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Primary Education in Bangladesh:
Policy transfer, external influence and national ownership

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Abstract

This paper aims to explain and analyze how external influence works to transfer the policy agenda from the international practices in the country's primary education sector and assess the national ownership in the context of this working dynamics. The development partners (DPs) have assumed a dominating role in primary education programme design and implementation. The paper argues that a long-standing vacuum and uncertainty in the relevant national policy and resistance by the vested interest groups to any attempt to bring about reforms in the education system provided space for the DPs to gradually intervene and assume a key role. Presently, the DPs are coordinating their strategy towards the primary education in leadership of a multilateral lending agency (WB/ADB) under the sector-wide approach (SWAp) modality. This leads to the DPs to assume hegemonic postures in setting the policy agenda in the education sector. The consequence is loss of national policy ownership and weak ministerial accountability to the government or the parliament.

1. Introduction

This paper argues that primary education sector in Bangladesh has experienced something of a policy vacuum and capacity gap, which paved the way for consistent and substantive influence of the development partners (DPs) in the sector. Their influence occurred through the transition from scattered, piecemeal 'projects' to broad based 'programme' funding for primary education development. After this transition in 1997, three sequential consistent programmes by the name of *Primary Education Development Programmes (PEDPs)* have been undertaken. Education donors and partners have taken a prominent role in the design, funding and implementation of these programmes (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization [Unesco] and United Nations Children's Fund [Unicef] 2013). When the development partners play such dominant role, the consequence is loss of national policy ownership and weak ministerial accountability to the government or the parliament for performance.

However, efforts were made to promote national policy ownership by changing the mode and nature of DPs' support for primary education development. The sector-wide approach (SWAp), which was introduced during the preparation of PEDP2, advocates for government leadership for designing a single sector policy and expenditures programme and for alignment of all significant development funds with this policy and programme. Even so, DPs remain dominant players in the policy process. Analysts point to gaps between existing national capacity and SWAp's requiring capacity to

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design policy and programme. SWAp calls for a higher level of capacity for the national education sector decision making – especially relating to planning, prioritising and performance monitoring – than when financing was linked to donor-identified projects. Capacity for high-level policy dialogue with DPs is basic requirement in SWAp.

This paper aims to explain and analyze how external influence works to transfer the policy agenda from the international practices in the country's primary education sector and assess the national ownership in the context of this working dynamics.

After this introduction, this paper is divided into five sections. First Section gives a brief sectoral overview describing concisely the primary education structure as well as successes and challenges of achieving universal primary education in Bangladesh. Section Two gives the framework of analysing external influence to transfer the policy agenda in the primary education sector. On the basis of Dolowitz and Marsh Model, the analysis is organised around four questions: why the country needs the international donors for delivering the primary education; who are these key development partners; how the influence of the development partners works to transfer the policy agenda; and do national politics and policies constraint or support policy transfer? Section Three examines, in detail, the external influence in primary education policy process in light of these analytical questions. Discussion of this section denotes that the DPs assume a dominating role in primary education programme design and implementation. We argue that a long-standing vacuum and uncertainty in the relevant national policy and resistance by the vested interest groups to any attempt to bring about reforms in the education system provide space for the DPs to gradually intervene and assume a key role. To what extent national ownership is upheld is discussed in Section Four. Finally, the paper concludes with recommendation for building up national capacity for ensuring national stewardship in the sector through departmental ownership and sector specialisation by staffing the Ministry and its subordinate offices with strictly career primary education bureaucrats.

The authors have used both primary and secondary sources to put together the analysis and discussions in this paper. The primary sources include key informant interviews with education experts, bureaucrats, school teachers, and former executives of the multilateral financial institutions. A number of journal articles, book chapters, newspaper reports and columns, and laws were thoroughly reviewed for this paper.

2. Primary Education in Bangladesh

The Constitution of Bangladesh envisions the provision of free and compulsory primary education for all eligible children (Article 17 (a) (b) (c)). The official schooling age for primary education is 6 - 11 years. The government has the major responsibility of primary education catering to about 58% children (Government of Bangladesh [GoB] 2012). In addition, the needs of the very poor are largely provided by the non-government organisations (NGOs) through non-formal primary education.

Among these different kinds of schools, the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) and its attached body – Directorate of Primary Education (DPE) are responsible for four types of formal primary schools and Ministry of Education (MoE) sees to some primary schools likely *ibtedaye madrasahs* and primary schools attached to high schools and *madrashas*. Some other schools including kindergarten, and non-registered and non-government schools with large enrollment operate outside government institutional framework. Here it is reasonable to assume that different types of schools and involvement of different institutions produce unequal outcomes. We argue that this problem is related to the absence of a common policy framework to ensure consolidation, coordination, and flexibility in the primary education system.

However, a number of acts and executive order were passed by successive governments in order to deliver primary education to the masses. They include Primary Schools (Taking over) Act 1974, the Primary Education Act 1981, the Executive Order 1983, and the Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990. Among these laws and the order, the Acts of 1974 and 1990 have impacted primary education system much. As per the Act of 1974 the state took over the responsibility of provision of primary education on its shoulder by nationalising 36,165 in 1973 and 1507 more schools at different times (Kulkarni 2013; Billah 2012).The 1990 Act empowered the government to undertake legal and administrative measures to implement "compulsory" primary education of all eligible children in the country. As a result, the whole country was brought under compulsory primary education in 1993. On the other hand, the 1974 Act brought the primary school system under a centralised administration from the previous district based management. Under the 2013 nationalisation scheme, Government has taken a policy decision not to allow establishment of any new primary school by private initiative and not consider it to be eligible for government funding at a later date. Thus, the Government will now assess the need for setting up new primary schools and set up schools on its own initiative and issue appropriate approvals of schools to be set up (Kulkarni 2013).

2.1 Key successes and challenges in primary education

Bangladesh has achieved significant progress in terms of enrolment in primary schools including gender parity. The country had already met the Dakar and the MDG target of achieving gender parity by 2005 (Unesco 2009). The number of children enrolled practically doubled from about 8.9 million to over 16 million between 1985 and 2005 (WB 2008). This enrollment contributed to the improvement of the situation of out-of-schooling by 23% in 1998 to 13.6% in 2008 with a major improvement in the poorest households (ibid).

This considerable increase in the primary education gross and net enrolment rates and the achievement of the MDG of gender parity in primary education have been possible mostly because of various interventions. These include stipends, scholarships, and school lunch or food provisions under the projects of the government and different development partners. Government's Primary School Stipend Programme accommodates 7.8 million students in rural areas, which is making an important

contribution towards increasing enrolment and the retention of socio-economically disadvantaged children (Unesco and Unicef 2013).

Nevertheless, about one-tenth (11%) of primary education age children, compared to 3% in India and 5% in Sri Lanka, cannot access to education in Bangladesh (Unesco and Unicef 2013). These children are the marginalised and the disadvantaged who have no access to primary education because of economic, social, ethnic, religious, geographic and language barriers and are affected by natural disasters and other emergencies (ibid).

Furthermore, completion of and progression through primary education on time are key requirements to achieve education for all (EFA) Goal2 and Millennium Development Goal (MDG)2 in addition to their enrolment into school. Bangladesh encounters challenges in retaining children in school until they graduate from primary education. In Bangladesh, 13% children repeat compared to 1% in Sri Lanka and 61% survive to the last grade of primary education cycle, which is exactly similar to Pakistan and much less than India (about 95%) (Unesco & Unicef 2013). Among the children, fewer boys are starting the last grade of primary education. This statistics highlights lack of school effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery.

3. Analytical Framework of External Influence in Policy Transfer

Analysis of external influence in policy transfer is founded on 'The Dolowitz and Marsh Model'. This model is organised around six questions (see Table 1): why do actors engage in policy transfer? who are the key actors involved in the policy transfer process? what is transferred? from where are the lessons drawn? what are the different degrees of transfer? what restricts or facilitates the policy transfer process?

Table 1: Dolowitz and Marsh Policy Transfer Framework

Why transfer? (mixtures)	Who is involved in transfer?	What is transferred?	From Where	Degree of transfer	Constraints on transfer
↓	↓	↓	↓	↓	↓
International Pressures	Bureaucrats Civil Servants	Programmes	Global & Regional	Emulation	Past policies

Source: Dolowitz and Marsh 2000

According to Dolowitz and Marsh, there are three types of policy transfer: a) voluntary, b) coercive, and c) mixtures. 'Lesson drawing' is an example of 'voluntary' policy transfer. On the other hand, 'direct imposition' exemplifies 'coercive' policy transfer. However, when a consensus is drawn between the recipients (wanted to) and the actors

(have to), then it can be termed 'mixtures of policy transfer'- 'international pressures' and 'loans' being some of the examples.

Furthermore, they identified four degrees of policy transfer: copying, which involves direct and complete transfer; emulation, which involves transfer of the ideas behind the policy or programme; combinations, which involve mixtures of several different policies; and inspiration, where policy in another jurisdiction may inspire a policy change, but where the final outcome does not actually draw upon the original.

On the basis of Dolowitz and Marsh Model, the discussion and analysis in this paper is organised around four questions: why the country needs the international donors for delivering the primary education (the rationale for external influence); who are these key development partners (key development partners involved); how the influence of the development partners works to transfer the policy agenda (the mode and nature of the influence); and do national politics and policies constraint or support policy transfer? The mode and nature of influence combines Dolowitz and Marsh Model's three questions: what is transferred; from where; and degree of transfer. After analysing this external influence in policy transfer, national ownership will be assessed.

4. Working Dynamics of External Influence in Policy Transfer

4.1 The rationale for external influence

The rationale for external involvement in the education sector emanates from both national and international perspectives. National dependency can be observed in terms of financing primary education development and filling in national capacity deficiencies in design and implementation of programmes and projects. These national needs have been catered to international development partners in perspective of the latter's shift in focus of supporting educational development globally.

Historically, Bangladesh had a large proportion of its population as illiterate which required urgent attention. In order to remove illiteracy the Constitution stipulates state provision of free and compulsory primary education for all. Reflecting the Constitutional provisions, Government opened up the primary education for the masses. However, since 96.7% of the national resources are spent towards teacher salaries in primary schools (Behrman *et al* 2002) very little resource remain to finance primary education development, which entails national dependency for external financial support.

This created a legacy of dependency on external funding in the primary education system, through aid, loans, and grants, which accounted for around 30 % to around 80 % of the total development cost during the last two decades (see Table 2).

Table 2: Sharing Programme/Project Cost by the Government and the DPs

Name of the programme/project	Total cost	GoB	Development partners
General Education Project (GEP)	US$ 335.51 million	US$ 68.89 million (20.53%)	US$ 266.62 million (79.47 %)
Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP)	US$ 2762.78 million	US$ 2010.78 million (72.22 %)	US$ 752.00 million (27.78 %)
Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP2)	US$ 1815.00 million	US$ 1161.00 million (64 %)	US$ 654.00 million (36 %)
Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP3)	US$ 7357.93 million (excluding discrete project costs BNFE)	US$ 6302.43 million (85.65%)	US$ 1055.50 million (14.35 %)

Source: GoB 1996; GoB 2003; ADB 2011a; GoB 2011

Although, 70% of development financing comes from the national revenues, the government's counterpart fund is less than that of development partners. PEDP2 is an example in this case. It was adopted with a cost of US$ 1815 million. Of this amount, 11 development partners contributed US$ 685.2 million including both loans and grants. Among them eight development partners pooled their funding and a parallel funding was provided by three others. The remaining US$ 1161 million was financed by the government (ADB 2011a). GoB's share comprised of US$ 864 million (74.42%) for the stipends project and only US$ 297 (25.58%) as counterpart funds[3]. Almost similar was in case of PEDP1. A comparison of funding between the government and the development partners of PEDP1 and 2 is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1: counterpart funding between government and development partners in PEDP1 & 2

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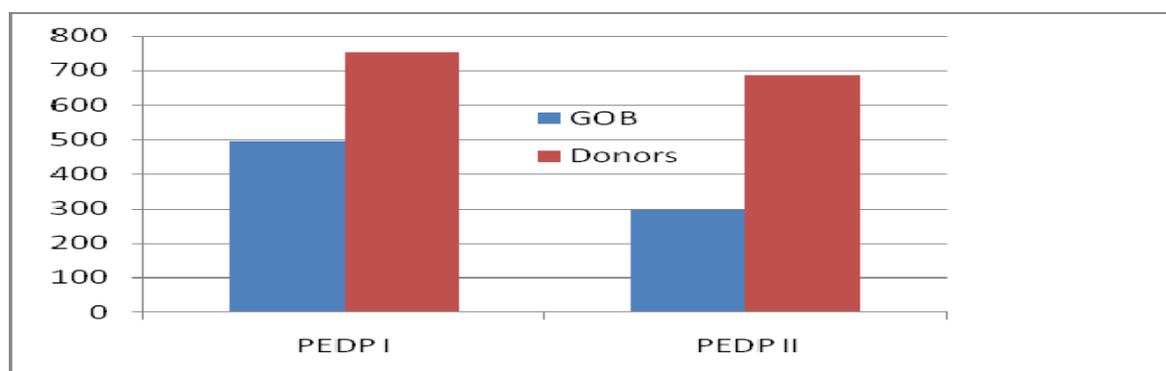
[3] Counterpart fund means the ratio of the funding of the government and the development partners for the same activity.

In addition to funding requirement, the public sector is beset with deficiencies in terms of capability for setting policy direction for primary education system. To overcome these deficiencies development partners provide technical assistance. For instance, ADB granted the Government of Bangladesh a technical assistance with a cost of US$ 9.9 million for the period from February to July, 2009 for preparing the primary education sector development programme (ADB 2008). This technical assistance engaged both national and international consultants.

The country's need for external support in primary education system received a positive response because of a shift in focus of international financial institutions regarding their support for education in the early 1980s. During the period of 1963 – 1980 the rationale for the World Bank's lending in education was manpower planning in which primary education was not empirically accommodated. It was the *1980 Education Policy Paper*, produced by an external Advisory Panel on Education in leadership of American scholars which called for shifting focus away from higher to basic education as a strategy to protecting the poor (Heyneman 1999). Since then primary schooling has been acknowledged as providing better access to formal and informal sector employment for poor households and encouraging behavioural change particularly in the areas of health, nutrition and fertility. This acknowledgment has been reflected in the aid policy (Colclough and De 2010). For instance, in the aftermath of the EFA Conference in Jomtien the World Bank increased lending for primary education by 360% from the 1986 to 1990 period to the 1991 to 1998 period (US$809 million annually). In addition, the percentage of bilateral education grants devoted to basic education tripled between 1989-90 and 1994-95 (Alexander 2001). Thereby, equilibrium is produced by the interplay between an internal need for external support and the Banks' shifting emphasis on basic education globally.

The shift of international support towards primary education connotes that Bangladesh is an important case for development partners. Of the global total of some 145 million children of primary-school age who were out of school in the late 1980s, some 60% were from four countries – India, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Nigeria (Lockheed, Verspoor and Associates 1991; cited in Colclough and De 2010).

4.2 Key development partners involved

The development partners include both bilateral donors and multilateral financial institutions who have been involved in the primary education system since early 1980s (see Table 3) and across the administrative levels from central to sub-cluster level (see Table 4). The inception of their involvement was marked through undertaking International Development Association (IDA)'s 'Universal Primary Education (UPE)' project during the Second Five-Year Plan period (1980 - 85). The project covered forty-four *Upazilas*. Simultaneously, Government of Bangladesh undertook 'Universal Primary Education (National)' project with its own finances. The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (Unesco) also provided financial assistance to these projects which targeted to improve the infrastructural facilities, distribution of textbooks and training of

teachers for the primary schools (Rabbi 2006; Ahmed 2012). However, in the First Five Year Plan (1973-78) and in the Two Year Plan period (1978-80) the Government had been alone trying for expansion of primary education and Universal Primary Education (UPE) (WB 2004).

Table 3: Involvement of development partners in last three decades

Period	Name of the project/programme	Donor involvement (jointly/singly)
1981- 85	Universalisation of Primary Education (UPE) project	World Bank, Unesco, Unicef
1985- 90	The Second Primary Education Project (SPEP)	World Bank, Unicef, SIDA, UNDP, Unesco
1991- 96	General Education Project (GEP)	IDA, ADB, DGIS, , Norway, SIDA, UNDP, UNFPA, Unicef, NORAD, German, JDRF, CIDA
1993-2000	Food for Education (FFE)	World Food Program (WFP)
1997 – 2002	Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP)	ADB, Islamic Development Bank, Germany, Norway, Sweden, United Kingdom, UNFPA, Unicef, World Bank
2004– 11	Second Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP 2)	ADB, IDA, DFID, EC, Netherlands, Norway, SIDA, CIDA, Japan/JICA, Unicef/AusAID
2011/12 – 2015/16	Third Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP3)	ADB, World Bank, DFID, EU, AusAID, Sida, CIDA, JICA, Unicef, Netherlands

Source: Based on information provided by DPE, MoPME

Furthermore, development partners have joined their hands in Government's innovative *food for education* programmes, which were designed to encourage low-income household parents to send their children to schools, increase school enrolments, promote school attendance and to reduce the drop-out rate. In this arena two major development partners are the World Food Programme (WFP) and the European Union. WFP financed a *National School Feeding Programme* jointly with the Government. The programme was introduced in a total of 87 highest poverty prone-*Upazillas* selected based on the poverty map from Fiscal Year 2009-10. Two similar programmes namely, *Food for Education Programme (2007-2010)* and *School Feeding Programme (January 2009 to June 2013)* were undertaken in some poverty prone and remote areas of Bangladesh with the assistance respectively from the WFP and the European Commission (Centre for Policy Dialogue [CPD] 2010).

Table 4: Donor activities across the administrative levels of primary education

Level	Development partners	Main Activity
DPE/central	ADB, IDA, NORAD, DFID	Management, MIS, HRD
Division	ADB, IDA	Access, quality
District	Unicef etc., GTZ/KFW	Teaching training
Upazila	NORAD, Unicef, GTZ/KFW, ADB	In-service teacher training, URCs
Sub-cluster	NORAD, ADB and IDA, through DPE	Sub-cluster in-service teacher training

Source: USAID 2002

Thus, Starting from the Second Five-Year Plan period until now, DPs have been active through financing the projects and programmes. Among them, the World Bank (WB) and the Asian Development Bank (ADB) are most influential in programme design and implementation. The former played a key role in PEDP1 and the latter in PEDP2. Key areas of monitoring and oversight, including joint fiduciary oversight of PEDP3 have been delegated to ADB and the World Bank (ADB 2011b).

4.3 The mode and nature of the policy influence

DPs' mode and nature of the policy influence has taken the form of emulation in primary education system. Emulation entails making the funds and the ideas available for reforms through respective programmes by the development partners. Two development programmes such as PEDP1 and PEDP2 were implemented during 1997-2011 and PEDP3 is being carried out at present. Undertaking consecutive programmes means complete transition from scattered, piecemeal 'projects' to broad based 'programme' funding for primary education development.

4.3.1 Finding a common cooperation modality

During the last three decades of their working for primary education in Bangladesh, the DPs endeavored to find a common cooperation modality. Their support for primary education came in two forms namely, project-based approach and programme-based approach. The project-based approach aimed to achieve quick gains. Before 1997, this approach dominated the primary education development in the country. However, DPs felt disillusioned with the project mode of development assistance (Ahmed 2011) since it produced two implications for the education sector. Firstly, while good short-term impacts were often generated from these projects the project-based approach did not create local ownership which hampered the longer-term effectiveness of the projects. Secondly, the government was weighed down to keep track of a high number of individual projects in the context of tending to use donor imposed disbursement and

accounting procedures rather than using, and strengthening, the government's own procedures. Furthermore, projects created much duplication in an uncoordinated and crowded development landscape (Save the Children 2009).

In amidst of shortcomings of the project-based approach, sector investment programmes (SIP) and programme-based approaches (PBA) were introduced in order to coordinate, harmonise and align external assistance to broader needs of developing the education system. The General Education Project (GEP) of early 1990s meets most of the characteristics of SIP. The GEP included capital investment projects to build school infrastructure and develop curriculum and textbooks to strengthen the education system. Within the GEP framework, different DPs supported different projects separately. For example, ADB funded development of primary education in Chittagong, Barisal, and Sylhet divisions to complement the government's focus of the GEP. However, GEP had been inflicted with many limitations which led to the design of Primary Education Development Programme in 1997, now called PEDP1, as a PBA. PBA consists of an umbrella over myriad of projects that are formally coordinated to deal with multi-activities involving multi-donors. In fact, the PBA was introduced at the behest of the DPs in the 1980s (Ahmed 2011).

However, government and development partners differed with regards to views on PEDP1 modality. Each donor had its mandate to set goals, disburse funds, and show progress and achievements working with or around government. Hence, the projects in PEDP1 were not formally coordinated.

To mitigate this issue, DPs came up with the Sector-Wide Approaches (SWAps) in education and health as a prominent means to achieve greater coherence in their approaches to providing development assistance. A brief for the 2000 Dakar World Education Forum regarded SWAps the best alternative to the fragmented project support which characterised international development cooperation (Ahmed 2011). In fact, SWAps can be regarded as variations of PBAs. The defining characteristics of a SWAp have been stated as that "all significant funding for the sector supports a single sector policy and expenditures programme, under Government leadership, adopting common approaches across the sector, and progressing towards relying on Government procedures to disburse and account for all funds" (Brown *et al* 2001; cited in Smith 2003). However, according to Ahmed (2011), SWAp has been a *sub-sector* approach.

On the premise of sub-SWAp, PEDP2 was designed and implemented in order to overcome weak coordination and duplication that impeded the implementation of PEDP1. A macro plan for PEDP2 was prepared with the involvement of the concerned Ministries, Directorates and development partners (Ahmed 2011). The macro plan aimed to integrate the PEDP2 programme within the organisational and operational systems of the MoPME and DPE to ensure that policy, procedures, processes and resources are harmonised to support project activities and to ensure institutionalisation and sustainability. Participating development partners in this programme created a *Project Liaison Unit* within the Asian Development Bank to manage the programme. On

the other hand, Government created a single Programme Management Unit (PMU) under PEDP2 for the diverse and complex operations of the programme. For monitoring the progress made under SWAp, joint review missions (JRMs) were carried out biennially.

Due to SWAp, no donor can push its agendas separately; rather they are compelled to fit their respective agendas into the overarching programme. Nevertheless, DPs have had room to influence the policy process. Analysts point to the gaps between the existing national capacity and the SWAp's required capacity to design policy and programmeme. SWAp calls for a higher level of capacity in decision making – especially relating to planning, prioritising and performance monitoring. It also called for a capacity for high-level policy dialogue with the DP, which the government lacked.

Hence, there is a need for building capacity within state representatives to negotiate with the DPs. This capacity would also need to be backed up by departmental ownership and sector specialisation by staffing the Ministry and the Directorate with strictly career primary education bureaucrats.

4.3.2   What is transferred?

DPs' engagement, specifically the World Bank and the ADB, in programme design and implementation implies large-scale policy influence. Generally, their support is intended to help stimulate constructive change. A Board of Directors representing all member countries approves a loan or grant when the recipient country can sufficiently stimulate the intended change of the loan or grant (Heyneman 1999). So, it was not just financial support that the DPs brought on board, as they were also instrumental in influencing certain policy directives with far-reaching consequences. Table 5 clusters the interventions adopted within the frameworks of PEDPs, which depicts that the changes are mostly incremental. Both quality education and participation in schools have been emphasised in PEDPs, along with the undertaking of some innovative elements to ensure the effectiveness of primary education in the country. However, the sector did not experience any policy reversal during the implementation period of PEDPs. One intervention implemented in a programme has been carried on in the next programmes. For example, social mobilisation was undertaken in PEDP1 to promote equitable access to quality education, which is retaken in PEDP3 for the same purpose. On the other hand, community participation was explored in PEDP2 for raising the quality standards in primary schools. Similarly, the decentralisation framework developed within PEDP2 has been planned to be expanded in PEDP3 and this decentralisation is identified as part of a comprehensive devolution plan. Box 1 explains the decentralisation framework, developed under PEDP2.

Table 5: Program interventions to develop primary education in Bangladesh

Interventions	PEDP1	PEDP2	PEDP3
Organisational development and capacity building	• Strengthening National Academy of Primary Education (NAPE) and National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB) • Strengthening institutional capacity at the national level and at the district, upazila and school levels	• Capacity of the MoPME and the DPE • EMIS capacity; • Field capacity at divisional, district and upazila levels • Organisational and management capacity at school level	• Strengthened field-level offices • Organisational review and strengthening • PEDP3 management and governance • PEDP3 financial management • Sector finance • Strengthening monitoring functions • Human resource development • Public-private partnerships (PPP)
Quality improvement in schools and classrooms	• Teacher development, school supervision and school cluster-based training • Improving teaching and learning	• Improving learning environment through provision of new classrooms, better quality textbooks, and an additional 35,000 teachers • Improving the quality of pre-service and in-service teacher training; • Community participation and support for raising quality standards in primary schools	• *Shikhbe Protiti Shishu* [Each Child Learns]: • School and classroom based assessment • Strengthening curriculum and textbooks • Textbook production and distribution • ICT in education • Teacher education and development
Equitable access to quality education	• Block grants to schools to support the provision of stationery to the poorest students • Social mobilisation	• Enhance institutional capacity of DPE at central and local levels to promote inclusive education • Improve primary school access and retention for disadvantaged children through stipends	• Second chance and alternative education • Pre primary • Mainstreaming inclusive education • Education in emergencies • Communication and social mobilisation • Targeted stipends • School health and school feeding • School physical environment
Infrastructure development	• Construction of new schools and additional classrooms	• Quality improvement through infrastructure development	• Needs Based Infrastructure Development

Source: Based on WB 2011; WB 2004; GoB 2011

Box 1: Decentralised planning and implementation at school level

A decentralisation framework was developed under PEDP2 for effective and efficient service delivery and community involvement. Within this framework, the planning function was decentralised at the school level with the implementation of the school-level improvement plan (SLIP) in 316 *upazilas* (ADB 2008). Under SLIP, a three-year development plan including specific allocations and implementation time-frames were prepared for the concerned school, by the school itself and submitted to the UEO for the approval. A SLIP school received a grant of BDT 20,000 from the government and explored community subventions to implement the plan and thereby creating a platform for a collective initiative for school development.

With emphasis on teaching and learning, SLIP funds were spent for achievement awards for students, class room management, teaching and learning aids, school dress for poor students, small-scale infrastructure repairing (electrical wiring, fitting fans, etc.), sports equipments, and extra-care of weaker students through appointing *para*-teachers and specialised teaching materials. These heads of expenditures altogether contribute to creating a school environment more attractive than the children's homes, leading to an increase in school attendance and an improvement in quality of learning. In addition, the introduction of SLIP brought about, through the evolve of the concept of planning at the school level, a bottom-up approach to planning and development, need based expenditures to enhance teaching and learning, and an institutionalised community involvement for school development.

Three reasons can broadly be identified for evolving this successful decentralisation at the school level. Firstly, community's own interest and its previous experience have induced them to support the primary schools under the auspices of SLIP. These schools serve the community's children. Historically, primary schools were local or community based institutions, even when receiving government funding (Sobhan 1998). Secondly, the standard resistance to reforms from the teacher community and/or bureaucrats did not occur, since the introduction of SLIP did not curtail their existing authority. Rather, SLIP involved them in the planning process by redefining their roles, as, the Head Teacher was made SLIP Committee's Member Secretary and the *Upazila* Education Officer was made SLIP's approving authority. Thirdly, since 1997 a sequence in undertaking development programmes was maintained in the Education Sector, leading to a better understanding of carrying out reforms between the government and the DPs.

4.3.3 From where policy is transferred

The development partners transfer the best practices from one country to another. Unicef supported decentralisation of school management through SLIPs (as discussed in the previous section) within PEDP2 in Bangladesh (Unicef 2009). The most widespread and far-reaching education decentralisation reforms have taken place in Latin America (Winkler and Gershberg 2003). International decentralisation models vary from the central government to sub-national governments (Argentina and Chile), to

schools (El Salvador, the Netherlands), and to schools with significant oversight or participation by sub-national governments (Armenia, Minas Gerais, Memphis).

Generally, a prominent avenue to push policy agenda in primary education are international conferences (see Figure 2). Among a watershed of conferences, three international gatherings have been the most influential in shaping the country's policies for primary education. First was the World Conference on Education for All, held at Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990. This Conference reawakened external cooperation for universal primary education in developing countries in context of a school enrollment decline in basic education during the 1980s (Alexander 2001). The conveners of this conference were the World Bank, Unicef, Unesco and UNDP – all were working under the UN mandate and the participants were all the developing countries' governments across the globe. Thereafter, two major global education policies were adopted in 2000, namely *Dakar Framework of Action* and the *Millennium Development Goals*.

Global initiatives through conferences result in common understanding on policy priorities in primary education between the aid recipient country and the aid lending agencies, as referred to Dolowitz and Marsh's 'mixtures' type of policy transfer. This makes policy transfer easier. For instance, the Jomtien Conference made declarations on the attainment of universal primary education by 2000, five additional undertakings on other aspects of access to education and the affirmation of the quality of primary education. Similarly, the UN Millennium declarations set specific targets to be achieved by 2015. As a signatory to these declarations, Bangladesh reciprocated these targets in its subsequent plans and programmes (see Table 6).
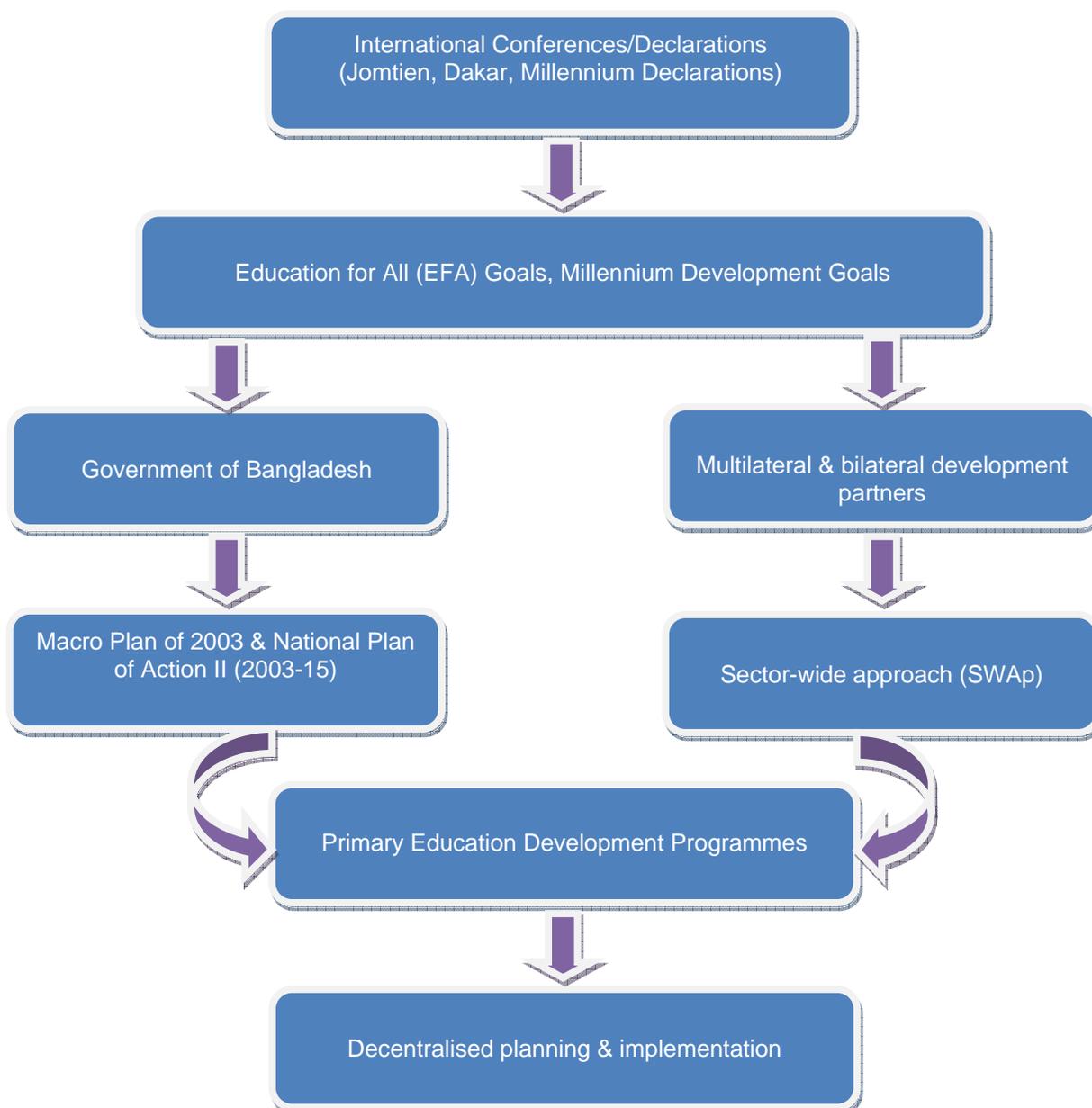
Figure 2: External influence in primary education policy proces

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│        International Conferences/Declarations     │
│        (Jomtien, Dakar, Millennium Declarations)  │
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│ Education for All (EFA) Goals, Millennium         │
│ Development Goals                                 │
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           ↓                              ↓
┌──────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Government of         │      │ Multilateral & bilateral  │
│ Bangladesh            │      │ development partners      │
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           ↓                              ↓
┌──────────────────────┐      ┌──────────────────────────┐
│ Macro Plan of 2003 &  │      │ Sector-wide approach      │
│ National Plan of      │      │ (SWAp)                    │
│ Action II (2003-15)   │      │                           │
└──────────────────────┘      └──────────────────────────┘
              ↘                      ↙
        ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Primary Education Development        │
        │ Programmes                          │
        └─────────────────────────────────────┘
                         ↓
        ┌─────────────────────────────────────┐
        │ Decentralised planning &            │
        │ implementation                      │
        └─────────────────────────────────────┘
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Table 6: Influence of international declarations on national policies

International Goals/Targets	Their imitation in national policies
World Conference on Education for All (EFA) (Jomtien, 1990) **EFA Goals:** Goal 1: Universal access to learning Goal 2: A focus on equity; Goal 3: Emphasis on learning outcomes; Goal 4: Broadening the means and the scope of basic education Goal 5: Enhancing the environment for learning Goal 6: Strengthening partnerships by 2000	• **Compulsory Primary Education Act 1990:** Compulsory primary education programmeme introduced in 68 Upazilas in 1992 and was expanded all over the country in 1993. • **A separate Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED)** was created in 1992 • **National Plan of Action-I 1991-2000:** The aim of the NPA-I was "to enhance both their quantitative and qualitative dimensions and also take up other feasible supportive programmes to attain the EFA 2000 targets" successfully. The actions proposed in the NPA I would "be dealt with two broad programmeme categories, (a) Primary Education and (b) Mass Education".
World Education Forum (Dakar, 2000) **Dakar Framework of Action** Goal 1: Expand early childhood care and education Goal 2: Provide free and compulsory primary education for all Goal 3: Promote learning and life skills for young people and adults Goal 4: Increase adult literacy by 50 percent Goal 5: Achieve gender parity by 2005, Gender quality by 2015 Goal 6: Improve the quality of education **The Millennium Declaration, (UN, 2000)** **Millennium Development Goals** Goal 1: Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger Goal 2: Achieving universal primary education Goal 3: Promoting gender equality and empowering women Goal 8: Developing a global partnership for development	• **National Plan of Action-II 2003-2015:** The aim of the NPA-II is to "all primary school-age children (6-10 years), boys and girls, including ethnic minorities, disadvantaged and disabled, should be enrolled and successfully completing the primary cycle and achieving quality education by considering the gender equality. • **Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED)** was upgraded into a full-fledged ministry in 2003. • **Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) October, 2005:** It was an eight point strategic agenda where the third point was on *Quality Education (particularly in primary, secondary and vocational levels with strong emphasis on girls' education).*

4.4 National politics and policies towards facilitating external policy transfer

Broadly, three institutional actors are active in primary education policy process in Bangladesh namely, the government, the NGOs and the development partners. The government includes politicians, primary education bureaucrats and primary school teachers. It was the political pursuit of establishing a socialist state in 1972 which led the politicians to enshrine the provision of free and compulsory education for all children in the country's 1972 Constitution as a fundamental state policy (Ahmad 1975). The first step to realise this constitutional aspiration had been witnessed through the take-over of

the responsibility of all existing primary schools on its shoulder by the Mujib regime. As a consequence of nationalising all primary schools, a primary education management through a chain of bureaucratic apparatus reaching to the *upazila* level and beyond evolved. Furthermore, this step made all school teachers public employees, united under association to ensure their interests. At this stage, an interesting nexus emerged between the primary education bureaucrats and teachers. As a result, reforms in management of primary education faced resistance from teacher communities and from bureaucrats. For instance, in 2008 the Caretaker Government contracted out the task of improving the functioning of primary schools in 20 *upazilas* to the Brac on a pilot basis. This idea came to naught on the opposition from the teachers' community (Haque 2009)[4]. In fact, the government's decision to involve Brac in quality improvement of primary schools was made in absence of a broader education policy at the national level. The existence of an education policy delineating public-private collaboration could lessen this resistance to reforms in the sector.

The need for a comprehensive national education policy has been voiced repeatedly, but this goal has remained elusive. Attempts were made by different political regimes to have an education policy for the nation, which can be seen through formation of a commission by one regime and scraping its recommendations by the following regime. Before 2009, a total of eight committees or commissions were formed and reports produced; however, none of them were fully implemented (Rabbi 2006).

Finally, after three decades of independence, the country had a National Education Policy (NEP) in 2000, approved by the Parliament. However, with a change of government following the elections in 2001, it was anticipated the fate of NEP as uncertain (Japan Bank for International Cooperation [JBIC] 2002). The BNP government, replacing the Bangladesh Awami League (AL) in 2001 national elections, scrapped the 2000 policy and instead, formed a commission led by the former Dhaka University Vice Chancellor Professor Muniruzzaman Mian in February 2003 (Juberee 2004).

Again, after coming to power in December 2008 national elections, the AL Government formed an 18-member Education Commission to draft the new education policy without reviving the earlier one. Based on their recommendations the *National Education Policy 2010* was passed in Parliament in June 2010 (Institute of Governance Studies [IGS] 2010). Nevertheless, the absence of main opposition party in the passing of the Policy in the Parliament does not guarantee the policy be taken up by the opposition if it comes to power in the future.

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[4] However, private management of public schools is not uncommon in South Asia. In Pakistan, a local NGO, the Cooperation for Advancement, Rehabilitation and Education (CARE), manages public schools in Lahore (Unesco & Unicef 2013). Nepal's Department of Education, over the last decade, has handed over the administration of more than 12,000 government schools to local communities (Kulkarni 2013). Nevertheless, while reforming the sector all possible stakeholders need to be included in the process. In the planning of the decentralisation framework, Chile, El Salvador and New Zealand designed teacher pay and transfer policies that have won the consent of unions (Winkler and Gershberg 2003).

Unlike in the past, the AL government had the 2010 Policy within one and half years after being elected to power. The regime has had three and half years to implement the Policy. Some remarkable steps have already been taken to implement the present education policy. An implementation committee and 24 sub-committees have been formed to give it more momentum. However, a coordinated regulatory framework is necessary to stop flip-flap attitude regarding the NEP and secure the continuation of the reforms within the framework of the policy.

In this context characterised by a) a long-standing vacuum, b) uncertainty regarding the relevant national policy, and c) resistance by the vested interest groups to any attempt to replicate and consolidate a local model, the remaining players – the development partners gradually intervened and assumed a key role.

5. Policy Transfer and National Ownership

It is inferred from the foregoing discussion that the country draws policy agenda from international initiatives, which is not dissociated with national ownership. State representatives exercise limited ownership by participating in these global processes and procedures. While the global commitments and frameworks are translated into actions at national level through undertaking projects and programmes, to what extent the government exercises stewardship is questionable.

The government's stewardship can be assessed in two ways: role of the DPs in design of projects and building national capacity for implementation. Presently, the DPs are coordinating their strategy towards the primary education in leadership of a multilateral lending agency (WB/ADB) under the SWAp modality. This leads the development partners to assume hegemonic postures in setting the policy agenda. The consequence is loss of national policy ownership and weak ministerial accountability to the government or the parliament. As per SWAp modility, joint review missions were carried out for monitoring the progress of the primary education development programmes.

A back-and-forth tendency of the Government was seen in regards of adopting programme approach in primary education development. In support of the Fifth Five-Year Development Plan 1997-2002, the Government and DPs agreed to implement a two-phase Primary Education Development Programme (PEDP) during 1998-2008. The first phase of the PEDP (1998 – 2003), with estimated costs of US$ 741.7 million, was designed with a programme approach. However, programme approach could not be implemented due to lack of Government's readiness and finally, upon the Government's request, the sub-sector-wide programme was split into nine major projects supported by DPs and 18 other smaller GoB projects (WB 2004). While returning from programme to project, the then Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED), (renamed as ministry since 2 January 2003), was made responsible for coordinating the implementation of these discrete projects within the agreed policy framework, mainly through the joint annual review. In reality, the Government's capacity to plan and manage the project effectively through coordination and logical sequencing of different activities of all 27 projects of PEDP1 was overrated. Hence, in order to support coordination, the IDA

supervision team took the lead in refining and finalising data collection, analysis and reporting on key performance indicators (KPIs) of PEDP1 (ibid).

In fact, primary education development has gone through incremental transition from project approach to assimilate SWAp. When PEDP2 was developed under a sub-sector approach it was new for both the DPs and the Government. Implementation of PEDP2 was stalled in cases due to lack of proactive understanding of requirements for inter-ministerial agreement to advance on certain actions (especially in instances where policy changes were required) and negotiation to resolve these issues. However, these lessons have been carried into the planning of PEDP3, more proactively to build joint-accountability (where required for some achievements) with other ministries and/or agencies during the design stage of the programme. In addition, most of the reforms initiated under PEDP2 have been rolled into PEDP3, which was approved in August 2011 and became effective in December 2011. PEDP3 provides for establishment of an inter-ministerial programme steering committee (PSC), chaired by the secretary of MOPME and with representatives of key ministries and civil society. The PSC will oversee the PEDP3 policy implementation, review programme progress, approve the annual budget, ensure timely decisions in critical inter-ministerial policy and implementation issues, and provide operational guidance. A programme surveillance unit (PSU), headed by the MoPME Additional Secretary, and a programme support office will support the PSC (GoB 2011; ADB 2011b).

In addition to finding a common cooperation modality, DPs played key role in design of primary education development programmes. PEDP1 was prepared with the assistance of Japanese Grant administered by IDA. Under the framework of this PEDP, the DPs and Government carried out 27 projects during1997-2002. In 2001 the Government requested ADB to start preparation for a follow-on project to the PEDP1. At the same time, some of the DPs wanted to take part in the preparation of PEDP2. Accordingly, Technical Assistance team of ADB and additional TA provided by Netherlands, Norway, EU, Unicef and IDA jointly prepared PEDP2 in collaboration with DPE and Primary and Mass Education Division (PMED) covering a period of five years (2003-2008) at an estimated cost of US$ 2.3 billion. Government's participation in this programme preparation was limited. PEDP2 lacked participation of key implementing line units of DPE, and was pushed for accelerated approval without adequate preparation; avoided tough policy issues and accepted high failure risk; and included a large number of non-prioritised actions (WB 2011).

Similarly, the GoB had comparatively limited involvement in preparation of the Macro Plan (MP) for primary education, which provided an overarching policy framework, strategies, and implementation plan, to be carried out under PEDP2. It was prepared largely by external, international consultants (engaged by ADB) and published in July 2002. The Government adopted and endorsed the Plan in January 2003. The Plan outlined the objectives of primary education over the next six years. As part of the MP, a stipend programme was instituted which targeted at the poorest 40% of enrolled primary school students, estimated at the time to number over four million annually (WB 2004; 2011).

As continuation of the DPs' support in programme design, ADB provided TA of US$ 9.9 million for preparing the primary education sector development programme in 2009. However, unlike the past, preparation of PEDP3 involved substantial participation of DPE line directors and implementing partners as well as civil society.

In order to promote national stewardship in preparation and implementation of national plans and programmes, emphasis had been given consistently in almost all projects and programmes so far to enhance the capacity of the Government. With the assistance of IDA, a Project Preparation Cell (PPC) was established in 1994 with Japanese Grant Fund under the Primary and Mass Education, to formulate a broad based programme for overall development of primary education. Considerable training was given to staff in procurement and financial management within PEDP1. Seven targeted TA, based on needs assessment, will be provided to strengthen capacity for effective implementation of PEDP3 (WB 2004; ADB 2011b).

However, high staff turnover undermined the impact of the capacity building and institutional development interventions of the projects and programmes. A significant proportion of the people who had been involved in implementing the General Education Project were no longer at their posts during preparation and implementation of PEDP1. In addition, four officers succeeded the helm of Secretary Position of the MoPME during PEDP1, which resulted in unsatisfactory programme implementation performance despite the huge commitment by Government (WB 2004). To address this concern we argue that the MoPME and the DPE need to be staffed with strictly career Primary Education bureaucrats to demonstrate departmental ownership, sector specialisation and state capacity to negotiate with the DPs.

6. Conclusion

External assistance undoubtedly led to significant achievements in the education sector in Bangladesh. However, as various goals turn into specific programmes and strategies in this sector, how they fit into national priorities, operational capabilities and political circumstances, have now become critical. To improve aid effectiveness, the key challenge is to strengthen country ownership of policy, implementation capacity and leadership in aid management.

This paper has tried to explain and analyse the influence of the DPs in the policy processes of the primary education sector through determining project design and monitoring the project performance. Resistance of the domestic interest groups and the long-standing vacuum and uncertainty of national education policy have facilitated this influence played by the DPs.

Bangladesh has successfully reduced its financial dependency on the DPs. Over the last two and half decades, DPs' financing of national educational projects and programmes came down from 80% in General Education Project to 15% in PEDP3. However, the Government has been dependent on DPs' technical assistance for its

programme design and implementation due to national capacity limitations. The Ministry has lost its institutional capacity to design and manage projects or programmes because of high staff turnover. A good number of bureaucrats who had been involved in implementing a program could not be found available in the design and implementation of the next programme.

So, DPs' influence in primary education sector remains dominant. Since introduction of SWAp in this sector they have enhanced delegated cooperation in key areas of monitoring and oversight, including joint fiduciary oversight of PEDP2 by ADB and PEDP3 by ADB and the World Bank.

In order to ensure national stewardship in the sector there is a need for building capacity within state representatives to negotiate with the DPs. This capacity would also need to be backed up by departmental ownership and sector specialisation by staffing the Ministry and the Directorate with strictly career Primary Education bureaucrats.

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