

**INDIA**  
**SARVA SHIKSHA ABHIYAN (SSA)**  
**THIRD JOINT REVIEW MISSION**  
**STATE REPORT: WEST BENGAL**  
**(January 12 to 20, 2006)**

## **1.0 Introduction**

On behalf of the Third Joint review Mission (JRM) of the SSA, that was combined with the Twenty Second JRM of the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), 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 DPEP 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. Team also met with Principal Secretary, Panchayati Raj and Rural development, who is also the mission director of the Shishu Shiksha Mission, Director SCERT, and Presidents of the West Bengal Boards of Primary, Secondary and Madarassah Education. Team visited Jalpaiguri (DPEP) and Nadia (SSA) districts where it interacted with the District Project officers and their teams and visited several Primary and Upper Primary Schools, Shishu Shiksha Kendra (SSK), Madhyamik Shiksha Kendras (MSKs), Ravindra Mukti Vidyalaya (RMV), CLRCs, CRCs and Madrassah. The team also met with the Zila Sabhadipati, District Magistrate and Chairman District Primary Schools Council (DPSC) at Nadia.

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 Officers and their teams 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 West Bengal has made good progress towards universalising the primary education and reducing gender disparities. The number of out of school children in 5+ to 8+ age group has reduced significantly from 3.35 lakh in 2003-04 to 1.88 lakh in 2004-05 and the girls enrolment has increased to 49.58%. The out of school children in the upper primary level has also reduced

significantly but this level still remains a big challenge due to paucity of regular schools. State has set up several mechanisms – MSKs and RMVs- for providing alternative schooling but they remain under resourced and it is yet not clear whether this is a sustainable mode for providing universal and quality education at the upper primary level. There are several innovative steps being taken to improve quality at the primary level but the state is lagging behind on filling up of teacher vacancies and on providing adequate civil infrastructure at schools, and these are constraining the efforts of the state towards quality education. Programme delivery is integrated with the Panchayati Raj system but there are several institutional mechanisms that govern separate aspects of elementary education and aligning the efforts of these institutions at the state and district level remains a key challenge. The proliferation of these institutions has understandably marginalised the role of the SPO (at present the SPO is headed by an acting SPD) which is more often than not is seen as a mechanism for funnelling additional funds for elementary education without being in any serious position to influence the policy and programme design. Perhaps, due to this very reason many of the key recommendations of the First and Second JRMs have still not been implemented.

### **Progress towards Development Objectives**

#### **3.0 Reduction in number of Out of School Children**

- 3.1 The state reports that the number of out of school children in 5+ to 8+ age group has declined from 10.8 lakh in 2002 to 1.88 lakh (2% of population) on 1/4/2005 and the GER and NER have improved respectively from 106% to 116% and from 88% to 98% over the same period. The enrolment<sup>1</sup> of girls (49.58%), SCs (28.5%) and STs (7%) also suggests that the state has been able to provide access to the disadvantaged groups. However, there are still a few districts with low enrolments (Purulia and Bankura) and close attention needs to be paid to these districts. Another feature that needs to be studied is extremely high GERs (161% in Uttar Dinajpur and 149% in Malda and DGHC) in several districts.
- 3.2 At the Upper primary level the number of out of school children in the age group of 9+ to 13+ has declined from 28.92 lakh in 2002 to 7.08 lakh on 1/4/2005 (7.5% of population) and the GER and NER have improved respectively from 69% to 79% and 62% to 74.6% over the same period. The enrolment<sup>2</sup> of girls (48.75%), SC (24.88%) and STs (4.84%) confirms that progress has been made in bridging the gender and social gaps.
- 3.3 The above analysis is based on 2004-05 data as the state is yet to finally ascertain number of out of school children in the current year. This needs to improve as several interventions (such as bridge courses) for this year depend

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<sup>1</sup> These figures are for enrolment in government and government aided schools and do not present a true picture of representation of these groups in the overall enrolment.

<sup>2</sup> Same as above.

on where currently out of school children are located. We have noted that bridge courses have been planned in urban areas (especially of Calcutta) but no plans for these were shared with the team. The mission would like to emphasise that without timely planning, expenditure on these schemes would not be productive. Similarly, no plans were shared with us regarding locations of the RMV centres proposed to be started this year.

- 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 (that was visited in connection with review of DPEP) 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. While a drive has recently been launched in Nadia district to update these registers, no such effort has been initiated in Jalpaiguri district. 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. The team is aware that there are a large number of unrecognised madarasaahs in the state but no authentic data on their numbers and enrolment is available. As most of these madarassahs provide education as per their own curriculum, children enrolled there should not be taken as 'in school'. It is recommended that the state should initiate measures to estimate number of children in these Madarasaahs so that a more clear picture of out of school children may emerge.
- 3.4 The success in reducing number of out of school children at the primary level is significantly contributed by the functioning of 13019 Shishu Shiksha Kendras (SSKs) and 3000 upgraded SSKs that provide alternative schooling to approx. 12.4 lakh children. These SSKs are run by the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development (PR&RD) who have constituted a separate mission for overseeing the implementation of the programme. SSKs have been established in rural areas and are managed by the local community. 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, many of 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. Our discussion with PS, PR&RD revealed that the state has no policy on upgradation of SSKs and the last time SSKs were upgraded was in 2003. Considering that many of the SSKs have more than 100 children enrolled, *state should seriously consider the implications of poorly resourced SSKs becoming a permanent part of the primary education system in their current form with different quality of primary schooling being made available to the children residing in main villages and hinterland.* We agree with the assessment of the PS, PR&RD that the key to success of these SSKs in remote and inaccessible areas has been the community control and the fact that the teachers are locally recruited and, therefore, these ingredients have to be preserved. However, this does not preclude a policy for upgrading SSKs in a time-bound manner by providing buildings and other infrastructure including more teachers.

3.5 During our meeting with PS, PR&RD it was emphasised that against an approved plan of Rs 112.49 crore for SSKs and MSKs (Rs 26.39 crore from DPEP and Rs 86.09 crore from SSA) only Rs 40.34 crore under SSA and Rs 14.06 crore under DPEP has been released so far and this is affecting the performance of the programme. We also found during the field visit that honorarium to Sahayikas has not been paid after September /October 2005. This was discussed with the SPD who explained that as only 43% of the funds have been received against the approved outlay, 43% of the annual requirement of SSM has been released to PBRSSM also. This rationale is not convincing. First, entire funds against the approved outlay for DPEP are available with the state and therefore DPEP funds should have been released in entirety. Second, it is clear that Rs 335 crore budgeted in SSA for teacher salary would not be utilised fully this year as recruitment has not taken place (so far only Rs 25 crore has been spent in this year) and as such there should not be any problem in releasing additional funds to the PBRSSM. Team recommends that SPD may hold a meeting with PS, PR&RD urgently and release funds appropriately so that functioning of this important programme is not affected. While, flow of funds to SSM needs to improve, we have elsewhere also emphasised that the utilisation certificates of funds released to SSM should also be expedited to ensure that the funds are being utilised for the purpose for which they were given. Considering that average size of a SSK is 100 children managed by two sahayikas who are paid only Rs 1000 p.m., average annual cost on salary of teachers is only Rs 240 per child and it is not clear how the balance of Rs 605 per child is being spent?

3.6 On the pattern of SSKs, Shishu Shiksha Prakashalpa (SSPs) have been set up in urban areas as alternative schooling centers. These are managed by the department of urban affairs. As on 1/4/2005 more than 40700 children are enrolled in 624 SSPs . In addition, NGO supported centres are run in KolKata under the Shikshalay scheme (442 centres, 23000 children). The team members visited an urban EGS under the Shikshalay scheme that provides schooling facility to both pre school children and Class I to IV. However, the

drop out rate from class I to IV is extremely high and this aspect needs to be studied further.

3.7 State has sanctioned 494 new primary schools (out of its own funds) in the year 2001 and these are being established gradually in various districts but the SPO does not have a clear picture regarding actual establishment of new schools.

3.8 While significant strides have been made towards improving access to primary schooling through both regular and alternative schooling, situation at upper primary level is less satisfactory. State has not been opening new upper primary schools and as a result, the Primary / Upper Primary school ratio is close to 5 for the state, with huge inter district variations. While this ratio is 1.57 for Kolkata, it is 8.37 for Purulia. As a result, there are on an average more than 450 children in these schools (again, with large inter district variation). Some of the upper primary schools that we visited had more than 150 children per class with inadequate seating capacity. The government policy is to open Madhaymik Shiksha Karmasuchi (MSK) schools in un-served locations. At present, 1260 MSKs have been established catering to approx 123000 children. We visited several MSKs and our initial impressions are that they are extremely poor in resources (average 3 teachers per school) and attendance rates were very poor. Rabindra Mukta Vidyalay (RMVs) are another alternative schooling system that has been put in place and at present more than 1078 such centres are operational with an enrolment of 26784 children. We visited several RMVs and are convinced that they are able to meet the needs of children that have dropped out (due to absenteeism or due to inability to cope with the curriculum) and the RMVs are geared to provide education based on individual need at their own pace. However, many of these centres are working in the mode of a regular school and we fear that in their zeal to work and act like a regular school (in fact, many of the RMVs had prescribed uniforms as well) they may lose their distinctiveness.

3.9 While acknowledging that both MSKs and RMVs are performing a useful role in addressing needs of specific groups of children, they are no substitutes for regular schools and as the primary schooling system produces more graduates, the pressure on existing upper primary schools will become even worse. There needs to be a rethink on the policy of not opening new upper primary schools (especially in districts where ratio of upper primary to primary schools is extremely poor) or for upgrading of existing primary schools to upper primary level or else the goal of achieving universal elementary education of good quality will be difficult to achieve. The existence of large number of alternative schools with indifferent quality is also likely to result in inequities.

3.8 The provision of school buildings, additional class rooms and other civil infrastructure is a key component for addressing the access problem. Here, the performance of the state has been less than satisfactory. Only 427 of the 836 new school buildings and 12881 of the 36945 additional class rooms that have been cumulatively sanctioned under SSA have been completed. A large number of works that were sanctioned in 2003-04 are yet to be completed. The

progress on civil works was reviewed in detail in districts and we believe that some of the reasons for delay in completion of civil works are:

- Delay in finalisation of locations where work is to be taken up. In Jalpaiguri district the location of 300 additional class rooms sanctioned for 2005-06 is yet to be finalised and no funds have been released, as yet. In Nadia, SSA committee finalised the locations and funds were released to CLRCs in the month of September 2005. However, CPCs have sent these lists for the approval of DPSCs which are yet to be obtained. As a result no works have been taken up as yet.
- Delays in transfer of funds – funds are transferred by cheques from district office to CLRCs who in turn issue cheques to VECs. In one CLRC where this transfer was examined in detail, delay of up to 4 months was observed on this count.
- The entire funds are transferred in one instalment. This is not only against the requirements of the FMP manual, it also means that funds for all sanctioned buildings are not released at the same time and the second lot is released when another instalment is received from GOI / State government.
- Inadequate supervision at both the state and district levels. At the state level, at present, only two JEs are available in the civil works cell and they are unable to rigorously monitor the reasons for delays. At the district level also monitoring and supervision of the civil works is poor. For example, in Jalpaiguri district of the 27 CLRC buildings sanctioned in 2001 (under DPEP) only 22 have been completed so far and there was lack of effective follow up on the remaining five.

We recommend that the whole procedure of finalisation of locations of new works and transfer of funds may be reviewed and streamlined for expediting the progress of civil works. First, these locations may be finalised while plan for a year is being prepared and if that is not feasible, decision may be taken in the District SSA committee (where DPSC is also represented) and this may be taken as final. Another feature is that cumulative sanctions figures needs to be revisited as number of works that are started in a year are normally less than the sanctioned number (since total funds are not available) and the balance is treated as lapse (not spill over). Vigorous monitoring and follow up of civil works needs to be done at the SPO and DPO level.

- 3.10 The team visited several new school buildings and additional class rooms and was impressed by the overall quality. State has advised several models for new schools and although there was no evidence that they were finalised after consultation with wider stakeholder groups, they are child friendly and very spacious and well ventilated. The community has been playing a leading role in construction and at several places it has contributed to add better features to the school. The design and construction of CLRC buildings was also found to be extremely attractive and functionally sound.
- 3.10 State reports that 363 primary schools still do not have buildings and a requirement of approx 37733 class rooms (after accounting for the ACRs

sanctioned till this year) has been estimated at primary level on the basis that each school should have four class rooms. Although, this may reflect the long term needs, for the present, requirement of additional class rooms should be estimated on the basis of the actual enrolment in schools and total requirement may be prioritised. No requirement has been projected systematically for additional class rooms for upper primary schools as most of these schools are combined with high / higher secondary schools and DISE data does not detail the availability of total infrastructure in these schools. However, a crude estimate of 58449 ACRs for upper primary schools has been made on the assumption that each upper primary school has at present 5 rooms and that there should be one class room for 40 children. This estimate is not reliable. First, current infrastructure needs to be estimated accurately (not on assumptions) and second, planning for one class room for 40 children at upper primary level may not be appropriate as average class (section) size for upper primary is much in excess of 40. State need to devise a better method to make a reasonable assessment of the infrastructure needs of the upper primary schools and use this assessment for future AWP&Bs.

### **Progress towards narrowing the Gender and Social Gaps and integration of CWSN**

- 4.1 SPO has provided information on enrolment of Girls, SCs and STs in government /government-aided schools. These are tabulated below.

Sr	Category	Primary		Upper Primary	
		2003-04	2004-05	2003-04	2004-05
1	Girls	49.52%	49.58%	48.23%	48.75%
2	SCs	28.41%	28.5%	24.63%	24.8%
3	STs	6.8%	7%	4.65%	4.8%

There has been good progress in bridging the gender gap and also social gaps at the primary level and the trends are encouraging. Our field visits have also corroborated the above. However, data on overall enrolment (including SSKS and private schools) is required to make a complete assessment. The drop in SC and ST enrolment %age at the upper primary level indicates that much more efforts are required at this level. This is further corroborated by the fact that in 9+ to 13+ age group, while total number of out of school children declined by 35% over 2003-05, this decline is only 34.3% and 31.36% for SCs and STs respectively. Apart from the limited information supplied on the status of education of special focus groups, we did not find defined activities in the plan approved for the current year for these groups. The quarterly progress report does not provide any activity for SC and ST other than supply of uniforms. The main activity under girls education appears to be formation and training of MTAs and training of VECsin addition to supply of uniforms. The utilization of funds indicates that these areas are not of high priority. The

mission interacted with an MTA in one of the two district visited. The degree of involvement of community and especially VEC, WEC and MTA is traditionally strong and the project needs to take advantage of the strength instead of reinventing them. We recommend that data on overall enrolment (both government and private) of focus groups, especially SCs and STs should be analysed in detail and coherent plans be prepared to address their needs.

- 4.3 In the state NPEGEL activity is being implemented in 57 EBBs covering 11 districts. 570 model cluster schools have been identified and recruitment of coordinators and construction of common rooms are in progress. However, our interactions in the field suggest that the principals of these model clusters need to be better apprised about the scheme. This year a sum of Rs 3.77 crore has been spent against annual outlay of Rs 11.33 crore and availability of Rs 8.93 crore. State has finalised locations for construction of hostels with existing upper primary schools under the KGBV scheme but work on many of these hostels is yet to begin. In Jalpaiguri, there is confusion regarding the agency which will prepare detailed estimates. This may be clarified.
- 4.3 The IED component involve establishment of District Resource Center, Orientation of teachers and special 90 days training of teachers encountering disabilities among children. In addition, supply of special equipments and devices, construction of ramps and in some instances home based interventions have been reported. One of the district visited reported involvement of NGOs in physically identifying the challenged children through surveys and Delphi techniques. Overall, state has reported identification of 144176 CWSN and enrolment of 95211 children in schools.

### **Improvement in Quality**

- 5.0 The state has a PTR of 49.24 at the primary level and 55.21 at the upper primary level with large inter district variation. At the primary level, there are approximately 28333 vacancies of regular teachers as per original sanction and 10344 new posts have been sanctioned under SSA this year. As against this, recruitment has been completed for 8651 and is under progress for 16328 vacancies. Thus, only 25% of the total vacancies of regular teacher have been filled up so far. At the upper primary level, 10306 vacancies were there in 2004 against which 8596 have been recruited this year. However, there are further vacancies of 17003 teachers and in addition 14201 new posts have been sanctioned under SSA this year. No recruitment has been made against these posts as yet. **Presence of such large number of vacancies of teachers has impeded the capacity of the state to improve quality of education.**
- 5.1 Recruitment of para teachers is another area of concern. Of the total sanction of 73636<sup>3</sup> new teacher posts, state has decided to recruit 2/3<sup>rd</sup> as para

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<sup>3</sup> It is not clear how demand for additional posts has been estimated. For an enrolment of 76 lakh in government aided primary schools, approx. 1.9 lakh teachers are required to achieve an overall PTR of 40 (this will be somewhat more when PTR is calculated at district level). We were informed that the



teachers and remaining as regular teachers. Thus, 20688 para teachers at the primary level and 28403 at the upper primary level are to be engaged. However, so far recruitment has been finalised for 15930 (these are renewals of the teachers appointed in previous years) and panels have been finalised for 19048 teachers. Effective steps for recruitment against the remaining posts (approx 14000) are yet to be taken. The mission would recommend that the recruitment of these teachers are finalised at the earliest, especially as the announcement of forthcoming elections will again make it difficult to fill these vacancies. Only 25% of the teachers at the primary level are females and state has no plan of action to improve this %age.

- 5.2 Apart from the overall shortage of teachers, we also noted large inter and intra district variation in availability of teachers. For example, in Jalpaiguri district average PTR is 52 but there are large number of schools with PTRs of below 20 and above 80. Similarly, at the upper primary level while the average PTR for the state is 55, it is as high as 104 for Murshidabad. An exercise towards rationalization of these numbers to lessen both intra and inter district inequalities needs to be undertaken both at the state and district level.
- 5.3 The teacher pupil ratio at upper primary level is much more problematic if the class size is not factored in calculations. The state has reported an average of around 459 students in Upper Primary school, the number of teachers reported is around 8 per school. While the PTR of 55 may appear reasonable, in reality subject-wise teaching makes the class size double. Hence the PTR works out to be double the size calculated by simple division of number of students by number of teachers. During our visits Upper Primary schools reflected the over crowded conditions. This is also reflected in the ratio between Primary and Upper Primary schools ranging from 4 to 7 across districts. Taking into consideration the increasing transition (reported NER being 79) and the size of population of 9+ to 13+ being similar to that of 5+ to 8+ (94.47 and 95.76 lakhs respectively) there is an urgent need to take a look at teacher recruitment and deployment policy and also explore use of educational technology like EDUSAT and online courses to support quality of upper primary education.
- 5.4 Training of teachers is a major component for improving quality and an outlay of Rs 58.07 crore has been approved against which only Rs 1.80 crore has been spent till 31/12/2005. Proposals for teacher training provide for three categories of training –10 days, 20 days and 60 days respectively called as in-service, induction and training of untrained teachers. **No annual plan /programme for teachers training have been prepared.** The state has not operationalized the latter two categories of training even though induction of para-teachers is very much required and even though there are more than 45558 untrained teachers at primary and 18235 teachers at the upper primary level. SPO is unable to take any view in this matter as primary and secondary boards are the authorised bodies in this regard. Our discussion with the

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state has an existing sanction of 1.82 lakh teachers (against which approx 1.52 lakh are working) and an additional sanction of 31,000 teachers has been given under SSA. This will bring the total sanction to approx. 2.13 lakh which translates to an overall state PTR of 35.7. This issue could not be clarified.

primary education board revealed that a provision of 2500 seats is made every year in the PTTIs for training of untrained teachers. No such details are available for the upper primary level. In this scenario, it is inconceivable that the target of 70,745 planned for this year can be achieved. This raises serious concerns about how the state has planned for this activity? No plan has been prepared for the induction training of newly recruited teachers (target is 85682) although a large number of regular and para teachers have been, and are being, recruited this year.

- 5.5 The progress regarding In-service teacher training is equally unsatisfactory. So far, training of primary school teachers has been provided on two modules (English and Health) and no training programmes have been conducted for upper primary teachers (excepting a brief training on Life Style Education) as relevant training modules have not been finalised by the Secondary board.
- 5.6 **Overall, planning and management of teacher training activities in the state urgently needs to be fixed.** First, the state has to operationalise the training infrastructure (SCERT, DIETS, CLTCs and CRCs) at various levels, and they have to be integrated with each other and with rest of the education system. Second, the state policy regarding training of untrained teachers and induction training needs to be articulated and finally, activities of various bodies (boards, DPSC, Education department and SPO/ DPO) need to be coordinated if training is to be delivered in a planned manner. We also feel that coordinators of CLRC and CRCs, which are crucial for inculcating a culture of continuous training, need to be better oriented and trained. Since the SSA project office at the state level is operating in isolation the coordination required to ensure planned schedule of development and delivery of training on a large scale with a workable strategy is the priority at this point of the project life.
- 5.7 Most of the districts have received school grants and in turn many have disbursed the grant among schools. Against the approved outlay of Rs 1138.26 lakhs , the State project office has reported Rs1082 lakhs till December 2005.
- 5.8 While an expenditure of Rs 1257 lakh against the approved Rs1648 lakh has been reported towards TLM, the funds have not actually reached the schools uniformly. The field visit indicated that in one district teachers have received the grants during December 2005. In other district the District Office has released the amount to the CLRC and the process of distribution is still on from CLRC. Even though it is reported that the guidelines have been issued for teachers regarding the utilization of the grant, the school visits indicated that there is no match between the TLMs with teaching learning process. Most of the materials have been procured from the market during the past 10 to 15 days.
- 5.8 Against an outlay of Rs 464.98 Lakh for Research and Evaluation, utilization has been around Rs 258 lakh. The State has reported a cohort based study involving 25 per cent sample of primary education. The study indicated an overall dropout rate of 19-20 percent (around 20 % for boys and 19% for Girls). However, the grade repetition was prevalent to the extent that only around 55

percent completed the primary cycle within the stipulated four years. Apart from state studies, one of the district visited reported district specific studies. Excepting a few districts (Murshidabad is another district reporting a few studies) other districts probably requires attention of the SPO in planning and executing relevant studies.

- 5.10 The state has reported activities related to focus groups like girls, SC&ST and ECE under innovative activity. Excepting for computer education other activities are integral part of SSA and DPEP planning. Utilization as on date under the activities categorized as Innovative Activities is not substantial, considering most of the allocation is spill over of the previous year. Field visits revealed that district office and concerned personnel have limited idea of innovations and the funds released to them remain unutilized.
- 5.11 The state has not reported the efforts made to improve achievement levels of students in primary grades in their reports as a separate set of activities. Nevertheless the state has taken up an innovative programme called Integrated Learning Improvement Programme (ILIP) in 5004 schools located in all the 20 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 so far has addressed 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 manual is provided for teachers to develop TLMs on their own. While the approach is worthwhile, systematic evaluation is needed to improve the same and introduce it in all the schools. No specific measures for enhancing quality of education at the upper primary levels have been reported. The ILIP is running in a pilot mode for few years in less than 10% of the schools. We recommend that state should now plan for improving the coverage of the scheme. This would require detailed planning to ensure that training of teachers and development of teaching modules is coordinated with the expansion.
- 5.12 Schools follow systematic evaluation through tests thrice a year and keep the progress record. 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. At few places where the team interacted with the MTAs, parents reported that they were made aware of the progress of their children. The DAT is applicable to all schools including SSKs. At the time of the visit of the mission to the district, DAT was in Progress. It is reported that the teachers take voluntary coaching classes to children showing learning difficulties based on DAT. **But the use of outcomes of such testing in classrooms is not evident.** This is the second year of DAT testing and state may compare the results to evaluate

improvements and also identify areas of weakness which may then be attended.

### **Financial Management and Procurement**

- 6.0 The overall pace of programme implementation and utilisation of funds needs to improve. Against an approved AWP&B of Rs 1001 crore, a sum of Rs 576 crore has been made available to the SPO so far (including opening balance of Rs 155 crore) against which expenditure of Rs 349 crore has been reported till 31/12/2005. Rs 202 crore was available at districts and Rs 28 crore at SPO level as on 31/12/2005. Balances at some of the districts are huge (Rs 34 crore at Paschim Mdenipur and Rs 20 crore in South 24 Paragan) and SPO needs to pay special attention to these districts. The team also noted that while the outlay of the state has been increased to Rs 1065 crore (as reported to us during the briefing meeting at Delhi), the SPO office reports to have no information in this regard. This situation needs to be reconciled.
- 6.2 The SSA FMP Manual has been rolled out up to the district level. However, the finance, account and procurement staff at district level are not fully aware of the provisions and requirements of FMP Manual. For example, the quarterly progress report (QPR) is not being submitted by DPOs to SPO in the format given in the FMP Manual. The manual has not been rolled out to sub-district or VEC/WEC/SMC levels. State office needs to develop brief procedure manuals for the sub-district and VEC levels and ensure that the key control systems are functional.
- 6.3 The SSA offices are procuring items on the basis of the guiding principles as contained in West Bengal Financial Rules (WBFR). Negotiations with lowest bidders are done occasionally but negotiation with other bidders was not noticed at the offices visited.
- 6.4 The state office transfers large amount of funds to other agencies 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) for the activities to be taken up by them. During the year 2004-05, such transfers account for more than Rs.115 Crores. The procurement done by these agencies are not monitored by SPO. In view of the fact that these transfers are huge, it is recommended that procurement by these agencies should also conform to the guidelines of FMP manual and is properly audited. A separate para on procurement compliance by these agencies should be added in future audit reports. At CLRC/VEC/WEC/SMC level, there is hardly any awareness about the government procurement procedure or the procedures contained in FMP manual. In most of the cases, written quotations are not being invited or collected for large value purchases (for example purchase of cement for civil work). In some other cases, the members of committees have visited the dealers and collected the verbal quotations or decided to purchase on single source basis from the dealer of their choice after passing a resolution.

- 6.5 Though the current TOR for auditor mentions procurement audit as one of the task, the auditors have hardly commented on procurement issues. This needs to be enforced. The current auditors have already completed 3 years and hence process of recruiting another auditor may be initiated so that the new auditors are in place before 31/03/2006.
- 6.6 Procurement Plans have been prepared at state and district levels for 2005-06 but are not being monitored for actual progress.
- 6.7 The entire fund flow arrangement from GOI level to VEC/WEC/SMC level is not efficient. For 2005-06, the AWP of the state was approved on 13/05/2005 where as the sanction letter was received by the state on 20/07/2005 (delay of more than 2 months). The first instalment of GOI funds was received by SPO on 05/07/2005 whereas the state share was received only on 14/11/2005. There have been delays of more than a month in releasing funds to the district and even on 31/12/2005 SPO had a balance of more than Rs 28 crore. It is recommended that transfer of funds from SPO office to other units be expedited. The districts release funds to VECs through circle project coordinator (at CLRC), which further add to the delay. The system of funds transfer needs to be streamlined and SPO may ascertain how this is being managed in some better performing states.
- 6.8 The auditors report for SPO for the year 2003-04 and 2004-05 does not mention any serious irregularities except huge amount released as advance towards civil work in progress. Notably the state is not following the release of funds in two instalments for civil work but entire budgeted amount is released in one go. It is suggested that practice of releasing funds in progress linked instalments be examined and if found appropriate, be implemented. District level audit reports raises issues like non-maintenance of stock register, non-availability of bank reconciliation statement, expenses not related to SSA activities, non-availability of note sheet and quotations etc. Accountant General (AG) in its report on SPO has raised many serious issues including excess expenditure due to violation of construction norms, excess release of funds beyond contractual period and doubtful expenditure.
- 6.9 Large sum of money are transferred to other government departments and agencies but utilisation of these funds are not followed very closely. For example, PBRSSM has not submitted utilisation certificates for Rs 44.71 crore released last year. SPO should institute a system for regular monitoring of utilisation of funds transferred to other agencies.
- 6.10 Funds transferred to districts and sub-districts are not being treated as advance and are not being reported in the advance register, as prescribed by the FMP manual.
- 6.11 Out of 40 sanctioned posts of accountants at district level, only 23 are filled. Most of the staff are well qualified and experienced. Staff turnover rate is quite high perhaps due to relatively lower remuneration The vacant posts should be filled up on priority. The staff at state, district and CLRC levels require training in financial management. No internal audit mechanism is available at present. However, SPO is planning to recruit a staff that would be in charge of internal audit.

- 6.12 VECs/SMCs were found to be fully involved in managing school funds. It was also observed that all the members including PTA representative, PRI representative and teachers' representative take active part in proceedings of these committees.
- 6.13 Double entry accounting on cash basis is being followed at state and district levels. At CLRC level and at some VEC/SMC, cashbooks and bank account passbooks are being maintained. At CLRC/VEC/SMC levels, these arrangements should be adequate provided the entries are made properly and regularly. At SPO level various books and registers prescribed by the manual are being maintained and are regularly updated. However, at district and sub-district levels many of these registers/records are not maintained. Monthly Monitoring Reports (MMR) and Quarterly Progress Reports are not being submitted timely. For example the MMR for the month of December 2005 and QPR for Oct-Dec 2005 are yet to be prepared by DPOs.
- 6.14 Overall, the pace of utilisation of funds needs to improve. This will require that the system for transfer of funds at various levels is made smoothly and there is effective and regular monitoring of utilisation and physical progress. Team also recommends that vacancies in account branch be filled up on priority and capacity building measures be initiated to ensure that the provisions of the FMP manual are adhered to at various levels.

### **Programme Management, Institutional Development and Capacity Building**

- 7.0 West Bengal has an evolved system for managing elementary education in the state. Separate boards have been set up for primary, secondary and Madarassah education at the state level. These boards have the responsibility for curriculum development, text book development, assessments, and training of teachers. Directorate of school education manages the administration of the primary schools. The SSKs and MSKs are managed by the Department of Panchayati Raj and Rural Development while Department of Urban Affairs is in charge of SSPs. At the district level, District Primary School Council, headed by a nominated chairman, is overall in-charge of all government-aided primary schools and has the authority for sanctioning new schools, for appointment and dismissal of teachers and for overall management of primary schooling system in the district. The department is represented by district inspector at the district level and sub inspectors at the circle level. There is no district level body for managing the upper primary schools, which are managed by an elected management committee at the school level. Another District Inspector represents the secondary department at the district level and is supported by Assistant Inspectors at Sub-division level. The Madarassah Board at the state level is overall in-charge for all 508 recognised madrasaahs in the state. The SSA mission has been situated amidst these numerous institutions. At the state level, SPD office is responsible for managing activities relating to SSA and DPEP. At the district level, Zila Sabhadipati heads the District SSA /DPEP committee while the District Magistrate is the Project Director. A district project

officer (50% districts are manned by education service and 50% by civil service officers) heads the district office.

- 7.1 The multiplicity of organisational arrangements at the state and district level and lack of integration of SPO and DPO with the existing institutional set up has resulted in them not being in-charge of any aspect relating to the elementary education in the state / district. As a result, both at the state and district level, SSA is viewed as a collection of activities without any focus on outcomes / output. Inability of the SPO / DPO to influence the education system and to play a coordinating role has markedly affected both the pace of implementation of the programme and its quality. This has resulted in lack of a strategic approach to solving the problems of elementary education at the SPO and DPO level. Given the fact that the existing institutional arrangements have a historical legacy and are rooted in the socio-political reality of the state, we would leave it to the state government to decide how SPOs and DPOs may be better positioned to be able to play the role expected of them. We are of the opinion that this is an important aspect that is affecting the overall programme management and should be taken up on priority.
- 7.2 The weak institutional positioning of the SPO and DPO has affected the planning process. Annual plans are not an outcome of a well thought out strategy, rather they are a compilation of many activities. Even after the AWP&B is approved no detailed plans are prepared for various components. For example, no annual plan for training of teachers has been prepared (at the state or district level), there is no detailed plan for children with special needs, and no plan for research and evaluation. As mentioned earlier, detailed plans for urban out of school children and for new RMV centres are also not available. Lack of forward programming has a direct impact on the pace of implementation of the programme and funds utilisation.
- 7.3 Notwithstanding the institutional issues, the functioning of the SPO and DPOs needs to improve dramatically if the programme is to deliver on its objectives. The SPO and DPOs view the SSA as a collection of activities without focusing on the big picture and without relating these activities to outcomes. **This is because these offices view themselves as an agency for channelling SSA funds to various entities in the education department, without being responsible or accountable for the educational outputs / outcomes.** Since 2002, more than 6 SPDs have held charge of the office and even at present no regular SPD has been appointed since the previous incumbent retired in December 2005. Not only are several positions in the SPO office vacant, the overall capacity of the existing staff is weak. As a result, there is no coherence in planning and implementation and monitoring systems are extremely weak. Lack of adherence to the provisions of the FMP manual is another concern. For example, Jalpaiguri district has not sent any QPR in the prescribed format since the inception of the programme and despite the fact this is in the knowledge of the state office no corrective steps have been taken so far. It is strongly recommended that urgent steps are taken improve the functioning of the SPO and DPOs – staff vacancies should be filled up by bringing in more experienced people, especially education planners, and a time bound

programme for capacity building of the staff be initiated. Department of Elementary Education, GOI may also provide necessary support to the state in this regard.

- 7.4 The process of preparation of AWP&B also needs to be reviewed. First, the planning calendar is not as prescribed by the SSA framework (preparation begins in January/ February) and second, details of various programme components are not finalised at the AWP&B stage. For example decisions regarding location of civil works, schools where additional teachers are to be provided, locations where new EGS/AIE interventions would be set up are taken in a gradual manner during the course of the year of implementation which naturally affects the pace of implementation of the programme.
- 7.5 State has taken several initiatives for quality improvement (for example, through initiation of ILIP programmes) in primary schools. However, state government has been slow in setting up the institutional structures to sustain these initiatives. Although, it has been decided to set up DIETs (by converting existing PTTIs) these are yet to become operational as teaching staff has not been sanctioned. CLRCs have been set up at the circle level but the coordinators (SI, schools) are mostly focused on the administrative duties (in fact, no job description has been prepared for these coordinators where their contribution towards quality enhancement is emphasised). Less than 33% of the CRCs have become functional. No CRC has been set up in the Jalpaiguri district. Although CRCs have been set up in Nadia district, their role and functions are not very clear to the coordinators. It is recommended that all the CRCs be made operational at the earliest and a capacity building programme is first conducted for the coordinators to clarify their roles and responsibilities. SCERT is functional in the state since long but staff has been sanctioned only recently. SCERT has a limited role in planning and designing of the teacher training programmes (as this is done by the respective boards). It has been conducting few research studies but there is no evidence that this research has in any way influenced the planning or implementation of the programme. SIEMAT, which was sanctioned few years back, is not operational as its building is not yet constructed. Overall, various institutions required to be set up under SSA are either not set up or if they have been set up, are not delivering. Finally, a key weakness that we observed was that these institutions at various levels are seen as stand alone interventions and no thought has gone into integrating them. It is recommended that the role and functions of SCERT / DIETs/CLRC and CRC is viewed in a holistic manner and institutions at higher levels are given responsibilities for coordinating and supporting the functioning of lower levels.
- 7.6 VECs / WECs have been set up at the grass root level to manage the affairs of primary schools and upper primary schools are managed by elected management committees. Management Committees are effective as they have the powers to discipline the staff. However, VECs have no control over regular staff. Our interactions with VEC members suggests that they are actively involved in implementing SSA, although, their role needs to be strengthened by bringing in more transparency at the school level. MTAs have also been set



- up but their functioning is variable. While, we did not see any evidence of active MTAs in Jalpaiguri, we could find several active MTAs in Nadia district.
- 7.7 Overall, the institutional set up for elementary education is complex and coordination between various actors needs to be strengthened. The SPO and DPO offices are not well integrated with the regular education department that is affecting the programme implementation and finally, substantial efforts are required to build capacities at all levels to improve performance of the programme.

### **Summary of Key Recommendations**

- 8.0 The key recommendations made in the aide memoire are summarised below:
- The functioning of the SPO needs to be strengthened urgently. 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.
  - The role of the SPO and DPOs, which is currently that of a funding channel, needs to be altered where they are made more responsible and accountable for the outcomes of various interventions.
  - The quality of plans needs to improve where interventions that are proposed have appropriate linkages with the strategic objectives. The consultation process has to be widened and should be undergone before plans are submitted (rather than after they are approved) so that delays in implementation on account of finalisation of micro level details (such as location of new buildings or the kind of training programmes and their numbers) during the course of the year do not happen.
  - 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.
  - The State may review its policy regarding up-gradation of large SSKs to the status of regular schools with proper infrastructure.
  - The pressure on Upper primary schooling system has increased and will increase further with the universalisation of primary education. The current policy of not opening new upper primary schools may need to be reviewed or else the objective of universalisation at upper primary level will not be achieved. The current policy of meeting the additional demand through MSKs and RMVs only is not only insufficient it is likely to result in inequities (in quality of education provided to different groups) as well.
  - Urgent action is required to fill up more than 73000 posts of teachers that are to be filled up with SSA support this year and simultaneously plans for their

induction training should be prepared and operationalised. State should also develop a plan of action to improve the %age of female teachers (which is currently 25% at primary level).

- Rationalization of teacher allocation to reduce large inter and intra district variations in pupil teacher ratio needs to be undertaken.
- Systems for monitoring of civil construction work need to be established and senior officers at SPO and DPO level should 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. It would be useful to make an assessment of the students attending unrecognised madarassas so that effective interventions for minority children, especially girls, may be designed.
- Capacity building of the staff in implementing FMP manual should be done on priority.