THE CHANGE OVER TIME: A LONGITUDINAL STUDY OF GOVERNMENT PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract
Bangladesh has made impressive gains towards achieving primary “education for all” over the last two decades. Yet development of primary education poses a daunting challenge because of inaccessibility and resource constraint. The resources which are there are sometimes not properly utilized due to inefficient management or weak support. If active participation by a broad cross section of community members is there, school development process becomes successful and the quality of education is improved in those schools and change happens regardless of many barriers and challenges. Quality of education depends on efficiency on meeting educational goals, relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs and also in the process of school development and the quality of support provided. A longitudinal study was conducted to see change over time in twelve government schools based on a mixture of qualitative and action research methods during one year time span, through support, despite the mentioned challenges and underlying problems. The key findings of the study included the following: (a) sufficient, effective and need based support can bring about change in primary schools; (b) communities are not ‘unconscious’, as is widely believed; (c) narrowing the gap between SMCs and communities is important in order to make schools more accountable to communities and (d) hard to reach children are not given due importance.

Introduction
Bangladesh is one of the world’s poorest countries with average GDP per capita only marginally higher than the dollar a day as per international poverty standards. The disparity between the rich and the poor is widening, the problem of inequality is tremendously increasing, and large segment of the population are facing the threat of systemic marginalization and deprivation. Rural poverty remained more extensive than urban poverty. The government has not successfully devised any exclusive mechanism to address the needs of the poor and to uplift their standard of living. Because of wide spread poverty, many women, girls and children are compelled to work under subhuman condition.

As education plays a vital role for sustainable economic development, primary education lays the foundation for it. The world community has been committed to achieve universal primary education since 1990. Bangladesh as a developing state has shown strong commitment to education. The constitution of Bangladesh states that the basic education is the constitutional right of the citizen. As a result, rapid growth in primary education and even at secondary level took place. It has received international recognition for its strong national commitment to education and the impressive gains it has made towards achieving primary “education for all” over the past two decades.

The successive governments, in fact, did adopt various programmes for the expansion of primary education in the country. As a result of these programmes and various non governmental efforts, progress in primary education enrolment has been exceptional, having reached a gross enrolment rate (GER) of 90% or more according to available statistics. However, the deterioration of quality, high drop-outs and low attendance rate have upset the benefits achieved through rapid expansion of enrolment. Though it has committed to achieve universal primary education of MDG by 2015 but it is not at present on track to achieve the EFA and MDG goals for 2015 or fulfill the constitutional pledge to “extend free and compulsory education to all children.”

The Education Watch study 2006 reveals that public spending on primary education remains low in comparison with other developing countries and insufficient to ensure acceptable quality. Repetition and drop-out (48 percent, base line survey report 2005, DPE) rates remain high, resulting in an inefficient cycle time of 6.6 years. Pupil assessments have found that those who do complete the primary cycle perform on average at a third grade achievement level, lack essential problem-solving skills and almost one third of students leave primary school without acquiring basic competencies. Further, attendance rates for primary school are uniformly low, averaging 58 percent. Not surprisingly, these problems are more acute among socio-economically disadvantaged groups, such as rural population, ethnic minorities, slum-dwellers, and the poor.

Development of primary education poses a daunting challenge because of inaccessibility and resource constraint. The resources which are there are sometimes not properly utilized due to inefficient management or weak support. In some schools the resources are effectively used through effective school development process.

Even though the government is well aware of these problems and still aims to achieve the target of MDGs by taking various measures. The major
A longitudinal study of government primary schools

The purpose of developing schedules in this way was to have rich, qualitative data as well as some quantifiable way of comparing the situation and process of development in each school.

**School Selection:** Schools were selected according to some criteria. The most difficult criterion to check was whether 'something interesting' was happening in the school. The study wanted to ensure the selection of some schools where change was observable.

All of the selected schools were double shift. Two of the schools were attached to a high school. This is often assumed to have a significant impact on the quality of the primary school.

**Location:** The schools covered a variety of locations. Some of the schools were in semi-industrial areas. Others were in semi-urban bazaar. Some were in a rural area. Some rural areas had good communications (e.g. Jamdia) while others were not far from the centre but extremely cut off (e.g. Chanpara in a remote chor/ beel area but only 12k from Atrai).

**Ethnicity:** Only one of the study schools—Shilong—had significant tribal intake. Most of the pupils were Marma, while most of the teachers were Chakma or Bengali. Chotomanika school had some Pahari (Hill area) students.

**Religion:** Most of the schools were in predominantly Muslim areas. Some of them had significant numbers of Hindu students, including Mondashi. Shilong students were mostly Buddhist, with a few Hindu and Muslim students.

**Gender:** Six of the schools had female Head teacher: Alimpur, Gurudia, Shilong, Jamdia, Champara and Mondashi. At Chotomanika, 7/8 Assistant Teachers were female.

**Disability:** A few of the schools had one or two physically disabled students (e.g. Gurudia and Mondashi). On the whole, disabled children were noticeable by their absence and in cases where they did come to school, their experiences highlighted the many challenges in their way (e.g. Mondashi).

All of the schools apart from Shanibari and Alimpur were eligible for stipend. The stipend was emerging as an absolutely critical factor in school-community relations. In some cases it appeared to strengthen these schedules in this way was to have rich, qualitative data as well as some quantifiable way of comparing the situation and process of development in each school.
relations—particularly where community members have been falsely informed or not informed at all. Or the stipend is paid late.

**Field Team Selection and Training:** Field teams of 3 members were selected on the basis of interest, availability and aptitude. One member of each field team was involved in piloting and development of the monitoring schedules. The full team was given a 2-day training and orientation, before field visits started.

**Learning:** The training and support of field team members proved to be much more difficult and time consuming for the core team than originally envisaged, and as a result it became wise to view the first round as a testing ground—as the data may not be very reliable.

In order to tackle these problems, intensive debrief discussions were held with each field team during January 04 to attempt to iron out problems and clarify confusion. Furthermore, central team members accompanied field teams during the second round.

**Visits and Process of Data Collection**

**First Round Visits:** The first round of school visits took place during initial year, when the study started. Field teams visited each school for one day.

**Learning:** In some cases there was little useful or interesting material in the schedules that came back. In other cases the schedules were full of interesting material, but some of the activities had not been understood. A decision was therefore made to hold debrief discussions with each team, partly to discuss any problems that arose and partly for the core team to begin to get a fuller picture of each school than afforded by the schedule.

All the field teams complained of limited time. Second and subsequent rounds were to be 2 full days in each school. The core team then met again for a preliminary analysis of the materials and to plan for next.

**Second Round Visits:** In order to support the field teams and based on process concerns raised during visit 1—the following activities were undertaken:

- A briefing meeting was held before 2nd round school visits

**Implementation of the Learning:** During the second round of school visits field teams visited each school for two days—in contrast to the first round, where each visit was for one day only. There was more consistency in terms of how field teams conducted the visit and how they filled in the schedule.

**Third round visits:** A preparation meeting for field teams was before the third round visit. Specific focus was on the following areas for development identified during the third round:

- Appropriate behaviour for researchers in schools and develop their interview techniques
- Analysis of raw data, demonstrating the careful recording of detailed data obtained in the field on the post visit schedule
- Examine the school development process and possible barriers to change with a view to this information being reflected in the next report
- Examine the ranking activities and consider how they best be used to collect information about school development and change

**Learning:** The researchers reported during the third round that they felt better able to understand and utilize the schedules and the quality of information was found to be good. Debrief discussions were held with each field team.

**Fourth round visits:** The fourth round visits were designed primarily as feedback visits with the following objectives:

- To give members of the school community the opportunity to feedback on team findings
- For researchers and members of the school community to reflect on their experience of the study
- To facilitate discussion among members of the school community to discuss plans for continued development of their school

Although there was some variation between different teams, feedback visits followed a similar general pattern. The first day involved discussions
with key stakeholders. Researchers presented back key findings and ask stakeholders to respond to them. The second day of feedback visits focused on a school-community meeting with the purpose of discussing what happens next. Team members facilitated a discussion at the school.

**Limitations and learning:** There were many advantages to work with teams made up of consultants and DPE (Department of Primary Education) field officers, primarily the knowledge and understanding of issues around school development, as well as the opportunities provided for capacity building. However, availability and pressure of work was a constant problem. Even though the field officers had experience of primary education in the field but many of them as team members (field officers) had little or no experience of working in a research capacity and in many cases it was difficult for them to visit schools to listen and observe. Initially, the core team encouraged them to move further down the continuum of observation and reflection. However, ultimately as the schools began to respond in quite dramatic ways to their inputs the study team realized that this was an opportunity to observe the change process in action and to document and learn from how the field teams were able to adapt with such change.

One of the reasons why it was important to work with team members and DPE officials who have had long exposure to the ideas and methods was that to rely on their attitudes to stakeholders at the school and community level being one based on respect and a belief that everyone (including children, illiterate or unschooled parents) has an important contribution to make and a right to have their say. However, it was found that in some cases ‘traditional attitudes’ were very deep-seated in some team members and they had a tendency to approach their task as ‘inspector’ rather than supportive observer an critical friend.

In a sense this experience was valuable – to illustrate that this approach was a barrier to change and development in the schools, as Head teachers and officials were put on the defensive, did not feel able to discuss openly and freely the challenges facing them and their schools and perpetuated negative attitudes and the blame culture. Conversely, where teams went in with a positive attitude from the beginning, by the 2nd or 3rd visit they had built excellent relationships with members of the school and community and were able to work together in an atmosphere of trust.

Finally, it should be pointed out that the study was immensely time consuming for core team as well as for the field team. This was primarily because the model of ‘decentralized analysis’ originally envisaged (where field teams would discuss & reflect on their experience together immediately after visiting the school) did not work as well as was hoped. It was therefore necessary for members of the core team to hold discussions with the field teams after each visit to draw out key issues and learning’s and to discuss focus areas for the next visit.

**Study Findings**

**The Support of the Upazila Education Officer**

The Upazila Education Officers (UEO) are the second highest tier in the Upazila and has the authority just after the District Primary Education Officer. The UEO is responsible for his or her Upazila. The main responsibility of an UEO is to play the role of education managers. Under an UEO there are AUEOs to assist them through their academic supervision capacity.

The LS shows what can happen as a result of the UEO being supportive of the AUEOs’ schools development work.

For example at Puratia school:

The UEO was not only been aware of the study and supported it, but he was also been instrumental in ensuring that other AUEOs know about it. As a result, two of the other AUEOs have been particularly interested in study and said that they have been using some ideas from it. These include making more frequent visits, discussing with a wider range of stakeholders and observing classes more of a whole school approach in their jobs.

In this case it is clear that the UEO support is crucial not just as manager of the AUEO, whose time and efforts are being taken up by the study. The UEO also provides legitimacy for the work-in many cases AUEOs appear to operate in a vacuum when it comes to professional issues.

One of the things that school stakeholders said repeatedly about the study team was that they provided a direction and focus to the school-something that for whatever reasons they were unable to generate themselves. The UEO could also potentially be the key repository of technical knowledge about school development, without which changes might not have a particular direction or focus.
The community is not ignorant

The Longitudinal study showed that members of the community were extremely keen to participate in the daily life of the school if they are given due importance. This is particularly true for mothers.

For example, at Jamdia school:

There were also significant changes in terms of community participation. For example, the Head teacher organized a yard meeting for mothers to discuss their children’s progress by the Head teacher. Furthermore, the team noticed that every day, SMC (School Managing Committee) members came to the school yard, mothers talked to them when they came to pick up their children. This initiative was started by the SMC as they came to understand the need to focus more strongly on teaching and learning. The team had been particularly surprised at the extent to which mothers have been prepared to get involved in the school, once given the opportunity. They remarked that at any one time they could call mothers to the school and ‘more than a hundred would come.’

This example shows how they were encouraged to come to school by both Head teacher and SMC and how they responded enthusiastically. This suggests firstly that the key barrier to participation is not ignorance but the importance of education, or a lack of value placed upon education. Rather it suggests that the main barriers are lack of knowledge of how to go about getting involved; a belief that their contributions are not wanted or needed; and a lack of self esteem. For example at Lakhinder School, a group of mothers said that initially, ‘no one called us, we have a right to come here, it is our school, we didn’t realise.’ These factors are all inextricably linked with the extreme social hierarchies that exist even at the school level, between for example Head teacher and parents, or SMC chair and parents.

A further example comes from Hasnath Memorial school, where initially there was little engagement with, or interest from parents.

A huge increase in interest in the school in the part of parents is evident, most clearly demonstrated by parents’ demand to be involved in SMC elections. Since nationalization of this school in 1985 SMC have simply been appointed without election. This time, parents explained that they wanted to take part in SMC elections because ‘the SMC is the key body and we want to elect people who can do the job.’

Generally speaking parents were coming to school more frequently, and talking to the Head teacher more readily.

It seems clear that the process of the longitudinal study, which involved team member seeking out parents and community members in their own environment, sitting and listening to their concerns, was in itself a considerable spur to increased community participation and models the type of engagement that is required from the headmasters, teachers, SMCs and AUEOs.

Community support is good for children and good for the school

It is also clear that there are distinct benefits for the school, and for children in particular from an increase in community engagement.

The team also reports increased attendance rates (90%) and improved teaching and learning due to a number of factors, including weekly tests, academic supervision, mothers’ initiatives, and SMC visits to the community. (Jamdia school)

This example from Lakhindar describes the headmasters’s gradual change in attitudes, and the beginning of a partnership between parents, headmasters, SMC.

According to the community, the headmasters has become much more active. His change in attitude is clear in that at first he commented that the community is ignorant, but by the third visit he was making regular community visits. The headmaster and the SMC together had initiated a system of home visits to tackle absenteeism: if a child is absent, a member of the SMC will go immediately to visit the child home, and the child’s parents will need to fill a form. At first visit, attendance was 60%; by the second visit, it has risen to 75%. (Lakhindar school)

At Lakhindar school, when asked to explain how the LS had help, they said that it ‘gave the stakeholders a way to come to the school’. There seems to have been an understanding at this school that the community can help to build a sense of accountability among school staffs & officials.

At Rahmathpur, ‘awareness of guardians’ was seem to be a key factors in positive change in the school.
Little support can encourage creative approach
The study shows that schools can with a little support come up with creative and appropriate solutions to the poor student achievement.

For example at Jamdia school:
Jamdia started a night school for all students but focus on those subjects that are considered ‘weak’, in particular Math and English. The poor parents particularly appreciated this initiative of night school as they cannot afford lamp oil (kerosene) for their children to study in the evenings. This improved second terminal exam.

This is one example where the initiative could not have happened without the active support of parents.

Others example of where the initiatives to improve student achievement include- early start (Rahmathpur), moving ‘slow learners’ to the front of the class, pairing good students with weaker students & using local materials as teaching aid (Lakhindar)

Further more, it was clear that efforts have been made to improve the classroom environment with support from the study team. For example, classrooms have been rearranged to facilitate group work, visual aid and school time table clearly displayed. A new teacher had been recruited since the third visit, and the team discussed with him how to plan lessons. Parents reported teaching is going well, and that results of the last terminal exam had improved. (chanpara)

The study also shows that, in most cases, student achievement is reported to have improved. In most cases this was based on terminal exam results.

The potential of the school as a focal point for other development issues
Interestingly, it seemed that the school has also become something of a focal point for wider community issues. The SMC chairman stated that they have learnt to solve issues (such as stipend selection, renovations) democratically, by forming a committee that includes members of the wider community. This has extended to issues that reach beyond the school, for example discussions about security and how to deal with the police and the increase in ‘terrorist’ groups in the area.

Replication of good practices
The study provides a good example of how positive changes can spread further.

Another interesting change at this school is that some of the changes and initiatives have become well known in the area. The team reports that people in the locality were constantly talking about the school and its improvement. Children have left others schools to join this school. The headmaster of a neighboring school has started to visit Jamdia to talk to the head teacher about how to develop his school. He was talking about starting a night school at his school too. This was a very encouraging sign of good ideas and initiatives spreading, driven by locally identified needs and priorities.

Observations
Role of the AUEO:
This LS reveals that extent to which the AUEO is aware of key issues in relation to school development and demonstrates behaviour and attitudes that are supportive of school development. For example the extent to which he or she has been involved in developing and implementing the key processes in the school for monitoring and development, and can explain how they prioritise teaching and learning as part of their revised role.

It can be concluded that generally speaking, AUEOs are disengaged from school life. However, it is important to recognise that AUEOs are often struggling with impossible workloads and difficult working conditions. What can be assumed that when AUEOs are often do engage, the impact can be huge as the support of Longitudinal Team like AUEOs visit has proved.

We should however bear in mind the many limitations that AUEOs face in offering effective support. For example, the school is two and half-hours by cars from the upazilla office. The AUEO has no car, a tiny transport
fund and is required to report first to the upazilla office every morning – no wonder that he tries to meet the headmaster at his office.

At Jamdia, the AUEO is described exceptionally good. Parents confirm that he has visited them to discuss absentee students. Sanibari GPS also has a strong AUEO. He has quickly built an excellent relationship with headmaster, who reports that the AUEO gives support for improvement of the school. However, due to unfilled posts this AUEO also has responsibility for 3 clusters, adding up to 80 schools. He admits that he cannot give time for academic supervision or improving teaching skills - which he has to focus on management issues.

The Longitudinal Study team was able in some cases to support change with the AUEOs clearly felt threatened by it. It was able to support change in the sense of providing an incentive and professional support for AUEOs but nobody can do anything about the systematic problems that effectively mitigate against AUEOs visiting schools and taking a more active role in school development.

**Activeness of School Managing Committee (SMC)**

In the twelve study schools, the picture that emerges is one of the SMCs where in most cases only two or three people were really active. However, this was not necessarily negative, as for example in Lakindar where the two really active members have motivated the rest of the SMCs to be involved in the school. There was marked difference in levels of involvement of SMCs between the more rural, isolated schools and the urban and the semi urban ones. The election of new SMCs enabled the team to observe a strong impact on the process of SMC formation from the Longitudinal study.

Jamdia School had a very strong SMC, members recognize that their main purpose is not just to improve 'external beauty' of the school. Parents report that they know SMC members, and that the SMC members care about their children. When asked why this SMC chair does not have a strong sense of hierarchy-for example at functions he will sit among the parents, rather than up on the stage - considered quite unusual. 'He respects the local people and they respected him.'

There were many examples of the opposite attitude, and it is clear that SMC members assume - or derive - plenty of local power from their position. At Mondashi, for example, the SMC chair asks 'why do we need community people? We are enough.' This attitude was particularly common in semi-urban or industrialized areas. Conversely – in rural schools such as Shilong and Chanpara there was little difference between SMC members and the wider community. Upazilla offices were distant and the school draws a lot more support from SMC and parents.

The Longitudinal Study process itself influenced not only the way SMCs were functioning but the process of election of new SMCs. For example at Lakhindar, members of the community expressed an interest in being on the SMC because of the LS visits – in particular they valued training, exposure to outsiders and the status that implies. In other cases it was clear that the discussions the team had been having with the community had raised their interest in the SMC and encouraged them to take an interest in the election process, e.g. at Mondashi and Hasanath Memorial

**Relationship between Head Teacher and Assistant Teacher**

Key findings here were the extremely low standards of teaching and learning across the board; common tendency for conflict between Head teacher and Teachers, lack of confidence, motivation and support for Assistant teachers; the dramatic improvements during the Longitudinal Study period.

Although the team did not sought to measure improvements in any systematic way, the sample reinforces the findings of other studies, which show extremely low standards of teaching and learning. There were some cases of professional negligence (teachers not even bothering to go to the classroom to teach) the overwhelming impression is one of the teachers with low educational/skills base themselves who have never been exposed to any other methods than the dominant ones and, crucially, have no incentive to try to improve or change in any way. Furthermore, teachers tend to blame by parents and the system.

One possible exception to this is Shanibari, where the Head teacher holds regular academic meetings at the start of the year to discuss annual work plans developed according to NCTB (National Curriculum of Textbook Board) subject competencies. He then meets with them fortnightly in order to monitor the plan and to deal with any issues arising.

Nevertheless there were chinks of light, for example the spread of innovative teaching practices observed at Puratia, and supported by the AUEO. Elsewhere, changes seem to be due to pressure exerted by the longitudinal study team to introduce Academic Supervision. At Gurudia,
Assistant Teachers were so enthused by this initiative that they memorized the teacher competencies. Teachers responded positively to the opportunity for regular meetings and discussions with Head teacher and AUEO on professional issues.

Further more, with guidance, support and encouragement from the longitudinal study team, teachers at several schools introduced simple practices to improve the quality of teaching and learning, for example, putting ‘slow learners’ on the front benches, opening the school early for extra classes. The problems perhaps that without specific training for the teachers, is that they simply don’t have the knowledge or experience or confidence to introduce improvements themselves.

Involvement of Parents

It was found that parents were rarely actively involved in school life or in their children’s learning. However, when invited, and when questioned, parents were willing and interested to give up their time to support the school. In some cases, it was seen changes in attitude from Head teachers and SMC towards parents-backed up by an increase in home and community visits.

Although the study has seen an increase in visits to community (for example at Rahmathpur), there was little evidence among the sample of parents being involved and consulted in school development planning. At Mondashi, parents say that they have been invited to various functions—but that it never happened before Longitudinal Study visits.

Whether the stipend has a positive or negative impact on school community relations seems to depend to a great extent on how the school chooses to deal with it. At Lakhindar, it is encouraging that mothers took their concerns about their children’s achievements in English and spoke to SMC members about it–SMC members discussed it with teachers who are now considering what action to take. Some Parents reported that their children are asking them to bring lamps to school so that they can study in the evenings – and see this as a positive sign that they are being pushed more.

What we can see that community support can be much broader than this – coming to the school, showing an interest, talking to teachers and Head teachers about their children’s progress.

How the longitudinal study team had an effect in the increase in community participation? The team in many cases went to see parents and asked them question about education related issues. At Chanpara, parents said that the Longitudinal Study visits are more useful than training, and that they learn from questioning.

Opinions of Children

During the piloting the tools for the longitudinal study it soon became clear that often children were saying some of the most perceptive and useful things that the team heard at school level –e.g. what goes on in the classroom, attitudes to children. There is also some evidence of children becoming more actively involved in development activities and Head teachers beginning to discuss decisions with children.

Children from Hasnath memorial said that it would be better if activities at the school were discussed with them first. They say they have little opportunity to talk in the classroom—only read and respond to questions. They know that results were poor, but ‘out of fear they could not tell anything to the teachers, neither teachers tell anything to them.

Gurudia GPS shows that even very small initiatives – such as increasing the number of benches – can have a huge impact on children. At Gurudia, the children reported that since getting more benches they are happier, more comfortable and more willing to come to school. At this school children had also taken the initiative to deal with the problem of their toilet.

At Chanpara, children had become actively involved in developing and maintaining the flower garden. They said ‘we love flowers, the school looks delightful, so we love to work in the garden.’ Similarly, at Hasnath, students expressed interest and delight in the new computers supplied by the SMC chair.

Children were positive about extra classes for slow learners at Rahmathpur. Also at Mondashi, they gave positive feedback about the use of different teaching learning technique in some of the classes, as well as weekly testing.

The fact that different children experience school in different ways is clearly illustrated by the experience of Hill children at Chotomanika – where the team observed that despite excellent efforts on the part of the school to encourage their attendance, they were not accepted by the Bengali children. This initiative came about as a result of team observation that students from poorer families had a tendency to remain
silent in class proving that; ethnic minority still is a problem and excluded!
Even the disable children did not raise their voice and were silent.

Despite the fact that students have clearly taken pride in their garden,
generally speaking the students at Chanpara were shy and withdrawn,
saying that teachers punish them if they can’t read or respond to a question. Similar at Shilong, where they could not say what they wanted
in life, and ‘their speaking ability is poor’. This is a contrast with the
confident children from Lakhindar who said that good teaching is the point
of school development. ‘A good school does not depend only on tree
plantation; it also depends on good reading and writing.’

In general the Longitudinal Study team noticed that children were
always positive about their teachers – they were very defensive about
their teachers. This is despite the evidence that in some schools children
are intimidated by the punitive environment created by teachers.

At Lakhindar, the Headteachers has taken the small but significant
step of consulting children about how to run the sports day – according to
the Longitudinal Study team, he was probably inspired by observing their
discussion with children about school development.

Strong parent and community support
This is very rarely there. In most cases, parents aren’t that aware of
what is going on at the school, and have a feeling that they have no right
to ask. Once given the opportunity their desire to get involve is
praiseworthy. Sometimes there are negative experiences of Community
Participation - e.g. at Rahmathpur. One case where Community
Participation is exceptional – Chanpara. The team often commented
that it is the most remote schools, where people have to fall back on their
resources. Where it happens very little – e.g. Shanibari – parents are
busy, system support is there.

Effective support from the education system
This is not really there at all, except in exceptional situations, AUEOs
are at the front line and in most cases they are unable to offer the kind of
support schools need for a variety of reasons, like too much work load and
responsibility of too many schools, vacant position, poor pay & motivation,
lack of skills etc. But there were some exceptional AUEOs – e.g. Jamdia,
Puratia. Schools can get ahead without much AUEO support (e.g. Chanpara).
LS have shown the dire impact of lack of AUEOs on schools; but also how
strong AUEO can turn the school around.

Material support (teacher development; text books; facilities)
In most of the LS schools these things were unavailable. In the case
of teacher development – most teachers had never had training other
than their Certificate in Ed (C in Ed). It was assumed that HT’s would
pass on their training to Assistant Teachers.

Assistant teachers responded well however when Headteachers were
tasked with introducing the teacher competencies, record of professional
development file and academic supervision suggested by LS team. None
of them were doing this by themselves.

At many schools the facilities were miserably inadequate. Very basic
things like benches, tables, and sanitation were of concern.

However if the school desired they were able to do a lot to improve the
situation by themselves, with the help of community like Chanpara.

It was observed that the indirect teacher support through different
training was not adequate - unless the Headteacher is supported &
supervised.

Also shown that the school environment and facilities can be
dramatically improved, if all worked together. To do with having some
pride in the school.

How LS has contributed?
LS team supported in more effective leadership. It helped to build
communication & relationships significantly – but also management of
teaching & learning, focusing on processes. Helped in translating the
theory into practice.

LS have turned academic supervision from a theory, or a half hearted
practice, into reality, by making sure that Headteachers to do it. Feedback
from teachers and children was very positive.

School Climate
· Expectations of students - although the study did not explore this
directly, the team members have to push hard to have discussions
with students. Some evidence of parents having low expectations
– e.g. parents at Hasnath Memorial who said ‘teachers are good;
my child’s merit is very poor’. They did not have any expectation
from the school. Children were very in different.
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- **Teacher attitude** - Very little evidence of this from LS schools. Most of the teachers from LS schools had negative attitude.

- **Order and discipline** - Beating was very common punishment in the LS schools.

- **Curriculum** - As all the schools were government schools they followed the national curriculum, highly organized but highly centralized.

- **Recognition** - None of the LS schools had rewards and incentives system to recognize the children performance in the class.

The team introduced through their visits the process of conducting academic supervision process. Most LS schools report significant improvement in teacher attitude. LS focus on talking with children & hearing their concerns.

Rewards & incentives – interesting that initially schools expected something from the LS team. When they came back 2nd time – a few were not interested or motivated. But when they came 3rd & 4th time, they realized there was something in it for them. Somehow been able to encourage ownership.

**Teaching Learning Process**

- **Learning time** - although the main focus of the LS was not on classroom-but the team did observe classes & talk to children about their classes – there was not much evidence of spending high time in the class.

- **Teaching strategies** - Most of the schools used traditional lecture oriented methods in the classroom.

- **Homework** - LS didn’t really focus on this – but it was discovered that often home work was a problem for poorer children in particular because they have no light to study by. Moreover, there parents were not literate to provide academic support after school hour. This sometimes pushed them for private tutoring.

- **Student assessment and feedback** - During the study in many of the schools a new initiative was brought in with weekly testing. There are many drawbacks to this (even less time on learning, for example) but parents and children responded enthusiastically. Would need observing properly – particularly to see how effective feedback is.

Support for implementation of academic supervision – more systematic approach to teacher support.

Input from experienced consultants and master trainers has enabled schools to start some interesting initiatives that fit their purposes – e.g. night school, early classes, pairing slower learners, moving slow learners to the front.

**Recommendations**

The following recommendation are made on the basis of the observation the team had during the study and which is also shared above.

**Field staff (AUEOs in particular) must be encouraged and enable with the reality of schools and peoples lives**

Improving schools is very difficult. Proper and effective support can bring about change and can improve a school. It is found that once every 3 months support, which is within the reach of AUEOs – is sufficient. A visit only for the sake of visit will not be an effective one. An effective visit would involve meeting key stakeholders of the school & community and discussing quality issues with them. It would involve listening and engaging, rather than imposing and telling. The visits which the study Team provided once every three month is sufficient for an AUEO to visit. The longitudinal study proved how the visits of an AUEO can be done within their stipulated time for school visit.

**Training must be followed up, and must be supported and must be backed up from above:**

As government gives priority to improve the condition of primary education system it gave emphasis to build the capacities of the field level officers like AUEO / HTs, teachers but for the weak monitoring system it becomes difficult to ensure that the training knowledge are implemented in the field. Training remains within the person but not translated into action. The environment is not supportive to motivate the trained person to carry on their duty in a smooth and systematic manner. Training is not enough to ensure this. Therefore, whatever training they received, it must be followed up and monitored to ensure that it is translated into action. The system should support this through issuing orders and implementing rules otherwise they have a tendency to avoid responsibilities giving various reasons.
Give emphasis for community participation through the system:

Parents are not ‘unconscious’ in the way that is traditionally meant (i.e., disinterested, not valuing education). They are sometimes uninformed—as are the majority of stakeholders—and the responsibility is on the system to improve information flow & to familiarize themselves with situation in schools. Once the door is open to parents & other communities they will show themselves to be enthusiastic and valuable—particularly in terms of building accountability of schools. But this can only work if school & SMC officials start to value the contribution of parents. Proper action should be taken by the authority to ensure community participation in the schools so they can take measures to reduce drop out and ensure quality through then request visits and different steps.

Gender considerations must be thought through and included in any approach in building community participation

There is a particular gender aspect to this—in that since so many fathers work away from the home it is mothers who will pick up the bulk of parental responsibility in relation to school—and it is particular hard for mothers to be heard by (mostly male) Head teachers, Teachers and SMC members.

Support during SMC elections is crucial—a good opportunity to ensure transparency and build ownership as well as for example publicizing the fact that any guardian can stand. This is particularly the case for mothers (see previous point) who often don’t know that they are eligible to stand and may lack the confidence to do so.

Conclusions

Despite progress in access to primary education in Bangladesh development of primary education and of the school poses a daunting challenge because of inaccessibility and resource constraint. School development means that the functionality improve in those parts that a school is built of and that the functions of the parts are coordinated in a way that the school as a whole better succeed in its strivings. To understand and explain school organizations development there is a need to make the inner parts of schools and its infrastructure apparent. The intense school development is a dynamic process which imply that conscious and knowledge based changes are incorporated in the local school culture.

The resources which are there are sometimes not properly utilized due to inefficient management or weak support. In some schools the resources are effectively used through effective school development process. If active participation by a broad cross section of community members is there school development process becomes successful and the quality of education is improved in those schools and change happens regardless of many barriers and challenges. Quality of education depends on efficiency on meeting educational goals, relevance to human and environmental conditions and needs and also in the process of school development and the quality of support provided. Community is defined in many ways. A community is a group of people who live in the same area, or share the same religion, culture or language. Community can also be understood as a set of values, solidarity, commitment, mutuality and trust.

This is important for us to bear in mind when considering communities interests and needs in relation to schooling—that it may be more difficult for some groups of people to articulate their needs and interests. For example, SMCs are always assumed to represent community interests, whereas in fact they may represent the interest of an elite group. A stakeholder analysis is a useful tool for helping people to analyse differences and divisions within the community. Community participation can be defined ‘as the creations of opportunities to enable all members of a community to actively contribute to and influence the developments process and to share equitably in the fruits of developments.

As it was observed that Longitudinal Study visits are more useful than training, and that they learn from questioning the visits of the AUEOs to provide quality support with the community people and school can do a lot to improve the schools and the quality of education.

In order to make the compulsory free primary education program successful, the nation has to solve the problems that stand in the way of enrollment and promote drop-out involving cross sectional people and community. The recommendations suggested can help in formulating a strategy for school development and reduce drop-out in our primary education.
Notes

1 Education Watch 2006 Financing Primary and Secondary Education in Bangladesh. Overview

2 Renewed hope/Daunting Challenges. Education Watch 2000. BANBESIS reports 61 percent

References

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