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**ARTICLE**

**Digital school libraries in Bangladesh: A role model for changing lives of the extreme poor children**

**14**

Md. Nasiruddin

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Digital school libraries in Bangladesh: A role model for changing lives of the extreme poor children

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In Bangladesh, Shariatpur is one of the lowest performing districts in primary education, standing near the bottom at 62 out of 64 districts based on dropout rates (BBS, 2012). It is also one of the most flood affected areas and has a high number of extreme poor. Concern Worldwide (Irish-based International Humanitarian Organization) has implemented a 3-year project from January 2013 to December 2015 namely "Digital School Library for Extreme Poor Children" with 10 schools in 2 Upazillas reached approximately 1000 children and developed a knowledge base society working with CBOs (Community-Based Organizations). The main aim of the project was to attract the extreme poor children to school and improve their education in a sustainable way through training and learning by the innovative approach of a digital school library. The author was appointed as a library consultant of that project. It was an amazing experience of the author that he had to face many challenges to get the attention because the extreme poor children were not interested at all to learn anything. They were very much fond of watching TV (television), moving here and there unnecessarily, playing in a group at riverside and jumping over the river for nothing. To attract them towards school, author in association with the research team made and presented some educational short videos namely, "Mina Cartoon (2015)" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dahl8UII3n4&list>) and "School for river erosion-affected children and sex workers children etc). These worked and inspired to bring them back to school. They become interested to visit the school library frequently for gathering knowledge. The author had to strive hard to develop the capacity of the School Management Committees (SMCs) and the Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs) through need based training with the help of an innovative approach of a school library, for example, he had to develop some digital learning resources including annual plans to get out-of-school-children into school. As a result of learning and training through digital school libraries, it has been seen that by the end of the project: (a) Improved pass rate; (b) Increased enrolment rate; (c) Increased retention rates; (d) Increased involvement of the SMCs and PTAs in development and implementation of School Level Improvement Plans; and (e) The poorest children and their parents got a good idea on Equality, Right Based Approach (RBA), HIV and AIDS and on their Rights and Entitlements. Thus school based small digital libraries have turned into integral part in their lives. The basic aim of the paper is to share the author's experience on how the digital school library project demonstrated access to primary school for the poorest and out-of-school children. Some interesting case studies will also be discussed in this paper.

**Key words:** Digital libraries, school libraries, libraries for extreme poor, knowledge base society.

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## INTRODUCTION

Primary education in Bangladesh is compulsory by law and according to the constitution the government is

responsible to provide education (Directorate of Primary Education, 2008). While Bangladesh has made significant

significant progress in gross enrolment rates and gender parity, drop-out rates remain significantly high resulting in low completion rates. More worryingly, available evidence suggests major weaknesses in classroom achievement and a growing quality divide between rural and urban schools (Unicef, 2009). Specific sub-groups of the poor also suffer from a lack of access to school facilities. The overriding challenge is to ensure quality improvements in the formal primary schools where the bulk of the children are The Daily Star (2015). The study is framed within the national plans of the government to support the move towards education for all. It intends to share the author's experience on how the innovative approach of a library demonstrated *quality of education* for the poorest and out-of-school children and ensuring that they come to school and stay in school (*improving access*). The study has chosen Shariatpur district as it is one of the lowest performing districts in primary education, standing near the bottom at 62 out of 64 districts with regards to rate of attendance, scholarship and drop outs. It is also one of the most flood affected and poverty prone areas in the country. The literacy rate is 38.9% (BBS, 2012). Overall gross and net intake (entry to class I) in the formal primary education system in 2012 were found to be 105 and 94%. Overall gross and net enrolment rates in primary education in Shariatpur district in 2012 were found to be 102 and 95%, respectively. The baseline study conducted for Concern Worldwide in 2012 in two Upazillas (Bhedaragonj and Gosairat) showed a gross enrolment rate of 94.64% and a net enrolment rate of 92.53% (Concern Worldwide, 2012).

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there are many government and non-government organizations have been working for eradication of illiteracy in different ways but the Installation of exceptional school library was a concept of Concern Worldwide (one of the Irish-Based Humanitarian Organizations), Bangladesh. There is no doubt about the fact that development is a product of education and education is a process through which people are formally and informally learned to acquire knowledge and skills. So the roles of libraries and librarians in the concept of eradication of illiteracy and capacity building of the people can never be overemphasized if it serves in innovative way by breaking the tradition (Ogunsola, 2011). It is already proved that library and information services have been transformed from passive to active and support to action-oriented. The study namely "Digital School Libraries for Extreme Poor Children" has been designed to attract the extreme poor children to school and improve their education in a sustainable way through training and learning by the innovative approach of a school library. It tries *to extricate*

*the clue why the low attendance and drop-out rates of these two Upazillas remain significantly high and what initiatives have libraries taken to reduce this?* The paper intends to share the experience of the author. It will explain how the library attract the children to school based on their interest and what are the learning's they learned from the library which changes their beliefs, attitudes, practices, behaviour and made them an important part of the community.

### The purpose of the study

The purpose of the study was to change the lives of the extreme poor children in a sustainable way by the installation of a digital school library in every school of remote rural areas in Bangladesh. Achieved outcomes of the study would be shared with the relevant bodies of the Government Organizations (GOs), Non-Government Organizations (NGOs), Policy Makers of the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education in Bangladesh. Its lessons learnt (best practices) should be treated as a "Role Model in Developing Strategy for Eradication of Illiteracy in Bangladesh" and the organizations who have been working for changing lives of the extreme poor children since long can adopt this model for the sustainable development of other marginalised people.

The present study is different from other research in the following aspects: It has to:

1. Work through community people by educating them disseminating proactive information;
2. Develop modules with a view to capacity building among Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), particularly female members, and building the capacity of the poorest mothers in addition to SMC development;
3. Develop advocacy on information literacy which play an important role at the local, district and national levels by the help of the libraries;

### Description of the study

Traditional approach always brings as usual result for attracting extreme poor children towards school in Bangladesh which is not satisfactory. Keeping it in mind, CWW (Concern Worldwide) (2012), thought to install an exceptional school library at the corner room of the school by which poor children would be interested to come to school. It was a 3-year project from January 2013 to December 2015 with 10 schools (100 from each school) in 2 Upazillas namely Bedorgonj and Gosairhat

(5 school from each upazila) where approximately 1000 children's and their parents need and demand in relation with schooling would be addressed. The libraries have been installed in each school with some attractive collections especially need based learning AVMs (Audio Visual Materials). Libraries installed by the project at the corner room because the room had been found useless and occasionally these were used for discussion purposes only with teachers. The rest of the time these were kept vacant. During baseline survey it has been observed that except sleeping time, most of the poor children preferred to stay outside of their home for a long time. They were very much interested in watching Hindi movie, action film, Bengali action movie, etc., rather than other games and going to school. The project decided to bring them back to the school utilizing the corner room as a library (the most attractive place for the children). This paper will share how the library acted as learning and training centre by collecting need based learning materials, providing right information for attracting the children towards school, creating awareness about their rights, educating about basic rights and allowing them to access resources. The project sanctioned many IT equipment for the children such as 5 PC (Desktop) internet connections, necessary furniture, video games, DVD players with CD-ROMs, eBooks on history, attractive video documentaries, multimedia projector, illustrative text books, story books, books on religions, cartoons, posters, sound systems, music collections and so on.

### Hypothesis

Extreme poor people in Bangladesh are trapped in a vicious cycle, denied access to basic services and subjected to varied forms of discrimination while their children are treated as social burden. Before launching the digital school library project, the study assessed relevant early projects data of some NGOs which were operated for changing livelihoods through microcredit. But it found no major changes. The study realised that they have a very potential role in country's economy and keeping them far behind from the mainstreaming, it is really tough to achieve sustainable economic development. During the period of developing concept note for changing lives of the extreme poor, the research team have observed that except sleeping time, most of the children preferred to stay outside of the home for playing. Most of the children were very much interested in watching TV in the shop/market/local elites home/club/where they get opportunity to watch it instead of going to school. They preferred Hindi movie, action film, Bengali action movie, etc., rather than other games and going to school. It was the main cause to utilize the corner room of the school as a library from where they will get the necessary learning and training on selective dissemination of information services for changing their

attitude, aptitude and even behavioral changes to cope with the society. Keeping it in mind, the study thought to introduce a digital school library approach by breaking the tradition.

### Objectives

The main objective of the study is to share the ideas of the author how a digital school library creates awareness and changes the attitude of the extreme poor people and improves the enrolment rates of their children through training and learning. Besides this, the study will explain how at the end of the project it has achieved the followings outcomes: (a) Improved pass rate on a standardized test for the poorest children rising to 60 from 10%; (b) Increased enrolment rate to 90% (from 40%); (c) Increased retention rates to 55% (from 30%); (d) 50% of SMCs and PTAs involved in development and implementation of School Level Improvement Plans; and (e) The poorest children and their parents got a good idea on Equality, Right based approach (RBA), HIV and AIDS and on their rights and entitlements.

### METHODOLOGY

10 primary schools under Shariatpur district, of which 5 from Bedergonj Upazilla and 5 from Gosahirhat upazilla were selected based on school type and accessibility. Schools were identified as accessible, if round the year access was easy; or inaccessible where the access was complicated in the flooding periods. Several methods were undertaken to collect quantitative and qualitative information like KII (Key Informants Information), FGD (Focus Group Discussion) AI, (Appreciative Inquiry), Personal Interviews etc. Secondary data on the planned outputs, activities, and how these contribute to the purpose of the project was collected through intensive review of the project documents and other supplementary documents as available in the Office of the Concern Worldwide and partner NGOs. In addition the government statistics were collected at the central level. The detailed sampling plan of the schools, learners, teachers, SMC and PTA members, project staff, parent's community, volunteer teachers, poor mothers, related government officials etc. were developed in consultation with the Concern Worldwide Officials. Primary data was collected through meeting, field visit, interview, focus group discussions (FGDs). Learning achievement of the children of selected classes was also assessed through administering appropriate tests. The data have been collected by a team of 20 members from January to June 2013 (Tables 1-7).

### Survey of the study

#### *Digital library initiatives*

With a view to create knowledge base society through installation of an exceptional digital school library, it was the challenge to the author and the library team to introduce the research methodology by which poor children's internal potentiality can be explored because it was the first task for the author to achieve project objective. The library committee formed different groups on different stakeholders based on their age and organized workshop where



**Table 1.** Sample schools for installation of digital library.

| Category     | Project                |                        |
|--------------|------------------------|------------------------|
|              | Bhedorganj             | Gosairhat              |
| Accessible   | 3 (100×3=300 students) | 2 (100×2=200 students) |
| Inaccessible | 2 (100×2=200 students) | 3 (100×3=300 students) |
| Total        | 5 (100×5=500 students) | 5 (100×5=500 students) |

**Table 2.** Activity plan to achieve the outcomes.

| Data collection   | January-June 2013  |
|---|--------------------|
| Data assemble and analysis  | July-December 2013 |
| Collect and Develop need based training module for improving learning achievement for underperforming and poorest children  | January-June 2014  |
| Training for teachers, SMCs, PTAs and groups on Library management, uses and its functions, library materials development conducted in 10 schools   | July-December 2014 |
| In 10 schools volunteers are working to improve learning achievement of poorest and underperforming students  | January-June 2015  |
| Advocate on improving library resources and learning achievement methods to national and local government (e.g. homework groups, peer to peer support, classroom support volunteers, classroom observation, active teaching techniques and materials development) | July-December 2015 |

they felt very comfortable to speak about themselves. At the beginning of the project, it was needed to introduce the project with the poor people in the project location. The study has applied appreciative inquiry method (AI) for hearing their voice in the form of a story and consulted several times with teachers, SMCs, PTA, community people, and extreme poor people about the service pattern which helped them to change their attitude. In their story, they explained about their identity, level of education, reasons for existing situation, personal liking, unlinking, interest of works, skills, dream, ambition, future plan, etc. Most of the parents expressed that getting education for their children is very important. As they have already spent their life with poverty, so in their life they have no any ambition, but they felt that education for their children can change the lives of their next generation. "We wish to live from hand-to-mouth and want to educate our children" said Rumana, a mother of the extreme poor children. "Poverty made us disable in every steps of our life. Now we want change and want to live like other people in the society", said another Rahim Mia, a father of the girl. When asked about the future plan, most of them did not have any. Mothers are very much interested to send their children to school. Based on the story, the author has analyzed their dream with a view to explore their potentiality. By applying AI (appreciative Inquiry) method and consultation techniques, their needs have been assessed that helped to explore the internal potentiality which will lead them for changing attitude and behavior. From AI and Consultation techniques, their needs have been assessed that helped to prepare the beneficiary profile.

#### **Demand for learning resources**

Based on the statement of the extreme poor people, SMC, PTAs, Community peoples, local elite, UNO (Upzilla Nirbahi Officer) and the children as well, plans have been developed in search of alternative ways to educate them for creating awareness and

changing attitude and aptitude. Special emphasis has been given on collecting and developing best-suited reading materials for the children and the selective dissemination of information (SDI) services for their parents. Service standards for the poor children were also the priority task to the author. For attracting dropout children, some motivating lessons have been shared through videos and other AVMs (audio-visual materials) like TV, radio, illustrative materials, text books, graphics, charts, cartoons, posters, playing equipment, etc. These have boosted up them. The most of the dropout children have preferred the following things AVMs (audio-visual materials) like TV, radio, illustrative materials, national text books, graphics, charts, cartoons, posters, playing equipment like Skipping, Ludu, Carom, Chess, Ring throw etc. Their parents and SMCs eagerly desired attractive learning resources for the library. To stimulate the children, some educational videos namely Mina Cartoon, Sisimpur (the popular Bengali cartoon for children) and schooling of river erosion affected children and pavement dwellers children, etc. were presented. These also inspired the children to go to school. They become interested to visit the library frequently for gathering knowledge. Thus, the need-based learning resources have been developed and some were collected to create interest among the children to go to school.

#### **Digital resource development**

It was full of audio-visual materials which prime motto is to create awareness among the extreme poor people for changing attitudes through counselling and encouraging them for sending their children to school. All the audio and video documentaries have been prepared by the research team incorporating suggestions and opinions of the community people of the project areas, SMSc, PTAs. UNO, volunteer teachers, elites of the community, community experts, legal experts and so on about the basic rights and encourage them for changing their attitude and traditional

Table 3. Responses with regards to the Outcome-1.

**Outcome-1: Improved pass rate on a standardized test for the poorest children rising to 60% from 10% by the end of the digital school library project**

| Milestones   | Questions asked   | Responses gathered  |
|--|---|---|
| (1) Collected and developed need based training module for the library to improve learning achievement for underperforming and poorest children  | How do you feel about the digital collections of the school library like short videos on Mina Cartoon, Amader School, Jiboner joono library etc. KII with UNO (2)                     | Important and all students are interested.  |
|  | Do you conduct any session for library management? What do you observe during classroom and library observation? Do you follow any format or checklist for this purpose? —SMC/FGD (1) | (1) No, We don't conduct any session for library management;<br>(2) Yes, (a) Observe neat and cleanliness of the library and classroom and the children as well, (b) Attentiveness of the library and its collection, (c) Whether every student can use the library, (d) Whether environment of the library is child friendly, (e) Whether teaching technique is joyful, (f) How teacher encourage students to use the library, (g) whether teacher use library materials in classroom teaching etc. (h) check library attendance registers of the teacher. (i) use checklist but few.  |
|  | Do you often visit school library ?- PTA/FGD (2)  | (1) Often visit school but not observe library.<br>(2) Observe library from the outside.  |
| (2) Training for teachers, SMCs, PTAs and groups on library uses, book loan services, collection developments, library management, active teaching and materials development conducted in 10 schools | Do you conduct home visit? What do you discuss with the parents of the children when you conduct home visit? - PTA/FGD (4)  | (1) Yes, tell parents so that their children become interested to use library. (2) Tell them to send their children to the school and visit library regularly. (3) Ask about the cause of absenteeism of the child. (4) Tell them to undertake IGA (Income Generating Activities) to meet the nutrition deficiency. (5) Tell them to monitor whether children study at home properly. (6) Tell them to keep their children neat and clean.  |
|  | How do you share the results of your observations with the teachers? How do you verify that the recommendations from the observations were implemented? —SMC/FGD(5)                   | (1) Observation result is discussed in presence of teacher at the library or individually with the teacher after the end of the class<br>(2) Whether observation result is implemented or not, is justified by next observation or in the monthly meeting (3) The issue is discussed in the SMC meeting   |
|  | How does the library project help you to attend school regularly? Give some examples of that support. — Poor Student/FGD(5)   | (1) Library collections attract us to the library and project staffs and teachers take care separately. (2) The library project encourages us to make group and work in a team. (3) It organises special coaching on our curriculum by volunteer teacher at library.(4) Those who are weak, library team identify them by their class teachers and arrange extra class for them after school hours (5) The library project also arrange special coaching by the volunteer teachers and follow up at home  |
| (3) Library taught them to help their parents  | Do you learn anything from the school library project to help your parents at home with household jobs? Does this make you be absent from school? —Poor student/FGD(3)                | Yes, since the inception of the library project, we learned to help our parents at cooking, bringing water, cleaning utensils, helping fathers at business, helping at shopping, taking care of younger, taking care during mother's sickness, feeding to livestock's, washing and cleaning, carrying foods for father's at the field.<br>No, It does not make any problem  |
|  | What are the causes behind absenteeism and dropout? What can you do to address these causes? —HT/Inter(2)   | (1) Causes: Lack of information and awareness of the guardian, poverty, child labour, financial insolvency, insufficient teacher, lack of child friendly environment in the school etc. (2) Solution: regular library visit, motivate parents to bring their child in library, provide necessary information support, organize courtyard meeting for creating reading habit, mother assembly, increase awareness to guardian that primary education is free of cost, increase use of library with more attractive teaching-learning materials, making school more child friendly, extend provision of getting stipend, extend provision of free coaching. |

Table 3. Contd.

|   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>What is your suggestion to continue the activities of the library project beyond the end of the project? —CBO members/FGD (12)</p> | <p>(1) Activities of the library project can be continued with the assistance of elites and local UP members, with the coordination of all (SMC, PTA and Teachers) (2) Volunteer teacher will continue their responsibilities. (3) Teacher and SMC will keep the program active and the quality education will continue. (4) the SMC member will ensure supply of teaching materials (5) Physical facilities will be ensured by the local Govt. and the SMC (6) Support of different NGO's, elites and other people of the community is also necessary to continue project activities.</p> |
|---|--|

Table 4. Responses with regards to the outcome-02.

| <b>Outcome-2: Increased enrolment to 90% (from 40%) in primary schools by the end of the Digital School Library project</b> |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| Milestones  | Questions asked  | Responses gathered   |
| <p>(1) Extricate the root cause to identify the dropout rate and low attendance</p>   | <p>What are the causes of low attendance and dropout? What initiatives have library taken to reduce this? —SMC/FGD(11)</p>   | <p>(1) Parents are not aware about education of their children, can't afford for education, poverty, can't complete lesson/home task, inadequate teacher and insufficient attractive library collection in the school, less income of the parents, migration, river erosion, visiting relatives house, natural disaster, help parents at home during harvesting time etc. (2) arrange book fair to create reading habit, ensure library visit, collect attractive library materials, arrange well decorated child friendly environment, engage parents, teacher, SMC, PTA, mothers etc with library programs</p> |
|   | <p>What do you do on library visit? How often (frequency) do you visit library. Do you ever visit any other libraries in your village or anywhere? —FGD/students (3)</p> | <p>Try to see new pictures of new books, watch short documentaries specially cartons. Our library is like our playground so we try to visit it every day at leisure time. No, we didn't see and know anything about library earlier than its inception.</p>  |
|   | <p>What kind of activities need to be undertaken for excluded and out of school children through library project. UNO / Inter (2)</p>                                    | <p>Arrange cultural competition among the school children and give them good books as prize. Library can offer need based training for the parents on literacy. Mobilise parents, Government stipend already there- reaching 100% of the poorest children.</p>   |
|   | <p>Why don't you go to school? —Out of school/Inter(1)</p>   | <p>(1) Lot of works at home. Parents can't afford of buying books, pen and others.(2) Due to the demotion to the lower class (3) To escape from the punishment. (4) Father married another woman (5) Due to poverty (6) Un friendly and unattractive environment of the school</p>   |
|   | <p>Is there any arrangement in the library to help under-performing children? What are these arrangements? —PTA/FGD (1)</p>  | <p>Yes, there are arrangement like— (1) Attractive library with child friendly collections. (2) Free movie/cinema. (3). many recreational games like keram, Ludu, Daba, etc are available in the library. (4) Special care after school hour Identifying underperforming children. (5) Parents are encouraged for sending their children to library.</p>   |
|   | <p>Do Library Committee meetings occur in this school? If yes, what sorts of issues are discussed in the meeting? —Teacher/FGD (5)</p>                                   | <p>Yes, (1) Explore the internal potentiality of the school children and then learning module/s development based on their potentiality. (2). Cause of absenteeism of the children (3). Motivating students to bring underperforming children to the school, (4) Increase attraction towards the library with a view to increase attendance to the school (5) Issues relating to the development of school, (6) About examination, (7) Minor repairing of the school, (8) School dress, (9) School gardening, (9) Sanitation situation of the school.</p>  |
|   | <p>What problems might you face if you are not educated? —Out of school/Inter (7)</p>  | <p>(1) Nobody will love me. (2) Will not get any job. (3) Life security will not be ensured. (4) Cannot mix with others. (5) Would not able to maintain family. (6) Will be deprived by other people (7) Always will fell in danger. (8) Would not meet up the basic needs and face insecurity. (9) Would not able to read and write</p>   |
|   | <p>What opportunities can be provided to enable you to go to school? — Out of school/Inter (8)</p>   | <p>(1) If books are provided free (2) If teacher do not punish.(3) If parents encourage to get admit to the school (4) If school dress and books are provided free</p>   |
|   |  | <p>(5) If we can watch movie or cartoon in leisure time</p>  |

**Table 5.** Responses with regards to the Outcome-03.

| <b>Outcome-3. Increased retention rates to 55% (from 30%) in primary schools by the end of the Digital school Library Project</b> |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Milestones</b>   | <b>Questions asked</b>  | <b>Responses gathered</b>   |
| Extremely poor children retention activities organized in 10 schools  | Do you participate in any occasion of the library? What are these occasion? Is this participation helpful? How? —Poor mother/FGD(16)  | (1) Yes, Book fair, cultural program, Mother's assembly, drama etc. (2) Yes, we become aware about the importance of the education of the children and also on other social issues in relation to the development of the children.  |
|   | Does library organise any Mothers gatherings in the schools? If Yes, How do library support them? What are the issues discussed there?— Local Elites/ Inter(10)   | Yes, Library organises mother's gatherings in schools in every months. It helps to disseminate information of the importance of education and look for options on how to enable kids to attend school- and how non literate mothers can assist the learning of the child.   |
|   | Do you like your library? If yes then cite 3 reasons? If not then give 3 reasons? Girls student/FGD (8)   | (1) Yes, feel good to study in the library. Can read, play and draw in the library. (2) Book and other reading material collections are attractive. (3) Library organises so many programs round the year which helps us in our education. (4) We can watch cinema, cartoon, etc in the library. (5) From the library, we could know much information about health and hygiene.   |
|   | Do the library committee co-operate with the school authority to organize co-curricular activities (debate, cultural activities, annual sports etc.) for the children in the school? If yes how? — Teacher/FGD(8) | Yes, Library Committee cooperates in organizing different occasion like, annual sports, day observation etc. in the school. They always come forward for the betterment of school and students providing physical presence and financial support to organize these occasions.   |
|   | How do you feel about going to school? Explain. — Girls student/FGD (1)   | (1) Good, for playing games, meet to our friends (2) There is library like our home, we can play there. Our teacher teaches us like parents. (3) The school is beautiful, teachers are also good and we can learn many things. (4) No corporal punishment. (5) Can attend cultural function. (6) We can meet to our Friends' every day. (7) Environment is beautiful. (8) We have play ground in the school. (9) In every Thursday we can read story books watch cartoon, cinema etc. and can attend library reading competition. |
|   | What problems do the female teachers and the girls face in this school? — Teacher/FGD (10)  | (1) No separate toilet for the female teachers (2) Girls face problems as there is no separate toilets  |
|   | Do library have separate toilets for boys and girls in the school? If not what problem do you face from this? — Girls student/FGD (5)   | (1) Yes, library has built separate toilets for girls and female teachers. (2) No, we use same toilets and do not face any problem. (3) No separate toilets for female. It would be better if there were separate toilets.  |
|   | Before establishing the library Which things do you not like about the school? Why? — Poor student/FGD (10)   | (1) No reading place. (2) No games arrangement. (3) Play ground is not big. (4) Drinking water and toilets are in same place. (5) Boys and girls toilets are in the same place. (6) Cows and goats graze in the school field. (6) No fan in the class room. (7) Old school building. (8) Insufficient furniture. (9) Dirty environment.   |

beliefs. The service pattern of this library was different than traditional one. Based on the demand of the target population, its collection was also different and extra ordinary. Most of the services provided here through AVMs. Some are through pictorial learning materials using illustrative reading materials for easy understanding of the beneficiaries. Service provided through AVMs are very effective than books and other printed materials. Keeping this in mind, the author was interested to start mind-mapping on writing

script and preparing short video documentaries for involving them into library project. The language used as subtitles in these documentaries was in Bengali (Mother Language). Therefore, it was possible to all to understand the videos very easily. The videos were edited by Sound and Vision (a professional Videographer) as there was a service contract with them. The finance and the technical support of making short documentaries were provided by the project in which the research team were mainly responsible to

**Table 6.** Responses with regards to the Outcome-04.

| <b>Outcome-4. 50% of SMCs and PTAs involved in development and implementation of School Level Improvement Plans by the end of the library project</b> |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <b>Milestones</b>   | <b>Questions asked</b>  | <b>Responses gathered</b>   |
| Library committee oriented SMCs of 10 schools on roles and responsibilities.  | How did you involve in the library committee? Do you know about the responsibilities? Describe 5 of the responsibilities. —SMC/FGD (1)  | (1) Involved by a library committee meeting (2) To attract both students and teachers to the school by a library (3) To increase the attendance of children. (4) To observe neat and cleanliness of the school. (5) To protect drop out of children (6) To assist to get stipend. (7) To enquire the absenteeism of the children. (8) To observe whether the teacher encourages students properly to use the library in the classroom |
|   | What is the SMC and PTA role in library development and how can it be improved? SMCs and PTAs — Local Elites/ Inter ( 9 )   | SMC main pillar for school development. They also help library committee to develop need based learning module for drop out children and monitoring their attendance. Provide support to meet to the parents, addresses their problems and attends training sessions  |
|   | How many meeting have you conducted upto the day since 2015? Mention at least three of the library related issues that have been discussed in those meeting and then implemented by you. — HT/FGD (5) | Two meetings.<br>1. Appoint human resources for the library.<br>2. Bring drop out children into school.<br>3. Organize meeting of library committee and teachers  |
|   | What do you know about the rights of the child? What steps have you taken to ensure that poor children realise their right to education? Give some examples —SMC/FGD (10)                             | (1) They do not know more about rights. (2) Discuss in different days to the child. (3) They discuss it in mother's gathering. (4) Discuss it in parents meeting. (5) discuss it in day observance  |
| Internal exposure visit organised for 10 SMCs to see a library which has ensured child centred learning   | Do you conduct exposure visits to share your experience with other SMCs? What is your specific plan for visiting another SMC? —Library Committee/FGD (9)  | (1) Yes, we visit and try to find out the weakness of the library. (2) We visit another school and see their library collections and manually we started inter library lending services both for teachers, SMC members and for child as well.   |

research on digital resource development. Thus, the digital school library became accessible and attractive to all the extreme people and their children as well with its digital collections. Realizing their level of education, the author has adopted suitable approach to get the extreme poor parents connected with the digital library that included formal training through workshop, group meeting, practical demonstration of IGAs, short tour (just bring them out from one school to another) for introducing other school libraries, cultural events, religious festival, picnic, spot visit, inspirational activities like indoor games competition, e.g., ludu, daba, keram, playing cards, etc., outdoor competition for their children, e.g., football match, cricket match etc.

Besides the inspirational activities, for the extreme poor people, author has developed different training e-Resources in local language and through CD-ROMs, the services were displayed. Some training modules have been revised for providing life skills training complemented by psychosocial support in reviewing existing life skills modules and adapted these to the specific context and needs of extreme poor people. Project people have also been trained up in these revised modules. These modules focused on enabling children to be self-responsible in ways that result in positive relationships with respect for others. The library project has helped children to develop positive assertiveness skills to protect themselves from drugs, violence, harassment, and other threats. As another form of psychosocial support, the library project has piloted legal-aid assistance for those extreme poor people who

are deprived from their basic rights. To create awareness among community people, library project launched two basic anticipatory information services namely "School e colo jobon goro" (come to school and build your life) and "Jiboner Janno Tathho (information for life)" which contain information related to health and hygiene, population control, respect others, religious knowledge, social norms and values, dignity of labor, roles and responsibilities of a citizen, work in group, value of education, childcare, hand-wash, saving environment from pollution, cleanliness and other social issues.

Some videos were educational but funny to attract the children to go to school. The key messages of these videos were everything is free in school including books, pens, khatas (writing material), dries milk, playing instruments and so on. They could not believe that all are free for them. Thus they become interested to go to school. Due to illiteracy, most of the extreme poor children preferred visual materials instead of printed sources. Keeping it in mind, the author has designed different digital posters which conveyed messages about their rights, health and safety measures, food and nutrition issues, behavior change issues etc. For example, one wall poster for "shikha amar odhikar" (means Education is my right) demonstrated issues about the basic rights of citizen, another poster on "protibar paiykhna por saban die hath dhowa shasther jonno valo" (means Washing hand is good for health every time after using toilet). Here, it is needed to mention that due to aforesaid reasons, these collections were not look like the traditional ones.

**Table 7.** Responses with regards to the equality, rights based approach, partnership, HIV and AIDS, disaster risk reduction, early marriage etc.

| Questions asked   | Responses gathered  |
|---|---|
| Have you ever noticed any discrepancy between rich and poor in the school? If yes then explain — Poor mother/FGD (15)   | (1) Yes, rich students are well dressed and they sit in front rows  |
| Do you face any problem with the rich children in the school? If yes Describe the problems. — Poor student/FGD (2)  | We do not face any problem.   |
| What sort of materials for playing and motivating do you have in the library? Which items do you use? —Girls students/FGD (7)   | For attracting extreme poor children to the school library collects AVMs (audio-visual materials) like TV, radio, illustrative materials, text books, graphics, charts, cartoons, posters, playing equipment like Skipping, Ludu, Carom, Chess, Ring throw etc.   |
| Do you participate in the co-curricular activities in the school? What sorts of activities do you participate in? —Girls students/FGD (9)   | Yes, participate in different co-curricular activities, such as (1) Annual sports (2) Cultural programme. (3) Recitation. (4) Drama. (5) Music. (6) Picnic. (7) Day observance (8). Organise book fair  |
| Is there any difference between the work that boys and girls do? — Out-of School/Inter (3)  | 1. Yes, boys do many jobs as mason work, carpenter, rod binding and other outside jobs and girls work at home.<br>2. No differences but wages of boys are more than girls.  |
| What do you know about the rights of the child? What steps have library taken to ensure that poor children realise their rights to education? Give some examples — Teacher/FGD (12) | Library teaches us every child has equal rights. So both rich and poor have the rights of getting proper education. Following initiative are taken by the library to aware children about their rights. (1) Demonstration, (2) Drama and role play, (3) Dissemination of information through SMC and PTA meeting, (4) Courtyard meeting, (5) By the Mina cartoon, (6) Discussion in the classroom, (7) Rally and campaign, (8) Mother assembly  |
| What sorts of problems do you face during floods? What steps are taken by the library project to reduce these problems? —Girls students/FGD (16)                                    | (1) Roads submerged under water, (2) We cannot come to school, (3) Problem of pure drinking water, (4) Toilet problem, (5) Books and khata goes wet, (6) Living place damages, (7) Interruption in study, (8) Water borne disease breaks out, (9) We cannot play.<br>The library committee in association with SMS/PTA and local elites make bamboo pool to cross the canal and small river. Library provides us information about DRR (Disaster Risk Reduction), weather forecasting, not to drink unclean water during flood etc. |
| Is there a negative impact on her if a girl is married below the legal age (18)? Why? Are there cases of early marriage in your area? — Girls student/ FGD (14)                     | Do not continue education, (2) There may be death risk for early motherhood, (3) Mother and child remain malnourish, become weak after marriage. (4) No., Only one/two in our area.<br>Library creates awareness about it.  |
| What steps library has been taken to eliminate early marriage?-Girls student/ FGD (15)  | (1) Library created awareness against early marriage providing right information on its negative impact among our parents. (2) Listening various story from the “library story telling session” we know that there is need to punish both parents of bridegroom. (3) Need to protest against it. (4) Need to take legal action. (5) Those who inspire early marriage should be handed over to police. (6) It should be stopped with the help of teacher, SMC, PTA, Library committee and the community people                       |

HT, Head teacher; UNO, Upazilla executive officer; SMC, school management committee; PTA, parents and teachers association; Inter, interview.

### **Learning achievement of the students**

Tests were administered to class II and class IV children in the 10 sample schools to assess the achievement level of the children and see if there is a change over the course of the project. A detailed analysis of the data is given Table 8.

As can be seen from the Table 8, there were dramatic improvements in the library project schools. The Class II results show that during Project Completion Report 60% has been

surpassed the target from 10% that is specified in the outcome. The class IV results improved dramatically more in project schools. When the study look at the pass rates of the students in the sample schools (School Records, 2005) earlier than the inception of the project 2006-08, the study did not see a clear trend of improvement, but after launching the library project the pass rates have been relatively higher.

Children’s learning achievement is supported by the library both inside and outside of the classroom. They are trained and guided

**Table 8.** Percentage of competencies students achieved on an average by grade.

| Group   | Class II |          |        | Class IV |          |        |
|---------|----------|----------|--------|----------|----------|--------|
|         | PCR      | Baseline | Change | PCR      | Baseline | Change |
| project | 60%      | 10%      | 50.0   | 90%      | 40%      | 50.0   |

PCR, Project completion report.

on effective learning and teaching techniques. Learning achievement is also supported through the development of teaching aids (flash cards, learning toys, etc). Increased awareness of parents about quality issues is expected to lead to greater demand and on-going support for quality education. This work is coordinated by the library committee and the Community Mobilizers (CMs) working closely with the SMC and PTA. Mothers and youths are also encouraged to start library work for the poorest children. The school library project acknowledges exemplary volunteer work through award ceremonies, publications and other initiatives.

Volunteer teachers, SMCs, PTAs and other group members have been trained on classroom observation and active teaching and materials development activities using need based training modules developed over the course of the project. The library team had developed pictorial observation sheets for non-literate mothers as well which is a great initiative to motivate them.

Activities under the advocacy aspect of the outcome are projected to begin during the last 6 months of the project. It is important to begin the introduction of activities such as homework groups, peer to peer support, classroom support volunteers, classroom observation, active teaching techniques, materials development etc. at the local and national level, soon because it is a very long process melting the iceberg of a huge system like the primary education system of Bangladesh.

### **Improved access to services**

During the final evaluation of the project, it has been found that 95% of the poor people in two upazillas received medical services (consultancy, check-up, medicine, counselling, and others). These arrangements assisted them in accessing health services. Stakeholders in two research locations unanimously agreed that poor people and their children can access to services has increased significantly as a result of the library project interventions. Access to government services has been increased in all project locations through linkages with local school library committee Primary School enrolment rate have been increased by 50% which never thought before launching the library project. Increased enrolment rates were achieved by raising awareness of the importance of educating their children. Access to legal aid also increased significantly through project interventions.

### **Research problems**

The sample consisted of 10 schools out of 101 in the two project area upazillas under Shariatpur districts. Questions may be arisen about the representativeness of the survey. But the research team has valid reason to select these 10 schools based on its type and accessibility.

Though 6 months is a very good time to do the actual field work and collect the data. But the research team had to face severe challenges for the first three months of data collection due to disastrous weather. It was the rainy season when extreme poor people had to shift their houses with belongings due to flood and river erosion. So, the team could not organize the initial workshop

with the stakeholders and beneficiaries to develop the tools which could indicate the representatives from all of the parents, teachers, local elites, project staffs, students and others related with the project. Even development of the questions were done by a small group and then shared in a small scale with the project staff and CBO members for feedback due to this disaster. It was also very difficult to check and cross check the accuracy of all the data as people were moving to the safe locations preventing themselves from flood, river erosion and water logging.

The competency tests had been taken of class II and IV students only on two subjects (Bangla and Math) whereas the baseline tested four subjects (Bangla, Maths, Social Studies and Science). It had made a bit complication to compare the data with the baseline information. There were several issues with collecting the data for a variety of reasons. Some of the information forms even in the 10 schools investigated in the Mid-Term Review at June 2014 (MTR) were not completed. 6 out of the 10 schools had a complete set of quantitative information and the remaining 4 project schools had partial complete set. This reaffirms the issue that the research team was very clear about the data what they have collected from the field. They also had a very common understanding of what it is and what it is for.

### **Other challenges**

1. Produce the innovative training modules and prepare the activity plan in new context;
2. Liability of newness
3. No specific research on it
4. Limited resources
5. Make them aware about library services
6. Social and religious influences
7. Time constraint

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The study expected to achieve the positive results because:

1. Bangladesh has demonstrated its commitment to achieve EFA (Education for All) goals and visible progress has been made in this regard (BANBEIS, 2012). A good number of the vulnerable and disadvantaged children, that is, children with disabilities, street children, children from hard to reach areas and ethnic communities including children with extreme poor socio-economic condition are still out of the education system. Some of them got the opportunities, but could not continue (Choudhury and Rahman, 2015).
2. Though girls are doing better than the boys in primary level, the frustration is that the percentage of girls completed primary education is not equally seen in the

secondary level education. Poverty, early marriage, unawareness of guardians, misapprehension of religion, lack of communication, eve teasing and violence against girls are among the reasons of their lagging behind (Nath and Chowdhury, 2008).

3. Bangladesh aspires to be a middle income country within the next decade, which makes it an imperative that the vicious cycle or chain of deficiencies in education, skills, productivity, employment and income opportunities is broken. But major challenges remains in respect of skills and capacities for rewarding life and livelihood including improving the quality of primary and secondary education (ADB, 2008). The Bureau of Non-Formal Education under the Ministries of Primary and Mass Education has to go a long way to be an effective agency for delivering non-formal education and promoting inclusive functional and sustainable literacy.

Taking into account the above mentioned causes, the study installed an innovative approach of a digital library at school instead of a traditional one for eradication of illiteracy and expected the innovative outcomes. It has been observed that since 40 years traditional approach brought as usual result in this regard.

The study results are very important considering the country context of the project. During baseline survey, it has been found that low attendance and dropout rates were very high in the two project areas but after the inception of the innovative library project these were significantly reduced. Besides these, the pass rates, enrolment rates, retention rates of the extreme poor children have been increased (Official records, 2015). Dramatic changes have been taking place in the behavior of the extreme poor people as long as they connected with library project. The extreme poor people are now more conscious about their rights and entitlements than before. It was the immediate results which have been achieved through the installation of digital library project. These outcomes are visible not only to the community people even to all who are working on primary education sector in Bangladesh as well. The long term results would be a milestone, no doubt, but it needs "impact analysis" which should be done after five years (In 2020) of the successful completion of the project. The study team felt that the installation of a digital school library project did well on relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, sustainability and correlations. It targeted to the poorest and most vulnerable girls for participating fully in education (primarily through the awareness raising training by the library at school) remains extremely important and relevant. It was effective at executing the intended activities to support the objectives of the project. Considering the number of beneficiaries and the size of the budget it was very efficient. Qualitative information shows change in behaviour of community people/parents and teachers. The accent of the project is around mobilizing the local population to support education for all and the information from the interviews are very positive and bodes well for the sustainability of the outcomes.

Considering the correlations of the project it can be said that it will help to the relevant bodies and organizations for creating knowledge based society if they adopt this approach in remote rural areas of Bangladesh for eradication of illiteracy. But it needs countrywide massive advocacy.

## Conclusion

The study achieved reputation by the local people and the local government as well to work with extreme poor people through an innovative approach of a digital school library. It was highly regarded by all stakeholders. It is the first study in Bangladesh working with extreme poor people by the innovative approach of a digital school library. While some other studies have been found on microcredit or on capacity building of the extreme poor people, most of the NGOs are implementing discrete sectoral programmes (primarily relating to health and hygiene). Significant progress has been made through this study, however, many challenges remain. Like all people, extreme poor people in remote rural areas also have dreams (The Daily Mirror, 2015). The digital school library has shown them the way of new life. But adopting an innovative library approach for creating knowledge base society is a very challenging task as rural people do not prefer to go for a new approach beyond the traditional one (Ogunsola, 2011). Based on extreme poor children demand, the most realistic approach has been adopted for changing their attitude. The paper has outlined the success and its lessons learnt would be a milestone for eradication of illiteracy strategy as well to create a knowledge base rural community in Bangladesh, if government and NGOs (Non Government Organizations) apply this idea for the sustainable development of other marginalised people.

## CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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The background of the entire page is a photograph of an open book with a bookmark, resting on a dark surface. The book's pages are slightly aged and the lighting is warm, creating a scholarly atmosphere. The text is overlaid on this image.

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