

Site Visit May 16, 2010
Bonpura Primary School
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Dr. Sunita Changkakati from ACRD (Assam Center for Rural Development), which is based in Guwahati, graciously arranged my visit to Bonpura on the morning on May 16, 2010. Bonpura is located about 2 hours from Guwahati, near a town called Jagi Road. The school itself is located a little away from the nearest road. There is about a 300 m walk from the end of the road via a pathway cutting through paddy fields, as seen below:



The nearest road is also not paved (there are about 5 km of unpaved road in the journey to the school). At the time of my visit, there had been some rains which made the road soggy but not un-drivable. However, a fallen tree blocked the road, and we had to walk the last 100 m or so. Not a big deal in the global scheme of things. It seems like most students and teachers at the school walk to the school from the village or nearby villages. I believe one of the teachers takes over an hour to come to the school via walk and boat.

The school itself was one big room where 4 classes were accommodated in different sections of the rooms. The building has a tin roof and a few windows; so it seemed to be well ventilated and

relatively cool even in the midst of summer. There is no electricity coming to the building. Next to the school is a bathroom (whose roof had been slightly damaged by the recent thunderstorms). There is also a new pre-primary school built by the government right next to the Asha school building. On the day of my visit, two teachers from this school were also in the Asha school helping out.

As soon as I entered the building, the students gathered around me. They recited various nursery rhymes (Humpty Dumpty, etc) as well as some Assamese (or maybe Bengali) songs. I believe many of the students belong to a minority Bengali community. Most students seemed well dressed, and some had school uniforms.



The school building/room was itself clean and seemed well-maintained. Apparently, due to the threat of flooding, the building is built on a raised platform. There was a flood a few years back when water entered the building. After that, they built the raised platform, and since then, things seem to be fine.

Apart from the headmaster, there are currently two teachers in the school (although one seems to be referred to as an assistant). The main teacher has been at the school for many years (at least 10, perhaps more). The younger teacher/assistant has been there for 2-3 years. There seems to be a small issue with her salary (her father was making the case for salary to be increased from the approx Rs 600 odd to more). However, the school has not accepted her demands, since they feel that there are now additional potential teachers available from the new

pre-primary school that has been constructed by the government right next to the Asha school. She is currently being mollified by the hope that the school gets taken over by the government, bring with it an increased salary

A key goal for the school is to become a government sponsored school. However, it seems that no new schools have been taken over by the government for 15+ years, so, it remains to be seen how realistic this goal is.

After a few selected students finished singing and reciting nursery rhymes, I took a quick look at the books being used in the school, as well as the notebooks of some of the students. There were a few English books and some in Assamese as well. The English teaching in the school is perhaps a bit shaky since the teachers themselves are not too fluent. So, my feeling is that a lot of English learning happens by rote; it is debatable how conversant the students will eventually be in English. A few students were able to read and write, but it remains to be seen whether they completely understand what they read and write.

I walked around the different sections and engaged a few children in some conversations. A few students were a bit more open, and were able to read from a book or write on their board as I had instructed them.



They also showed me some of their handicrafts, which apparently they work on in the school. This mainly includes different kinds of baskets, cloth and various trinkets.



During my visit, they had arranged channa for everyone. This was nice, except that once the students were done eating, there was plenty of waste paper all around.

One issue in the school apparently is teachers training. Sarva Shiksha organization apparently does provide training sessions, but more can be done.

From what Sunita told me, the headmaster gets funds monthly to pay the teachers and manage the operations. The headmaster also has a cell phone that Sunita had given him, for communication.

After spending about 2 hours at the school, it was time to leave. The students excitedly ran out.



Only to be called back for a parting photo ...

(You can also see the new pre-primary school in the photo).



Some villagers had also come, though I didn't get a chance to interact with them.

Summary of issues/recommendations :

1. I was quite happy with the condition of the school. I was also happy to note that the government is supporting a pre-primary school right next door. It was also great interacting with the students and the teachers. I have some nice videos and photos for the website too.
2. I would recommend that the school gets a trash can. There was definitely a lot of paper lying about after the channa snacks.
3. The students' English proficiency is perhaps a concern. It is good that they can read and write English, but perhaps more can be done. Maybe there are English tapes they can listen to on a battery operated cassette or CD player?
4. In general, perhaps, could there be a way to get more audio/visual material for teaching purposes. This will perhaps reduce the dependency on the teachers' skills, and also get the students familiar with listening to English, and perhaps speaking English as well.