learning facilitators	8	0	8
Parents	6	4	10
BLGU members	0	3	3
MBHTE officials	2	2	4
Total participants	16	9	25

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

Based on the findings, the following are the key learnings for our three learning questions:

1. WHAT APPROACHES HAVE BEEN MOST EFFECTIVE IN ADVANCING AKAP'S AIM?



1.1 Community-based learning centres have been pivotal in bringing education to areas where formal schooling is inaccessible. By setting up centres closer to communities, particularly in remote or conflict-affected areas, AKAP has successfully brought out-of-school children into the folds of education.

- All parents participating in the FGDs stated that the **long distance between their homes and schools deters them from sending their children to school.** The closest government school is more than 10 kilometres away from their residences, while AKAP learning centres are situated within 5 kilometres. Parents or older siblings can accompany children who walk to the centres and then go to their work.



If it were not for the learning centres, most of our children would remain out of school.

— a father, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



Parents reflected on the necessity of community-based education like AKAP's learning centres, explaining that it **provides a jump-start to children's education and enables continuity.**



Two of my four children studied at the BRAC learning centre [under the ADM project]. After they graduated from the centre, we enrolled them at a government school. They are now in high school.

— a mother, Barangay Kulambog, Sultan sa Barongis.



MBHTE representatives participating in FGDs highlighted that **the programme has nearly 7,500 learners, including children from IP communities** like the Bajau in Sulu and Tawi-Tawi and upland communities in Maguindanao Del Sur and Maguindanao Del Norte.



For many of these communities, education was not previously a priority. But now that the centre is near, parents are committed to sending and continuing their children's schooling.

— an MBHTE representative, Cotabato city.





1.2 Regular training of learning facilitators has significantly improved teaching quality, fostering learners' development. BRAC provides rigorous pedagogical training to new learning facilitators, followed by quarterly refresher courses tailored to K to 3 classroom needs.



Facilitators participating in FGDs noted that the training's practical applications, such as **teaching strategies and classroom management**, were particularly helpful.



We often use the peer-assisted learning technique from the training, pairing fast and slow learners so the former can assist the latter in reading and numeracy.



— a learning facilitator, Barangay Kulambog, Sultan sa Barongis.



Recent additions to the training include content on disability inclusion, equipping facilitators to **adapt teaching methods for learners with disabilities**.



I have worked with children with dyslexia as well as those with ADHD. The training helped me to be conscious of the needs of those children, such as providing specific guidance on tasks like writing.



— a learning facilitator, Barangay Kulambog, Sultan sa Barongis.



Parents praised the **teaching quality at AKAP learning centres**, stating that the learning facilitators are hands-on and patient. Parents whose children are in formal schools drew comparisons between the two. They stated that other schools give less individualised attention to support children's learning. Parents believed that the extra support and attention at AKAP learning centres came from the learning facilitators being more dedicated and involved in their students' education. It remains unclear whether the teacher-to-student ratio at formal schools limits individualised attention for students.



Unlike in formal schools, here the facilitator offers tutorial and remedial classes to support students who may be falling behind.



— a father, Barangay Kulambog, Sultan sa Barongis.



Parents reflected on the **positive changes in their children's literacy, numeracy, and communication skills**. They elaborated that their children are able to read and write in local languages (such as Tagalog) as well as in English. They also shared that the children can clearly articulate their thoughts and relay instructions or information from the learning facilitators.



My seven-year-old child, who couldn't recognise letters before, now recites the alphabets and basic numbers fluently.



— a father, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



1.3 Efforts to engage parents through monthly meetings and supervision visits by government staff such as BLGU and MBHTE has facilitated parents to take more interest in their children's education.



Parents stated that they look forward to the monthly meetings with learning facilitators as they can learn about their children's progress and also discuss any concerns.



Like me, many parents here are not educated. Meetings with the learning facilitator allows us to learn how best to support our children's education and be their 'cheerleaders'.



— a father, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



When my daughter shows me her classwork, I encourage her by recognising the stars and good remarks she has received.



— a mother, Barangay Kulambog, Sultan sa Barongis.

2. WHAT IMPROVEMENTS OR CHANGES COULD BE MADE TO ENHANCE AKAP'S IMPACT?



2.1 Adequate budgeting and timely disbursement of funds to meet the need for more books and educational resources. A lack of supply of learning materials was emphasised by all respondents.



Parents of children who had previously attended BRAC's ADM learning centres noted that ADM consistently provided materials, alleviating the financial burden on families. In contrast, AKAP's supply of books, particularly storybooks, diminished after the initial two years. Learning facilitators agreed that learning materials would support children in studying at home and improve their ability to deliver lessons effectively.



An MBHTE representative explained that although the overall budget for AKAP has increased over the years, in light of the growing number of learners and barangays the **overall budget at MBHTE-level is insufficient to take the responsibility of supplying learning materials**. The responsibility to provide learning materials has been assigned to the respective BLGUs, but delays in fund disbursement and budget constraints at BLGU-level has affected the provision of learning materials.



The project has purposefully increased reliance on BLGU to do more for the learning centres, including providing learning materials to increase ownership and ensure sustainability.



— an MBHTE representative, Cotabato city.



2.2 Nutritional support, livelihood support, and literacy programmes for adults were suggested by the respondents to address socio-economic barriers to education and enable parents and communities to prioritise children's education.



Parents from the indigenous community outlined the need for **school-based nutritional programmes** to ensure children get at least one healthy meal daily.



Many children come to the learning centre on empty stomach, mainly because we do not earn enough to provide three meals a day. Schools and these learning centres should provide at least one meal every day.



— a father, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



The BLGU emphasised the need for **sustainable financial support for families** to ensure children's continued education, proposing livelihood programmes for parents to provide a stable income. Insights from the parents regarding children's dropout from schools further corroborated the relevance of the committee's suggestion. The parents said that many families are involved in seasonal farming on lands they do not own, which limits their income and ability to support educational needs. The meagre earnings from farming are not sufficient to fund children's education beyond a point.



Survival is most important. Every member of the family, including the children, has to contribute in bringing home an income. If they are working, they do not have enough time to go to school.



— a father, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



According to the representatives of MBHTE, many parents during MBHTE's monitoring visits at the learning centres have inquired about and requested **adult literacy programmes** in the barangay to better support their children's learning.



2.3 Increasing the frequency of refresher training and improving disability inclusion course content were recommended by the learning facilitators. They said that the frequency of refresher courses should be increased from quarterly to monthly to better retain information and apply new teaching methods. They also suggested enhancing the content on disability inclusion to help facilitators recognise the early signs of disabilities in children and adopt appropriate teaching strategies. This would not only enable them to better support learners with special needs but also provide guidance to parents managing these challenges at home.



2.4 Systemising licensing of learning facilitators as teachers would set up for sustainable progress. The component of licensure for learning facilitators under the project is unclear and lacks a clear structure. While the project supports facilitators in obtaining accreditation by improving their knowledge and skills through the training, there is no explicit information on whether this licensure permits facilitators to teach specific levels (e.g., primary or secondary), nor on whether all facilitators are required to take the examinations, or if it is optional and left to individual discretion. The process itself, including the role of MBHTE and implementing partners of AKAP in facilitating the transition from facilitator to fully licensed teacher, lacks detailed explanation. Without clear guidelines or a systematised pathway, the effective integration of the licensure components may be hindered. Till date, only 50 percent of the learning facilitators have been accredited with licences.



2.5 The need to expand the centres to include classes up to Grade 5 were expressed by the parents to enable children to complete their primary education within the learning centres. This, according to the parents, addresses the issue of access as otherwise the children would have to enrol at catchment schools which are a long distance away from their homes.

3. HOW SUSTAINABLE ARE THE AKAP'S INTERVENTIONS BEYOND THE PROJECT'S LIFESPAN?

The sustainability of the project's interventions faces challenges, due to the following reasons:



3.1 The pace at which learning centres transition to formal primary schools is too long. To date, only six learning centres have successfully transitioned, raising the question about how these centres will continue to operate once Pathways ends its support. For a learning centre to transition to a formal school, it must meet stringent government requirements, including land donation, endorsement from local leaders, and community support. Additionally, a minimum enrolment of 100 learners is required, and compliance with national laws must be ensured—new schools cannot be established near existing ones unless the population justifies it. These criteria make the transition process lengthy and uncertain.



3.2 Local government funding is insufficient. According to the BLGU, which plays a critical role in supporting education at the community level, they operate with severely limited budgets. For the 2023-2024 school year, the BLGU was allocated only 20,000 pesos to support three elementary schools and four daycare centres—an amount that is grossly inadequate to meet even the most basic needs, such as maintaining facilities or providing essential materials. BLGUs then have to rely on external support from NGOs and other government departments to fill these gaps, but this process is unpredictable and unsustainable.



Because of inadequate funding, we regularly seek support from others like the Office of Indigenous Peoples and NGOs. But it is a ‘gamble’ — we may get additional money, we may not—and makes planning and timely responses very tough.



— a BLGU member, Barangay Tinungkaan, Upi.



3.3 There is limited collaboration across government levels. The MBHTE expects BLGUs to take greater financial and managerial responsibility for learning centres, including contributing to teachers’ salaries. However, given the limited resources available at the local level, this expectation is unrealistic. Without systemic reform and effective collaboration, learning centres cannot continue to support students the way it has had so far once financial contributions from Pathways ends.



3.4 Many parents expressed concerns about the distance to formal schools beyond Grade 3. Expanding the learning centres to include higher grades, like Grade 4 and 5, would ensure a smoother transition and improve educational continuity. Distance between learners’ homes and the nearest catchment schools remains a concern for parents. Not only are the children too young to travel such a distance on their own, the parents are worried about children’s safety due to armed conflict in those regions.



3.5 Changes in political leadership pose a significant risk to the programme’s stability, according to the MBHTE representatives. Each leadership change requires extensive advocacy to secure continued support for the project. If any administrative uncertainties occur before the project can transition majority of the learning centres into primary schools, the long-term sustainability of AKAP may be further undermined.



RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Introducing school-based nutritional programmes** can help address socio-economic barriers to education by ensuring that children receive at least one healthy meal daily. This will alleviate the challenges faced by households that struggle to provide sufficient meals and improve learners' focus and participation in educational activities.
- 2. Providing livelihood support to parents** will help create a stable income stream, enabling them to prioritise their children's education. This initiative can address financial challenges that force families to prioritise survival over education, ensuring better educational continuity for children.
- 3. Establish and strengthen parent-community associations** to advocate for increased funding for existing centres and establishment of more government schools in underserved areas. These associations can serve as a collective voice, engaging with local leaders and local government units to prioritise children's education and allocate sufficient resources to ensure children access to education.
- 4. Expanding learning centres to provide complete primary education**, not only aligns with the project's goal of providing access to quality elementary education but also can create a smoother transition into higher levels of learning and reduce drop-out rates caused by the lack of nearby schooling options beyond Grade 3.
- 5. Advocacy for effective coordination and collaboration** from national to grassroots levels is needed to mobilise resources and align efforts. The lack of coordination among government entities has exacerbated the funding and management challenges. Isolated efforts or assigning responsibility to a single entity without addressing systemic gaps are unlikely to lead to sustainable outcomes. The project could include more activities to advocate for and foster such partnerships.

