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BANGLADESH

Pre-primary Education and
The School Learning Improvement Plan

CASE STUDY

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Coordinator: Malisa Santigul

Editor: Ellie Meleisea

Graphic designer: Umaporn Tang-on

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Acronyms

BDT	Bangladeshi taka
BRAC	Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee
DPE	Directorate of Primary Education
ECD	Early childhood development
EFA	Education for All
FGD	Focus group discussion
GEM	Global EFA Meeting
GO-NGO	Government and non-government organization
GPS	Government primary schools
JFIT	Japanese Funds-in-Trust
MoPME	Ministry of Primary and Mass Education
NAPE	National Academy for Primary Education
NCTB	National Curriculum and Textbook Board
NFE	Non-formal education
NGO	Non-governmental organization
PEDP	Primary Education Development Programme
PPE	Pre-primary education
RNGPS	Registered non-governmental primary schools
SLIP	School Learning Improvement Plan
SMC	School management committee
UEO	Upazila Education Office
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UPEP	Upazila Primary Education Plan
USD	United States dollar

Preface

There has been significant progress towards the six EFA goals, however, all available indicators are pointing to a bitter reality that EFA will be an “unfinished business”. The 2013/4 EFA Global Monitoring Report has concluded that with less than two years until the 2015 deadline, the world is not on track. Amidst the many challenges, many countries have demonstrated how achievements can be made with the commitment from government, expanded partnerships, innovative thinking and efficient use of resources. There are lessons to be learned.

At the Global EFA Meeting (GEM) in Paris in November 2012, Ministers, heads of delegations, leading officials of multilateral and bilateral organizations, and senior representatives of civil society and private sector organizations, including those from Asia-Pacific, committed to the “Big Push”. The GEM participants called upon governments and EFA partners to identify successful initiatives and innovative practices and to adapt, replicate, or scale-up such initiatives to speed up EFA progress.

Subsequently, the 13th Regional Meeting of National EFA Coordinators: The Big Push, which was organized in Bangkok, Thailand on 26–27 February 2013 as a follow up to the GEM, underscored the need for increased knowledge on innovative and creative ways of addressing EFA challenges so as to inform policy-making and programme development on EFA. To this end, the meeting requested UNESCO Bangkok to document innovative approaches and effective practices from countries that have succeeded in transforming EFA goals into concrete realities and to disseminate this knowledge for the benefit of all countries.

The Asia-Pacific region is full of successful initiatives, with stories of good practices in almost every country. Over the years, UNESCO has documented these practices to share them with a wider audience. These five country case studies provide in-depth understanding of promising initiatives that are critical in EFA acceleration in Asia-Pacific. While this research attempts to gather evidence on successful initiatives that have helped countries to accelerate EFA progress, it should be noted that these case studies are some examples selected from a vast pool of equally promising EFA practices in this region.

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1

Introduction

1.1 Background

Bangladesh, located in South Asia, has an area of 147,570 square kilometres. The country's population is over 150 million and almost one third of the population is aged under 15 (UN Statistics, 2013).

In Bangladesh, education is compulsory for children aged 6 to 10, covering five years of primary school. Bangladesh has almost 20 million children enrolled in grades 1 to 5¹, including an estimated 1.5 million learners participating in non-formal primary education (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014; Islam, 2013), and around 8 million students are enrolled at the secondary level (Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics, 2012).

Children attend a variety of school types: government schools, non-governmental (non-formal) schools and madrasas (religious schools) (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). These schools vary in terms of teacher quality and performance, buildings and facilities and teacher-student ratios. They also vary in terms of provisions for pre-primary education (Ahmed et al., 2011).

The management of the education system falls under two ministries, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME), which is responsible for primary education, including pre-primary and mass literacy, and the Ministry of Education, which is responsible for secondary, vocational and tertiary education.

1.2 Progress towards the EFA goals

Since the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (EFA) held in Jomtien, Thailand, significant progress has been made in Bangladesh with regard to expanding access to formal, free and compulsory primary education, literacy education and non-formal education (NFE), as a result of EFA-focused initiatives taken by the government and by non-governmental actors with government and donor support.

The 2011 Bangladesh Millennium Development Goals Progress Report (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and UNDP 2011) shows that Bangladesh has had two areas of success that stand out. The first was the country's remarkable expansion of access to primary education, reaching close to universal access. Gross primary enrolment rates rose from 90 per cent in the late 1990s to over 100 per cent by 2012. The second success was the elimination of the gender gap in access and participation in primary and secondary education. Gender parity in access to primary

¹ These children are not all within the 6–10 age bracket. Children aged below 6 and children aged above 10 are also enrolled in primary education. The size of the population aged 6–10 is around 18 million (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014).

education has been achieved and the ratio of female to male students in primary education is currently 51:49 (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). Bangladesh has thus achieved EFA Goal 2 (Compulsory Primary Education for All) and Goal 5 (Gender Parity).

The successes so far are a result of a high level of government and national commitment to EFA, which has been reflected in a range of proactive measures undertaken in recent years, including expansion of schooling provisions, incentives in the form of conditional cash transfers (stipends) to induce poor and disadvantaged groups to send their children to school, distribution of free textbooks, and social mobilization and awareness-raising.

1.3 Challenges

While significant progress has been made since 1990, broad challenges remain that affect children's access to schools and their performance while at school, and which also affect the performance of the schools in delivering good-quality services to students. Although improvements have been seen, the performance of all types of schools is less than acceptable in terms of meaningful participation and learning outcomes (Ahmed et al., 2011).

While the urban population is better off, in general, than its rural counterpart in terms of access to educational services, the rapidly-growing populations of the poor urban slums have been underserved by both the government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). There is a subset of households that are extremely poor (roughly the poorest quintile), for whom the costs of even the cheapest education are prohibitive (Cameron, 2011).

Roads and transportation have major implications for enrolment ratios – especially for rural girls' enrolment and attendance rates. The distances of schools from residences in some areas, and the lengthy travel times and high transport costs in these areas discourage parents and guardians from sending children to school (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and UNDP, 2009).

Another issue affecting enrolment and retention rates is that although there is a notional catchment area for government primary schools (GPS) and registered non-governmental primary schools (RNGPS), children are not required to be enrolled in the neighbourhood school, nor are schools required to enrol all children from the neighbourhood who seek admission. There is also no rigorous or systematic planning for geographical distribution of schools so as to make provisions for the schooling of all children for a geographical unit (Sabur and Ahmed, 2011).

The category of 'silent exclusion' describes a significant proportion of children who are enrolled in school, but are not effectively engaged in learning. The characteristics of these students include poor attendance, grade repetition and poor performance in class activities and examinations, all of which make them vulnerable to dropping out. Studies indicate that this category comprises between one fifth and one quarter of primary school students in Bangladesh (Ahmed et al., 2011).

Unfavourable teacher-student ratios, insufficient contact hours, poor teacher training, inadequate physical facilities and low-quality textbooks and materials are other significant factors that contribute to low attendance rates. The high student-teacher ratio and low contact hours are major factors in poor student performance (Ahmed et al., 2011). Furthermore, low salaries received by teachers serve as an impediment to recruiting and retaining staff, and thus contribute to the low quality of education provided at schools and subsequent low levels of attendance and retention (Sommers, 2011).

These deficits can be explained by the low overall public resources allocated for all education including the primary stage and pre-primary education. For primary education, including pre-primary, it has remained less than 1 per cent of gross domestic product in recent years, one of the lowest worldwide, even among developing countries (Ahmed et al., 2011).

Although there are district and sub-district offices to oversee the schools, primary education in Bangladesh is basically governed from the central office located in the capital. As a consequence, the school management committees (SMCs) are unable to function as required. This centralization is also a barrier to developing local level leadership, which is vital for an effectively functioning primary education system. Furthermore, the lack of decentralization hampers coordination among the various types of primary schools towards achieving good quality education for all.

1.4 Government programmes

It is in the larger context of these challenges that various initiatives have been undertaken in Bangladesh with government lead. The second phase of the Primary Education Development Programme, PEDP II (2004–2011), was developed to address the various issues relating to the quality of education and to accelerate the achievement of the EFA goals. PEDP II was jointly financed by the government and 11 development partners under the MoPME. The government, with support from development partners, then developed a follow-on programme (PEDP III, 2011–2015) based on the lessons learned and the government's priorities, as articulated in the Second National Plan of Action, the National Strategy for Accelerated Poverty Reduction, the National Education Policy and other related documents.

1.5 Purpose and methods of the case study

This case study about promising EFA initiatives in Bangladesh was commissioned by UNESCO Bangkok as one of five country case studies from the Asia-Pacific region that, when combined, provide a comprehensive overview of successful and innovative initiatives that have been critical to the acceleration of EFA in the region.

Among the policy and strategy steps in Bangladesh that have contributed to positive changes in terms of intensifying the EFA effort, the two highlighted in this case study are the pre-primary education (PPE) initiative and the School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP) programme.

The study began with a desk review of the overall EFA situation in Bangladesh, based on government and non-government documents and reports. At this time an analytical framework was developed for the review of secondary sources and for field work, identifying key issues and concerns and relevant information to be examined. The desk review involved triangulating qualitative and quantitative information from secondary and primary sources, and identifying the nature of conclusions and lessons expected and the types of potential recommendations and their use.

The desk review was followed by an in-depth field investigation in 15 primary education institutions (10 public schools and five NGO-run PPE facilities) in which the research team examined the application of PPE and SLIP principles, methods and activities. The institutions were selected to represent geographical size and management variations. As part of this investigation, the research team examined school records and data, made observations of school and classroom operations, and conducted focus group discussions (FGD) with teachers, SMCs, parents and students. Guidelines and checklists were prepared prior to these school visits and FGDs.

2

Promising EFA initiatives

2.1 Context

In the run-up to 2015, the remaining EFA challenges in Bangladesh are to: (1) create the conditions for both boys and girls to complete primary education and (2) enable all children to achieve good learning outcomes at school.

An important strategy for achieving higher completion rates and better learning outcomes at the primary level is to ensure that all children have access to good-quality pre-primary education of at least a year's duration.

Pre-primary education, also known as early childhood care and education (ECCE), helps shape children's developing brains, endowing children with the cognitive and non-cognitive skills they need to participate effectively when they enter primary school; enabling them to achieve good results and complete their primary education.

Another important strategy for enabling children to complete primary school and to achieve better results is to ensure that schools have the facilities, tools and skills required to offer high-quality education. Supporting schools to overcome the obstacles they face results in better conditions for teaching and learning, and better opportunities for children to succeed.

Bangladesh introduced two measures in this regard: i) the Pre-Primary Education (PPE) initiative, which aims to provide all children aged between 5 and 6 with one year of pre-school and focuses attention on preparing children from disadvantaged home environments for formal school, and ii) the School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP) initiative, which supports schools to address specific local constraints and improve school operations by engaging school management committees, teachers and parents.

The government launched the PPE initiative under PEDP II (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014). The adoption of this strategy was motivated by the government's recognition of the benefits of good-quality pre-primary education, and resulted from evidence-based advocacy by national and international NGOs.

The SLIP initiative was begun with the aim of improving the quality of education at the school level. It involves providing modest amounts of funds to schools to manage and implement activities according to their own identified school improvement needs. It also engages SMCs, teachers and parents in improving school operations. While improving the quality of education, this initiative was also a step towards decentralization of education through empowering the schools to manage their own affairs and promoting the role of the community in education. SLIP encourages reform at the school level – the school being, ultimately, the locus of action for where improvement of learning must happen.

These two initiatives are the subject of the present case study and are noteworthy for the promise and potential they hold for addressing challenges in intensifying the EFA effort. In particular, these initiatives have been a significant part of the government's effort to accelerate progress towards achieving EFA Goal 1 (Early Childhood Care and Education) and Goal 6 (Quality of Education) in Bangladesh. They were incorporated into PEDP II and continued under PEDP III, and draw on approaches that were first initiated and practiced for some time by non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

2.2 Aims and evolution of the PPE initiative

The Pre-Primary Education initiative aims to provide one year of education to young children aged between 5 and 6, to foster their physical and mental preparation before they enter into Grade 1 of primary school. The pre-primary classes are popularly referred to as 'baby classes'.

The operational framework for the development of the PPE initiative, formulated collaboratively with NGOs and the Bangladesh Early Childhood Development (ECD) Network, was approved by the MoPME and taken up for implementation in 2010 under PEDP II. This operational framework envisaged institutionalization of PPE through the development of curriculum and learning materials, the recruitment of PPE teachers and the provision of professional support to those teachers.

The MoPME and the Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) have undertaken several initiatives over the years to expand pre-primary education, involving various actors, including NGOs. Under PEDP II, orientation was given to concerned education officials and an interim curricular package was prepared to introduce pre-primary education in about 37,000 government primary schools. The government also approved guidelines for collaboration between government and non-governmental organizations (GO-NGO) and prepared a GO-NGO implementation plan, based on the guidelines, which created options for NGOs to work with government in universalizing good quality pre-primary education.

A PPE curriculum was developed and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) prepared the learning materials on the basis of the approved curriculum. A training manual for a 15-day short course for PPE teachers was developed by the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), the NCTB and the DPE in consultation with other stakeholders, including NGOs.

An initial grant of 5,000 Bangladeshi taka (BDT), equivalent to approximately 63 United States dollars (USD),² was provided to each government primary school to enable the schools to prepare and procure supplementary teaching-learning materials to be used in the PPE classrooms. The PPE grant was supplemented by part of an allocation the schools were given for the implementation of the SLIP programme. A total of 37,672 additional assistant teacher posts (one for each GPS) were approved by the Ministry of Finance for staffing of PPE classes, with over 15,000 teachers recruited as of November 2013.

Building on the experience gained and progress made under PEDP II, the PPE became an important sub-component of the new sector-wide programme, PEDP III. Under PEDP III the aim of the PPE initiative was adjusted, becoming: to create permanent structures for PPE in the primary education system and gradually provide standardized services for all children.

² 1 USD = 79 BDT

2.3 Aims and evolution of the SLIP initiative

The School-Level Improvement Plan, re-named the School Learning Improvement Plan (SLIP) under PEDP III, is intended to improve learning outcomes and primary enrolment and completion rates through encouraging decentralization, increasing local input into school management and enhancing relations between schools and local communities.

The SLIP initiative began as a pilot in 13 upazilas (sub-districts) in 2007, preceded by a pre-pilot phase in six other sub-districts in 2006 to trial the core procedures. In 2008 and 2009, around 40 Upazila Education Offices (UEO) were established to support the expansion of SLIP in the remaining sub-districts of Bangladesh. Scaling-up began in 2009, providing sub-districts with technical and financial support for overall improvement in the quality of primary education. As of 2013, SLIP was operational in the GPS of 280 of the 469 sub-districts of Bangladesh.

PEDP II envisaged decentralization as an implementation strategy for improving quality and equity in primary education. The aim was to encourage active involvement of stakeholders at the grassroots level in planning, implementing and monitoring educational activities for children. PEDP III aims to take the SLIP initiative further and promote the decentralization of a more extensive set of education functions.

The SLIP initiative was supported by the provision of school-level improvement planning grants, which were continued and scaled up under PEDP III. In financial year 2012/13, 31,807 schools, comprising 20,800 GPS and 11,007 RNGPS, were each provided with SLIP grants of BDT30,000 (approximately USD400) covering 53 districts and 280 sub-districts; a total allocation of BDT955 million (USD 12 million). Fifty sub-districts in 26 districts were also provided with training and with funding for UPEP preparation costs at the rate of BDT10,000 per sub-district (USD120), adding up to a total cost of BDT500,000.

SLIP promotes a bottom-up planning process, as does the process of preparing an Upazila Primary Education Plan (UPEP) in each sub-district. Under the UPEP initiative, launched in association with SLIP, the expectation was to ensure each sub-district prepared a UPEP, in which the needs would be identified through SLIP and through situation analyses in each sub-district. The UPEPs would then be consolidated and a system of preparing Annual Operational Plans would be established.

Monitoring of the SLIP initiative is mainly undertaken by the UEOs, School Social Audit Committees, District Education Offices and, occasionally, by officials of the DPE.

3

Findings and conclusions

This study examined two initiatives: (i) the PPE initiative, a programme to introduce pre-primary education to enhance school readiness of all children, particularly; and (ii) the SLIP initiative, a programme to increase involvement and responsibility of school-level stakeholders for the improvement of school and learner performance. The main findings and conclusions of the study are summarized below.

3.1 Overall findings relating to the PPE initiative

In the first four years of its implementation, the PPE initiative doubled participation in pre-school education, increasing it from 895,524 in 2010 to 1,827,950 in 2013 (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014).

Table 1: Enrolment in pre-primary education (GPS and RNGPS), 2010–2013

Type	2010	2011	2012	2013
GPS	634,933	1,209,288	1,178,311	1,257,872
RNGPS*	260,591	336,540	501,793	570,078
Total	895,524	1,545,828	1,680,104	1,827,950

Source: Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014

Notes: *RNGPS are now called Newly Nationalized Primary Schools (NNPS).

As of 2013, 67 per cent of Grade 1 children had participated in pre-primary education in GPS or in private and NGO-run pre-primary centres. NGOs contributed significantly to the expansion of services, serving almost a third of the children participating in pre-primary education in 2013 (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014).

Field-level observations and evidence from past NGO- and government-supported programmes confirm the benefits for PPE participants in terms of a smooth transition from home to school, and good performance and self-confidence of children in school. Recognizing the benefits of good quality pre-primary education, the government pledged to provide one year of free PPE to children aged between 5 and 6 in all primary schools. The PPE initiative was formally introduced in 2010 and as of 2013 PPE classes were being accessed by more than 55 per cent of the children in the target age group.

While major progress has been made in expanding services, work is needed to continue the extension of PPE to all children in the target age group. The study found a relationship between non-participation in education and poverty-related variables, including food security status and household income. It is clear that efforts have to be intensified to reach those who have not yet been reached, paying special attention to disadvantaged groups.

This study also found that the quality of PPE services remains uneven. It is necessary to ensure acceptable quality of the services, including through ensuring teachers are well-trained, motivated and dedicated.

3.2 Study findings relating to PPE in GPS

The government's PPE initiative began in the government primary schools, and as of 2013, 99 per cent of GPS had pre-primary classes (Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, 2014).

The research team visited 10 public pre-primary classes based in formal primary schools (in urban, semi-urban and rural areas), to obtain a sense of how these classes function. This section summarizes the findings from the school visits.

Evaluations of the GPS teachers and management committees at the surveyed schools found that these staff were, in general, committed, sincere and motivated. The team found teachers to be interested in this relatively new initiative and many of them already quite knowledgeable about the teaching techniques, teaching-learning materials and games appropriate for pre-school. The teachers assigned to conduct sessions in the pre-primary section were mostly enthusiastic, and used the required teaching methods and techniques.

The research team found that the head teachers, despite their low budgets and limited human resources and logistics facilities, led the pre-primary classes competently in most of the surveyed schools.

Visits to the PPE classes found that they were equipped with good infrastructure facilities, including accessibility ramps, and other facilities such as safe drinking water, toilets, playgrounds, recreational facilities and teaching-learning materials. It was observed, however, that some GPS did not have dedicated classrooms for PPE.

The study found that the small annual fund (BDT5,000) provided to each school by the government for PPE incidental costs, allowed the GPS to procure teaching-learning materials and other essential supplies, including floor mats, pencils, colouring pencils, erasers, sharpeners, plastic sets of animals and alphabets and plastic balls. This funding was supplemented in many cases with part of the SLIP grant.

It was noted that the schools are supposed to conduct classes in two shifts so as to manage the large numbers of students with the existing infrastructure and facilities, but as of 2013 the schools were yet to begin second batches of pre-primary classes, except in a very small number of schools in urban areas, mainly in the capital city, Dhaka.

In many classes, the teacher-student ratios were found to be significantly higher than the suggested or desirable ratio. The number of students taught by a single teacher in some of the pre-primary classes was found to be between 60 and 80, making it difficult to conduct meaningful learning. The explanation given for this was that the demand for the services was high and the planning and managing guidelines for running pre-primary classes were still to be clarified and fully enforced. The research team found that there was much variation in class size from school to school, however. While numerous schools had classes with as many as 80 students, a small number of schools had classes with only around 10 students.

The head teachers expressed that the large class sizes and, in many cases, the absence of a dedicated classroom or space for pre-primary classes, did not allow for the creation of the necessary physical ambience, including play space, activity corners and placing of decorations on the walls. This, they said, is an impediment to providing high-quality pre-primary education.

3.3 Study findings relating to PPE in NFE

Field visits and interviews conducted at pre-primary classes being run under the early childhood education programme implemented by the Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) found that the teachers of these (non-formal) classes had good rapport with students and were generally able to handle learning activities in the class and students' learning problems. Some BRAC personnel felt that conceptual and developmental aspects in students' learning were not reaching BRAC expectations of a satisfactory level, however. BRAC was therefore considering recruitment of teachers with a higher level of formal secondary education qualification instead of the current practice of recruiting former BRAC school graduates as pre-primary teachers.

The research team found that non-formal schools have smaller PPE class sizes and less variation in class size among the schools, compared to PPE classes at GPS. When comparisons were made with private kindergartens, however, the team found that the average class sizes in the private kindergartens were smaller, but they found that school-to-school variation in class size was highest in those kindergartens.

The study also found that not enough effort has been made so far to extend pre-primary education to *ibtedayi* madrasas, which serve a significant percentage (about 7 per cent) of children at primary-level.

Researchers noted that the absence of mandatory application of birth registration is a source of confusing and conflicting statistics regarding enrolment. The study found this to be a problem in projecting and planning pre-primary requirements and in recording data about the children served. Likewise, completion and dropout data, which are necessary for proper planning and management of the system, were found to be inadequate.

3.4 Study findings regarding the SLIP initiative

The SLIP initiative was introduced as a step towards greater participation and involvement of school personnel, community and parents in improving learning environment and performance of schools. Begun as a pilot project in 2008, the initiative provides small annual financial grants to schools. Funds distributed to the schools have made the SMCs more confident in planning and management of their schools. Although the financial support is modest and the scope of activities is small, the initiative has become an effective vehicle for promoting participation and accountability of community stakeholders in school management.

An overall improvement in educational achievement was noticed among the schools in which SMCs have taken a lead role in the preparation and implementation of school learning improvement plans. The capacity built among the teachers and SMCs under SLIP initiatives, including training and orientation, with support from the Upazila Resource Centres and the Upazila Primary Education Offices, has improved teacher performance in classrooms both in primary and pre-primary education.

The study found that the SLIP initiative has received enthusiastic support from the central level and has made an impact at the school level. The SLIP has now spread to most government schools in 60 per cent of the sub-districts in the country.

SLIPs also serve as an input at the sub-district level to preparing UPEPs as a supportive action in implementing PEDP III. It is clear that UPEP and SLIP both have a role to play and have mutually complementary roles, if the aim of decentralization of school management is to be achieved.

By decentralizing many school management functions and making schools responsive and accountable to parents and local community, the SLIP initiative has helped to lay the ground for further significant progress in this area. The SLIP initiative appears to have responded to a need felt by stakeholders at the school and community level.

It can be said that, on the whole, the SLIP initiative has a positive impact in terms of promoting access, equity and improving the quality of education, but the specific level of that contribution is difficult to measure.

The study found that the SLIP initiative seems to have played a significant role in increasing SMC members' engagement in school management. Examples of such actions observed in field visits include SMC's decisions to build boundary walls for the schools, to construct additional classrooms and to install water facilities, toilets, electric fans and other infrastructure for children.

A UNICEF report (2009) similarly noted that SLIP has been successful in meeting the modest objective of providing 'a small-scale, guaranteed fund to enable schools to plan and implement limited improvements in their physical environment, toward creating a more welcoming learning space for children'. The report also noted that 'It was apparent from all of the school authorities and SMCs interviewed that SLIP is making a major difference to their status as managers; they can now not simply make expenditure plans, but also act on them'. The same UNICEF report, however, also drew attention to the fact that the gains of the SLIP initiative may be fragile and will need consolidating.

A study by the Swedish International Development Agency (2010) reported that the SLIP funds have been used mainly for such things as adding new teachers' rooms, which eased classroom space shortages; obtaining furniture for teachers' rooms; obtaining new school benches and chairs; repairing classroom floors, windows, benches and televisions; repairing and replacing blackboards; repainting and repairing walls; cleaning and repairing toilets and septic tanks; filling of playfields; organizing sports days; and buying ceiling fans and re-wiring them. It appears from this that a direct impact of the modest financial support through SLIP has been to compensate for the schools' lack of budget and funds for regular maintenance and repair work.

From the field visits, it was observed that schools utilized the SLIP funds both in infrastructural improvement and to procure teaching-learning materials. In one of the schools visited, the SMC had painted the school building, purchased ceiling fans and repaired doors and windows. Schools had also procured podiums, education materials, pushpin boards, hanging stands, tool boxes for schoolyard maintenance, play materials, wall clocks, toilet cleaning materials, notice boards, flash drives, school bags and uniforms as well as geometry boxes containing compasses, sextants, scales and other requirements for geometry practice.

A head teacher reported that the SLIP had facilitated the development of skills among the teachers and senior students to prepare low and no-cost teaching aids from junk and natural materials. Such skills were perceived as perhaps being helpful in PPE as well as in primary education.

The study found that a sense of ownership had increased among the community people, including SMC members, after they were included in SLIP planning and monitoring. An SMC chair remarked, 'We feel this is our school and we need to provide maximum efforts on improving the quality of education in school'. Similarly, a head teacher noted, 'We have been able to raise funds at the local level through using our network'.

It was evident from the FGDs with the teachers, parents and SMC members that all had some understanding of SLIP and PPE and their significance for improving the quality of education,

though this understanding varied in level and degree. Although parents were less aware of SLIP than teachers and SMC members, they expressed their interest in working closely with SMCs and teachers to improve the quality of primary education and promote gender parity.

The present study found that the decentralization agenda, which was indicated in the operational guidelines for the SLIP initiative, is yet to be translated at the local level to the extent necessary to prepare UPEPs or to institutionalize SLIP as a component of sub-district-level planning or transferring significant finance and budget management to the school level.

The researchers noted that the UPEP initiative has not had the same level of commitment that SLIP has seen, and there is relatively little understanding of UPEP's relevance at the national and sub-district levels. In addition, the inter-connection between SLIP and UPEP has not been appreciated or adequately highlighted.

Although not deliberately linked with PPE, the SLIP initiative also supported the assessment of the PPE situation, and the planning and implementation of PPE in government primary schools.

3.5 Lessons learned

This study's examination of the PPE and SLIP initiatives found that the two concerns of enhancing school readiness of children and making schools assume greater responsibility and accountability to improve their performance are being addressed by these initiatives. These initiatives have contributed to Bangladesh's effort to accelerate efforts to achieve EFA Goal 1 and Goal 6.

There is still much to be done, however. A number of lessons learned have been derived from the study results. These are grouped below under two categories: (i) general lessons learned and (ii) lessons that are specific to the future of the PPE and SLIP initiatives.

3.5.1 General lessons learned

- **Birth registration:** Measures should be taken through local government agencies to enforce registration of new births.
- **Respond to the issues faced by poor families:** The findings of the study of the SLIP initiative indicate that dedicating resources towards initiatives at the school level would improve access to education for children from poor families.
- **Address the issues faced by poor urban children:** Special financial allocations (to compensate for serious disparities in provisions and quality of services) are essential to increase enrolments of poor urban children and to ensure their continued participation in education.
- **Tackle silent exclusion:** Along with the overall effort to improve pedagogy, responses should entail specific actions at the school and community level.
- **Develop and trial sub-district-based universal pre-primary and primary education planning and management:** A systematic trial should be carried out in selected sub-districts, involving local government and all service providers.
- **Ensure greater authority with accountability at school level:** Possibilities for school-level action need to be broadened in scope and promoted by earmarking larger resources and appropriate policy support.

- **Significantly increase public expenditure for education:** The low share of GDP allocated for education in Bangladesh, particularly the low allocation for primary and pre-primary education, is inconsistent with the goal of high-quality education for all. Substantially greater public resources should be committed, particularly for the school level along with greater discretion and accountability in their use.

3.5.2 Specific lessons learned for PPE and SLIP

- **Provided dedicated space and teachers for PPE:** Exclusive classrooms or spaces are essential to create and maintain the necessary learning environment for effective pre-primary education.
- **Ensure an effective coordination and collaboration approach in PPE:** Comprehensive and detailed plans should be prepared at the sub-district and union levels for PPE implementation.
- **Provide support for RNGPS and ibtedayee madrasas in extending PPE services:** The government authorities need to be proactive in resource mobilization for this purpose.
- **Implement an expanded SLIP tryout to deepen and broaden school level authority with accountability:** Academic and research institutions and NGOs active in the field and possessing appropriate capacity can be involved in such a trial.
- **Ensure policy-makers and implementers are adequately responsive to ensure implementation of all related policies, plans and programmes, so that children obtain maximum benefits from any new initiative.** All of the stakeholders need to be involved in monitoring and supervision of school-level activities as per the annual education plans and other relevant plans.

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UNESCO Bangkok Office
Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education

Mom Luang Pin Malakul Centenary Building
920 Sukhumvit Road, Prakanong, Klongtoey
Bangkok 10110, Thailand
Email: appeal.bgk@unesco.org
Website: www.unesco.org/bangkok
Tel: +66-2-3910577 Fax: +66-2-3910866