

Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning through Community Participation: Achievements, Limitations and Risks. Early Lessons from the Schooling Improvement Fund in Ghana, 1998, 38 p.



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Annex 1. Background to community participation in education in Ghana

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Summary

This research is based on work conducted during the preparatory phase of the UK Government's support to the Government of Ghana's basic education sector programme. It draws on visits to the Schooling Improvement Fund (SIF) Project and analyses other community education projects as well as interviews with the members of the SIF facilitating Non-governmental Organisation (NGO), CEDEP (Centre for the Development of People). The SIF is currently being implemented in the following districts: Savelugu Nanton, Tano and Sefwi Wiawso.

The paper makes three main points. The first refers to the SIF's focus on community participation. Despite some early signs of progress in increasing community commitment to

school ownership, there are design shortcomings in the scope of participatory activities undertaken and in an appreciation of the practical and institutional barriers to achieving more extensive community empowerment. Secondly, it is argued that increasing community participation in education is not a sufficient condition for improving the quality of teaching and learning; the teachers themselves must be involved as key players in attempts to improve teaching methods and techniques. Thirdly, although increasing community participation and improving the quality of teaching and learning may ultimately impact on access, the relationship is not a given. In some regions of Ghana, education can be made more accessible through improving the quality of teaching and learning but in others a focus on poverty reduction will be an essential requirement.

The paper concludes by synthesising the main practical, technical and institutional proposals reviewed to increase community participation in education, improve the quality of

teaching and learning, and to ensure that both the former have an impact on improving access to education in Ghana.

At the time of writing, the SIF has only just completed a first phase, so it is still in an experimental stage. The approach adopted in this paper has therefore been to enter into the details of the SIF case study, but at the same time to draw upon the broad social development and education literature, with the aim of making practical recommendations for how community participation in Ghana can more successfully contribute to improving quality of education and increasing access.



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1. Introduction

Participatory operations in education can achieve many objectives, including increasing the relevance and quality of education, improving ownership, reaching disadvantaged groups, mobilising additional resources and building institutional capacity¹. A number of participatory projects across the developing regions of Africa, Latin America and Asia have been initiated to improve the quality of education through the provision of local schooling improvement funding mechanisms. In Latin America and some parts of Africa, these mechanisms have been teacher focused. In Ghana and the majority of other cases in Africa, they have been community focused.

¹ N Colletta and G Perkins, 1995, Participation in Education. World Bank Environment Department Papers Participation Series Paper No 001.

This paper analyses recent attempts to expand the depth and scope of community involvement in basic education in Ghana, with the aim of improving the quality of teaching and learning. It focuses on the experiences of the pilot phase of the Schooling Improvement Fund (SIF) project, while drawing upon other examples of community and social fund-type projects in education. It also explores the links between quality of education and access to education.

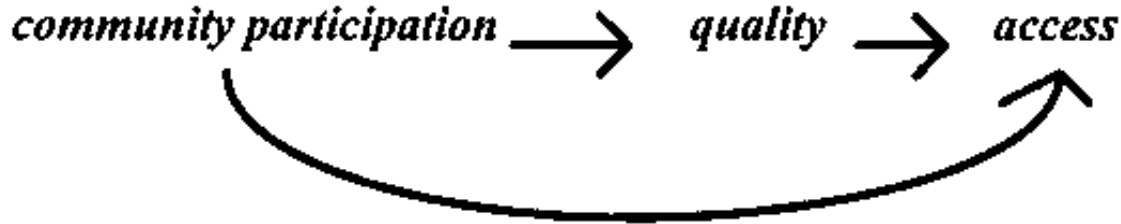
Baku and Agyeman (1997) claim that parents must be made to have a clearer understanding of quality education, because this in itself provides an incentive for them to participate in supporting their school. "In soliciting community participation, it is important to keep parents and the communities fully

informed about the aims and methods of primary education. They need to be assisted to understand what their children will derive from their participation as well as the harm that may be done to the children by lack of parental and community active involvement."² Thus, the social development concern is not limited to whether the following relationship holds true:

² Baku and Agyeman, op. Cit. p. 17.

community participation → *quality*

but if and how a more complex relationship is valid:



The factors affecting community participation, quality and access are many and complex, and involve very real problems of measurement. From the social development perspective, improving the quality of education is important insofar as it offers the potential for helping to increase access to education. This linkage is highlighted in the UK Government White Paper on Development³: "The quality of education is a crucial factor in encouraging parents to enrol their children (particularly girls) and in ensuring they attend school throughout the year."

³ Ibid., p. 23.

Much of the literature on participatory approaches to development focuses on how community participation enhances sustainable development, what it is and how it should be done. While acknowledging that it can involve risks and costs, there are relatively few discussions based on *detailed* case studies which examine why it can be problematic to achieve in practice. Social development practitioners and advisers are aware and concerned that community participation happens more in theory than in practice⁴. The UK Government White Paper on International Development also urges that with limited resources: "We need to know what will work and what will not work." And: "Getting it right means not only investing in effective relationships but in pushing back the boundaries of shared knowledge, understanding the problems which constrain sustainable development and working with national and international partners to develop appropriate, often innovative, solutions which will help to eliminate poverty."⁵

The approach adopted in this paper has therefore been to enter into the details of the SIF case study, but at the same time to draw upon the broad social development and education literature, with the aim of making practical recommendations for how community participation in Ghana can more successfully contribute to improving quality of education and increasing access⁶.

⁴ Rosalind Eyben and Sarah Ladbury, 1992, 'Popular participation in aid assisted projects: why more in theory than practice?', paper presented at GAPP Conference on Participatory Development.

⁵ Department for International Development, 1997, Eliminating World Poverty: A Challenge for the 21st Century. London, p.48.

6 Combining the details of a case study with a more general discussion of community participation and quality makes for slightly dense reading. However, I would argue that it is only by examining the detailed and complex relationship between the various factors -of a practical, technical, design and institutional nature - in a case study that we can work out exactly how and where a project needs modifying to achieve the expected objectives and impact.

The paper makes three main points. The first refers to the SIF's focus on fostering community participation. Despite some early signs of progress in increasing community commitment to school ownership, there are design shortcomings in the scope of participatory activities undertaken and in an appreciation of the practical and institutional barriers to achieving more extensive community

empowerment. Secondly, it is argued that increasing community participation in education is not a sufficient condition for improving the quality of teaching and learning; the teachers themselves must be involved as key players in attempts to improve teaching methods and techniques.

Thirdly, although increasing community participation and improving the quality of teaching and learning may ultimately impact on access, the relationship is not a given. In some regions of Ghana, education can be made more accessible through improving the quality of teaching and learning but in others a focus on poverty reduction will be an essential pre-requisite.

It may seem paradoxical for a social development practitioner to argue that we should recognise the limits of community participation. But if later evaluations of education projects in Ghana judge the impact of community participation to have been negligible in terms of increasing the quality of education, there is a risk that the proverbial baby will be thrown out with

the bath water. The history of education reform in Ghana is fairly rich with 'condemned' as opposed to modified experiments, for instance in distance education and the use of untrained teachers in primary education. The frequent underlying problem has been that not enough attention is paid to the complexity of factors influencing community participation, quality and access in the design of the projects.

The rest of this paper is organised in sections which cover the following areas: The first section examines the SIF project design process in Ghana and the extent to which this facilitated community participation. The second examines the concrete achievements and limitations of the SIF in terms of community empowerment and ownership. In the third section, the limits to community empowerment as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning are discussed. The fourth section examines the relationship between the facilitating NGO, local education authorities and key local institutions (school management committees, parent teacher

associations and district education oversight committees) in terms of mainstreaming approaches and principles of community involvement and governance to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The fifth section examines the broader links between community participation and teaching quality, and access to schooling. The conclusion outlines the main practical and institutional recommendations reviewed to increase community participation in education, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to ensure that both the former have an impact on improving access to education.



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2. The SIF in Ghana - project design and process

The SIF and community participation

Design limitations on extent of participatory activities

The SIF and community participation

The SIF project grew out of a previously World Bank financed programme in Ghana, the Primary School Development Project (PSDP), which had found that an emphasis on providing school infrastructure and materials did not have the intended impact of improving schooling. The World Bank's mid-term review of the PSDP noted that: "It is obvious that much more effort needs to be made to raise awareness among the communities of the need for them to be involved in education."⁷ It recommended a two-pronged approach,

combining information, education and communication (IEC) activities to raise awareness of the value of education, as well as providing a mechanism for responding to the specific needs of the particular school communities and encouraging initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning. At the same time, it was reported that: "There has been no apparent improvement in the performance of teachers in the project schools. Many teachers report to school late, and some only go to school two or three times a week. School attendance records are not properly kept. Very little teaching is going on in many classrooms, and instructional time is not used effectively."

⁷ World Bank, 199?., Mid-term Review of the PSDP, p.4

It was decided that the SIF project should be piloted in phases, to allow time to learn from both projects experience.

At the time of writing, the SIF has only just completed a first phase, so it is still in an experimental phase. However, it is useful even at this stage to attempt to draw out lessons learnt as the project moves into an expanded second phase.

These lessons could also be useful in a broader sense, as similar schooling improvement fund-type projects are initiated in other countries.

The main objectives of the SIF were two-fold: to increase community participation and ownership of schools, and to improve the quality of schooling. The two objectives were understood to be essentially linked. Thus: "The SIF is a mechanism for financing small-scale incentives to encourage community-based demand-driven initiatives which demonstrate a potential for improving the quality of teaching and learning, and to foster a sense of community ownership of schools and thereby enhance community interest and

active participation in the education process"⁸. There was some confusion over whether community participation was really considered as an end in itself or as a means, or both. The SIF manual (a sort of working document for the project implementers) does, as has been said above, describe it as an objective.

⁸ World Bank, 1997, Ghana SIF Mid-term evaluation Terms of Reference.

In the early stages of project identification, a Ghanaian NGO, CEDEP (Centre for the Development of People), was approached to provide the facilitating role in the SIF pilot because of its good track record on engaging communities in participatory development activities. Discussions with members of the NGO about the relative lack of 'teacher development inputs' suggest that they regarded the community ownership of schools element as a means of

achieving improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. The NGO, however, found itself obliged to get involved in implementing the SIF to a greater extent than had been expected for a number of reasons which are discussed below. It was therefore under intense pressure to try to keep to the original timetable for the pilot project, and it admitted that, regrettably, time devoted to facilitating community participation activities got squeezed.

CEDEP also believed (and this was reflected in the project design) that to a large extent their main goal was to address the community participation and ownership objective, and (this point emerged during several discussions, including the mid-term review) that the improved quality would emerge from the community empowerment. Paradoxically then, during the SIF pilot there were three sets of problems and shortcomings with this emphasis on community participation. These were:

- i.) design limitations in the extent of participatory activities undertaken;
- ii.) unforeseen practical and institutional barriers to achieving the degree of community empowerment aimed for through the participatory activities actually undertaken; and
- iii.) over-optimism concerning the potential of community involvement to achieve the project's objective of improving the quality of teaching and learning.

Taken together, we might wonder *even if* CEDEP had had both adequate time and appropriate planning of the participatory activities they engaged in during the preparatory stage of the SIF, it would be doubtful if this alone could have achieved both of the project's objectives.

BOX 1. SIF Process

Mobilisation (months 1 to 2)

- review and approval of Operational Manual;
- contracting and equipping facilitator;
- signing Memo of Understanding with District Assemblies;
- identification and selection of GVOs (Grassroots Voluntary Organisations);
- formation of SMCs;
- organisation of Orientation Workshops;
- constituting District Approval Committees (DACs);
- organisation of community workshops;
- distribution of application forms and guidelines to project schools.

Project design and appraisal (months 2 to 3)

- identification and prioritisation of educational needs;

- formulation of SIPs;
- submission of SIPs to facilitator/GVOs;
- appraisal of pre-qualification of application;
- submission of appraisal reports to DACs;
- approval of SIPs by DACs;
- submission of approved reports to PMU (Project Management Unit).

Launching of SIPs (Schooling Improvement Plans) **(month 4)**

- organisation of Launch Workshop;
- opening of SIP bank accounts;
- signing of financing agreements;
- disbursement of first SIP funds.

Implementation and review (months 5 to 10)

- purchasing of materials;
- mobilisation of labour and technical assistance;

- preparation of instructional materials;
- execution of other SIP components;
- submission of monitoring reports by communities;
- submission of monitoring reports by Facilitator;
- submission of first financial reports;
- disbursement of second SIP funds;
- submission of second financial reports;
- evaluation and review workshop;
- issue of certificates of completion.

Source: SIF Operational Manual

Design limitations on extent of participatory activities

It is questionable if the pilot project design encouraged the facilitating NGO to engage the communities in the most appropriate kind of participatory activities. The communities were obliged to contribute 20 per cent of the total costs of

their schooling improvement fund plan, either in labour (for instance, in digging the pit latrines or levelling the playing field area) or in money. They could decide on the total budget for their plan, up to a ceiling of 12 to 13 million cedis (the equivalent of about £4,000 or \$6,500). Examples of how communities contributed, and the extent to which their participation gave them a sense of ownership in their schools are discussed below in the following section.

Colletta and Perkins⁹ describe a more intense degree of participation as one where decisions and actions are initiated by the beneficiary group themselves, including determining the school curriculum content, the school calendar and teacher recruitment. They say that when this has happened, the results can be that morale is boosted, drop out and repeater rates reduced, achievement scores improved, and enrolment demand expanded. Yet the authors do not enter into details concerning the scope and the influence of these

success stories, and it remains unclear whether these only occur in small-scale projects (for instance, in the NGO, Action Aid's, "shepherd" schools in northern Ghana) or have become more broadly institutionalised in certain countries.

⁹ Op. Cit. p.6.

The SIF project did not set out to engage in these sorts of activities with communities. Possibly it was for this reason that the link in the SIF between community participation and improving the quality of teaching and learning remained a weak one. However, it shall also be argued below that there is a limit to how far community participation alone can help bring about the desired increase in quality of teaching and learning.

BOX 2. Guidelines for activities eligible for SIF funding

a. production of instructional aids (with encouragement to

produce locally relevant teaching aids at school/community level);

b. equipment (such as weighing scales, graduated measuring jars, math sets, agricultural equipment, thermometers and weather stations);

c. minor repairs to existing school infrastructure (e.g. door locks and hinges);

d. specialised furniture (such as storage cupboards);

e. improvements to the physical environment (erosion control measures and other environmental activities);

f. simple, relatively inexpensive water and sanitation facilities;

g. physical education kits (e.g. Footballs, netball equipment,

jerseys and nets);

h. training and technical assistance (e.g. in special skills for teachers, such as effective reading techniques and technical assistance to implement difficult SIP activities);

i. other (e.g. Bicycles for teachers, library books, support to learning-oriented school association programmes such as excursions which promote the objectives of a diversified curriculum)

Source: SIF Operational Manual

The project also had some difficulties in maximising its input and support during the stage of facilitation in the formulation of the SIF plans (SIPs). Four factors were identified as explaining shortcomings in the actual formulation of the SIPs, most of which relate to the tight timing of the pilot design. These were: i.) the pilot's tight deadlines inadvertently

encouraged participants to devote undue attention to outputs (for instance, the plans themselves) at the expense of the community empowerment process; ii.) the SIF Operational Manual was not available in the communities or the School Management Committees (SMCs); iii.) the initial inexperience of the CEDEP field supervisors led to a rather mechanical application of the manual's guidelines; and iv.) training for the SMCs eventually took place after the preparation of the SIPs, due to other tight deadlines. One of the members of the SIF mid-term review team commented: "Considering that the process of SIP development is the single most important instrument for achieving community ownership, adequate time should be allowed for this important stage in future", and: "The SIF methodology ought to devote more attention to creating a demand for quality education. This will require lengthening the preparation time in order to allow for a higher standard of animation".¹⁰

10 D. Korboe, 1997, notes on the SIF mid-term review.

Again, although it may have been necessary and wise for the SIF to set limits to its scope, it could be argued that the project missed the opportunity to engage in some participatory activities which appear to have had an impact in other countries on improving access to and quality in education. Baku and Agyeman (1997) identify the non-attainment of expected benefits from education as one of the opportunity costs or factors militating against access: "... functional education should keep track of and pace with the economic life and growth of the community. This implies that *the content and, indeed the objectives of education are important determinants of access to education as well as retention...* Parents may not have any motivation to send their children to school and the children themselves [not] want to remain in school if education, by its content, gives no hope

or prospect of better jobs and better life in the future than for those who fail to attend school."¹¹

¹¹ Baku and Agyeman, op. Cit. p. 12, authors italics.

Some of these design shortcomings have been addressed during the design of the second phase. The early stage of preparation will include a phase of PLA (participatory learning and action), to devote more attention to discussions around the value of education, and what good quality education means, and what are the real problems of schooling. A pilot trial of the PLA has already taken place, as a tack-on to the first pilot phase (by then, these communities were in the last stages of implementing their SIF plans). It aimed to focus on issues of how teacher-community relationships could be improved, how to improve attendance rates, and appropriate levels of supervision on all sides. Some of the CEDEP team

feel that this exercise has usefully helped focus attention away from the SIF project inputs and more towards practical ways in which communities and teachers can work in closer collaboration.



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2. Community empowerment and ownership

Achievements

Limitations¹³

Achievements

The SIF pilot did manage to generate a considerable degree of involvement and interest from community members. Community commitment to education was demonstrated through participation (to varying degrees across the 60 communities) in drawing up the SIF plans and through their 20 per cent contributions to the cost of the project, a combination of labour and money contributions. But although most of them had engaged in communal labour, in many instances people reported that they had only engaged in this work because they were obliged to or would be fined if they did not, which does not of itself demonstrate much of a sense of real commitment and ownership of their school. Communities also participated through making visits to schools to check whether new equipment and other items had arrived, but it was not clear whether they were making more regular visits to the schools since the SIF. Some

individuals contributed money, but in certain rural areas this was left to the local committees or religious bodies.

The women contributed to the communal labour in terms of fetching water, carrying bricks, sand and mortar. But many of them were unsure about the end product of their labour; some confused it with other projects taking place at the same time. Few of them attended the SMC meetings to design the SIF plan (often because the meetings were held at a time when they could not attend), but they claimed that their ideas and suggestions were passed on by their men folk.

Discussions with focus groups of women suggest that they had contributed some good ideas and realistic comments on the SIF plan and more generally on how to improve their school. In one community, women had the initiative of encouraging food sellers to provide food by the side of the school for their children, to further encourage the children to stay in school for the whole duration of the day's lessons.

When discussing poor learning outcomes, one group of

women criticised the teachers for poor performance, but they also pointed out that parents were at fault for not disciplining their children, and the children themselves were at fault.

The communities and teachers were also asked what impact they considered the project had had by the mid-term review. People claimed that improvements could already be seen both in the quality of education and in community cooperation, but in many cases, the examples given of such improvements were questionable. These examples and additional comments are given in Box 3. They suggested often more a perception that the flourish of activities around the SIF *must have* led to improvements. Community members were convinced that the quality of teaching and learning had improved *because*, they believed, attendance and punctuality had improved, and yet the school records do not on the whole back up the assertion of increased enrolments and improved attendance rates.

Box 4: Impact of the SIF: examples cited by community

members

- "the children are happier since the SIF items have arrived, especially the footballs and jerseys and games such as ludo"
- "the children have participated in the SIF, for instance, in helping to clear the land around the school"
- "the children are now actively involved in study groups in the evenings, rather than watching television, videos or wandering around the village or town"
- "the children arrive punctually" Some said they even rush to arrive early in school -but one parent said they do this because otherwise they will be caned (!)
- most parents claim they are satisfied with the SIF "because the children are now attending school and are

respectful", although some still consider there are outstanding problems

- "the community (especially the SMC) come more often to the District Assembly to discuss schooling issues and show greater interest and involvement in the school"
- "the community visit the school itself more often" but these visits tend to provoke discussions narrowly related to the SIF plan, for instance, on the leveling of the playing fields
- "enrolments have increased and attendance improved."
(However, the records, inaccurate as they are - the teachers themselves commonly admit that they do not keep them up to date - actually suggest that the opposite may be the case in many of the SIF schools. In other instances, it was likely that enrolments may have increased through pupils changing from attending a non-SIF to a SIF school. Thus, there may not have been a real increase in

enrolments.)

- "the teachers are more committed." (When asked for examples, some parents said that they are giving extra classes for the pupils, and they have observed that when they visit the school, the teachers are busy teaching)
- a group of pupils reported that: "teachers are now more punctual." However, when asked why, one of them explained: "Lots of people come from Wiawso on bikes [the project staff and district education officers], and now they teach. We don't know them, but they are checking the teachers and so the teachers have become more serious. They have also given regular exercises out of school"
- "the community now helps teachers solve their problems, including improving the rooms they rent out to them." Community members impressed on the new teachers that they would teach better if they lived in the community, near

the school.

- some claimed: "the most important part of the SIF is the cladding of the pavillions" (however, that was actually part of an earlier project)
- some people either claimed that they had seen "no differences or improvements in the school", and the problems were a combination of the teachers who often speak poor English, and the poor attention of the pupils.

Source: notes from the mid-term review

A more important question is whether the SIF plans provided solutions to the problems identified by the community members. When asked what they saw as the main problems affecting their school, the answers were commonly: extra textbooks were needed; school furniture was lacking; the school buildings were in poor condition; teachers had

problems in finding accommodation; there was high pupil and teacher absenteeism; and many teachers could not speak good English.

An examination of the plans and discussions with community members suggest that in their contribution to the SIF design, parents focused on the things they could both understand and influence, which is arguably both rational and wise. They could, for instance, at least understand the value and results to be gained from improved recreational, drinking and sanitary facilities, which they saw as helping to keep children in school. Parents pointed out that before the arrival of the recreational facilities, the children would often get themselves injured in dangerous games. However, since the emphasis was on football fields under recreational facilities, one might wonder what impact this would actually have in increasing girls' interest in schooling¹². One man pointed out during the SIF evaluation that even if his son were never to do well at

school, he might at least become a good football player since that the school has acquired a playing field (and the success of the young Ghanaian football team suggests that he has a point). But this 'jollification' emphasis (making the school a more fun and attractive place for children - or boys at least) provides only part of the answer to improving schooling.

12 In a more recent visit to a SIF school in Savelugu Nanton district, in February 1998, the school had been closed early because the morning had been devoted to a football match. The girls' role was to stand by and cheer on the boys, and then wash their football jerseys after the match.

The fact that the communities contributed in the decision making process and in money and labour to the SIF plans arguably shows a *minimum* commitment to their ownership of the schools, but not yet to an active role in improving the

quality of teaching and learning. The mass meetings of the communities, and meetings of the SMCs and of women's groups which fed into the decision making process have put into motion an important process which could improve schooling. But working against this is the fact that the plans are not, on the whole, addressing the real problems of schooling, and the influence of the communities may only last for the duration of the project, while there is a lot of money and attention from local education offices, the Ministry of Education (MoE) and Ghana Education Service (GES) in Accra and the aid community. To quote the answer of one pupil to the question of why teachers were performing better: "Lots of people come from Wiawso on bikes [the project staff and district education officers], and now they teach. We don't know them, but they are checking the teachers and so the teachers have become more serious."

Limitations¹³

13 In this section, I am also drawing on a joint report by myself and Trevor Robertson, based on a visit to SIF communities in Sefwi Wiawso district in April 1997. The full report is available in both our visit reports to DFID.

Power and influence

Administrative and management skills

There were significant practical and institutional barriers to achieving full community empowerment, which the design of the pilot did not fully take into account. Discussions with the SIF communities suggest that there *are* limits to community ownership as long as community members lack political clout (power and influence) and key skills (administrative and managerial type skills).

Power and influence

Turning first to the communities' lack of power and influence, discussions with groups in the communities suggest that they perceive some of the key problems in schooling as the lack of sufficient and adequate pedagogical materials including textbooks, and furniture; teacher absenteeism, and local political and community differences affecting education. These are problems which communities feel, based on experience, that they have little or no power to influence. The SIF project specifically excluded the option of communities choosing to purchase textbooks or furniture through the SIF plan. This was because the SIF was not intended to be a miniature whole education reform package in and of itself (and arguably it was good that the SIF refrained from adopting such ambitious objectives), but was supposed to complement other projects and interventions. The World Bank manager of the schooling improvement fund-type project in Chile, insisted that this sort of schooling improvement project

can only work *as long as* other education reforms, projects and packages of assistance are taking place simultaneously¹⁴. The District Assemblies of the three SIF pilot districts had undertaken to provide a "matching fund", to clad remaining unclad school pavilions and provide outstanding supplies of textbooks and furniture. However, by the time of the mid-term review, this support was still not in place, not even in Sefwi Wiawso, the district which appeared to demonstrate the keenest interest and support for the project.

¹⁴ From a meeting held in January 1998.

Additionally, it was apparently not made clear enough to the communities that the plans might either not be accepted at all, or altered slightly by the district approval committee (DAC) and central MoE. Some of the CEDEP district field supervisors were aware that not all of the requests made by

the communities corresponded strictly to the SIF criteria as laid out in the Operational Manual, but at the same time they felt that to say 'no' to the communities risked undermining their sense of ownership. At some stage in the judication of the plans, the MoE decided that a degree of streamlining of the plans was probably necessary, so it cut back on some of the requests, especially for recreational kits and bicycles for teachers. CEDEP reported (during the mid-term review discussions with them) that these modifications led to suspicion on the part of the community, and they had to waste some time regaining lost ground in restoring local confidence that the projects would still go ahead.

Teacher absenteeism and subsequent poor relations between community and teachers was particularly marked in Sefwi Wiawso district. The district is composed of an inordinately high proportion of migrant worker families, mainly coming from eastern Ghana to work in the cocoa areas of the Western Region of Ghana. Teachers, on the other hand,

were predominantly from Western Region and, according to many accounts, tend to despise the migrant worker families. Complaints made by the 'foreign' community members to the district education office (whose staff are mainly local Sefwi Wiawso residents) about teacher absenteeism or bad teacher behaviour appear not to have met with much response. This state of affairs prompted one of the CEDEP field supervisors to comment: "... we need to get district directors to respond immediately to problems of teacher performance and the need for books, otherwise communities feel they are not the *real owners* of teaching issues in their villages." The field supervisors posted by CEDEP to this district found themselves in the delicate position of personally receiving support from the progressive district director of education, but becoming increasingly aware that his office and the district assembly were either unable or unwilling (or a combination of both) to respond to problems concerning teacher behaviour and lack of textbooks.

Local power relations and hierarchies need to be recognised as a fairly potent and entrenched aspect of community structures. CEDEP pointed out during the mid-term review discussions that even if they had had more time to engage in the facilitation process with the communities to ensure that they took the major role in developing their plans, the community members might still have handed over the task to the teachers, in the recognition that it is up to them to decide how the SIF resources should be spent.

Administrative and management skills

Community members also lacked a set of skills central to the actual execution of their SIF plans, namely conceptualising and planning a project, and the ability to handle finance, budgeting and implementation. The only kind of technical assistance which they might have been able to access, according to the SIF Operational Manual (see Box 2), was to implement difficult components of the plans, but this does not

cover all the areas of expertise which they required. The limited capacity of all but a few in the community to deal with this set of issues meant that the SIF plans and projects were heavily dependent on either a few local teachers or local elites or on external advice and support. Thus, real ownership of the SIF plans was effectively out of the hands of the majority of the community members.

CEDEP had to spend more time than had been anticipated in the design of the pilot on giving practical assistance to the SMCs, for instance, in opening bank accounts and finding and purchasing the materials for their plans. One of the districts had talked about the idea of setting up a central purchasing consortium, but this suggestion was finally rejected as it was considered that this would reduce the role and therefore ownership of the SMCs in the project. But if the communities, through the SMCs are going to be expected to engage in practice, administrative and management activities which are quite new to them, it is important that adequate time and

attention is devoted to assisting them to learn how to carry out these duties, otherwise more valuable time which could be spent in discussing schooling issues and difficulties may get side-tracked into assisting in sorting out administrative and practical difficulties.



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3. Limits to community empowerment as a means of improving quality of teaching and learning

On all sides (MoE, donors and CEDEP) there appears to

have been over-optimism or a lack of clarity (or, less generously, a lack of educational expertise and advice) concerning the potential link between community empowerment and improvements in the quality of teaching and learning. During meetings with the SIF communities and during the evaluation, it became evident that there were limits to how far community involvement (if not actual empowerment) can achieve the goal of improving quality of teaching and learning as long as the communities themselves lack sufficient pedagogical knowledge, and as long as certain key institutions are left out of the drive to improve quality. The only area of possible funding in the SIF plans which covered training assistance (see Box 2), gave the example of training in effective reading techniques. All the communities opted for this training for their teachers, but no other kind of training. It seems quite certain that they just took the example offered, rather than first being assisted to acquire a better understanding of teaching and learning processes. CEDEP's

own mid-term evaluation of its activities in support of the SIF was self-critical in the extent to which the local facilitators guided communities in making decisions for the SIPs:

"Communities should not be over directed in proposals."¹⁵

15 CEDEP, Mid-term Evaluation Report on the SIF, May 1997.

This exclusive focus on the community role in improving quality risks creating an unfortunate backlash. If communities participate extensively and still do not see any improvements in schooling (for instance, in terms of examination results), they may feel that their efforts are in vain¹⁶. Baku and Agyeman¹⁷ demonstrate that community participation is predicated on an awareness of school problems, for which the community members rely on teachers to reliably inform them of the problems faced by the school. So, if the teachers cannot accurately assess their own problems, the community

will be none the wiser. One teacher voiced his opinion (which according to the accounts of the community facilitators was quite common): "the community has no idea of what is needed in teaching".

16 In fact, no matter how successful the intervention, it would probably take some time before examination results improve enough to be statistically significant. But again, this is another issue which it would be worthwhile to discuss with communities, so that they are not labouring under unrealistically high expectations.

17 op. Cit. p.59.

It also risks promoting a more severely punitive behaviour towards school children: once teachers are in the classroom and teaching materials are also present, if results continue to be poor, there will be a temptation to blame the child for not

trying harder. Some members of the SIF review team noticed several instances of teachers beating pupils for arriving late to school or for getting the answer wrong. And it has been noted above (see Box 3) that some parents reported (apparently approvingly) that their children are now punctual because otherwise they will be caned. Although the Ghanaian Government made corporal punishment in schools illegal about ten years ago, it still takes place, and it would seem that there is scope for it to increase unless teachers learn what they consider to be more satisfactory ways of getting their pupils to learn effectively.

The focus on the communities also risks creating a backlash of opposition from others (teachers and education specialists) to community involvement in such projects. The project's focus on communities rather than teachers resulted quite frequently in a conflictual situation between the teachers and the communities. Even while lacking the means to become fully empowered, the project achieved its goal of

encouraging communities to question teachers, which in many cases put their backs up, negatively affected teacher-community relations, and reduced the chance of mutual cooperation to improve the quality of schooling. The following discussion seeks to point out that teachers are, nevertheless, of central importance to the task of improving teaching and learning outcomes.

Some education specialists argue that it is precisely the sort of classroom interaction which takes place, especially for girls, that most influences quality of learning outcomes, in terms of dropping out of school and achieving good enough exam results: "Qualitative research conducted in class-rooms reveals common patterns and characteristics of girls' learning environments, which include teachers' interaction with students, their attitudes and beliefs about female and male students; and the tasks and duties they assign. These patterns, which form an integral part of a school's hidden curriculum and affect students' learning outcomes, reveal

much about gender and relationships of power and authority in the school environment."¹⁸ Miske and Van Belle Prouty insist that teachers are central figures at the micro-level of change and transformation in the classroom. A report from a recent joint DFID/GES visit of schools in northern Ghana proposes: "The essential component in making a difference in the classroom is that teachers know how to teach, i.e. how to bring about meaningful learning. Once teachers have these skills, then improved infrastructure, accommodation or transport for teachers and strategies to improve access will assist the process, but without the former, none of the latter components on their own will necessarily make any difference to the quality of teaching and learning. There is no value in exhorting teachers to do better, work harder nor provide incentives, if they do not know how to bring about effective, meaningful learning."¹⁹

18 Shirley Miske and Diane Van Belle Prouty,

January 1997, Schools are for girls too: Creating an environment of validation. SD Publication Series, Office of Sustainable Development Bureau for Africa, Technical Paper No. 41, pp. 3-4.

¹⁹ Mary Surridge, December 1997, 'Appraisal visit to selected districts in the Northern Region and Upper East Region', visit report.

A comparison between the SIF in Ghana with experiences to date in applying schooling improvement fund-type projects within education programmes funded primarily by the World Bank in other developing countries also throws into question the role which communities can play in improving the quality of teaching and learning. The evidence is not yet clear on this comparison, because none of these projects have yet reached completion, but there are early indications available through reports and other documentation. Later this year, the

World Bank intends to hold a review of experience in these projects. Until then, there is not even a list of how many such projects exist, nor of their main characteristics, so much of the following information has been gleaned through discussions held with some of the World Bank managers ('team leaders') responsible for these projects as well as from personal experience in monitoring one of these projects in Guinea.²⁰

20 I am extremely grateful for the comments and insights provided to me by Yon Kimaro, William Experton, Penelope Bender and Eluned Roberts-Schweitzer of the World Bank during discussions held in January 1998.

In Latin America, there are several schooling improvement fund projects in progress. Most, if not all, of these are teacher focused. The teachers are provided with the

necessary support to analyse the problems in their schools (the focus usually being on pedagogical problems), and come up with solutions which they write up in the form of a mini project. To obtain funding for the project, the project usually passes through a series of 'juries', commonly composed of teacher trainers, education experts and local and central Ministry of Education bureaucrats, which can either accept, reject or request modifications of the project.

There are about a dozen of these projects taking place in the Africa region, but there the model tends to be that it is the community which draws up and executes the schooling improvement fund project, rather than the teachers. The exceptions are the projects in Guinea and Senegal (and possibly to a lesser extent in Burkina Faso), where the model is entirely teacher-focused. The rationale for the community approach appears to be that the projects in Africa were conceived as part of a framework of measures to reduce the costs of education, by encouraging communities to contribute

to the costs of their own schools²¹ (this highly significant point is taken up below under quality, community participation and access). The concern which has motivated the approach in the teacher focused projects has tended to be with how to make teachers full partners in their own professional development, that is, through combining a top down (external expertise) and bottom up (teacher initiative and autonomy) approach. In the words of one of the facilitators for the Guinean Small Grants Programme (schooling improvement fund-type project): "The Small Grants Programme is premised on our conviction that we cannot circumvent teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools."²²

21 However, this may be a false economy. Taking the comparison of Ghana and Guinea, it has been said above that the Ghanaian SIF requires communities to contribute twenty per cent of the

total cost of the projects, in money and labour. The Guinean projects did not require any financial contribution from the teachers, although it did require extensive time to be devoted to project preparation and execution. The financial ceiling for the projects in Ghana was, again as mentioned above, approximately US\$6,500; the ceiling in Guinea was just \$1,000. *Even if the* impact of these teacher-focused and community-focused schooling improvement fund projects were found to be similar (and early indications suggest that Guinea has the advantage), the Ghanaian Government would have invested more money per community (despite the community contribution), than the Guinean Government. It could be argued that this comparison is a gross over-simplification of the two education programmes, and it is certainly true that there are many other factors at play. But it is also

true that the Ghanaian basic education programme overall has much more money invested in it than the Guinean primary education programme.

²² Martial Dembele, March 1997, 'Small Grants in Guinea: Finding Ways to Transform Small-scale Incentives into Widespread Commitment', Paper presented at the annual conference of the Comparative and International Education Society, Mexico City.

Experience shows that even when the project is teacher-focused, an extremely difficult and lengthy process is necessary to assist teachers to come to grips with what the *real* problems and difficulties are in teaching and learning. It is no surprise that the operational manuals, at least for the Chile and Guinea projects, run to several box files worth, while the Ghanaian SIF operational manual consists of one

document of about 60 pages. Dembele²³ describes the application of this approach in a resource scarce country such Guinea as a formidable challenge, which is further complicated by the teachers' relatively low level of formal education. See Box 4.

23 *ibid.*

Box 5: Teachers struggle to identify their real problems in a school in Guinea

Towards the end of one intensive training session with teams of teachers held in a hot, dusty school in Middle Guinea one weekend, there was an important break-through in comprehension, which took a long time to achieve. One team was presenting its project proposal to the other teams. The proposal, like many others, identified the main pedagogical problem as teachers' poor understanding of

French. The solution, again typically, was identified as the provision of more textbooks. After much animated discussion, another team pointed out that if the problem was a poor understanding of French, the provision of more textbooks in itself would not provide the solution: what the teachers really needed was training in French and training in how best to teach the language to their pupils.

Source: own visit notes, 1996

Despite the difficulties, early indications from the Guinea project seem to suggest that this approach has had an impact in improving the quality of teaching and learning, and in improving teacher motivation.

It should also be borne in mind that the teacher-focused project does involve the communities, to a greater or lesser degree. The participation of communities tends to be elicited and solicited through the greater commitment, motivation and

success of the teacher involvement in improving schooling. In this sense, community participation is one of the ends rather than the means of improving the quality of teaching and learning. A rather unusual project among the 5,000 or so teacher-designed schooling improvement projects in Chile, was one where the teachers decided to create a garden for their school (adopting high-technology but not costly agricultural techniques) in one of the most inaccessible desert areas of Chile. The local community apparently regarded the garden as nothing short of a miracle, and were very willing to become more involved in and supportive of the school in a variety of ways, including tending to the garden.

The Ghanaian Ministry of Education might therefore be advised to focus programmes on improving the quality of teaching and learning more directly on teachers, drawing on support from education expertise and from MoE/GES staff at all levels, as well as other stakeholders concerned with teacher development, such as the Ghanaian National Union of

Teachers. The task would by no means be an easy one, but it may be the only way in the long term of improving the quality of teaching and learning. It should be pointed out that the SIF facilitating NGO, CEDEP, sought to remedy some of the shortcomings in the project design vis-a-vis the lack of teacher involvement. It introduced training especially for teachers, to seek to redress the imbalance between community and teacher involvement. However, the SIF remains very weak in the area of teacher development, and proposals for the second phase of the pilot appear not to address this issue.

We should turn back to how the communities themselves defined the difficulties in their schools. One of the major problems identified was the lack of adequate supervision and monitoring of teachers. The very presence of teachers in the classroom is one factor positively correlated with quality improvements in teaching and learning²⁴. While community

members may not be capable of recognising good teaching methods from poor ones, they are capable themselves of monitoring whether or not teachers and pupils are present during school hours. But it then becomes important that higher authorities, starting with the head teacher and moving up to the district education authorities and even up to the central Ministry of Education if necessary, respond to evidence of high absenteeism and poor teacher performance, as was pointed out under 'ii.)' above.

24 T Allsop's paper: review of fifty or so education projects in Africa, 1996

The issues of parental monitoring and understanding of quality, are likely to be addressed to some extent in the new MoE School Performance, Appraisal and Monitoring programme (SPAM). The objective of the SPAM is to ensure that school testing is carried out regularly in all schools in a district; the results for the schools are then ranked for the

district and taken back by circuit supervisors for discussion with members of each community. The SPAM is due to be tried out shortly in the SIF communities. Earlier piloting of the SPAM has demonstrated that these successive ranking exercises have done much to raise awareness in the communities about the relative quality of schooling which their children are receiving, and provide a useful tool for communities and district education offices (through circuit supervisors) to monitor standards. The SPAM should not be seen as a substitute for a teacher-focused schooling improvement and development programme, but together with such a programme, it could help to bridge the gap in community understanding of what quality education and learning is about.

As the education reform programme has become gradually more mainstreamed within MoE/GES, the mechanisms for effective cross-Divisional cooperation are still at a fledgling stage. In this climate, the SIF risks being seen as exclusively

'a community participation project' whilst a new project which focuses on teacher development to bring about 'whole school change' currently does not articulate a strong requirement for community involvement, and a financial management programme is set to pursue its programme without the collaboration of divisions in charge of either teacher education or access and community participation. There are plenty of other examples of 'go it alone' initiatives. As such, they each risk coming under heavy criticism for not addressing other fundamental issues necessary to ensure comprehensive reform of the education system.



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4 Relationship between NGO and local institutions and education authorities

Community level
District level

Large NGOs, usually internationally based but including some national organisations based in-country are increasingly being used as intermediaries between Government and donor, and local beneficiaries. There is much ongoing debate concerning what their role could and should be. Because 'NGO' can cover such a broad range of organisations, it is important to establish the type of NGO being considered in these debates. Farrington and Bebbington warn that "for all their

talk about participation and capacity building, NGOs perform better at delivering services (inputs, seed, health, education, etc.) or implementing projects such as road and canal-building. Several analyses of NGOs have come to the conclusion that they do not reach the poorest of the poor."²⁵ During an ODA/NGO seminar in 1992, many participants claimed that: "The most appropriate role for a local NGO would not necessarily be in the delivery of services or aid but in organising the consultation, feasibility and planning process with the local community, or assisting communities to access government services and pressure government to deliver them effectively."²⁶ Commenting on some key factors which make community-based institutions effective, Francis et al (1996) argue that the qualities and skill of leadership, especially to be able to mediate between village and government office, are crucial to community advancement.²⁷

25 J Farrington and A Bebbington, 1993, Reluctant Partners? Non-Governmental Organisations, the State and Sustainable Agricultural Development, Routledge, p.15.

26 ODA, 1992, 'Report on the ODA/NGO Seminar on Popular Participation', p.21.

27 P Francis et al, 1996, State, Community and Local Development in Nigeria, World Bank Technical Paper No. 336, Africa Region Series.

It has been argued above that the facilitating NGO cannot do everything to bring about community participation, and that community participation alone is only part of the solution to improving the quality of teaching and learning. In other words, we cannot offload so many difficulties and problems on NGOs and communities. What then is and should be the role

of other institutions and education authorities in mainstreaming approaches and principles of community involvement and governance?

At the time of its design, the SIF project concentrated on working out a vertical structure, from the highest level of the Steering Group down to the School Management Committee, with the Ministry of Education's Project Management Unit and the facilitating NGO falling between these levels. However, it played less attention to horizontal structures, that is, the relationship of different actors at the district and local community level. The financing mechanism for the SIF adopted a straight top to bottom structure: funds passed directly from the Project Management Unit (PMU) of the MoE to the SMCs on the basis of their approved SIF plans. The PMU also directly financed CEDEP for its role in running and facilitating the pilot. No funding passed through the Ministry of Education and the central, regional or district offices of the Ghana Education Service.

When the SIF pilot began, there would have been justifiably little confidence in the capacity at district level for district authorities to play a greater role. With recent developments in the decentralising of budgeting and financial management from the centre to the districts, it now becomes more feasible and necessary to respond to the challenge of working out in greater detail the necessary horizontal relationships, bringing together expertise at district level covering communication skills to improve access and community participation as well as greater management for efficiency (especially on the whole area of sanctions and incentives for teachers) and teacher development (including a focus on improving teaching and learning methods).

It is generally agreed that the institutional and social context have a critical role to play in providing the conditions for sustainable economic development. As a rule of thumb, "it is easier to build on existing institutions than to create new

ones."²⁸, and Putnam²⁹ demonstrates, in his study of civic traditions in modern Italy, that the civic community has deep historical roots, so we might be ill-advised to rush into creating new institutions. But how a project should work with local, grassroots institutions, to what extent it should seek to change or modify them (for instance, in terms of encouraging greater female participation and working to change what might be an elite identity and lack of representation of the wider community), and how it should encourage the forging or consolidation of links between these organisations and local government authorities are all outstanding issues which need to be tackled sensitively. Francis et al provide a useful checklist of the kind of explanations given for not getting the institutional and social questions right. These are: poor technical design of implementing institutions; absence of suitable institutions at the local level; disconnect between an indigenous order and an externally imposed institutional framework; failure to incorporate an emerging 'civil society';

difficulty of establishing credible, enforceable contracts; and lack of 'generalised trust'.³⁰

²⁸ Colletta and Perkins, op. Cit.

²⁹ R Putnam, 1993, Making democracy work: civic traditions in modern Italy. Princeton University Press

³⁰ P Francis et al, op. cit., p.3.

We need, therefore, to analyse to what extent key institutions were involved at community and district level in the SIF pilot, and how their role and interaction might be strengthened in future with the aim of mainstreaming approaches and principles of community involvement and governance.

Community level

The two important institutions at the school and community level are the Parent Teachers' Associations (PTAs) and School Management Committees (SMCs). PTAs have existed throughout Ghana for many years. As the name implies, membership is restricted to teachers and the parents of pupils who attend a given school. In 1994, the Government of Ghana inaugurated the institution of the SMC, a body which is supposed to solicit membership from a broader section of the community than just teachers and parents. Baku and Agyeman's survey of teachers and headteachers found that only 43 per cent of the respondents claimed to have a SMC. Commitment and regular attendance, they claimed, was only 'high' or 'very high' for SMC meetings in 10 per cent of communities, compared with 18 per cent attendance at PTA meetings.³¹ However, they also found that the Town Development Committees and SMCs, where they existed, were reliable vehicles for promoting community participation.³²

31 Baku and Agyeman, op. Cit. p. 53.

32 Ibid., p.96.

During the process of SIF plan preparation, the SMC was the body which played a central role; in most cases, the PTAs played rather a minor, supportive role later, during the implementation period. The main problem with the SMC involvement was that its composition rarely met the national requirements. There were often no women representatives from the community, and about half the members turned out to be teachers or ex-teachers, in addition to holding another position in the community (e.g. the Assemblyman, the Unit Committee Chairman and members of local associations). So effectively it was sometimes doubtful whether the SMC did encompass a broader representation of community interests than the PTA. In many cases, just one member of the SMC, a teacher usually in the role of secretary, played a major role

in drafting the SIF, which was then taken back to the rest of the SMC and to broader community meetings for their comments and approval. In these situations, conflict between the teachers and communities was sometimes less evident, but despite the greater involvement of the teachers on the SMC, there were no more likely to be imaginatively worked out plans to improve the quality of teaching and learning. In a few of the SIF communities, the teachers writing the draft SIF plan included the provision of bicycles for themselves, but at a broader community meeting, this item was struck off, which again added to the sense of grievance felt by the teachers.

It is difficult to arrive at a clear distinction between the roles and functions of the PTAs and SMCs, which may simply be an indication that their roles are still in the process of evolving. In one village visited, it was said that before the SIF, the PTA's main role had been to address pupil absenteeism and organise work to carry out minor school

repairs, but this work had handed this over to the SMC more recently. In one of the three districts, the district director of education pointed out that the SMCs were starting to carry out the function of following up problems concerning absent teachers, but the SMCs in the SIF communities were more operational in this respect than those in the non-SIF communities. One SMC member said that the SMC and the PTA were the "same thing", except for the fact that PTAs focused on checking that both teachers and pupils arrived punctually at school. The officers of the district education office in one of the three pilot districts remarked that their main problem, from the point of view of the institutional setup of the SIF, was conflict between the PTAs and SMCs. The chiefs and elders in another community claimed that the PTAs and SMCs worked in close partnership.

Whatever their respective roles and strengths, it is clear that the capacity of both PTAs and SMCs needs to be strengthened. In future, the intermediary NGO role could be

re-focused to address broader issues to do with helping these community organisations become more representative of their communities, more effective in communicating with district education offices and district assemblies, and more capable of dealing with community-teacher relations. It is interesting to note that the community-focused schooling improvement fund project in Chad moved away from its original design to straightforward capacity building of PTAs, for which it has started to achieve results. But the task of strengthening institutions in poorer communities is not straightforward because these communities also tend to be less well endowed with effective institutions (although the relationship is not simple: poverty may reinforce reciprocal social bonds as well as leading to a depletion of social capital.)³³

³³ P Francis et al, op. Cit.

District level

The main committee at district level responsible for dealing with questions of education is the District Education Oversight Committee (DEOC). However, the DEOCs have only been in existence since 1995, and a number of visits to districts throughout Ghana suggest that many of them had not yet met by mid-1997, the stage at which the SIF pilot was already being implemented. The project had encouraged the setting up of a new committee in the pilot district capitals, called the District Approval Committee (DAC) which was composed of district representatives of MoE and GES, the District Coordinating Officer, the Chair of the Social Services Subcommittee of the District Assembly and a representative of a local NGO where applicable.

In some districts there may have been too little involvement on the part of the Assembly and District Education office (DEO) in the SIF. The DAC members in one district who

were interviewed during the mid-term review said that they had relied on CEDEP to read all the SIF plans and then give recommendations to the DAC. The reason for meeting very rarely was given as the lack of 'T&T' (transport and food) allowances. Again, it was apparently the lack of any separate transport allowance which meant that they were only able to visit to pilot SIF communities when CEDEP gave them money for fuel. Summing up, they said that: "the project should remunerate the DAC for their work if the District Assembly won't." The NGO district field supervisors pointed out that there were delays in implementing the pilot at various stages as DAC and DEO did not fulfil their role or delayed playing their part, and there was an insufficient degree of ownership, with the DEO being a long way from understanding the whole process and objectives.

It has been proposed that the next phase of the SIF pilot continues to work through the DAC mechanism, but although many of the DEOCs are relatively new, it might be better for

the purposes of mainstreaming the district's involvement in the project if the DEOC (which are a permanent district structure) were to take over the DAC's role in the SIF, possibly through setting up a sub-committee to carry out the liaising activities with the NGO. Because the DACs did not, on the whole, become very actively involved in the first phase of the SIF, it cannot be argued that their experience would be lost through working with a different structure.

In another of the pilot districts, the problem was inappropriate involvement on the part of the district education office. The DEO gave out guidelines on SIP formulation to head teachers in advance of CEDEP's arrival, and did not inform communities of their obligation to contribute twenty per cent of the total costs, nor that their plans may not be accepted, wholly or partly, by the MoE. The consequences were quite serious as CEDEP had to hold lots of discussions with communities, backtracking to explain how the project was actually different to what they were originally told, and to try

to soothe over dissatisfaction, and false hopes and expectations.

Ultimately district level education structures must be more fully involved, as befits their skills and authority, and in line with their new role in the decentralisation of education services under the performance and reform management programme. We should be working towards a situation in which the district education office contract out to NGOs for their skills and to other individuals and organisations where appropriate. Of course, they are likely to be resistant to such a way of working because once they have the financial resources in their own control, they will prefer to keep these resources within their own institution rather than to contract out to other institutions to provide a particular service. Two good reasons for this preference would be the opportunity to control resources and patronage and, in most cases, the chances of getting a service at less expense than through

contracting a NGO³⁴. This was illustrated by the Sefwi Wiawso district. The district director of education was for a long time resistant to the idea that CEDEP's services were needed at all for the SIF. This was a case of one of the more committed directors of education feeling that the extra resources from the SIF for managing and facilitating would have been better spent by the district office of education. It was only after some months of the pilot that he began to understand the sort of facilitating skills which the CEDEP field supervisors employed and came to realise that his office would not have been able to undertake these activities unaided. So the right balance between the facilitating role of the NGO and the enhanced service delivery and teacher advisory role of the GES needs to be achieved, and again, this might only be done through a collaborative approach of social development, management and teacher educational input, from both Government and donor side.

34 see Carmen Malena, "Working with NGOs" for a discussion on how frequently NGO involvement in a project proves to be more rather than less costly.



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5. Links between community governance and quality, and access to education

[Quality and access; community participation and access](#)

Poverty and access

Quality and access; community participation and access

Access is defined here as increasing enrolments and reducing drop-outs in schools, and the Ghanaian Government's concern is to target particular groups, such as girls and poorer families who are currently less likely to enrol in the first place, and more likely to drop out of the system. The objectives of the SIF did not specifically include improving access to education. However, much development literature makes the links between on the one hand, increasing community participation and improving the quality of education, and on the other hand increasing enrolments and access. So the assumption might be that at least further down the line of the project lifetime, enrolment should increase and drop-outs decline in SIF schools as and when community participation increases and quality improves.

We have already argued first, that the SIF pilot design has not yet established the conditions to encourage widespread community ownership of schooling, and second, that community ownership is an insufficient condition for improving the quality of teaching and learning. But as the SIF or other community and teacher development initiatives are further developed, with the districts and local institutions playing a more central role, we need to examine the question of how community governance and improved quality of education might have an impact on access. While it can be argued that most development projects ultimately have an impact, however indirectly, on poorer and more vulnerable social groups, it is important to spell out the expected nature of those links. Some projects have a more direct and immediate impact on poorer groups than others, while others may even have an unintended negative impact.

There are at least two sets of relationships that need to be taken into consideration: the link between quality and access,

and between community participation and access.

The relationship between quality and quantity (numbers of children in schools, which is key indicator of access) is not straightforward. The thrust of the education reform programme in Ghana recognises that the poor quality of education acts effectively to increase the opportunity costs of education (as the benefits of education decline while the need for child labour to support parents remains the same), and thus deters many parents from enrolling their children. But an increase in quantity risks affecting quality negatively, as classes become more crowded and new recruits to the system arrive with fewer of the benefits of the better-off children's parents (for instance, in terms of a space to study their homework, and the backing of more educated parents who are more likely to prioritise the successful learning of their children). This situation calls for improved classroom management techniques and different teaching methods (for which, again, the teachers and education experts should play

a key role), as well as ultimately the building of more schools and classrooms. These issues need to be considered in policy discussions of quality and access.

Turning to the connection between community participation and access, it is important to distinguish between a range of types of community participation, particularly between those involving financial and non-financial contributions. In practice, the dividing line is blurred because many forms of contribution involve community time and labour, which are indirect costs for those concerned.

If we look for examples of how community participation (non-financial contributions on the part of the community) has helped increase access to education in Ghana, the evidence is weak. One of the objectives of the USAID-funded Equity Improvement Programme was to increase enrolments through community participation. Baku and Agyeman report that success was apparently attributed to providing incentives

for parents to attend PTAs and other meetings and for community members to serve as resource persons: "The evaluation result of the Equity Improvement Programme provides a good indication of what level of *community participation can be induced with the appropriate bait*".³⁵

There are two important points to note here. Firstly, this approach appears to lack the foundations for sustainability: withdraw the financial bait, and presumably you lose the community participation and enrolments fall.

Secondly, paying people to participate in education appears to defeat the purpose of encouraging community participation to help relieve the Government's burden of the costs of education.

³⁵ Baku and Agyeman, op. Cit. p.95, authors italics.

The social development concern to foster community participation in terms of governance of schools sits rather

uneasily in the same arena with the financial management concern to solicit community participation in the drive for more efficient management of resources.

It was pointed out above that to a large extent, the rationale for the community approach to schooling improvement fund-type projects was that they were conceived as part of a framework of measures to reduce the costs of education, by encouraging communities to contribute to the costs of their own schools. The debate around financing the education sector includes discussions of to what extent individuals or households can and should "cost share"³⁶ the burden of education expenditure with government. The experience of participation through cost sharing in education has been mixed. Colletta and Perkins warn that even getting together labour support can be difficult in the poorest of communities. "The opportunity cost of voluntary time and effort often is not accounted for in estimating cost effectiveness and may be

very high in some participatory projects. The goals of equity and poverty alleviation may be jeopardised if these dangers are not recognised."³⁷

³⁶ See, for instance. Cost Sharing in Education, P Penrose, ODA, 1997.

³⁷ Colletta and Perkins, op. cit. p. 10.

Poverty and access

In late 1997, it was announced that the Ghana Education Service had empowered PTAs to impose special levies on basic schools to raise funds for school projects³⁸. It is therefore important that we know to what extent and under what conditions community members can participate by financial contributions towards the costs of education.

38 Ghanaian Times, October 8 1997.

The link between poverty and low school enrolment and retention rates is made in several studies. However, the precise nature of this relationship is complex. In some cases, it appears that the main deterrent for many parents to place their children in school arises from the poor quality of schooling, rather than poverty in an absolute sense (the inability to afford school uniform, pay for exercise books and other direct costs of schooling).

PREP'S *Second Social Survey* (1994)³⁹ found that restricted financial circumstances were identified as the greatest constraint to the education of both boys and girls. Financial constraints constituted a slightly greater barrier for girls than for boys. It was also more significant a factor in the Upper East and Upper West regions than in the other regions. (The Northern region was not included in this study

due to ethnic conflict at the time.) The Survey also calculated that a higher proportion of school aged children were not in school in both Upper East and Upper West than in the other regions.

³⁹ Fianu and Buckle, 1994, PREP. Second Social Survey. A study into community attitudes and social factors underlying regional and gender-based differentials in primary education in Ghana.

A poverty profile of the Ashanti region (1996)⁴⁰ found that access to and utilisation of formal education facilities is constrained by poverty as parents are unable to provide the educational requirements of their children. The cost of education is seen not in terms of school fees but other requirements such as uniforms, textbooks, furniture and development levies. This study identified two types of poverty. The 'ahokyiri' are the able poor, who can afford the

basic necessities of life, but not education. They are commonly female headed households or households headed by unskilled and/or illiterate adults. The 'ohio' are the very poor, who are unable to work and earn an income. They include the chronically sick and disabled.

40 Poverty Profile of the Ashanti Region using a Participatory Rural Appraisal Approach. sponsored by SCF, 1996.

A study on school enrolment in the Afram Plains (1996)⁴¹ also found that the major obstacle to attending school is poverty. Either parents could not afford school fees or other school-related expenses such as uniform, or the child was needed to assist in the household economy in some way.

41 UNICEF, 1996, Factors Influencing School Enrolment and the Health of School-aged Children.

Afram Plains, Eastern Region.

The participatory poverty assessment in Ghana (1995)⁴² found the incidence and depth of poverty was greatest in the rural north. The main concern of most community members concerning education was the issue of quality rather than access. Discussions of quality covered a broad range of issues, from poor teaching and facilities, lack of supervision of teachers, lack of clear feedback on children's performance, and the shortage of teachers resulting from the policy of retrenchment of untrained teachers. Rural northern communities were apparently willing to engage in community mobilisation in education, but could not contribute in cash. The study advised that "service provision systems that rely to a substantial extent on the capacity of local communities to generate cash will thus lead to equity problems in terms of access." Yet one of the three SIF pilot districts which is located in the Northern Region, Savelugu Nanton, appeared

to experience less difficulties in collecting cash contributions for Schooling Improvement Plans than the districts in Ashanti and Western regions. A common pattern in Savelugu Nanton is for families to send some but not all of their children to school. Poverty could be said to influence their decisions not in an absolute sense but, in keeping with the high value they place on a good quality education, they are willing to make sacrifices to ensure that some of their children get a good education, rather than risk all of them receiving a poor education with insufficient support provided by parents and the community. But it is also possible that community members were under intense pressure from the project team to make their financial contributions in Savelugu Nanton such that many of them then had to forego financial resources otherwise intended for health or other important needs.

42 A Norton et al, 1995, Poverty Assessment in Ghana using Qualitative and Participatory Research

Methods. World Bank.

A study by Penrose cited in Penrose⁴³ advised that survey questions on the willingness to pay for education asked of school administrators, teachers and parents "are notoriously difficult to interpret". About three quarters of teachers did not believe that pupils would be willing or able to pay more fees. Approximately one third of school administrators thought that pupils could pay more than an additional 3,000 cedis, but at the same time they believed that between four and six pupils in ten might drop out if fees were raised. In half of the schools surveyed pupils had been sent home for non-payment of fees at some time. Four in ten parents said they were willing to pay higher fees, but they would need to see improvements in facilities, teaching and their children's performance.

⁴³ P Penrose, unpublished. Budgeting and

Expenditures in the Education Sector in Ghana, EU/MoE.

This brief review suggests that in some situations, a focus on improving the quality of education will in itself make schooling more accessible to parents, but in other situations the poor quality and poverty issues will both need to be tackled.

Depending upon the proportion of very poor ('ohio') in a given community, there may be scope for exempting certain members from payment of fees, and for providing certain children with assistance in provision of uniforms or exercise books. This is an area where, once district education offices are in greater control of their own financial resources through the decentralisation programme, PTAs and SMCs could play an important role in setting criteria for exemptions and applying to the district education office for assistance. The district education offices could choose to allocate some of their resources to finance operational research, drawing on a

broad understanding from the surveys and qualitative studies of how poverty and poor quality of schooling affect household decisions in education, and assisting or guiding communities to come up with solutions. Some of these solutions might be derived from within the community while others might require policy measures or financial support from the district education office. To a large extent, the solutions may require assistance from other sectors, for instance, where communities recognise that access to rural credit or income generating activities would be the most effective means of enabling families to afford education for their children. Although the district education office may not be able to respond directly to assist in all ways, the promotion of participatory learning and action and other local planning tools should help empower communities to gain access to the relevant agencies and organisations which could help them resolve their difficulties.

There are already a number of initiatives (ranging from small

to medium scale) in the northern regions which have gone some way to address poverty as a barrier to education. The experience of Catholic Relief Services in providing school meals for pupils in the three northern regions has demonstrated that the school meal is one factor which helps retain pupils. This programme also responds to drop-out linked to seasonal vulnerability, where whole communities go hungry during the 'hungry season'. Other programmes such as an improved school health programme, where PTAs or SMCs manage certain medication (possibly including malaria prophylaxis), could also make the immediate benefits of schooling more appealing to parents.

Radical experiments sponsored by non-governmental organisations (NGOs), such as the 'Shepherd Schools' and 'School for Life' could be the most effective means of tackling the direct costs of schooling. The MoE/GES might have difficulty in promoting such informal schools, with their radically simplified curriculum. However, they might wish to

permit districts to promote elements from these experiments, such as abolishing school uniforms or requiring that pupils work from one exercise book, rather than one for each subject, if these changes were to make school more accessible for families.



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6 Conclusions and recommendations

The aim of this concluding section is to briefly synthesise the main practical, technical and institutional proposals reviewed

in this paper, to increase community participation in education, improve the quality of teaching and learning, and to ensure that both the former have an impact on improving access to education. It encompasses both broad recommendations on these issues, as well as some specific proposals with regard to the future phases of the Schooling Improvement Fund in Ghana.

1. Design limitations on the extent of participatory activities in schooling improvement fund-type projects:

- Sufficient time must be devoted to engaging communities in discussions of the problems in their schools and possible solutions: this is of key importance;
- The scope of participatory activities needs to be reviewed: the key questions should be "what kind of participatory activities?" and "with what purpose?".

(Proposals to adopt PLA in the next stage of the SIF should help to focus attention towards practical ways in which communities and teachers can work in closer collaboration, rather than on a series of project inputs)

- This review should take place simultaneously with a review of teacher involvement in initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning;

2. Achievements and limitations to community ownership and empowerment:

- It is important to recognise and seek to overcome the real limits to community ownership where communities lack political clout and certain skills (power and influence; administrative and managerial skills), otherwise only a minimum commitment to community ownership is likely to be generated;

- Community ownership will be reinforced if the capacity of local organisations (particularly PTAs and SMCs or similar bodies) to negotiate with teachers and local authorities is strengthened, and district education offices respond to problems of poor teacher performance.

3. The role of community participation in improving the quality of teaching and learning:

- It is more appropriate for teachers rather than communities to engage in developing local projects to improve teaching methods and techniques, which are considered to be key factors in improving the quality of teaching and learning;
- Communities should still have a significant role to play in managing schools. They should be engaged in issues of teacher and pupil attendance, monitoring

children's homework, teacher-community relations and monitoring learning outcomes. (In Ghana, the monitoring of learning outcomes role of communities is likely to be strengthened through the SPAM);

- Creating the right balance between teacher and community empowerment has institutional implications. There need to be adequate institutional structures to ensure that the planning of teacher development, community participation and management is integrated from the centre down to local levels.

4. Relationship between NGOs, local institutions and education authorities in mainstreaming approaches and principles of community involvement and governance:

- The NGO intermediary role might best focus on helping community organisations become more

representative of their communities, more effective in communicating with district education offices and better able to deal with community-teacher relations;

- This sort of project will be more easily mainstreamed if it works with and through existing local education authorities. (In Ghana, the SIF might best operate with and through the District Education Oversight Committee rather than the ad hoc District Approval Committee);
- Funding for some of the management of these projects should, where possible, be channelled through decentralised education offices. (As funding in education becomes increasingly decentralised in Ghana, it would become up to each district education office to decide if and how it would want to operate a SIF-type project, and what services it

would need to contract out, for instance, to acquire the facilitating services and skills of NGOs and the teacher development skills of education experts, teacher training colleges, etc.)

5. Links between community governance and quality, and access to schooling:

- Localised action research might often be necessary to establish to what extent poverty as opposed to poor quality acts as the main barrier to schooling, and to assist communities to plan to address their real problems;
- Where decentralisation programmes have empowered local education offices with a greater control over their financial resources, local community organisations such as PTAs and SMCs could play a role in setting criteria for exemptions or

assistance for poorer families to meet the costs of education, and applying to local education offices for this assistance.

- All the above is likely to be realised more effectively where central Ministries of Education devise a coherent framework to coordinate all access and participation related activities. Donors also need to play their part to ensure that access and participation issues are not just tacked on to an education programme, but an integral part of it.



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Annex 1. Background to community participation in education in Ghana

History of community participation in Ghana

There is a long history of community participation in education in Ghana. Many schools, including those in the poorer area of northern Ghana, have been constructed entirely through the efforts of community participation. However, the history of community participation in education is marked by a pattern of highs and lows. The critical low point was the early 1980s, when Ghana experienced an overall decline in education due to a combination of factors: economic crisis affecting financing of the education sector, poor maintenance and management practices, and a notion (left over from the days of greater economic prosperity and socialist ideology) that

the provision of education at all levels was the sole responsibility of Government, which deprived the system of any meaningful role for communities⁴⁴.

44 Baku and Agyeman, June 1997, The effects of community participation in the provision of basic education on access to and quality of education, report conducted on behalf of the Educational Research Network for West and Central Africa - ERNWACA, p.3. This review of community participation in education in Ghana provides a rich source of material on the background of education change and reform as well as community participation.

Although the severe economic crisis of the 1980s in Ghana has passed, the Government remains constrained in terms of how much more it can increase its financing of education. The

1992 Ghanaian Constitution committed the Government to drawing up a programme for the provision of Free Compulsory and Universal Basic Education⁴⁵. To achieve its target of 100 per cent enrolments among all school age children, the Government recognises that it needs to draw upon the active involvement of communities in the management of schools and in helping to raise the standards of basic education.

45 Chapter 6, section 38, sub-section 2 of the 1992 Ghanaian Constitution.

Concept of a 'school community'

Baku and Agyeman's (1997) study of community participation in basic education in Ghana claims that every school community is composed of several elements including the traditional/political leadership of the area, the association of parents and teachers, the Town Development Committees,

NGOs in the area, the various religious bodies and the generality of the residents. The authors admit that this set up does not hold true in all cases, especially in urban areas where parents do not always patronise schools within their area of residence.

But other evidence suggest that the notion of a school community is considerably more complex. Visits to the SIF schools in rural areas revealed that it is a common practice for parents in central Ghana to send some of their children to live with relatives who are based in urban areas, so that their children can benefit from what might be a better school (in the sense of better services, better facilities and more committed teachers). This suggests that these parents could be less committed to assisting in the development of their own village school.

Where communities are scattered and children travel from villages and hamlets some miles away from the school, these

children's parents often fail to get involved in 'their' school, and it might be difficult to encourage or sanction such parents. In urban and peri-urban areas, the problem is also exacerbated by there being several primary schools. This means that the issue of community members holding allegiance to a particular school community and therefore taking responsibility for supporting that school, is fairly complex.

Baku and Agyeman's found that: "While the communities are generally favourably disposed to participating in the provision of basic education for their children, they are opposed to the situation where the Government or its agents by themselves decide on what responsibilities to assign to the communities without taking into consideration the capabilities of the individual communities to meet such responsibilities."⁴⁶ Yet, in the same executive summary, they recommend that participation in communal labour in schools should be made

compulsory by legislation.

46 *ibid*, p. v.

Traditional and modern forms of community participation

Traditional forms of participation

Essentially concerned with the provision of infrastructure, these include:

- communal labour by community to provide infrastructure, such as toilets, school building and workshops;
- payment of money levied by the chief, elders or TDCs to finance school projects;
- search for, or provision of accommodation for teachers;

- chief, elders or other community members offering rooms in their houses to store school property;
- provision of land for gardening, farming etc.;
- churches allowing their chapels to be used for classes in cases of inadequate classroom accommodation;
- parental attendance at PTA meetings;
- community patronage of school functions such as Speech Days, Open Days, etc.
- supply of the needs of wards by parents or guardians;
- involvement of youth in weeding the school's football field where the school children are considered too young to do this.

New forms of participation

An integral part of the educational reform programme, launched in 1987, these focus more on the community role in decision-making affecting the curriculum and management of schools, and examples include:

- participation in management of schools through representation on SMC;
- participation of communities, PTAs and religious bodies in curriculum design;
- participation in actual teaching as resource persons for some culture-oriented themes;
- participation in the protection and maintenance of school property;
- supervision and monitoring of pupils' attendance at school;

- involvement in enrolment drives to increase pupils' access (some Chiefs even trying to compel parents to send their children to school);
- participation in the form of offering motivation to teachers to improve their performance;
- participation in the supervision of pupils' studies at home.

Source: derived from Baku and Agyeman, 1997

It is worth noting how expectations of community participation have shifted considerably in recent times. While the traditional forms of participation revolve around communities assisting with the provision of infrastructure, the recent education reform programmes have emphasised communities' involvement in management and supervision of schools, with some examples of communities getting involved in decision-

making in curriculum design (although the latter are, as yet, rare examples). See Box. The change of focus is quite extensive. The new expectations on the communities to participate in school management and even curriculum design are likely to have provoked some degree of conflict with teachers, who may feel undermined by community members and consider that it is inappropriate for them to become involved in pedagogical matters. Likewise, there may well be a lack of understanding on the part of the communities of the new role expected of them.

UNICEF's community-based education project in Ghana, Childscope, clearly identifies community participation as a strategy rather than as an objective in itself. There is considerable discussion in the literature over whether community participation should be regarded as a means or an end in itself⁴⁷. In the context of an education programme (of which the SIF is a part), there may be a stronger

argument for regarding community participation as a means rather than as an end⁴⁸. However, this does not preclude the expectation that community participation in any project is likely to have a knock-on effect of increasing community capacity in general to take ownership and control in a number of important areas. In order to be able to judge the impact and success of a project, it is necessary to have first a clear idea of what the project's objectives were, even if the line between means and end does, in practice, become blurred.

47 See, for instance a comment on SIDA's understanding of participation: "Popular participation in Swedish development cooperation can be viewed with reference to the democracy and equity goals, as an objective in itself, i.e. a basic democratic right that should be promoted in all development projects. It is also considered, in a more instrumental way, as a means to increase efficiency, effectiveness and

sustainability in development projects.", Pierre Spitz, 'People's participation in IFAD projects: some preliminary considerations'. Agency Paper presented at the Workshop on Participatory Development, World Bank, 1992.

48 There is, of course, also strong opposition in development debates against sector projects and programmes, but as things stand, the SIF *is* part of an education sector programme.



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Summary

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