

Bangladesh Reality Check 2009

Policy Brief - Education

The purpose of Sida's five year Reality Check is to try to prompt further action within the ongoing sector reform programmes that can improve the quality of life of people living in poverty in Bangladesh. Taking the form of a 'listening study', it documents annually people's experiences and perceptions of changing health and education services, based on short intensive home stays with 27 households for four days and nights in nine locations.¹

Main Findings in Education

- Low income households see education as important, most try to send their children to school, and expansion of 'low fee' private and NGO pre-schools and primary schools reflects this demand.
- The introduction of the new Class 5 public examination is very positive, offering a more objective means for all types of primary schools to prepare and assess students.
- Teachers explain high drop-out level as due to household economic pressures, but parents and children instead report a failure of schools to engage pupils' interest, particularly boys'.
- NGO schools attract children due to an open, friendly teaching style, but public sector teachers often characterise them as non-serious.
- Local 'philanthropic' services are growing, motivated by a combination of profit and 'giving back to the community', and offer more choice.
- There is declining support for government stipends, seen as divisive, inadequate and hard to administer. A universal feeding programme is preferred.
- Teacher training brings mixed results: some teachers reported useful skills, others did not, but felt it gave them capacity to better manage relationships with superiors. Long absences from school for training creates staffing problems.
- The use of teachers for non-teaching work (requested by the authorities), such as for census, reduces teaching time.
- School Level Improvement Plan (SLIP) committees are ineffective, except where an effective Principal is in place (due to lack of awareness, or to 'politicisation') and may discourage local philanthropy.
- Parents are unwilling to question teachers' authority or join PTAs. Teachers feel disempowered and are not consulted in relation to policy.

Recommendations

- New analysis is needed of the extent and causes of growing disenchantment with the stipend programme, and the options for creating a more equitable and manageable alternative.
- As a matter of priority, ways need to be devised to prevent further erosion of teaching contact hours.
- New alternative approaches need to be developed with boys so that they will find learning more relevant, engaging and exciting.

¹ More detail can be found in the Reality Check Bangladesh 2009 full report at <http://www.sida.se>