

## **Site Visit : BGUS (July 15, 2011)**

### **Project Description**

Balia Gram Unnayan Samity (BGUS) is an NGO working in the Hoogly district of West Bengal for the social and educational upliftment of the villagers. BGUS runs pre-primary schools and coaching centers that benefit children from 7 villages. These efforts are largely aimed at improving the quality of education and preventing early drop out amongst children in these poor communities, by instilling school going habits in children (through pre-primary schools) and providing additional support to the students attending Government schools (through the coaching programs). BGUS also runs a book bank that lends text and reference books to students. In addition to this, BGUS supports other development activities in the region related to healthcare, farming practices, professional training etc.

### **Project Scope:**

- +Seven pre-primary schools in ten villages for 303 children (Age: 3-6)
  - Learning & teaching material
  - Teachers salary
  - Provides mid-day meal to all the children attending pre-primary school
- + Coaching program for ~ 260 children (Class I till Class 8)
  - Learning & teaching material
  - Teachers salary
- + Book bank for ~ 400 students (Age: 15+)

### **Significance:**

The children need a friendly and accessible introduction to education and schooling in a rural area that has a 30% literacy rate and where there hasn't been a tradition of school-going. Without pre-primary education and preparation, a number of children find the step up to government primary schools an insurmountable barrier - a large proportion of these children are of illiterate parents who are unable to prepare them for primary school. In addition, the coaching program helps students from economically weaker sections of society to cope up with the school work and compete with students from affluent families who can afford private tuitions or have educated parents to help them with their school work.

BGUS also operates a book bank that lends text books to students for the academic year. This program is very popular and benefits students even outside the project area of BGUS.

### Site Visit

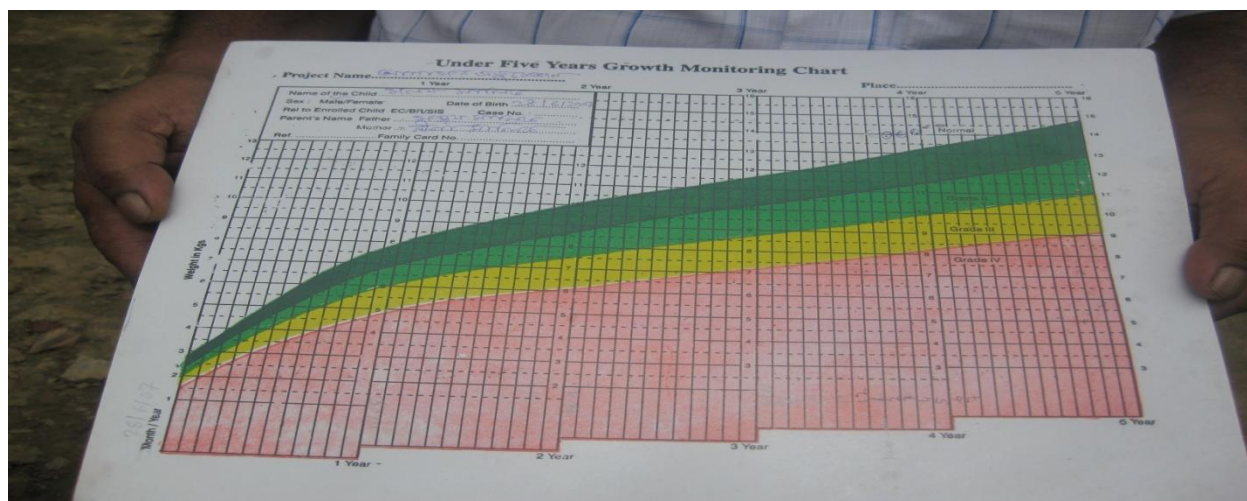
Last year, me with my parents visited all the 7 schools in 7 villages that are run by BGUS. I have provided a very detailed description of my visit to each of these schools below. But in short, I would stress that I was overwhelmed by the dedication and continuous effort of the teachers and the staffs at BGUS . They were very meticulous with all the documents regarding grade-books, audit books, nutrition and growth monitor charts etc and at the same time greatly encouraged local participation, specifically mothers of these children. Due to funding constraints, BGUS cannot pay the teachers the market-rate salary, but that did not become a restricting factor for their continuous dedication for the poor children of that region. Each of the teachers was up-to date regarding their students' progress and their nutrition. The joint and collaborative effort of the teachers and the mothers in continuing the pre-primary schools and mid-day meals was remarkable. In addition, I was also able to see one of the coaching centers in session. The children were very excited to see me. The parents expressed their sincere gratitude to all the donors of Asha for helping their children to get educated, which they cannot afford by themselves. I should also mention that BGUS needs a lot of reconstructions. 4 of the 7 buildings are in deplorable condition, all the school bathrooms need to be reconstructed and water tube wells have to be placed in many of these schools. BGUS is solely dependent on Asha UIUC for the resources for running pre-primary schools, coaching centers and bookbank; and we at Asha UIUC have been only been able to raise the running costs of these 3 programs so far. We are trying our best to apply for external funds for this reconstruction programs also.

#### **1. Balia:**

I reached Balia village around 11.30am and went to the Balia pre-primary school immediately. The children at the Balia school brought flowers from home to greet me. Some mothers were also present. They recite poems in English and Bengali, could do quick addition and subtraction. The kids of KG2 class sang a full Rabindra Sangeet. Some kids enacted some Bengali poems to me. The teachers were well aware which kids were absent. They also showed me the growth charts and attendance books. The mothers were quite happy that kids were coming to school. There was no malnourished kid in Balia school. However, the bathroom and the play ground are in deplorable condition. Also there is a pond at

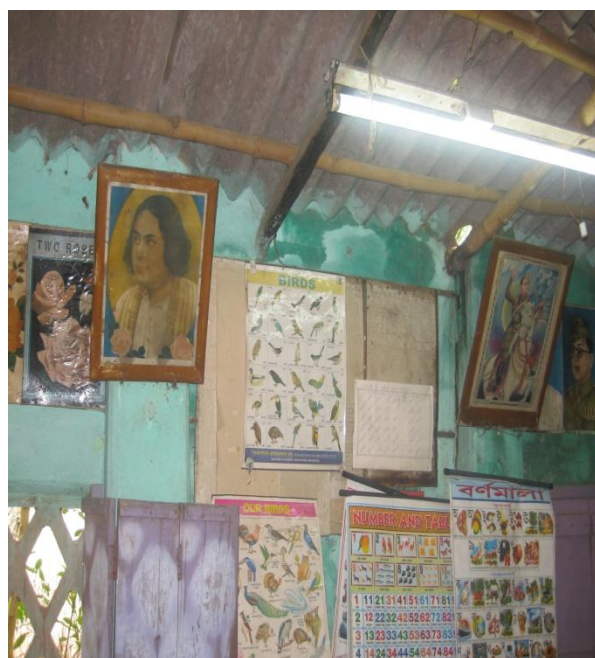
the back of the school and for safety purpose of the children a fence is required. Please see the pictures for reference.





## 2. Kashipur:

After Balia I went to Kashipur village. There is only one room and the balcony for taking 3 classes (Nursery, KG I and KG II). The walls have cracked, there is whole in the roof as you can see from the picture. Bathroom and playground cannot be used by children under any condition. The children were all properly nutritioned. However some mothers requested for provision of lunch tiffin (which BGUS used to provide before [Please Note, we have started the nutrition programs at BGUS from August 2011 onwards. This site visit was done in July 2011.]). The kids could recite poems to me and were very jolly.







### 3. Narayanpur:

By the time I reached Narayanpur, it was almost 1.30pm-1.45pm. Most of the mothers took their kids home. However when we reached many mothers got their kids back to the school. Headmaster of the village (an elderly person who oversees the welfare of the area along with Mr Chakraborty) scolded the mothers for taking their kids home before 2pm. But what I understood is that since the school no longer provides any lunch, the kids get hungry by 2pm, and so most of the mothers took the kids home for

food. The condition of school was terrible. Walls were cracked, roofs collapsed. Class could be held in the balcony area. Out of two rooms, they use only one room for teaching, but the walls are again cracked. The other room they have stored the titles which have fallen off the roof as they cannot keep it outside as it may get stolen. If there is heavy rain then the mothers don't send the kids to school as there is too much danger that the walls will collapse...and which I could see to be quite possible from the condition of the school. Two days before my visit there was a storm and one of the pillars crashed totally. Needless to say, that there is no working tubewell nearby, no fence for pond and the play ground (swings etc) do not exist. The toys used by children are very old, broken.

The condition of the village is also not great. It is mainly a village of the weavers and although their art has a lot of value in the city, but unfortunately they don't earn much from the middlemen.









Next I visited all the other 4 schools just to see the conditions. So I could not meet the kids for these 4 schools as it was after 2pm.

#### **4. Jigra:**

Condition of the school was well as it was recently built using WAH fund in 2008-2009. The WAH funds helped to reconstruct this school and thus they were able to increase the number of students in that year. However the playground condition was same as the others.





##### **5. Icchapur:**

The school doesn't have electricity. They have one room and the front area balcony for taking classes. The roof tiles are old and during rainy season there is water leakage inside the classrooms. The bathrooms and playground cannot be used by children. The cycles for children are very old and heavily rusted.







## 6. Bahirkand

There is no electricity in the school building. There is a pole nearby, but to get electricity to the school, at least two more poles have to be built- it may have involve some cost , but it is very much doable if BGUS can get some additional fund. One small room- which has charts and books. There is no water supply nearby; neither there is a proper bathroom. The toys used by the small children are all rusted, old and broken. When I reached there, the teacher was taking the coaching classes. I met a girl who is in class 8 now, who has been with BGUS since her pre-primary. The coaching class children were very excited to see me. The coaching classes had to be held early in the evening as there was no electricity in the school. So they can only study as long as there is daylight.







## 7. Dulla

The last school I visited was Dulla. It is quite far from rest of the schools. Even Bhirkand is also far off from the center. The condition of the school is deplorable. The roof has collapsed, walls cracked, no window panes, no electricity, no bathroom, toys are broken. Some parents were there and they said they benefit from the school, but they were very concerned about the safety of their children in the schools....which I think is very reasonable given the serious condition the school is in.





The areas where BGUS has schools are quite poor, and thus these kind of initiatives taken by BGUS is beneficial. The govt. schools in these areas prefer to take children who pass from the pre-primary school of BGUS as the children are well learnt and could follow the class curriculum in primary schools. All these 3 programs of BGUS are dependent on Asha UIUC for fund. We at Asha UIUC could only raise the running cost so far. However we should seriously think about reconstruction plan for the schools, playground, bathrooms and water supply, as without these basic facilities quality of education can be



improved much. In some schools as I have described, the condition is so bad that it really raises the concern for the safety of the children. The teachers are very much concerned for the schools and the children. Each of the schools has charts, books etc for the children and balia, kashipur schools could easily show me the books, attendance copies, growth charts. The book bank, library and reading room are in good condition, although I didn't meet any library member on that particular day. 3-4 pre-primary teachers are from the local neighborhood who have been benefited by the book bank and BGUS and now are working with BGUS. We should also think of nutrition for the children, especially in villages like Dulla, Bahirkand, Narayanpur and Icchapur [ Please note: We have started the nutrition program for the children since August 2011. This site visit was done in July2011.]