

**Performance and Effectiveness of School Management  
Committees (SMC) of BRAC Schools**

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## Executive Summary

The study examined the School Management Committees of NFPE schools. With the knowledge of supposed ineffectiveness of the committees, the goal was to find out what practices could be reinstated, or what could be done differently in order to have proper and effective management committees in all BRAC schools. By conducting Focus Group Discussions with eight Management Committees from two NFPE areas, the study determined a few areas of concern, such as committee formation, participation, orientation, monitoring, supervision and so forth.

The study suggests that an orientation must be provided to all the members when the committee is formed, about their duties, responsibilities, and obligations. Such an orientation session may involve greater community participation, so that the school community and parents become aware of the existence of the committee and its responsibilities. The process of committee formation has to be made more participatory so that the community is more involved. The attendance of committee members at monthly parents meetings must be ascertained at the end of each year and frequently absent members could be requested to turn his/ her responsibilities to another motivated and aspiring parent or guardian for smooth running of the SMC activities. Proper monitoring of management committee activities must be carried out throughout the year, so that accountability is ensured.

## Introduction

BRAC started the Non Formal Primary Education Program in 1985 only with 22 schools, today the number stands at approximately a little above 34,000. The NFPE model started as a three-year program, presently extended to a four-year program, for children between the age of 8 and 10. These children either never entered a school, or have dropped out from a formal school.

Basic Education for Older Children (BEOC) was another two-year program, introduced in 1988 for older children between the age of 11 and 14, who never had an opportunity to attend school. BEOC also extended to a three-year program recently. The schools provide education in basic literacy, numeric, life-skills, social and environmental awareness and so on.

Community participation is essential for the success of any rural development program. BRAC has tried to incorporate this view in its development planning to the best of its ability. In order to ensure the smooth running of BRAC schools and to ensure the successful implementation of the NFPE program, involvement and spontaneous participation of the community have been highly emphasized.

The NFPE program is developed/designed to be relevant to the rural life and to suit special need of the children (Hasan et al., 1995). A monthly parent/guardian meeting, in the presence of the teacher and the BRAC staff, has been a regular practice since the inception of NFPE program. This practice must have been initiated in the hope of creating more community participation. However, despite some positive impact of this practice, in many instances merely a monthly meeting could not bring about the desired goal of community participation. The study *linking the School and Family: Community Participation in BRAC Schools* by Hasan et al. provides important information in this respect.

It may have been assumed that for the proper functioning of the schools, and to increase participation and community involvement, forming a management committee for each school could be useful. With this view, a committee is formed for each BRAC School. This study is an examination of the performance and the effectiveness of the committees in BRAC schools.

## **The School Management Committee (SMC)**

A School Management Committee (SMC) comprises of seven members, i.e., an enthusiastic local community leader/member, the teacher, five parents (four mothers and one father) of the students. A list of SMC members is supposed to hang in each school. It is obligatory for at least two of the parents to be RDP members (from RDP areas). Two of the members will have to be changed every year, and the replacement/ selection of two new members must be done by the parents/guardians. The respective NFPE staff/s (PO/PA) is/are suppose to play the role of mediator/s.

As a part of the plan of including the management committees in the qualitative improvement of the schools, the committee members are provided with an orientation to make them knowledgeable about their duties, obligations, and responsibilities. The committee is notified about the date and informed about the agenda of the monthly parents' meeting by the designated PO/PA.

Besides attending the monthly parent/guardian meetings, the Management Committees are also suppose to have additional meetings with the respective Program Organizers or Program Assistants whenever deemed necessary (emergencies), also to discuss about problems, school-progress, and the steps needed to be taken in the future. The teacher may also update the committee about the latest developments.

The responsibilities of the committees can be summarized as below. The members will

- take time to visit schools-in-session to ensure attendance
- lend a helping hand to the NFPE staff whenever needed
- attend monthly parents meeting regularly
- keep in touch with the local people from all walks of life and create an atmosphere of mutual cooperation in times of school-related crises
- contribute to the physical/material well-being of the school
- participate in decision-making

Therefore, from the descriptions of the expected SMC activities, it can be said that the committees kind of operate as an intermediary between the school community and the NFPE

personnel. Most important, besides ensuring some of the basic NFPE program objectives listed below, such as,

- high attendance and retention rate;
- immediate and appropriate replacement;
- punctuality of the teacher and the students;
- proper appraisal of the teacher;
- proper care and maintenance of school room and supplies;
- cleanliness and proper hygienic practices;

a well-functioning SMC could be expected to play a broader role of bringing the community together and to create an atmosphere conducive to spontaneous participation. The study aimed to find out to what extent and how effectively are the committees being able to perform that role, the reasons for their inability, and to delineate some of the ways in which the issues related to ineffective can be addressed.

### **Objective**

The aim of this study was to have a close look at the committees in order to determine the performance and effectiveness of the School Management Committees for the proper functioning of the schools, to know if all or some of the previously mentioned expectations are met. Presence of some of the practices and activities mentioned below could be some indications of good performance. Again, these are merely some of the objective criteria designed to be met. Issues to be examined in this regard will be, if

- a) the monthly meetings are held regularly
- b) the meetings are participatory and responsive
- c) the participation is voluntary and not imposed
- d) the proceedings are promptly and adequately recorded
- e) serious problems or concerns are immediately reported, and sincere efforts are being made to take necessary measures

- f) the decisions in favor of the schools' sustenance, improvement, or well being are implemented immediately or fairly soon after the meetings

If the above-mentioned practices are not taking place, it may probably be assumed that the committees are not performing their roles effectively. If that is the case, the study aims to find out the reasons why, and what needs to be done in order to improve performance and eradicate the factors contributing to ineffectiveness. For effectiveness, it is necessary and desirable for all involved to develop a sense of community amongst themselves with voluntary and enthusiastic participation, strong commitment to their cause, and accountability in cases of failure.

### **Rationale of the Study**

A parent or a guardian plays one of the most significant roles in a child's schooling and in his/her academic achievement. One of the prerequisites for a successful completion of schooling is parents' enthusiastic involvement. Therefore, the holding of a parent/teacher meeting to ensure a child's regular progress is a universal practice.

As far as BRAC schools are concerned, community participation is also desired and highly encouraged along with parents' involvement, to ensure attendance and deter dropping-out, along with many other issues. The idea of creating a management committee for BRAC schools originated with the intention of integrating the whole community to facilitate the process of learning. Community involvement is extremely important for the smooth running of BRAC schools. However, hardly any investigation has been conducted to evaluate the performance and effectiveness of these committees.

Furthermore, researcher's observations and experiences from field-test surely called for the need to examine the performance and effectiveness of School Management Committees a little more elaborately. Eight (8) schools from two areas (Mymensingh=6, Comilla=2) were visited for field-testing. Quite a few numbers of irregularities had been noticed in regard to overall school performances. Some of the issues listed below could be attributed to how School Management Committees were operating in those areas

- the way committees were formed (more imposed than spontaneous/voluntary)

- irregular meetings (absence of separate SMC meetings in almost all instances)
- irregular attendance of SMC members (in parent/guardian meetings)
- lack of adequate monitoring of SMC activities
- lack of proper recording of proceedings of parent/guardian meetings
- low attendance of children at school
- problems related to punctuality and hygiene.

Some of these observations may have reflected some inefficiency on behalf of almost all committed to proper running of schools. However, since the focus of this study is the effectiveness of School Management Committees, by examining the above mentioned issues, this study expected to make some contributions in regard to SMC-related issues, and hoped to have some implications for the program.

### **Methodology**

Using the qualitative approach, performance and effectiveness of a total of eight (8) committees were studied from two (2) program areas. Four (4) committees were selected from an area in Manikganj district, and four (4) were selected from an area in Tangail district. In both the areas, the NFPE program started operating in 1986, basically since the program's commencement. The area in Manikganj was selected for the schools' relatively good performance, and the area in Tangail was selected for the schools' poorer performance.

Schools representing grades 2 to 4 were randomly selected from the area in Manikganj. For Tangail, grades 2 to 3 were included in the sample because grade 4 has not been introduced in that area yet. Inclusion of grade one was avoided because those schools have just started to operate in both the areas and that would have made it difficult to get information on issues over a long period of time.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was conducted with each committee. Also, by using an unstructured interview guide, in-depth interviews were conducted with all the teachers (8), three to four parents (non-committee members) from each school, and the respective NFPE personnel. Although teachers are included in the school management committee, they were requested not to participate in the Focus Group Discussion. Instead a separate interview was conducted with each teacher. The parents were interviewed in groups of three or four.

The procedure of conducting FGD without the teachers was followed to ensure a feeling of ease and comfort among the rest of the members, because the presence of the teacher may have worked as an intimidating factor, or may have made them apprehensive about voicing some of their opinions. Carrying out Focus Group Discussions and interviews separately with all concerned provided room for cross-checking of various information accrued in the process of research.

## **Findings**

The data for the study was collected in the month of May 1998. Information was sought on meetings and other activities of the school from the beginning of the year, that is January 1998, until the month of May 1998. The findings from the Focus Group Discussions and the interviews are given below separately for each school from the two study areas, i.e., Manikganj and Tangail.

### **Manikganj**

#### **School 1:**

This is a school in its third year. The teacher has been teaching for twelve years. She has completed three cycles of teaching and presently teaching her fourth cycle. The list of names of the committee members was unavailable in the school. But the teacher recorded the names of the members in the register. This school appeared to be performing well, as far as students' academic performance was concerned.

**FGD in School 1:** This committee is operating for three years. The members participated in the discussion enthusiastically. They said that they were selected as committee members, at the beginning of the school cycle, based on everybody's perceptions of them as possessing a higher level of consciousness about the school and the greater society related issues.

"Those who are concerned about the school's well-being are selected for the committee" was the statement they repeatedly used to explain their eligibility to become committee members. But in the course of the discussion, while probed, it became apparent that the NFPE staff, in



this instance, played the most significant role in the selection of them as committee members, not the parents or the rest of the community.

The committee comprised of five mothers, one father, and the teacher. Although the community leader is suppose to be chosen from outside of the parents, one of the fathers was chosen as the community leader for this committee. According to the committee members, some of their main responsibilities are to act as the motivating force for the children and the parents to ensure children's attendance, to attend the monthly parents meetings and encourage others to come, to evaluate the teacher's performance and so on. Besides attending the parents meeting, they do not arrange or attend any other meetings. When asked to recount the responsibilities they are expected to carry out, they repeatedly mentioned a few things such as ensuring attendance and performance.

The parents meetings have been held regularly in this school throughout the months of January till May 1998. Attendance rate was found to be satisfactory, twenty-nine to thirty percent on average. Harvesting was given as the reason for a relatively low attendance rate in the months of April and May. As far as School Management Committee was concerned, every one of them attended the meetings but the community leader. He also came to join the FGD session much later than the scheduled time. He could not give a satisfactory reason for his long absence from such an important monthly event for the school.

**Interview with the Teacher:** The teacher has been teaching for 12 years. She has finished three cycles of teaching and presently teaching her fourth. This school appeared to be performing very well. The teacher appeared to be very much in touch with her students. She was found to be very patient with the students while she waited for them to answer her questions, or while the students came up with wrong responses. She gave real life examples while delivering lessons. As far as students and teaching were concerned, she appeared to be well-versed in classroom management issues, which includes her teaching methods, relationship with the students, attitude and behavior towards her students.

While discussing the issues related to the management committee, she did not appear to be well informed about who they were, for example she could not name the members right away when requested to schedule a meeting with them. She had to consult the students to find out whose parents were members although names were documented in her register book.

When asked about the SMC members' responsibilities, she gave the typical responses such as ensuring student attendance, punctuality, and cleanliness. However, she made a significant observation and honestly reported that the designated committee members did not come to inspect the school that week. She did not have any suggestions when asked how NFPE could improve or increase the effectiveness of the school management committees.

She was well informed about the parent/guardian meetings. Meetings have taken place regularly in her school since January 1998, only that attendance has been low in April and May. She recalled very well the reasons why many of the parents could not be present. She informed that she arranges the meeting if the respective NFPE staff can not do the same for any given reason.

**Interview with the Parents :** Four mothers joined the interview session. The mothers did not seem to be knowledgeable about school related issues at all. They did not know about the committee. Therefore, it was obvious that they did not know who the members were or how they were selected. They were not vocal at all during the interview. They needed to be probed and requested repeatedly to speak up. This was a significant indication of the extent of their participation in other settings where they would have to speak or give an opinion, like in the meetings.

### **School 2:**

This was a fourth year school. The teacher had twelve years of teaching experience, this being her fourth cycle. According to the records, the meetings were held regularly in this school and attendance rate was high. This school appeared to be performing very well. The list of members was available in the schoolroom, hanging on the appropriate space where it should have been.

**FGD in School 2:** The members participated spontaneously in the discussion. The community leader was relatively quieter, but he was found to be a regular about attending the meetings. The community leader in this instance was also selected from one of the fathers. One of the members/guardians, who happens to be an older brother of one of the students appeared very much involved in the school's well-being. He had some education (HSC).

They arrange meetings themselves if the respective staff cannot do so for any reason. According to the committee, the efficiency of the teacher plays the most significant role in the proper running of the school. This view about the teacher came up repeatedly during the discussion. A sense of community has developed adequately around this school, with the teacher playing a very significant role. The committee formation in this school appeared to be very participatory.

All the members thought that having an outsider taking part in the school's activities might have a positive impact. An outsider can participate as a well wisher and attend meetings and gatherings related to the school. An outsider, according to them, can also provide ideas from different perspectives. The members seemed to be aware and conscious of social issues and practices detrimental to children's well-being. They have intervened in two events in recent times. First they stopped an early marriage of a student from this school by influencing the parents and talking them out of it. The ceremony will take place after two years, when she will be older and will have finished her primary school education. Secondly, when a teacher slapped a student in a neighboring NFPE school, they went and discussed the issue with the teacher. They could do it successfully because of the existence of a community feeling among themselves. One of the members was replaced the previous year because the member left the area.

The daily inspection of the school by different SMC members throughout the week seemed to be regular. Although the teacher and the parents verified that the weekly inspections were carried out, the members thought that a way of keeping the record could be introduced, so that the information could be readily available for monitoring purposes.

**Interview with the Teacher:** According to the teacher the school is performing well, which was also found to be evident during the researcher's visit. The teacher emphasized the importance of community involvement for a school's better performance. She has successfully developed community participation around school-related issues.

**Interview with the Parents:** Four mothers were interviewed. All of them participated enthusiastically. They spoke well of the performance of the teacher and the children. They were knowledgeable about the Management Committee, and testified positively about their

activities. They verified the fact that the designated members for daily school inspection do their job regularly and efficiently.

### **School 3:**

This is a school in its second year. The teacher has been teaching for the last four years and has an education up to higher secondary level. The meetings were found to be regular, and the attendance rate was high. This school was located in a very unhygienic environment, with drains running on two sides of the school. The list of the committee members was not available in the school or with the teacher.

**FGD in School 3:** The selection of the committee members was done predominantly by the teacher in this instance. One of the members was a former NFPE teacher. The community leader was not a parent in this committee. They inspect school three times a week, unlike daily inspections found in other schools. According to the members, they attend the monthly meetings regularly. They perceived the meetings as a motivating force. Among the issues discussed during the meeting were found to be importance of punctuality, children's regular attendance, and cleanliness. This confirmed the picture typical of most of the parents and committee meetings.

**Interview with the Teacher:** The teacher thought that the members could be changed or replaced if there was a need. She played the dominant role in the selection process because she thought that since she was the one who would be working with them closely, her preference mattered the most. According to the teacher, she gave priority to the individuals who appeared most enthusiastic about education.

**Interview with the Parents:** Four mothers and a father were interviewed. According to them, all the parents jointly make decisions about the School Management Committee. They claimed that the meetings were regular and participation was high. When inquired about the topics discussed in the meetings, they mentioned ensuring attendance, checking on the teacher, and early marriage were some of the most discussed issues in the meetings.

#### **School 4:**

This is a school in the fourth year of its cycle. According to the teacher and the school records, no meetings were held through the months of January until March. The teacher could not explain exactly why the meetings were not held. Apparently it was obvious that the teacher or the management committee did not take any initiative to call the meeting if the respective NFPE staff did not do so. This was the only school in this area of study where such an incidence was observed.. The teacher has 7 years of experience of teaching in NFPE schools.

**FGD in School 4:** One of the members was a group leader of a Village Organization, two were regular members and one woman was a member of the Union Parishad. The latter appeared to be very vocal. Two members were not parents, but guardians of two children related by blood. There were two male members in the committee. No outsider was a member including the community leader.

According to them the NFPE staff selected them as members. When inquired about the meetings, they did not seem to know what to say. They confirmed that if they had to, they would arrange meetings in absence of or without instructions from the respective NFPE staff. According to them, the meetings are not always necessary if everything seems to be going well with the school.

Community involvement appeared to be minimal in this school. It was evident not only by absence of regular meetings, but also by their lack of concern and awareness regarding community participation.

#### **Tangail**

##### **School 1:**

This was a school in its second year. The school did not have the list of committee members available.

**FGD in School 1:** The community leader said that he was not aware of the fact that he needed to attend the meetings regularly. The question was posed due to his very irregular

involvement with the school meetings. The NFPE staff formed the committee for this school. They were told to ensure attendance of the teacher and the students. They thought that maintaining a sign-up book could be helpful for members coming for inspection.

**Interview with the Teacher:** According to the teacher, no training or orientation is provided for the committees to make them knowledgeable about their responsibilities. The only time something close to an orientation takes place is during the first parents meeting after a school starts. This is also the when the committee is formed. The respective Program Organizer sets the meetings.

**School 2:**

This was a class three school. Meetings did not take place in the months of March, April and May.

**FGD in School 2:** All members were women. They were not aware of who the community leader was. There was only one village organization member in this group and she was the one who spoke the most. The others were kind of quiet most of the time and spoke very little. They claimed that everybody together selected them as members.

**Interview with the Parents:** According to the parents, the NFPE staff selected the committee members. This contradicts with the members' claim that everyone was involved in the selection process. They reiterated the fact that meetings were not taking place in the recent months. They further added that it was not easy for them to get in touch with the committee members to find out the reasons.

**Interview with the Teacher:** The teacher was unaware of the fact that there had to be a community leader in the School Management Committee.

**School 3:**

The school was in its third year.

**FGD in School 3:** Four committee members attended the meeting. According to them, the staff decides about the committee members. When asked what were the qualities looked for in prospective members, their perception was found to be that those who were more conscious, more intelligent, and were able to talk more were selected as members. Also individuals who have more time in hand to be involved in school activities were preferred. The community leader does not show up in meetings regularly, He said that he was available for emergencies, and did not consider it necessary for him to come to meetings all the time. According to the members, their responsibility was to ensure children's attendance and teacher's performance.

**Interview with the Parents:** Three parents attended the session. According to them the staff decided about the committee formation. They were not aware of who the school committee members were. The parents meetings inform them to ensure children's attendance and children's cleanliness.

**Interview with the Teacher:** The teacher was not knowledgeable about the inclusion of a community leader in the school management committees.

#### **School 4 :**

The school was in the third year of the cycle.

**FGD in School 4:** The community leader of the management committee did not attend meetings regularly, as he did not think it was necessary. According to them, an orientation should be provided to them in the beginning so that they could be aware of their duties and responsibilities. No such orientation was given to them ever. They attend the parents meeting and discuss the usual topics about attendance, cleanliness and hygiene. The committee did not serve any greater purpose.

The teacher was absent on the day the schools visited, and a separate interview session could not be arranged. None of the parents appeared for the discussion session in this school.

## Discussion and Conclusions

Despite the committee members' claim that they were selected as members by all the other parents, the teacher, and the respective NFPE staff on the first parents meeting after the school starts, it was found that in both areas of Manikganj and of Tangail, the members of the committee were selected mostly by the NFPE staff or the teacher, or the NFPE staff and the teacher together, with probably the opinion of a few parents.

According to the committee members, their selection is based on the perceived opinions of all concerned of their higher levels of motivation to be involved in the school activities, and of their supposed higher levels of consciousness about issues. However, in reality, it was evident that the selection process and the formation of the committees are not necessarily participatory. While interviewing the parents, it came out consistently that the parents were sometimes not even aware of the existence of the committees. Again, in some cases, even if they knew that a committee for the school existed, they were not knowledgeable about their responsibilities and activities.

In both Manikganj and Tangail, it was found that a father was selected as the community leader. This practice probably is not in accordance with program objective

When inquired about their duties and responsibilities, the members repeatedly mentioned a few things, in a rather mechanical fashion, that they were expected to do, such as,

- a) attend the monthly parents meetings regularly
- b) visit school to check on student attendance, and class-work (each member is responsible to visit the school on a designated day of the week)
- c) get together, in case of a crisis situation, to discuss and find out solutions

The most important information that came out of the interviews with the parents was that most of the parents are not aware of the existence of management committees. This clearly contradicts with the SMC members' claim that they were selected by popular mandate.



It was found that the monthly parents meetings were held quite regularly in the area of Manikganj, except for one school where only one meeting was held since the beginning of the year until the month of May. Information on meetings was sought through the months of January until May. The attendance was found to be well recorded in the teachers' attendance register, which is also used for recording the students' daily attendance.

As far as attendance of SMC members in the meetings were concerned, it was observed that except for one school, the community leader was absent in all the meetings. Otherwise, the attendance of the rest of the members was regular in this area.

The monthly parents' meetings were found to be very irregular in the area of Tangail. And even when meetings took place, the attendance is very low. The attendance was not well recorded at all. The researcher had to depend on the word of mouth only.

The issues concerned can be summarized as below

- No orientation
- Absence of clearly-defined responsibilities/activities
- Community leader chosen from parents (usually father)
- Member selection process not always participatory, sometimes even on his/her behalf
- Meetings not participatory
- Community leader consistently absent at meetings
- Absent/ indifferent members are not replaced or changed
- Inadequate monitoring/recording

The School Management Committees of BRAC schools need to be given more structure. Although apparently it seems that there is no need for Management Committees in the sense that a good teacher and an efficient team of NFPE supervisors are sufficient for the smooth-running of the schools. But the existence of a committee comprised of some parents, a member from the community, and of events like monthly parent/guardian meetings are extremely significant from the perspective of community participation.

#### **Some Issues to be considered**

**Orientation:** The programme can introduce an orientation session for a newly formed School Management Committee. After the committee is formed during the first parents'

meeting of a school, a day can be fixed for committee members to meet and receive an orientation from the programme personnel on their duties and assignments.

**Committee Formation:** The process of committee formation could be made more participatory.

**Specialized Training in Participation:** A way could be improvised for an effective training in participation, for both the teachers and the rest of the staff involved in supervision.

**The Community Leader:** It could be better for the committee to have a member who preferably has some education, well respected in the area, and has a positive influence on the community.

**Membership Rotation:** committee members could be changed or replaced whenever necessary, particularly who are absent for a prolonged period of time.

**Monitoring/ Recording:** Emphasis should be given on regular and proper monitoring and recording of Management Committee activities.

## **Reference**

Hasan, Monira et al. (1994). *Linking the School and Family: Community Participation in BRAC Schools*. Unpublished BRAC Report.