

INDIA
DISTRICT PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME (DPEP)
TWENTY SECOND JOINT REVIEW MISSION
STATE REPORT: WEST BENGAL
(January 12 to 20, 2006)

1.0 Introduction

On behalf of the Twenty Second JRM of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP) that was combined with the Third Joint review Mission (JRM) of the SSA, Prof CS Nagaraju (GOI), Shanker Lal (DFID) and Rajeev Kapoor (DFID) visited State of West Bengal from 12 to 20 January. The aim of the JRM was to review the progress towards achieving the objectives of the SSA and DPEP (which is supporting primary education in five districts of the state). *A separate report on SSA has been submitted, although many of the planning and capacity building issues are common to both SSA and DPEP.*

At the state level, discussions were held with the Principal Secretary, School Education, Commissioner, School Education, and State Project Director and his team. We also met with Principal Secretary, Panchayati Raj and Rural Development, who is also the mission director of the Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Siksha Misson (PBRSSM), Director SCERT, and Presidents of the West Bengal Boards of Primary, Secondary and Madrassah Education. Team visited Jalpaiguri district where it interacted with the District Project officer and his team and visited several Primary and Upper Primary Schools, Shishu Shiksha Kendra (SSK), Madhyamik Shiksha Kendras (MSKs), Ravindra Mukta Vidyalaya (RMV), and CLRCs.

The team members appreciate the extensive documentation provided during the visits, both at the state and the districts and would like to thank the State Project officer and his team and the District Project Officer and his team for facilitating the visit and for extending the hospitality to us and also all the officials at the state and districts who gave us their time and shared their views and knowledge with us.

2.0 Overview

2.1 DPEP II is running in 5 districts of West Bengal and is due to close by September 2006. These are some of the most backward districts of the state. An outlay of Rs 70.61 crore has been approved for the state for 2005-06 against which Rs 71.10 crore are available with the state (including the opening balance). The overall funds utilisation is Rs 33.80 crore till 31/12/2005 leaving unutilised balance of Rs37.30 Crores. The major components of the programme sanctioned this year are pedagogy, alternative schooling and early childhood education. Of these, while good progress is visible for pedagogy (school grant, TLM etc.) and alternative schooling (for supporting SSKs), there

is negligible expenditure on the early childhood education component. While no fresh civil works have been sanctioned this year, works sanctioned in the previous years are still ongoing and their progress needs to be expedited. It is noted that against total EFC approval of Rs 282.69 crore (we understand grant available from development partner is even more than EFC approval), total expenditure till 31/12/2005 is only Rs 219.5 crore. It is unlikely that balance amount would be spent in remaining 9 months. An extension by another six months may be considered to ensure that the development assistance is utilised.

- 2.2 West Bengal has made good progress towards universalising the primary education and reducing gender disparities. This is reflected in the DPEP districts also although districts like Purulia are still lagging behind. There has been a significant improvement in enrolment of girls and SCs /STs. However, drop out rates are still very high and substantial efforts are required for improving quality.

3.0 Enrolment and Completion

- 3.1 The state reports that net enrolment of children in the age group of 5+ to 8+ in these districts has increased from 14.44 lakh in 2003-04 to 15.34 lakh in 2004-05 (NER and GER are respectively 95.91% and 138%). A key feature is that districts of Purulia and Uttar Dinajpur, which were lagging behind, have shown good improvement.
- 3.3 The progress in enrolment has been achieved due to the active involvement of the community. At the beginning of the academic session in May every year, a drive (School Chalo Karmasuchi) is launched wherein out of school children are identified and efforts made to enrol them. The progress in enrolment is verified in September. This work is coordinated by the CLRCs. However, data from this drive is not flowing upwards and at the state level out of school children are being estimated on the basis of DISE and other data. *As such, the figures of out of school children reported to us in the districts do not tally with the reports provided by the state office.* More specifically, Jalpaiguri district has evolved its own method of estimating out of school children with population figures for various age groups being projected as per their own formula and number of children in private schools being guesstimated. The quality of data has further being affected as the Child Education Registers (CERs) that are to be maintained at the VEC level have not been updated since 2003. The mission recommends that the system of collecting and reporting of data on enrolment and out of school children be streamlined and be uniformly applied in all districts. The system of cross checking of 5% of the DISE data also needs to be reinforced to ensure reliability of data.
- 3.4 The success in reducing number of out of school children at the primary level is significantly contributed by the functioning of Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs) and upgraded SSKs that provide alternative schooling to approx. 2.69 lakh children in these districts. 2995 SSKs are being supported by DPEP in these districts with an outlay of Rs 26.48 crore in 2005-06. However, Mission

Director of SSM would like funds from SPO office to flow more smoothly and quicker. The team members visited a few SSKs and found that the SSKs were playing an important role in bringing the hard to reach children in the schools. The recent decision to extend the mid day meal scheme to SSKs also has further strengthened their appeal. While the important contribution being made by SSKs is appreciated, the SSKs that the team visited were found to be extremely poor in terms of infrastructure and raises concerns whether the requirements of infrastructure that are considered essential for quality education in regular schools do not apply to these SSKs.

- 3.5 DPEP districts have made good progress in bridging the gender and social gaps. Enrolment of girls in these districts has increased from 49.15% to 49.46% over 2003-05 and is more than the share of girls in the total population. Enrolment of SCs and STs and of girls belonging to these social groups has also improved and the project seems to have achieved its key objective of increased enrolment and reduction in gender / social gaps.
- 3.6 State has reported a CRF of 36.59% in these districts (Boys: 33.66% and girls : 32.18%) on the basis of a cohort study conducted in 2004. However, comparative data for previous years for all the DPEP districts was not made available to the team. An assessment of comparative position has been made on the basis of a 'Study on School Efficiency: Cohort 2001- A State Project Office Conducted Study, 2002-03' which is reported in the Report on Education in West Bengal prepared by Tapas Majumdar and Jyotsana Jha in 2004 and the details are presented in table below:

Sr.	District	CRF (cohort 2001)	CRF (Cohort 2004)
1	Dakshin Dinajpur	37.8%	35.02%
2	Jalpaiguri	44.06%	36.52%
3	Malda	51.39%	43.84%
4	Purulia	31.69%	33.36%
5	Uttar Dinajpur	40.1%	32.97%

The data above suggests that the completion rate in four years has declined significantly in 4 out of 5 DPEP districts. The team understands that there are issues of sample size and data inaccuracies and actual position may not be as disconcerting but it will still be safe to conclude that DPEP has not been able to improve CRFs and this is a cause for concern and an area that needs to be explored further.

- 3.7 As mentioned earlier, state has been able to address the issue of access largely due to the innovation of SSKs that are located in far flung and inaccessible areas. In addition, bridge courses have been conducted in previous years and, although no data on mainstreaming of these children was made available to us, anecdotal evidence from the field visit suggests that mainstreaming is taking place. However, no studies have been conducted to follow up the progress of such children and to assess extent of early dropouts.

Such study would be helpful in not only developing better strategies for mainstreaming but also in better design of bridge courses.

- 3.8 There has been a significant reduction in drop out rates for both boys and girls in all DPEP districts except Malda. In Malda, drop out rates have increased for both boys and girls by 6-8% points over 2001-2004. Reasons for this need to be explored and corrective action initiated. This is also reflected in sharp decline in CRF for Malda over the same period.
- 3.9 State has made good progress in integrating children with mild and moderate disabilities in regular schools. A total of 37360 children have been identified so far and of these 17163 children are reported to be enrolled in schools and 50 in EGS/AIE centres. 4421 aid and appliances have been distributed and more than 20700 teachers have been provided sensitization training. The team visited a DLRO in Jalpaiguri district and also met with the children with disabilities who have been supported by the DLRO and our assessment is that these interventions have met with reasonable success.

4.0 Learning and Quality

- 4.1 No regular posts of teachers have been created under DPEP II. However in one district 1244 Para teachers have been appointed in 2005-06 from SSA.
- 4.2. The state has not reported the efforts made to improve achievement levels of students in primary grades. Nevertheless the project has supported an innovative programme called Integrated Learning Improvement Programme (ILIP) in selected number of schools in all districts including DPEP districts. The strategy involves learning in small groups facilitated by the teacher, feedback through continuous comprehensive evaluation, use of specially prepared learning materials and teacher training. The programme is being piloted in 824 schools in DPEP districts addressed to first two grades. Local specific comparative study of ILIP and Non-ILIP Schools have shown considerable improvement of learner attainments in school subjects. However the sample of the study being small and not representative there is a need to assess thoroughly before it is upscaled. The field visits indicated that the expansion of ILIP to III grade is not accompanied by preparation of prototype and model materials for guiding the teachers in development and use of TLMs at their own level. Instead, a guideline is provided for teachers to develop TLMs on their own without the back up of workshops or model materials.
- 4.3 External evaluation at the end of Class II and Diagnostic Testing (DAT) of all children at the end of Class IV is a state policy and hence applicable in DPEP districts also. It is reported that the teachers take voluntary coaching classes to children showing learning difficulties based on DAT. But the use of the outcomes of such testing in classrooms is not evident. At the time of the visit of the mission to the district, DAT was in Progress. The DAT is applicable to all schools including SSKs.

- 4.4 Teacher training is planned and implemented in all schools by WBBPE in all districts in the state. Hence there are no district specific training plan indicating the schedule and coverage of teaches. The Board envisages a cascade model and modules on specific themes and areas are developed at the state level. At the time of the visit modules of teaching English for Class I and module of health education in Primary grades were being addressed. However coverage of English teaching was extensive and the health education was sporadic.
- 4.5 Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSK) are the main alternative scheme for ensuring primary education within the vicinity of residence and it is a programme of the state owned and managed by the Department of Panchayat Raj. But the Curriculum and other criteria of standards are same as the regular primary schools. The practice of state level diagnostic testing takes place also in AS institutions.
- 4.6 Circle Level Resource Centre (CLRC) have been established under Sub inspector (SI) of Education for teacher support and supervision. Each of the CLRC covers 70 to 80 schools and all SSKs within the jurisdiction involving around 250 to 300 teachers. The strategy also involves setting up of CRCs with clusters of 10 to 15 schools. Some of the clusters are located in the secondary schools with the Secondary Head masters as coordinators. Teachers from regular secondary schools and some times retired teachers are appointed as resource teachers. The district visit indicated that no CRCs have been established so far in Jalpaiguri district. Our visit to Nadia (SSA) district suggest that even where these have been set up they are not effectively functioning. There is no practice of monthly or fortnightly meeting of teachers from cluster schools. Even CLRC needs further strengthening to facilitate academic support to the teachers. The SI has not been oriented and trained to lead the training team and supervise the working of schools. Special focus at the CLRC and CRC level for supporting para-teachers requires immediate attention.
- 4.7 It has been noted that Most of the interventions are planned and executed by state level board uniformly in all the districts and such initiatives are funded by DPEP in the Phase II districts. The local specific interventions at the district level are conspicuously absent.

5.0 Financial Performance, Institutional Aspects and Capacity Building:

- 5.1 Overall progress under DPEP-II has been slower than that anticipated in AWP&B. For example, for the current year, roughly about 50% of approved outlay could only be utilised till the end of third quarter. However, based on the status of utilisation certificates received, it may be concluded that actual fund utilised for intended interventions are much lower. The fund flow mechanism is not very efficient and in addition to delays in release of funds particularly at district and sub-district levels, large amount of funds are held up in bank accounts. For example, DPO, Jalpaiguri holds Rs.826.02 Lakhs in bank account as on 31/12/05.

- 5.2 The slow progress on civil work is a major cause of concern. Following table shows the cumulative progress in DPEP-II districts as on 31/12/2005:

Item	Target	Completed	In Progress
NSB(P)	520	363	152
ACR (P)	6539	2153	3792
CLRC	135	86	39
DW/T (P)	1100	343	740
Major repair	200	167	31
Minor repair	75	67	7
CFE	1052	596	208

- 5.3 It was noticed that some of the civil works sanctioned even in 2002-03 are not yet completed but the entire funds have been released for all the civil works. The mission strongly emphasised need to follow-up the civil work completion as DPEP-II is coming to a close shortly.
- 5.4 As per the audit report of 2004-05, there are many outstanding issues to be addressed such as long outstanding advances, long standing liabilities, non-availability of quotations for some purchases. Other observations from the audit report are large unutilised balance (about Rs.893.06 Lakhs) and capital work in progress of Rs.9929.81 Lakhs at the end of the year. At district level (Jalpaiguri) also similar issues were observed in addition to expenditure on non-DPEP related activities and not awarding contracts to the lowest bidders. AG report for the state of Jalpaiguri contains more serious issues like defalcation of government money by the then cashier and undue favour of Rs.35.11 Lakhs extended to one of the assistant engineers, diversion of fund, irregular purchase on higher price etc. are mentioned. The response of SPO/DPO on these issues were not provided to the mission.
- 5.5 There is very strong involvement of community and PRI institutions in implementation of DPEP-II. At district level, the DPEP and SSA committees are headed by Zilla Sabhadhipati, an elected member, whereas the district magistrate acts as the district project director. At village level, VECs headed by representative of Gram Panchayat are responsible for planning and implementation of interventions under DPEP-II. Members of VEC and WECs have been trained till 31/12/2005 on maintenance of child register, cash book etc. All the VECs have now opened the bank accounts and the funds are routing through these accounts. Though there was a strong sense of ownership due to community involvement, the mission felt that the VECs/WECs should be more involved in planning process, which is currently more or less a top-down process.
- 5.6 The Mission felt that SPO is not able to deliver effectively due to presence of multiplicity of government departments and bodies like Paschim Banga Rajya Shishu Siksha Misson (PBRSSM), West Bengal Primary Education Board, West Bengal Secondary Education Board, West Bengal Madrasah Education Board, SCERT and Ravindra Mukta Vidyalaya (RMV). These bodies are

running various programme on their own and the role of SPO is not beyond channelling funds for these scheme. The Government of West Bengal may like to decide how SPOs and DPOs may be better positioned to be able to play the role expected of them.

6.0 Conclusions and Key Recommendations

The overall pace of implementation of the programme needs to improve and especially the civil works construction needs to be expedited as the DPEP is coming to a close next year. Many of the issues relating to planning, implementation and institutional capacity building are common to both SSA and DPEP and have been highlighted in the aide memoire for the SSA. Some of the key recommendations are summarised below:

- The programme duration may be extended for another six months (beyond September 2006), as it is unlikely that the state will be able to utilise the assistance in the remaining 9 months.
- The planning and monitoring of the programme needs to improve both at the state and district levels. This will require complete staffing and capacity building at SPO and DPO level. The SPO and DPO offices have to be positioned better to be able to coordinate the work of several organisations / institutions operating in the state.
- There has been no progress on the ECCE component this year. Reasons for this are not clear. This should be reviewed on priority.
- The system of funds flow from SPO to districts and then to sub-districts needs to be revamped to reduce transit time. The procedures for finalisation of locations of various civil works and for opening of new schools / EGS / AIE centres etc need to be streamlined. This may be done by ensuring that the Executive committee of the State Mission and the District Elementary Education Societies are vested with sufficient powers to finalise these, in consultation with other bodies.
- Systems for monitoring of civil construction work need to be established and senior officers at SPO and DPO level be designated to monitor the progress of works closely.
- State has made very little progress on teacher training. A detailed training plan needs to be prepared by SPO in consultation with the department of education and Boards for primary and secondary education and simultaneously the institutions of SCERT / DIET / CLRC/CRC need to be made functional in the entire state to implement the training plan. It is also required that these institutions are not viewed as stand alone organisations but that they are linked with each other for cohesive functioning.
- The system of data collection on enrolment and out of school children needs to be re-looked so that SPO office has access to correct and more up-to-date information.