

## The State and Art of Community Participation in providing Quality Basic Education: The case for Manicaland Province- Zimbabwe.

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### Abstract

*This research study set out to describe how community participation was happening and how it influenced quality of basic education in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. The study was guided by four research questions: how do communities define community participation in providing quality basic education; how is the community contributing in providing quality basic education; and how is community participation influencing quality of basic education? A qualitative multiple case study design was used to generate qualitative data from three primary schools. The three cases were selected on the basis of them being relevant to the research purpose and were conveniently accessible to the researcher. Qualitative data were generated through in-depth interviews with head teachers, head men, and councillors and focus group discussions held with parents and other members of the selected communities. More data were gathered from observing participation activities as well as analysing relevant documents that provided rich data for corroborating data from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. Data were analysed in a grounded theory framework in which content analysis was the main strategy. The study found out that community members defined community participation according to how they were involved in the education of their primary school children. The community members were involved in the education of their children through providing children with basic educational needs that included feeding, uniforms, construction and maintaining of classrooms as well as play grounds, supplying stationery and textbooks. Parents also monitored teaching and learning processes through checking teachers' behaviour in and out of classrooms, as well as monitoring children's learning progress through supervising homework, attending consultation days, and sporting activities. Parents were involved in school financial activities and administration through paying school levies, engaging in fundraising projects, and attending meetings. In their participation processes, community members were influenced by economic factors, especially their differences in level of family income; social factors, mainly differences in level of parents' education and political affiliation; and cultural factors, especially their differences in gender roles. The study concluded that, although community participation had increased the number of classrooms and improved the appearance of school grounds, it had negatively influenced quality of basic education due to hungry and lowly motivated children, inadequate supplies of teaching and learning materials, inadequate time for homework, frequent pupil absenteeism, children dropping out of school, uncommitted teachers, and unavailability of essential facilities and equipment. The study recommended that schools organise special community orientation programmes for first time parents joining the school, establish school feeding programme, create school based home work time for pupils, School Development Committees need to be more representation, and schools need to create more space for involvement of parents in administrative issues. The study recommends that a wider and quantitative survey be carried out to establish the extent of the negative effects of community participation on quality of basic education in the province.*

### Background to the study

Community participation in education has been widely proclaimed at international educational policy making indaba such as the World Conference for Education for All that was held in Dakar in 1990 and the Delhi Declaration of 2000. Most countries have subsequently crafted local educational policies in line with this international framework. However, in some local contexts, and mostly in rural areas, this policy does not seem to have achieved the desired quality education results. In her study of community participation in rural Ethiopia, Swift-Morgan (2006) found out that promoting community participation in providing basic education was not a sure way of improving Quality of education. Similarly, De Grauwe (2001) in his study of four Africa countries found out that in Zimbabwe, rural communities did not monitor the behaviour of their teachers. And, Chikoko (2010) in his paper based on findings from a study that was conducted in Malawi and Zimbabwe advised that the link between decentralising provision of basic education and quality of education was not automatic.

In addition, research studies that have been carried out in some rural contexts in Zimbabwe also give results

that are contrary to the expectations of educational policy on community participation. Nyagura (1991) observed that rural primary schools were seriously constrained by shortages of classrooms, classroom furniture and qualified teachers; insufficient textbooks, pens and pencils, chalk and paper; inadequate or even no administration facilities such as school office, file cabinets and telephone service. The Nziramasanga Commission on Education and Training (1999) reported that, in many rural areas visited by the commission, donor-assisted school buildings were still without roofs, doors and windows because the authorities and communities had failed to complete the projects.

In a recent need assessment study carried out in Chimanimani district in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe, The Zimbabwe Open University (2009) also reported that schools had dilapidated classrooms and teachers houses. Teachers did not have essential teaching materials and reference books. Also, most school children did not have basic textbooks, and necessary writing materials, a situation most school heads blamed on lack of community commitment in the education of their children. Further, pass rates in grade seven final examinations (end of primary school

examination) were reported to be low with 56 schools scoring 0% pass rates (Ministry of Education Sport Arts and Culture, 2000).

It is from this background that an in-depth qualitative case study was carried out so as to have a more informed understanding of how communities were participating in providing basic education in their schools. The following research questions guided the study, How do community members define community participation in providing quality basic education; How are communities participating in providing basic education? What are the factors influencing community participation in providing basic education; How is community participation influencing quality of basic education?

### Methodology

The purpose of the study was to describe how community participation was happening in rural schools in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in a qualitative research paradigm, in which, according to Weiss (1998), Patton (2002), Ritchie, Lewis (2004) and Babbie (2010), the rural people were studied in their communal areas and in terms of their own definitions of community participation. In addition, the study focused on the subjective experiences of individuals and was sensitive to the contexts in which people interact with each other.

In order for the researcher to make a thick description of how community participation was happening in rural areas in Manicaland Province in Zimbabwe, the study was carried out through a case study design. A case study design, which is defined by (Yin, 2003: 13) as “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context”, is capable of adopting qualitative methods of data generation which are most suitable for investigating participants’ experiences, views and opinions on community participation in providing basic education.

The study was carried out in Manicaland province in Zimbabwe. Two districts, Mutasa and Mutare, were involved in this study. From the two districts, three primary schools were selected to participate in this study on the basis of their potential to provide rich and relevant data as well as their convenience of access to the researcher (Babbie, 2010, Cohen and Manion, 1980).

### The Research Findings

This section of the report presents the findings of the research. The key features of the findings are provided in summary form as given in table 1 below.

Data for the research were generated and tape recorded from in-depth interviews with head teachers, head men, and councillors, as well as from focus group discussions with parents and other community members at the respective primary schools. In addition, data were gathered through observation during community participation activities such as meetings, and analysing documents such as school development committee minute books and correspondence memos. The data that were generated from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and analysed manually in a grounded theory framework.

I used the Scissors and Sort Technique to analyse the data. I used this method because it is effective and efficient as advised by Ryan and Bernard (nd), Kruger and Casey (2003), Stewert (2006), and Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2010). At this stage, I was guided by the following processes as pointed out by Kruger and Casey (2003).

- Write down focus group discussion question on separate manila sheets.
  - Categorise the data taking cognisance of the following key questions.
- (A) Did the participant answer the question that was asked?  
If **YES**- does the comment say something of importance about the topic?  
If **YES**- tape it onto the manila sheet under the appropriate question. Then, is it like something that has been said earlier?  
If **YES**- then start grouping like quotes. If **NO**- start a separate pile.
- (B) Did the participant answer the question that was asked?  
If **NO**- Does the comment answer a different question in the focus group?  
If **YES**- move it to appropriate question.  
If **NO**- Does the comment say something of importance about the topic?  
If **NO**- Set it aside

The researcher was identifying and coding what different participants were saying about a particular research question, thus, providing a platform for comparing and contrasting each data against the rest so as to establish themes and categories as pointed out by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Pope et al. (2000).

Table 1: Summary of Research Findings

Community contribution	Influence on quality Of education
<b>Theme:</b> Preparing children for school: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• feeding children- <i>preparing breakfast, preparing break time snack</i></li> <li>• clothing children appropriately- <i>uniforms, bathing, laundry</i></li> <li>• paying school levy</li> </ul>	Many hungry children in classes, some children without uniforms Inadequate financial resources in schools.
<b>Theme:</b> Supplying school stationery and textbooks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• teachers stationery- <i>charts, markers, record books</i></li> <li>• children’s stationery-<i>exercise books, ball pen, pencil, covers</i></li> </ul>	Many Children without exercise books, pens, pencils and textbooks for non core subjects Teachers have adequate stationery for classroom use
<b>Theme:</b> Preparing schools for children: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• constructing new structures- <i>classrooms, toilets, ECD play centre</i></li> <li>• maintaining existing buildings- <i>repairing classrooms</i></li> <li>• maintaining existing school grounds- <i>clearing bushes, cutting grass, weeding,</i></li> </ul>	Mostly clean and safe school environment; inadequate classrooms; adequate toilet facilities; inadequate sporting facilities and equipment
<b>Theme:</b> Making decisions on how to participate: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• school fees- <i>amount, payment structure, non payment</i></li> <li>• labour- <i>who, when, how</i></li> </ul>	low attendance, the same few parents always attended; inadequate money to meet school budgets
<b>Theme:</b> Monitoring children’s progress : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Classroom Learning <i>Consultation days, Supervising homework</i></li> <li>• Co-curricular- <i>sporting, games</i></li> </ul>	Inadequate monitoring of children’s progress. Limited supervision of children’s homework
<b>Theme:</b> monitoring teachers’ behaviour: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• behaviour at school-<i>attendance</i></li> <li>• behaviour in the community-, <i>public deportment</i></li> </ul>	Conflict between teachers and parents  Increased hours of teaching and learning

**Discussion of findings**

The study found out that communities were involved in preparing children for school, supplying teaching and learning materials, building and maintaining school buildings, and monitoring teachers’ behaviour, children’s progress, and paying school levies as shown in Table 1.

Most of the participants in this study described how they were involved in feeding and clothing their children appropriately for school, as well as supplying stationery for use by children in class activities. In

addition, some participants described how they were involved in raising money and providing labour for repairing and repainting classrooms.

However, a critical observation across the findings is the inadequacy of the contribution of community members in the various areas in which they were involved. In the primary schools that participated in this study, some of the children attended school hungry. One teacher elaborated thus,

I once had a child who was always complaining of having a

headache each time after break. I took her aside and asked whether she had taken some food. That is when she revealed that she does not have anything to eat before she comes to school. I then gave her a packet of maputi [corn snack] that I had in my bag. After eating the maputi, she joined the class. By lunch time the headache had gone and she was already playing with other children. I then realised that many children come to school hungry.

In a focus group discussion, a woman supported:

I sometimes have problems in having food for the child. I fail to get what to give him in the morning. I sometimes have some breakfast for him but I fail to have something for the lunch box. There was a drought; people don't have enough food in the homes.

In a separate focus group discussion, a man confirmed: "This year I did not harvest anything, it was a complete right off, now the little money I may get, I first look for food for the children but it is not enough". Subsequently, the teachers had problems in covering planned work because some of the hungry children could not cope with the work. In a focus group discussion one teacher summarised:

It affects my work...the child does not concentrate when I am working with her, when I am pacing up to cover the syllabus, that child has no energy to do that. The child's progress is.... we can say retarded, it's slow. I do not achieve my targets on time. You can see that participation by a well fed child is more than participation and concentration by a hungry child. When you engage children in games that require more energy, you see the hungry child failing to participate well.

Consistent with these findings, Kleinman et al., (2002) in their study on the relationship between breakfast and academic performance on 97 school children in the United States observed that students at nutritional risk had significantly poorer grades and more behaviour problems than students who were not.

similarly, Lippman (2010) advises that, children, especially the younger ones, need to be well fed for them to have quality learning characteristics such as high concentration and participation levels in class activities. Therefore, children of parents who did not have enough food in their homes were likely to perform less than their potential.

The study also found out that schools did not have adequate classrooms, play grounds and sporting equipment. Some of the school children did not have uniforms, exercise books and pens. In an in-depth interview, a head teacher remarked: "...currently, we have only one block of two classrooms and some of the children are having lessons under trees...". In a separate in-depth interview, another head teacher added:

Our parents here don't buy books for their children....when the exercise books are used up...most of them don't replace them... they don't buy stationery...a child can come to school from January to December without an exercise book.

This finding revealed that the school did not have adequate facilities and children did not have enough stationery for use in their learning activities. Nziramasanga (1999) in a commissioned national survey on education and training in Zimbabwe came up with similar conclusion on school facilities. Similarly, Nhamo (2012) in his mixed-method study on factors affecting the teaching of Physical education in Zimbabwe concluded that there was inadequate supply of facilities for sport in primary schools. Similarly, Chivedza, Wadesango, and Kurebwa (2012) in a qualitative study of factors that militate against the provision of quality education at grade seven level in Gokwe South Central Cluster of Zimbabwe, concluded that, among other factors, the shortage of resources in schools is a factor. Also, Swift-Morgan (2006) in her qualitative study on community participation in Ethiopia came to a similar conclusion. She concluded that community participation in providing teaching and learning resources did not automatically lead to increased availability of classroom stationery. And a similar conclusion can be made from this study. In addition, Chikoko (2009) in his empirical study on decentralised decision making in Malawi and Zimbabwe concluded that the relationship between community participation and quality of education was not automatic.

Further, the study found out that the schools did not have adequate financial resources for administrative

and curriculum activities. In an in-depth interview a school head explained:

The way I see things, what slows down progress, on the part of the parent, is none payment of fees [school levy], inadequacy of finance in the school. All these things need money but you will find that a term can come to an end yet the parents have not paid anything meaningful. Some of our parents do not pay fees as expected of them.

In a focus group discussion a man confirmed:

Some of us even fail to pay the money [school levy] because the money we earn is not even enough for the family upkeep. Sometimes you see the child coming to school without shoes because of the small pay we get. The money is not even enough for food. We cannot afford.

As a result the children whose parents had not paid fees were turned away from school. In a focus group discussion one member of the SDC confirmed, “Sometimes we ask the children to go back home and collect money for school”. This scenario implied that some of the children missed school as they were turned away to collect money for school levy. Literature reviewed for this study shows that effective learning takes place when children attend school regularly (Douglas and Ross, 2011). A situation where several children are absent from school implies that little learning takes place in that school. Therefore, participation of community members through paying fees led to pupil absenteeism and possible drop out as some of the parents did not have viable sources of income.

This study also found out that communities were monitoring teachers’ work behaviour but had strained relationships with their teachers. In a focus group discussion, an SDC chairman explained:

As a member of the SDC, I also need to check whether teachers are coming to school at the right time, this is because there was a time we had problems with parents saying teachers are coming late for school from town

....so we had an issue with parents  
.....but the problem was somewhat resolved...the teachers don’t look happy.

The monitoring process lacked respect for the teachers’ professional status as community members did not have a systematic way for monitoring teachers’ behaviour at work. In a focus group, a teacher summarised:

Sometimes you hear them shouting, ‘you are late for school!’ but I will have been delayed by police officers on the way to work. If you delay by 5 minutes, they make a case out of it, ‘you love to get an incentive but you come late for work’, the case is, why you came in at 5 minutes after 8, they can even shout at you in the road.

This finding seems to contradict the findings by De Grauwe (2001) in his quantitative survey of four African countries in which he concluded that rural communities in Zimbabwe had not contributed significantly to monitoring presence and performance of teachers in local schools. In the primary schools in this study, although the monitoring process by the community members did not seem to show professional respect of the teachers, their monitoring had resulted in teachers increased punctuality and observing set out dismissal time. In an in-depth interview, a head teacher confirmed:

...some teachers come from Mutare every day....they would arrive late, after 8 so the parents expressed their complaints...and it helped because now they arrive earlier than those staying here. This time you find that 7.30...7.45...they are already here. All this came from parents ...their observations on their teachers and complaints they expressed and it helped.

The psycho-social environment should be safe for children, non threatening, peaceful, and non discriminatory (UNICEF, 2000). An ideal quality psycho-social school environment is one in which children interact with each other and their teachers in harmony. It is an environment in which the teachers are firm but friendly, and show some relaxed but distinctive teacher-pupil relationships (Dorman, 2002). Teachers and community members interact regularly

in agreement and children feel safe and secure as they get along with learning activities.

Parents, although they contributed to providing basic education through monitoring children's home work the findings from this study show that the monitoring did not seem effective. Most parents seemed to be too busy with domestic chores to find enough time for doing homework. In a focus group discussion, a mother summarised:

I have too much work in the home. I cannot get time for homework, I have to work in the field and garden, do laundry and ironing, cooking and washing up, ...time to sit down and do home work is not available, ...too much work...sometimes...

This implies that some children have limited time for homework. Homework is an essential element in providing quality education (Protheroe, 2009). More so, the younger children have less developed study habits and are less able to handle disturbances at home (Cooper, 2008). It follows that, the young Primary School children need more attention and guidance when doing homework. Therefore, the study shows that parents and children do not have enough time for children's homework.

### Conclusions

Based on the findings that have been discussed above, the following conclusions were made from this study.

Community members were involved and defined community participation in providing basic education as preparing children for school through feeding and dressing them appropriately, providing and maintain school facilities and paying school fees, providing stationery, monitoring teachers' behaviour, and supervising children's homework.

Community participation negatively influenced quality of basic education through inadequate feeding and clothing children for school, inadequate supply of children's school stationery, inadequate provision of financial resources, inadequate supervision of children's homework, creating strained relationships with teachers, and promoting pupil absenteeism as well as drop out.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations were made on the basis of the findings in this study.

- Schools should develop orientation programmes through which community

members develop capacity to fully participate in school decision making processes.

- Schools to lobby for government supported school supplementary feeding programmes
- Schools to initiate school-based afternoon *home-work* study sessions in which voluntary community members supervise children's homework.

### Further research

- A major survey research project to establish the extent of the inadequacy of school facilities and resources could be carried out in rural areas in Zimbabwe
- A in-depth research study to investigate the factors influencing community participation processes in providing basic education.

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