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School Committees in the Context of Preparing and Implementing Whole School Development Planning

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the involvement of school committees in the preparation and implementation of Whole School Development Planning (WSDP). The data employed is based on a cross-sectional survey was conducted between October and November, 2006 in 16 public primary schools in Tabora Municipality, Tanzania. In all, 60 respondents made up of one Municipal Education Officer (MEO), 16 head teachers, 13 school committee chairpersons and 30 statutory members of the school committees were selected to participate in the study using both purposive and random sampling procedures. Interviews, questionnaire and documentary reviews were deployed to collect the requisite data. The findings of the study reveal that the majority of public primary schools under study had functional WSDPs. The implication is that the aspiration of the Primary Education Development Programme Phase One (PEDP I, 2002-2006) to provide training to school committees on WSDPs was—to a large extent—on the right track. Moreover, the study established that school committees were mostly involved in the preparation, implementation monitoring and evaluation of WSDPs. However, there is a need for the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training (MoEVT) to provide intensive on-going training that include initial induction programme and on-going WSDP preparation and implementation support to equip the key players with knowledge and skills, especially in rural-based primary schools and those unable to properly prepare WSDPs in a bid to enhance efficiency and achieve optimum returns from the WSDPs.

Keywords: School Committees, Whole School Development Planning, Training, Head Teacher.

1. Introduction

Tanzania recognises the importance of school-community partnerships in the development of the primary education sector. In fact, the country's 1978 Education Act stipulates the main roles and responsibilities of school committees as vetting school admission applications for pupils, confirming or preventing the dismissal of pupils, and advising the head of school and the local authorities on matters relating to running the school. Moreover, the country's 1995 Education and Training Policy (ETP) makes it mandatory for all education institutions to have school or college committees/boards. Thus, both the law and the policy are in place as part of the country's drive to promote effective management and operations of its educational institutions.

Indeed, experience in different countries shows that schools function better and student performances improve when communities, particularly parents, are actively involved in the planning and management of school activities (De Grauwe and Varghese, 2000). In Indonesia, for example, the local communities have contributed about \$ 2.6 million in monetary and non-monetary contributions to facilitate the implementation of school development plans through school community participation (RTI, 2010).

Despite these prospects, experience has shown that these school committees can be bedevilled by several hitches. Sumra (1996) claims that teachers tend to dominate the discussion in school committees because of their higher level of education than those of villagers, for example. Furthermore, Mpango and Mushi (1998) observe that most of the school committee members were found to be villagers with very little or no education at all. Like Sumra (1996), Mpango and Mushi (1998) claim that school planning and decision-making on school expenditure were largely influenced by the head teacher and other school staff, with the community members expected to simply go along with what they had decided.

And yet, Tanzania's Primary Education Development Programme Phase One (PDPI, 2002-2006) assigns school committees responsibilities that include working together with the head teacher to prepare the Whole School Development Plans (WSDPs). Perhaps, with hindsight the government was aware that without collaborative efforts, particularly at the planning stage, the community would not own the school initiatives and hence not get the kind of co-operation that come with active participation by members of these committees. In fact, several efforts have been made in Tanzania to ensure that school committees function properly. The Ministry of Education and Culture (MoEC) in 1998 prepared the Manual for WSDPs to be used as a guideline by all persons responsible for planning, managing and implementing primary school developments plans. This blueprint was

drafted to ensure that the country established a strong base for policy implementation, which in turn translates into operation and effective school committees.

Although efforts to involve school committees in the process of preparing and implementing WSDPs have been on-going for some years now, little critical examination of these WSDPs has been made. The studies available on school committees in Tanzania's primary school include one by Kiwope (2003), which focused on the school committees' perception of power-sharing in the primary school management. Consequently, little is known about the extent to which school committee members are actually involved in the planning and implementation process of WSDPs. The absence of reliable data on such involvement leads to several questions about these school committees. These questions include: how are the school committees involved in the process of planning and implementation of WSDPs? What kind of training do school committees get on how to prepare and implement WSDPs? What kind of capacity do such training endow these committee members in preparing and implementing WSDPs? Moreover, one also wonders about the varying capacities of these school committees to implement WSDPs, considering the gulf in the rural and urban based schools, with the latter institutions more privileged not only in terms of materials available at their disposal but also in the education level of the majority of the members of the school committees on the parents side. This paper therefore, reports the findings of a study that was carried out to provide answers to these questions and determine how the school committees under study help to shape and implement the WSDPs within Tanzania's primary education sector.

2. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

- (a) Establish whether the school under the study had WSDPs.
- (b) Identify the stakeholders involved in the preparation of these WSDPs, if the response is in the affirmative; or
- (c) Find out why the schools failed to have WSDPs, if the response was in the negative, and establish how they went about school development plans in the absence of the WSDPs.
- (d) Examine the manner in which school committees were involved in preparing WSDPs.
- (e) Establish the role of school committees in the implementation of WSDPs

3. Methodology

This study used a cross sectional survey approach. It was conducted in Tabora Municipality, Tanzania between October and November 2006 in 16 public primary schools. It was mainly qualitative but was also supported by some quantitative data. The 60 respondents, who participated in the study, were made up of one Municipal Educational Officer (MEO), 16 head teachers, 13 school committee chairpersons and 30 statutory members of the school committees. Two types of sampling were employed. Purposive sampling was used to select the MEO, the head teachers and school committee chairpersons, who were selected purposive on the virtue of their position. The public primary schools were selected based on their urban/rural location as Table. 3.1 illustrate

Table 3.1: Distribution of Public Primary Schools under Study in Tabora Municipality

S/N	Name of School	Ward	Location
1	Jamhuri	Kiloleni	Urban
2	Townschool	Kiloleni	Urban
3	Isike	Kanyenye	Urban
4	Gongoni	Kanyenye	Urban
5	Uhuru	Cheyo	Urban
6	Mwenge	Cheyo	Urban
7	Kiyungi	Kitete	Urban
8	Kitete	Kitete	Urban
9	Kazima	Itonjanda	Rural
10	Manoleo	Itonjanda	Rural
11	Kipalapala	Itetemia	Rural
12	Kwihara	Itetemia	Rural
13	Itaga	Misha	Rural
14	Misha	Misha	Rural
15	Ndevelwa	Ndevelwa	Rural
16	Itulu	Ndevelwa	Rural

Source: MEO Office (2006).

Random sampling on the other hand, was used to select statutory members of school committees. This probability sampling technique was deployed to ensure that each committee member had an equal chance of

being included in the sample and in the process eliminate the element of bias.

To collect the requisite data, interviews, questionnaire and documentary review were deployed. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the MEO, School Committee chairs and head teachers. For statutory members of the school committees, self-administered questionnaires made up of both open-ended and closed questions were employed. Data collection also involved documentary review of school committee minutes and samples of WSDPs, which generated information that helped to support findings generated through the use of the other data collection methods.

Prior to fieldwork, the researcher conducted a pilot study. This pilot study was part of efforts deployed with a view to ensuring the validity and reliability of the findings. Moreover, the study employed triangulation—the use of more than two methods in a study with to double or even triple check the results of a research undertaking—was employed in this study as manifested by the use of the interview, questionnaire, and documentary review methods. Furthermore, ethical considerations were taken into account to ensure that the study followed the research procedures, including getting informed consent, ensuring privacy and anonymity for the participants.

Data analysis was conducted in two ways: qualitative data was subjected to content analysis whereas quantitative data were translated into frequencies and percentages before being presented in tabular form.

4 Discussion of the Study Findings

4.1 Presence of WSDPs in Schools Under Study

To identify whether the school under the study had WSDPs, semi-structured interviews were used. Responding, 61.5 percent of the school committee chairpersons and 69 percent of the head teachers affirmed that their primary schools had operational WSDPs. The remaining 38.5 percent of school committee chairpersons and 31 percent of the head teachers denied that their primary schools had any WSDPs. The same question was also raised in the questionnaire for committee members, whose responses indicated that 69 percent of the school committee statutory members of school committees out of the 29 responding members said “yes”, and the remaining 31 percent were negative. In other words, these findings were concurrent with the outcome of the interviews with school committee chairpersons and head teachers. Furthermore, information obtained through documentary review revealed that 69 percent of the 16 primary schools under study had WSDPs. It was also established that 60 percent of the five primary schools without WSDPs were urban-based. Generally, the findings suggest that the majority of primary schools had WSDPs, implying that school committees to a large extent were active in these schools, and hence raising the prospect of their participating with the head teachers and other teachers to fulfil their obligations in the preparation of WSDPs as stipulated in the PEDP.

4.2 Stakeholders' Involvement in the Preparation of WSDPs

Objective number two of the study sought to identify the stakeholders involved in the preparation of WSDPs. Responding, 28 percent statutory school committee members indicated in the questionnaire that the school committee were involved in the preparation of WSDPs. For 3.4 percent of statutory school committee member said that the village council was involved instead. Also, semi-structured interview were used to obtain information on the same objective. Among interviewed, 90.9 percent of the head teachers from primary schools with WSDPs also confirmed during interviews that they included students, teachers and school committees in the preparations of WSDPs. Furthermore, 63 percent of the school committee chairpersons agreed during interviews with the explanations of the head teachers. Explaining, they also said that the Village Council, The Ward Education Officer and the MEO were also involved in the preparation of WSDPs. Similarly, the MEO agreed with the explanations of the school committee chairpersons, the head teachers and the statutory members of school committees. The MEO said that those mostly involved in the preparation of WSDPs were school committee chairpersons. Generally, there was proof of the participation of these committees in the preparation of the WSDPs. This is in line with the requirement by the the United Republic of Tanzania, URT(1998) to the effect that parents and other community members should get an opportunity to plan and support schools materially and morally to cultivate a sense of school ownership. In other words, the school committee chairpersons were more involved in this preparation undertaking than other members of the school committees.

4.3 Factors behind Lack of WSDPs at Primary Schools

The third objective was aimed at finding out why some primary schools did not have WSDPs despite a standing government directive to do so. Through semi-structured interviews, 20 percent of the head teachers and 7.6 percent of the school committee chairpersons indicated that their schools were in the process of preparing WSDPs. In the interim period, the schools were using WSDPs prepared in 2005, which the school management team prepared without involving the school committee. Also, 60 percent of the head teachers and 75 percent of the school committee chairpersons indicated that they had only been recently appointed to their positions and, hence, did not possess the requisite skills for preparing WSDPs. Similarly, one head teacher explained that her school only started operating in the January of the year (2006) in which the data were being collected. This being

her first appointment, she had yet to benefit from a seminar on WSDPs, hence the difficulties she, her school and the school committees were facing in preparing WSDPs.

Information obtained through an interview with the MEO revealed that the last seminar for school committees on preparing of WSDPs was conducted in 2004. Since then many changes had taken place, including the transfer of some members from one school to another, the passing away of some committee members and the involvement of other members, particularly teachers in in-service training. The findings show that new primary schools, especially those established since 2005, were the most severely hit when it came to lack of WSDP preparedness due to lack of exposure to any orientation or training. For example, Jamhuri Primary School, which was established in 2006, had no school committee member who had received any such training on WSDP.

These problems are not endemic to Tanzania. Kenya also experienced similar problems when it came to training. Struggling to train school committee members, the Kenya government with assistance from the UK's Department for International Development launched a major programme to train and support primary school committees (Herriot, 1999 as cited in Bray, 1999). The initial evaluations of this programme show a substantial impact as many more school committees were now able to integrate school development planning in their operations. These schools have also enhanced the feeling of ownership and community involvement in the areas where they operate. In other words, the intervention has helped to address a problem that could otherwise have undermined the effectiveness of the school committees. Indeed, the programme has helped the country move make steady progress in the involvement of school committees in the running of these educational institutions. Tanzania could also pick a leaf from Kenya and launch a similar programme.

Evidently, the successful fulfilment of the school committee roles, including the preparation of WSDPs, also depend on the education level of the school committee members since teachers and school teachers by virtue of their professional designation have an adequate educational background. Having school committee members with a good educational level could enable them to cope with the changes and demands of the education sector. Due to the importance of the school committee chairpersons' level of education, the study also sought to determine the educational background of these important members of these entities. The findings have been summarised in Table 4.3:

Table 4.3 School Committee Chairperson's Level of Education

School	Location	Ward	Level of Education	Sex
Jamhuri	Urban	Kiloleni	Form 4	Male
Townschool	Urban	Kiloleni	Form 4	Female
Mwenge	Urban	Cheyo	Form 4	Male
Uhuru	Urban	Cheyo	Form 4	Male
Kitete	Urban	Kitete	Standard 7	Male
Kiyungi	Urban	Kitete	Masters	Male
Gongoni	Urban	Kanyenye	Form 4	Male
Isike	Urban	Kanyenye	Form 4	Male
Kwihara	Rural	Itetemia	Standard 7	Male
Kipalapala	Rural	Itetemia	Standard 7	Male
Kazima	Rural	Itonjanda	Standard 7	Male
Manoleo	Rural	Itonjanda	Standard 7	Male
Itaga	Rural	Misha	Standard 7	Male
Misha	Rural	Misha	Standard 7	Male
Ndevelwa	Rural	Ndevelwa	Standard 7	Male
Itulu	Rural	Ndevelwa	Form 2	Male

Source: Head Teachers' Offices in Primary Schools Under Review (2006)

Table 4.3 demonstrates that only 6.2 percent of the school committee chairpersons had masters, 37 percent had a Form Four education and 6.2 percent of the school committee chairperson had a Form Two education. Half of the school committee chairpersons (50%) only had a Standard VII education, and these accounted for 75 percent of school committee chairpersons in rural-based primary schools. Generally, the majority of the school committee chairpersons had lower education levels than one would anticipate for people holding such responsible positions. And yet the 2002-2006 PEDP, 1978 Education Act amended in 1995 and the ETP of 1995 have all given these committees enormous responsibilities, including participating in WSDPs. From a gender perspective, 93.7 percent of the members of the school committees were male. The implication is that only a few women volunteer in handling management issues or they were culturally marginalised since many of the communities in Tanzania are dominated by patriarchal values.

Malawi also faces a similar problem of the paucity of women in school committees. To increase the participation of women in these school committees, the country enacted legislation that stipulates that one-third

of the places on these school committees should be reserved for females. In reality, however, women continue to be outnumbered in the committees. Indeed, in many cases the quota is either not met or is rarely exceeded (Rose 2003). At seven of 20 schools under review there was no woman in school committees. At one school, the absence of women in school committee was attributed to their refusal to join the committee even when chosen due to the heavy social and economic burden they had to shoulder in their village. Furthermore, women either did not turn up at the meetings or, if present, would often not speak (Rose, 2003). These occurrences are common in many African countries, including Tanzania, where women tend to occupy peripheral roles due to socially-constructed roles, which in the rural areas are also complicated by the heavy burden the women had to carry. Also, historically in Tanzania women do not get as many education opportunities as their male counterparts particularly the higher one goes up the pyramidal educational structure.

Generally, the low level of education among school committee members should be a major concern for the MoEVT and the communities surrounding the school because education remains a major factor in enhancing the performance of the schools and the accountability of those schools, both of which suffer when committee members lack ample education. For example, in the preparation of WSDPs, the uneducated committee members or those with little education could not serve as watchdogs capable of identifying anomalies and challenging issues that do not seem right. The findings are consistent with those of the URT (1997), Sumara (1996), Mpango and Mushi (1998), and Mbena (2005), which all concluded that school committee members, particularly in the rural areas, were generally, illiterate. This reality raises the stakes regarding the importance of training of school committee members to make them more competent participants. Indeed, they need to be made aware of their role in planning, decision-making and monitoring to ensure these committees operate effectively and efficiently as envisaged (Mulengeki, 2004). On the other hand, Moshia and Dachi (2004) found that in rural areas education politics are controlled by the elite class, made up by opinion-makers, vocal parents and those who command resources. In fact, Moshia and Dachi (2004) argue that the ability to mobilise community resources and demand transparency and accountability of the elite class in these are more important to the electorates than the level of formal education of the electees, who in turn to influence the course of events at the grassroots level.

4.3.1 Sources of School Development Plans and Activities

The study also sought to was to find out where the school development plans and activities emanated from. Through semi-structured interviews, 75 percent of school committee chairpersons and 80 percent of the head teachers explained that they used school committee reports as their guide in developing these plans. The explained that they failed to prepare WSDPs because they had not received any seminar or training on preparing WSDPs. The remaining 20 percent of the head teacher and 25 percent of the school committee chairperson indicated that they used the 2005 WSDPs which were out of date. There appears to be negligence and unaccountability in these schools since the stakeholders were not actively involved in management issues contrary to the 1995 ETP, which emphasises that “boards and committees of education and training institutions shall be responsible for management planning, discipline and finance of institutions under jurisdiction”. This anomaly certainly has to be addressed for these committees and their schools to operate much more viably.

4.4. The Role of School Committees in the WSDP Preparation Process

The fourth objective of the study focused on the role of school committees in the WSDP preparation process. The findings show that among the interviewees, 81.8 percent of the head teachers explained that during the WSDPs preparation process, teachers set their three-year implementation targets. They explained that the school committees were at liberty to vet the target, and provide suggestions in accordance with their level of education and experience. Furthermore, 88 percent school committee chairpersons said that school committees were also responsible for endorsing the WSDPs, submitting the plans to the Village level, and then to the MEO for further approval. These school committees were also involved in reading out the prepared WSDPs at the parents-teachers' meetings. This way all the stakeholders—teachers, school committee members, parents and the entire community—were in some way involved in the WSDP preparation process. The involvement of these stakeholders is important because, ideally, each member has an interest and some level of expertise in a particular area, which when integrated in the final whole constitutes a meaningful contribution that help to better the final product. In addition, such education partners can help the school management to determine whether the community is ready to address a given problem or likely to support a particular type of programme (Mead, 2006). Furthermore, stakeholder involvement tends to heighten the sense of ownership among stakeholders and has the potential of bringing about a positive outcome (URT, 1998). It is in this regard that Mwai (2004) underscores the enhancement of the involvement of major stakeholders, especially in decision-making and management of schools. After all, schools would be better off—than otherwise—by doing so.

4.5 The Role of School Committees in WSDP Implementation

This objective was aimed at understanding the role of school committees in the WSDP implementation. Responding, 54.5 percent of the head teachers pointed out during the interviews that the school committees were

responsible for ensuring that the work schedules were on time. In addition, the committees were responsible for ensuring that the plans were implemented as planned. Furthermore, 67 percent of the school committee chairpersons said that school committees conducted a formative evaluation, noting the deficiencies and making necessary adjustments which eventually translate into positive results in the WSDP implementation process. Another 11 percent of the school committee chairperson and 18.2 percent head teachers explained that the school committees were responsible for convincing, influencing, lobbying and negotiating with other parents to participate in planned school development activities.

During the interviews, it was also established from 22 percent of the school committee chairpersons and 18.2 percent of the head teachers that there were sub-committees, which were assigned specific tasks relating to the WSDPs. Similarly, the MEO concurred with the school committee chairpersons and head teachers on the apportioning of different tasks to different sub-committees. Specifically, the school committees were involved in making quotations and purchasing of goods and services, depending on the area each sub-committee was assigned. The MEO also explained that the school committees were participating effectively in overseeing and supervising the construction of school buildings. Generally, these findings demonstrate that school committees were able to participate effectively not only in the implementation of WSDPs, but also in the monitoring and evaluation of these WSDPs. In other words, these committees the involvement of these committees in the preparation of WSDPs, in turn, facilitates their effective participation in the implementation of the WSDPs.

5 Conclusion

Generally, the provision of quality education in Tanzania's primary schools depends on many factors, including good preparation and implementation of WSDPs. As such, there is an urgent need for the schools to have capable school committees at their disposal, which would participate fully and actively alongside the head teachers in the WSDP preparation and implementation processes. This study found that getting qualified school committees, especially in the rural areas that are often disadvantaged not only in terms of infrastructure but also in terms of having ready access to well-educated parents and community members to provide the much needed injection of life in the school committees, remains a challenge. This discrepancy was reflected in the varying capacity of the school committees to prepare and implement WSDPs. The factors mitigating factors included school location, which in turn determined what kind of members would constitute the school committees. The problem was further compounded by lack of training for the committee members that would at least arm them with the tools they need to effectively take part in both the preparation and implementation of the WSDPs. Thus, there is also an urgent need to provide intensive on-going train that includes induction programmes and on-going support to school committees, especially in the rural areas and primary schools still unable to prepare WSDPs to make them conversant with their roles and responsibility assigned in addition to equipping them with the requisite knowledge and skills. These interventions, as was the case in Kenya, can help make a difference when implemented on a sustainable basis. Furthermore, there is a need to also address the issue of gender imbalance since the rather limited representation of the female members of school committee also misses out on their input, which when harnessed could help make a difference.

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