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A Day in the Life

Logistics Support Officers in Bangladesh

USAID | DELIVER PROJECT 2009

Logistics Support Officer Azim Uddin provides on-the-job training at the Union Health and Family Welfare Center in Ashuganj, Bangladesh.

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USAID | DELIVER PROJECT staff member Sylvia Ness gives a first hand account of the importance of Logistics Support Officers in Bangladesh.

Recently, as the Program Officer for the USAID | DELIVER PROJECT in Bangladesh doing some preliminary research for a new scope of work for the project, I spent two days in Bangladesh with Azim Uddin, a Logistics Support Officer (LSO). I was fortunate enough to accompany him during his day-to-day field work. Azim has worked with the USAID | DELIVER PROJECT for almost two years, but from the way he interacts with the government and the nongovernmental organization (NGO) staff, you would think that he had been doing this for many years.

As I observed during the Sunday and Monday I spent with Azim, he and the other LSOs are expected to complete a variety of activities; the work requires that they serve as troubleshooters, as advisors, as facilitators, and as liaisons with the central-level Directorate General of Family Planning (DGPF). They report to the USAID | DELIVER PROJECT office in Dhaka and interact with the DGPF personnel at every level of the supply chain. On the Sunday when I accompanied him, Azim's scheduled appointments included the Family Planning Inspector (FPI), Family Welfare Visitors (FWV), the Sub-Assistant Community Medical Officer (SACMO), and the Family Welfare Assistants (FWAs) at the Union Health and Family Welfare Center (FWC) in Ashuganj. Later that same Sunday, he met with the storekeeper at the upazila in Ashuganj.

When Azim and I arrived at our first destination, Azim asked the FWAs to show him their records and reports; he checked them for arithmetic errors, and checked for critical compliance to documentation guidelines, such as entering the last month's ending balance and the following month's opening balance. In the case of one FWA, Azim found a discrepancy. He took the time to not only explain how to correct the error, but he also explained the crucial role that FWAs play in providing data to the DGFP, which the DGFP then uses to make critical decisions. Next, during this

visit, Azim evaluated the storeroom to assess whether or not the staff were following the proper storage guidelines. Azim also conducted a physical inventory of the contraceptives to determine if they corresponded to the records and reports he saw earlier. During our visit, they did match, but only after the FPI remembered that she had stored some products in another location—Azim said that this was a perfect example of what not to do. At the upazila, the storekeeper had segregated expired product but had not labeled them. Her records were inconsistent, which the LMIS report had flagged the previous month. Azim immediately gave her on-the-job (OJT) training, including practice entering the data. By the time we left, she was smiling and appeared to be relieved.

On Monday, the second day I spent with Azim, we attended the logistics management training for storekeepers and Upazila Family Planning Officers (UFPOs). Twenty young, new recruits were beginning their first day of a five-day training where they would learn how to record and report and how to supervise staff and provide feedback. The recruits would also become familiar with the DGFP minimum-maximum policies and basic logistics systems information. Although he was not formally part of the training, Azim answered questions from the participants and shared practical everyday examples from his broad experience with the intricacies of the public sector system. Several times during the training, Azim was called on to answer questions about the upazila inventory management system (UIMS), which is being rolled out in the upazilas with computers and the web-based logistics management information system (LMIS). The new recruits will play a significant role providing data for the web-based LMIS and operating the UIMS once it is in place in each upazila.

The USAID | DELIVER PROJECT supports up to seven LSOs in the field at any one time. Like Azim, the other LSOs live and work in the field. They regularly visit the regional warehouses and upazilas (sub-districts); they also visit with storekeepers at the SDP storerooms. in Bangladesh LSOs are a crucial interface with the real workers of the last mile—the FWAs. Sometimes, LSOs visit facilities in their assigned region to monitor activities; other times, they schedule a visit at an upazila. Often they make a scheduled visit because they see a possible error in the information from the web-based LMIS. Whether they make a routine visit or a scheduled visit, all LSOs follow the same prescribed plan.

When Azim and the other LSOs visit, they use a checklist to make sure all the details are included in the report for the supervisor and the team in the Dhaka office. Like Azim, every LSO sends in a report that details issues and highlights from the monthly visits; all the reports are compiled into one report for the DGFP. The LSOs also spend some time with the head of each facility they visit to make sure this person knows the results of the visit, whether it's a fantastic job done by facility staff, or some improvements that need to be made and how they can accomplish this. The central-level DGFP then uses the report to follow-up on specific issues, plan trainings, or issue directives based on the information he or she receives.

Although only seven LSOs work in the country (currently operating with five)—the one-on-one OJT, the small group interaction, and the introduction last year of a web-based LMIS at the regional level—have helped Bangladesh maintain an impressive reporting rate of approximately 97 percent. LSOs also run a hotline that the government and the NGO supply chain staff can call with problems—one problem they might call about would be low stock at an SDP. LSOs have on-line access to the web-based LMIS. They can see where stock is in the system and can work with the upazilas to transfer products from overstocked to understocked facilities without waiting for the next reporting period.

Throughout my two days with Azim, I had a recurring thought—this is how the system is supposed to work. A respected, trusted cadre of resource people should be available to target low-performing facilities and provide needed OJT; to facilitate fast data-driven decision making; and to be a responsive, reliable

resource for those working in the last mile of the system. Only a few resources are needed—training and maintaining specialized staff like the LSOs—but the results can be significant. Azim lives in the region he works; he knows many of the supply chain staff personally; he travels the same way they do, by public transport; in short, although he is outside of the system, he is also an integral, accepted part of the system and part of what makes the LMIS so robust in Bangladesh.

The authors' views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the United States Government.

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