

Feature

Local Initiative in Organising Mass Literacy Campaign

by Mahmood Aminul Islam

The Relevance of Dapunia Union Parishad Model Election

I am writing this article assuming that all the political parties in Bangladesh are united in their resolve to eradicate illiteracy from the country within the shortest possible time. A strong political will shared by all the parties, is essential to make people in all walks of life aware of the grave problem created by the persisting high rate of illiteracy, and motivate them to take determined action both individually and collectively for early solution of the problem.

Early this century, voluntary efforts were made in this sub-continent to spread literacy among a largely illiterate population without much success. But since the 1950s, with the end to colonial rule, the literacy drive has gained momentum, and now it is considered a priority programme linked to development. This has led many countries in the Asia-Pacific region like Bangladesh and India to take it upon themselves to plan and implement national literacy programmes which would produce quick results in eradicating illiteracy. But the tendency to central planning including target setting and prescribing implementation methods has not changed much, although the programme is best executed as a campaign through local initiative and with mass participation.

In Bangladesh, quite a few NGOs are associated in programme implementation to supplement government efforts. These NGOs are mostly based in Dhaka and other cities which leaves little scope to fully bring the local initiative into play. The present approach ignores the fact that each of the 68000 villages grouped together in 4451 Unions (the smallest administrative unit) has its own character with people well conversant with local conditions. The differences between villages, however small, should go into total planning and implementation of a national literacy programme. People in the same village have intimate knowledge of one another making it easier for them to identify the potential learners and the resources available locally in terms of physical facilities, literacy workers — organisers — and financial resources supportive of literacy. These particulars are needed for local planning of the literacy campaign. With such active involvement, the community would feel personally responsible for successful implementation of something which they themselves have planned.

Here I would like to cite a very recent example of what participatory planning and implementation at grassroots level can achieve even in a difficult and sensitive operation. It happened during model election of Dapunia Union Parishad in Mymensingh district held on 30 April, 1994.

According to the Election Commission, the responsibility of conducting the election including registration of voters, preparation of identity cards for each voter, setting up of polling stations — one in each of the 27 villages, appointment of presiding and assistant presiding officers, and even the



Maktabs, traditional schools, in masjid (mosque) premises. Courtesy — Unicef

canvassing for each candidate and keeping peace and order at the polling stations was carried out by a 15-member (10 men and 5 women) voters club formed in each village.

The club members selected one director and one asst director for their respective clubs. All the clubs jointly elected one director general and one joint director general to coordinate the activities of 27 voters' clubs for efficient conduct of the election. The club members were given necessary training and guidance specially on the preparation of electoral rolls by the officials of the Election Commission from time to time since September 1992. On the election day, 19,826 voters (out of a total population of 38,515) exercised their rights of franchise to elect one chairman out of 11 candidates and 9 members out of 40 candidates.

Dapunia model election was a one time operation, but the concept of voters' clubs can be developed to encourage local initiative in planning and implementing all rural development programmes for which maximum community partici-

pation is necessary to achieve the best result.

In countries like Bangladesh where the majority population is illiterate, the literacy programme has to be approached as a movement or a campaign in which everybody has to take part according to his/her capacity. Drawing analogy with Dapunia model election all the Unions may be invited in phases to organise literacy campaign for a year in their own area (generally 15-25 villages) on a voluntary basis. Each village could form a literacy workers' club with a small executive committee and along with other clubs in the Union prepare a coordinated plan including resource mobilization to impart literacy to all those adults and adolescents who have remained illiterate. In executing the plan the club members have to receive training and guidance as was the case in Dapunia.

Each literacy workers' club (which may be renamed as community development workers' club after the campaign) could be given a small annual grant as recognition of its voluntary services to the

community and to meet its organisational expenses. If paid at the rate Tk 3000.00 an amount of Tk 20.4 crore would be required annually for 68000 clubs. The amount is insignificant compared to the enthusiasm it would create in the local youth for voluntary participation in literacy and other development work. The government is now spending a good amount as subvention to the NGOs engaged in executing a limited literacy programme in 63 thanas.

In the present literacy and non-formal education programme, primers, teachers manual and other educational materials are supplied centrally. This creates logistic problem, and in a way, discourages local initiative. Arrangements may be made with the selected printers and publishers to have unrestricted printing and sale of approved literacy materials throughout the country at a heavily subsidised price (say Tk 2.00 for primer, Tk 3.00 for teachers manual). The low pricing and easy availability will enable the clubs to procure the materials for the learners. The clubs will need help to train their literacy workers. The identified resource persons from each locality may be trained as trainers and supervisors. Special arrangements will have to be made with the Open University for regular broadcast of the trainers' training programmes. The district and thana resource centres as recommended by the government appointed high powered Task Force can play a significant role in providing training and other technical support services to the clubs.

It is estimated that about 20 million adults will have to be made literate to attain a modest target of 62 per cent literacy rate by the year 2000. Apart from resource constraints, it is unthinkable that even this target could be reached by following the usual programme approach. The only alternative is to launch a campaign with the blessings of all the political parties for mass awakening to the urgent need of universal literacy, and generating spontaneous and enthusiastic response in people to execute the action plan in their villages drawing support from their respective Union coordinating committees.

Dapunia Union Parishad model election has shown that through proper organisation and support, and by placing trust in people's ability it is possible to successfully plan and implement a complex operation like election through local voluntary efforts.

I end this article with an appeal that we should not lose sight of Dapunia success story. Let us develop and refine the voters' club concept for a total literacy campaign, and bottom-up planning and implementation of development programmes which is being advocated by the present government.

(Mahmood Aminul Islam is a retired Addl Secretary, Ministry of Education, and served as the national coordinator of mass education programme in 1980-1982.)

CROSS AND CRESCENT MOVE INTO THE LECTURE HALL

by Crespo Sebunya in Kampala and John Gambanga in Mutare

More than 200,000 African students, about 10 per cent of the continent's total student population, are studying abroad — a far higher proportion than for any other region of the world. Part of the reason for this brain drain is the lack of universities at home. Now there are signs, reports Gemini News Service, that the Churches are moving into the higher education gap left by the state.

CHURCHES are repeating the key role they played in the provision of pre-independence primary and secondary schooling in Africa by setting up universities.

The trend challenges the widespread assumption on the continent that university education should be provided by governments. The trouble is that governments do not have the money to do the job.

Salaries are so poor at Uganda's Makerere University, once a world class institution, that lecturers usually give only three lectures a week, early in the morning, so that they can hold other fulltime jobs. The main attraction of a staff job there is cheap housing.

One result of the university famine is that there are more expatriate scholars, scientists and consultants in Africa than ever before. The UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) points out in its recently published *World Science Report* that this effectively returns \$2.3 billion of development aid to the North every year.

It also means, according to Thomas Odhiambo, president of the African Academy of Sciences, that African states have become increasingly "addicted to external solutions."

Despite severe economic constraints, students often regard privileges as a right. Makerere students, for example, used to receive travel allowances and pocket money, known as "boom," in addition to stationary and all education costs. With austerity the perks have gone, but the idea that government owes them an education and a living is still strong.

This approach is rejected by Professor Golora Moses, Vice-Chancellor of the proposed Bugema Adventist University in Uganda: "People should throw off the colonial mentality that university education should be free. People have to build their own institutions and support them."

Bugema is drawing financial support from Uganda's estimated 500,000 Adventists, a Christian denomination. It also has dairy and poultry farms, a carpentry workshop and 420 acres of farmland. These activities will be used to subsidise fees, which will amount to 300,000 Uganda shillings a quarter, less than half the fee required by a Bachelor of Commerce student at Makerere.

In addition, initially only courses relatively cheap to run are offered, including education, business, nursing and religious studies.

The Adventists are following in the footsteps of the Muslims, who have established a university with the support of the international Islamic Conference, and the Protestants and Catholics, which each started a university.

It can be a troublesome business. The Pakistani rector of the Islamic University, Professor Huq, collided with senior government officials when he insisted that the Board members should have high academic qualifications.

Ministers disagreed

The Protestant University was nearly stillborn when Anglican Church officials threatened to pull out as a result of an administrative row over ownership. It has also been sullied by financial scandals.

The Z\$60 million Africa University draws students from 11 African countries and has an Angolan Chancellor, Bishop Emílio de Carvalho.

President Robert Mugabe has challenged other Churches to follow the example of the Methodists, and the Catholics, the biggest denomination in the country, have taken up the gauntlet, establishing a committee to examine plans for a university.

A fifth university is also in the offing, under consideration

problem of unemployed graduates.

Said a report by the UN Development Programme in Uganda, "New graduates of arts and social sciences are finding it difficult to secure employment in the tight labour market, which shows preference for highly skilled workers."

That is why Isa Sengoba did not even bother to look for a job when he completed his arts degree at Makerere. Instead, he returned home to help his mother raise chickens. — GEMINI NEWS

Chasing degrees



Academic Feat

A talented Bangladeshi student, Shagor Mohammad Abed studying in New York, has received an All-American Scholars Award from the United States Achievement Academy. This outstanding honour is an important National Award granted to the top academically talented students in America in recognition to their hard work and commitment solely to academic excellence.

Shagor Mohammad Abed, aged 13 and born in Khulna, Bangladesh, came to America along with his parents only 2 years ago and was admitted to Leonardo Da Vinci Intermediate School in Queens in New York City where he is now studying in 8th grade.

In Bangladesh he studied in Silver Bells Kindergarten and Collegiate High School in Chittagong. He also won primary scholarship in the talent pool in 1990. He is the son of A R M Mostafizur Rahman, former Director of Central Drug Laboratory, Chittagong and Hosneara Rahman, former teacher of Chittagong City Corporation Dobhash Girls' High School, Chittagong.

Upon the permission from the Ministry of Education, Govt of Bangladesh, Dr Dilip Kumar Sen, Associate Professor of Accounting, Govt Jagannath University College, Dhaka obtained the Doctor of Literature (D Litt) degree (which is considered the highest research degree in social sciences of the universities in Indo-Pak-Bangladesh sub-continent). He obtained the degree from Rabindra Bharati University, Calcutta, India in 1993-94 on the basis of his thesis — "Anatomy of Human Resource Measurement and Accounting: An Inquiry into its Applicability to Decision-Making and External Financial Reporting".

awarders are happy that their daughters are getting scholarships. More than four-fifths of them felt that their status in the community has gone up as a result of sending their daughters to schools. One-third of awarders' parent said that it would not have been possible on their part to send their daughters to schools in the absence of the SSGSP. Almost all the parents of the awarders felt that their daughters will get betterrooms after completion of their education.

Ensuring Secondary School Girls Education Through Scholarship Project

by Afifa Raihana

HERE is one thing for which we should all be thankful. Today we don't have to think about the problems of getting girls out of their 'houses for education. That great job has already been done by Begum Rokeya. But bringing the girls to school isn't enough. For various reasons they drop out of school. The govt has made primary education free. But a lot of girls drop out before going to secondary school. Some families think that it's more profitable to have a girl working in the house, helping the mother with the household work than sending her to school. Apart from this reason there are other social and religious barriers that make a girl's education real tough.

Source: A report prepared by Abul Barkat, Ph. D. Javed Helali, M A Barkat-E-Khuda, Ph. D.

In Bangladesh the disparity in access to education of girls and boys, although evident in primary schools where girls comprise 45 per cent of enrollees, is most significant in secondary schools where girls comprise only about 34 per cent. During the last two decades while there has been some reduction in gender disparity at the primary level, no such change has been observed at the secondary level.

Female secondary education and human development are interrelated and interdependent. Since female secondary education is a major problem in the education sector of Bangladesh and since female education and fertility behaviour are interwoven, the Bangladesh Association for Community Education (BACE) with the support of Nesodden

Friendship Group (NVG) initiated, in 1990, a five-year project entitled "Secondary School Girls Scholarship Project" (SSGSP) in 10 secondary schools of Kaharole Thana of Dinajpur District. From 1991 this project (SSGSP) covers all 11 recognized girls and co-educational secondary schools of Kaharole.

OBJECTIVES

The SSGSP has seven objectives: (a) increase girl students' enrollment in the secondary schools; (b) decrease the number of girls who dropout from the secondary schools; (c) increase girl students' attendance at the school; (d) encourage girl students to continue their formal education to the highest possible levels; (e) increase employment opportunities for the women; (f) delay age at marriage by keeping the girls at school; (g) increase the status of women in the family and the community; (h) encourage girl students in undertaking income-generation activities; and (i) involve girl students in eradication of illiteracy in the vicinity.

In line with the above objectives of the Project, this formative evaluation addresses the following: (a) how far have the project objectives been achieved so far? (b) what steps are proposed for further improvement? (c) what are the motivational aspects of the project on local female students, parents, and community? (d) how do the evaluation data compare with the baseline data? and (e) how do the evaluation data compare with data from the 3 control schools?

FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The major findings and

recommendations emerging from the present evaluation are summarized as follows:

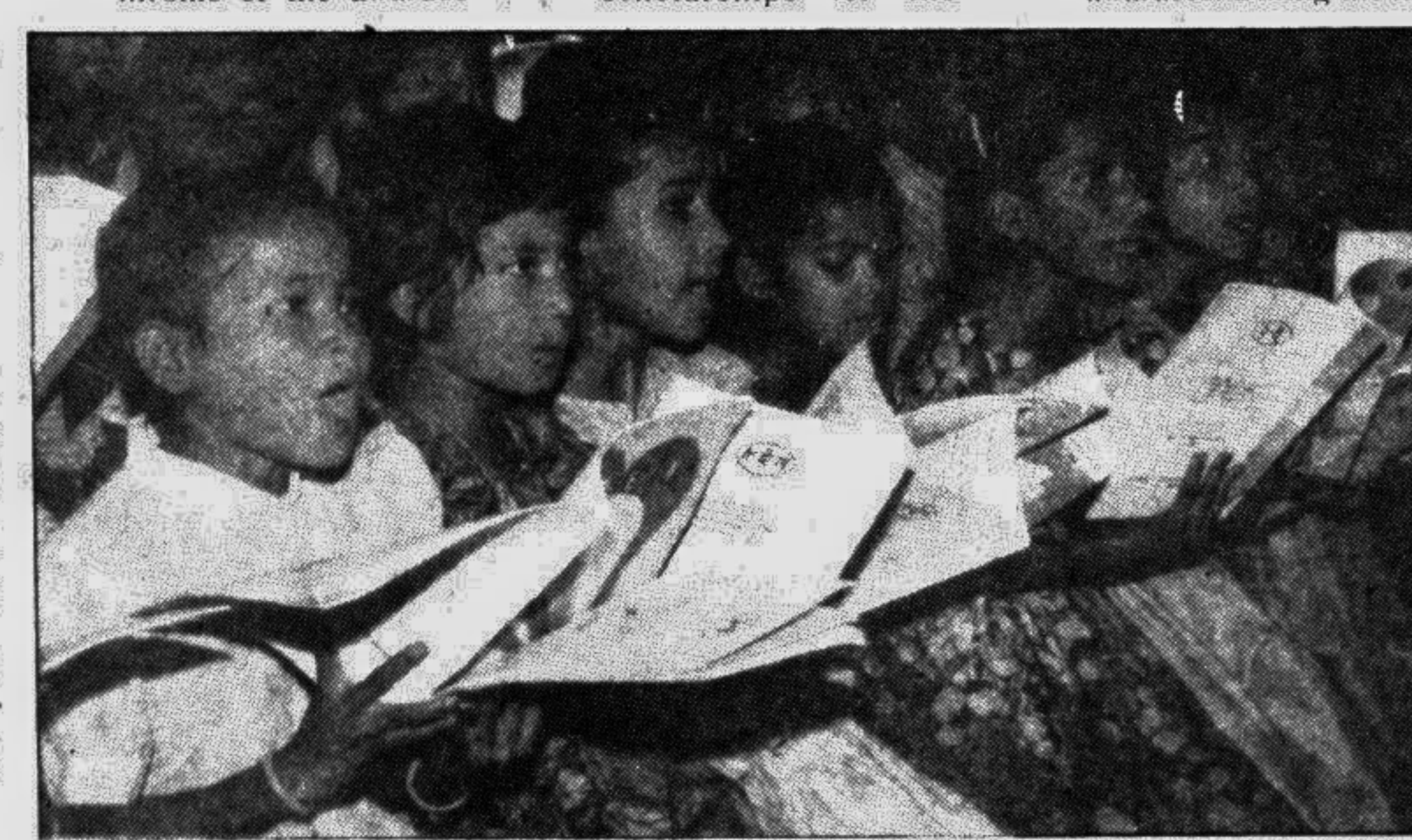
- Kaharole Thana is relatively disadvantaged thana compared to the control thana (Boghaganj) with respect to such educational variables as literacy rate, population per secondary school, and percentage of households without at least one literate person.
- In terms of economic and educational variables, the SSGSP awarders are more disadvantaged than their comparison group. The average annual household income of the awarder

girls is about four times less compared to their comparison group.

- Although the SSGSP is intended to increase enrollment of secondary school girls, it also has positive indirect effect on the enrollment of girls at the primary level.
- Due to the SSGSP, female-male parity in enrollment in Grades 6-8 has been achieved by 1992. However, at this stage of formative evaluation, it is difficult to predict whether the parity achieved would be sustained in the future.
- With the introduction of scholarships for the

girls, the enrollment of girls increased by at least 1.5 times in the first year of award; irrespective of grade.

- One-fifth of the increment in combined enrollment of Grades 6-8 girls during the last three years (1990-92) in the project schools was due to the SSGSP.
- Among all possible groups (awarders, non-awarders girls and boys), the progression rate of the awarders was higher than the other groups.
- Among all groups, the in-grade dropout rate was lowest among the awarders. During the last



If school could be made attractive to these students then their attendance would automatically increase. Courtesy — Unicef

two-and-a-half years of the SSGSP, the overall dropout rates among the awarders (Grades 6-8) was 4 per cent. Marriage was the main reason for dropping out.

- Attendance of girls in the project schools has improved after implementation of the SSGSP. Attendance of awarders sharply increased immediately after giving award in that grade.
- Among all groups, average marks obtained in the annual final examination were higher among the awarders than others.
- Although, the awarders are much more active than their counterparts in the comparison schools regarding participation in selected extramural activities (plantation, kitchen gardening, raising poultry birds, and taking part in removal of illiteracy), there still exist a high proportion of awarders who did not participate in those activities during the last year.
- In terms of aspiration for higher education leading to graduation (completion of Grade 14) and above, a lower proportion of the awarders than their counterparts expressed such an intention.
- Regarding employment aspirations, teaching was most frequently mentioned by the awarders. In order to re-

alize their employment aspirations, given the scarce job market in Bangladesh, the majority of the awarders suggested that the project could help them in finding jobs, and/or provide them with loans to generate self-employment.

- About one-fifth of the awarders reported that it would have been impossible for them to continue their education at the secondary level, had there been no financial assistance from the SSGSP. This finding is corroborated by the fact that one-fifth of the increment in enrollment of girls (Grades 6-8 during 1990-1992) in the project schools was due to the SSGSP.
- Almost all awarders feel that their status in the family has been enhanced after getting the award and after their participation in income-generation activities.
- Modernization effects of education, measured in terms of perceptions related to ideal age at marriage, need for consultation with girls for their consent before marriage, and the relationship between education and dowry, appear to be more positive among the awarder girls than their counterparts in the comparison schools. This can be attributed to the motivational efforts of the Supervising Teachers of the SSGSP.
- All the parents of the

awarders are happy that their daughters are getting scholarships. More than four-fifths of them felt that their status in the community has gone up as a result of sending their daughters to schools. One-third of awarders' parent said that it would not have been possible on their part to send their daughters to schools in the absence of the SSGSP. Almost all the parents of the awarders felt that their daughters will get betterrooms after completion of their education.

- According to the community leaders, between 40 and 80 per cent of the present awarders would not have been enrolled, had there been no SSGSP. Among the suggestions put forward by the community leaders for further improvement of the SSGSP, the important ones include their greater involvement in project activities, parent/guardian associations (unionwise/schoolwise), recruitment of more Supervising Teachers to ensure more frequent visits to the households, etc.
- The current organizational chart for SSGSP does not adequately reflect the existing organizational structure. Thus, BACE HQ should possess an organizational chart for SSGSP, comprising an organogram (proposed in this evaluation study) roster of executive titles, position descriptions, and a well-drafted organizational manual.