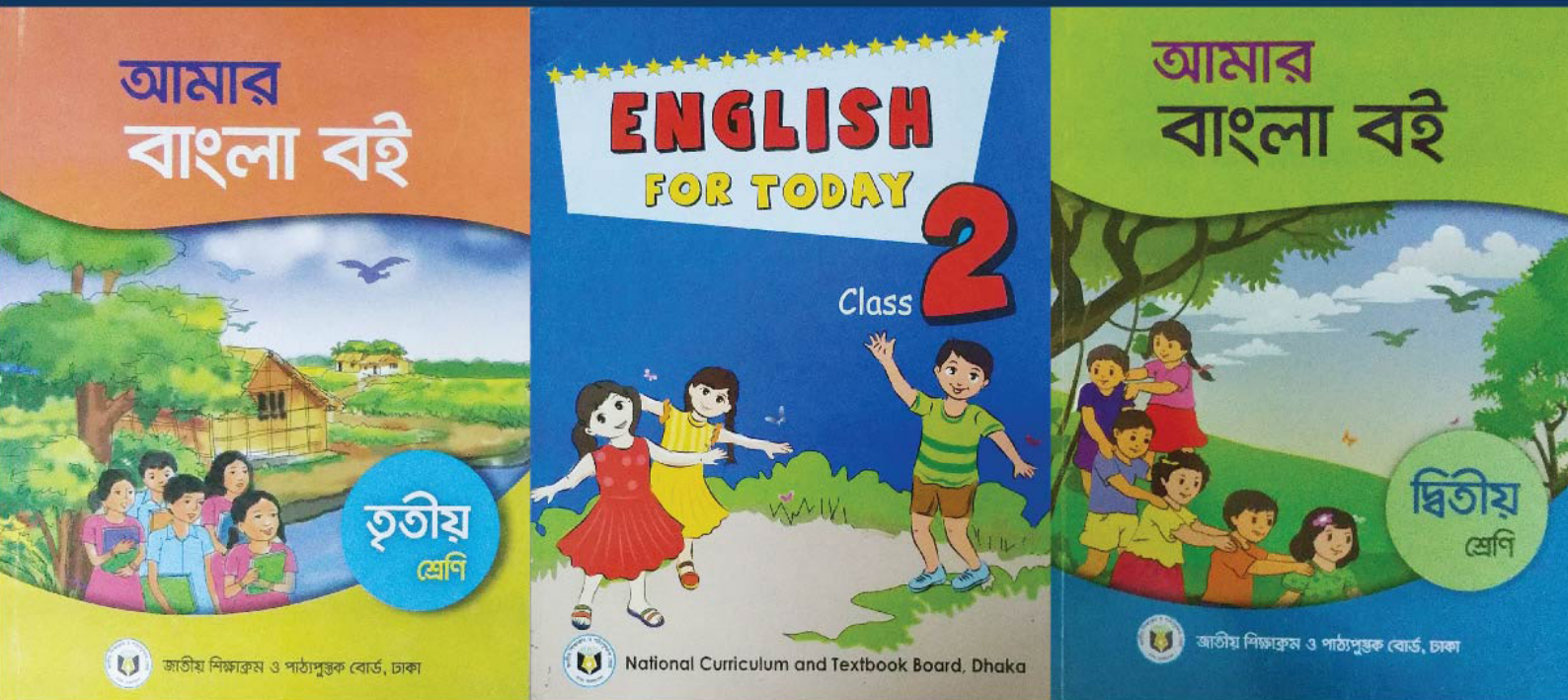


# Case Study 1

## Textbook Quality and Distribution in Bangladesh



Syeda Salina Aziz  
Kaneta Zillur  
June 2016



## INTRODUCTION

Public procurement is one of the most crucial areas of government operation which involves huge allocation of public funds and needs a considerable amount of technical expertise to be dealt with. This sector remains 'most vulnerable to corruption' and its integrity is threatened by the opportunities that exist 'for both public and private actors to divert public funds for private gain' (Beth, 2007). It is also stated that 'public procurement tends to involve relatively few, but high-value transactions. Compared to sectors with low-value and a high number of transactions the procurement officers thus have more to gain on corrupt behavior' (Ware et al., 2007 cited in Heggstad et al. 2010).

The risk of corruption and pilferage involved in public procurement is more visible in case of some public works like public construction works or utility service provisions whereas in other areas it is not so easily identifiable. Educational procurement is one of such areas where problems are many but evidence is not. As OECD rightly argues, lack of data makes it even more complicated to assess the level of vulnerabilities in educational procurement (OECD, 2012). Amongst different types of educational procurement, textbook procurement is one of the most 'risky' due to its high priority, strict deadlines and high allocation of public fund.

This case study deals with procurement in the education sector, particularly procurement of text books and with a specific attention to production and quality of primary school textbooks and their distribution in Bangladesh. It will be important to note that textbook quality in this particular case study refers to the print quality and not the content. An assessment of content of primary school textbooks goes beyond the scope of this case study.

This year, as a part of the activities taken under the Public Procurement Reform a Project-II (PPRP-II), the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD) has developed and piloted a third party monitoring strategy in two districts

of Bangladesh. Text book distribution and quality monitoring is one of the projects where citizen engagement has been introduced under PPRP II. The report from the citizen monitoring group suggests that textbook quality has been a major issue in all the schools that were inspected by the committee.

This case study takes a closer look into the textbook procurement and tries to understand the major challenges in the ensuring of quality textbooks.

কাগজের মান খারাপ, ছবি  
অস্পষ্ট, সেলাই নাই, বই বেশি  
দিন টিকবে না।  
প্রধান শিক্ষক  
জগৎগাতী স: প্রা: বিদ্যালয়, সিরাজগঞ্জ

## PRODUCTION/PRINT QUALITY OF TEXTBOOK AND ITS DISTRIBUTION: BACKGROUND

Delivering quality textbooks is a widely discussed and debated issue in Bangladesh. The 2003 PEDP II review report mentioned that textbook are particularly important because 'their supply attracts public attention, is politically sensitive, and normal procedures are distorted by the operation of colluding publishing houses' (Wood et al, 2003) It is also said that the government effectively has no control over the price, distribution, or quality of the books that are supplied to their schools. Until recently, delay in textbook distribution was one of the major concerns of the national curriculum and textbook board (NCTB). It was often reported that the delay in delivery of books was deliberately done by the printers to benefit the illegal traders as a little delay of one or two weeks can hugely benefit those who sell duplicate and guide books. While the board accused the printer for the failure, the printers also blamed the board for delays in procuring and supplying the textbook content.

To overcome this problem, NCTB decided to open up the tendering process in international level in 2010. As a result, one fourth of the order

went to Indian publishers for printing in 2010; however, the printing process didn't show any immediate improvement in that year as the textbook supply was delayed by both the domestic and foreign printers. It only started showing positive results in the following year. Reportedly, printers were able to supply 85 percent of primary textbook in schools within the given deadline. This continued for next few years while on average one third of the textbook were printed from abroad and two thirds from Bangladesh. This was a huge success for the country and the two affiliated ministries joined in the celebration whilst diverting attention away from the issue of improving quality of textbooks.

**Quality of paper is bad,  
pictures are unclear, not  
properly stitched, it  
won't last long**

**Head Teacher  
Jagatgati Govt. Primary School, Sirajganj**

The local printers were never happy with the arrangement and kept bringing up issues about encouraging the domestic printing industry, value for money and printing quality. Many critics have argued that upon influence from the local printers, in mid 2014, the Press Association of Bangladesh complained about the poor quality of paper and demanded that the Ministry conduct inspections. In response to that, an official investigation took place and some printers were waved or banned from service. This entire 'pro-local printing' agenda continued and even got stronger every year which was reflected in the bidding of 2016 textbook when 22 local printers won the entire bid of primary textbook by bidding at a 32 percent lower rate than the floated price. It was reported widely that the 22 printers formed collusion intentionally to block out the Indian publishing houses<sup>1</sup>. Many others also expressed concerns about whether the printers will be able to supply quality textbooks at such low costs. The World Bank, being a major funder of textbook production in Bangladesh, expressed

concerns and subsequently came up with a condition that stated that the bills of the printers and publishers will be paid only after the quality of the books is verified by independent inspection agents. Additionally, they asked to raise the performance guarantee (PG) of the printers to 15 per cent from 10 per cent to which the printers showed great resistance. Amidst these protests and discussions, a *Quality Assurance* protocol was put in place. While the textbooks were being delivered on time, the quality remained an issue. The following section explores this issue of quality to see how the procurement system works in textbook and to identify the major players as well as to identify the major challenges in the procurement system.

## STAKEHOLDERS IN TEXTBOOK PROCUREMENT

Major stakeholder of the primary education system of Bangladesh is the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education (MoPME) that is responsible for looking after primary and non formal education. The Directorate of Primary Education (DPE), located under the MoPME is responsible for several types of formal primary schools. The Ministry of Education (MOE) is in charge of secondary, higher secondary and tertiary education, including technical education and vocational training; and also for the religious educational institutions. Under the MOE, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) has responsibility for the curriculum and textbooks for both primary and secondary education. When it comes to procurement of primary textbooks, DPE is the purchaser of the textbooks. They raise the demand for textbook based on the estimates provided by schools all over the country. However, the contract is managed by NCTB which is located under the Ministry of Education (MOE).

## CHALLENGES IN PROCUREMENT PROCESS

Procurement is a long and complicated process that includes steps prior to procurement till the

<sup>1</sup> <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/76635/Increasing-complexity-over-primary-textbook>

evaluation carried out after the procurement. The risks associated in each stages also vary, such as the pre-procurement steps include lack of adequate needs assessment, planning and budgeting, poor choice of procedure, insufficient time given to prepare bid and so on (Beth, 2007). When the problems at pre-procurement stages are looked at for textbook it seems that need assessment remain a problem in textbook procurement. The PEDP 2 report mentioned about risk associated with stock management of textbook that resulted from an oversupply of textbook. Each year, a considerable amount of stock remains in the stores that are kept as a buffer stock. For instance, in 2010, 5.7 lakh textbook remained unused. It happened in the subsequent years, five percent of the textbooks were kept as buffers, which mostly remained unused. Good thing is, from this year, the DPE has decided to cut the buffer stock to three percent.

**Printing companies were supposed to use 70 per cent virgin pulp paper but it seems they did not comply with the criteria. Instead, the printing firms used paper that are made from materials like recycled paper;**

**Monitoring officer at the NCTB reported in the New Age, January 9, 2016.**

Involvement of multiple stakeholders in this process is a crucial aspect to consider in understanding the issue of textbook. As discussed, when the demand is raised by an entity, the contract is managed by another located under a different ministry. The whole back and forth process creates undue complications. For instance, during the first stage DPE sends demand to NCTB. Based on the demand, NCTB fixes the specification and sends it back to DPE for reviewing. After DPEs review and approval, it goes back to NCTB. NCTB

procures the textbook and send the books to all the Upazilas where the DPE receives them and distributes the books to the schools. When it comes to payment, there remains a dual structure. The bills are paid by DPE while the work order is issued by NCTB. This entire process is time consuming and it creates problem of dual authority. Even the suppliers find it difficult to work under dual authority. At the same time, to comply with development partner's (DPs) requirement, the agencies also need to go through certain steps, which take longer than the time required for this step.

Collusion between tenderers is another major problem that exists in procurement. Bidders, collude to get to gain advantageous ground, and compromise the quality of procurement. Quite evidently, the same happened this year in case of textbook procurement, 22 bidders colluded and won the bid that ended up with low quality supply of books.

At post bidding stages, procurement risks consist of insufficient monitoring of the contract, lack of accountability among subcontractors and partners, inadequate supervision etc. Textbook quality is a reflection of poor monitoring involved in the process. Many government officials have admitted that the handling of the publishing industry has been an ongoing issue for the Government for the last few decades. Different printers print the textbooks in huge quantities. It is almost impossible to monitor the quality of printing and paper physically in each different location. Again, there is an alleged nexus between the officials and printer through which poor quality paper gets approved by the authority. Even though the government built in a provision for pre shipment inspections, the inspectors were either found to be insufficiently skilled or not motivated enough to carry out the work properly. This year, the World Bank proposed to introduce the Quality Assurance Protocol, in an attempt to ensure accountability of the winning publishing house. Under this protocol, a four-stage monitoring framework was designed which could not be practiced due to many reasons. A Key Informant Interview suggested that even though an external agency

was appointed to monitor the printing activities, this was not effective, as the agency did not have enough authority over the printers. It had also taken a considerable amount of time to set up the evaluation team that would be monitoring the textbook distribution.

Time is a major constraint in ensuring the quality printing of textbook. The bidding process usually starts at the end of February but it needs more than three or four months to finally start printing. For example, this year, after the final work order was issued, the printers had only 130 days to finish the printing, which was again hampered by many debates, discussion, protocols and conditions. When the entire printing is done in such a short time, meeting the deadline became the most important concern and other issues got overshadowed. No or very little time can be spent on quality inspection and even the inspection finds about poor quality, no time can be spent on correcting the order. Again there is a lack of mechanism to penalize the printer once the textbooks are received, which allows the printers to get away with delivering sub standard products.

## FIELD OBSERVATION OF TEXTBOOK DISTRIBUTION AND QUALITY IN SELECTED SCHOOLS

In early January 2016, BIGD took the initiative to monitor the textbook distribution and quality at the two districts in Bangladesh with the help of citizen committee in two respective districts. The initial exercise for the groups started with the participation in the 'textbook festival' of 2016

which the government arranges every year. According to the initial reporting, the distribution of textbook strictly followed the demand raised by the schools. The teachers and head teachers respond that the number of textbook that they received match with the demand they raised but not all the books reached the school on the first day of distribution. Students received books for the three major subjects, Bengali, English and Mathematics, during the first round and the books for the other subjects during second round. The schoolteachers have since expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of the books and have argued that the quality is sub standard. However, none of the students or teachers received any document about the tender specification of the books, and therefore cannot provide a proper assessment.

In the next round, on 1st February 2016, the Citizen Committee and Youth Groups visited 28 government primary schools in the piloting Upazilas (list of the schools are given in the annex). They met with the head teacher of those schools and made random visits to the classrooms and inquired about certain aspects of textbook distribution including the total number of students in a given school, the total quantity demanded and the quantity received at the school and the quality of the textbook. The findings are as follows:

## TEXTBOOK DEMAND AND DISTRIBUTION

The Citizen Committee and Youth Group reported that authorities of all 28 schools

### List of textbooks received in primary schools

Class 1 | Bengali, English and Mathematics

Class 2 | Bengali, English and Mathematics

Class 3 | Bengali, English, Mathematics, Elementary Science, Islam and Moral Education, Social Science

Class 4 | Bengali, English, Mathematics, Elementary Science, Islam and Moral Education, Social Science

Class 5 | Bengali, English, Mathematics, Elementary Science, Islam and Moral Education, Social Science

confirmed that they received the correct number of textbooks according to the demand note they sent. The group members also reviewed the copies of 'demand note' for verification. This was followed by a discussion with the students, who also reported that they received the books on time. The reports submitted by the members of the citizen committee show that there were no discrepancies in the distribution of textbooks.

## QUALITY OF TEXTBOOKS

The Citizen Committee and Youth Group members asked the authority in each school about textbook quality. The opinion varied, with the head teachers in some school opining that the quality was average whereas in many of the other schools, they said that the quality was poor. When the students were asked the same question, they reported that the quality was very poor. In all the schools, the students generally stated that compared to the previous

year's textbooks, the quality of the paper used in the book as well as the print quality had both deteriorated. They have also opined that the binding of the books was done poorly, and little attention was paid to whether such a poorly bound book can survive a school year.

The Citizen Committee has collected samples of the distributed textbooks from different grade standards. Their observations identified several issues with the textbook quality which are mentioned below, followed by several images collected from the field:

- The paper used in the textbooks is ordinary and very thin
- The textbook covers are not of good quality
- The overall print is hazy and therefore, it is hard to follow the text
- The pictures in the textbooks are also hazy
- The print quality makes the textbooks appear worn and old



- Some of the pictures were printed twice and hence did not have any clarity
- The printing press used gum to bind the books resulting in sub standard binding
- The sequencing of the pages are often incorrect
- Pages are missing and some book have blank pages without any text or images
- The ink is blotched on some pages
- Images and stories are often mismatched
- Exposure to water completely damages the books and they disintegrate to the point where they can no longer be used

বইয়ের ভিতরের পাতা গুলো  
অফসেট কাগজ দিয়ে করা উচিত।

শিক্ষক

শীতলগাড়ী স: প্রা: বিদ্যালয়, রংপুর

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

As mentioned above, there is scope for improvement in the coordination and communication between the NCTB and the DPE. As the two key agencies responsible for delivering textbooks, NCTB and DPE have to explore new and stricter ways to ensure the quality of textbooks. While inspection agents monitor quality assurance, they cannot bear sole responsibility; multi stage monitoring and close supervision by the NCTB will be crucial in easing the criticisms surrounding textbook

quality. However, the biggest impediment to raising quality of textbooks is time. There is a limited time frame from when the DPE raises the demand to when NCTB delivers the textbooks. Due to this time crunch and the added issue of red tape involved in the process, it becomes that much more difficult to ensure good quality textbooks within the time limit. Therefore, NCTB and DPE should increase their efficiency in processing documents so that the procurement process is not unnecessarily prolonged. Development partners should also exercise promptness in providing feedback so the publishing houses can start the printing process on schedule. However, quality cannot be improved unless publishing houses conform to a strict accountability mechanism. If the penalty for delivering sub standard textbooks is negligible, the publishing houses will not feel obliged to raise efficiency and quality of the textbooks.

## CONCLUSION

The Bangladesh government along with assistance from development partners has put great emphasis in recent years on improving the quality and distribution of textbooks to primary level schools. While distribution is no longer a major issue as the textbooks get delivered timely on the first of January each year, similar improvements have not been seen in terms of the quality of textbooks. Joint effort from all the actors involved in the production and distribution of textbooks, both government and non government, will be required to raise the quality standards of textbooks in Bangladesh.

**ANNEX: NAME OF SCHOOLS MONITORED UNDER THE PILOT**

<b>Rangpur Sadar</b>	No. of teachers	No. of students	<b>Mithapukur</b>	No. of teachers	No. of students
Bishyanathapur Govt. Primary School	4	126	Balua Govt. Primary School	5	250
Moslempur Govt. Primary School	6	323	Bajrak Shantashpur Govt. Primary School	5	219
Janpur Jonaber Danga Govt. Primary School	4	280	Latibpur Govt. Primary School	10	239
Shiber Govt. Primary School	7	210	Paglarhat Manjusri Govt. Primary School	5	203
Shampur Bandar Govt. Primary School	5	194	Jibonpur Model Govt. Primary School	15	373
Munshipara Govt. Primary School	10	250	Shitalgari Govt. Primary School	7	240
Munshipara boys Govt. Primary School	9	273	Hamidpur Govt. Primary School	5	157

<b>Sirajganj Sadar</b>	No. of teachers	No. of students	<b>Belkuchi</b>	No. of teachers	No. of students
Hossainpur Govt. Primary School	10	295	Lakhipur Govt. Primary School	5	254
Malshapara Govt. Primary School	9	424	Khidromatria North Primary School	7	480
Jagatgati Govt. Primary School	7	301	Chalanatunpara Govt. Primary School	3	140
Masumpur Govt. Primary School	12	431	Garamashi Govt. Primary School	8	329
Noyapara Mechra Govt. Primary School	4	144	Shohagpur Girls Govt. Primary School	7	323
Charmirpur Govt. Primary School		220	Chala mukundagati Govt. Primary School	17	1129
Kadda Govt. Primary School	3	118	Chakh Shohagpur Govt. Primary School	14	582

## BIBLIOGRAPHY:

Akkas, A J M. (2016). The text book failures. The New Age. 10 January. Retrieved from <http://newagebd.net/191866/the-textbook-failures/>.

Beth, E. (2007). Integrity in public procurement: good practice from A to Z. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).

Billah, M. (2016). The quality of textbooks. The Independent. 3 February. Retrieved from <http://www.theindependentbd.com/home/printnews/32657>.

Heggstad, K., Frøystad, M., & Isaksen, J. (2010). The Basics of Integrity in Procurement: A Guidebook. Bergen: CMI.

Alamgir, M. (2016). Poor quality textbook: Lenders open investigation, NCTB probe yet to finish. The New Age. 15 February. Retrieved from <http://newagebd.net/203135/poor-quality-textbook-lenders-open-investigation/>.

New Age (2015). Lessons for govt from printing delay (editorial). The Daily New Age. 25 December. Retrieved from <http://newagebd.net/187201/lessons-for-govt-from-textbook-printing-delay/>.

OECD (2012). Strengthening Integrity and Fighting Corruption in Education: Serbia: (Serbian version), OECD Publishing, Paris.

Sharifuzzaman (2015). Increasing complexity over primary textbook printing. The Daily ProthomAlo. 24 August. Retrieved from <http://en.prothom-alo.com/bangladesh/news/76635/Increasing-complexity-over-primary-textbook>.

Wood, J., Hye, H. A., & Shrivastava, A. (2003). Bangladesh: developing a risk-reduction strategy on financial management and governance in PEDP2. Report prepared for the PEDP II Development Partners.

## AUTHOR

Syeda Salina Aziz, Senior Research Associate and Kaneta Zillur, Research Associate at the BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD).



**BRAC Institute of Governance and Development (BIGD)**

BRAC University

SK Centre (Basement, 3<sup>rd</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> & 9<sup>th</sup> Floor), GP, JA-4, TB Gate  
Mohakhali, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh

Tel : (+88 02) 5881 0306, 5881 0326, 5881 0320, 883 5303

Fax : (+88 02) 883 2542



<http://bigd.bracu.ac.bd>



[facebook.com/BIGDBRACUniversity](https://www.facebook.com/BIGDBRACUniversity)



[twitter.com/BIGD\\_BRACU](https://twitter.com/BIGD_BRACU)



[BIGD, BRAC University](https://www.youtube.com/BIGD_BRACU)