



Trends in school supervision

Teacher support through resource centres: the Nepalese case

Tirth Raj Khaniya



International Institute for Educational Planning

Teacher support through resource centres: the Nepalese case

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International Institute for Educational Planning
7 - 9 rue Eugène-Delacroix, 75116 Paris

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPEP	Basic and Primary Education Project
CERID	Research Centre for Educational Innovation and Development
DANIDA	Danish International Development Authority
DEO	District Education Officer
ERD	Education for Rural Development
FC	Field Co-ordinator
IEES	Improving the Efficiency of Education Systems
MOE	Ministry of Education
NEC	National Education Commission
NESP	New Education System Plan
PC	Programme Co-ordinator
PEDP	Primary Education Development Project
PEP	Primary Education Project
RC	Resource Centre
RCMC	Resource Centre Management Committee
RP	Resource Person
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
VDC	Village Development Committee

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'.¹ The project, which began in 1996, is one of the main research components of the Institute's Medium-Term Plan 1996-2001.

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 existing in almost every country for a long time, 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, which has been developed against this background, consists of research, training and dissemination activities. Its specific objectives are to assist countries in diagnosing and reforming their existing services of supervision and support, and to identify promising strategies for the reorganization and strengthening of these services.

¹ Other titles in the series include:

Current issues in supervision: a literature review.

Changing schools from within: a management intervention for improving school functioning in Sri Lanka.

The series of publications, of which this monograph forms a part, is the result of research, implemented in several regions, designed to address a number of questions, such as:

- How is 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 different 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 main 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 all 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, and 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 policy-makers intending to reform supervision, and to supervisors who want to improve on their practice.

INTRODUCTION

The origins of modern public education in Nepal date back to less than 50 years, to 1951, when, as the result of political change, education was declared open to all citizens irrespective of ruling or ruled class. Before that, education was accessible only to the ruler's extended family. Since then, the declared policy of the government in the field of education has been to provide equal access to quality education and to improve the management and planning of education in the primary sector. The fact that there are now about 24,000 primary schools, compared to 321 in 1951, is clear evidence of the initiatives being taken towards this end. Assessing the current situation in light of that which prevailed some 50 years ago, it would appear that Nepal has done remarkably well. Nevertheless, improving the quality of education remains, undoubtedly, a challenging task.

The current overall literacy rate stands at 42 per cent, compared to 5 per cent in the early 1950s. A breakdown of the situation reveals that female literacy is 26 per cent while male literacy is 56 per cent. Education now is not only accessible to all individuals, but it has also been officially declared that there is no tuition fee for Grades 1 to 10. Steps have also been taken to provide education to disabled children and to develop early childhood education. The gross primary enrolment rate is 130 per cent for boys and 87 per cent for girls and net enrolment stands at about 70 per cent (80 per cent boys and 60 per cent girls). The primary cycle completion rate is 35 per cent, half of what it is in many Asian countries. The share of the government budget allocated to education has increased in recent years from 10 per cent to 14 per cent.

In order to address issues relating to the improvement of the education sector, in particular in view of achieving a higher literacy rate and universalizing primary education, the government, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, formed a high-level National

Education Commission (NEC), which submitted a comprehensive report in 1992. Since then, new educational policies have been adopted in line with the content and spirit of this report, emphasizing access to, quality of and equal opportunity in primary education.

The eighth five-year plan (1992-1997), therefore, has given a high priority to 'basic and primary education'. It aims at providing primary education to 90 per cent of school going-age (6-10) children. For that purpose it proposed to establish an additional 2,025 primary schools, hire 8,000 teachers and train 35,000 primary-school teachers. Preparation for the ninth five-year plan (1997-2002) has commenced and will continue to give a high priority to primary education. This is demonstrated by the increasing trend in allocating government funds to primary education, which now receives almost 50 per cent of the total education budget.

The emphasis given to education in general, and primary education in particular, since the democratic government came into power, leads to the hope that Nepal will achieve substantial improvement in education by the end of the twentieth century.

This paper presents one strategy implemented by the Nepalese Government to improve the quality of education, namely the resource centre system for professional support to teachers. It discusses its development, its potential contribution and the obstacles it has encountered.

This monograph has five chapters. *Chapter I* describes, in general, primary education in Nepal. It also discusses the reforms which have taken place and the attempts made towards improving school functioning. *Chapter II* concentrates on why the resource centre system was created, the changes it underwent over the years and its present situation. In *Chapter III*, the impact of the Resource Centre (RC) system

on school functioning will be discussed. This chapter contains information gathered during visits to RCs and interactions with school headmasters and teachers. In *Chapter IV*, some critical issues in resource centre development will be addressed. Finally, *Chapter V* will reflect on the lessons learned through this experience and the future development of this strategy.

I. BACKGROUND

1. Basic education: current problems and the need for change

Many changes in education were initiated in order to address the people's aspirations and expectations after the establishment of democracy in 1990 in Nepal. It was strongly realized that, in tune with the political change, reform in education was necessary so that future citizens could protect democracy, act democratically and cope with the demands of the twenty-first century. The previous education system was seen as politically motivated, to make people loyal to the absolute monarchy. This system seemed unable to provide equitable access and quality education to the people.

Participation

It is evident from the enrolment rates mentioned above that there are many children who do not have access to education, because of the insufficient number of schools and their location. Even where there are schools, enrolment is poor. Under the previous government, there was no transparent plan for opening new schools where necessary. Only politically well-connected people could establish new schools in their areas, no matter whether they needed them or not. As a result, it was found that some schools were almost empty in one area of a district, while many children were deprived of school education in another part of the same district. After the establishment of democracy, the government was under pressure to provide better access to education by opening new schools and recruiting more teachers.

Quality

The Master Plan of the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) indicates that, on average, it used to take more than nine years for a child to complete the primary cycle of five years in Nepal. This clearly

questions the internal efficiency rate of the system which, according to a 1993 study, was around 53 per cent. The same study also shows that the wastage in primary education was very high. It was noted that 70 per cent of all drop-outs and 53 per cent of all repeats occurred in Grade 1. The situation in relation to girls' education was even worse.

The primary education curriculum was seen as not sufficiently relevant to the new context. The curriculum, in principle, aimed at fostering civic knowledge, together with the development of physical and mental health, literacy, numeracy, cultural and scientific knowledge. However, some of the objectives and contents of the curriculum were irrelevant and out-dated in the context of the new political situation, others were difficult to assess. There was, therefore, a demand for an education system which would be more pertinent and suitable to the changed context. Moreover, the education system was not serving the developmental needs of children nor the expectations of the people. It produced children with a knowledge of specialized subjects of little importance to their lives, and without a knowledge of the relevant subjects such as health and nutrition, productivity, population and environment. The high drop-out rate and poor participation were felt to be the result of this uninspiring curriculum. The teaching was based on a structural approach to learning which largely ignored the cognitive aspect of children's development. It was seen as unclear in terms of its goals and narrow in terms of its contents. Finally, its delivery was defective, in part because of the poor textbooks.

The supply of poor instructional materials to schools was also a problem, with a particularly negative impact on students from poor households. In order to encourage children from different economic backgrounds to participate in primary education, the system needed to incorporate the necessary and relevant contents for all children, regardless of their economic and professional background.

Teacher

In the Nepalese context, the minimum qualification for a primary-school teacher is the School Leaving Certificate (SLC). In other words, anyone who has completed ten years of education, and is at least 16 years of age, is eligible to become a primary-school teacher. A teacher with this background obviously cannot be expected to be competent enough to handle large primary classes without additional training. While many primary teachers have recently received training, still more than half (52 per cent) are believed to be untrained.

For a long time, the policy on teacher training had been inconsistent. The only training programme widely carried out was a basic programme of 150 hours, which was considered too short. Teacher training was not compulsory and the MOE had no concrete teacher preparation scheme. In this regard, there was a serious need for a clear policy and a competent teacher training programme. The new government has stated that all teachers should be trained soon and that there should be a mechanism to stop the recruitment of untrained teachers.

However, the weakness of teacher training offers only one explanation for the low quality of the teaching force. Other factors relate to their working conditions and conditions of service. Teachers were not given medical allowances, adequate funds and pension until a decade ago. There was neither a promotion mechanism nor a clear career path. There was no clear policy on the recruitment of female teachers. It was just by chance that female teachers comprised 11 per cent of the teaching force at primary level.

Supervision

In the Nepalese context, school supervision as such began in an organized manner during the implementation of the New Education System Plan (NESP-1972). While originally focused on improving

instruction, it quickly became ritual, administrative and inefficient, and finally became non-functional. Various reasons can explain this: the number of supervisors was limited as the number of schools grew, the incentives given were not attractive, the reports submitted by the supervisors were not used by the District Education Officer (DEO) while making decisions, the DEO asked the supervisors to do too much administrative work in the office, and DEOs did not approve the travel orders for supervisors to visit schools, for financial reasons. The allowances given to supervisors were so unattractive that no one was motivated to go into the field of school supervision.

In this way, supervisors became hand-maids of DEOs and supervision became just a ritual exercise to collect very limited information about the physical progress of the school and the presence and absence of teachers and students. As a form of professional support, school supervision thus became almost non-existent.

It is believed that in the absence of an effective supervision system, vast differences exist in the way different schools function and classrooms are managed. Educationists have shown that supervision is a very important supporting mechanism for teachers if it is focused on management of classroom instruction. Such a mechanism would help in minimizing the differences between classrooms. The traditional supervision system, as it was confined, in practice, to gathering information about the school and its physical facilities, had therefore to be replaced by a well-organized and competently staffed support and supervision system.

Management and planning

For the purpose of improving the country's administration, in 1962 the country was divided into five development regions, 14 zones and 75 districts – a structure which was subsequently adopted by the

Ministry of Education. This administrative structure has not changed since. Consequently, the District Education Office, established almost 25 years ago, is still responsible for all educational administration at district level. In between this Office and the Ministry operates the Regional Directorate, but this unit of administration has played a relatively minor role in the management of school education. Every school therefore directly contacts the DEO for all kinds of support and communication and the DEO is expected to directly contact the Ministry.

The planning and management of the Nepalese system, as in many other developing countries, is, to a large extent, centralized. The common practice is that instructions and directions are received from the centre and people concerned at the local level act accordingly. Manpower planning and resource allocation are carried out by the centre. This centralization has rendered management less efficient. Indeed, in a mountainous country such as Nepal, which is very difficult to traverse, educational workers, or people involved in educational management, should be allowed to directly intervene in schools. In order to effect qualitative improvement, local bodies should be permitted to make decisions on school affairs. However, whenever there is a direct involvement of the Ministry through the DEO, there is a likelihood that people will distance themselves from involvement in school affairs.

In the wake of the democracy movement, the community became more eager to play a role in managing its schools and wanted to test the government's commitment to empowering the local bodies to exercise supervision and control of primary schools. In other words, decentralized school management was something people were waiting for. The results of several projects, which had experimented with the involvement of local bodies in school management, were encouraging. Several studies had shown that such community participation was both academically and financially beneficial.

For these different purposes, the democratic government proposed to make a provision for people's involvement in school management, with the Ministry concentrating on the technical aspects and policy matters of education. The education code in 1992-1993 allowed for the establishment of school management committees in order to include people in school activities. Such committees were formed for each school and mandated to raise funds and to take an interest in school management and in its promotion. However, there have been changes both in the way the committee is formed and in its authority and roles, coinciding with changes in the government. The Ministry indeed remains eager to directly intervene in the administration and management of schools. It has been argued that an explicit legal provision, making it clear that the committee should be responsible for activities in relation to school management, is necessary, and that this provision should not frequently change, in order to maintain a certain stability.

2. A brief overview of attempts to improve school functioning in Nepal

Like many other countries, Nepal believes that education is the cornerstone of the social and economic development of a country. In this vein, primary education serves as the foundation for the whole process of development. In the field of social development, education produces people who understand family planning, health and nutrition. Education also contributes significantly to economic development by producing a labour force which has the required knowledge for development. Studies, carried out as early as the 1960s (e.g. Peaslee, 1965), claim that most developed countries only achieved high economic growth rates after having universalized primary education. It is thus widely accepted that it is through education that the pace of development of any country is accelerated.

Education obviously plays an important role in developing cognitive competence in children: literacy (reading and writing), numeracy, adaptation and problem solving skills. These components of education or cognitive competence produce an individual who is able to perform more efficiently and is capable of handling problems, in difficult situations, independently.

Consequently, his Majesty's Government of Nepal has placed much emphasis on providing access, improving quality and strengthening management of primary education. A first pilot project, called Education for Rural Development (ERD), focusing on the Seti zone, started in 1980. Two years later, another pilot project, the Primary Education Project (PEP, 1982-1992), was initiated with the assistance of the World Bank. In line with this, Nepal has also fully endorsed the Jomtien declaration (1990) on 'Education for All' and initiated, more recently, several programmes such as the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP, 1992-1997), the Primary Education Development Project (PEDP, 1992-1997), and the establishment of the Council for Non-Formal Education, to mention but a few. The following paragraphs briefly describe the main initiatives taken by the government to expand and improve basic education in the country during recent years.

Access

In order to provide access to primary education, new schools have been opened, additional teachers recruited and school buildings set up all over the country. In this regard, a school-mapping exercise was carried out. It helped to find out where schools were needed, and revealed that many communities all over the country, especially in the rural areas, needed outside support either to build new schools or to renovate the old buildings.

To help redress this situation, Nepal received assistance from the World Bank and DANIDA, and initiated the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP, 1992-1997). It also received a loan from the Asian Development Bank for the Primary Education Development Project (PEDP, 1992-1997). BPEP was designed in such a way that it incorporated components such as curriculum and textbook development, school and resource centre construction, short-term in-service teacher training and non-formal education, etc. The PEDP was designed to incorporate long-term teacher training and management training programmes and school construction. These two projects have already covered 50 districts out of 75 and will cover the remaining districts over the next few years. In order to provide access to those who have not been able to go through the formal education system, the BPEP has been conducting educational programmes for girls, and an out-of-school programme, adopting a non-formal approach.

Quality

In order to provide quality education, the Ministry of Education has implemented the following activities under the two above-mentioned projects:

- Curriculum change;
- Development of new textbooks congruent with the curriculum;
- Improving physical conditions of the schools;
- Training teachers and headteachers;
- Improving supervision through the resource centre mechanism.

BPEP has successfully completed the development of the new curriculum for Grades 1-5 and has set the learning outcomes for each grade. It has also completed the development of textbooks in line with the new curriculum. After three years of piloting and improving the materials, in the first year of BPEP (1992-1993), the new Grade 1 textbooks were distributed throughout the country. In the following

four years, the textbooks for Grades 2 to 5 were similarly developed and distributed. Consequently, the whole primary cycle has changed in terms of the curriculum and textbook development.

Long-term and short-term teacher training programmes are also taking place under the BPEP and PEDP projects. BPEP has provided curriculum dissemination training to primary headteachers and grade teachers all over the country, hand in hand with the introduction of new textbooks. It has also offered 150 and 180 hours training for several teachers through resource centres. Furthermore, it is in the process of preparing a two-and-a-half-month training course for 10,000 teachers which is part of a 10-month-long teacher training programme. In the same manner, PEDP has a major long-term teacher training programme. It has already completed the development of 10-month teacher training packages, which can also be broken into five-and-a-half and five-month packages. Nine primary teacher training centres have been established in different parts of the country to provide long-term in-service training programmes for primary-school teachers. It also offers management training courses for regional directors, DEOs, headteachers, and supervisors.

One important aspect of these attempts to improve the quality of education was the setting up of resource centres, which is the main topic of this paper.

Decentralized management

Another major objective of BPEP is to strengthen district-level management and planning of primary education. For that purpose, BPEP is constructing District Education Offices in 20 districts, supplies vehicles and other equipment such as computers and fax machines, and offers training for DEOs and assistant DEOs. Resource Centres are involved in the whole process of decentralized management and planning. Management training is given to headteachers also, as there

has been a change in the education regulation which gives schools more power than ever before in relation to recruitment and transfer of teachers: no teacher is recruited or transferred without the consent of the school headteacher or the chairperson of the School Management Committee. This is accepted as a significant step towards decentralizing school management.

Community leaders are also involved in the management of schools, through their membership of the School Management Committee, which can deal with issues such as recruiting teachers on a temporary basis and raising funds for school development. This kind of provision has promoted community participation in gathering resources for schools. Legal provision has been made to empower school management committees and headteachers. Through the Resource Centre, schools are guided to plan yearly programmes and implement them.

Teachers' morale

It is needless to mention that teachers are a key element in the whole process of educational development. They are also a change agent of the society. Under the democratic regime, considerable importance has been given to the issue of how to boost teachers' morale. Several avenues (professional training, ensuring job security, providing reasonable incentives) have been explored. Teachers are now given facilities which are equivalent to government officials in terms of salary, provident funds, pension and medical allowances. They have also been given a sense of job security by the newly amended education regulation. For example, as mentioned earlier, central offices can no longer transfer or make any decision on teachers without their consent or that of the concerned management committee of the school. The promotion ladder of schoolteachers has been made clear. As a result, a teacher can be promoted to a status equivalent to a joint secretary in the Ministry (e.g. gazetted 1st class). It is hoped that this provision will boost the morale of teachers.

All of these inputs are expected to contribute to increasing the quality of primary education. Some early indications reveal that this has indeed been the case. For example, the National Planning Commission (1996) study found some form of qualitative improvement in primary education in terms of increased attendance, and reduced drop-out and repetition.

II. THE CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESOURCE CENTRES

1. Introduction

The concept of the resource centre is not new in educational management. It has been in operation in a selected number of areas in many countries of the world since the 1950s. Many terms such as nucleus, zones, complexes, school learning cells, clusters or satellite schools are used to describe the phenomenon (Wheeler et al., 1986, p. 42). These terms can refer to very different realities, as individual resource centres are constantly making efforts to develop strategies suitable to their particular areas. However, it generally involves clustering 10 to 20 schools within a region and pooling resources together in order to develop and use learning materials more intensely, to strengthen teachers' skills and performance and thus to improve the educational attainment of pupils (Kumarak et al., 1986, p. 5). It can further imply that various activities such as teacher training and examinations are conducted jointly and that individuals within the community are brought together for social awareness. It has been effective in stimulating local involvement in, and contributions to, schools, as well as reducing inequalities in performance of schools.

2. The rationale for resource centres

These attractive aspects of the resource centre system have influenced educationists and planners involved in educational development in Nepal.

It was widely accepted that the old education system was not able to deliver the expected outcomes. Based on previous experiences and impact studies, the resource centre system was introduced, in particular

to improve the support mechanism for primary-school teachers. It was thought, at the same time, that resource centres could be used 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 resource centres teachers and headteachers of the cluster schools could be brought together to discuss teaching and management-related issues and to share their resources and experiences.

These different points were particularly relevant to Nepal, as the system was characterized by a number of weaknesses, which the introduction of the resource centres was expected to address.

Poor professional performance of primary-school teachers

As pointed out, many primary teachers enter schools without much experience or qualifications. They are, moreover, left untrained for the major part of their career. The facilities and support available to teachers were of little help to their professional development. It is not surprising that, in this context, the quality of primary-school teaching was unsatisfactorily low. It was necessary, therefore, that some strategy be developed to provide in-service training for teachers in order to improve their professional performance.

It is believed that schoolteachers are capable of developing suitable teaching and learning packages, adopting teaching techniques appropriate to their classrooms, designing and applying testing and evaluation devices, planning school management and involving the local community in the development of the schools. In order to enable teachers to perform the above tasks, what they need is constant advice, supervision, follow-up, refresher courses and skill enhancement training. Different pilot projects have shown that the RC could be useful for training teachers, without taking them away from the schools, in a cost-effective manner.

Ineffective supervisory structure

While in general the efficiency of supervision was gravely in doubt, the situation in the rural and mountainous areas was even worse. Schools are scattered and it takes many hours on foot to reach them from the district headquarters. At the same time, headteachers or teachers have to walk for more than a whole day to reach the district headquarters for any kind of advice or support. As a result, schools were seldom, if ever, supervised, many used to remain closed most of the year and teachers were very irregular in their attendance. The community was not aware of school management issues and of the way teachers were expected to run classes. It was in this context that, in the early 1980s, a pilot project was started in order to test a close supervision and monitoring procedure through the resource centre system. Studies based on this project revealed that the procedure was feasible in the Nepalese context.

Inefficient school management and planning

Before the introduction of the resource centre, it was mainly the DEO who was involved in school management. In the past, school co-operation committees had been formed to help schools in their management, but the role of the headteacher and the community members was not made very clear at that time. There were regular conflicts between schools and community regarding who had the power to manage, and how to manage, schools. There was no training for either committee members, teachers or headteachers in school management. For these reasons, the introduction of school co-operation committees turned out to be unsuccessful and, therefore, they were later abolished.

It was realized that the resource centre model could be useful in setting up a system of school management committees or the like. The centre could provide a training venue at the local level. It would also

allow teachers to interact with the local bodies; in this context, the RC would work as a link between the school and the DEO.

At present, as this monograph will point out, it is foreseen that the resource centre will take on an even bigger role: to act as a management unit, amidst the DEO and schools. In tune with this, a person assigned to the resource centre would have some authority delegated by the DEOs to deal with several management issues. The argument is that unless the resource centre is involved in sharing some of the DEO responsibilities and authorities, the number of schools a district covers is so large that the district administration is incapable of taking care of the management and administration of all schools, especially the most remote ones. In the absence of an intermediate mechanism, a school would have to directly contact the DEO for all kinds of communication.

The resource centre, by playing this go-between role, would also promote decentralized planning and management by primary schools. The idea was that the schools within the cluster should be led by the RC to collectively plan their educational development, for example running examinations, conducting extra-curricular activities, holding weekly meetings and sharing human and physical resources if necessary. The RC management is expected, therefore, to develop a yearly plan for the educational and developmental activities of all schools under its responsibility.

Scarcity and inefficient use of instructional materials

Nepal was not only struggling with a scarcity of instructional materials and an inefficient distribution. The use of these materials in schools also left much to be desired: teachers were found not to have gone through the instructional materials and other documents sent by the centre, such as curriculum, teacher guides, reports, books, reference materials etc.

In order to improve the situation, it was realized that instructional materials should be developed not only at the central level and distributed to schools, but also at the local level, in resource centres and in schools. Moreover, teachers should be obliged to use them in a way more befitting to their pupils. The RC system was thus chosen to facilitate the whole process of distribution and production and the RP was assigned to help teachers to use them. In this regard, the necessary inputs for developing and using instructional materials were given to schools. Supplementary materials have been developed and supplied to project schools, while basic learning equipment (chalkboards, slates) were also supplied to schools at some stage.

3. Evolution of the resource centre: a historical perspective

In view of the perceived potential of the resource centres to improve school quality, educational authorities in Nepal have at different times attempted to introduce this system. The first such attempt at administering and supervising schools under a clustering scheme dates as far back as 1953, when Development Blocks were established in some districts to take care of schools' development tasks. The main idea behind this was to develop a local secondary school (called the leader school) as the nucleus of local educational organization, and the other schools in the periphery (called feeders) as the cells. It established a loose linkage between schools. District-level primary and lower-secondary exit examinations were conducted within a cluster. It was the first time schools were asked to work together for their development in the history of Nepalese education.

In 1980, the Education for Rural Development (ERD) Project was initiated in the Seti zone. It differed from previous projects in its approach to link the concept of school clustering with resource centres. The RC was a cornerstone of the Seti project. Crowley (1990) notes

that the objective of the Seti RC was to function as a training centre and a channel for the supply of materials, and to provide supervisory support to literacy programmes and clusters of satellite schools. The resource centre at the initial stage began, thus, with three main functional roles: as training centre, supervision centre and supply centre. In a way, the RC was, from the very beginning, expected to provide a broad range of services.

In the Seti model, there was no provision for a separate building and an individual as a resource person (RP). Rather, the centre school as a whole (which could be either a secondary or lower secondary, but not a primary school) had the responsibility to act as a RC. It had to mobilize its human and physical resources to cater for the needs of the satellite schools and the non-formal classes. In ERD Seti, the RC was a concept instead of a building. The project provided funds for the improvement of physical facilities for the centre schools, rather than for constructing a separate RC.

Another important point was that the Seti project was directed towards bringing about changes in the society economically and socially, including in the life of the people. This vision led to use the RC to deliver all kinds of inputs like plants, medicine and seeds, without confining it to education. In education, it focused much on non-formal education, as it attempted to deliver the kind of education and skills that people in the rural areas need to survive.

At the beginning, the Seti RCs adopted a top-down operation, receiving all guidelines from the centre. As they grew and gained experience, they started developing their programmes according to the local needs and interest. Eventually, they evolved as bottom-up institutions, developing plans and programmes by themselves for their own development.

When the Seti project had been in operation for two years, in 1982, the Primary Education Project (PEP) was initiated. Under PEP also, the RC was considered to be a very important component of the project. Most of the activities intended for school improvement were channelled, as in Seti, through the RC to schools. However, the RC in the PEP model was different from the Seti ERD model in many respects.

The resource centre in PEP was not confined to merely a concept, rather it started emerging as an independent institution involving a separate management. There was a separate resource centre building with adequate furniture and equipment. A B.Ed graduate with some experience in teaching was appointed as a full-time resource person (RP), responsible for all RC activities, in contrast to Seti, where generally the headteacher of the centre school performed that role. The construction cost of the resource centre was borne by the project. The centre was to be used exclusively for RC functions, in particular for teacher training. Strict instructions were given to headteachers and DEOs that no classroom teaching was allowed in its hall.

The PEP established 133 RCs covering 1,855 schools. The major task of the RC was to improve the educational situation of the schools in the cluster through providing in-service training and supervision of classroom instruction. It was also supposed to provide teachers with the necessary professional support. Supportive supervision of the schools in the cluster area was the most important activity of the RC under PEP, and one well appreciated by the teachers and schoolheads (BPEP, 1993).

Another provision in PEP was the position of a field co-ordinator (FC), a B.Ed at least, but senior to a resource person in terms of status, appointed to co-ordinate three-six resource centres. The FC was expected to work as a liaison between the resource centre and the

district. The idea was that, by asking FCs to do most of the co-ordinating work, the resource person would be free to get involved in the instructional activities and would thus contribute more to school achievement. There was also an RC management committee, formed under the chairmanship of the Chairman of the RC school. Its purpose was to mobilize the community support necessary for the operation of the project activities in the centre. The headteachers of the satellite schools were the members of the committee.

In the BPEP project, which was launched in the early 1990s, the resource centre has become the cornerstone of the programme. Adequate resources have been allocated to the development of the RC unit throughout the country. In many ways, the BPEP RC looks similar to the PEP RC, as it follows more or less similar criteria with regard to the establishment and construction, and the recruitment of resource persons. In both projects, the overarching purpose of the RC has been to provide professional support to teachers through in-service training and supportive supervision. However, the RCs under BPEP are expected to carry out more functions than under the PEP, especially in relation to decentralized management and planning of primary schools, as they are being evolved as a basic management unit for primary education development.

Taking into consideration the geo-political situation of Nepal, it was realized that merely providing resources and directions from the centre would not be sufficient for educational development. What is important is how the people working at the local level can be mobilized effectively in the whole process of educational management and planning. In order to allow the local community and people at the district level to share power and authority, the resource-centre concept of school management and planning was introduced on an experimental basis.

Now the government seems to have committed itself to using the resource centres as a basic management unit and has given, for the first time, the system of the RC a legal status, accepting it as an echelon in educational management. It is within this context that legal provisions are being made to empower local bodies so that their roles in school management become effective. The effect of having the resource centre integrated in the regular government structure is that permanent school supervisors will occupy the position of resource persons. On the whole, the centre is evolving as a community centre as well as a basic unit for school management under the Ministry's regular structure, through which supportive supervision and in-service teacher training can be offered.

Another significant difference between BPEP and previous projects is that the project management encourages RCs to offer their facilities for different income-generating activities. This, it is hoped, will lead to a deeper involvement by the communities. The main rationale, however, is that RCs are expected to be self-sustainable by raising funds through income-generating activities, such as renting the RC hall, collecting donations, organizing cultural programmes, examination fees, training fees, film shows, etc. The BPEP management foresees the provision of a matching fund to those RCs which are able to raise funds for their local activities.

The roles and objectives of resource centres have thus changed somewhat under the three projects which have set up such centres. To summarize the above, an outline of their characteristics under each of these projects is presented below.

ERD-Seti

The resource centre model was supposed to perform the following functions:

- supervision of satellite schools and project activities such as non-formal classes;
- training of teachers, management committee members and headteachers;
- establishment of village reading centres;
- holding meetings with satellite schoolteachers on project-related issues;
- organizing meetings once a month in the RC hall for the teachers of cluster schools to discuss various issues related to teaching and learning in the classroom situation;
- carrying out co-curricular activities involving satellite schools;
- making arrangements for the collection and delivery of materials for satellite schools that are provided by the Project;
- acting as a demonstration school and practising innovative ideas.

PEP

The major aspects of the RC under the PEP model were:

- a focus on in-service teacher training;
- a resource person as the key factor to create an academic environment within the RC and motivate primary-school teachers in the cluster areas;
- a field co-ordinator to co-ordinate a certain number (e.g. three-six) of resource centres;
- school supervision and monitoring by the RP as a follow-up to teacher training;
- supervision of non-formal classes;
- assistance to teachers in developing teaching materials;
- provision of education and training for out-of-school children, women and girls;
- a distribution centre for instructional materials received from the centre;

- discussion of academic issues in the cluster schools at weekly meetings.

BPEP

A typical resource centre under BPEP performs the following functions:

- organizing the head/teacher training programme;
 - conducting workshops and meetings of headteachers, resource centre management committee and teachers;
 - organizing extra-curricular activities;
 - monitoring, supervision, and evaluation of schools;
 - creating awareness in the local community;
 - supporting school building construction and maintenance;
 - selecting a model school within the cluster;
 - conducting an annual examination within the cluster;
 - making a school catchment survey;
 - collecting school-related data;
 - constitution of a Resource Centre Management Committee;
 - preparing annual plans/programmes;
 - conducting a new primary school curriculum dissemination programme;
 - non-formal education training;
 - special education;
 - women's education training;
 - trainers' training.
-

Apparently, as the RC system grows, it is expected to perform more functions. The above lists present its role in terms of separate activities. In the future, however, its role can be expected to become more holistic, as it will assume the responsibility for the overall academic leadership in the cluster. It is expected to be the central point for the delivery of both materials and instructions from the centre to cluster schools. At the same time, the RC will identify the needs of the local schools, for example, the type of training the teachers need, and communicate them to the centre through the DEO.

4. The present situation

The Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) is, in its first phase, in operation in 40 of the 75 districts in Nepal. A mid-term evaluation of the project was carried out in 1996 and revealed that, despite some problems, the project was working well towards achieving its objectives. The RC system was also positively assessed (BPEP, Mid-term Review, 1996). One of the crucial issues discussed in the review was the continuity of the resource centre system. The mid-term report accepts BPEP as a national programme and indicates that more resource centres will be created in the years to come, to cover the whole country.

BPEP has already established 669 resource centres in 40 districts covering 11,703 schools. It is envisaged that a further 289 resource centre buildings will be constructed in the current fiscal year. People involved in the planning and management of basic and primary education strongly feel that the country should proceed with this system.

Staffing

In principle, each resource person is assigned to one resource centre. However, in many places it has been found that a resource person is assigned to two resource centres. If necessary, the RPs can obtain help from the resource centre school staff, more specifically from the headteacher, who acts as the responsible person in their absence. The minimum academic qualification set for an RP is the B.Ed. In addition, she/he has to have at least three years' teaching experience. Preference is given to those who have gained a considerable length of experience in teaching, supervision and school management. She/he is given a basic training including training on curriculum development and implementation, monitoring, and production of teaching materials.

The source for RPs could be either schoolteachers with the given qualification or school supervisors. During the study it was revealed that the majority were from the school teaching force. They were either on secondment or employed on a temporary basis. Some of them were found to be school supervisors with a permanent teaching position.

At present, the Basic and Primary Education Project (BPEP) is responsible for recruiting the resource persons. BPEP management will decide whether in the future resource persons should be recruited from among a fresh stock of B.Ed holders or from among school supervisors or teachers on secondment. It is hoped that some sort of fixed criteria will soon be developed to guide this recruitment process.

Facilities

A resource centre is supposed to have the following facilities:

- a resource centre building which has a training hall, a store, an office room and a toilet;
- furniture necessary for training and meetings;
- a yearly budget for approved activities;
- materials that deal with teacher training, supervision and information about the cluster schools, mostly published by BPEP;
- a typewriter and a duplicating machine.

Geographical distribution of RCs and satellite schools

Generally, a resource centre is established on the basis of a school-mapping exercise with a view to making it a central point for a cluster of some 10 to 15 schools. In an ideal situation, a resource centre is expected to be established in a place not more than three-four hours walk from any school within the cluster. However, it was found that some schools were located much further away than this, while, in some cases, a resource centre has to cover more than 25 schools.

The distribution of resource centres, satellite schools and resource persons in the 40 districts is shown in *Table 1*. The last two columns show the number of schools per resource centre and per resource person. It can easily be seen that the majority of resource persons are responsible for more than one centre. This shows that on average they have to supervise and assist 32 schools, with some being in charge of more than 70 schools.

Table 1. Distribution of resource persons and centres in 40 districts

Districts	RCs	Schools	RPs	Schools RC	Schools RP
Eastern Region					
1. Jhapa	22	332	10	15	33
2. Dhankuta	19	263	12	14	22
3. Morang	19	449	12	24	37
4. Udayapur	14	289	8	21	36
5. Siraha	14	342	5	24	68
6. Ilam	17	326	14	19	23
7. Sunsari	15	273	9	18	30
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>120</i>	<i>2274</i>	<i>70</i>	<i>19</i>	<i>32</i>
Central Region					
8. Sarlahi	14	379	6	27	63
9. Parsa	11	287	4	26	72
10. Chitawan	14	320	10	23	32
11. Nuwakot	17	311	9	18	35
12. Dhanusa	14	240	9	17	27
13. Mahottari	14	226	7	16	32
14. Rautahat	14	296	4	21	74
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>98</i>	<i>2059</i>	<i>49</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>42</i>
Western Region					
15. Tanahu	22	488	13	22	38
16. Kaski	33	408	17	12	24
17. Mustang	8	62	3	8	21
18. Kapilbastu	10	264	10	26	26
19. Lamjung	20	357	12	18	30
20. Syanja	33	484	13	15	37
21. Nawalparasi	17	347	9	20	39
22. Gulmi	26	439	12	17	37
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>169</i>	<i>2849</i>	<i>89</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>32</i>

Table 1. (continued)

Mid-Western					
23. Dang	19	300	10	16	30
24. Banke	10	193	4	19	48
25. Surkhet	18	437	18	24	24
26. Dailekh	14	311	8	22	39
27. Kalikot	6	145	4	24	36
28. Mugu	10	106	9	11	12
29. Rukum	18	231	9	13	26
30. Pyuthan	20	294	12	15	25
31. Salyan	24	281	8	12	35
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>139</i>	<i>2298</i>	<i>82</i>	<i>17</i>	<i>28</i>
Far-Western Region					
32. Kailali	18	293	10	16	29
33. Bajura	13	178	7	14	25
34. Doti	18	263	6	15	44
35. Bajhang	16	243	7	15	35
36. Achham	16	291	7	18	42
37. Dadeldhura	10	191	8	19	24
38. Darchula	21	254	15	12	17
39. Baitadi	22	325	14	15	23
40. Kanchanpur	9	185	6	21	31
<i>Sub-total</i>	<i>143</i>	<i>2223</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>28</i>
Grand total	669	11703	370	17	32

III. THE RESOURCE CENTRE SYSTEM, ITS FUNCTIONING AND IMPACT ON SCHOOLS

1. Types of support offered

As mentioned in the previous chapter, the Resource Centre is the cornerstone of BPEP. It offers a broad range of support to schools in general and teachers in particular and is the legal echelon of the education management system, based closest to the school. In other words, the RC is the last point for all educational delivery to and communication with schools.

The resource centres offer their venues and personnel, in particular the RPs, to conduct professional training to schoolteachers and head-teachers. Teachers can go to the RC training centre for all kinds of in-service training. The RC organizes meetings of teachers, head-teachers, and resource centre management committee members, where they can discuss common problems and find solutions. This is the place where they can agree on sharing their resources according to their needs.

Instructional supervision is one of the most important types of support provided to the satellite schools. RPs, in principle, are expected to visit schools at least once a month, but in reality do so much less frequently. They discuss instructional issues with teachers and examine school functioning to check if the necessary educational materials, such as curriculum, teacher guides, and reference materials, are available and used by teachers, and if teachers are well prepared for classroom teaching. They give demonstration classes if they feel that teachers need them. They organize workshops/seminars and provide teacher training in specific subjects.

The resource centres contain educational materials such as textbooks, teacher guides, and reference materials published by the project. They also file information about the qualification and training of teachers and the physical situation of the schools within the RC, which can be exploited by schools to promote their performance. The resource persons are expected to strengthen relationships between cluster schools and to encourage them to share their human and physical resources. Schools are helped to elaborate and implement an annual plan for their development. The resource persons are responsible for following up on the extent to which these plans are carried out as foreseen. They also discuss what kind of assistance schools need to carry out those activities.

They take a lead in organizing extra-curricular activities involving schools in the cluster. Such activities can bring schools together and promote a healthy competition among them. A model school is selected in each cluster to demonstrate the efficient management of a good school to the rest of the schools.

In line with this, the resource persons conduct final examinations involving all schools in the cluster, to demonstrate to teachers how accurate assessments can be carried out. As trained graduates, they are expected to develop and conduct good examinations and to disseminate the examination reports so that they have positive feedback effects on teaching and learning. At the same time, because of collective efforts, the examinations will also be less expensive.

Community involvement in school management is very important for decentralized planning and management. Through such involvement the schools are generating funds, receiving land for schools or for the RC, receiving unskilled labour and local materials free of cost for construction work. The community leaders are also expected to

visit schools and report to the district authority or the RP if the teachers are absent or the school is closed. Through the RC system it is possible to create awareness among the local community, through training and enlightening them on what is envisaged as the role of the local body.

2. Case studies and experiences of selected resource centres

In order to gain a clearer picture about how the system actually operates and provides services to the schools, three resource centres were visited by the author, who interacted with the teachers and the resource persons. Ideally, a more complete study with a representative sample of centres should have been undertaken, but this was not possible for this study; a brief, but profound, discussion with the relevant people on the spot does provide us with some idea about how resource centres are operating. The three RCs were selected in such a way that they would provide a balanced picture.

Case study 1: Shree Khairahani Secondary School Resource Centre, Chitawan

This resource centre is located in Khairahani Village Development Committee, in Chitawan district, in the valley. It covers three Village Development Committees (VDCs): Birendra Nagar, Khairahani and Kumroj. It is located in a secondary-school compound and covers 25 schools, out of which three are secondary, one is lower secondary and 21 are primary schools. All of these schools are within two hours walking distance.

The RC building was constructed three years ago with funds provided by BPEP, and the local community donated the land. It has not been provided with such equipment as a typewriter or a duplicating machine, but it was given a fund for furniture. It has adequate space for seminars and meetings.

The resource person, assigned to the resource centre, has many years teaching experience. He visits every school once a month. He provides advice to teachers on curriculum and teachers' guides, on how to achieve the learning outcomes set for the primary grades. The assessment revealed that teachers are becoming more regular in their attendance than before his frequent visits to schools. Teachers are better prepared for teaching, go to the classroom on time and stay there as expected. Though the RP is supposed to look after the primary section only, secondary schools have also been affected by the visits. Since he is accepted as a representative of the DEO, his presence in the school makes secondary teachers aware of their role and responsibility. Secondary heads are satisfied, as teachers are becoming more disciplined.

The RP runs village readiness programmes to promote girls' enrolment and non-formal education activities.

On the whole, it is felt that the system has improved the teaching and learning situation: the drop-out rate has reduced, enrolment has increased, as has the grade completion rate.

However, the resource person was disappointed with a number of issues. Most importantly, he had the feeling that the DEO did not go through his reports and did not pay the necessary attention to the issues identified. On some occasions, the DEO has made decisions which go against the RP's recommendations. This kind of situation has led the resource person to sometimes lose face and has contributed to his low morale: he feels he is never appreciated for what he does. Talking to him it was revealed that the schools had more respect for those RPs who had come from the position of school supervisors because they belonged to the regular government supervision system. The others are likely to be neglected or ignored by the schools. This distinction

has led the majority of the RPs to be treated as second-class officials, both by the DEO and the school community.

There was also dissatisfaction concerning the functioning of the resource centre management committee (RCMC) and the Programme Co-ordinator (PC). The RCMC is supposed to play a very important role in making RCs useful and effective. However, the experience in the field shows that this committee is not functional. A first problem is that it is difficult to bring all RCMC members together and have an effective meeting with them. Secondly, even if a meeting takes place, the members think that they have nothing to provide to the RC. The role and responsibility of the RCMC has not been explicitly mentioned. This is also the case for the PC: the RP does not understand what he does and how he does his work. He does not contribute to academic activities and does not have time to visit schools. He mostly spends his time on administrative work in the office. He goes to the field only when he has to accompany visitors who come from the central office of the project. His support to the RP has thus been insufficient, if not inexistent.

A further problem relates to the funding. Many activities are expected to be carried out by the RC mechanism, some of which involve money. But the centres do not have funds for many activities they propose to carry out. It is in this context that they have been asked to raise funds through income-generating activities and that a matching fund, provided by the project, has been created. However, this has been of little help so far.

Monitoring and evaluation of the resource person is a final issue about which complaints have been voiced. There is no one to supervise or evaluate the RP's work in the field, as the PC has no time to go to the field. There is no central supervision mechanism either. The question

then crops up: how to ensure that they visit schools and how to identify and reward well-performing resource persons? This particular RP is of the opinion that those who do not perform well should be penalized, but does not see how this can be done with the present monitoring mechanism.

Case study 2: Triveni High School Resource Centre, Mugling

This resource centre is based in the hilly part of Chitawan district and covers two VDCs: Darechok and Chandibhanjyang. It serves 22 schools: two secondary and 20 primary. The RC building is two years old. Unlike many other resource centres, it has no equipment (such as a typewriter or a duplicating machine), but it has sufficient furniture. Visiting the resource centre, it was found that it had no adequate charts and information displayed in the hall. A resource person who has six years of experience has been assigned to it. He does not hold a permanent position, such as that of a teacher, which means that, if he loses this job, he will be unemployed.

The resource centre is not centrally located. Since it is established to support schools which are in the remote hilly regions of the district, the resource person has to walk for almost the whole day to reach some of the schools. He nevertheless succeeds in visiting each school in his cluster once every two months.

The resource person receives training in instructional supervision. He considers that his most important activity is to present model classes through which teachers can improve their teaching. Teachers are given suggestions and feedback after their classes are observed. Because of his timely visits, teachers are attending more regularly and are better prepared for classroom teaching.

Much of his time is taken up in teacher training programmes, which he considers an important but time-consuming activity. He also

organizes subject-wise training for the teaching of mathematics, science and English. He is involved in running village readiness and cleanliness programmes (the non-formal programme), in holding weekly meetings, etc.

The teachers and the school community hold a high opinion of the resource centre system. The people have the feeling that it contributes to reducing drop-out and repetition, and to increasing enrolment. Teacher attendance has also improved. As the area is characterized by a high illiteracy rate, teachers were not very responsive to the community before the creation of the RC.

The resource person, none the less, has a number of complaints. He feels that the DEO does not attach much value to his reports. Since there is no provision for an assistant in the RC, the centre is closed whenever he goes on school visits. As such, the RC remains open only around 100 days a year. It is also a problem that the RP has nobody to help him to circulate any message or notice within the cluster. Since there is no continuity in supplying equipment needed by the resource centre, it can do very little to support the schools.

Case study 3: Janapath Secondary School Resource Centre, Birat Nagar Morang

This resource centre, like many others, is located in a secondary school compound, in the municipality area. There are 19 schools under this newly built RC. It does not have adequate furniture, but expects this to be remedied within the year. It has no typewriter or duplicating machine.

The schools under this cluster are not far from the RC, all within three hours' walking distance. At the time of the author's visit, the RP was working in the hall. Most of the information about the schools in the cluster could be found in the centre, which, however, did not have many other resource materials.

The resource person frequently visits schools. The teachers feel that they are benefiting from the presence both of the RP and the RC hall. Their frequent interaction with the RP has made them confident about what they are doing and, as a result, they believe their performance has improved.

Most of the acclaimed achievements of this RC are similar to others. The RP has the feeling that the system has improved teaching at primary level through subject training, providing immediate feedback, demonstrating to teachers how to teach, and running regular meetings of the teachers and headteachers. The resource centre carries out several activities in joint collaboration with the cluster schools. This has improved examinations and extra-curricular activities. On the whole, the teachers in the core school and the RP believe that, since the introduction of the RC system, enrolment in primary education has increased, while girls' participation has also improved.

The RP does not belong to the school supervisor group. He feels, as do his colleagues in the other centres, that he is treated differently from RPs with a school supervisor background. He believes that senior teachers would fit the profile of a resource person. He recommends more professional training for resource persons. Like others, he complains that, although he prepares good reports after his field visits and submits them to the DEO, they are usually ignored by the DEO.

3. Reactions from teachers and management committee members

Several discussions with teachers and management committee members from Chitawan and Morang were held. On the whole, they had a very positive opinion of the RC system.

They appreciated in particular the fact that RPs undertake fairly regular school visits. Those RPs based in clusters in the plains, succeed in visiting all schools in the cluster once a month, but those working in

the hilly regions were unable to make such frequent visits. The community members involved in school functioning – such as teachers and management committee members – feel that there has been a positive impact of the system in particular on teacher performance and discipline. Before its introduction, teachers used to be absent quite often. Now, at least, teachers, who are aware that the RP may visit their school at any time, come to school on a regular basis and report to the headteacher if they cannot come. At the same time, because of the involvement of the RPs in the school management committee, and the training provided to community leaders on school management, the management committee members now know what can be expected of teachers. If teachers are absent, they can raise a question or report to the RP.

Moreover, when the RP visits schools, he keeps a record of the progress the school has made and the work to be done by teachers, in particular to complete the curriculum. On his next visit, he examines what has been completed, thus making teachers more accountable for the completion of the course.

The teachers believe that the training they receive through the RCs has enabled them to manage classroom teaching more effectively. They appreciate that someone close to them helps them whenever they encounter any problems and observes how they perform in the classroom. This is in contrast to the DEO, who seldom, if ever, undertook classroom observation. They are convinced that an evaluation of teachers carried out by the RPs would be much better than one by the DEO.

The general observation of teachers and the local community is that the introduction of the RC system has led to an improvement in the internal efficiency of the school system: there are more children in the classroom and more children completing the course cycle than ever before. Furthermore, pupil absenteeism has decreased.

The co-operation and co-ordination between schools in many activities has helped all schools, as each one is benefiting from the others' resources. At the same time, the weekly meetings provide them with an opportunity to share experiences and resources, which has also contributed to better achievement. Schools are finding it easier to communicate with the District Education headquarters through the RC.

4. Evaluation of the impact on teacher classroom performance and school functioning

It is difficult to draw from the limited information, presented above, a general judgement about the impact of the RC/RP on school functioning. However, on the basis of these few visits and discussions, the initial impression is that the system has brought about a lot of changes in school functioning. The RCs have played a role in producing trained teachers locally, initiating collective efforts by bringing satellite schools together, supervising schools on a regular basis, solving common problems of cluster schools, leading cluster schools to jointly run annual examinations, involving the community in school activities and conducting extra-curricular activities.

So far, few studies have investigated in a more systematic manner, the effect of the RC system on school functioning. Among the sources of information are the regular evaluation studies carried out by the BPEP monitoring and evaluation unit, and donors' evaluation reports. Other sources of information are BPEP (1993), CERES (1995) and NPC (1996).

Based on these studies and the information obtained from the school visits and interactions with teachers and headteachers, the following conclusions can be drawn.

Teachers' performance has improved in the classroom because of the professional training they have received. This can be seen by observing how teachers are prepared before they enter the classroom,

what materials they bring with them, and the educational materials such as curriculum, teachers' guide and reference materials they consult before they start teaching. This improvement has certainly contributed to higher levels of student achievement and increased enrolment in primary schools.

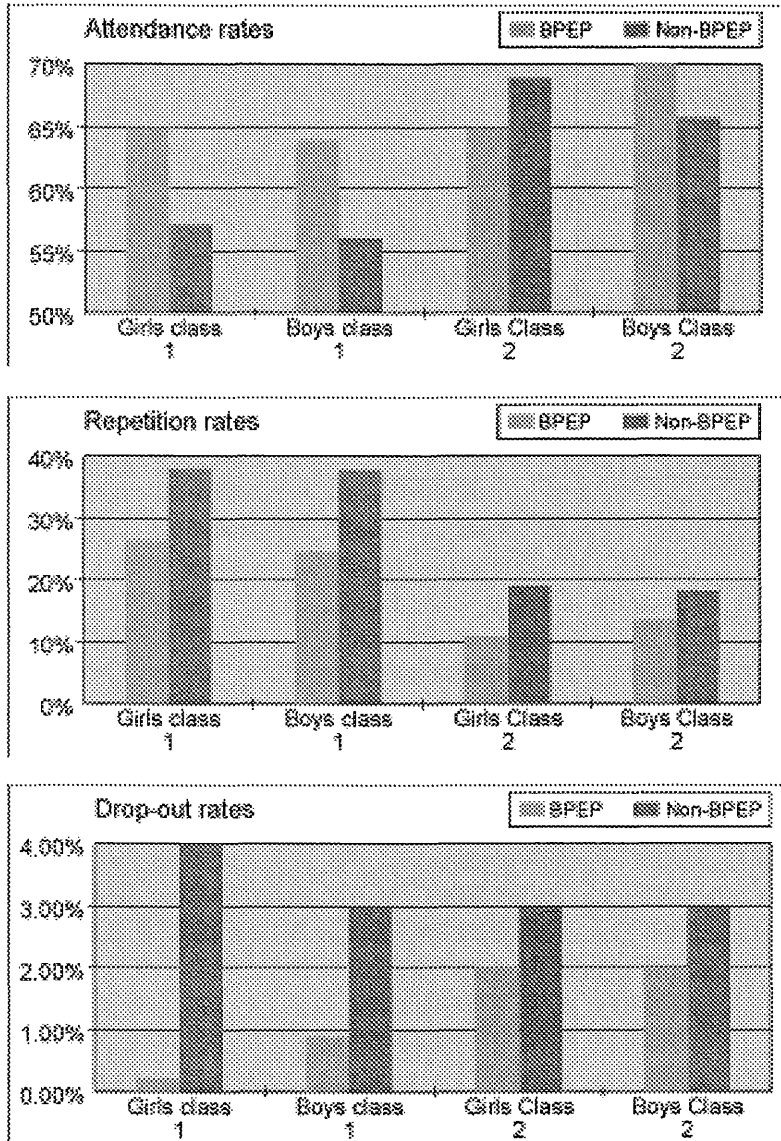
A study on the impact of the Primary Education Project (PEP) arrived at a similar conclusion, as it compared PEP with non-PEP districts. Drop-out and repetition rates were lower in the former and this was related mainly to the RC system (BPEP, 1993).

A corresponding study related to BPEP, the Nepal Multiple Indicator Surveillance, was carried out by the National Planning Commission and UNICEF (NPC, 1996). It strongly argues that there has been a noticeable improvement in primary education as a result of the BPEP project. The study presents data on attendance, repetition and drop-out rates to support the argument. *Figure 1* reveals indeed that both boys and girls attend schools more regularly and perform better in BPEP districts than in non-BPEP districts.

The study also highlighted a new professionalism among the schoolteachers. They showed an interest in discussing educationally pertinent issues at the weekly meetings. This system of regular meetings has developed in teachers a sense of confidence, that there is a place where they can discuss their educational problems, if they have any, and find the possible solution on the spot. The headmasters reported that teachers were more serious about their classroom performance, prepared to work full-time in the classroom and ready to develop and use varied teaching materials.

The study also confirmed that the frequent monitoring/supervision and guidance of resource persons have made teachers come to school on a more regular basis.

Figure 1. Attendance, repetition and drop-out rates in BPEP and non-BPEP districts



A sense of healthy competition has been introduced in the cluster schools through involving them in extra-curricular activities such as sports, essay writing, and song competitions led by the resource centres. Clustering has also resulted in more co-operation and interaction among headteachers and teachers, while schools have worked together in the administration of the final examinations. A certain uniformity in administering schools in the cluster was another result. As already noted, schools have started developing annual plans, which have also facilitated the contact with the communities. In this way, the RC system is bringing the local community closer to school management, which has a positive effect on teachers' performance in the classroom.

IV. CRITICAL ISSUES

The resource centre system was set up to bring supervision and support closer to schools, and to facilitate communication between the school and the administration. The system was considered necessary in the Nepalese context, for the implementation of a decentralization policy in school management and planning. The critical issue is that centres should be maintained and organized in such a way that they continue serving these purposes and do not deviate from the originally given tasks. Otherwise the purpose of improving teacher support could be defeated. In this chapter, some problems experienced with the present system will be discussed, and suggestions will be made on how to overcome these, on the basis of the past experiences and insights gained so far.

The establishment of the resource centre system in Nepal has not been an easy task. The system has now been in operation for about 15 years, it has experienced several problems and undergone a number of changes. It has been significantly supported both by donor agencies and the government. However, since the resource centre is a new system in the whole process of school management in Nepal, it is not yet fully accepted in, nor integrated into, the educational management structure. Despite its important contribution to decentralized management and planning of primary schools and its popularity among educationists, it is difficult to say whether it will retain the present status after outside assistance is stopped.

To some extent, the management of the resource centre system is in a critical stage. There are several issues which will need to be addressed soon.

1. Recruitment and career development of resource persons

The RP is the key player in the resource centre system. In other words, the success of the system is largely dependent upon who the RPs are, how they are recruited and what kind of training they get. It is, therefore, very important that policies regarding their recruitment be determined very carefully. It is necessary that they be assured of long-term job security and professional training as well.

The project does not seem to have a clear policy on how the required number of RPs will be recruited. In the past, different strategies have been adopted. In the Seti project, the whole school was seen as a resource centre and the whole teacher community was treated as resource persons. In PEP, secondary-school supervisors, primary-school supervisors with a B.Ed degree, or primary and secondary teachers with the same degree, were hired as full-time RPs. In BPEP, similar criteria were adopted for their recruitment. There is, however, no policy on which group of people, with what background, will hold the RP positions in the long term.

In some cases, resource persons are schoolteachers on secondment and, in other cases, they are school supervisors who are permanent staff of the Ministry of Education. Both options have posed problems. In the former case, the teachers were never appointed on a permanent basis. Many of them, trained as RPs, were sent back to their schools after some years, either because they were called back by the school, or because the project management did not want them to continue. But relying on school supervisors has also been a problem, as there are too few school supervisors in the Ministry of Education in comparison to the number of RPs required, especially if the programme is expanded to cover the whole country. The programme may need more than 1,300 RPs (supposing there will be one for each RC) when it is fully operational throughout the country, but the total number of supervisors is only

around 400. Furthermore, these supervisors are expected to look after secondary schools as well. When they become RPs, secondary schools will not be properly supervised.

Combining the two strategies and relying on both teachers and supervisors to act as RPs, however, has another disadvantage. Since the supervisors are permanent staff of the DEO, teachers and the district office of education seem to pay more attention to their suggestions than to those of the RPs who came from the teaching force. As a result, the latter are losing the recognition which they previously enjoyed.

As mentioned earlier, RPs – and especially teachers on secondment – have the feeling that DEOs ignore the field reports submitted by them. When the DEOs do not treat the RPs as their regular staff, and do not respond to their reports and recommendations positively, a conflict seems to arise between the two parties.

As no clear criteria exist for RP selection, in many cases political factors have become crucial: those teachers who have had some political access to the government have been offered such a post. It was noticed, moreover, that schools were loath to give up their good teachers, but offered the opportunity to join the project to those teachers who were not well reputed. It led the programme to recruit mostly moderate teachers as RPs. Now the project finds it a problem to manage such resource persons and get them to function effectively.

Probably the best option would be to use competent and qualified schoolteachers, which implies that a permanent solution will have to be worked out to retain these RPs in the programme with a teaching background. The government has taken a first step by giving the RP position a legal status within the regular structure of the MOE. Any solution should ensure, however, that RPs and supervisors co-operate systematically.

2. Training and monitoring of resource persons

The training being offered is not adequate. While it is true that most RPs have preliminary training in education, they have not been sufficiently introduced to the BPEP programme and its objectives. One of the main points emerging from the discussions with the experts working at the centrally based resource centre development unit, was that the RPs did not have an adequate knowledge of and training in the basic thrust behind the programme.

There is no system, in the centre or at the district level, to evaluate and monitor the performance of the RPs. In the absence of this, how to ensure that they respect their approved programme has been a problem. Part of their routine work is to submit a monthly programme to the DEO for his approval, and to carry out school visits. In this way, the DEO is informed about their proposed programme in advance. However, the resource persons themselves decide, in practice, whether they should follow the programme and visit schools. They do not have to record their attendance anywhere either. The absence of an efficient monitoring and evaluation system has resulted in RPs neglecting their tasks and their programme, as approved by the DEO.

A supervision mechanism, therefore, is being developed by the project in order to monitor the resource persons. The project has, in this regard, strengthened the resource centre development unit by appointing more than eight full-time experts who are permanent staff of the Ministry of Education, and by equipping it with different facilities. The unit will be able to carry out effective supervision of the resource persons, which will eventually ensure that they undertake regular and useful visits to schools. Along with this, steps are being taken to involve the local bodies in the management of the resource centre system.

However, the development of a monitoring mechanism alone will not be enough to mobilize all resource persons and improve their professional performance. What is equally needed is some support and advice. Resource persons should be helped to understand clearly how to implement the programmes which are approved by their district officers. There should be a provision as well for a supportive investigation of what they do, and what they claim to have done, in light of their approved programme, and why they failed to undertake some of their tasks. The district office should also be required to respond to the progress reports submitted by them. It is thus suggested that the Project develops a manual, for the use of the resource persons, which explains in detail the different aspects of their job and how to undertake, step by step, the tasks expected of them. The manual should also clarify the roles and responsibilities of the resource centre management committee (RCMC).

3. Workload of resource persons

The RP is expected to play many roles and perform many tasks. As he/she is based in the middle of the cluster with easy access to satellite schools, different divisions of the Ministry of Education and the different sections of the BPE Project use him/her to serve their purpose. What happens sometimes is that they are given more responsibility than they can deliver. For example, RPs are increasingly asked to get involved in long-term teacher training (i.e. 2.5 months training). Apart from in-service teacher training, RPs train non-formal education teachers, supervisors and community leaders. In addition, they undertake many other activities and are asked by the DEOs to become involved in the administrative affairs. The question is: how can they provide systematic instructional supervision and support, when they are also distracted by so many diverse and time-consuming tasks?

Furthermore, an RP needs, in many cases, to look after two resource centres which would make him/her accountable for more than 50 schools. Obviously, this will make it much more difficult to visit all schools regularly and to spend some time in each school. When they cannot visit schools periodically, the teachers do not get feedback to improve their classroom instructions.

One study (CERES, 1995) indicates indeed that the RPs are so busy, in particular with training programmes, that they have no time to provide supportive supervision to the schools. The question should therefore be asked if all training to be conducted in the resource centres should involve the RPs?

It is not surprising, in view of what emerges above, that the turnover rate of resource persons is quite high. The fact that no specific plan exists to give resource persons permanent positions can largely explain this. Unless the project develops a long-term plan for RP hiring, it may end up with uncommitted staff.

4. Use and equipment of resource centres

The cost involved in the construction and maintenance of a resource centre is high.² In addition, it is supplied with furniture, equipment, education materials, etc. and incurs maintenance costs. A resource person is also seconded to it. The full utilization of the resource centre hall is thus very important. The CERES (1995) study, however, has shown that the RC halls are underutilized. The majority of the halls were found to have been used less than 50 per cent of the full working days of the year. This was confirmed by the RPs during the author's visit to the centres. It is difficult to justify this financial investment if the halls are not exploited to their full potential.

² It is said that the cost of an RC construction is Rs. 269,000 in PEP and around Rs 400,000 in BPEP.

If the resource centre halls are not properly and adequately utilized, the whole system will be discredited. But it can be argued that the management of the system does not allow for their full utilization. Indeed, as every centre is looked after by only one person, this person is faced with a dilemma: on the one hand the hall has to be adequately utilized, and on the other hand she/he is expected to regularly visit cluster schools. The problem is how to harmonize these two functions of the system. To put it another way, how can it be ensured that the hall will be used for educational development even in the absence of the RPs? It is therefore necessary to manage centres in such a way that they are fully utilized for the purposes for which they are constructed, without stopping the RPs from making frequent visits to schools. Now this is not the case: there is no support staff in the resource centre and in most cases the school, where the centre is located, does not have control over it. It is, therefore, true that when an RP is away, visiting schools, the centre remains closed, except if – but this was seldom the case – the headteacher of the core school takes care of it.

A critical issue is that the planners and central-level management of the project are anxious to get many things done through the RC, but that this incurs the risk of neglecting the main functions of both the resource persons and centres. It should not be forgotten that the system was originally set up to provide professional support to teachers. One way out of this dilemma could be to involve the schools, where the resource centres are located, more intensively in their management.

The visits to some resource centres and the discussions with their staff revealed another threat to the successful functioning of the centres: many were not well equipped with the necessary educational and other resource materials. BPEP publications, such as teacher guides, curriculum, textbooks and other reference materials for teacher training, profiles of the cluster schools, and statistical information on the cluster, were lacking in many cases. Not all centres were equipped

with a duplicating machine and adequate furniture. In the absence of these materials, a resource centre is of no more help to a teacher than any other building.

5. Relationship with communities

The experts working at the central unit at BPEP, in charge of the resource centres, noticed the lack of clarity in some aspects of the policy on the resource centre system. One of the problems is how to make the resource persons accountable to the local bodies, for example to the resource centre management committee. It is argued that unless the RCMC is given legal powers, the RPs will not recognize it as a fully fledged partner. The lack of clarity in the RCMC's role and responsibility has impeded its efficiency.

6. Compatibility with the secondary level

While the supervision of primary schools is becoming increasingly based on the resource centre system, supervision of secondary schools has not changed much. The same traditional approach is being adopted, whereby a supervisor goes to school once or twice a year, if at all, and gathers some information about the physical progress of the schools. They have no idea of how to make a supervision system supportive to teaching, and how to make it contribute to improving school functioning. They are simply B.Ed graduates without adequate professional training.

In the present context, the resource centres are not involved in the training and supervision of secondary-school teachers, except that the headteachers, if they so wish, can participate in the resource centre programmes in their capacity as headteachers of the primary schools. The rest of the secondary level has no relation with the resource centres.

More than 95 per cent of secondary schools have a primary section.³ In this context, it is not profitable to set up a support programme only for primary level and to ignore secondary education completely. It is, therefore, argued that the resource centre system for primary level has to be made compatible with the support system of secondary level for its effective implementation. It is also true that without changing secondary education, change in primary education becomes less effective.

If the present system of support and supervision of secondary education prevails, quality in secondary education cannot be improved. Hence, it is necessary that either a support mechanism comparable to BPEP be created or provision be made to use some of the resource centres for the purpose of serving secondary schools as well. It is clearly not difficult, whenever a primary school is supervised, to supervise its secondary level at the same time. While creating this system, the two systems should be made compatible, which would lower the costs. It would indeed be odd to rely on two separate supervisors to go to the same school for a similar job. Undoubtedly, training and other forms of support given to RPs would enable them to look after the secondary level as well.

³ The school system in Nepal is structured as follows: Grades 1-5 (age 5-10) primary schools; Grades 1-5-10 (age 5-16) secondary schools, including primary sections; Grades 1-5-10-12 (age 5-18) higher secondary, including primary and secondary sections.

V. LESSONS LEARNED AND PROSPECTS FOR FUTURE DEVELOPMENT

Lessons have been learned from past experiences. For the last 15 years, the RC system has been in operation in different modalities. During this period, several activities were initiated and valuable experiences were accumulated. Some of these activities, however, only took place as long as foreign assistance was available. For instance, once external funding to the ERD Seti project was stopped, the project was declared over and several popular and effective activities were discontinued. Something similar happened to the ADB-funded Science Education Project (in the 1980s), which was implemented throughout the country to bring about changes in the teaching of science, mathematics and English at secondary level. Once the project was over, it was only because another project (the Secondary Education Development Project) was started that a number of very important activities were sustained. Otherwise, those activities would have been discontinued because they were not institutionalized.

The following question, therefore, needs to be addressed: for how long can the strategy of relying on project after project continue? Even if a new project is established to take over the old activities, their efficiency is likely to suffer because of a shift in interest and a change in personnel involved in it. The message to BPEP is clear: it is necessary that the institutionalization process starts now, before the project gets close to its end and before it becomes very big and unmanageable.

At the same time, it is very important that the process of institutionalization be tackled very carefully. If the integration of BPEP activities into the regular system of the MOE takes place without adequate preparation, the characteristics, through which BPEP has been able to improve the quality of primary education, may be lost. For this purpose,

it is necessary that adequate exercises be carried out to understand how the responsible institutions and divisions of the Ministry of Education, which are expected to take care of the merger, can be strengthened so that the quality of primary education achieved through BPEP can be maintained. Fortunately, BPEP has a long history of pilot operation to look back upon and the many lessons learned during its implementation can be a guide to improving its operation in future.

The Ministry of Education has started addressing these issues by recognizing the resource centre as a regular institution within the education management structure. This decision is an indication of the government's commitment to the sustainable development of the resource centre system. This policy of sustainability, however, faces a number of questions, the most important of which are highlighted here.

1. Integrating an innovation

The lesson has been learned that development projects should involve, from the outset, both the regular staff of the Ministry and competent people from outside. The project should be led by academic vision as well as management experiences. Involvement of academics gives, to the regular staff of the Ministry, good exposure to the recent developments in the relevant field, which is helpful for the implementation and future prospects of the project.

In the Nepalese context, the use of the RC system for in-service teacher training and instructional supervision has been on an experimental basis for a long time. It should now be developed into a basic unit with an official status for school management. Now indeed is the appropriate time for such a step. After the re-establishment of democracy, the government and the donor agencies have allocated adequate funds for the development of primary education. It can be argued that a similar opportunity in terms of experiences and resources

may not be available for another couple of decades. International donor agencies cannot be expected to focus on the same issue for several years. They may shift their priority away from education to something else.

The project is also aiming at strengthening district- and local-level planning and management capacities. It is working on a decentralized scheme for the management of the RC system. For that purpose, six districts which were originally covered by PEP (1982-1992) would be given a lump-sum budget, on a pilot basis, allowing them to allocate the resources according to their own priorities in the coming fiscal year. These districts will be made fully responsible for planning the project's implementation, while the project will provide training to the community leaders on planning and management of resource centres and the cluster schools. This process will enable the schools and local bodies to work, collectively and with a certain level of autonomy, in planning and managing their activities.

2. National coverage of the resource centre system

BPEP is a national programme launched with the assistance of several donors and a huge involvement of national resources for the purpose of bringing about changes in primary education throughout the country. Some of its activities have already covered the whole country, such as the change of textbooks in Grades 1-5, and the curriculum reform. But the operation of the RC system has so far covered only 40 districts out of 75. The government and the donor agencies are fully convinced that the whole country should benefit from the introduction of the RC system. A school-mapping exercise has already been carried out in this regard. On the basis of the mid-term evaluation of the BPEP project, the government and the donors have initiated discussions on the implementation of a second phase, which should cover the whole country in another couple of years.

3. Regional resource centres

It has been observed that the present structure of the resource centre is not adequate to achieve the objectives for which it was set up. The resource persons are asked to perform many tasks over and above in-service teacher training and instructional supervision of schools. As a result, they have complained that the DEOs use them as their administrative assistants. The resource persons, who are in that situation, are being criticized for the same weaknesses as the DEOs. It can be argued that unless a separate category of staff is created to share the DEO's administrative workload, they will continue asking the RPs to get involved in the administrative business. The second argument is that the supervision of secondary schools has been inefficient and that the supervision of primary schools has to be made compatible with that of secondary schools, which almost all have a primary section. There is indeed no point in having two separate networks for the supervision of primary and secondary schools.

One way of overcoming some of these obstacles is to create a regional resource centre, in order to co-ordinate the RCs in the constituency and to promote effective primary and secondary school supervision. The regional RC could act in every constituency as an intermediate point between RCs in the constituency and the District Education Office, taking some responsibility for administration and co-ordination of schools in the constituency. It should be well equipped with both human and physical resources. This provision will free the existing RCs from being overburdened by administrative tasks, and will allow them to work on the academic improvement of the schools.

This initiative could be linked to the government's policy to set up, as part of the decentralization Act, an electoral constituency as a unit for development under the leadership of the respective member of parliament.

It is also very important that the proposed regional resource centres receive some degree of autonomy and acquire some authority delegated by the DEO; e.g. teachers can be transferred from one school to another within the constituency. The regional resource centre should be headed by a senior school supervisor who is a permanent staff member of the Ministry. They should obtain their salary from the government's regular budget, as part of a move to increase the share of government funding to the project.

4. Distribution of educational materials

The RC's role in distributing educational materials is a crucial one. One of the main problems in the existing education system is indeed that the students do not get the set textbooks for primary grades on time, due to many reasons: because the children may not have money to buy them at the beginning (as the money is refunded at a later stage), because the books may not be available in the rural areas even after the commencement of the academic year, because there may not be bookshops nearby, where the children can buy books. Teachers also complain that the educational materials that the project sends to schools do not reach them in time. In order to overcome these problems, the use of the resource centres to distribute textbooks to children and educational materials to cluster schools would be very useful. Since the RCs are centrally located, schools would find it easier to ask their students to get books in time if they were distributed through the RCs. In addition to textbooks, other educational materials can also be supplied to cluster schools through the same channel. Hence, perhaps the RCs could be used as a centre for the provision of educational materials in the future. If the RCs are encouraged to work in this direction, they can co-ordinate all the schools in the cluster and make an arrangement to collect textbooks for all schools at one time and distribute them just before the commencement of the academic year.

5. Addressing local needs

The activities, undertaken at the moment by RCs, are decided upon by the central authorities. They also, in many cases, prepare the annual plans for schools, although this is supposed to be the responsibility of the school. It is thus not surprising that these activities follow a national pattern (e.g. similar kinds of activities for all RCs throughout the country), ignoring the local needs. It is, therefore, suggested that the RCs be prepared to address the local needs, as requested by the schoolteachers, in the future. They should be given the option, and allowed the autonomy, to run training or any other support activities on the request of cluster schools. In other words, schools should be encouraged to get together and develop plans for the kind of help they need from the resource centres. For example, the RCs should survey the kind of training that the teachers of the cluster schools need, and provide them with the training.

In order for the resource centres to carry out some important activities at local level of relevance to their schools and teachers, they can generate funds locally. Some additional funds in the form of matching fund will be given to them from the centre.

6. Community mobilization

The community is one of the very important partners in education. The present model of community participation under BPEP is confined to their contribution to school construction, and their involvement in the school management committee. In that sense, it is suggested that the resource centre should be developed as a community centre so as to involve the community in activities of the cluster schools and encourage the schools to play a role in community activities. In this regard, the resource centres should be guided towards initiating activities which will promote such participation. At the same time, the

people should be given awareness training and orientation in education regulation so that they gain a clear image of their role.

A final important point is that the 'community' in Nepal does not necessarily involve the parents. The active people of the community usually take part in the affairs of the local school, no matter whether they send their children to that school or not. In many cases the leading parents send their children to a boarding school far away, but still get involved in the school management committee. It can be argued that community participation only becomes effective when the people participating send their children to the local school and when all parents become involved in the school's activities.

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The book

This publication forms part of a series entitled *Trends in school supervision* which accompanies the implementation of a programme on *Improving teacher supervision and support services for basic education*. The main aims of the programme are to assist countries in diagnosing and reforming their existing services of supervision and support, and to identify promising strategies for the reorganization and strengthening of these services.

This paper presents one strategy, which the Nepalese Government has implemented to improve the quality of education, in particular in the more remote regions of the country. Nepal, like many other countries, is faced with the problem of ensuring that quality teaching takes place in the isolated schools, which are far from the established education offices and therefore receive few visits, and where teachers struggle with a feeling of abandonment. A solution to this problem lies in strengthening the relations between neighbouring schools, while at the same time posting specific support agents closer to these schools. One way of doing this is to cluster schools around resource centres, which offer professional support to teachers. Such a strategy has been adopted in many countries. This monograph discusses its development in Nepal, its potential contribution to improving the quality of schools, and the obstacles it has encountered.

The Nepal experience should be of interest and inspiration to policy-makers, personnel of supervision and support services, and to all those who are involved in improving the quality of education.

The author

Tirth Raj Khaniya is at present Vice-Chairman of the Higher Secondary Education Board in Nepal. He worked, between 1976 and 1989, as Assistant Lecturer at the Tribhuvan University and was, between 1992 and 1994, Director of the Basic and Primary Education Project, in the framework of which the resource centre system was set up. He has published several articles and studies on education in Nepal.

**Teacher support through
resource centres:
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