



# Improving governmental primary education in Bihar

How to make a stuck system work



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## Summary

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Primary Education in Bihar today is hallmarked by segregation. On the one hand, there is a private school market where the children of those who can afford it turn to and a governmental school system for the Rest. This project focuses solely on the governmental school system, but thus cannot ignore the implications there are in a political economy where the children of those who are powerful and have a voice are not using these public services any longer. While enrollment has gone up to 99% according to government claims, the reality looks different. Children with disabilities are often entirely excluded, a usual school day shows an attendance of around 60%. Learning levels are deteriorating from year to year in governmental schools (according to the ASER reports) while they increase in the private schools. Various programs like DPEP or SSA have brought little change for the quality of education in governmental schools. The state was aware of these developments at least since the 1960s when alarming reports prepared for the government came up. The reluctance to act with political will resulted in a situation where India - and especially states like Bihar - face nothing less than a crisis in education.

## Education in crisis

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### How the Rest goes to school

What does a usual school day in a governmental school look like? Our focus area is a single cluster in Kurhani block. The nine schools have different characteristics. Some have a building, some have none. Some have a toilet, some have none. Some have multiple classrooms, some have none or only a single room. What is common among them is that none fulfills the RTE norms and in none effective learning is happening.

Governmental primary schools are a case of isomorphic mimicry in this state. Like flies pretending to be bees, the buildings or verandas pretend to be schools. If we define a school as a building in which children, teachers, books and learning materials regularly combine to make learning happen, there are no governmental schools in the cluster. Because learning is not happening – and books are not there. Teachers were recruited some years back for a rate of 1,500 INR with a minimum qualification requirement of having passed class X. Many entered by unfair means and fake marksheets. These very same people now receive a decent salary (although irregular), but lack the basic knowledge even for class VI. Asking children about what they would have to know according to the curriculum reveals that they do not know almost anything.



Nonetheless the increase of enrollment was celebrated as a great success for India. Having the bodies of children in schools, that is 'schooling', was confused with education. What Bihar has today is poorly equipped schools where no education is happening. A day in a governmental school reveals how this is (not) happening. Teachers write their obligatory four lines on the blackboard and leave the hot room with no electricity to sit outside while children might or might not copy the lines into their exercise books which they might have or not. Often one can hardly find a teacher in a classroom. Teaching is not happening at all. Asking the teachers, one will hear complaints of salaries not paid for months, of books not provided till today, of more than hundred students and multiple classes in one room, and children coming irregularly and being not interested in education. The pride and sense of duty of the teacher profession has vanished. Teachers and parents blame each other and have turned to despair. A belief that change is possible is not existent.

## So what? Now what?

What can be done in such a situation where almost nothing seems to function and a de facto collapsed system is only appearing to continue to work on the surface?

There will be no other option than to go into these schools with manpower. Providing continuing in-service training for a whole year with a mentor who ensures that teachers are working, but who also supports the teachers in teaching them how to teach.

At the same time, it must be ensured that the state fulfils what the law says on paper. The RTE norms must be fulfilled without any further delay. There can be no financial reasons to delay the delivery of a fundamental right – if resources are rare, other things must wait. A fundamental right cannot wait.



### Our approach

- Provision of in-service training, support and monitoring by a mentor in the schools for at least one year.
- Introduction of the MultiGradeMultiLevel-Methodology in the classroom.
- Providing small funds for schools to improve the learning environment.
- Creating awareness and provision of information about learning levels, legal norms, powers etc. among SMC members, PRI members and the common people.
- Creating common platforms of members of the political, administrative and school sphere together with villagers to address issues directly.
- Ensuring fulfillment of the RTE norms by increasing public demand and using legal ways.
- Advocating for the Common Neighborhood School System as in a report submitted to the Govt. of Bihar in 2007.
- Demanding a restructuring of the teacher cadre by examining the knowledge of para-teachers previously recruited and replacing those who fail the minimum requirements.
- Demanding a strengthening of the teacher training institutions in the state.
- Building an alliance of Civil Society Organizations, social activists, academics, judiciary, common people and the media to demand a strong public education system.

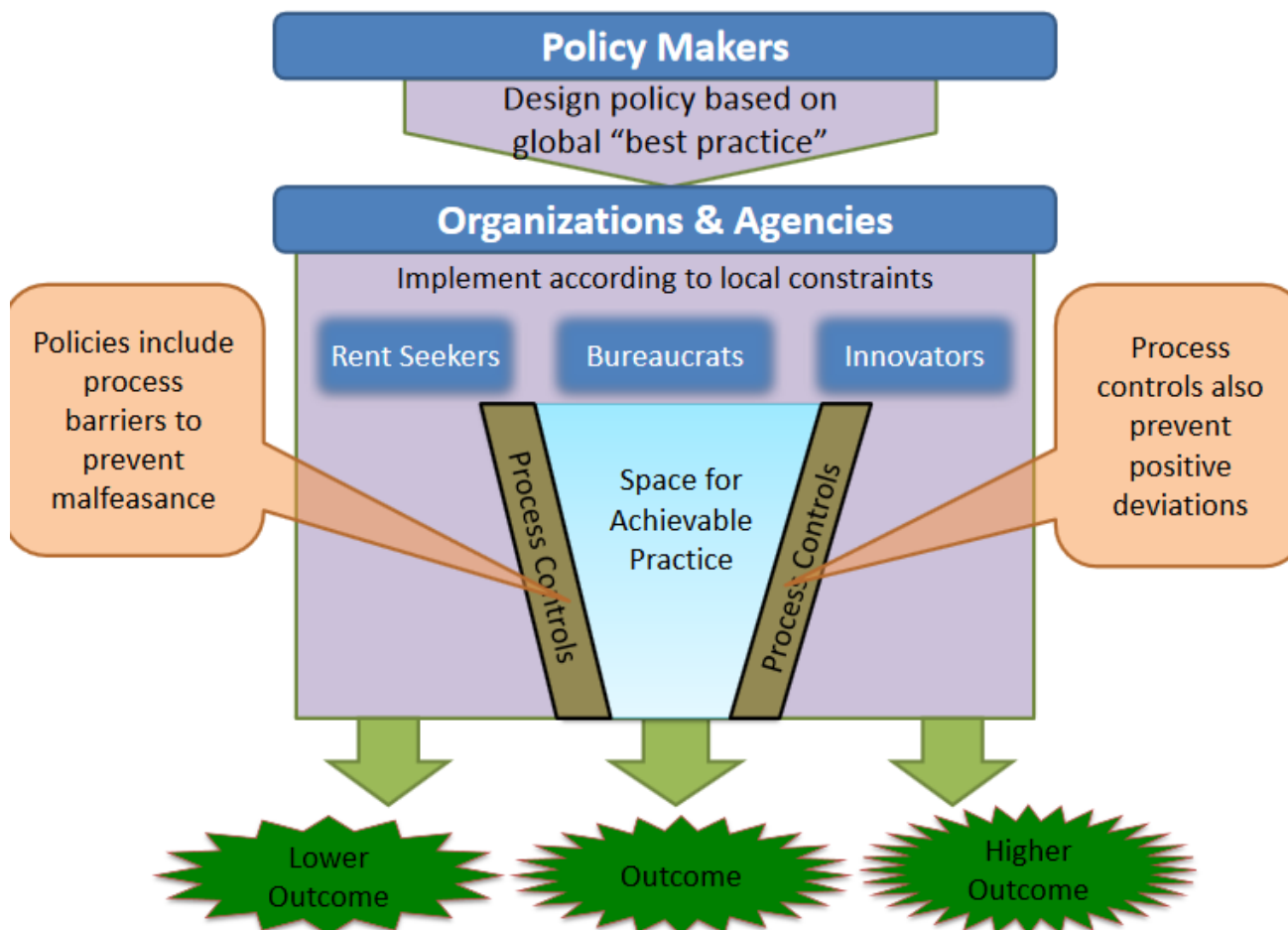
# The theoretical background

Our intervention inside the governmental education system is based on PDIA (Problem Driven Iterative Adaptation), an approach put forward by Matt Andrews, Lant Pritchett and Michael Woolcock from Harvard University. We want to allow positive deviations inside the system and ensure by frequent feedback loops that these deviations indeed have a positive effect on what matters – that is the teaching process in the classroom and the resulting learning levels of the children. We will use standardized testing (with variations in the exact questions) to monitor the results of our interventions closely and frequently.

PDIA is based on the following principles:

1. Local Solutions for Local Problems → What are the issues faced in schools and classrooms?
2. Pushing Problem Driven Positive Deviance → What changes have positive effects?
3. Try, Learn, Iterate, Adapt → Try and fail forward = learning
4. Scale Learning through Diffusion → Diffuse positive deviations into the system

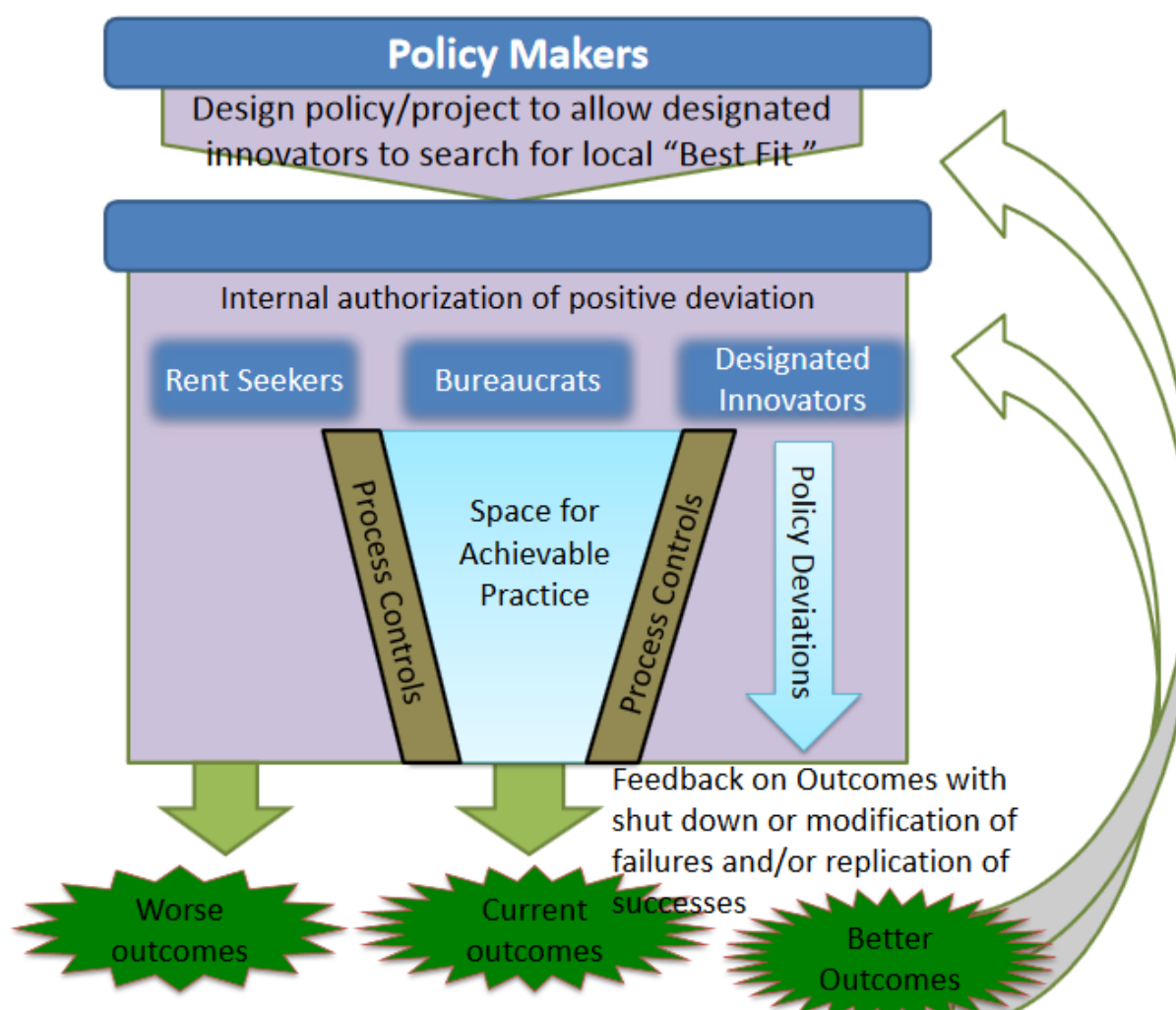
To allow this to happen, we need to get from



Source: Building State Capability: Evidence, Analysis, Action. Lant Pritchett Harvard Kennedy School and Center for Global Development. January 16, 2017. Enhancing Quality of Service Delivery Conference. Available online: [http://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/files/bsc/files/pritchett\\_world\\_bank\\_2017.pdf](http://bsc.cid.harvard.edu/files/bsc/files/pritchett_world_bank_2017.pdf)



Towards



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This can be achieved by getting the permission for accountable experiments in the nine selected schools. Close monitoring and frequent feedback loops ensure that negative deviations are quickly recognized and minimized.

Only by making a stuck system open to innovations can effective change inside the system be accomplished. Our focus is to create change in the daily functioning of average governmental primary schools in Bihar with minimum resources.