

PPRC POLICY BRIEF

Primary Education Budget Watch Project
in partnership with
Commonwealth Education Fund, Bangladesh

Quest for Quality *Primary Education:* Where are the Entry Points?

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN
K. SHAKHAWAT ALI

February, 2005



Power and Participation Research Centre

House 79, Road 12A, Dhanmondi R/A, Dhaka 1209

Preface

Education is a relatively new focus for PPRC. But it has emerged as a logical focus to the Centre's longer work on poverty and local governance. The common theme on all these three areas of work has been a methodological one, an attempt to accord priority to grass-root insights and build agendas from a holistic reading of the ground reality. In many ways, education, particularly basic education, has emerged as one of the critical agendas to influence poverty outcomes and governance a principle vehicle to take this agenda forward. The opportunities to engage on these unfolding agendas are many and PPRC feels particularly grateful that the Primary Education Budget Watch Project supported by the Commonwealth Education Fund and ActionAid, Bangladesh has given the Centre an entry point to engage on this most significant of contemporary agendas.

This Policy Brief has been an outcome of three sets of experiences: a process of pilot action research in south-western Bangladesh in partnership with UTTARAN, a dialogue process with ActionAid, Bangladesh and its many partners on the Primary Education Budget Watch project, and, finally, the extraordinarily rich series of discussions within the national advocacy group *Shushikkha Andolon*.

The PPRC Project Secretariat coordinated by Khondaker Shakhawat Ali deserves special appreciation for steering the overall research process and for ensuring the necessary support to field journeys. Shakhawat Ali has also collaborated in the preparation of this Policy Brief and prepared the Time-Line on Evolution of Discourse and Policy on Education. Abdullah Al-Rashed of PPRC undertook much of the administrative burden and requires special mention. UTTARAN in Satkhira and Shabolombi in Netrakona were committed and effective partners and deserve the sincerest of appreciation. Shahidul Islam of UTTARAN and Begum Rokeya of Shabolombi deserve a special mention here. Deepest gratitude is also due to all members of the *Shushikkha Andolon* for their commitment and willingness to engage for desired transformations in the primary education sector. Additional appreciation is due to those members who undertook the journeys to offices and field, Abdullah Abu Sayeed, Momtaz Jahan, Ahmed Kamal, Amirul Islam Chowdhury, Mohammad Mohsin, Muhammad Ibrahim and Rasheda K. Chowdhury. Nasreen Huq of ActionAid, Bangladesh and the CEF Secretariat also deserve appreciation for their support.

The quest for quality in primary education is a compelling contemporary engagement. This Policy Brief has been prepared both as a work-in-progress and as an input to the agenda-building process in such a quest. It is our sincere hope that it will prove to be of use to the long list of actors who are engaged on the action agenda on quality primary education.

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN
Dhaka, 14th February, 2005

LIST OF CONTENTS

- I A Paradigm Shift on Educational Interventions?
- II Knowledge Strategies for Agenda-Building Insights: Action Research and *Prerona Safar*
 - II.1 Pilot Action Research
 - II.2 *Prerona Safar*
- III Insights from the Pilot Action Research
 - III.1 The Community-State Interface in Primary Schooling
 - III.2 Family Burden in Cost of primary Schooling
 - III.3 School Fund and School Meal
 - III.4 How Coherent is the Administrative Work-Load in Primary Education?
 - III.5 Community Perceptions on Priority Intervention Agenda
- III Insights from *Prerona Safar*
 - III.1 Insights on Administrative Coherence
 - III.2 The Question of Supplementary Schooling
 - III.3 School Fund and School Meal
- IV Where are the Entry Points for a Quality Agenda on Primary Education?
 - IV.1 Budget-Intensive Entry Points
 - IV.2 Procedure-Intensive Entry Points
 - IV.3 Innovation-Intensive Entry Points
- Annex *A Time-Line on Discourse and Policy on Education*

I A Paradigm Shift on Educational Interventions?

Though basic education has featured prominently as a reform focus in Bangladesh from as far back as the colonial period (see Annex 1 for a time-line on discourse and policy on basic education), the overriding intervention paradigm of recent times has been around the theme of access. UNDP's human development approach enunciated in the early 1990s popularized the access theme as the primary school enrolment indicator. Policy-makers and administrators alike responded to the enrolment challenge with a gusto which has catapulted Bangladesh to UNDP's medium human development league of countries. The success has been not only on the supply side, i.e. building of schools, expansion of non-formal schooling, incentive programmes such as the food-for-education and girl student stipend programmes, as well as awareness programmes through the media and social communication initiatives. The demand side too has been as responsive; even the poorest families have come to value education and give high priority to the primary education of their children, boys and girls alike.

The evidence on achievements is clear: net enrolment rate stood at 86.7 in 2002 for boys and girls combined and at 87.4 for girls only (BANBEIS). Achievements on gender parity too is consistent across all primary grades. The move towards gender parity within the eighty thousand odd primary schools is remarkable even within teachers: 37.9 percent of teachers in both public and private/community primary schools in 2002 were female in contrast to 2 percent at the time of independence.

It is not the case that the access goal has been won on all fronts. Specific segments of the population, particularly within the poor, ethnic groups and in remote locations, still have to struggle for access. Increasingly however, research on outcome indicators is driving home the point that access achievements are not necessarily translating into commensurate quality achievements. Drop-out rate was 33 percent in 2001 (BANBEIS) and repetition rate 39.9 percent in 2002 (Education Watch). Extent of failure in examinations is another disturbing indicator of lack of achievements on the quality frontier. The concern is not only about such outcome indicators but also about various process indicators such as teacher quality, contact hours, class-room environment, school facilities etc.

Thus, if access was the defining pre-occupation of the past decade and a half, a paradigm shift towards a pre-occupation with quality while retaining the focus on equity has become an urgent necessity. In a sense, such a realization has already been spreading but the actual intervention agenda remains very much to be developed. In particular, it is important to ensure that the development of the quality agenda is not driven by top-down expert approaches alone. Insights gained from action research and other participatory approaches can play an invaluable role here in identifying effective entry points to further the quality agenda.

II Knowledge Strategies for Agenda-Building Insights: Action Research and *Prerona Safar*

Mobilizing field knowledge as an agenda-building resource is more of a research challenge than it may appear at first sight. Two common weaknesses to avoid here are, firstly, over-formulaic participatory approaches, and secondly, participatory approaches which see participation as an end in itself while losing sight of the agenda-building imperative. Bearing such pitfalls in mind, we have tried out two different knowledge strategies to gain insights for a quality agenda on primary education.

II.1 Pilot Action Research

The first of these was a pilot action research carried out in partnership with a local NGO – Uttaran – in Tala upazila of Satkhira district in south-western Bangladesh. The action research was constructed as a combination of community and local government engagement, research training, qualitative research, and participatory validation of findings. The research focus per se was on the ground reality of school operation and the operation of the education department at the local level, local perceptions on the primary education process, family expenditures on primary education, and, school budgetary and resource positions.

Four major steps were identified for taking the action research forward:

- Identification of key stakeholders through a dialogue between PPRC and the local partner,
- Formulation of research questions,
- Translation of selected questions into implementable research tasks through a local dialogue process, and,
- Community sharing sessions to sensitize relevant stakeholders on the proposed research and fine-tune and validate research tools.

The stakeholders identified as relevant to the process-mapping exercise were:

- school authorities,
- the state represented both through its budgetary support and through the education administration at the local level (upazila),
- the local community, and finally,
- the families of students.

Five research questions were formulated:

- The interface of the state and the local community in the growth of schools
- School budgets and resource positions
- Rate and nature of utilization of school facilities

- Quality of education administration at local level (upazila)
- Family burden in primary education expenditures.

These were translated into the following research tasks:

- Prepare a chronological account of the history of a selected primary school focusing on how it was established and major phases of its development.
- Prepare profiles on assets, income and expenditure flows on 2 selected primary schools.
- Time-management analysis of school activities including profiling of school visitors.
- Documentation of education administration at upazila level.
- Case analysis of family budgets of selected students focusing on expenditures on education.

II.2 *Prerona Safar*

As distinct from the action research, a different knowledge strategy tried was the *prerona safar* undertaken under the aegis of the *Shushikkha Andolon*, the citizen advocacy group. *Prerona Safar* whose literal translation is motivational journey was basically constructed as an organized journey of visual experiences and reflective dialogues in field conditions by a high-level group in partnership with local-level actors. The objectives of the *prerona safar* are a combination of reality check on ground realities, strengthening of visual and listening cultures, and gaining agenda-building insights.

In pursuance of its national advocacy objectives, *Shushikkha Andolon* aims to undertake a series of *prerona safars* to various parts of the country. The first of these was to Netrakona in northern Bangladesh in partnership with Shabolombi, a local NGO with a well-established track record of engagement in educational and other sectors. The three components which made up the *prerona safar* programme were school visit, dialogue with local education administration, and most importantly a field conference with school management committees of eleven local primary schools.

III Insights from the Pilot Action Research

III.1 The Community-State Interface in Primary Schooling

A chronological analysis of the oldest school in the area, Khalilnagar Primary School, shows three distinct phases in the growth of the school. Between 1905 and 1952, it was the local community that played the major role in the growth of the school. Between 1952 and 1973, the main actors were the local government body, i.e. District Board, and the local community. Since 1973, the central state has become the dominant actor in the life of the school but its focus has narrowed to the issues of infrastructure, teacher salaries, training and educational materials. School budget analysis demonstrate the overwhelming state dependence for meeting school expenditures (99.6 and 97.7% respectively for the two researched schools).

From a process perspective, the key consequence has been that community engagement became marginal and a holistic focus on quality outcomes often became a missing focus. Critical policy challenges indicated by the action research include creating opportunities for more effective community participation in strengthening the focus on quality and exploring the possibility of bringing back a local government oversight over school education. Specific entry points to ensure further healthy growth of the school include:

- *Engagement of Community Teachers.* Inadequacy of teaching staff is a major problem. Current provision allow for a maximum of 5 teachers which is also not met in many instances. For Khalilnagar Union as a whole, average number of teachers in primary schools was found to be 2.9 Some schools have begun to innovate with engaging Community Teachers through support from local community for supplementing teaching staff and addressing student counseling needs. This is a promising direction to advocate on given that additional resource support from the state appear unlikely.
- *Activating the Provision for a Parent-Teacher Welfare Fund.* While mobilizing community support is a recognized objective, it often does not materialize for want of credible institutional instruments. Current law provides for a Parent-Teacher Welfare Fund which in most cases have not been acted upon. Khalilnagar School is something of an exception in having a somewhat active Parent-Teacher Association. This can be an important entry point to strengthen community participation in ensuring quality education.

III.2 Family Burden in Cost of primary Schooling

Per primary student government expenditure in the two researched schools came to Taka 1714 for the under-populated Nolta Primary School and Taka 877 for the overpopulated Khalilnagar Primary School. However, notwithstanding the fact that primary education is free, the action research demonstrated that rural families also make a substantial investment

on primary education of their children. 12 case studies were done on families of differing income backgrounds. On average, a poor family was found to make a monthly expenditure of Taka 251, a middle class family Taka 279 and a well-to-do family Taka 329 on primary education of their children. Clearly, the burden of this expenditure is quite inelastic meaning that it is incurred whatever the family income position of the respective households. Thus we see that the burden falls heaviest on the poor households – 17% compared to 6% for middle class families and 2% for well-to-do families (Table 1).

Table 1
Average Family Expenditures on Primary Education

<i>Family Category</i>	<i>Average Monthly Family Income (Taka)</i>	<i>Average Monthly Expenditure on Primary Student (Taka)</i>	<i>Family Expenditure on primary student as % of family Income</i>
Well-to-do	16336	329	2
Middle Class	4386	279	6.4
Poor	1471	251	17.1

A look at the expenditure items illustrate the nature of the burden. Major expenditure items incurred by families are *private tutoring, pen and paper, tiffin, dress, and evening lighting* (Table 2). Some obvious areas for advocacy here are to institutionalize student counseling through community initiatives which can substantially reduce the necessity for private tutoring. Another area for intervention is the provision of school meal which can also reduce the tiffin cost. One eye-opener was the cost incurred for evening lighting often requiring use of kerosene oil. Here the challenge is not of the education sector as such but of provision of infrastructural support through rural electrification or of innovative attempts such as use of solar power.

Table 2
Pattern of Family Expenditures on Primary Education:
Case Pictures of Different Family Categories

<i>Expenditure Items</i>	<i>Well-to-do Family (Taka)</i>	<i>Middle Class (Taka)</i>	<i>Poor (Taka)</i>
Exam Fee	45	45	45
Private Tutor	600	960	1000
Books	30	-	-
Pen and paper	360	480	360
Tiffin	288	600	680
Communication	-		
School Dress and General Clothing	1080	750	450
Shoe/sandal	300	100	50
House lighting	900	600	600
<i>All</i>	<i>3603</i>	<i>3535</i>	<i>3105</i>

III.3 Capacity Utilization in Primary Schools

It is true significant investments have been made in a primary education infrastructure including teacher salaries. But two crucial requirement shortfalls which remain are in the number of class rooms and the number of teachers – 3 rooms and 3 teachers for 5 classes. While initiation of the Primary Education Development Programme –II indicate that addressing such shortfalls are already within government priorities, critical question remains as to the extent of capacity utilization of such investments. Findings on the two researched schools in Tala, Satkhira highlight some features of capacity utilization:

- School working calendar is of 238 days a year but the action research shows that in actual practice, school remains open for 201 days meaning a **16% work day loss**.
- **Teacher absenteeism** on average was found to be **15%**.
- On average, school started 15 minutes beyond scheduled time and finished 30 minutes before scheduled time. This translates into an **average loss of 12.5% of the school working day**.
- There are 3 class rooms in which 5 classes have to be accommodated. This frequently produces a chaotic situation.
- Average student presence was 79.8%.
- Break-hours are well utilized for assembly and play-time.
- Extra-curricular activities do not extend beyond physical training.
- The visitor diary shows that the principal category of visitors are parents. The main purposes of visit were to submit leave applications for wards, inform teachers about absent student, learn about stipends, general enquiry about progress of respective wards. Interestingly, parental visits were found to be done by fathers and mothers in equal proportions.

III.4 How Coherent is the Administrative Work-Load in Primary Education?

While the state has assumed the dominant role in administering primary education, this role has increasingly come with a baggage of project responsibilities which have tended to eat into the core inspection and teaching time. Conflict with teaching time is evident from the routine extra-teaching activities of teachers and the administrative load of maintaining a variety of registers.

Table 3 profiles the range of activities and estimated time spent by the teachers of the researched primary school. The profile was constructed through a self-reporting process steered by the field researcher.

Table 3
Routine Profile of Extra-Teaching Activities of Teachers in a Primary School

Teacher	Description of the Jobs	Date	Time/hours
Headmaster	Participation on the discussion programme held on Scout movement founder Baden Powell	22.02.03	2
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for work relating to Time Scale	24.02.03	2
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for the Question Paper of 1st Term Exam	19.04.03	5
	Participation in the Cluster Meeting	14.04.03	2.5
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for work relating to Chairman? Oriental Course	25.04.03	3
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for submitting the Question Paper of 2 nd Term Exam	02.08.03	2
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for Note Books/Papers	04.08.03	2
	Went to Upazila Education Office for work relating to the teachers	01.09.03 04.08.03	5
	Went to Uttaran Office for training on Sanitation	14.09.03	2
	Went to Upazila Education Office for work relating to the accounting of the Chairman Oriental Course	17.09.03	10am-4pm
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for submitting Contingency Vouchers	27.09.03	3
	Went to Tala Upazila Education Office for submitting Salt Testing Forms	20.10.03	2
	Went to Upazila Education Office for submitting the Answer Papers of the Model Test of the Scholarship Exam 2003	08.12.03	2
	Went to Education Office to bring the programme for the Exam	03.12.03	2
	Went to Upazila Education Office for submitting the Demand Sheet for the stipends	03.12.03	3
	Went to Education Office for including Education Officer & Assistant Officer in the card of the stipends	27.04.03	3
	Went to Education Office for attending the seminar on the stipend	03.05.03	3
	Went to TNO, Education Office & Editor of the Scout for attending meeting of the Scout, purchasing things for scout, Training, submitting information, etc.	11.03.03 to 16.09.03	32 hours in 9 days
	Attending the monthly Co-ordination meeting (once every month, yearly 12 times)		10 am to 4 pm
	Assistant teacher	Administering Polio Drops	03.03.03 04.04.03
Assistant Teacher	Administering Polio Drops	03.03.03 04.04.03	12 hours in 2 days
All Teachers	Training on Sub-cluster (Once every 2 months)		10-4 pm
All teachers	Participating in the Orientation of the Scholarship Exam		10 – 4 pm

Aside from the extra-school activities, within the school too there is a significant administrative burden which is evident in the long list of registers which have to be officially maintained. The list of registers is described below:

- Teacher attendance register
- Student attendance register
- Wheat distribution register
- Stipend beneficiary register
- Wheat master roll
- Book distribution register
- SMC meeting register
- Guardian committee meeting register
- Inspection register
- Stock register
- Teacher leave register
- Cash book
- Student enrolment register
- Exam results register.

Time utilization analysis of Upazila Education Office similarly reveal the fact that the core inspection responsibility is compromised by an expanding list of project and other responsibilities including responding to queries on scholarship model tests, stipend allocations, certifying stipend beneficiary list, enquiry related to granting registration for new school, administration work related to Ideal Project, cub scout programs etc. Use of a daily diary methodology showed for example that in the first week of November, 2003, nearly 55 percent of office time was used for such project and problem management purposes. Though this percentage is likely to be somewhat lower if the monthly average is considered, it nevertheless points to the constraints in releasing the education office capacity for the core inspection function aimed at improving overall school management and class-room environment.

III.5 *Community Perceptions on Priority Intervention Agenda*

A participatory perception exercise on ranking the priority areas to be addressed to improve quality in primary education also brought out some additional insights (Table 4). The five highest ranked agenda in order of priority were *parental awareness, teaching quality, pro-active school governance, attractive pedagogy, and, ensuring access of the poor*. What is striking is not only the strength of such an agenda formulation, but also the specific hierarchy of priorities therein. The focus clearly is not on any narrow technical fix in realizing the quality agenda but on a holistic package which highlights the role of the parent, the teacher, the management and the state.

Table 4
*Community Perceptions on Quality agenda:
Ranking of Priorities*

Area	Ranking
Strengthening awareness of parents, in particular mothers	1
Trained and efficient teachers	2
Regular and active SMC	3
Attractive educational style	4
Ensuring presence of poor and marginal groups, Smooth relationship between SMC, teachers and parents	5
Rational teacher-student ratio	6
Teachers with subject specialization, Life-oriented and up-to-date curriculum, Alternative use of stipend in education	7
Active role local government and local educational administration	8
Adequate number of class-rooms, Rational salaries	9
Materials for extra-curricular	10

III.6 Issues for Follow-up Action Research

The experience of the pilot action research in Tala, Satkhira laid the basis for an expansion of the action research to other areas and other themes. A series of participatory consultations with local partners identified a follow-up action research agenda which will hopefully feed into a further elaboration of the intervention agenda on quality primary education. The follow-up action research agenda is described in Table 5 below.

Table 5
Planned Follow-up Action Research Agenda

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Partner</i>
Class-room practice and culture	Noakhali	NRDS
Primary schools and their catchment area	Netrokona	Shabolombi
Primary text-book distribution process	Bhola	COAST
Primary school governance issues	Satkhira	Uttaran
Profile of Primary Teacher	Kushtia	WAVE
Comparative study on primary curriculum in different types of schools	Satkhira	Uttaran
Administrative coordination in primary education: CHT practice and experience	Rangamati	Zabarang Kalyan Samity
Realistic school calendar	Sylhet	FIVDB

IV Insights from *Prerona Safar*

The visit to a school, dialogue with local education administration and the field conference of SMC members yielded a number of useful insights relevant to agenda-building.

IV.1 Insights on Administrative Coherence

- The provision of 40 percent coverage of primary students for the poor-oriented stipend programme puts a major 'political' load on school and administrative authorities in terms of the selection question. Reducing this load through increasing the percentage provision even at the cost of reducing the size of the stipend is a policy option to be explored.
- Flood 2004 put into spotlight the problem of the rigidity of the school leave calendar in the flood-affected areas. Even though schools effectively remained closed for the flood period, head teachers did not feel empowered to make up for the lost time by utilizing normal leave days for want of an administrative authorization for the same. When queried, the district education officer also felt not empowered to issue such an authorization for want of any guide-line from Dhaka. This loss of school-time in the public sector contrasts with the flexibility demonstrated by the private schools in Dhaka city who make up for lost time, whether due to natural or political disturbances, by utilizing normal leave days. For the disaster-prone parts of Bangladesh, this unwarranted loss of school time is a routine affair and clearly points towards the wisdom of adjusting the official school calendar to accommodate well-known area specificities.

IV.2 The Question of Supplementary Teaching

The question of supplementary teaching or coaching as in popular usage has become both a widely practiced phenomenon and a cause for concern. Table 2 has already shown this as a major expenditure burden on families. The other reason for concern derives from the fact of coaching as becoming an informal commercial use of teacher's time often with poor or low standards. As a response to such concerns, the possibility of mobilizing a category of community teachers under the aegis of the school as a possible way out is emerging as a reform focus. The field conference with SMC members provided invaluable insights as to how serious is the concern and how this question of community teachers is best handled.

The most important insight to emerge was that there are three distinct areas and purposes for which supplementary teaching becomes a relevant issue for quality improvement in primary education. Most of the discussions in the SMC conference focused on the remedial need, i.e. supplementary teaching needed for slow learners. However, it quickly became clear that the issue of slow learners was referring to two distinct agendas, one about slow learners per se, and the other about the fact a large majority of students in came without any pre-school experience. Indeed, in the eyes of the assembled SMC members and teachers,

the most important requirement was not supplementary teaching per se but the urgent need to revive and re-introduce the practice of pre-schools within the primary education system. It also became clear that the primary teachers were not pre-disposed to introduction of pre-school opportunities within the school framework as it would imply extra work-load for them. Indeed, it appears it was for this very rationale of extra work-load which was invoked by primary teacher's association who agitated to have the practice of pre-school (baby class in the language of the time) quietly dropped from their schedule in 1987. The solution implicitly being articulated was that pre-school was essential but it had to be introduced within a community (i.e. para or neighbourhood) rather than a school context.

Aside from the remedial rationale for supplementary teaching, there is of course also an excellence rationale i.e. supplementary teaching helping to ensure high achievements within and outside the classroom. Though this did not feature much in this particular discussion forum, experience around Bangladesh has shown that some 'best practice' schools have successfully innovated with engaging community teachers to significantly raise overall school standards (example : Shibram Primary School in Gaibanda, *Source: Daily Prothom Alo*).

IV.3 School Fund and School Meal

To reduce budgetary dependence on the state, the idea of mobilizing a school fund at the community level has been mooted in recent times and some examples created. The main insight which emerged from the Netrakona discussions was that the idea required further exploration. While there were clear arguments for such a move, safeguards and clearer understanding on the matter had to be developed first.

The issue of a school meal for primary school children provoked both ready agreement and strong reservations that the implementation arrangements had to be sorted out before any such programme were to become viable. Teachers in particular were concerned that introduction of such initiatives should in no way become their responsibility. The policy message was that the idea was attractive, indeed essential if contact hours were to be enhanced, but programme design was the real challenge.

Aside from these specific insights, a theme repeatedly emphasized during the SMC dialogue was the importance accorded to parental awareness and engagement, an emphasis repeated in the community perceptions exercise during the action research (Table 4).

V Where are the Entry Points for a Quality Agenda on Primary Education?

The primary education sector in Bangladesh has built an impressive track record of achievements. These adhere mainly to indicators of access, namely, enrolment and gender parity. Building on these achievements, there is an increasing necessity for a shift of paradigm focus to questions of quality. Such a realization is dawning across the board i.e. in the school, within the family, and within the policy process. The quality agenda, however, is neither a ready-made nor a self-evident one. Nor should it be driven by expert opinions unlinked to an understanding of ground realities. This is where insights from field-oriented knowledge strategies can provide useful inputs towards developing a more meaningful intervention agenda.

V.1 Budget-Intensive Entry Points

- Pursuit of quality goals is contingent on a minimally rational school infrastructure. Current reality is that the 5 grades of a primary school are crammed into 3 class-rooms with inevitable consequences for class-room environment and teacher-student interaction. Ensuring a minimally rational infrastructure, i.e. 1 room each for each of the five primary grades, will be crucial to the quality agenda. This is first and foremost a budgetary challenge but it has already been acknowledged in PEDP-II document. The challenge is about early implementation.
- Pursuit of quality goals is also contingent on a minimally rational teaching capacity. The teacher-student ratio in primary schools nationally is 1:61 (BANBEIS, 2003). Without significantly improving on this ratio, quality goals are likely to remain distant. The operational need is to increase the number of teachers to an optimum of 7 for the 5 grades but in the interim ensure at least 5 teachers per school. In current scenario, meeting this challenge will primarily be a public sector responsibility. However, the possibility of a community role through the provision of community teachers as a supplementary teaching force, as has been piloted in some schools, will merit further exploration.
- The third budget-intensive entry point identified through the action research is the importance of evening lighting which increases study time for the students. Expenditure on lighting is a burden on poorer families and there is a clear quality education argument for higher investment in rural electrification and alternative power sources.

V.2 Procedure-Intensive Entry Points

Some of the entry points are not really about budgets and resources but about rational procedures and administrative coherence.

- One such entry point relevant to the quality agenda is to win acceptance for a region-specific flexible school calendar. The issue needs to be given fuller formulation but represents a clear felt-need as articulated in the SMC field conference. A lesser goal but one which requires lesser policy engagement too is to ensure administrative cover for school management when they need to make up for school-time lost due to floods and other disasters. The actual intervention instrument here would be a Ministry circular which empowers the district education officer to respond to school requests to be able to utilize routine holidays for making up lost school-time due to natural disasters.

- An important consideration in the quality agenda is the quality and efficacy of the oversight function within the primary education process both within the school and over the schools. Analysis of time utilization by teachers and education administrators has demonstrated clearly how the oversight time is compromised by project duties and register maintenance duties. Establishing a greater coherence within this administrative process is a priority need but the entry points here are not so self-evident. A careful review process as to how the non-teaching work load of primary teachers can be rationalized and how the inspection time of educational administrators can be optimized itself can be the entry point at this stage.

V.2 *Innovation-Intensive Entry Points*

The third category of entry points is not really about budgetary or administrative process in the first instance. Rather, these are about innovation, creative responses that establish new agendas which subsequently can engage the public sector.

- The most important innovation-oriented entry point to emerge from the field insights is the theme of pre-schools. Low competency achievements were attributed most significantly to the fact that grade 1 students came wholly unprepared and quickly fell into a syndrome of under-achievement even if their innate abilities were good. The scope for pre-school experience was thus held essential if outcome indicators on primary education were to improve. Bringing pre-school towards the top of the intervention agenda is thus a critically important advocacy agenda. What the field insights served to clarify is how best the focus on pre-schools is operationalized. It was evident from the response of the teachers that the revival of a pre-school component within the school framework would meet with teacher resistance as this implied an extra work-load. Indeed, it was on this very argument that the practice of baby class fell into decay from 1987 under opposition of primary teacher association. Thus, if pre-school option is to move forward, the initial effort has to be an informal community (neighborhood) initiative through the mobilization of willing and pro-active mothers who use their own residence. Some pilot experiences have already accumulated in this area (PLAN, Bangladesh) which can be reviewed and utilized for further spread of the pre-school practice.

- The second innovation-intensive entry point is the linking of the primary schools with the local government institution i.e. Union Parishad. Building the actual agenda here requires further consultative work but a number of rationales have already emerged as to the potential benefits of such a link-up. While NGOs have created many innovative experiences, a common problem here is that to the extent that such experiences remain within a project framework, they remain in danger of decay if the project context is removed. There is a need to anchor such experiences in mainstream community bodies if they are to endure and the local government easily qualifies as one of the most important vehicle in this regard. Another critical possibility which requires further pilots and advocacy is the mobilization of women UP members to champion the community-based pre-school process. Neither the action research nor the *prerona safar* provided a full formulation of this link-up agenda but both pointed towards the importance of a vigorous exploration of the issue.
- The idea of a community-driven school fund has been mooted as an intervention agenda in some quarters and some experiences also created. What emerged from the field insights was both an initial acceptance of the potential of such an innovation but also the need to clarify further how it would work in practice. There is clearly a mind-set challenge to be overcome here. One point which became clear was that teachers were unwilling to be an actor in such an initiative which is seen more as a SMC matter. The entry point at this stage is thus not an operational agenda as such but more of a design and advocacy agenda.
- A similar conclusion applies to the question of school meal. While there was little disagreement on the intrinsic merit of such an innovation – it would increase contact hours, improve nutrition and assist the poor – there were widespread concerns as to its operational feasibility. Teachers were quite emphatic that they should not be drawn into the administration of such an initiative if it were to occur. There was also some skepticism as to where the resources for such a scheme would come from. While the school meal idea has the potential to become a compelling programme making multiple contributions to the quality agenda, at this stage it was clear that the relevant entry point essentially lay in design development through a further consultative process and pilot experiments. In particular, it would be important to explore alternative scenarios regarding both financing, administrative arrangement and service provision.
- The last entry point to consider here is to strengthen the accountability process within the system through innovating on community-relevant and community-validated quality outcome indices. A shared understanding of quality can serve to reinforce the sense of community ownership and create the ground for a fuller community engagement in primary education.

A Time-Line on Discourse and Policy on Education

- 1854* The celebrated Wood's Educational Dispatch of 1854, resulting from an enquiry about education in India by the Select Committee of the British House of Commons, provided the legal foundation for modern public education in Bengal.
- 1859* Lord Stanley recommended that government should take direct responsibility for primary education and reserve the system of grant-in-aid, as suggested in the Dispatch of 1854, to secondary and higher education. The Dispatch of 1859 suggested that the government should levy a local tax, if necessary, for the purpose of defraying the expenses of primary schools.
- 1871* Lord Mayo authorized the Provincial Governments to spend the income accruing from their educational departments upon educational projects.
- 1882* Lord Ripon appointed the first Indian Education Commission on February 3, 1882 with William Hunter as its Chairman.
- 1877* Lord Lytton, pursuing a decentralization policy, introduced a policy of Quinquennial Settlement under which education came under the direct control of the provincial governments for a period of five years and a certain fraction of the income from the departments of Law and Excise was fixed for educational purposes. But the Central Government reserved the power of determining the country-wide education policy. The system continued till 1882.
- 1901* All Indian Education Conference was held at Shimla.
- 1904* On March 11, 1904, Lord Curzon published his education policy in the form of a government Resolution.
- 1905* Swadeshi Movement established 'The National Council of Education'. Prominent leaders included Sir Gurudas Banerjee, Rash Behari Ghosh and Rabindranath Tagore.
- 1906* A Government report on Japanese system of education was published from Calcutta in the year 1906.
- 1910* On March 19, 1910, Sri Gokhale moved the following Resolution in the imperial Legislative Council, that council recommends a beginning should be made in direction of making elementary education free and compulsory throughout the

country, and that a mixed Commission of the officials and non-officials be appointed at an early date to frame definite proposal.

A Department of Education was created under the Government of India in 1910 but education remained entirely in the hands of Provincial Governments. Prior to 1910, education was under Home Department of the Government of India. Now the Department of Land and Health were also sub-joined to this newly established Department of Education.

- 1912* The elementary education was made free in 1912.
- 1913* The Government of India passed the Resolution on Educational policy on February 21st, 1913.
- 1917* Russian Revolution introduces idea of mass education.
- 1920* Dhaka University was established through the DU Act of 1920.
- 1930* A provincial department of education was established and thus began the process of centralization and bureaucratization of education. The enactment of the Bengal Education code in 1930 was a landmark legislation that created the District School board as the administrative body for primary education.
- 1935* A Central Advisory Board, recommended by the Hertz Committee of 1927, was established to coordinate all aspects of education policy.
- 1937* Provincial autonomy came into operation in 11 provinces. By this time, the importance of education for the regeneration of the country had been accepted in all quarters. Mahatma Gandhi worked out the Wardhra Scheme of education with a view to making primary education for general masses inexpensive and compulsory, practical and beneficial. The scheme embodied the principle of primary education through some basic handicrafts.
- 1945* A separate Education Department was established under the Central Government and its responsibilities were entrusted to a member of the Central Executive.
- 1947* Partition of India into the two independent states of India and Pakistan. First Education Conference was held at Karachi, 27th November – 1st December.
- 1949* Maulana Akram Khan Education Commission established.
- 1951* Second Education Congress was held at Karachi, 4th – 6th December.

- 1952* First Five Year Plan was prepared and education sector got priority.
- 1958* Army rule established and the Sharif Commission on education appointed.
- 1961* The East Pakistan Intermediate and Secondary Education Ordinance of 1961 spelt out the law regarding establishment of managing committees for secondary schools. Based on this ordinance, regulations were framed at various times on such matters as student fees, admission and registration, and terms of teachers' service.
- 1962 –64* Student Movement was created against the Sharif Commission with a demand and they demanded pro-people education policy. In 1964, new Education Commission appointed headed by Justice Hamidur Rahman which submitted report the same year.
- 1969* New Education Commission under Air Marshal Noor Khan appointed after the fall of Ayub regime. Commission submitted report same year.
- 1971* Independent state of Bangladesh born through the War of Liberation.
- 1972* Education Commission appointed under Dr. Kudrat-a-Khuda. Draft report submitted the next year.
- 1974* Primary School (Taking Over) Act passed calling for free primary education and making primary school teachers central government servants. The Act marked a centralization of education administration from the previous District Board based management. Final report of Kudrat-e-Khuda Commission submitted.
- 1978-79* An Advisory Committee appointed which submitted an Interim Education Commission report on 8th February, 1979. The Madrasah Education Ordinance (1978) was issued.
- 1981* The Primary Education Act of 1981 issued as a Decree providing for sub-divisional (now district) Local Education Authorities and formation of School Management Committees. However, this was not followed up by necessary administrative steps for implementation.
- 1987* The informal practice of pre-school (baby class) fell into decay upon opposition from primary school teacher association.
- 1990* The Compulsory Primary Education Act (CPE) was enacted to implement the constitutional provision for free, universal and compulsory education.

- 1991* Act on Non-government Teachers and Employees Welfare Trust passed. Integrated Non-Formal Education Programme (subsequently DNFPE) established.
- 1993* The whole country was brought under CPE program. Food-for-Education programme launched.
- 1995* Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) initiated as the government umbrella programme on formal primary education.
- 1997* Shamsul Haque Education Commission established and report submitted same year.
- 1999* National Plan of Action – 1 approved
- 2000* 'Education for All' policy issued.
- 2001* Moniruzzaman Miah Education Commission established.
- 2002* Stipend Programme and Food-for Education programme are consolidated into a single programme titled Upabritti (Stipend) Project for Primary Education under which 40 percent of all primary students are to be given a monetary stipend. Selection of recipients becomes the responsibility of the Headmaster in association with the School Management Committee and list is to be reviewed and approved by Upazila Education Officer.
- Draft National Plan of Action – 2 finalized.
- 2003* DNFPE abolished.
- 2004* Moniruzzaman Commission submits Report.
400 crore taka Hard-to-reach Children education programme launched.
5000 crore taka PEDP-II launched.
- 2005* PRSP launched.