



# Building the Capacity of School Leaders

A Case Study on QESSP School  
Leadership Interventions

# CONTENTS

Section 1 .....	3
<b>Background and purpose of the Case Study</b>	
Section 2 .....	4
<b>QESSP interventions</b>	
Evidence Generation	
Intervention 1 - Amhara region: Improve the level of under- standard schools (level-one on inspection standard) through evidence based schools planning and supervision	
Capacity Development	
Contributions to better quality education in Amhara	
Intervention 2 - SNNPR: Instructional Leadership Capacity Building for Cluster Supervision and School Leaders in Southern Nation Nationality Peoples' Region (SNNPR)	
Capacity Development	
Contributions towards enhanced awareness of instructional leadership in SNNPR	
Section 3 .....	9
<b>Lessons Learned</b>	
Annexes .....	11
Annex 1 Documents reviewed	
Annex 2 Policy context	
Annex 3 Methodology	
Annex 4 List of interviewees	

## ABOUT QESSP

The Quality Education Strategic Support Programme (QESSP) aims to enhance the capacity of the education sector in Ethiopia to improve outcomes for learners. We support partners to implement reforms, enhance policy dialogue and improve the evidence base to inform education policy by providing technical assistance, management support and flexible funds.

We focus on these areas: teacher education, school leadership, inclusive education, curriculum development, and system wide strengthening. QESSP is a four-year programme funded by UK aid from the UK government and managed by the British Council.

**Find out more:** [www.ethiopia.britishcouncil.org/QESSP](http://www.ethiopia.britishcouncil.org/QESSP)

This publication has been funded by UK aid from the UK government; however the views expressed do not necessarily reflect the UK government's official policies. Its contents are the sole responsibility of the Quality Education Strategic Support Programme.

All photos in this document © British Council.



## SECTION 1

# BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE CASE STUDY

**The Quality Education Strategic Support Programme (QESSP)'s Theory of Change (ToC), Results Framework (RF) and accompanying M&E plan (2016) outline five major 'component outcome' areas through which, it wishes to bring about systemic change within the Ethiopian education system during and beyond its own lifetime.**

These components or priority areas are:

1. **Teacher education:** Strengthened teacher training and management capacity
2. **School leadership:** Improved instructional leadership and planning capacity
3. **Inclusion and equity:** Increased capacity in equity and inclusive education
4. **Curriculum:** Strengthened peace education curriculum development capacity
5. **System wide strengthening:** Enhanced institutional and organisational capacity of the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Regional Education Bureaus (REBs) to deliver key sector priorities

It is envisaged that if QESSP supported-outputs related to generating evidence, initiating and facilitating policy dialogue and developing capacity are delivered as planned and the critical assumptions identified hold true, then there will be significant individual, institutional and organisational change.

It is believed that this will result in strengthened capacity of federal and regional educational institutions

to enhance quality, through their enhanced ability to design and implement education reform programme and policies at national and regional level (e.g. GEQIP II; ESDP V). In combination with other reform initiatives, the long-term impact will be higher quality, equity and efficiency of general education, including enhanced learning outcomes and retention rates for boys and girls.

As QESSP now is in its final year of implementation, there is increasing need to report on QESSP's contribution to higher-level results (outcomes) within its RF to DFID, MoE, and other donors in the education sector. It is also an opportune time to draw lessons from QESSP's experience to inform future programming, such as follow on programmes to GEQIP II (GEQIP E) and other capacity development programmes.

The purpose of this study is to trace the contributory effect of QESSP interventions on school leadership in the Amhara and Southern Nation Nationality Peoples' Region (SNNPR) to the extent possible. In studying QESSP contributions, the expected outcomes of the interventions are taken into account, but also more broadly the effects on organisational, institutional and individual capacity.

The term school leadership is often used interchangeably with school management and school administration. In practice, school leaders need to balance "between higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student and school performance (leadership), routine maintenance of present operations (management) and lower order duties (administration)."<sup>1</sup>

<sup>[1]</sup> Dimmock (1999) op cit. in OECD (2008).



## SECTION 2

# QESSP INTERVENTIONS

**Following the rapid expansion of education provision in Ethiopia, school leadership has risen to the centre of attention as the quality of education deteriorated. Weak leadership and management capacity at schools negatively affects the quality of education. For instance, in the 2015-2020 Education Sector Development Plan (ESDP) V, school leadership is recognised as a critical factor for effective teaching and learning outcomes. Strong leadership is also considered in the ESDP V as indispensable for the development and implementation of School Improvement Plans (SIPs) through which the quality of education can be enhanced.**

Even though school leadership courses are offered in regular programmes at universities and via Continuous Professional Development (CPD) training at Colleges of Teacher Education (CTEs), management capacities of (deputy) principals and cluster supervisors are often weak. Interviews with representatives from the REBs from Amhara and SNNPR explained that many principals have been appointed because of their political affiliation rather than their competencies. Since it was only very recently that a transparent competitive selection system has been introduced, principals often lack knowledge, experience and enthusiasm to perform their duties: They only take limited ownership of SIPs and are often unable to perform instructional leadership tasks such as supporting teachers to improve their skills around classroom assessments and active learning.

Weak leadership and management capacity have been addressed in the subsequent multi-donor funded General Education Quality Improvement Project (GEQIP I and GEQIP II). Currently, the GEQIP E 2017-2022 launched a comprehensive Leadership and Management training programme provided by CTEs and introduced measures to strengthen school leadership capacity required for the development and implementation of evidence-based and result-oriented SIPs.

QESSP interventions in the area of school leadership seek to improve instructional leadership and planning capacities to develop and implement evidence-based SIPs, which ultimately advances the quality of education provided. In order to achieve this outcome, QESSP supported primary schools in the Amhara region to upgrade themselves to the next level via one-year SIPs and provided capacity building to schools in the SNNPR to increase awareness and practice of instructional leadership. Even though QESSP support in the two regions both concern school leadership, they differ significantly from each other, following the large differences in the country and the distinct individual requests from the two REBs. While school leadership is directly targeted in SNNPR, it is indirectly addressed as a vehicle for the development and implementation of evidence-based SIPs in Amhara. Evidence generated with the support of QESSP highlight two different but interrelated challenges in the area of school leadership.

## Evidence Generation

**QESSP supported multiple studies, of which the following ones focused on school leadership:**

- **Analytical report On a Three Year Inspection Result: Level One Primary Schools in Focus.** This study aims to render three-year data from the school inspection on 1783 underperforming primary schools in the Amhara Region into practical information suitable for SIPs. The study was undertaken by the Amhara REB with support from senior researchers from Bahir Dar University.
- **The Capacity Assessment of Primary and Secondary School Principals and Supervisors on Classroom Assessment and Active Learning in SNNPR** is intended as a baseline study to identify capacity gaps and to recommend appropriate interventions to build capacity of principals and supervisors to conduct instructional leadership. The assessment was commissioned by the British Council (BC) and the REB.

The two analytical studies highlighted particular sets of challenges that have been addressed by the QESSP interventions. Both interventions have been developed after series of consultations between the QESSP team and the REBs and laid down in project proposals submitted by the REBs to QESSP.



### INTERVENTION 1

**Amhara region: Improve the level of under- standard schools (level-one on inspection standard) through evidence based schools planning and supervision**

Schools in Ethiopia are subject to an inspection framework based on 26 standards related to learning inputs, processes and outputs. The inspection categorises schools in four levels: Level 1 and 2 are below the minimum standards while level 3 and 4 exceed these standards. In Amhara, about 85% of the approximately 7000 primary schools are under performing and classified by the inspection as Level 1 and level 2 schools.

The in-depth analysis of the three-year inspection data on the 1784 weakest level 1 primary schools revealed that most schools score low on multiple standards, such as creating conducive learning environment for girls, supporting learning by technology, promoting inclusive learning, and active learning strategies. The average performance of these schools was found below the minimum level required in twenty-four standards. Not all schools score low on the same standards.

Furthermore, there exist differences between schools in rural and urban settings as the former tend to perform worse than the latter.

In response to these challenges, the pilot project in Amhara selected 368 level 1 primary schools from 35 Woredas with comparatively high shares of underperforming schools in both urban and rural settings. QESSP provided support to principals, deputy principals and cluster supervisors of these schools to develop and implement one-year SIPs -usually SIPs comprise three years. These SIPs build on 11 inspection standards that were specifically selected for the purpose of this project based on the following criteria:

1. Directly related to learning outcomes;
2. Under the influence of the school leaders and;
3. Attainable within one academic year.

In addition, the SIPs should not require additional budget from state funds.

The pilot project supported schools to improve their performance along these 11 standards. Improvement of these standards marks an important step in the process of providing better quality education at the 368 target schools.

## Capacity Development

**In collaboration with the Amhara REB and experts from the Bahir Dar University, QESSP provided multiple capacity building activities:**

**QESSP developed teaching and learning materials for the workshop** on evidence-based planning “Turning Schools Around: The Role of School Leaders in Improving Performance”, which included a facilitator booklet and a participant manual. QESSP furthermore deployed seventeen BC trainers from their on-call pool to facilitate the workshop on how to develop evidence based planning.

During the workshop, **participants received training on how to use inspection data, prioritisation, planning, technical feedback related to the identified priorities** as well as on issues like how to involve communities and fund-raising. Much of the training was devoted to make participants aware of their responsibility to improve school performance. Participants initially blamed low performance on externalities such as a lack of available funding.

Participants from each school included the principal, deputy principal and the cluster supervisor (if all available) to create a common understanding of the issues at stake and to avoid interruptions in the process following staff rotations.

At the end of the workshop the participants had jointly identified 11 key priority standards from the national inspection framework and developed a draft SIP with a clear responsibility matrix between the school, the cluster supervisor and the Woreda Education Office. This draft plan was later to be finalised and signed off by the local Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA).

After the workshop certificates and banners were produced for each school showing the level of the school. While banners were intended to be displayed at the school premises, some principals displayed it at the market to increase awareness among the communities.

Follow-up support and supervision was provided by the cluster supervisors and the Woreda Education Offices. Furthermore, the British Council offered on-call support.

Two learning and sharing events were organised for the participants to facilitate the exchange of experiences and to follow up remaining challenges.

Re-inspections were undertaken at the end of the year to assess whether the target schools achieved their targets laid down in the SIPs and managed to avoid further deterioration. Those schools that performed particularly well, were inspected by representatives from other regions, to ensure objective assessment.



## Contributions to better quality education in Amhara

**QESSP did contribute to higher ratings of participating schools:**

The participation rate of the 368 targeted schools in the pilot project was high. 97% of all targeted schools participated in the training. The project evaluation revealed that some of the targeted schools did not participate because principals were new and unaware of the training. In addition, the evaluation showed that not all schools received the materials such as the certificates and banners as well as the support as laid down in the project design.

**Schools achieved progress on all the 11 standards identified, albeit to different extents**, and 279 schools (80%) managed to progress from level 1 to level 2 and beyond. Four schools even managed to progress by two levels and became level 3 schools. Overall, the schools improved their performance by 10 points (from 44 to 54) on the 11 selected standards. Improved performance occurred at both rural and urban schools.

**Project effectiveness was also perceived by the participants as such.** 99% of the participants rated the overall effectiveness of the project as ‘moderate’, ‘high’ or ‘very high’. A visit to a targeted school in Bahir Dar (Amhara Region) illustrated the results achieved. Due to the project, the principal managed to significantly improve the participation of the community in school matters. She was able to convince the school community to fence the school premises and maintain traditional school buildings. Furthermore, the principal also raised funding for the construction of separate toilets for boys and girls as a result of the new skills learned via project.

Multiple factors contributed to these achievements: First, the selection of the 368 schools and their targets was (in part) based on their feasibility to achieve progress within one year. Second, new skills and motivation of individual school leaders gave a new impetus to change the quality of education provision at their schools. Third, strengthening the involvement of communities and other stakeholders, as learned during the training, facilitated target achievement.

It is too early to judge whether achievements can be sustained. In principle, promoted schools can relapse back to level 1 schools. Such relapses are likely because the achievements depended to a significant extent on the individual efforts of school leaders rather than on institutionalized efforts. At the same time however, 77% of participants indicated to be confident enough to maintain change at school level. Furthermore, for most schools level 3 and 4 are still very remote and achieving these levels will require massive efforts in the upcoming years.

Currently, the Amhara REB is upscaling the project to reach the remaining level 1 schools using its own internal resource. This expansion comes at a time when the regional government plans to increasingly invest in school infrastructure, in particular of level 1 schools. Preparations for the upscaling have been undertaken in close cooperation with QESSP. The up-scaled project will make use of the same materials and training modalities as developed for the pilot. In addition, the REB aims to utilise the experience of principals of the schools that managed to progress to level 3 as best practices.

## INTERVENTION 2

### SNNPR: Instructional Leadership Capacity Building for Cluster Supervisors and School Leaders in Southern Nation Nationality Peoples' Region (SNNPR)

The QESSP-supported study revealed multiple reasons for principals' inability to ensure proper learning to the benefit and success of learners at their schools. Principals as well as supervisors predominantly focus on general school matters and tasks outside the school, rather than engage in instructional leadership. In addition, principals often shy away from classroom observation and from providing necessary support to teachers via classroom assessments and active learning.

Even though instructional leadership belongs to the core tasks of principals, they often delegate this to the deputy principals and department heads, who do not have the necessary capacities themselves. At the same time however, principals seldom have the necessary guiding documents and support from their management, nor do they have a proper understanding of instructional leadership. As a result, teacher's perceptions of instructional leadership is often negative as they assign limited capacities to perform these tasks to their principals.

The analysis paved the way for recommendations on developing capacities to provide instructional leadership on short term, including training.

On the basis of this baseline assessment, QESSP and the REB identified the key challenges to be addressed with the project as well as the approach to address these challenges.



The following gaps of leadership skills and instructional leadership' knowledge and practice are supposed to be addressed in the project:

1. School leaders are not practicing instructional leadership;
2. They are not confident to be an instructional leader as they don't have the necessary tools;
3. School leaders are distracted by other tasks that often do not contribute to better learning outcomes.

QESSP and the REB decided therefore that the main purpose of the project should be to build capacity of school leaders, in particular on instructional leadership, to improve learning outcomes.

Upon developing the project, the SNNPR REB was inspired by the project in Amhara. Representatives of the REB participated in the Amhara workshop and undertook re-inspections in that region. Contrary to the project in Amhara however, this project includes all primary and secondary schools in the region. It is therefore not a pilot project.

## Capacity Development

**QESSP developed a specific cascading training model to reach (potentially) all school leaders in the region.**

Thirty-five instructors from the British Council and the region were initially trained as master trainers, who subsequently trained 330 centre coordinators to deliver the actual training to 10,500 school principals and cluster supervisors across the region.

Furthermore, **QESSP prepared teacher learning materials**, including four series of video material to compensate for the messages that could get lost through the cascading training model.

**The training on instructional leadership was very practice oriented and contained in-build feedback loops.** In order to match the situation on the ground, the training centred around four modules:

1. My role as Instructional Leader
2. Collaborative Inquiry/Action research
3. Lesson observation and feedback
4. Lesson study

Each module was covered at a time during four rounds of training. After each round, participants prepared an action plan to deliver activities based on the training to practice what they have learned. The intervals of approximately one month allowed for proper exchanges on experiences obtained at the start of the next round.

**QESSP covers the costs of the master and actual trainers**, but the largest financial burden is covered by the government to ensure sustainability and ownership of outcome the project

Finally, the project foresaw learning and sharing events through review meetings with stakeholders, including communities, to make school leaders socially accountable and bi-annual reporting.

## Contributions towards enhanced awareness of instructional leadership in SNNPR

The objective of this project is to train all 10,500 school leaders in SNNPR via four rounds of training. **So far, the trainings did not go as expected.** The last two rounds of training were delayed and have only been delivered at the end of 2018. This makes it difficult to assess the achievements of the project.

**There appears to be the need to improve participation in all four rounds of training.** A recent non-representative QESSP survey among 210 school leaders in SNNPR revealed that only 60% participated in all four rounds of the training. A potential explanatory factor is the long period of training delivery, which often causes new school leaders to arrive at the training after the original ones left. Even though the project foresees additional support to such 'new' participants, more measures may be necessary to optimise participation rates, for example by repeating trainings.

Interviews with the REB representative revealed that **the REB started to monitor school leaders more thoroughly since the baseline study** and has since terminated employment of about 150 underperforming school leaders. In addition, the representative stated that **the training sessions brought forward lively discussion** among the participants and that **communities increasingly engage in discussions** on the role and functioning of school leaders. According to the representative, these are first signs of changed mind-sets on school leadership

Indeed, despite the modest participation rate, the survey does suggest that **skills and awareness of the importance of instructional leadership increased in comparison with the baseline.** All respondents confirmed to perceive themselves as instructional leaders, that they know what to do as an instructional leader, and that the training contributed to their instructional leadership skills. The training furthermore appeared to be valuable for increased engagement of school leaders in representing the school at meetings in the community and networking as well as curriculum and teaching-related tasks such as instructing and supporting teachers, lesson observation and collaborative enquiry.

## SECTION 3

# LESSONS LEARNED

The two projects produced a number of lessons, relevant to those implementing similar interventions, those running similar technical assistance, capacity building programmes such as QESSP and for those responsible for future programming:

### General lessons

**The demand-driven nature of QESSP enabled a tailored approach to addressing specific school leadership challenges of the regions.** This approach also fostered ownership at the REBs. At the same time however, addressing leadership challenges could benefit from a transcending approach at Federal level. Both REB's had specific ideas about the challenges concerning school leadership in their respective region, which was confirmed by the evidence gathered by the analytical work. It remains unclear whether these challenges are indeed very region-specific. Hence, it should be further explored at Federal level, in cooperation with the regions, whether more regions would benefit from trainings on instructional leadership and from support with the development and one-year improvement plans as it is unlikely that all regions face fundamentally different school leadership challenges that require divergent solutions. This requires involvement of the regions to keep them committed.

**The evidence-based approach offered the opportunity to identify the root causes at stake and to formulate precise objectives of the projects.** In addition, sufficient time was taken by the REBs and QESSP to discuss the project and develop the design.

**Both projects revealed the need for practice-oriented engagements.** QESSP delivered trainings that were rooted in the day-to-day practice of participants. This allowed the school leaders and other stakeholders involved to identify with the training materials more easily and to apply their knowledge more swiftly.

**Time alignment and coordination with larger relevant programmes like GEQIP should receive due attention.** Coordination between DFID, QESSP and GEQIP teams happened in a monthly meeting at the Ministry but in practice there were not many joint activities. Also time-wise alignment was not optimal: QESSP started 18 months later than GEQIP II, while given its nature it had better contributed in the initial phase with evidence generation. It would be important to ensure better alignment and ensure a more regular coordination between the teams, besides MoE fora.

### Lessons from the project in Amhara

While the pilot project certainly was effective, **it is questionable whether similar results can be achieved with the up-scaled project.** The up-scaled project is likely to require a more long term approach, which also benefits the overall sustainability of the intervention. Aside from the school leaders deploying their new skills and motivation as well as enhanced stakeholder involvement, the achievements of the pilot project were pre-determined by the fact that schools and their SIP targets were selected on the basis of the feasibility to achieve progress in one year. The up-scaled project addresses level 1 schools that are much more difficult to change and are unlikely to change within one year. Therefore the up-scaled project requires proper expectation management and support over longer periods of time. As suggested by QESSP, schools that graduated to level 3 could function as role models. The long term support could be deployed for all schools, also for those that participated in the pilot project, in order to avoid relapses.

### Lessons from the project in SNNPR

Despite the cascading training model, more efforts might be required to improve attendance as indicated by the recent non-representative QESSP survey. For a start, it is important to find out why exactly participation in the four rounds of training appears to be low. Furthermore, appropriate solutions should be developed. For example, to repeat trainings, to shorten the intervals between training round or to compress trainings to reduce the impact of staff rotations among school leaders. Furthermore, the communication strategy could be expanded, for instance via social media, to make school leaders more aware of the existence of the training.