Report on Remote School Support Supervision Pilot Evaluation

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Background

School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs) are integral in ensuring data collection and supervisory services to schools in their respective districts. As part of this role, SQAOs are therefore expected to perform several functions including inspections and data collection of school facilities and activities, and attendance of pupils and teachers; provide trainings and guidance to teachers, school administrators, SMCs and/or community members covering different aspects of teaching, school management and governance; monitor and supervise the distribution and usage of teaching and learning materials (TLMs) and other related supplies to schools. This requires consistent school visits and coordination with schools on a regular basis.

To streamline SQAOs' and ensure efficient utilisation of this cadre of valuable human resource, the Ministry of Basic and Secondary School Education (MBSSE) has developed and piloted a School Quality Assurance (SQA) system which is set to be rolled out at the start of this academic year. The SQA system prioritises six distinct areas of school quality that SQAOs focus on during their school visits. The guidance provided by SQAOs to teachers and school leaders on such visits are meant to inform gradual improvements in markers of school quality. Similarly, the data collected during these visits is designed to inform and regularly update a repository of data accessible to key focal points at the cluster, district, and national levels to diagnose and address persistent challenges in improving school quality across the country.

While in-person school visits by the SQAOs are a central component of a well-functioning SQA system, close coordination and a regular interface between the SQAOs and school leaders can possibly be enhanced and strengthened through remote engagements. Therefore, SQAOs from five districts - Kailahun, Bo, Port Loko, Bombali and Western Rural piloted the remote support to complement their in-person school visits with remote support and guidance they provided to school leaders via WhatsApp and SMS messages, and phone calls. The pilot started in November 2024 to July 2025. ⌗our options were piloted across 200 schools (40 in each district) as follows: Generic messages in Kailahun, Direct phone calls in Port Loko and Western Rural districts, targeted WhatsApp messages in Bombali Districts and combined targeted messages and phone calls in Bo district.

This report summarises the feedback from select SQAOs, as well as school leaders on whether remote coordination was at all useful, and if so, how can it be enhanced going forward.

Methodology

To gather feedback and insights that can potentially inform an understanding of the utility (or lack thereof) of the remote support, we sampled 36 SQAOs, and 46 school leaders from 5 districts. This allowed us to aggregate the feedback from 'providers' and 'recipients' of remote support from SQAOs to the schools.

The figure below outlines representation from each of the five districts.
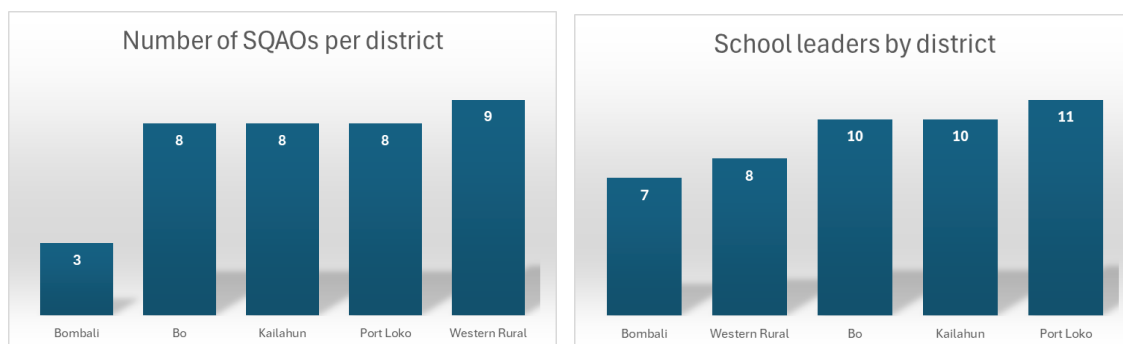
The sampled SQAOs and school leaders were interviewed by the LWL staff members using a basic questionnaire (Annex A) that focussed on the modality of remote support, feedback on whether the support was helpful, and what changes can be made to improve its effectiveness. The data from the interviews was collected through Tangerine.

The review of the remote support pilot is meant to aggregate indicative feedback from SQAOs and school leaders on the viability of remote support. It is worth noting that remote support already exists in different forms. The pilot and the review are meant to explore whether streamlining and structuring it can enhance the effectiveness of coordination between SQAOs and school leaders.

A simple random sampling method was employed to select participants for the evaluation. Specifically, 10 School Quality Assurance Officers (SQAOs) and 10 school principals were randomly selected from each of the five target districts, resulting in a total of 100 participants. However, 82 participants were reached.

The plan to engage 10 SQAOs in each of the 5 districts was constrained due to the unavailability of some SQAOs, especially for Bombali. Bombali has 9 SQAOs and at the time of the exercise 3 were sick and 3 on other MBSSE engagement. The turnout for school leaders was mostly possible in almost all districts.

The 200 schools involved in the pilot were categorized into three geographical classifications: Urban, Semi-Urban, and Rural. From each category, schools were selected based on the assigned SQAO responsible for that school.

Additionally, the selection process considered the level of engagement with remote support, classifying schools into high engagement, medium engagement and low engagement.

This stratified approach ensured a diverse and representative sample for the interviews, capturing variations in both geographical context and remote support engagement levels.
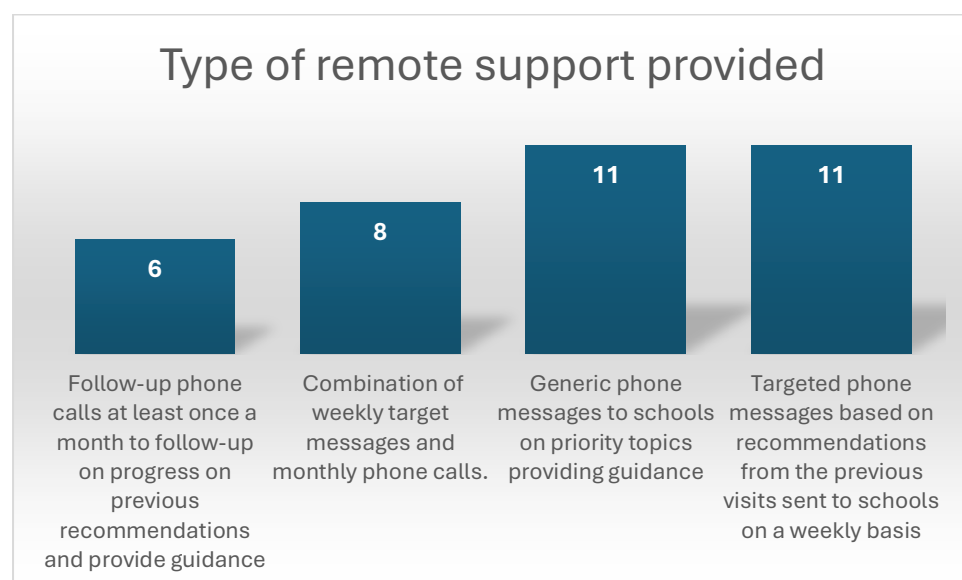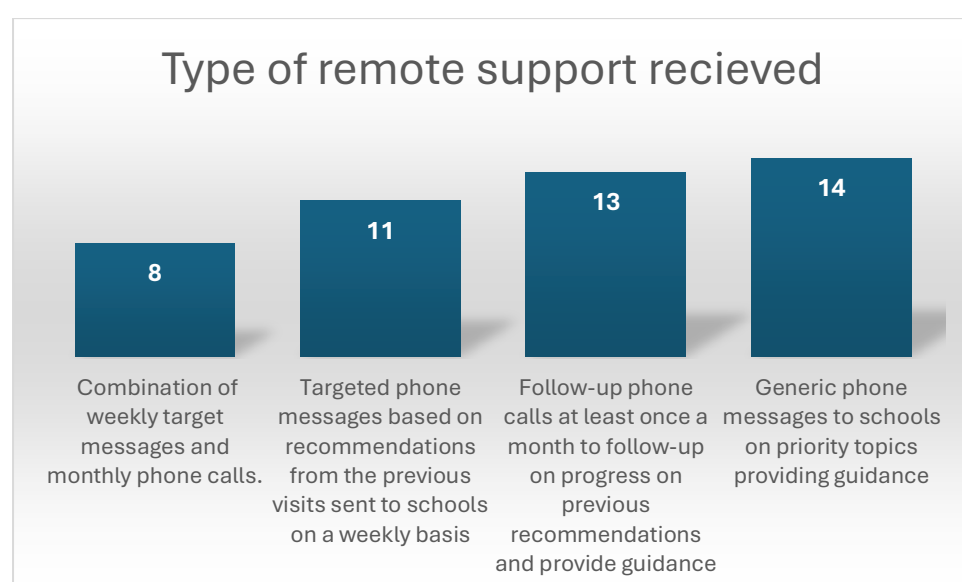

Findings

Areas of focus

Throughout the pilot phase, SQAOs used different modalities to provide remote guidance and support to the school leaders. These included (i) general messages containing key guidance and information for improvements in different aspects of school quality (ii) targeted and tailored messages containing specific guidance for different schools (iii) follow-up phone calls to provide

tailored guidance to specific schools, and (iv) a combination of tailored messages and phone calls.

Most of the surveyed SQAOs reported using targeted tailored messages and general messages to provide remote support.

Type of remote support provided

| Follow-up phone calls at least once a month to follow-up on progress on previous recommendations and provide guidance	Combination of weekly target messages and monthly phone calls.	Generic phone messages to schools on priority topics providing guidance	Targeted phone messages based on recommendations from the previous visits sent to schools on a weekly basis
6	8	11	11

This varies a little for surveyed school leaders. Like SQAOs, most school leaders reported receiving general messages for support from SQAOs. However, many school leaders also reported receiving follow-up phone calls with tailored guidance from the SQAOs.

Type of remote support recieved

Combination of weekly target messages and monthly phone calls.	Targeted phone messages based on recommendations from the previous visits sent to schools on a weekly basis	Follow-up phone calls at least once a month to follow-up on progress on previous recommendations and provide guidance	Generic phone messages to schools on priority topics providing guidance
8	11	13	14

From the six areas of school quality defined as per the revised SQA tool, greatest focus of the remote support was on teaching and learning (42 school leaders reported that remote support focussed on this), followed by school community (37 school leaders reported that remote

support focussed on this) and school safety. The area of school management and administration was not prioritised during remote support as none of the school leaders reported it as an area of focus.
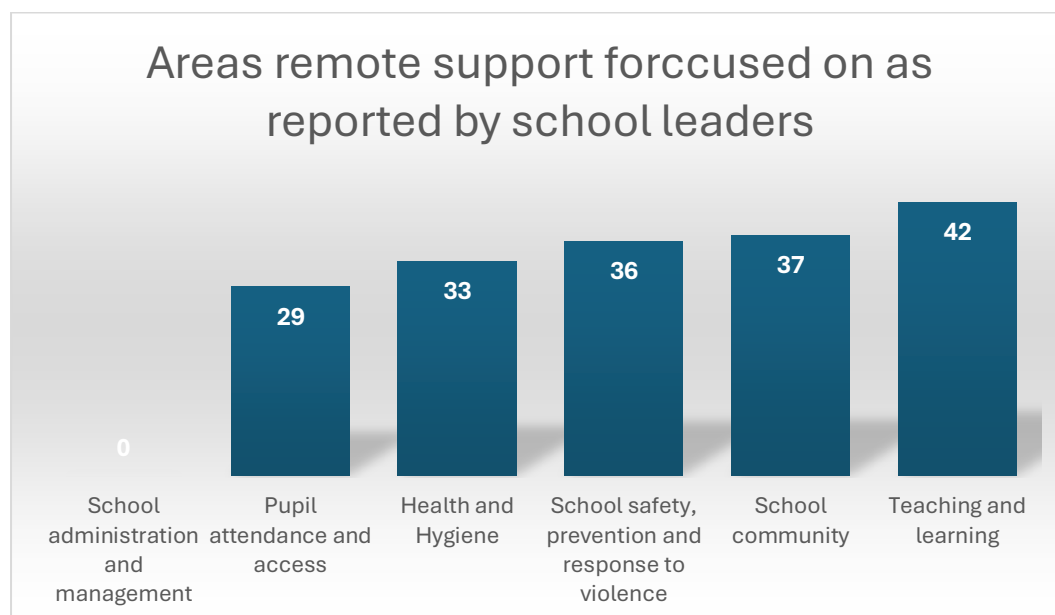
On the other hand, remote support pilot showed some areas couldn't be covered as well through remote support. According to the surveyed SQAOs lesson observations and using them to inform feedback to the schools was not possible through remote support. Similarly, it wasn't possible to monitor attendance, participation levels in schools, oversee inclusion practices, health and hygiene arrangements and practices remotely.

Effectiveness of remote support

To better understand the usefulness of remote support, SQAOs were asked whether providing support to the schools remotely helped them structure their support and guidance during their in-person visits. Overwhelming majority of the surveyed SQAOs (32) noted that providing remote support and engaging with school leaders virtually was helpful in identifying problem areas for the school that they were able to focus on during physical visits. It was also helpful in keeping regular follow-ups after the visit. 3 SQAOs noted that its usefulness was limited - it was helpful to have interacted on the phone with the school leader, but it did not significantly result in better coordination and improvements.

The school leaders were asked a similar question to which all school leaders except 1, noted that remoted support from the SQAO was helpful for them in extracting maximum value from the SQAO's in-person visit.

43 out of 46 sampled school leaders noted that remote support was extremely useful. They reported the remote support was regular, the (respective) SQAOs established good check-in systems with them, and encouraged them to flag issues and share queries which they helped address through guidance.

School leaders provided examples of the above:

"It (remote support) is very useful as I have a constant communication with the SQAO. Sometimes he attended our staff meeting remotely and this helped to strengthen my control

amongst teachers. Usually, he will call to check lessons during the afternoon and i have a good rapport with him."

"Through his (SQAO's) calls, I engaged on how we can encourage the community teachers and he supported to discuss with them, and they are still in school. Also, a teacher was using canning, and I called the SQAO to discuss with the teacher and supported the teacher on alternative ways. Also, the SQAO has linked me with Njala University to help to address the teachers' challenges. We have a strong communication now and he has help in support our TLC prepare and attendance."

The feedback form SQAOs shows that remote support can also be a viable means to streamline and strengthen SQAO routines improving their access to schools as well as the quality of engagements they have with the school leaders. Among the surveyed SQAOs, all but one noted that remote support either helped them better structure their regular feedback and guidance to schools, or expand their outreach to schools, or helped them with both tasks.
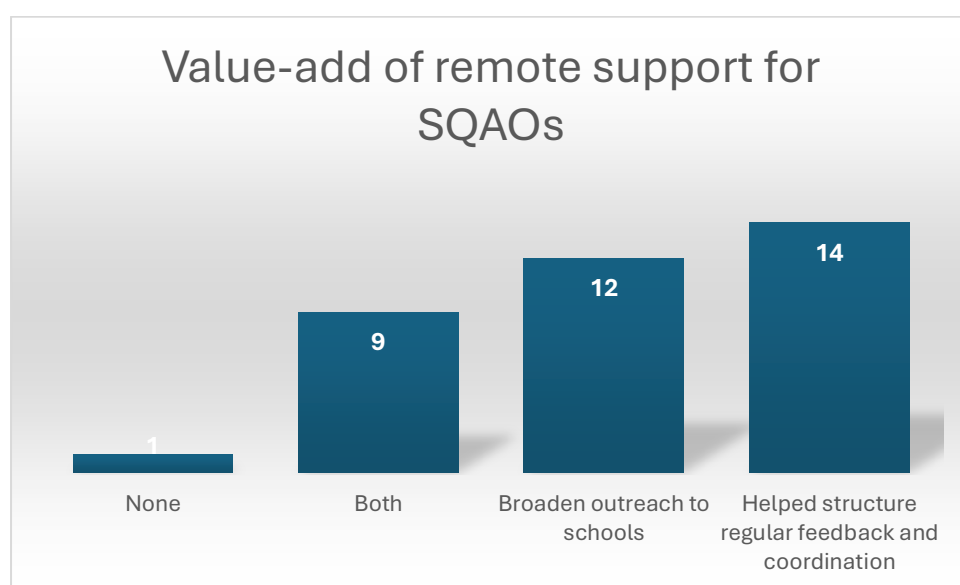
Lessons to scale and improve remote support

When asked whether remote support should continue, all the surveyed SQAOs and school leaders (except 1 of each) responded in the affirmative.

On suggestions of how the remote support can be strengthened and improved, many SQAOs and school leaders noted the value of focussing on targeted and tailored messages as opposed to generic guidance. They noted that tailored messages are better aligned with specific conditions of the school they are meant for and therefore more useful. Several SQAOs also suggested accompanying tailored messages with frequent follow-up phone calls to ensure oversight and support. However, relying on just phone calls was considered operationally difficult by most. Hence a combination of tailored messages and phone calls for guidance was outlined a preferred modality of remote support by many school leaders and SQAOs. On the operational side, respondents identified limited bandwidth challenges that if curtailed, can help scale the coverage of remote support.

Conclusions

This review shows great appetite among SQAOs as well as school leaders to continue and possibly expand the ambit of support and guidance provided by the SQAOs to schools. However, it also outlines operational bottlenecks and provides suggestions that can make remote support more effective. The salient findings from the feedback of SQAOs and school leaders are summarised below:

1. Remote support can and should not be viewed as a replacement to in-person school visits from SQAOs. All respondents were unanimous in pointing out that remote support is a useful complement to in-person physical visits.

2. In most cases, the surveyed SQAOs, and school leaders noted that that tailored messages informed by prior school visits were the best way to deliver remote support. Several other respondents noted that combining tailored messages with follow-up phone calls was very effective. This indicates that for several reasons (like lack of specific guidance tailored to a specific situation in specific schools and operational constraints limiting phone calls), general messages and just phone calls emerged as the least desirable modalities of remote support.

3. Virtually all respondents noted that remote support from SQAOs to schools should continue in the future. For it to be more effective, generic messages should be replaced with tailored guidance delivered through targeted messages complemented with follow-up phone calls where possible.

4. The coordination and interface between SQAOs and schools, generated and strengthened through remote support can be sustainable if operational considerations are overseen and upgraded. These primarily include broadband connectivity through better internet data packages for SQAOs and school leaders.

5. There is substantial positive feedback from providers and recipients of remote support to indicate its utility and value in helping strengthen the SQA system through improved coordination and alignment between SQAOs and schools.