

Balia Gram Unnayan Samity Site Visit Report

Sourabh Banerjee
BGUS Project Steward
Asha for Education, UIUC Chapter

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1 Purpose and Itinerary of Visit

This is the 2016 site visit report for Balia Gram Unnayan Samity, a project under ASHA UIUC Chapter. The main purpose of the visit was to check in on the current conditions of their pre-primary schools, coaching program, library and book bank and discuss any administrative issues with the project correspondents there. I also wanted to visit the renovation site for the pre-primary school at Balia which was being rebuilt using funds from last year's budget. Finally I also wanted to hear from the locals and the teachers at the respective schools if they had any concerns or would like us to consider any new avenues for development in the pre-primary school level.

We first visited the pre-primary schools, starting with the newly renovated one. I was accompanied by Mr. Tarapada Chakrabarty (Board Member, BGUS and Project Contact for ASHA UIUC) and the ex-headmaster of the Balia High School as well as the respective teachers in the schools. We tried to cover as many schools as we could during the school hours. Next I visited the library and went over their book-bank program. Finally I had a meeting with the Board members, staff members and the teachers of the pre-primary schools at the BGUS office at Balia, where we discussed administrative issues and noted any concerns and requests from the staff members.

Details of the site visit are given in the following sections in a concise form. I also list the main minutes of the meeting in a later section.

2 Pre-primary Schools

2.1 Balia

The pre-primary school at Balia was undergoing re-construction using funds from last year's approved budget. Construction started from January 6th, 2016. It entailed completely destroying the previous structure (which was in a very deplorable condition) and building a school building, proper playground and a lavatory on a new foundation (which was being laid during my site visit). Some pictures of construction are given in Figure 1. As of the latest update in May, painting and final touches were being finished. School was expected to resume very soon.



Figure 1: The construction works going on at Balia

During construction, the school was being temporarily held at the home of Mr. Bamapada Dey, a local patron. It was nice to see a very active parental participation in the proceedings of the relocated school. Pictures of ongoing school session at the new location is given in Figure 2.

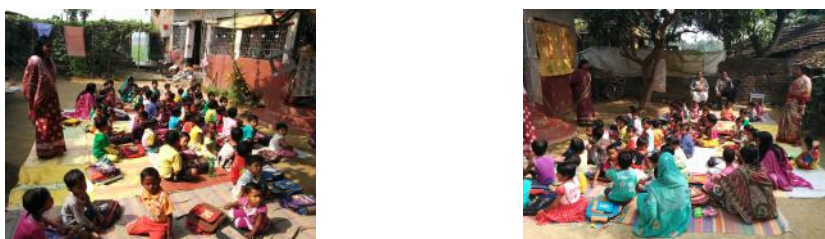


Figure 2: School in progress at the new location in Balia

2.2 Kashipur and Ichhapur

These two schools were renovated last year using funds from the previous years' approved budget. Construction works finished shortly before my site visit. Classes were going on smoothly in these two schools.

2.3 Narayanpur

The pre-primary school at Narayanpur was one of the BGUS members' main points of concern. A small amount was kept in last year's approved budget for renovation of this school building, which was barely enough for construction on the warehouse beside the school building so that it can be used as a classroom or a kitchen space. Constructions were to start on the godown (warehouse) to convert it to a school usable room. However the main classrooms are also in a very dilapidated condition as can be seen in Figure 3. There were holes in the asbestos of the classroom roof, which posed a big problem in the monsoon season. There are also cracks in the roof and wall which raises security concerns of the building. There is also no supply of electricity in this part of the village. Funds for construction of the Narayanpur school and arranging for electricity lines was included in the 2016 proposed budget. This was one of the urgent requirements of the project.



Figure 3: The deplorable conditions of the building at Narayanpur

2.4 Bahirkhand, Dullya and Jigra

Schools were properly functional at these locations. However at Bahirkhand village also, the godown (warehouse) beside the main school building was being used as the main classroom (Figure 4), since the main school building had roofs in bad condition and is only used as a kitchen space. There was also no supply of electricity to the schools in Bahirkhand and Dullya and this was included in the proposed budget of 2016-17.



Figure 4: Class going on at the warehouse in Bahirkhand

3 Meeting with the Board members

All the three programs, pre-primary schools, coaching program for primary and high school and the book bank program which assists students upto post-graduate level were functioning very well. There is increasing awareness in the community about BGUS and they have been successful in decreasing the drop out rates of high school students over the years, which is one of their primary goals. There is also a very active parental participation in most of the schools. There are now about 320 kids enrolled in the pre-primary school program. They are very particular in demanding their daily attendance in school. Their coaching program has provisions for tutoring upto 180 students every year. Their book bank program is very popular and every year the book requirements of 20 selected students are completely met by BGUS. They now have a study room (which was recently constructed using funds from WAH campaign of previous year) where students (specifically girls) can come and study using book from their library. Exam time sees a huge turnout in the study room. The main minutes of the meeting were:

- Pre-primary school at Narayanpur needs immediate attention.
- The warehouses which are used as classrooms needs renovation and proper doors (instead of the shutters which are there now).
- Requests from guardians for uniform for the pre-primary schools (expenses of which were partially included in previous year's budget).

- Needs additional books for library and book bank program and exercise books for the kindergarten students.
- NO Electricity in three villages (Dullya, Bahirkhand, Narayanpur), which was one of their urgent concerns. Expenses were included in the proposed budget of 2016-17.
- Requests for increasing salary of the teachers.

The teachers' salary in the current year (2015-16) ranges from Rs. 775 (\$11) to Rs. 1845 (\$28), which is very low given the amount of effort and dedication they put in their work. There are about 20 teachers for the pre-primary schools who are all girls from the respective villages (some were ex-students of schools under BGUS). The staffs and coaching program teachers are mostly volunteers working on a minimal wage. I had the opportunity to interact with the teachers and staffs and personally it felt amazing seeing their dedication and passion in doing something good for their villages. They all had a sense of belongingness to their respective schools and were extremely motivated in what they were doing. Overall also, the organization was immaculate, with ledgers and drafts documenting each aspect of their works and keeping track of their budget and expenses. There were no immediate issues raised in this regard. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Subhash Chandra Pal (Secretary, BGUS), Mr. Tarapada Chakrabarty, other board members and the teachers and staffs affiliated to BGUS.