



Bangladesh

Country Context

Despite the constitutional directive for a unified, people-centred secular education system, there are eight types of primary level education institutions that can be found in Bangladesh- ranging from private, English Medium schools through to religious Madrassas. It takes on an average 6.6 years to complete the five-year primary education cycle. The supposedly free primary education cost parents an average of Taka 1000 per year, which amounts to about two percent of average household income. Whilst the vast majority of children are enrolled in government primary schools (61.3% of the overall number of those in schools), there are still roughly 4.17 million children who are registered in non-governmental primary schools in Bangladesh. The Education Watch survey conducted in 1998 revealed that although there is a high overall gross enrolment rate in primary education in Bangladesh (107% average), the net enrolment rate stands far behind at 77%, of which 78.6% for boys and 75.5% for girls. Furthermore, despite a high enrolment rate many children do not attend school regularly as noted in a study undertaken in 2001, " on days of visits, attendance rates were 58% of enrolment rates in government schools and 48% in rural NGO schools".

Distance to schools is claimed as the most significant barrier to their children's education; despite a national policy, which aims to provide a primary school within 2 kilometres of each/every child. While remarkable strides have been made in relation to gender equity in educational systems, all the efforts have not fared well in attracting and retaining poorer children into schools. Three such groups of particularly excluded children are working children, those with disabilities and children from ethnic and linguistic minority communities- all facing limited access to relevant educational opportunities. While efforts have been made by a significant number of local and international organisations as well as the Government to extend Non-Formal Primary Education to those who are unable to attend/complete the primary education, coverage remains extremely limited. The drop out rate for girls over the primary period, grades 1-5, is 26.6%, and that for boys 28%. One of the most significant challenges in overcoming this situation is the need to attract and retain teachers who can work effectively with marginalized children, who are often less healthy and less motivated to study.

In 2001/2002, education expenditures represented 2.2% of GDP in Bangladesh. As such, Bangladesh dedicates the least amount of its budget proportionally to education amongst SAARC nations. While loaning agencies and donors have long advocated for greater disbursement of the education budget to/for the school level, the highly centralised financing system in Bangladesh is such that schools have extremely limited independence in budget setting and financial management. This situation is not set to change in the near future, and will require ongoing advocacy efforts as well as

practical interventions with schools and a decentralised education system in order to move forward.

Key Achievements

- ❑ Formation and Functioning of School Management Committees
- ❑ More diverse representation on local education-related committees
- ❑ Decreasing teacher absenteeism and increasing pupil school attendance
- ❑ Increased awareness among civil society on the many opportunities for parents to participate in the education of their children, particularly at the school/community level.
- ❑ An underlying enthusiasm among local organisations working with the CEF in the potential of improvements in the educational situation- both for individual schools and in influencing policy.
- ❑ Supported the formation of a Parliamentary Caucus on Primary Education.
- ❑ Support to CSOs and media to conduct and launch two investigative reports on the process of the National Plan of Action on Education (NPA) and the Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP II).

Breakdown by Criteria

CRITERION 1

With CEF support, an existing education network (CAMPE) has been able to achieve a great deal especially in research. However some concerns remain; in particular the potential for CAMPE to be viewed as less of a network and more of a “traditional” NGO by focusing on too few projects. Two other significant and influential groups have been formed with support from CEF – Sushikkha Andolon and the Parliamentary Caucus on Primary Education. CEF has made good progress with the press and media in Bangladesh but like many other programmes, had less success in engaging donors and the representatives from the private sector. Capacity building has been very successful both in terms of training to local partners and the interest it has raised among the most marginalised members of communities where they work. Key recommendations of the MTR include a mechanism to gather CEF partners by areas of work not geographical scope, and greater participation of children in CEF work. Importantly, the MTR in Bangladesh recognised the need to clarify expectations and expected outcomes as a result of advocacy and participation in meetings. In a similar vein, the report highlights the importance of pursuing research projects to a useful conclusion.

CRITERION 2

CEF Bangladesh supported the formation of a Primary Education Budget Watch Group, which provided training to partners on budget analysis and developing a research initiative. Several good pieces of research have been supported in Bangladesh but only a few are of these are directly related to budget allocation. One example is where the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) drew directly on CEF sponsored research to make a specific reference to the need for Government to support rural electrification to assist school and home study. Several education committees have been formed at the Upozila and Union level as a result of CEF work. However, the MTR further stresses

the need to conclude on advocacy, recognising a lost opportunity of a ministerial visit due to a lack of follow-up after the event.

CRITERION 3

Despite self-recognition that this has been the weakest area of work in Bangladesh, some successes have been recorded: Translation of curriculum into indigenous languages, more flexible school calendar, more regular opening and closing of schools, employment of community teachers to provide after-hours tutorials and coaching, greater punctuality of teachers and better attendance by pupils. The majority of local partners in Bangladesh have been working with School Management Committees and the MTR comments on the benefit of arranging a meeting for the partners to share and exchange experiences, particularly tools for their formation, management and budget processes. However it questions the overall value of drawing together this information in a database to influence practice in schools. A further recommendation is that CEF partners help to facilitate school self-assessments prior to the commencement of work in schools.

Case Study: Sharing knowledge to broaden success

In collaboration with Bangladesh Adibasi Forum (BAF), CEF has supported the translation of the first two classes of the national primary curriculum into five indigenous languages. The materials are currently being piloted and will be published under the next phase of the CEF programme. In addition to research on the portrayal of indigenous peoples within the primary curriculum, BAF has also been advocating strongly, with support from the indigenous community, for a more flexible school calendar in line with their seasonal requirements.

Another activity supported by CEF and one met with great enthusiasm by local school level partners, was a study visit to a rural primary school. Shibram Primary School is well known for its quality and in particular, its effective School Management Committee (SMC). The school was visited by 7 CEF partners who learnt about the approaches used by the headmaster to involve the community in the management of the school. Shibram Primary School has been able to improve student performance and recognition that in order to increase community participation it is important to improve learning outcomes and test results. As a result of this visit, SMC members from other schools have been motivated to begin similar processes in their own school.

“Long after the formation of the SMC, we are now observing the national days at our school. We did not have these before. We now have annual sports activities as well. We have discipline in the classrooms. We publish annual results for the public. We have had an insight after our visit to Shibram School.”

SMC Chairman, Kurulgachi School