Quality education through school-based supervision and support:
The case of GSS primary schools in Bangladesh

R. Govinda and Shahjahan Tapan

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Trends in school supervision

Quality education through school-based supervision and support: the case of GSS primary schools in Bangladesh

R. Govinda and Shahjahan Tapan
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<tr>
<td>ALP</td>
<td>Adolescent Literacy Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>ANPB</td>
<td><em>Anondo Niketon Prathomik Bidhyalaya</em> (A place of joy)</td>
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<td>ANTRIEP</td>
<td>Asian Network of Training and Research Institutions in Educational Planning</td>
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<tr>
<td>ATEO</td>
<td>Assistant Thana Education Officer</td>
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<td>FS</td>
<td>Field Supervisor</td>
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<td>GSS</td>
<td><em>Gonoshahajjo Sangstha</em> (Organization for extending support to people)</td>
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<td>IIEP</td>
<td>International Institute for Educational Planning</td>
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<td>IQER</td>
<td>Institute for Quality Education and Research</td>
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<td>MIS</td>
<td>Management Information System</td>
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<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
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<td>PEP</td>
<td>Primary Education Programme</td>
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<td>RPS</td>
<td>Rural Primary School</td>
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<td>SMC</td>
<td>School Management Committee</td>
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<td>SMDP</td>
<td>Social Mobilization and Development Programme</td>
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<tr>
<td>SS</td>
<td>School Supervisor</td>
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<td>TEO</td>
<td>Thana Education Officer</td>
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PRESENTATION OF THE SERIES

This publication forms part of a series on ‘Trends in school supervision’, which accompanies the implementation of an IIEP project on ‘Improving teacher supervision and support services for basic education’. The project, which began in 1996, is one of the main components of the Institute’s Medium Term Plan 1996-2001. The Institute wishes to express its sincere thanks to BMZ (the German Federal Ministry for Technical Co-operation) and to UNICEF for their support in the implementation of this project.

Earlier research, at the Institute and elsewhere, has pointed to the need, in an era of increased decentralization and school autonomy, to strengthen the skills of personnel involved in supervision and support at local level and in schools.

Two related points are worth mentioning here, as they form both the background to and the rationale for the IIEP’s concern with this area of management. Firstly, professional supervision and support services for teachers, although long-established in almost every country, have been ignored, increasingly so since resources have become more scarce. This neglect has, until recent times, been reflected by a similar indifference among researchers. Secondly, one important reason why the quality of basic education has deteriorated in many contexts is precisely related to the weakening of these services.

The IIEP project, developed against this background, consists of research, training and dissemination activities. Its specific objectives are to assist countries in diagnosing and reforming the existing services of supervision and support, and to identify promising strategies for their reorganization and strengthening. The series of
publications, of which this monograph forms a part, is the result of research, implemented in several regions, to address a number of questions, such as:

- How are supervision and support organized in different countries? What have been the major trends in their recent evolution?
- What are the principal problems which supervision and support services are presently facing in terms of: organizational structures; overall management; and daily functioning?
- To what extent and under what conditions do these services have a positive impact on the quality of the teaching-learning processes in schools?
- What are the major innovations taking place, mainly in respect of the devolution of supervision and support to the school-site level? How do these innovations operate? What are the main results?

In order to formulate answers to these questions, the project elaborated the following operational definition of school supervision and support services: all those services whose main function is to control and evaluate, and/or advise and support schoolheads and teachers. The focus of the project is on external supervision and support, that is to say on the work of inspectors, supervisors, advisers, counsellors, etc. located outside the school, at local, regional or central levels. A common characteristic of these officers is that regular visits to schools are an essential part of their mandate.

However, many countries, in their attempts to reform and innovate supervision, are increasingly relying on in-school or community-based strategies (such as resource centres, school clusters, in-school supervision by the principal or by peers, school-based management) to complement, if not to replace, external supervision and support. The project therefore also pays attention to a number of such innovations and, in more general terms, the strengths and weaknesses
of strategies aiming at the reinforcement of internal quality-control mechanisms.

This series: ‘Trends in school supervision’, thus consists of a variety of titles: national diagnoses on supervision and support, comparative analyses of the situation by region, case studies on innovative experiences, monographs and discussion papers on specific management issues. It is hoped that this series will fill a gap in education research as well as be an inspiration, in particular to policymakers intending to reform supervision, and to supervisors who want to improve on their practice.

Other titles in the series include:

- Gurr, D. 1999. *From supervision to quality assurance: the case of the State of Victoria (Australia).*
I. THE GSS PRIMARY EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Gonoshahajjo Sangstha: goals and programmes

The Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (GSS) which means ‘Organization for extending support to people’ was set up in 1983 as a non-government development agency. Its aim is to empower the civil society, in general, and poor and dependent women, in particular, so as to help them become effective partners in the processes of institutional decision-making. The main focus of GSS is to initiate activities that help re-allocate power to the poor and the women through a participatory process of organization building and self-determination. The GSS approach to empowerment is inspired by the basic consideration that ‘poverty and dependence are as much due to lack of resources as to lack of power.’ Advocacy, people mobilization and education are seen as constituting a three-fold strategy to reach this goal. The broad contours of the activities under these programmes can be defined in terms of the following four aims:

(a) to build people’s capacity, particularly of women and children, through quality education and help them learn, acquire skills, be creative and make their own decisions;
(b) to develop their capacity to protect themselves against injustice and exploitation;
(c) to improve their bargaining power in terms of making demands on the existing services of the state and at local levels; and
(d) to increase their effective participation in institutional decision-making processes at all levels.

Keeping the above overall goals in view, GSS activities are grouped under three major programmes:
Social Mobilization and Development Programme (SMDP)

Its major purpose is to ensure effective participation of landless labourers, poor and dependent people (including women) in local-level decision-making and initiate the villagers to think, act and deliberate on their life situation, gender issues, etc. by organizing Gonoshahajjo Sangstha (people's committees or village committees). Major components of this programme are: social mobilization, legal aid and legal education, popular theatre and education, primary health education, forestry and fishery projects and self-help credit programmes.

Advocacy programme

Its objective is to involve different sectors of civil society in identifying their sectoral and common agenda, and to get leaders and activists from different sectors working together so that they can eventually influence decision-making in various stages of the hierarchy. This programme involves information, research and documentation, advocacy education and capacity building; public interest advocacy; legal and cultural advocacy; policy dialogue and alternatives.

Education programme

The education programme has the following components: primary education; adolescent education; adult education; continued education and educational advocacy. The following activities are being undertaken by the GSS education programme in the pursuance of the overall GSS goals:

• constructing, setting up and running primary schools;
• developing and strengthening the primary education curriculum;
• establishing adolescent literacy centres;
• constructing and operating teacher training institutes and resource centres;
• offering continuing education support;
• undertaking educational research;
• promoting education advocacy.

The Primary Education Programme of Gonoshahajjo Sangstha

Context and origin

The Primary Education Programme (PEP) was started in 1986-87 in order to meet demand from within the programme and to respond to external factors related to the primary education condition of the poor. The internal demand essentially arose from women who had participated in various activities, including adult literacy activities, of GSS. It was felt that education and capacity building among poor women would not lead to sustainable processes of empowerment unless this was accompanied by the education of their children. The poor situation of public primary education in the country also prompted GSS to launch its Primary Education Programme. In particular, it was found that while primary education had been making progress in quantitative terms, very little attention had been given to the quality of schools, particularly for children from poorer sections of society. In fact, the irrelevant curriculum and inappropriate pedagogy discouraged children from attending. At the same time, it was believed that an alternative, very different from the mainstream, would not be viable in the long term. The Primary Education Programme was designed to meet this external challenge and to demonstrate the scope for providing quality education to the poor and marginalized within the larger framework of the existing system.
PEP started in 1986 with six primary schools on an experimental basis in the slum areas of Dhaka and, later on, in Khulna, where GSS was already undertaking social mobilization work. In 1991, the programme was reviewed and new pedagogic approaches were designed to improve the quality of these schools by introducing child-centred and activity-oriented methods. The programme was subsequently extended to rural areas where participants in the GSS Social Mobilization and Development Programme demanded education for their children. The programme has since then gradually expanded, reaching out to children from new rural and urban pockets.

**Objectives of PEP**

In line with its basic concern for quality improvement in primary education and supporting the development of the poor, GSS has emphasized two major goals for the Primary Education Programme. These are: (a) introducing the concept of quality primary education in Bangladesh, and (b) increasing the level of sustainable literacy in GSS working areas.

The specific objectives of PEP include the following:

- creating opportunities for learning for the destitute and poor children who have never been exposed to, or who have dropped out from, formal schooling;
- introducing primary education in the areas of the country where no school exists;
- designing and promoting child-centred teaching methodologies;
- developing a system of continued education for post-primary children;
- co-operating with and providing support to other NGOs engaged in educational development programmes; and
• contributing to quality improvement in the government primary education programme.

In order to achieve the above-stated objectives, PEP has initiated actions on several fronts. The two major dimensions, to which we will return later, are curriculum and material development, and designing improved methods of classroom organization and pedagogy.

**Expansion of PEP**

As noted earlier, PEP, which began as an experimental effort in 1986-87, has gradually grown into a fairly large network of primary schools located in different parts of the country. All the primary schools of GSS are known as *Anondo Niketon Prathomik Bidhyalaya* (ANPB), which means ‘A Place of Joy’ primary school.

GSS now runs a large network of primary schools including 23 training schools located in different districts of the country, namely, Mymensingh, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Khulna, Kushtia and Chittagong. By mid-1998, GSS was running more than 700 primary schools located in 20 different districts of Bangladesh, with a total enrolment of over 114,000 children, the ratio between boys and girls being almost equal. Most of these are set up in the low-literacy zones where GSS had already been operating the SMDP and where the local people donate their land for school construction. Children enrolled in these schools are invariably from families of landless labourers or marginal farmers and are normally aged from 6 to 11. The number of boys and girls in these schools is equally balanced, with a marginal bias in favour of girls.

At present there are 14 urban primary schools located in slum areas. Eight of these are in Dhaka. These schools serve a three-fold purpose. First, they specifically cater for the educational needs of
the urban poor. Secondly, they serve as on-the-job training centres for teachers. For this purpose, they are generally located in the neighbourhood of regional training centres of GSS. Thirdly, these schools help influence the mainstream, as government officials are able to visit them frequently.

**GSS’s concept of quality primary education**

GSS views the quality of education in a comprehensive manner, focusing not only on the outcomes of schooling, but also on the physical, social and intellectual environment provided in the school. Within the context of primary schooling, quality is taken to mean:

- creation of a problem-solving, independent and learning environment designed to help children raise questions and be creative;
- active learning;
- maximum individual student-teacher learning time;
- developmentally appropriate learning materials and a relevant skill-based curriculum;
- clean, well-lit schools with 30 students per class; and
- clearly-set lesson plans for each child.

Within this broad definition of quality primary education, the GSS primary schools are designed to focus on the following objectives:

- to organize classroom activities, following a child-centred approach and based on interactive teaching methods, to help all children regardless of their capability to realize their own learning potential in all curriculum areas;
- to motivate children towards reading books and developing sound reading habits in order to become independent readers and writers;
The GSS primary education programme

- to ensure that each child masters not only the basic mathematical skills but also develops a sound understanding of mathematical concepts and practical application;
- to give the children an understanding and respect of traditions and environmental issues;
- to impart primary health education and to make every child aware of relevant health-related factors such as basic nutrition and hygiene; and
- to develop their creativity through the provision of appropriate art and crafts education.

Some major features of PEP

Curriculum and material development

The curriculum followed in GSS schools is essentially the same as in government primary schools. Accordingly, the subjects taught are Bengali, mathematics, social studies, science, religious studies and English. However, in following this curriculum, GSS adopts a diversified teaching-learning activity approach involving project work, reading, games, creative writing, primary health care and extracurricular activities. In order to make learning an enjoyable experience, the GSS curriculum includes colourful and interesting materials which relate closely to the children’s own environment. The extra materials supplement the government curriculum and ensure that new information permeates gradually according to the learner’s pace and ability. For example, with the Bengali textbook for Grade I, GSS primary schools use seven extra reading books of the same level. The same system is followed for Grades II and III, with 14 additional reading books. Based on the same philosophy, concrete supplementary learning materials are used for mathematics in order to help the children get a clear understanding of mathematical
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concepts. The learners are also provided with a mathematics workbook for practice.

Apart from the specific grade-related supplementary reading books, GSS has developed a range of teaching-learning materials for the use of teachers, students and School Supervisors. With the help of teachers and supervisors, PEP has also prepared different types of charts such as ‘Animals of Bangladesh’, ‘Fruits of Bangladesh’, ‘Flowers of Bangladesh’, ‘Names of Months in English and Bengali’, etc. Care is taken to ensure that the charts are attractive and presentable to the children. Teachers are also encouraged to develop game, mathematics, reading and word cards, plus other learning aids for teaching mathematics and other subjects. The charts and cards are regularly used by all teachers in organizing teaching-learning activities in the classroom. It is worth noting that many other NGOs have also been purchasing the materials prepared by GSS for use in the schools they support. GSS has also published some supplementary books for developing and sustaining Bangla reading capability. The books are colourful and suitable for young learners.

GSS considers the development of the primary-school curriculum as a continuous process consisting of the following tasks:

(i) fixing levels of competences and skills to be acquired for each age group in different subjects;
(ii) development of core and support materials and activities for both learners and teachers as aids in the acquisition of stated competences and skills;
(iii) setting quantitative and qualitative indicators for measuring competences and skills; and
(iv) determination of assessment criteria for measuring progress of learners in different curricular areas.
Classroom arrangement

The classroom arrangement plays a vital role in encouraging learner-centred activities (See Diagram 1). GSS Anondo Niketon Prathomik Bidhyalaya classrooms are significantly different from the formal school classrooms in terms of internal organization and activities. In order to perform diversified activities and meet individual student’s needs, three corners of a rectangular classroom are designated as learning centres/corners. The middle of the classroom serves two purposes: conducting combined/common class activities and organizing small group activities. The walls of the classroom are decorated with various educational charts and posters and samples of work done by the children. This pattern of classroom organization is followed for all the grades. The basic purpose of the arrangement is to ensure individual attention, allow all children to progress at their own pace, and facilitate continuous peer learning and interaction.

Diagram 1. Classroom organization
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the case of GSS primary schools in Bangladesh

Time-management framework

As in the government-managed schools, GSS also conducts classes on a shift basis with children attending the school for not more than three hours each day. This places tremendous responsibility on the teachers to use the time available in an effective and efficient manner, yet without sacrificing the principles of a child-centred education and activity-oriented approach. Thus, GSS has evolved a time-management framework which clearly specifies the way teacher-student time should be spent during the school hours. In accordance with this framework, children spend one and a half hours in class and 55 minutes on group activities. Five minutes are set aside for the teacher to complete the attendance roll. Children are not given any homework, but are encouraged to read story-books and other material at home.

Interactive learning system

GSS’s aim is to adopt and develop a child-centred interactive learning system which allows the teacher to give attention to all children according to their needs. It also allows for individual learning according to the child’s own ability and pace of learning. Keeping these considerations in view, children are divided into activity groups within each classroom. There are three ‘learning’ groups and three to four ‘purposeful activity’ groups. The three ‘learning’ groups participate in: Bengali-based combined written work including comprehension and handwriting; creative writing and project work and mathematics work. The ‘purposeful activity’ groups are engaged in using the support materials such as reading and mathematics cards, reading story-books or drawing. During the group activity, the teacher moves from one group to another giving attention to the group as a whole as well as to each child, listening to their reading and helping them in creative writing and mathematics.
As such, all children are actively involved in the learning process instead of being passive listeners. They are constantly engaged in using different educational materials or interacting with the teacher on a one-to-one or small-group basis. Group teaching allows for peer learning and interaction between children by providing opportunities for purposeful activities. It is believed that by adopting such a child-centred methodology it is possible, and even easier, to develop a closer relationship between the learners themselves and with the teacher as well, which should, in turn, make the learning process less difficult, more enjoyable and stress-free.

**Learner performance: its assessment and monitoring**

As ensuring quality education is one of the major goals of PEP, clear specification of learner attainment in terms of expected levels for different grades has been made. Every pupil's learning achievement is monitored and assessed daily and fortnightly by teachers. In addition, learner achievement is measured quarterly and annually by School Supervisors to observe progress in arithmetic, writing and language on the basis of the achievement levels set.

The data from weekly assessment are kept in the school and then analyzed to draw up the fortnightly teaching plan. Again, fortnightly assessment is done by the teacher as well as the supervisors. The quarterly assessment of each child's learning competences is summarized on an annual analysis sheet. Based on this, the annual progress report is prepared. Progress reports also include information on the educational and family background of each student, in addition to attendance and academic achievement. Together, these indicators form the basis for learner assessment.

While one set of information on learner performance goes directly to the PEP Head Office in Dhaka, where it is checked and computerized in the central UNIX-Oracle-based Management
Information System (MIS), another one is shared by the supervisory staff at the local level in the monthly meeting organized by the Regional Co-ordinator. Disaggregated data help them locate performance weaknesses at the local level which can be easily linked to the individual teacher, the School Supervisor and the Field Supervisor. The Research, Monitoring and Documentation Unit at the Head Office is responsible for generating tables showing learner performance. This information is then disseminated downward so that functionaries at the local level are able to compare local performance against the overall situation.

**Attendance and drop-outs**

Regular participation of all enrolled children throughout the primary education cycle is viewed in GSS as an important indicator of the quality of the education provided and the acceptance of the programme by the community. Teachers and supervisors are required to make special efforts to achieve this goal. It is found that the average attendance rate of children, for both boys and girls in rural as well as urban areas, has been over 80 per cent. In this respect, it is worth mentioning that the GSS primary teachers monitor the attendance of each child on a daily basis. If any child is found absent for more than a day the teacher visits the home in order to find out the reason for the absence. This has helped to reduce, to a considerable extent, the incidence of absenteeism among the learners.

The average drop-out rates in schools are 7.6 per cent in rural schools, and 20.9 per cent in urban schools; the corresponding figure for government schools is estimated to be around 39 per cent. One reason for the significant difference in drop-out rate between rural and urban schools is associated with the fact that the urban children are temporary slum dwellers and are therefore highly mobile, as
they move from one slum to another. In the case of rural schools, the School Supervisors are able to monitor the students’ attendance and meet with their parents to encourage them to send their children to school on a more regular basis. GSS believes that its permanent infrastructure, attractive educational materials, interesting recreational programmes, and interactive child-centred teaching methods play a vital role in reducing the overall drop-out rates. The involvement of the community and the parents in school activities also has a significant influence.

**GSS schools, teachers and their training**

**Establishing GSS schools**

Before a designated site for a school is selected, the school supervisor conducts a house-to-house survey to identify the number of local children who are of school-going age. Based on the survey, the supervisor determines whether there is a sufficient number of out-of-school children (at least 180) who are likely to attend a GSS school. Further, the school is established only after the local community agrees to provide space for the school and extend cooperation in the daily functioning of the school. Therefore the emphasis is on mustering a concrete demand through social mobilization and then responding to the demand.

**Teachers**

GSS considers that the quality of the teacher is a key determinant in the quality of education. Keeping this in view, GSS applies the following criteria for selecting teachers:

- teachers must be living in the catchment area of the proposed school;
• the teacher must have the minimum qualification of 10 years of schooling (i.e. secondary school certificate); and
• preference is given to women; male teachers are recruited only if it is impossible to find a suitably qualified female.

The posts of teachers for rural schools are advertised locally. Selected applicants have to qualify through written and oral examinations. The selected candidates are asked to complete training provided by GSS. After satisfactory completion of training the candidates are appointed as teachers. A similar procedure is followed for selecting teachers in urban areas. However, applicants in this case are required to possess a university degree along with a teacher-training qualification, rather than simply a secondary school certificate.

Every GSS teacher teaches two shifts a day: two and a half hours in the morning with a half-hour break and then three hours in the afternoon. The teachers are also expected to do community work every second day of the week. During community work they visit the families of their students and interact with the parents. In addition, a parent/teacher meeting is held every month to discuss various management issues and the perceptions of the parents regarding the educational programme in the primary school.

Teachers are normally offered a contract for a period of one year, renewable subject to performance. The teacher turnover is quite low (around 13 per cent) and the best teachers, particularly those with a Higher Secondary Certificate, are promoted to become senior teachers after a minimum completion of three years.

Teacher training

Teacher-training courses are compulsory for all newly-recruited teachers irrespective of their background. A Basic Teacher Training
The GSS primary education programme

A programme lasting 15 days is conducted as a residential course in one of the GSS training centres. Out of the 15 days, 3 are devoted to basic training and orientation to GSS as an organization, and 12 to initial training to pedagogy and classroom management. The training includes two and a half hours of daily teaching practice in GSS primary schools, two and a half hours’ discussion on various topics of the curriculum and three hours of role play followed by teaching practice in the nearby training school. In addition to this initial training, follow-up training of one day per month and regular workshops are organized at the thana or district level for teachers and supervisors. The follow-up training provides an opportunity for the teachers to discuss problems related to conducting classes and to provide and receive feedback from School Supervisors and colleagues.

As discussed above, training of GSS teachers and supervisors is practice-oriented. To begin with, they receive information on the GSS methods of teaching and the supervision and support services provided by GSS. Orientation to basic principles of child psychology and pedagogy are part of the training process, during which emphasis is placed on the developmental stages of children and the appropriate expectations of the teachers in terms of attention/concentration span of the children at each developmental stage. During the training programme the trainee undertakes the role of the teacher in a real classroom situation. Training material in the form of hand-outs on child psychology, the GSS method of teaching, teaching aids, and reference books are provided during the training sessions. Special care is taken to ensure that the quality of the teaching materials is appropriate to the needs of the teachers and supervisors. Reference books on education and pedagogy are made available for supervisors, who are encouraged to read such references and utilize them to improve their understanding of the education process.
Overall management structure

With a network of more than 700 primary schools located in five different districts, the PEP management structure has also considerably expanded. Most of the functions related to organizational matters are carried out by a group of professionals working at the headquarters in Dhaka. While the work of the PEP is managed by a team exclusively devoted to the task, some senior professionals effectively participate in other programmes of GSS, such as Social Mobilization and Advocacy programmes. This is viewed as of special importance as through such cross-programme participation, they bring into the PEP management their varied experience in a multisectoral framework.

Considering that the programme is spread over several districts, it is managed by professionals placed in different regions. The critical link in the whole management system consists of the Field and School Supervisors. Grass-roots-level management of the programme, monitoring the quality of implementation in the field including the schools is the responsibility of the supervisors. The PEP has been operating a strategy of supervision which is very different from what is normally expected of supervisors in the larger school system and on them depends the whole responsibility of monitoring the quality of education processes in the primary schools. An analysis of the roles and responsibilities of the supervisors as conceived under the GSS programme of primary education, as well as the way the system is in operation, will be described in detail in the following chapters.
II. SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT SERVICES TO TEACHERS: THE GSS PERSPECTIVE

Supervision of activities at the school level is a key factor in ensuring the good functioning of the primary education programme. In fact, supervision has always been an integral feature of education programmes in all countries. Theoretically, supervision has two basic functions which directly impinge on school functioning. First, supervision should help ‘maintain system-level norms’. This is important as primary schools are the basic units of a larger system. While each school may have its own uniqueness and individuality, together they have to follow certain common patterns of organization and functioning. Secondly, supervision should ‘promote change and development’ of every school. While this two-fold definition is accepted in theory, the actual functioning of the supervision system often presents a one-sided picture of control and monitoring, with practically no support for change and improvement. How does GSS conceive the role of a supervisor? How does that become linked to the basic concern for quality in GSS schools? What are the basic principles around which the system of supervision has been designed? What specific roles and functions have been envisaged for the supervisors? These questions will be addressed in this chapter.

Basic premises

Traditionally, school supervision is focused on teachers and their performance, on the one hand, and administrative efficiency of the primary school, on the other. Moving away from this traditional focus, the GSS system of supervision is based on the philosophy that every child should be taken care of. This shift in the focus from the teacher or the school to the child is significant as, in the final analysis, it is the
progress of the child that matters. Thus, a supervisor has to ensure that the quality of learning and development of every child in the school is supervised. The roles and functions specified for the supervisors in PEP have been derived from the application of this basic philosophy of child-centredness. After all, if classroom teaching has to be child-centred, should not the supervision be?

A second basic premise of the system of supervision in PEP is, control without support will not lead to quality improvement. Traditionally, it is assumed that quality parameters can be externally determined and prescribed for all schools. It is this assumption that has led to overemphasis on the control dimension of supervision. The primary education programme of GSS considers that it is only a system of continuous on-the-job help, support and guidance to the teacher that can lead to provision of quality education in every primary school.

The third principle that guides the system of supervision in GSS is that monitoring as well as support to primary-school teachers should be non-hierarchical and participatory in nature. It is considered that fleeting visits and casual observations of teaching will not help in improving quality. Supervision has to be a participatory process in which the supervisor directly gets involved in classroom teaching work. Through this approach, the supervisor will be able to gain a more authentic view of the instructional process and be more realistic in proposing change and improvement in the functioning of the teachers. Also, this makes the accountability for the progress of the children a shared concern among teachers and the supervisor.

**Roles and functions of supervisors**

The functions of a School Supervisor in the GSS system are defined keeping in view these various basic principles. The GSS
model of supervision demands that every supervisor plays a multi-fold role. Supervisors can no longer remain outsiders to the school or to the community, visiting the school only occasionally and advising or disciplining the teacher. They are fully responsible for the quality of functioning of the school. GSS expects them to play six major roles and functions, namely:

• as headteacher;
• as a classroom teacher;
• as guide and counsellor to the teacher;
• as link between the school, the community and GSS management;
• as key organizer of school functioning;
• as administrator and academic planner.

In the traditional system, the teacher, the headteacher and the supervisor are seen as three distinct sets of functionaries, within essentially a hierarchical relationship. But, there are no headteachers in GSS schools. Rather, supervisors have to function as the headteachers. This places special responsibility on them to play a significant role in the internal management and planning of the primary school alongside the teachers. As already noted, accountability for effective functioning of the schools will be a shared responsibility of the supervisors and the teachers. This also implies that the supervisor has to consider academic and administrative aspects of managing a school in an integrated manner. For instance, maintenance of records of school attendance and other details on the learners is again a joint responsibility. In terms of human relations, it requires the supervisor to function through collaborative and co-operative strategies rather than with a superior-subordinate relationship with the teachers.

Inside the classroom, supervisors have several roles to play. Firstly, they have to be teachers themselves and actively participate in the
teaching-learning process. Secondly, it is their responsibility to ensure that the teachers plan their work systematically and follow the broad parameters of classroom teaching suggested in GSS primary schools. In particular, adherence to the time-management framework, classroom organization and child-centred teaching methods have to be monitored carefully, as these are considered to be the central features characterizing quality education in the primary schools. At the same time, supervisors have also to function as ‘master teachers’ and guide the teachers whenever needed.

**Job description of School Supervisors**

The GSS model of school supervision started initially along the same lines as that of the Assistant Thana Education Officer, who is the supervisory officer in the formal school system. But, after three to four months, in 1991, GSS found that School Supervisors (SS) did not know the children and did not focus on how they learn. It was decided therefore that their job needed a more academic orientation and greater attention to the teaching-learning process. The model of school supervision was revised and a new job description was formulated. During the first phase of PEP, each SS had the responsibility for five schools, but it was reduced to three in order to meet the needs of the new schoolteachers who needed closer support. Under this arrangement, the SS helps the teachers initially by taking classes for two weeks with the new teachers, observing and assisting them in the classroom.

This existing model of school supervision has two objectives:

(i) to assist beginning teachers to gain confidence in the classroom and to highlight effective classroom management and teaching methodology; and
(ii) to provide the SS with the opportunity of gaining first-hand knowledge and experience of the difficulties and problems that might arise and to become trouble-shooters at the micro level.

In order to ensure that these objectives are systematically pursued and their roles clearly understood by the supervisors as well as others concerned, a brief document indicating the ‘job description’ of a School Supervisor has been prepared. The list of functions is specified in the document below.

**Job description of the School Supervisor**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Academic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• An SS will visit two schools/centres every day. In the first shift he will attend for 15 minutes before starting the school/centre and in the second shift he shall not leave the school/centre before closing time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• In order to develop a teacher an SS will conduct each class of every school/centre himself for a period of 9-12 days continuously.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will supervise whether teachers conduct classes using child-centred methods.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will observe whether students use their exercise (khata) in the right way, i.e. that they do not unnecessarily repeat the same writings/drawing, whether they do mathematics/project work daily and whether they write dates every day in the pages of their respective exercise book etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will supervise to see if the teachers conduct classes according to the lesson plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will observe different activities of the teacher, e.g. story-telling style, conducting reading or learners’ presentation of project work, etc. and will also see whether they are keeping reading records properly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will examine the teacher and student attendance registers as well as the Home visit register on a regular basis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• He will assess the progress of every student of a class every 12 days.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from the list of functions, the supervisor has to perform several academic and administrative functions. In fact, it should be noted that the functions are not limited to the internal
functioning of the schools. Outside the school, the supervisor has to organize joint meetings of all the teachers and thereby provide a common forum for experience sharing and peer learning. Since teachers are selected from within the community, the supervisor is also expected to function as the link between the community and PEP management.

Obviously, GSS proposes a radical framework of supervision and support, keeping the quality of school functioning in the forefront. The job description calls for the supervisor to perform a variety of functions. To what extent do the field conditions allow the supervisors to perform all these roles effectively and how does the PEP management facilitate the functioning of such a system? In other words, how does such a system actually work? An attempt is made in the following chapter to address these questions.
III. SUPERVISION AND SUPPORT SYSTEM IN ACTION

As described in the previous chapter, GSS has attempted to develop a supervisory system which is founded on sound principles of quality education. How does such a system actually operate in the field? What kind of structural arrangement and institutional support have been created to ensure that the system functions effectively? What are the strategies adopted to build capacities among School Supervisors? What kinds of accountability mechanisms are in place to monitor the work of supervisors? How is it guaranteed that the supervision process does not boil down to mere control and maintenance, as happens in the larger system? These are some of the questions that we shall examine in this chapter. Apart from describing the various features of the existing system, an attempt will be made to reflect on how it is actually operating in the field. This chapter is based on the observations made during the field visits to the schools and on the empirical analysis of the work of the supervisors and other functionaries involved.

Structure of the supervision system

The structure of the supervision system for GSS schools is based on the various principles discussed above. In addition, the system is designed keeping in view the field realities in which the primary schools have to function. For instance, it is difficult to find an adequate number of teachers with the requisite knowledge and skills to guarantee quality education. GSS teachers are invariably recruited from the same community where the school is located and seldom possess the necessary professional background or adequate initial training. Thus, they need a lot of support in their job, in order to function as effective classroom teachers while adopting child-centred
methods of teaching. This is an important principle that has influenced the operational features of the GSS supervision system.

The system also acknowledges the fact that the School Supervisors cannot function in isolation, in order to maintain high quality in the schools which invariably function in difficult locations and contexts. School Supervisors themselves have to be supported by appropriate institutional facilities at various levels. Keeping this in view, the GSS supervisory and support services function with close links from the grass-roots level (the teachers) to the top level (the programme head). However, direct supervision of schools rests with the School Supervisor, who is further supported by Field Supervisors and Regional Co-ordinators (See Diagrams 2 and 3).

Diagram 2. Support to teachers
Diagram 3. The structure of supervision

The Regional Co-ordinators report to the Field Co-ordinator, who is responsible for the overall administration of the schools including academic achievement; school construction; training and material development at the field level. As can be observed from Diagram 3, a fairly elaborate organizational structure has been created linking the various functionaries beginning from the Programme Management Unit at Dhaka to individual schools located in different parts of the operational area of the Project. The structures make adequate arrangement not only for supervision but also for providing continuous professional inputs to the teachers and supervisors.
Quality education through school-based supervision and support:  
the case of GSS primary schools in Bangladesh

**Teacher support mechanisms**

The importance of providing continuous professional support to the teacher for quality performance in education is well recognized. However, few systems have succeeded in putting into place a strategy reaching out to all teachers on a regular basis and providing help to them in a need-based manner. GSS, therefore, has taken special care to see that teachers in their schools are provided professional inputs through constant supervision and guidance. In order to meet this requirement, every supervisor has to visit every school following a pre-specified schedule. When supervisors visit a school, they observe teaching as well as other aspects of classroom functioning. They sit with the teachers and discuss the problems that they face in carrying out classroom activities systematically. Besides, there are three other provisions by which teachers are supported by the School Supervisors and other personnel of the programme.

**Individualized training of teachers**

Supervisors are responsible for the development of the teachers in the schools they supervise. In order to do this, the supervisor has to prepare a three-and-a-half-months plan, initially for nine teachers. Under this, the supervisor has to organize orientation classes of two weeks for all the teachers, individually if necessary, and help them to teach and manage the class effectively. This process continues until the teacher acquires self-confidence, and is capable of conducting classes independently.

**Follow-up training**

Every month a one-day *follow-up training session* is organized at every cluster for each teacher. In these training sessions, problems faced particularly with respect to teaching of different subjects and topics are discussed. Demonstration lessons and role-play exercises are presented by the supervisor, and other experienced teachers,
for participants to obtain a wider scope of teaching methods and techniques.

**Refresher course**

Apart from the above, there are annual and six-monthly refresher courses organized for the teachers at both regional and cluster levels. A typical refresher course is a five-day course devoted to teacher-orientation to new methods, upgrading of subject knowledge, reviewing of programmes in particular for higher classes, for further efficient learning, special orientation on teaching subjects such as history, science, social science, etc.

In addition to these regular activities, there are also provisions of further training to develop subject knowledge of teachers and methods of effective delivery of contents to the learners. Recently the GSS Education Programme has launched a 15-day intensive training course for the teachers and supervisors. All the teachers and supervisors of the programme participated in these intensive training courses and found them very useful.

**Recruitment and professional background of School and Field Supervisors**

Recruitment of both School Supervisors and Field Supervisors is the joint responsibility of the Primary Education Programme and the central administration of GSS. The training of School Supervisors and Field Supervisors is conducted in the GSS training centres in four regions - Dhaka, Khulna, Syedpur and Mymensing. This training covers a wide range of theoretical and practical subjects including pedagogy, child development, administrative and other areas concerned with the operation of GSS schools.
School Supervisors (SS)

Potential School Supervisors are identified through advertisement in the national newspapers. The minimum qualification for a School Supervisor is a master's degree in any subject or a bachelor's degree with professional training or any other bachelor's degree with three years' teaching experience in GSS schools. The applicants have to present themselves for oral and written tests. The successful applicants undergo training and are then appointed as School Supervisors only after satisfactory completion of the training. The minimum qualification for a Rural Primary School (RPS) and Adolescent Literacy Programme (ALP) teacher is Secondary School Certificate or equivalent. An RPS teacher with three years' teaching experience in GSS schools may be promoted as a Senior Teacher if he/she qualifies in the written and oral test conducted for the selection of Senior Teachers. A Senior Teacher has a role that is similar to an SS except that he/she is responsible for only two schools.

Field Supervisors (FS)

Field Supervisors are selected from among supervisors of GSS schools. A School Supervisor with three years' experience in GSS schools is eligible for the post of FS. The final selection is done on the basis of their performance in oral and written tests.

Role of Field Supervisors

As discussed earlier, the Field Supervisors function immediately above the School Supervisors, providing them the necessary administrative and academic support. Normally, a Field Supervisor is responsible for 18 schools and 6 School Supervisors.
A person identified to be a Field Supervisor is initially placed as FS-in-Charge for six months. He/she is then assessed on the basis of field performance and a written examination on pedagogy, practical experience, and understanding of subject matter at the school level. The person is also subjected to regular staff appraisal. If successful, the person is appointed to the post of Field Supervisor.

The Field Supervisors have the following main roles in the Primary Education Programme of GSS:

(i) to help School Supervisors develop their professional background in order to improve the schools they are responsible for;

(ii) to undertake administrative work of the 18 schools under their jurisdiction, including carrying out repairs and maintaining individual schools, procuring supplies from the head office at Dhaka, recording of teachers'/supervisors’ leave, compiling quarterly reports on school achievement, project reports, etc.;

(iii) to attend the follow-up training of teachers;

(iv) to organize bi-monthly academic workshops for School Supervisors including the programme and the academic input for School Supervisors and other Field Supervisors;

(v) to be responsible for the initial stages of land acquisition before the land is registered through the SMDP lawyers. This includes participation in the surveying of initial student numbers; discussions with the community about the proposed school and the availability of land; campaigning on the benefits of schooling for the children and the community; and

(vi) to participate, whenever called for, in the interviewing of teachers and in the supervision of teacher examinations; and to advertise local jobs in the union office, markets and other convenient places.
Training of supervisors

The School Supervisors receive three days of basic training, 12 days of initial teacher training and 15 days of field training immediately after recruitment. The SS also has a school practicum of two months in a classroom situation. Further training for 18 days is given to every supervisor which consists of three days a month over a period of six months and a bi-monthly workshop. A School Supervisor is initially given a temporary appointment for six months and, on the basis of satisfactory performance, receives a permanent appointment.

Capacity building through classroom teaching

GSS has allocated each School Supervisor to three schools and nine teachers. The School Supervisor has certain conditions to fulfil before his appointment. Some teacher training is necessary, namely basic training and initial training in order to develop the necessary insight and understanding into classroom teaching-learning processes, and also into the system of education in GSS schools. The SS is thereafter expected to interact with students on a regular basis and to conduct classes. Their responsibilities include carrying out both a fortnightly and a quarterly assessment of each child, including recording of this assessment. This implies conducting individual assessments of learning for 550 students.

As already mentioned, the School Supervisors are also responsible for keeping files, buying and preparing teaching-learning materials, making contacts with government and NGO officials, keeping the school compound neat and clean and keeping a stock register. They also prepare monthly reports and forward them to the head office, supply materials to schools, collect children’s articles, stories, poems etc. and send them to the head office for publication in the GSS
magazine. They are also in charge of organizing different festivals and national celebrations such as Victory and Independence days.

**Process of school supervision**

**Participation in school management and instructional planning**

In the GSS system, School Supervisors play a key role in the management of the school. Each SS is normally responsible for three schools (in some cases five) located within a radius of 10 km. The School Supervisor monitors student achievement as well as the improvement of the school. The supervisors are placed at the union level (lowest unit of local administration). They have to be present for half a day at two schools under their jurisdiction. During their stay at the school, they supervise the work of the teachers and also actually teach the students along with the teacher. They assist in planning lessons. In fact, they jointly plan lessons with the teacher and also help the teacher to develop lesson-planning skills. Each teacher has to develop fortnightly lesson plans based on the groups of children as defined by ability in each subject; this forms the basis for their daily lesson plans.

**Monthly meetings**

The School Supervisors hold the responsibility of arranging a monthly meeting for the teachers in their schools. The meeting is, normally, conducted in the form of a workshop, where problems are discussed among the teachers and possible solutions sought. The supervisor’s role in these workshops is that of a facilitator rather than a trainer. This is an important feature where the role of the supervisor is changed to one of support, rather than of monitoring, in order to maximize the individual teacher’s potential and overall
competence and, in so doing, ensure the improvement of the quality of education for all participants in the GSS school system.

**Supervisor as headteacher**

In the government primary school a headteacher is responsible for the supervision of the academic performance of the students in one school. He is not directly responsible for teaching a class or following up the students’ work on a daily basis. The headteacher has a certificate from a Primary Training Institute or a Bachelor of Education degree. The Assistant Thana Education Officer is responsible for about 20 schools; his role is one of management and administration and supervision of head and other teachers while assisting in educational training. The Thana Education Officer, the District Primary Education Officer and the Directorate of Primary Education have more of an administrative role. In comparison, GSS primary schools do not have separately designated posts of headteacher. One of the full-time teachers in the school is given responsibility over the school. This position lasts one year and is rotated amongst all teachers of the school. Therefore, supervisors function as headteachers for all the three primary schools under their responsibility.

The following excerpt from the diary of a School Supervisor exemplifies the variety of functions that they are called upon to perform in and outside the school:
## Supervision and support system in action

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Job done</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class one in Kumaruli school. Observed combined class teaching and noted few problems in teaching mathematics. Then visited section B of class one and checked exercise books and corrected in mathematics, making them more understandable to the children. Worked with a small group for language development. Visited Class two section A and checked exercise books of some children and helped them to understand and solve a few problems. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions after the class. Visited Bhasati school in the second shift and continued a case study in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03.08.97</td>
<td>Attended monthly meeting at the cluster office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching and noted few problems in teaching mathematics. Advised learners to use their exercise books methodically. Worked with small group and taught mathematics using concrete material. Checked students’ work. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions after the class. Visited Fathapur school in the second shift and worked with the Class three teacher. Completed IQER evaluation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching. Worked with the irregular students for language development. Discussed with the teacher about absenteeism and together went to the house of the children who are very irregular to meet their parents. We urged them to send their children to the centre. Attended another ALP centre at Jhatia village at 12.45 p.m. Completed community work and attended a meeting with the parents which was scheduled before. Attendance and other related issues were discussed in the meeting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section B of class two in Kumariar char school. Observed combined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>class teaching and noted few problems in language teaching. Advised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learners to use their exercise books methodologically. Then visited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>section C of Class two and checked exercise books of some children and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corrected errors. Then visited section A of Class two. Worked with a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>small group and taught mathematics using concrete material. Discussed the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visited Bhasati school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class one in Jhatia school. Observed combined class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching and noted few problems in news exchange. Worked with two small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>groups for language development. Then visited section B of Class one and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>checked exercise books of some children and corrected some errors. Then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visited section C of Class one. Worked with small group for language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>suggested possible solution after class. Visited Kumariar char school in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class four.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section C of Class two in Fathapur school. Observed combined class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching and noted few problems in news exchange. Checked exercise books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>of language, mathematics and writing of ten different students and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>corrected errors and made these understandable to the children. Then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visited section B of Class two and worked with a small group for language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>development. Then visited section A of Class two and worked with a small</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>group and taught mathematics. Visited Jhatia school in the second shift</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and continued IQER evaluation in Class four.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10.08.97</td>
<td>Attended follow-up training at the cluster office and demonstrated project</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>work and creative writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class two in Kumaruli school. Observed combined class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>teaching and noted a few problems in language work (conjunct alphabet).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Then visited section B of Class one and checked exercise books. Then</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>visited section A of Class one and worked with small group and taught</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mathematics. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>suggested possible solutions. Visited Kumariar char school in the second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.08.97</td>
<td>Attended follow-up training at the cluster office and demonstrated project work and creative writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class two in Fathapur school. Observed combined class teaching and noted few problems. Then visited the other classes and checked exercise books, corrected some errors. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions. Visited Jathia school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching. Checked all exercise books. Visited Kumaruli school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section B of Class two in Kumariar char school. Observed combined class teaching. Then visited section A of Class one and worked with a small group for language development. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions. Visited Kumaruli school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class one in Jhatia school. Observed combined class teaching. Checked students' exercise books and corrected some errors. Visited Bhasati school in the second shift and attended community meeting there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18.08.97</td>
<td>Visited Fathepur school in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching. Worked with two small groups in language development and mathematics activities. Visited Kumaruli school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class four.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19.08.97</td>
<td>Visited Kumariar char school and since attendance of the school was quite low I went to the community with the teacher and talked to the parents. Visited another ALP in the second shift and attended community meeting there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching and noted the problems in the diary. Visited another ALP in the second shift and organized community meeting and drew attention of the parents to the low attendance of children.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class one in Bhasati school and continued the case study. Visited Kumariar char school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity Details</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22.08.97</td>
<td>Visited Jatia school in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching. Checked all exercise books of other two classes. Worked with a small group in mathematics. Visited Kumariar char school in the second shift and continued IQER evaluation in Class three.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.08.97</td>
<td>Visited Basati school in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching and attended community meeting as per schedule. Visited another ALP in the second shift and noted problems in the diary.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section A of Class one in Kumariar char school. Observed combined class teaching. Worked with a small group for language development. Then visited section B of Class one and worked with the small group in mathematics activities. Visited Tangongati school in the second shift in emergency and returned to the office with the message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Observed combined class teaching and noted the problems in the diary. Worked with two small groups in language development and mathematics. Visited another Kumaruli school in the second shift and organized community meeting there.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30.08.97</td>
<td>Visited one ALP in the first shift. Discussed with the teacher about absenteeism and together went to the house of the children who are very irregular in order to meet their parents. We urged them to send their children to the centre. Attended Jhatia school and checked students’ exercise books. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31.08.97</td>
<td>Visited section B of Class two in Kumariar char school. Observed combined class teaching and noted few problems in the diary. Then worked with a small group for language development in another section. Discussed the problems observed with the teachers and suggested possible solutions after the class finished. Visited one ALP centre in the second shift and observed combined class teaching. Worked with the small group and helped in reading. Discussed the problem with the teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some field observations on the functioning of the system

How effectively the system is working can only be gauged, in the final analysis, in terms of the way the basic units, namely the primary schools, are functioning. But, the way a school functions reflects the combined effect of a variety of factors, both internal and external. Obviously, several people contribute to the successful functioning of a school, first and foremost the teachers. It is, therefore, difficult to isolate and attribute any observation in the field exclusively to the work of a supervisor. However, the current state of functioning of the schools and the perception of different personnel in and outside the project should be useful for a proper understanding of the system in operation.

During school visits, the use of child-centred methods, as reflected in the style of classroom organization and various activities involving small-group teaching and learning corners, was obvious. Activities by learners form the central feature of the teaching-learning process, and interactive peer learning is also highly encouraged. One could observe the total involvement of the children in the learning processes, indicating that learners are not treated merely as passive receivers of information. It was also visible from the variety of activities being pursued by the learners that the emphasis is not exclusively on textbook-based scholastic learning. The interaction pattern between the teacher and the learners pointed to a relatively high level of confidence among the learners.

Discussions with government education officers such as Thana Education Officers (TEOs) and Assistant TEOs indicated that the GSS primary education approach was familiar to the people involved with the government programme. One of the TEOs highlighted the different methods of teaching adopted in GSS schools and the significantly higher levels of attendance of pupils in these schools in
comparison to government schools in the same neighbourhood. He stated that the success of the education programme could be attributed to the social mobilization programmes of GSS and that he had been referring to the GSS model as an example during meetings with School Management Committees, and often asked the members to visit the schools and follow some of the practices in planning the development of their own schools.

Discussions with ATEOs were quite revealing. In general, ATEOs appreciated the GSS methodology as an undoubtedly effective one. One of the ATEOs had personally visited a number of GSS schools to observe the process. He believed that the child-centred education, the use of various teaching aids, a reasonable class size and the teacher-support system in terms of school supervision are the major aspects which differ from the government schools, and are responsible for increasing children's interest in studying and improving their quality of learning.

According to the ATEOs, the GSS model can be replicated in the state-run schools. This would require effective training of teachers, based on a new model rather than the traditional method; greater social mobilization and community involvement; reasonable class size and a reduced workload for the teachers. This would ensure that teachers are better motivated. They also pointed out that the GSS teachers have high motivation, in spite of the fact that their salaries are lower than those received by government teachers. According to a Field Supervisor from Syedpur, some state-run schools have started story-telling sessions in the classroom and the school staff sometimes visit GSS schools and ask for help from the supervisors and teachers with regard to teaching aids and educational materials. This clearly shows the interest some government officials have in GSS’s education programme and supervision system.
To gain an insight into teachers' opinions on the supervision system of GSS, a questionnaire was given to several teachers. Their responses revealed that the supervisors visit each school from two to four days per week on average. They work in the classrooms, assisting the teachers by taking small groups in mathematics and creative writing. According to the teachers, during activity sessions, the SS checked students' exercise books and their writing. One teacher said, “When I first started teaching I could not keep the children on task and the SS helped me for five days with classroom management and now I can manage easily.” Another teacher pointed out that the roles and functions of SS were well designed and useful, as they communicated with the head office, regional training centres and others and, at the same time, they worked in the schools and helped the teachers.
IV. LESSONS, PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

The Primary Education Programme of GSS has been in operation for about ten years. Features of the present supervision system have actually evolved over these years through a process of experimentation and feedback. During this process, several interesting lessons have emerged which should be of considerable value in understanding the GSS supervision system, on the one hand, and in deriving guidance for improving the processes of inspection and supervision in the government-operated system of primary education, on the other.

Cornerstones of the GSS approach to supervision

Integration of supervision with support services to teachers

Traditionally, supervisors of primary schools in Bangladesh tend to consider their task to be one of controlling the activities of the school in general, and monitoring and evaluating the work of the teachers, in particular. At the same time, it is conceded that the monitoring visits of the ATEOs are not sufficiently regular and frequent to create the necessary impact on the functioning of the primary schools. Furthermore, this control-oriented approach to inspection and supervision is not always appreciated by the teachers. GSS recognizes the importance of control and monitoring if teaching and school functioning are to be improved; but equally essential is that teachers are provided with considerable on-the-job support, both academic and administrative, in order that the schools function effectively. In line with this principle, GSS has attempted to define the roles and functions of the supervisor to accommodate both
control and support-oriented activities. Consequently, teachers do not perceive the supervisor as an outside authority coming to inspect and find fault, but as someone who is directly concerned with guiding the teachers and improving their performance. This approach has helped to raise the confidence of the teachers and has also created a feeling of security that there is someone to rely upon.

**Building a joint accountability system involving the supervisor and the schoolteachers**

In the GSS approach to supervision, the responsibility and workload of a supervisor is delineated not in terms of number of schools, but in proportion to the number of children. Each supervisor is jointly (with the teacher) considered responsible for ensuring that a specified number of children learn effectively. This is to be done both by closely monitoring the quality of the teaching-learning process and by carrying out regular assessment of learning outcomes through achievement tests. The supervisor has a certain amount of freedom to decide who needs more help and attention in different schools and among teachers and can organize the work accordingly. Learner progress is seen as the final indicator of the success of the work of the supervisor as well as of the school. This approach of focusing on learner progress and fixing joint responsibility between teachers and the supervisor for ensuring effective school functioning is an important lesson that the operators of the larger system would do well to note.

**Continuous involvement of the supervisor in the classroom**

A fundamental principle emphasized in the GSS approach to supervision is that only someone who is actively engaged in various school-based activities can meaningfully provide support to monitoring school functioning. Following this principle, school visits by the supervisor involve an extended stay in the school, normally
for the whole day, and practical involvement of the supervisor in the classroom teaching-learning process and organization of schoolwork. This approach has several important implications: (a) it offers an opportunity for the supervisor to demonstrate the ideas in action rather than only giving advice to the teachers; (b) it helps the supervisor to selectively emphasize and transfer effective practices from one school to another; (c) activities in the school become a source of learning for the supervisor and not mere events to be judged and evaluated; and (d) authenticity of the work of the supervisor increases through continuous practical experience while operating in real conditions prevalent in the school.

**Holistic perspective of school improvement combining pedagogy and management**

GSS schools do not have a headteacher in each school. As already described, one can consider that the supervisor functions as a headteacher also. The supervisor has to look at the school management dimension along with classroom teaching. This approach of combining both pedagogic concerns in the form of academic supervision and management, and organizational concerns in terms of regular administration of the school, has brought in a holistic perspective in viewing school functioning and improvement. It has also helped the supervisor to understand the processes in an individualized and contextualized manner. The supervisor's advice to the teachers, therefore, is likely to be more realistic, keeping in view the conditions in which particular schools function. The holistic approach to supervision is another important lesson to be noted from the GSS system of supervision.

**Arranging for peer learning and problem-solving at the local level**

An underlying assumption in organizing external support and supervision is that however good the school organization and quality
of the teachers may be, there will always be problems that require external guidance. This is particularly true with regard to academic and professional issues that teachers frequently face in carrying out their regular tasks. Since this is quite frequent, support and assistance cannot be provided all the time. Also, the supervisor may not always be well equipped to help teachers in every case. A question that supervisors invariably face is: “How do we mobilize local support for solving such problems?” Here again, GSS has evolved a method of periodic interaction among teachers from groups of schools functioning in the neighbourhood. This mechanism allows for effective peer learning and problem-solving at the local level. This process is also found to be extremely useful for the supervisors, who act as facilitators in bringing together teachers from different schools and promote exchange of experiences among them.

Some problems and constraints

As an innovative project in primary education, GSS considers the system of supervision to be an evolving one. Even though there are many areas that hold important lessons for the larger system of primary education, it is worthwhile to analyze and understand some of the constraints and problems faced in implementing the GSS approach to supervision. Some of these problems and constraints are highlighted shortly. As can be seen from the discussion, some are internal to the primary education programme of GSS, while others arise out of the combination of external factors characterizing the context in which the programme is operating.

Non-availability of supervisors with a rural background

Ideally, the school supervisor should be fully familiar not only with the internal functioning of the primary school, but also the external context in which the school functions. This requires that
the supervisor, as in the case of teachers, be recruited from the same locality as the school. However, GSS has been facing serious difficulties in recruiting qualified persons as supervisors at the local level. Consequently, there has been a continued dependence on urban areas for finding suitably qualified people. This to some extent impedes quick and effective understanding of the local cultural contexts and constraints in shaping the work of the primary school. A related constraint is the inability to recruit women teachers as supervisors. This again is due to the small number of girls who are able to complete their education beyond school level in rural areas, and the lack of qualified women from urban areas who are willing to serve in remote rural areas where GSS schools are located. GSS may have to re-examine the formal qualification requirement for recruiting supervisors and the possibility of utilizing the services of some of the women teachers currently working in GSS schools, after suitable training and orientation.

**Problem of short contact period and shift system**

GSS schools function on the same lines as the government-managed ones. This is a positive feature as far as the curriculum is concerned as it ensures equivalence and allows for transfer to the mainstream when students complete primary schooling. However, in view of the time limitations and the unusually short working hours, a serious problem in promoting child-centred learning and other innovations arises. In fact, in some cases, the GSS schools also function in two shifts, following the same pattern adopted in the government schools. This adherence to the short contact period and shift system limits the freedom for adopting a truly interactive activity-based approach and tends to make the tasks of the teachers, as well as of the supervisor, routinized. It is worth while to re-examine this issue and explore the scope for adopting a more flexible and longer time period for conducting the classes in GSS schools.
Scope for more experimentation by practising teachers and supervisors

GSS has really broken new ground in its approach to organizing teaching-learning processes and providing school-based supervision and support services to the teachers. However, the main thrust for following the new framework for teaching seems to come from outside. At times, one feels that the activities of the schools are over-structured and externally prescribed, notwithstanding the fact that the overall framework is quite innovative and effective. In order to keep the teachers’ morale high and better motivate them, it is necessary to create adequate scope for promoting more innovations at the school level – the teachers and the supervisors should generate these from within the school. It is also advantageous to allow for freedom and experimentation by the teachers with regard to the time distribution mechanism for teaching different subjects and carrying out different activities, for which all teachers are currently required to strictly follow a prescribed time allocation protocol as pre-specified by the project authorities. In fact, the Project management is aware of this. But, it is a genuine dilemma faced in many innovative projects, whether to adopt a tested and effective method in a uniform or even rigid manner, or to give greater scope for experimentation, in which case there is always a risk of not doing as well as the standardized approach.

Creating an empirical research base for quality education

As an evolving system, it is imperative that the supervision mechanisms adopted under the GSS Primary Education Programme continuously receive feedback from the field. Also, if adequate scope is created for school-based experimentation, proper analysis and documentation of findings and observations from the field become essential. Seen from this angle, conducting empirical studies plays
an important role in shaping the contours of the supervision system, in particular, and the Primary Education Programme of the GSS, in general. At present one finds that empirical studies do not receive adequate attention in the overall framework of the Project. It will considerably enhance the authenticity of the whole programme and also increase its adaptability to a larger system if in-house arrangements are made to continuously collect information and carry out process documentation. The studies would also help to analyze the efficiency and effectiveness of the system’s functioning at the grass-roots level and to give feedback to the fieldworkers in a more systematic manner. The proposed Institute for Quality Education and Research (IQER) should perhaps meet this need.

**Building bridges between GSS schools and other primary schools in the locality**

A major strength of the GSS Primary Education Programme is the close association and involvement of the parents and community members in the establishment and functioning of the primary school. Needless to say, the supervisor and the teachers play a critical role in building such an atmosphere of mutual trust and support. This has induced a sense of ownership of the school among the community members. Ensuring that the teachers hail from the same locality has further strengthened this relationship. Also, the GSS primary schools generally have a good rapport with the local education authorities of the government. Yet, one feels that the GSS primary school as an educational institution functions in relative isolation from the educational activities sometimes even in the immediate environment. These schools continue to adopt traditional approaches in teaching as well as in supervision whereas, in the immediate neighbourhood, the GSS primary schools vigorously pursue a child-centred and activity-based approach.
Even though the GSS schools are set up in considerably backward areas, one easily comes across other primary schools functioning in the same locality. This is explained by the number of children of school-going age, which is quite large, while GSS, in pursuit of quality education, admits only a fixed number of children into the primary school. While this approach of ensuring quality education is essential, it will be worth while to build more effective bridges between the GSS schools and other primary schools - government as well as private ones - functioning in the vicinity. This is necessary if the GSS approach to quality education, in particular the school-based supervision and support services, has to help to transform the larger system of primary education in the country.

Prospects

The GSS’s major agenda is to give voice to the destitute and the poor, which will ultimately contribute to the improvement of the society as a whole in Bangladesh. In fact, about 87 per cent of children attending GSS schools are from landless or marginal peasant families. The Primary Education Programme, therefore, is designed as a complementary sector of GSS’s comprehensive framework of development programmes. The main aim is to initiate and ensure the provision of quality primary education for all students in GSS schools.

The supervisory system evolved as part of the PEP programme is considered as a critical element in ensuring such quality education for children hailing from deprived sections of the society. Every School Supervisor or Field Supervisor is expected to have a knowledge and an understanding of both the pedagogical processes and school management. They are to provide academic support to teachers and are accountable for the actual learning capacities of the children. This integrated perspective on pedagogy, management and
Lesser, problems and prospects

Learner performance has tremendous potential for developing a new framework for quality primary education in Bangladesh. The particular value of such an approach lies in the fact that GSS schools operate under conditions very similar to the ones in which the government schools function. Therefore, transferability of the lessons learned in these schools to government schools is quite high.

The school supervision system under GSS is designed with a low supervisor-teacher ratio of around one to three. This has helped to provide personalized and context-specific support to teachers. Sometimes, the maintenance of such a low ratio is not considered as cost-effective and affordable in the larger system. But three points are worth keeping in mind. Firstly, the system of supervision should not be viewed in isolation of the total cost of running a primary school in GSS, which is significantly lower than that of a regular primary school. Secondly, cost-effectiveness should also be examined taking into consideration the quality of the output, in this case the quality of learning. Thirdly, the supervisory support provided in the larger system is too fragile and undersized to make any useful impact on the quality of the teaching-learning process. Therefore, the norms adopted in the larger system cannot offer a suitable yardstick to determine the appropriateness or affordability of the supervision framework adopted under GSS. This does not mean that there is no scope for further experimentation within the GSS system. GSS and the Government of Bangladesh have to jointly explore a suitable model to adopt in the primary education programme of the country, yet without compromising on the requirements of quality education.

The GSS primary education system has considerably expanded during the last few years. It is no longer a small experiment insignificant to universal primary education programmes. It is, of course, true that the number of children to educate is so large that
even GSS with its tremendous expansion cannot make a major dent on the primary education scene in quantitative terms. But that is the strength of the GSS programme. The goal is to reach out to the most deprived sections of the society and demonstrate that quality education can be effectively provided to such children also. It is this successful model of quality primary education that is an important pointer for adoption in the larger system.

The efforts, till now, have been to ensure that the schools set up and managed by the GSS function effectively. The focus has been exclusively on the internal efficiency and effectiveness of the programme. There is, however, ample scope for expanding the concept and the accompanying practices to the primary schools in the neighbourhood. This can possibly be done on an experimental basis in selected localities where the GSS schools are already functioning. The goal is not to replicate wholesale the practices adopted for classroom teaching and supervision to new school settings. Rather, the aim will be to study and design relevant strategies for schools functioning under different conditions. For instance, GSS schools operate strictly with a maximum of 30 children per class. But, it is quite unlikely that all schools in Bangladesh will be able to adopt this norm in teacher recruitment. Therefore, it may be useful to study and identify strategies of implementing some of the important elements of classroom teaching and school-based supervision practices from GSS schools which can be suitably adopted in government-managed schools. This requires, as already pointed out, a closer association between GSS primary schools and other primary schools functioning in the same locality.

A second approach through which GSS can go further in experimenting with quality primary education is to adopt a selected area for intensive action, which can be a district or a cluster of villages,
for universalizing primary education of good quality. This will be based on a well-worked out collaborative plan involving all agencies running primary schools in that area, including government and registered non-government agencies. Such an approach will provide an ideal setting for experimenting with strategies of spreading quality education with adequate attention to the requirements of schooling in quantitative terms. With the establishment of the Institute of Quality Education Research, such an area-specific approach will offer a field-based laboratory for designing new strategies and innovations.

Finally, it may be emphasized that the strength of the GSS Primary Education Programme lies in its clear-cut perspective in providing quality education to the disadvantaged and the destitute. It is important that this objective is maintained, in trying to make an impact on the larger system or expanding the system, without compromising on the parameters of quality for which the GSS Primary Education Programme has come to be known. Quality education is a vast area demanding continuous attention both in terms of action-orientated explorations and human resource development. GSS can make significant contributions in this area and provide leadership to the larger system on providing quality education at the primary stage.
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