

Site Visit Report, Balia Gram Unnayan Samity

Srijan Sengupta, Asha for Education, UIUC
BGUS Project Steward and Chapter President

Date of visit: 16th Jan, 2015

1 Summary

The main purpose of the visit was to look at the newly reconstructed school buildings that were rebuilt/ renovated using funds from the ‘reconstructing young minds’ campaign. I also wanted to check in regarding the current state of the pre-primary schools, coaching program, and library. Finally, I wanted to discuss any overall administrative issues with the project partners.

Our trip started with visiting the newly rebuilt and renovated schools, where I was accompanied by Mr Subhash Chandra Pal (Secretary, BGUS) and Mr Tarapada Chakrabarty (Board Member, BGUS), as well as the head teachers of the respective schools. It was from my last site visit to BGUS two years back that we at Asha for Education (UIUC) truly realized the deplorable and dangerous condition of the school buildings. This motivated us to run a focused fund-raising campaign that succeeded in raising INR 471,800 for the reconstruction and renovation of these buildings. It was great too see that the reconstruction plans as laid out by BGUS have been successfully implemented and the schools are in excellent condition.

After visiting the schools, I had a meeting with BGUS board members at the BGUS office in Balia, where we discussed the current state of the various branches of the project. More details from the visit are in the following sections.

2 Pre-primary schools

2.1 Ichhapur

The Ichhapur school building had been in a poor condition, and INR 195,000 was sanctioned for reconstruction. The old structure was taken apart and the school was rebuilt at the same place. Mr Ashok Kumar Das, a community patron, provided accommodation to run the Ichhapur pre-primary school at his house during the construction period. Construction work and painting was completed in Feb 2014, following which the school is now operating in the new building. Below are before and after pictures.



Figure 1: Ichhapur before (left) and after (right).

2.2 Bahirkhan and Dullya

At the Bahirkhand school, the roof had sagged in in one room, making it unsafe for use. They also had a godown (warehouse) in the premises which lacked windows and therefore can't be used for classes. The renovation plan was to convert the warehouse to classroom by installing windows, and patch-up work on the roof to make the classroom safe. The budget sanctioned for this project was INR 41,650. Mr Tapan Mallick, a community patron, provided accommodation to run the Ichhapur pre-primary school at his house during the construction period. The renovation was completed in Nov, 2013 and all classes are being run in the new building. Below are before and after pictures for Bahirkhand. The renovation plan and budget for Dullya was similar to Bahirkhand, and was completed on March 14, 2014.



Figure 2: Bahirkhand before (left) and after (right).

2.3 Kashipur

The Kashipur building was in a very bad condition, much like the building at Ichhapur, and the plan was to take the building apart and reconstruct it. At the time of my visit, they have finalized the contract and are just about to start the work. The target completion date is April 30, before the rains arrive. Mr Tapan Maity will be accommodating the Kashipur school at his home while the construction is in progress.

3 Meeting at BGUS headquarters

All the three programs — pre-primary school, coaching program, and book bank program are running very well, and the total enrollment is about 900. There are now 320 children (3-6 years) enrolled in the seven pre-primary schools. The coaching program is now serving 180 kids in age group 6 to 12, in classes I to VII. The book bank lends books for higher education to approximately 400 members, who are in classes XI, XII, or attending college. There is increasing awareness and support in the community about BGUS.

I also had the chance to interact with a some teachers who manage the schools, and it is remarkable to see their dedication and personal involvement. The 20 teachers are being paid between INR 820 (approx \$13) and INR 1845 (approx \$28) per month. These salaries are admittedly very low, but the teachers (all of whom belong to the community) have a strong sense of pride in the project, and this is their principal motivation. Overall the organization is doing great and there are no immediate administrative issues. The meeting was attended by Mr Subhash Chandra Pal (Secretary, BGUS), Mr Tarapada Chakrabarty, and several other board members.