

Going the distance

Online School by Grameenphone and Jaago in Bandarban

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2011: Grameenphone and Jaago signed a contract and began working together, launching their first online school in Gazipur.

2014: More online schools are opened, one of which is in Bandarban.

2015: Grameenphone takes six young individuals to Bandarban on a three-day visit to see the school and how it operates.

Jaago's many schools aim to provide quality education to children coming from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. With the online schools, they go a step further. These schools are situated in remote locations where it would be difficult for competent teachers to commute to and for students to commute from. The online school in Kanapara, Bandarban is a prime example of such a scenario. The next closest school for the folks living there is roughly 5 km away, which in the hill tracts is an even more arduous journey.

So how does an online classroom work? Children are admitted to Reception first, a class specially geared to teach the students the manners and etiquette that come with an online classroom.

"The children are very attentive and actively participate in the class. They're not like us, who watch video tutorials and get bored," says Mahmudur Rahman, one of the participants of the visit. To maintain this atmosphere, students are not admitted to higher classes from outside, but internally promoted instead. As such, two classes now exist, with 30 to 40 students in each. A rotation is maintained in the seating arrangement so that each student may have a chance at proximity with the teacher, and vice versa.

Since it is difficult for teachers to control children without a physical presence, there are moderators present who act as their assistants and proxies when necessary. The moderators are taken from the locality and their engagement in the classroom instills them with



valuable skills and experience. After the classes are finished, the teachers will hold a 10-15 minute discussion with the moderators about the day, and their lesson plans and ideas for the next day. In the event of a con-

the teachers take the classes. The connection is provided and maintained by a partner in this endeavour – Agni Systems Ltd – free of cost.

This school has had a tremen-

citizens, ones who can survive in this age of increasing globalisation. In 2007-08, when call centres were being outsourced, Bangladesh missed out on that opportunity and India was benefited. This will not happen again," says Siad Arefeen, another participant. The children speak English very well. Not only that but they are also very polite and well mannered.

The curriculum followed by the school is Jaago's own. It is closest to the English version of our national curriculum but borrows things from other curricula as well. The school will go up to class 5, after which the students will sit for the national PSC examination. They can transfer to other schools after PSC.

"If I had to say just one thing about the school, it would be that the students have access to a good environment as well as good education – the two things one looks for in schools in Dhaka," says Ummay Tanjina Payel, another participant.

What goals does Grameenphone have regarding this project?

"Rather than expanding, we want to take what we have and make it work better. A few minor tweaks here and there," says M. Hafizur Rahman Khan (Specialist of Corporate Responsibility Engagement, Grameenphone), who looks after the project.

"We have targeted the remote areas where underprivileged children do not have the opportunity to go to a regular school. We have used our resources and connectivity to overcome the barriers to provide them with quality (instead of elementary) education. We are hopeful that this initiative will create an example across the nation that communica-

tion can overcome any boundaries. Our goal here is to make education the best it can be and continue working towards 'internet for all', leaving no one behind.

Grameenphone is very proud to be a part of this initiative," says Debashis Roy, Head of Corporate Responsibility, Grameenphone Ltd.



PHOTOS: SIAD AREFEEN

nectivity issue, the moderators may hold the class by themselves.

The technology used is the basic needed for video conferencing. Nevertheless, it still entices the students and encourages them to attend the class. An internet connection is used to connect the school to Rayer Bazaar from where

dous impact on the community. The children enthusiastically share whatever they learn with their parents. Parents are also eager to send their children to this school, as they believe it teaches at a higher and more internationally competitive standard.

"This school is raising global