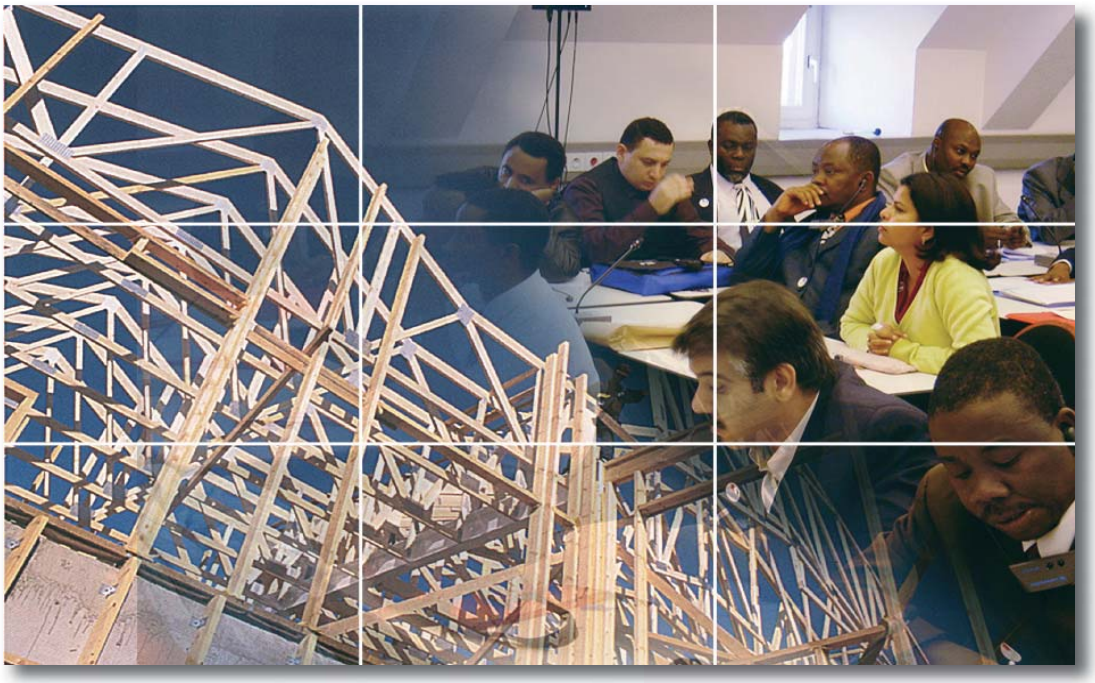
Reforming school supervision for quality improvement

Module 3

The organization of supervision services



United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

International Institute for Educational Planning

Module 3

THE ORGANIZATION OF SUPERVISION SERVICES

Introduction **3**

Scope of the Module **4**

Expected outcomes **4**

The organization of the supervision service: the traditional pattern **5**

The structure of the supervision service 5

Supervision and other quality improvement and monitoring services 12

Recent changes in the organization of the service **17**

Decentralizing supervision 18

Creating resource centres and school clusters 20

Lessons learned **28**

Annex: Examples of resource centres in different countries **30**

Module 3

THE ORGANIZATION OF SUPERVISION SERVICES

Introduction

Different countries organize their supervision service in very different ways, depending on its role and what is expected of it. When the service is supposed to offer regular advice and support to teachers, its organization and structure should logically be unlike a service that has to exercise external control of schools. Most countries, however, have very similar supervision structures, which is certainly not surprising as, in addition to their services having similar historical backgrounds, most have assigned similar roles to them.

The size of a country, of its education system and of its management structure has a clear impact on the organization of supervision. Small island states, for instance, will sometimes have no intermediate structures between the Ministry and the school, while large federal nations may have four or more levels of administration and supervision. In such cases, the organization of supervision can become very complicated with, at times, a detrimental impact on its effectiveness.

Even where the organization is rather simple, the distribution of tasks and of officers between levels might need to be rethought, for at least two reasons: on the one hand, the need for officers from different services (e.g. inspection and curriculum development) to co-ordinate their interventions; on the other hand, the growing demand for more autonomy from schools and principals.

Scope of the Module

This module will first examine in detail the 'traditional pattern' of organizing the supervision service. It will look at:

- the structure of the service itself and reflect on its effectiveness; and
- the ways in which this service relates to other services that play a role in quality monitoring and improvement (such as: teacher training, examinations and tests, and so on).

In recent years, the organization of the service has undergone change in many countries for various reasons, some of which are related to the need for a school-based quality assurance approach (see *Module 1*), some to the changing role of the supervision service (see *Module 2*) and others to the need for streamlining the existing structure. Three reforms, all aiming at bringing supervision closer to the school, are particularly important: further decentralization of the service; the creation of school clusters and resource centres; and the intensification of supervision at the school site, e.g. by senior staff. *Section 2* of this module will examine in detail the first two reforms while the third one forms the topic of *Module 6* and will not be examined here.

Expected outcomes

At the end of this module, participants should be able to:

- understand the rationale behind the present structure of the supervision service in different countries, and its problems and challenges;
- appreciate the importance of co-ordination between supervision and other quality monitoring and improvement services;
- discuss recent reforms in the structure of the supervision service; and
- analyze the improvements these reforms can bring as well as the challenges they encounter.

The organization of the supervision service: the traditional pattern

This part will address two issues: the structure of the supervision service and the relationships between supervision and other services aimed at improving and monitoring quality.

The structure of the supervision service

This section will look at two questions: first, it explains the complexity that characterizes the supervision structure in most countries; second, it debates the impact of such a complex structure on the effectiveness of the service.

Task 1

Before starting this section, you are asked to prepare a matrix, similar to the table below, presenting the organization of the supervision service in your own country. This will offer answers to the following questions:

At what levels are officers functioning?

Which schools (primary/secondary) do they supervise?

What are the functions of these different levels (control/support; administrative/ pedagogical)?

Levels	Responsible officers	Schools/Teachers to be supervised	Functions to be performed
Central			
...			
School			

Completing the task: some hints

You will find on the next few pages examples of some completed matrices, from quite contrasting situations. Completing this matrix could help you identify (1) functions that are not being covered; (2) functions that are the responsibility of more than one level; and (3) functions that could be better carried out by another level than the one presently responsible.

The complexity of developing this matrix probably mirrors the complexity of your supervision system. This reflects a series of factors, including the size of your country and the level and nature of decentralization and the number of actors who are expected to visit schools. In a small centralized country, it would not be surprising to have only one set of officers in charge of supervision. In a large, decentralized system, there could be several 'layers' of officers who belong to the Ministry of Education and in addition some people employed by local authorities.

A complex structure

The organization of supervision and support services is complex, not to say intricate, in most countries. There are mainly three explanations for this complexity.

First, in almost all countries **supervision services exist at each important level of the education administration: central, regional and local**. This is a result of the expansion of the education system and of its management structure. Services, which originally existed only at central level, have been decentralized and now have officers posted at several levels. In various countries, one single level has been given the responsibility of visiting schools. In various others, all officers, from central to district level, include school visits among their tasks. The distribution of tasks between these levels is seldom clear.

> *Examples:*
>
> *In a number of countries, such as **France**, the central level will concentrate more on 'system' evaluation, through the publication of thematic reports, for example, while local level supervision will be in charge of the 'raw' inspection work, which entails in particular the assessment of teachers. A significant group of countries assign the same task of school supervision fundamentally to officers at various levels. In **Sri Lanka**, schools are supervised by officers at central, provincial, zonal and divisional levels and also by master teachers. The intensity of supervision differs somewhat from one level to another: some days are set aside per month for school visits at provincial as well as at zonal and divisional levels. In **Nepal**, on the other hand, supervisors work only from district offices. Officers based above that level do not have regular school visits among their main tasks.*

Box 1.: Structures of school supervision in Korea and Sri Lanka

To illustrate the diversity in the structures of supervision systems, the following are examples of more and less complex structures. Only those officers who have to officially visit schools for supervision and/or support purposes are included.

Korea

Level	*Responsible officers*	*Schools to be supervised*
Central ministry	No supervision department	-
Metropolitan and provincial offices	(Junior) supervisors in secondary supervision section	High school
City and county offices	(Junior) supervisors in elementary and middle school education division	Elementary and middle schools

In Korea, primary and secondary schools are supervised by only one actor, the junior supervisor, based in the metropolitan and provincial offices, for secondary schools, and in the city and county offices for primary schools. In Sri Lanka, supervision is a major function at every level. Team supervisory visits are planned at all levels, always in collaboration with officers from the other levels. The officers closest to schools are expected to monitor school activities more frequently than others.

Sri Lanka[1]

Level	*Responsible officers*	*Schools to be supervised*
Central ministry	Education officers, primary/secondary education unit	Primary/secondary sections of national schools
Provincial	Education officers in the provincial department of education	National schools Type 1AB and 1C schools
Zonal	Education officers in the zonal education office	Type 1AB and 1C schools Type 2 and 3 schools
Divisional	Education officers in the divisional education office	Type 1AB and 1C schools
School clusters	Master teachers	National schools Type 1AB and 1C schools Type 2 and 3 schools

In smaller countries, where the education system and administration is less complex, the problem of co-ordination between levels is often less prevalent. However, as examples in *Box 2* show, small does not necessarily imply a simple structure, and countries of similar sizes have developed quite different structures.

[1] Note: Sri Lanka does not make a distinction between primary and secondary schools, but classifies schools as follows:

Type 1AB	*Schools with classes up to Grade 13 including G.C.E. (Advanced Level) science, arts and business streams.*
Type 1C	*Schools with classes up to Grade 13 and including G.C.E. arts and business Streams*
Type 2	*Schools with classes up to Grade 11*
Type 3	*Elementary schools with classes up to Grade 8*

Box 2: . Structures of school supervision in small states

To illustrate the diversity in the structures of supervision systems, the following are examples of more and less complex structures in countries that are characterized either by their small size or a fairly small population.

Zanzibar

All inspectors work within the central Ministry of Education. The Division of Inspection forms part of the Department of Professional Services. The head of the Division is the Chief Inspector, followed in the hierarchy by the Co-ordinators. They organize the work of primary and secondary inspectors and teacher advisors. Primary inspectors are responsible for particular districts, but are based in the central Ministry.

Grenada

The structure is not very different from Zanzibar. All supervisors, called Education Officers (Schools), are based within the Ministry, under the leadership of a Senior Education Officer. They are in charge of the supervision of both primary and secondary schools. A separate section, however, exists for the supervision of and support to early childhood education. In addition, there are several officers in charge of teacher support and supervision and curriculum development for specific subjects.

Dominica

Dominica, comparable in size and population to Grenada, has adopted quite a different structure. Primary supervision is separated from secondary. Education officers in charge of the supervision of primary schools are based in decentralized offices at parish level. There is one Senior Education Officer, who supervises the 15 secondary schools.

Box 3.: Structures of school supervision in some African states

Botswana

Primary and secondary supervision are separated. For primary schools, the structure is as follows:

Level	*Responsible officers*	*Main tasks*
Central ministry	Inspection unit within the Department of Primary Education	Planning overall supervision policy, some school visits
Regional	Six regional offices	Co-ordinating supervision work
Local	Regional offices are divided into inspectoral areas with a Senior Education Officer, who is the main supervisory actor.	School visits and report writing

For secondary schools, the structure is quite different:

Level	*Responsible officers*	*Main tasks*
Central ministry	Inspection unit within the Department of Secondary Education	Planning overall supervision policy, some school visits
Regional	Five regional offices, with subject-specific advisers.	School visits and report writing

At secondary level, at the time of writing, all regional offices are not yet fully functional, as they do not all have the necessary subject-specific advisers.

Namibia

Level	*Responsible officers*	*Main tasks*
Central ministry	Directorate Inspectorate and Advisory Services	In-service training; policy advice; system monitoring; some school visits
Regional	Seven regional offices, with inspectors of education and advisory teachers	School visits to primary and secondary schools and report writing
Local	Circuits and district offices (the latter to be set up). These are areas of responsibility, not specific offices.	

Secondly, schools of different levels and types, and different subjects, will be supervised by distinct officers. In addition, many countries assign special supervisors for specific groups of schools and specific subjects.

Examples

*In the Indian State of **Tamil Nadu**, for example, specific inspectors cover respectively all-girls schools, Anglo-Indian schools and the former 'Panchayat union' schools. In **Uttar Pradesh**, in addition to the distinction between primary and post-primary school supervision, there are specific officers to supervise urban and rural schools and special staff to visit girls' schools.*

In many countries, primary and secondary school supervision function separately. Box 3 gives the example of Botswana, where this is the case, and of Namibia, where no such separation exists. One intricate question concerns the advantages and risks of separating primary from secondary school supervision. It seems to make sense that primary school supervision be assigned to officers located closer to the action, e.g. at district or local level, while secondary school supervision could be the task of regional officers. Furthermore, primary inspectors are usually generalists, while secondary inspectors are subject-area specialists. The examples of Bangladesh and Nepal show that the issue is not that simple.

Examples

*In **Bangladesh**, in 1988, the creation of separate directorates for the management and supervision of primary and secondary and higher education is believed to have strengthened the supervision structure of primary education. However, such a*

separation of supervision in two services is not without problems. In **Nepal***, in the 1980s, supervision of primary and secondary schools was also the responsibility of different actors. Following an evaluation in 1989, it was decided to combine these tasks and to assign supervision of both school levels to the same person. This was linked to the organization of primary and secondary schools in clusters and, at the same time, it was thought that it could lead to a more intensive use of existing staff. Currently, some supervisors who feel inadequately equipped to offer subject-specific guidance at secondary level are contesting this reform.*

Questions

What is the situation of your country in this regard? What are the advantages and disadvantages of primary and secondary schools being supervised by different officers?

Should separate professionals be in charge of primary and secondary school supervision? There is no easy answer to this question. To a large extent, it depends on the focus of the supervision visit: whether it is more oriented towards the school than the individual teacher; that is, more on management than on pedagogical practice. It makes sense to have one common service when school management is the main issue to be covered; and separate subject officers at secondary level where the subject knowledge of the individual teachers are the main concerns. Having one service to supervise both primary and secondary has two advantages: it allows for a more intensive use of the supervision staff, with the school/supervisor ratio being smaller; and it can intensify collaboration between primary and secondary schools within a cluster. The risk, however, is that supervisors, who have generally been working in and with primary schools, will not easily be accepted within secondary schools or will be unable to offer useful advice. The reverse is true – though probably to a lesser extent – for those with mainly secondary school experience. The implications for recruitment needs to be carefully considered and will be addressed in *Module 4*.

Thirdly, officers will also be differentiated on the basis of their tasks, separating for example inspectors or supervisors from advisers, or separating the supervision of administrative aspects from that of pedagogic aspects. In some cases, a distinction will be made between the inspection of teachers and the supervision of the school's management, through the inspection of the headteacher. Yet another distinction is that between monitoring the system, in many instances a task of a specific corps of officers at central level, and monitoring the individual schools.

Examples

*In **Nepal**, a distinction exists between school supervisors and resource persons, who are solely responsible for offering advice. Thailand draws a distinction between inspection (monitoring the implementation of education policy) and supervision (the instructional improvement of schools and teachers). The central level is mainly in charge of inspection. Two separate groups of inspectors exist: the inspectors-general, who have their own department and focus on the macro-picture of overall policies and the inspectors, who work within the existing Ministry departments and are only concerned with the micro-view of policies related to their department. Supervision is the task of both the central and regional levels and is carried out by supervisors. The **Irish** Inspectorate is composed of three sections: primary; post-primary (both essentially supervision agencies); and the psychological service (mainly a support agency). In several countries, including **France** and **Spain**, a distinction is made between supervision of pedagogical and of administrative matters*

A problematic structure?

The available literature and the experiences of different countries shows that such complex multi-level structures carry a number of problems:

- They lead to an unclear division of tasks. The distribution of responsibilities between, for instance, a pedagogical support unit and a school inspection unit is seldom made explicit. It has been known for staff from different offices to visit schools on the same day, not knowing about the other's visit.
- The spread of staff over different levels and different sections leads to small numbers of staff in each, which limits their impact and results in an inefficient duplication of administrative services. This is particularly worrisome when the financial resources available to supervision services are scarce.
- There could also be a problem of conflicting lines of authority, which is especially pre-occupying for schools influenced by different 'authorities'.
- Schools and teachers receive visits and advice from many different sources, which could disorientate rather than help. Lack of co-ordination between these officers adds to their confusion.

There are, however, two possible advantages of having officers at different levels visit schools. First, it increases the total number of people that are supposed to undertake school visits and could therefore increase their frequency. Secondly, such visits allow the school administration system to remain in close contact with the daily realities of the school.

While it is fairly straightforward to identify the problems that a particular organization can face, there is no 'one-size-fits-all' solution. What is the 'best' model for a country depends on several factors, including:

- the role which the supervision service is supposed to play. If the service is expected simply to exercise administrative control every two or three years, evidently less officers have to be placed close to school than in a service which has as its main task to offer intensive and regular support to teachers;
- the strength and experience of headteachers and of teachers. The following principle can be a useful guideline: the more professional school staff are, the less supervision and support they need;
- the size of the country and of the education system;
- the functions exercised by other services. All efforts should be made to avoid overlap. Where a strong teacher training and development service that regularly goes out to schools exists, the supervision service might not need to include teacher development as an explicit task in its mandate; and
- the available finances. It makes little sense to demand that supervisors undertake tasks for which they do not have the necessary resources. In such a situation, it is better to limit their mandate.

Part II of this module will comment on a number of changes that many countries have introduced in order to overcome the weaknesses which characterizes their present organization. One aspect to consider in more detail, however, before examining these reforms, concerns the relationship between supervision and the other services that have a role to play in quality improvement and monitoring.

Supervision and other quality improvement and monitoring services

Supervision, as was mentioned before, is only one of the services that has as its main tasks the improvement of the performance of schools and teachers. It also forms part of an overall quality monitoring system (see Module 1).

While the internal co-ordination of the supervision service poses problems, the relationships between supervision and these other services must also be analyzed.

Question

What are the different services that have a role to play in pedagogical improvement and/or quality monitoring and with whom supervisors should regularly exchange information? What interaction, if any, exists between these services and the supervision service?

Among the services in charge of pedagogical improvement and/or monitoring, one can mention pedagogical research departments, teacher training institutions, examination centres and curriculum centres. Ideally, the relations between supervision and these other services, in particular teacher training, should be close and well organized. In such a way, supervision findings and recommendations could feed into teacher training and curriculum development, while there would be a greater rapport between examinations and the delivered curriculum. Such a coherent set of interventions would offer more help to teachers, who are at times confused by the conflicting advice coming from these different sources.

In order to create an effective interaction between supervision and these other services, four broad factors are of particular relevance:

1. supervision visits collect information relevant to pedagogical improvement;
2. supervision reports are disseminated to the different interested services and provide them with relevant easy-to-access information, so that they can act upon the recommendations;
3. supervisors have a role to play in, for instance, examination writing, achievement testing or teacher training;
4. mechanisms – of a formal or less formal nature – for co-operation and exchange of information between supervision and other pedagogical improvement/monitoring services exist or are being developed.

Research conducted by the IIEP shows that in most countries such contacts are few and far between and are seldom institutionalized. This is particularly preoccupying in countries as diverse as India or the Bahamas, where teacher training institutions do not have the potential to train all newly recruited teachers. As a result, many teachers enter the service without previous training. Supervisors, more than in other countries, could be expected to build teachers' capacities through informal support sessions.

The following paragraphs give some details on the situation as far as teacher training is concerned in five Asian countries. This is followed by the example of Botswana, which offers a different picture.

> ***Examples***
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> *In the five Asian countries, contacts are rare where pre-service training is concerned. Such training is generally in the hands of teacher training institutions, with whom acting supervisors have little contact. As regards in-service teacher training, supervision staff should have a more active role to play, but this is only the case, out of the five countries, in* ***Bangladesh*** *and* ***Sri Lanka****. In Bangladesh, the supervisors devote a considerable amount of their time (13 per cent on average) to running and improving teacher training within school clusters. In Sri Lanka, a distinction must be made between short-term and long-term in-service training. Supervisors are of little importance to the latter, as it is mainly the concern of training institutions. Where short-term programmes are concerned, they enter the picture, as one of their main responsibilities is precisely to organize such programmes, including for instance management training for headteachers. The Sri Lanka report, however, also comments that the lack of co-ordination between different implementing organizations leads to duplication in in-service training. In* ***Korea****,* ***Nepal*** *and* ***Uttar Pradesh****, supervisors have no involvement in in-service teacher training and it does not appear in any of the job descriptions. In Korea, for instance, in-service training is in the hands of institutions with which supervisors have no regular, organized contact.*

In Botswana, primary school supervisors, called Education Officers, take part in other pedagogical activities:

- they are members of subject panels responsible for curriculum development;
- they participate in item-writing, pre-testing and supervision with regard to examinations;
- pre-service education: they sit on the Advisory Committees of the Colleges of Education, which, among other things, review the colleges' curricula;
- they are members of In-Service Committees, which exist at regional level and on which teachers, headteachers and NGOs are represented.

At secondary level, supervisors are even more deeply involved in other pedagogical support functions: this can be explained by the fact that for a long time Senior Education Officers were solely responsible for all aspects of their subjects, and that only recently some tasks have been given to other departments. They retain important duties, for instance as Chief Examiner in their respective subjects.

While the Botswana case seems the most amenable to developing supervision as an integrated component of a pedagogical improvement service, it is not without problems. With the ever increasing number of schools and pressure from within the

Ministry and from the public in general for more inspections, Senior Education Officers have found the duties they do in co-operation with or on behalf of other departments to be an added burden that limits their capacity to supervise schools more effectively. Indeed, it is difficult to argue that supervisors need to widen their co-operation with other school and teacher support services, while recognizing at the same time that they spend too little time on their priority task: supervision.

This raises a number of issues.

- First, in which of these fields should supervisors, as a priority, be involved? The one field that comes closest to their core task, supervision, is undoubtedly in-service training. It could be argued that a good school visit should take the form of an informal training session of school staff. In addition, many recommendations, which conclude visits, relate to the need for such training. Ensuring that supervisors work closely together with other staff in charge of in-service training might also help in changing the image of the supervisor in a positive way.
- A second question concerns the form that supervisors' involvement in other services should take. Should it be left to individuals in for example their field offices to decide in what area to be involved or should the supervision service, as an institution, ensure that its views and opinions are taken into account? In other words, the choice exists between relying on informal contacts or formal rules, which are not mutually exclusive strategies.

While there are no simple answers to these questions, some more practical solutions exist.

Question

What practical steps can fairly easily be taken to alleviate this lack of co-ordination between supervision and other quality monitoring services?

It is important to ensure that some form of contact exists between supervisors, teacher trainers, curriculum developers and others, through, as a minimum, the exchange of reports, and, where possible, the organization of team visits. This is

illustrated by the following excerpt of a management audit prepared by the IIEP for the Grenada Ministry of Education.

Example[2]

The roles of two categories of officers (Education Officers and Curriculum Development Officers) are different and at the same time fully complementary. While the Curriculum Development Officers concentrate on pedagogical advice and support to the individual teachers, the Education Officers combine control and support functions in administrative as well as pedagogical matters, and they focus more on the school. It should be clear, however, that in order to do their work properly, Curriculum Development Officers cannot ignore what goes on in the school as a whole, in the same way that Education Officers cannot properly monitor the functioning of schools if they ignore what is going on in the classrooms. Consequently, co-operation and convergence are needed. In order to obtain such co-operation, practical steps could be taken at three complementary levels:

- *Planning of school visits: to date, there has been no co-ordination in planning visits between different officers. A mechanism should be worked out whereby officers of the two units exchange information on planned visits in order to arrive at a rational and balanced distribution of those visits between schools. Ideally, visits should be planned jointly on the basis of a clear and common identification of the needs of different schools.*
- *Exchange of information: reporting on school visits is presently limited to a strict minimum. The absence of systematic recording of substantive findings after school visits does not facilitate co-ordination between different officers visiting the same school. A standard format could be worked out for recording such findings in a systematic and concise way. Such records would then be systematically added to each individual school file, which should be common to the two units. By keeping such school files (which could be rapidly computerized), a good database could be built up on the quality problems in each individual school, which should facilitate co-ordination and targeted joint intervention.*
- *Team building: indeed, co-ordination should go beyond exchange of information. Its ultimate aim is to pursue the development of common approaches to supervision work and the creation of a team spirit through appropriate capacity-building activities such as regular workshops, common school visits and so on. Already, Curriculum Development and Education Officers co-operate in carrying out occasional 'school performance reviews', which could constitute a good starting point for further development of teamwork.*

[2] Source: IIEP & Grenada Ministry of Education, 2000.

Recent changes in the organization of the service

The description of the organization of supervision, in the previous sections, reflects to a large extent what has existed in most countries for a long time. In recent years, several changes were introduced that have had an impact on the service's organization. The previous paragraphs already referred to some of these. The purpose of this section is to offer a clearer description of each of these trends.

Tasks

Identify recent reforms in your country concerning the structure of your supervision system. What have been the reasons for these reforms?

Reflect on any other innovative strategies concerning the organization and structure of the service that could lead to improvements.

Completing the task: some hints

In many cases, what was felt to be one main weakness of the supervision service was the distance between the supervisors and the schools. Partly as a result, schools were too rarely visited, in particular the remote small rural schools. Many countries therefore tried to bridge that gap by creating an extra supervisory level under the present lowest level or by bringing schools together in clusters, sometimes with a resource centre in the middle.

In a few other cases, countries decide to centralize their service. One example is England and Wales, to which we will come back in Module 7. Their objective is to streamline the service and clarify its structure by abolishing the intermediate levels.

When examining the reforms in your own country, it is useful to examine to what extent the service is being centralized or decentralized and what are the reasons for these strategies.

The traditional organization of the supervision service has a number of weaknesses, which have been listed above. They relate both to inefficiency (the spread of officers over too many units) and ineffectiveness (the low impact of schools). This led to the search for new organizational models. In addition, this search was inspired by, on the one hand, the demand to develop, within the supervision service, a quality-assurance culture rather than a quality-control approach, and, on the other hand, a change in the focus of supervision: away from external control and towards school and teacher development

In light of this, it is hardly surprising that numerous countries have attempted, at different times, to improve on or reform the organization of existing services. Three types of reform have been particularly popular. Their purpose is to bring supervision closer to where the action is taking place, that is to say to the school-site level. They do so in different ways: by decentralizing the service further; by building up a new structure (the resource centre) between the supervisors and the schools; or by strengthening in-school supervision. The following paragraphs discuss the first two strategies, while the third one will be examined in *Module 6*.

Decentralizing supervision

Throughout the expansion of the education system, one preoccupation has been the increasing distance between the supervisors and the schools. Several countries have tried to close that distance through the creation of additional levels of supervision and support staff, under the level closest to the school. In that way, the first district offices were set up and in more recent times various countries have created a sub-district level. This fits within an overall policy of decentralization of the educational management system, which has gained in popularity over the last decade or so.

Several countries have taken this organizational reform as an opportunity to attempt to transform the focus of the service, by demanding from these newly appointed staff that they develop a collegial relationship with teachers and dedicate more time to support and advice and less to control.

> *Examples*
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> ***Bangladesh*** *created in 1980 a new tier of officials called the Assistant Thana (district) education officers, who have quickly become the main linkage between schools and the administration. Their creation has improved the ratio of schools to supervisors from 100 to 20. These officers are expected to visit the schools at least twice a month, once for school-based teacher training and once for general supervision.* ***Belize*** *has set up administrative structures around existing district education centres, which includes the transfer of education officers away from the central Ministry offices and the establishment of District Councils. Another well-known example concerns* ***Pakistan****, which in 1979 introduced the position of learning co-ordinators, who have to visit some 10-20 schools per month. A comparable strategy exists in, for example,* ***Bermuda****, where these professionals are called 'peripatetic resource teachers'; in* ***Myanmar****, with its assistant township*

*education officers; and in **Lao**. In the last country, this is being accompanied by the creation of school clusters.*

Questions

What, from your point of view, could be the advantages of such a strategy?
What will be the problems encountered when trying to implement it?
What, therefore should be the accompanying measures during implementation?

Two different issues crop up here: how feasible it is to create an extra tier of officers, based closer to schools; and how these officers can be concerned more with support than with control. The answers to these questions can to some extent be found in the experiences of Pakistan and Bangladesh.

The Pakistani strategy of placing learning co-ordinators close to schools proved to have quite a number of benefits at the early stage of its implementation[3]: "a significant reduction in teacher absenteeism; improvements in the quality of teaching; increased enrolment and better attendance by students; an opportunity for teachers to discuss their problems with persons not primarily concerned with administration; a greater sense of professionalism among teachers; the use of co-ordinators as substitutes for missing teachers; better communication from district management to the schools".

But this strategy is not without risks. It demands, more precisely, a fairly heavy investment to ensure that the new tier of officials can perform efficiently. One can wonder, if there were not enough resources available to strengthen existing supervisors, why create a new structure? In many countries, the creation of a separate level of educational administration between the Ministry and schools

[3] Source: Warwick et al, 1989, p. 298.

might not be feasible. The Bangladesh experience is rather typical of what took place in many other countries. The Assistant Thana Education Officers faced, because of the financial constraints, difficult working conditions and in particular lack of transport. As a result, their school visits were not nearly as frequent as expected and the time they spent in school too short for serious developmental work with teachers. Little was put in place to accompany this reform and allow for a change in culture: recruitment procedures and criteria remained the same, while training was lacking. The result is therefore mixed: more school visits are indeed taking place, but they remain of a bureaucratic nature and the overall cost of the supervision service has increased, with little benefit to be shown for it.

A less cost-intensive alternative is to post single supervisors at district level, perhaps within general administrative offices. But this could bring about several challenges:

- these officers will have to work without their own support staff such as secretaries;
- the lack of colleagues could lead to a sense of isolation and an absence of exchanges and discussions, which offer important learning opportunities; and
- the question of who will control these officers also needs to be decided upon.

When these close-to-school actors undertake support-oriented tasks, a different issue can arise, one of jealousy and rivalry between the different officers. This was clearly the case in Pakistan: because of the introduction of the learning co-ordinators, incumbent district education officers felt that their authority was being undermined and supervisors complained that they did not receive the same special allowances and motorbikes as the learning co-ordinators. The integration of these co-ordinators into the existing administrative structures, however, has tempered those feelings of jealousy, but now this staff have lost their original character and have become just another group of supervisors.

Another issue is that when adding a level to the administration, responsibilities and resources should be taken away from other levels, for the system not to lose in efficiency. This is difficult, both politically and from a management point of view.

Creating resource centres and school clusters

Strengthening collaboration between schools by setting up a system of mutual support and supervision generally takes the form of **clustering schools around resource centres**. This strategy is comparable to the previous one, in the sense that it leads to the creation of an additional layer between the district and the schools. It is different, however, as its objectives are twofold: on the one hand, to orient supervision more towards development and support, rather than control; and, on the other hand, to allow schools to benefit from each other's experiences and expertise. It aims to some extent at replacing the external supervision actors (the inspectors and district education officers) by a system that is in part school-based. The following paragraphs will examine in more detail:

- what precisely is a resource centre;
- different options in the organization of these centres;

- what has been their impact on school improvement; and
- what seem to be the more successful experiences.

What is a resource centre and what are its objectives

There exist several types of resource centres. The following elements characterize all of them:

- it is a physical location, with its own staff;
- its activities include the provision of resource materials to teachers, but can also include other more pro-active support strategies, such as in-service training; and
- its clientele consists of the teachers and schools from the surrounding area.

What is probably more important, however, than these characteristics are the objectives of a centre. Its ultimate objective is to contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning in the schools. To do so, it can play different roles:

- it offers teachers and schools access to resources, which will help in improving their practices;
- it offers training, either in the centre or in schools;
- it allows teachers from different schools to meet and discuss with each other.

In many countries, the development of resource centres is linked to school clusters. As a rule, they group neighbouring schools around a larger core school, where the resource centre might be based. When linked with school clusters, resource centres generally have two more explicit objectives:

- first, to improve teaching by sharing resources, experience and expertise among staff; and
- second, to facilitate administration and gain from economies of scale.

Both clusters and resource centres exist in an increasing number of countries. The names differ from one place to another. Clusters can be called 'nuclei', pedagogical zones, complexes, school learning cells, core and satellite schools, while the terms teacher or educational resource centre can be used interchangeably. School clusters or a similar arrangement exist in most countries of Latin America and in a wide and diverse range of other countries, in many cases in conjunction with resource centres. Countries do not all follow exactly the same model when setting up resource centres and organizing schools into clusters. *Annex I* shows the variety of experiences in different countries and contexts.

Task

Read through Annex I and highlight some important distinctions between different resource centre strategies.

Completing the task: some hints

A number of differences exist between resource centres in different countries. Several can be identified. Five are mentioned here briefly, while two more fundamental ones are discussed in the following paragraphs.

In some countries, additional staff (such as teacher trainers, master teachers or resource persons) are employed at the centre. In others, existing school staff, in particular principals, are given additional tasks.

Resource centres and school clusters can be set up mainly to facilitate the administration of the increasing number of schools or to improve pedagogical practices through exchanges between schools.

Resource centres can be completely new structures or the task of 'resourcing' schools can be given to existing units, such as teacher training centres.

The strategy can be implemented from the top down with the Ministry organizing schools clusters and building up resource centres. Or it can be the result of initiatives taken at the local level, with principals and teachers deciding that, in the absence of regular supervision and support, they will meet from time to time to discuss their challenges and innovative practices.

The strategy can cover the whole country or only certain areas, for instance the remote rural ones.

Two core options in the development of resource centres

The description of the functioning of resource centres in some selected countries shows a wide variety of experiences in the roles assigned to these centres and in the tasks performed by them. We will comment here on two issues that must be considered when setting up a resource centres system and that will have a great impact on the need for financing and staffing.

1. Should the staff in RCs be involved in teacher training and therefore go out to school or should they remain in their centre and limit themselves to providing materials and resources to teachers?

There are three arguments to support the claim that RCs should be involved in in-service training through school visits:

- they cannot fulfil their objective of quality improvement without involvement in this crucial area;
- in order for their support to be relevant to teachers, they surely need to visit schools regularly and discuss with the staff;
- visiting schools and training teachers is an important way of publicizing the centre. Many centres that do not undertake these activities remain unknown by the schools.

But such an involvement will not be without problems: first, the experiences of most countries show that resource centres do not have the necessary staff nor the finances to be able to regularly organize training or go out to schools. Second, for such centres to undertake regular school visits, they will need to be plentiful, something few countries can afford. Indeed, few countries can afford to staff such a large number of centres with more than one or two professionals. The result will be that when the resource person is in school, the centre is closed and of no use to anyone. A solution might reside in attaching all resource centres to an existing school, the core school of a cluster. However, in Nepal, where this was the case, this did not solve the problem: the schools were not given control over the centre, for reasons of security and accountability, and headteachers were reluctant to take care of centres in the absence of the resource person.

2. Should resource centres become part of the educational administration or remain as a separate structure?

Resource centres in most countries were created within the framework of specific projects. There are several good reasons to argue that they should be integrated into the educational administration:

- the findings of their work can be of use and interest to other actors within the administration, in particular the supervisors. Relationships between these different actors will become simpler and more direct when all belong to the same public service;
- such integration will lead to more co-ordination, for example between resource persons and district supervisors, and therefore to less confusion;

- the sustainability of these centres will improve if the official administration takes over its management and becomes responsible for their financing; and
- when remaining as separate actors, the impact of resource persons on teachers might be limited, because they lack the authority that is attached to staff belonging to the Ministry.

Countries who attempted to integrate RCs and turned them into part of the educational administration experienced some problems. Nepal attempted to integrate the resource centre structure into its educational administration. Two core problems were experienced:

- by becoming part of the administration, resource persons are increasingly used by that administration for tasks unrelated to their job, such as data collection or resolution of administrative problems. They therefore experience similar problems to the supervisors: a heavy workload and a loss of concentration on what is the main reason for their existence, namely support and advice; and
- it also seems that teachers have a less collegial relationship with staff belonging to the educational administration than with resource persons whose linkage with the administration is weak and who therefore are not in a position of authority over them.

An evaluation: a second-rate alternative?

The resource centre strategy has held many promises, but its actual performance in most countries has been quite disappointing.

Question

What do you think can explain this unsatisfactory result?

The poor impact of resource centres on the performance of schools and teachers has four main explanations:

1. It seems that only a minority of teachers regularly visit the resource centres. The distance between the school and the centre undoubtedly plays a role, but other factors are equally important: the lack of time, especially when teachers have more than one job or when centres are only open during school hours; the fact that the materials within the centres are not always what teachers are in need of, and finally the fact that centres are just not sufficiently well known by teachers.

Examples

An evaluation of different resource centre projects[4] in ***India*** *(Andra Pradesh),* ***Kenya****,* ***Nepal*** *and* ***Zambia*** *showed that in all cases, perhaps with one exception, there were extremely few 'drop-ins'. For example, on average in Zambia only two teachers per week visited the centres. In Nepal, participants on in-service courses were asked how many of them come to the TRC and how often. Even those who lived within a 5 km radius, some even only 1 km away, said they had never been to the centre before. At one centre, only five books had been borrowed in the last year, and those were checked out to trainers.*

2. Teachers generally only visit centres when specific training courses are organized. The knowledge gained through these courses, or the materials developed, are seldom used in the schools. The same evaluation referred to above concludes that materials rarely get to the classrooms, and that it is even more rare for them to be used by children. Teachers find it difficult to transmit whatever new pedagogical methods they have been taught, to the classroom.
3. This lack of impact on the classroom can be explained in part by the fact that resource centres do not have sufficient staff to include regular school visits among their main tasks. The continued detachment of resource centres from schools and classrooms makes it very difficult for such centres to have an impact on schools.
4. A further constraint on the work of resource centres lies in the conditions of many schools and the characteristics of many teachers. These conditions and characteristics do not undergo much change, merely because of the existence of resource centres. It is worth pointing out that the environment in schools to which the teachers return can be very poor. The school's ability and willingness to welcome new ideas and resources cannot be taken for granted.

To summarize: the present model of resource centres starts from the belief that schools will improve by providing teachers with a place to obtain or develop teaching and learning materials, by offering them training from time to time, and visiting them at times in schools. Where centres have remained remote from the schools and the classroom, this has not succeeded. There is a need to think creatively about new models that could help in overcoming this fundamental weakness.

[4] Source: Knamiller, 1999.

Some successful options

Arguably the main weakness of the resource centre model, presented above, lies in the gap between its ambitions and its means. There seem, then, to be two ways forward: on the one hand, to limit the ambitions, for instance by asking centres to work with less schools or to focus on one single task; on the other hand, to give them more means to function with. The few successful resource centre programmes have done precisely that. The following paragraphs present three alternatives.

Alternative one: Restrict the number of schools and teachers per centre.

For resource centres to have a deep and consistent impact on the teachers, for whom they are responsible, it is advisable that they work with those teachers in their own classroom environment at regular intervals. A system of centres that are located close to schools most in need of support and that have only a few schools under their charge has proven to be effective. Such a model works particularly well where school density is high and communications between schools and the centre rather easy.

> *Example*[5]
>
> *The Teacher Advisory Centres (TAC) set up by the Aga Khan Foundation in Mombasa,* ***Kenya****, serves a small number of schools and teachers, mainly in an urban area, with well-staffed and well-resourced centres, to which the community makes a clear commitment by providing facilities and care-taking. Each centre has a Tutor and a Programme Officer (PO). Each TAC serves about 12 primary schools, within 3-5 km of the centre. Its key feature is that the PO picks out a small number of schools, three or four, from this cluster and works intensely with them for one year, spending three days each week in these schools. On these days, the Tutor visits the other schools in the cluster. The Programme Officers meet weekly to plan and prepare in-service workshops in co-ordination with the Tutors. The intimate and prolonged contact between a PO and a very few selected schools leads to a positive impact in schools: it encourages better teacher attendance and advice is more ready to hand. The model allows for maximum advisory support time in schools and a minimum amount of time for teachers to be absent.*

Alternative two: Assign only the task of providing resources to the centres

Asking that resource centres provide materials and resources to schools as well as offer training has several implications: it is costly in terms of staff and finances, and may lead to increased teacher absenteeism. Most countries cannot afford such ambitious strategies. It is undoubtedly more feasible, in contexts of financial scarcity, to ask centres to focus only on the task of providing and developing teaching materials. At present, many schools function without such material support, which makes the working environment de-motivating. The centre could both act as a link between the administration and the schools to ensure that materials reach schools, and develop its own support materials to be distributed to schools and teachers.

Alternative three: Turn existing teacher training centres into teacher resource centres

In many countries, in-service training is in the hands of a ministry department or an institution, which is decentralized to regional or, in a few cases, district level. In

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[5] *Source: Knamiller, 1999.*

other words, within each region or district, a centre is in charge of in-service teacher training. Rather than creating a separate structure, it could make more sense to re-formulate the tasks of these existing centres and strengthen them with some additional staff and funds. The advantages are evident: less worries about co-ordination; economies of scale; and arguably more appropriate teacher training strategies. The disadvantages are equally clear: it is not simple to change the ethos of an existing structure; and – more fundamentally – the distance between these centres and schools remains difficult to bridge.

Lessons learned

Question:

The expected outcomes of this module were that you would gain an understanding of the rationale that underlies the structure of the supervision service in different countries, and the problems that countries experience in this regard. The module also discussed several strategies to overcome these challenges. Summarize briefly what you learnt by studying this module. Does it compare with what follows?

In many countries, the structure of the supervision service is complex: officers exist at different levels and there are regularly different officers for different tasks (such as control – support; classroom supervision – pedagogical guidance) and for different levels. This complexity threatens the service's effectiveness: the spread of staff leads to small numbers of staff in each office, limiting their impact. In addition, it could lead to an unclear division of tasks and to conflicting lines of authority.

Equally preoccupying are the generally weak relationships between supervision and the other services in charge of quality improvement, such as the teacher training or curriculum development units. As a minimum, reports should be exchanged between different units to improve on their co-ordination.

Countries have undertaken several structural changes in order to make the service more effective and strengthen its impact on schools. While some countries have streamlined the service through its centralization, many have attempted to bring supervision closer to schools. They have done so in two ways:

- by creating an additional supervisory layer under the one closest to the schools; and
- by organizing schools into clusters and around resource centres.

Neither strategy is without problems. The first one can lead to a more complex structure with more officers and is therefore costly. The creation of resource centres has not automatically led to stronger teacher supervision and support for several reasons, including the fact that few teachers visit them and that what they learn there is not always relevant to their classroom.

Annex: Examples of resource centres in different countries

In **Burundi** and **Cambodia**, most schools are satellite schools situated around a core school. In Burundi, the core school director has the explicit task of supervising classroom teaching in all the cluster schools. In Cambodia, this task is assigned to a chairperson, who must also gather information to be submitted to the district officer and who presides over cluster meetings, for example on teacher promotion. In each cluster, there is a resource centre used as a training centre for working teachers and as a meeting centre for principals and teachers. These centres store all sorts of data and information gathered from all schools.

Malaysia is developing a rather intricate structure, with State Educational Resource Centres at the state level, Teacher Activity Centres, catering for some 20-50 schools, at the district level and School Resource Centres at each school. In **Lao**, the setting up of a network of teacher upgrading centres in the most disadvantaged provinces was accompanied by the creation of a team of primary teacher educators and the promotion of a regular monitoring and supervision system. District education officers and supervisors, based at the teacher upgrading centre, were given specific supervision training. These supervisors have to visit schools for 20 days per month and this regular supervision and support is seen as a main reason for the programme's beneficial impact on the education system.

In **Jamaica**[6], an interesting innovation uses teacher colleges as resource centres. The Bethlehem and Mico Teachers colleges are linked to a cluster of primary and secondary schools. The colleges provide leadership, technical support and training to teachers and members of the school communities in the clusters, and in return gain access to the schools with respect to the teaching practicum and action research by staff and students.

In the **Andra Pradesh** Primary Education project in India[7], the teacher centre programme is "actually a process where all teachers in a cluster who did the initial 12-day training in the six pedagogical principles of the project, meet for a day six times a year. The purpose of these meetings is to consolidate and further develop the principles through sharing ideas and practice. Physically, the teacher centre is a room in one of the schools in the cluster."

In **Nepal** the resource centre system was introduced, in particular to improve the support mechanism for primary school teachers. Resource centres are used, at the same time, to deliver all educational inputs to teachers and schools: in-service teacher training, refresher training, instructions and directions from the centre, professional advice on teaching, educational materials, and so on. Through the

6 Source: Miller, 1999.

7 Source: Knamiller, 1999

resource centres, teachers and headteachers of the cluster schools are brought together to discuss teaching and management-related issues and to share their resources and experiences.

In **Zambia**, there are provincial and district resource centres. The provincial centres are run by three subject co-ordinators. The district centres have a co-ordinator who is an experienced primary teacher. Each district has three subject trainers. The centres have a role in a cascade system of in-service training and as resource centres.

Botswana has 11 well-staffed Educational Resource Centres. These centres play several roles: they offer the possibility to teachers to develop their own teaching and learning resources, and the staff – which forms part of the Ministry's In-Service Department – organizes regular training programmes, within the centre and in schools. All centres have a documentation centre, several training rooms, a workshop and boarding facilities. In addition, there are a few 'mobile resource centres', i.e. a well-stocked bus, which regularly goes out to different schools to allow the teachers to borrow and to develop useful materials.

School supervision services exist in nearly all countries; they have played a key role in the development of the public education system, by monitoring the quality of schools and by supporting their improvement. However, in many countries, these services are under increasingly heavy critique, because of their failure to have a positive impact on quality of teaching and learning. This failure is, in part, the result of a strategic challenge: the mandate of the service outweighs by far its resources, and is also caused by a series of poor management and planning decisions.

Against this background, many countries have attempted to reform their supervision system. These reforms are also inspired by the need to improve educational quality and by the recent trend towards more school autonomy. Indeed, the ability of schools to use their greater freedom effectively will depend to a large extent on the support services on which they can rely, while supervision may be needed to guide them in their decision-making and to monitor the use they make of their resources. While these reforms have met with mixed success, their overall analysis allows us to gain profound insight into what can be achieved in a specific context. This set of training modules takes the reader through a systematic examination of the issues that a Ministry of Education, intent on reforming its supervision service, will face.

The public, which will benefit most from these modules, are senior staff within ministries who are directly involved in the organisation, planning and management of supervision services, staff of research and training institutions who work on school supervision, and practising supervisors.

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