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## **Educational Administration At Local Level In Zimbabwe: Conflicts, Achievements And Challenges**

Boniface R.S Chivore , Gabriel M. Machinga and Bornface C. Chisaka

### **Introduction**

The practice of having government sharing powers and responsibilities with local school communities in the provision and administration of education is world-wide. Generally this is termed decentralisation. Decentralisation is necessary and desirable to the extent that it promotes and strengthens democracy and civic responsibility. Through it, citizens have greater scope for participating in their governance and development. Furthermore, decentralisation helps in minimising bureaucracy by reducing levels of decision making and thereby achieving greater efficiency of operations. However, Power (1980) warns that decentralisation is sometimes unfairly used by higher organs within systems as a strategy of dumping problems. However this misgiving by Power (1980) , cannot be said to be good reason enough to discourage decentralisation.

### **Local Control of Schools: Theoretical Considerations**

One of the most controversial issues in the governance and administration of schools is the extent to which schools should be controlled by local authorities. Central government, however, is ultimately responsible for the provision of education services to its citizens. Therefore central government cannot absolve itself of the responsibility to provide education. Two issues emerge from this argument. The first is related to the degree of decentralisation which any government administration considers to be optimal for the discharge of the education service, with the result that there are varying patterns in the control of schools from state to state. The second issue is associated with the role or roles which each has to play in the support and control of education. Such roles more or less differ from one government administration to another.

Whether or not a government administration decides to allow local authorities control of schools within its areas of jurisdiction depends on its perception of the relative merits of such a move and this, in turn, depends on the contextual factors in play.

Hill, Smith and Spinks (1990) note that increasing local control of schools is world-wide and their analysis of six countries from Western Europe and America supports this observation. The exact form of this devolution of responsibility varies from one country to another, and the models adopted similarly vary (Hill, Smith and Spinks, 1990). In all cases, the central issues which come to the fore are linked to legislation; resources and their allocation; administrative control vis-a-vis professional management; accountability, and changing roles and responsibilities. These issues have raised perennial controversy among scholars of educational administration and management, especially with reference to issues of decentralisation.

Supporters of decentralisation argue that this practice eases financial burden on central government, and forces local authorities to generate additional resources for school support. Bray and Asar (1986) argue that when resources are managed by the local community, there is faster development. Keith and Girling (1991) similarly assert that the benefits of local control go beyond the assurance of additional resources, but also ensures greater political support and increased student achievement. Hill, Smith and Spinks (1990) however, give the warning that working formulae have to be employed to ensure minimum levels of equity among schools. The formula adopted has to take into account the mandatory and discretionary components of schools' resource needs.

Hawes and Stephens (1990) are strong advocates of local community control of schools through administrative structures such as Schools Development Committees or Councils (SDCs) They argue that the approach brings the schools closer to the community and in this way the school is made more accountable to the community it serves. The two authors believe that the quality and quantity of the physical resources of schools are determined by what the community can offer through democratically elected local school parents' bodies as instruments for community participation in these schools. For these reasons, they assert

that local community school boards should therefore be meaningfully empowered so that they become the prominent focal point of school-based education administration.

Banks (1976) is another advocate of localised school control for effective community participation in the affairs of the school. Banks (1976) contends that meaningful administrative power and authority should be decentralised to the local school community for at least two reasons. Firstly, this approach guarantees that the school and its programmes remain in touch with the wishes and needs of the local community. Secondly, the community is afforded latitude for considerable self-determination in the pace, quantity and quality of development which the local schools experience.

While recognising the ideals of local community initiative, support and control, there are inherent complexities that go with this approach. It has to be born in mind, also that when school support depends more and more heavily on local authorities, then school development largely becomes a function of the strength of the local community's resource base as well as the community's will to commit a proportion of these resources to education.

Ultimately, the result is that the wealth within schools will generally reflect the wealth of the communities which support them. This, of course, is acceptable provided equity issues are not emphasised by the state. In other words, local control of schools can create inequities where they did not exist, and exacerbate them where they already exist, particularly where existing policies are designed to reduce them. It is because of this that some countries have introduced discriminatory funding of schools by Central Government as soon as local control mechanisms are in place. Failure to implement such strategies for equalisation brings devolution policies into conflict with equity policies.

Devolution of decision making power to local authorities also tends to enhance the quality of decisions since there is better access to essential information. In this age of information explosion decisions based on intuition, inadequate or inaccurate information can be harmful. The local authorities tend to understand better their local people and their context, and can make a more accurate assessment of their needs, desires,

problems, constraints and opportunities. The assumption is that the local people have both the power for self-determination and the knowledge required to achieve what they plan to accomplish. This might not always be the case. Using a Marxist framework to analyse developments in America, Bowles and Gintis (1977:22) concluded that "the educational demands of unorganised people-farmers and workers – are almost impossible to discover." In fact, they argue that schools are agents of political control by central political authority who subtly dictate needs for the local people under the guise of devolution. The argument that local control enhances the quality of decisions can be fallacious because where locals lack the expertise to decide wisely, their decisions are products of external manipulation. In such cases, arguments which link devolution to "popular participation" of clients become questionable.

Even in countries which promote equity, there is still an implicit acknowledgement of the need for local variation among schools. Local variation is a product of local initiative which, in turn, is promoted through the devolution of power and control to local authorities. This, however, raises other issues. The first issue relates to the overall national objectives which must be supported through education. Every state, naturally, creates structures which ensure its own survival and perpetuation. Governments, therefore, are not always willing to grant total autonomy to schools because they may implement programmes and curricula which contradict the policies of Central Government. Autonomy is therefore closely monitored. Secondly, local variations make monitoring and evaluation of the system difficult. Where communities are allowed to set their own priorities there is the danger that certain basic or minimum provisions and processes may not be adhered to and Central Government can be held accountable for this.

For these reasons, some theorists have advocated greater centralisation, arguing that it ensures equity, the achievement and maintenance of minimum and/or uniform standards, and coherence across the whole system. It ensures standardisation of procedures and thus facilitates monitoring.

Some even argue that centralisation fosters a common national identity and promotes national unity. Duplication is avoided, weak local capacity

is made up for by the central authority and benefits can accrue to schools through economies of scale. As Cummings and Riddel (1993:4-6) observed, research has consistently shown that state intervention is necessary for the correction of imbalances, and even where the desire to grant autonomy to local schools is genuine, "a central hub is needed to set standards and regulate disparities."

It is against this body of theory that each country makes its own choices with regard to the establishment of local boards or committees for the control of schools, as well as definition of the specific roles which these have to play in the development of education. What ultimately guides such choices are factors relating to the political, social, economic, geographical and cultural setting or context of each country.

### **Local School Boards in Colonial Zimbabwe**

The education system of Zimbabwe has a long history of ensuring local community participation in the financing, development and management of individual schools. This was done through the establishment of local school management structures which became known by a variety of names. The Judges Commission Report on Southern Rhodesia Education (1962:157) observes that "Some mission schools, it is true, have school committees, some have parents' organisations." However, while acknowledging the existence of these organs, the Commission did not think highly of them as it states: (page 157): "We have seen little to convince us that these are effective administrative or even advisory bodies."

In its educational newsletter of August 1974, the Anglican Diocese of Mashonaland (African Education Office) found it necessary to express reservations about some school development committees of the time for they wrote (page 4): "We all know how much variation there is in the calibre of School Committees." Although one would need a lot more facts about the prevailing circumstances at the time before commenting in detail on the committees referred to in the quotation above, the views suggest that an impact assessment on those committees was necessary.

The aided schools referred to above appear to have had the privilege of establishing their school committees either voluntarily or amidst less stringent circumstances. This is in view of a further observation by the Judges Commission (1962:157): which noted "Amongst the various categories of aided schools there are undenominational schools in urban and industrial areas; and in these cases the Government actually prescribes the setting up of management boards." The idea of Government prescription in the establishment of these school management boards applies even today.

Other similarities between the school committees observed by the Judges Commission and the current ones include their being provided for by enactments and their being expected to play a pivotal role in motivating and managing development within their schools. One may therefore conclude that the basic objectives of establishing school committees in this country's schools are factors which have remained the same throughout the years in spite of change of time and governments.

## **LOCAL SCHOOL BOARDS, POST INDEPENDENCE DEVELOPMENT IN ZIMBABWE**

### **Local School Committees/Associations: Changes in Roles and Status**

In Zimbabwe, the development of local committees/associations since independence has been recognised and empowered through a number of pieces of legislation. In the process, such structures at rural council schools became the centre of perennial conflicts between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development.

With regard to the recognition of local community participation, official pronouncements to this effect also came from the top leadership of government. Robert Mugabe, then Prime Minister (1983) in ZIMFEP (1987:29-30) declared: "... if we are to reach our cherished goal of universal education, our communities must increase their participation in

the provision of education." Further, Mugabe notes that communities in Zimbabwe, especially those in the rural areas, had always contributed immensely to education as they worked with the missionaries in building schools.

Turning to the empowerment of Zimbabwe's School Committees/Associations through legislation, their existence has been the cause of feuding, especially between the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development and its rural District Councils on one side, and the Ministry of Education on the other. The conflict which escalated since 1992 still exists and has the potential to seriously affect the new School Development Committees in future. This is in view of the fact that Rural District Councils are set to get far-reaching powers and authority over social services and infrastructure within their areas of jurisdiction under government's new programme of decentralisation.

The District Councils Act of 1982 provided for the establishment of School Committees by the district councils for each of the schools in the area under their jurisdiction. The school committees established were therefore answerable to their council and not to the Ministry of Education. It should be noted that all local councils in Zimbabwe fall under the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. The responsibilities of these committees are in the provision of materials and facilities such as classrooms, teachers' houses, furniture, textbooks and stationery.

Although every child received a per capita grant from the Ministry of Education, the money was not paid to school committees. In terms of the Education Act of 1987 such grants were channeled through the local authority of each school. Through its own Education Committee, the District Council received textbook and stationery orders directly from school heads who were not required to consult their local school committees in such cases. In turn, council officials placed orders for these requirements with suppliers chosen by council and not by school heads. Once the supplier was ready with the items ordered he/she delivered them directly to the school where the head or his/her delegate received the consignment. In acknowledgement, recipients signed

delivery notes or invoices which were used by the supplier to claim payment from council. Eventually, this system became fraught with problems. Numerous allegations of financial mismanagement in the area of per capita grants were made against district councils.

### **The Conflict and its Perspectives**

The conflict between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development has several aspects to it. Firstly, it may be perceived as a culmination of events from 1987. Secondly, it may also be blamed on personal differences between key personalities in the two ministries during the escalation of the feuding. However, beneath all such explanations, is the fact that the conflict has its roots in the pieces of legislation that govern education in this country.

The responsibilities and powers of any government ministry are provided for by law. For purposes of functioning as they presently do, the ministries of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development and Education derive their mandate from their respective Acts of Parliament.

The latter Ministry administers the Education Act of 1987 together with any relevant or subsequent ancillary legislation. This may be in the form of Amendment Acts or Statutory Instruments. Likewise, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development is empowered to do what it does by District Councils Act of 1982 and the Rural Councils Act of 1974 as amended in 1980 (now repealed). What is worth noting in terms of the administration of education in rural areas is that both the Education Act of 1987 and the Rural District Councils' Act of 1988 respectively confer specific powers and responsibilities on the two ministries. In essence therefore, the various Acts of Parliament administered by the two Ministries including the Urban Councils' Act, impose a working partnership between these Ministries. Both are almost equally grassroot-based in their organisational structure and functions. In addition, both have a central role to play in the development of one and the same community for which they were created to serve.

The partnership in question has not worked as smoothly as expected. Instead, it has been bedevilled by serious conflicts. Costley and Todd (1987) describe conflict as a difference of opinion between two or more people or organisations which arises because scarce resources or activities must be shared. Additionally, such conflict may be the outcome of a tussle for power within a system. The conflict between the two Ministries appears to have been along similar lines. Besides feuding over a control of school grants from central government, the ministries appear to have been jostling for power and ownership of non-government schools, especially in the rural areas.

Prior to 1987, the Ministry of Education had no direct financial dealings with council schools. The District Councils Act of 1982 provided for the establishment of school committees by the then District Councils in respect of each of the schools under their jurisdiction. These committees were therefore answerable to their council and not to the Ministry of Education. The Ministry paid per capita grants and teachers' salaries through the councils. Because of this pivotal role which they played in the deployment of human, material and financial resources, councils established within their administrative system an Education Section manned by an executive officer with the assistance of a full complement of requisite staff. The section became powerful and performed principal functions which included the appointment of teachers who were then under the Unified Teaching Service; the payment of their (teachers') salaries; purchase of school textbooks, stationery and furniture; and accounting for the council's entire education budget. As part of this budget, councils administered school building grants from the Ministry of Education. This situation still applies but only in respect of secondary schools since primary schools are no longer eligible for government building grants.

### **Control over Teachers : 1986-1987**

The controversy between the two Ministries began with the transfer of power to appoint teachers and administer their salaries from councils to the Ministry of Education and the Salary Service Bureau, respectively. Making all teachers civil servants with all the entitlements given to them

by the Public Service Commission meant that the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development lost control.

With regard to the appointment of teachers, the Ministry of Education argued that since council officials were not professionals in the field of education, it was not proper for them to handle the delicate matters of professional staffing of schools. As justification, it was pointed out that council officials often deployed secondary school teachers without due regard for their specialist subject qualifications. On their part, councils countered by arguing that staffing of schools was done in consultation with the heads of schools. It must also be borne in mind that these events were taking place at the height of the phenomenal expansion of the country's education system during which 55% of the teaching force was still untrained (Annual Reports, Ministry of Education and Culture and Ministry of Higher Education, 1990). Given this scenario, staffing was by itself a problematic affair. In almost all sectors of public administration where rapid expansion was experienced at that time, existing management/administrative capacities were outstripped.

Far more serious than the above allegations of poor personnel management (teacher appointment and deployment) were those of mismanagement of teachers' salaries. Between mid-1985 and end of 1986 there were rumours of councils paying 'ghost' or 'phantom' teachers (Second Report, Estimates Committee of Parliament, 1987). These were popular jargons of the time used in the press, in Parliament and at meetings to describe non-existent teachers. True, some such 'teachers' could have been falsely paid by unscrupulous council officials who conned government of money in this way. However, it would be unfair to suggest that all council officers were culprits in this case.

The ultimate result of the foregoing situation was that the Ministry of Education secured the support of Cabinet, teachers and Parliament. It was therefore easy for it to include particular clauses in the Education Act of 1987. As could be expected, the object of the special clauses was not to improve councils' management capacity and expertise, but to transfer teachers on to the Public Service. This development effectively eclipsed council's control and influence over teachers since their salaries were subsequently paid directly into every teacher's bank

account straight from Salary Service Bureau. In the process, the school staffing function was taken over by the Ministry of Education which created the position of the District Staffing Officer for the purpose. Admittedly, district staffing officers are professionals in this function, but it should be pointed out that they too have not been spared of allegations of corruption. It is further noted that at the time of assuming their new and additional responsibilities, these officers had no qualifications in financial management.

As far as the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development was concerned, the advent of the Education Act of 1987 signalled the beginning of the erosion of its power and meaningful role in the administration of education in the country. Indeed, what the Ministry feared would happen in this direction did happen, especially as a result of the Education Amendment Act of 1991.

### **The Education Amendment Act of 1991 : Rationale and Implications**

At the time of enacting the Education Act of 1987, the Ministry of Education came up with further grievances with the practice of channelling funds to schools through councils. This time, the issue of concern was per capita grants. This is money paid by government in respect of each school child for the purpose of purchasing textbooks and stationery.

As was the case with the issue of teachers' salary grants, a number of serious charges of inefficiency and corruption were leveled against councils by the Ministry of Education. Some of these are discussed below.

It was alleged that councils were diverting per capita grants from the intended purpose and using them for other projects such as building beer-halls. It was further alleged that some councils often hoarded such funds in their bank accounts for long durations in order to earn substantial interest at the expense of the supposed beneficiaries (pupils) who then went without books and stationery. There was yet a further area of difficulty. All along, the practice had been that councils would

deduct a certain percentage from these grants in order to meet normal administrative expenses incurred by them in servicing schools. In this regard, the Ministry of Education claimed that the percentages deducted by councils were exorbitant and thus exploitative. For these reasons, the Ministry of Education felt it was being disadvantaged by councils. It thus took an uncompromising stance. For it, the solution lay in dispossessing councils of this function as well.

The catalogue of complaints did not end there. It was further alleged that councils forced schools to purchase books, stationery and furniture only from particular suppliers with whom some council officials had shady deals. It was felt by the 'aggrieved' Ministry that sometimes schools ended up with wrong books being deliberately purchased for them by the councils. Ironically, some headmasters were also accused of being equally corrupt in this regard as they were said to connive with the council officials.

### **Evidence of Malpractices in Council Schools Funds**

In 1986 Parliament's Estimates Committee investigated the matter and reported its findings to Parliament in 1987 (Second Report of the Estimates Committee on the Ministry of Education, Vote No. 18, 1986-87:6-7). The Committee found a number of irregularities in the administration of per capita grants as cited below.

Most of the Education Committees of Councils were not aware of how much money each of their schools was entitled to, or their balance after every purchase of items made on behalf of the school. In contrast, "... headmasters were fully conversant with the subject"; said the Estimates Committee (page 8). To worsen the problem, heads were not always informed about the state of their per capita grants.

A further finding by the Estimates Committee was that although councils knew that the per capita grant was only to be used to purchase books, stationery, equipment and other educational material, "... some councils were virementing on the per capita grant to offset non-educational expenses" (page 8).

Further still, the Committee (page 11) was concerned that while the Ministry of Education disbursed these grants to councils, there was "no statutory instrument in terms of which the Ministry could control, monitor and audit the funds" once they were transferred to the councils.

In view of these findings, the Committee concluded (page 18); "... the administration of the per capita grants leaves much to be desired" and made a two-part recommendation which had a lot to do with the establishment of the current School Development Committees and School Development Associations. In the first part (page 18), the Committee states: "the whole matter be reviewed immediately with a view to achieving tighter controls and the effective utilisation of the grants." The second part of the recommendation is closely linked to the first and states that in the 'review' in question, "the Secretary for Education be legally empowered to monitor the administration of the grant directly" (page 21). These recommendations were subsequently endorsed by Parliament.

### **Corrective Measures**

Efforts to implement the recommendations resulted in the enactment of the Education Amendment Act of 1991 in terms of which the establishment of School Development Associations at Government schools, and School Development Committees at non-Government schools became a legal requirement.

Responsible authorities of non-Government schools could apply for exemption provided their reasons for doing so were accepted by the Ministry of Education. It was through this provision that mission and urban councils were exempted from the requirement to establish these committees at their schools due to their comparatively more efficient handling of the per capita grants.

An additional allegation by the Ministry of Education was that councils did not maintain proper and accurate individual school accounts. The result was that some schools overspent and funds from those that had savings were used to mitigate such over-expenditure. It was feared that such malpractice in financial management would encourage the rest of

the schools to overspend as well. As a solution, the Ministry of Education instructed all councils to improve on the upkeep of individual school accounts. Eventually, the Ministry went further and took the drastic and unilateral decision to bypass councils and pay per capita grants direct to schools through its regional offices throughout the country. This move, taken during the 1989/90 fiscal year was very popular with school heads. However, for the Ministry, the move turned out to be a disaster as it was sued by councils and lost the case in the courts. This was because its action was in contravention of Section 29, paragraph (1) of the Education Act of 1987. The paragraph reads, in part:

... the Minister (of Education) shall, in respect of each year, make a grant

... to the responsible authority of every registered school...

Although an amicable solution was to be sought by councils together with the Ministry of Education following the intervention of the then Senior Minister of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development, this was never to be. The Ministry of Education took a firm stand after briefly reverting to the requirements of the Education Act as it stood then. In pursuit of its uncompromising stance, the Ministry of Education introduced an Amendment Bill in Parliament and this is what brought about the Education Amendment Act of the same year, 1991. As far as the local administration of education in non-government schools is concerned, the Amendment Act, Section 29A, states:

- a) the responsible authority (e.g. council) of every registered school to which a grant is made in terms of section twenty-nine shall establish a committee, to be known as a School Development Committee;
- b) a School Development Committee, if approved by the Minister, (of Education) shall be vested with control of the financial affairs of the school for which it has been established.

Taken from the Ministry of Local Government's point of view, the two paragraphs cited above amounted to a provocation: councils would create the School Development Committees by which they (councils) would be completely dispossessed of virtually all financial control. Obviously, such provisions were a recipe for controversy. Once it became law, the Education Amendment Act became even more controversial. This is because at the interpretation and implementation stage, the Ministry of Education came up with Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992 which states under Part II, paragraph 3:

Every School Development Committee shall be a body corporate capable of suing and being sued in its own name and, subject to the Act and in terms of these regulations, capable of performing all acts that bodies corporate may by law perform.

By making School Development Committees bodies corporate, the Education Amendment Act effectively equated them to the Local authorities in terms of the law. Naturally, councils felt offended by the establishment of these committees which they perceived as being equal, parallel and competing with them due to the 'sweeping powers' given to them.

On the composition of the School Development Committees, the same instrument goes on to say:

... a School Development Committee shall consist of:

- a) five persons elected ... by parents of pupils at the school; and
- b) the head of the school; and
- c) the deputy head of the school; and
- d) a teacher at the school, who shall be appointed by the Secretary, and (in the case of councils);

- e) a councilor appointed by the local authority.

It is legal provisions such as these which prompted the then President of the Rural District Councils Association, Matimba, to express indignation (Herald 25 March 1994:9) by stating:

... the Rural District Councils Act empowered councils to run schools in their localities although the Ministry of Education and Culture was at the same time busy forming structures which would effectively remove schools from councils' control.

Councils, which are a creation of Government, are not allowed to employ teachers, transfer or discharge them but surprisingly missionaries are allowed to do so. This means Government has no confidence in its own creation.

### **The Conflict and its Implications**

In spite of the numerous joint meetings held by the two ministries at various levels, and the Secretaries' joint Circular No. 2 of 1992, the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development still had reason to feel marginalised by its counterpart. In a way, the feeling was confirmed by the Ministry of Education's Administration and Finance Circular No. 6 of 1994, together with the accompanying 'Manual on Financial Administration in non-Government Schools'. In the circular, exclusive powers of school management are bestowed on the School Development Committees on which only one person sits as a representative of council.

Although there appeared to have been a relative lull in the conflict during 1995, there was a resurgence of discontent from the Ministry of Local Government, Rural and Urban Development. As an example, April 1996, the Minister found it necessary to express frustration over the way his Rural District Councils were regarded within Central Government itself. He noted:

... the slow pace at which Rural District Councils gain the trust and confidence of central government line Ministries. Central

Government personnel still doubt the ability of these rural people to act responsibly and effectively in the planning and management of development and financial resources.

In terms of the Education Act of 1987 and the Rural District Councils Act of 1998, the administration of rural education in Zimbabwe is under a complex dual system of authority. The two pieces of legislation give similar powers and responsibilities over the same schools to two separate Ministries of the same Government. The interpretation of the two Acts has not been harmonized. To make matters worse, the Education Amendment Act of 1991 has, by conferring 'body corporate' status to SDCs, created new local (responsible) authorities within the areas of other local authorities : councils. For as long as the pieces of legislation governing education in Zimbabwe continue to sit in disharmony, conflict between the two Ministries' various parallel structures is inevitable.

### **School Development Association : Nature, Functions and Composition**

As pointed out earlier, the establishment of SDAs was not controversial. Statutory Instrument No. 70 of 1993 stipulated the objects, the powers, and functions of SDAs as summarised below.

#### **Objects of School Development Associations (Section 5)**

**The objectives of the SDAs are;**

- a) to promote, improve and encourage the development and maintenance of the school;
- b) to assist in the advancement of the moral, cultural, physical, spiritual and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school;
- c) to promote and encourage programmes of interest, both educational and social, for the benefit of the pupils and their parents and teachers.

### **Functions of School Development Associations (Section 6)**

In the exercise of its functions, an association shall:

- a) use the land, buildings and other facilities or parts thereof for educational, sporting, recreational or other purposes which are of benefit to the school;
- b) assist as far as it is able in the operation, extension and development of the school in the best interest of the present and future pupils, in collaboration with the headmaster and subject to the approval of the Secretary;
- c) assist in the preservation and maintenance of the property and facilities of the school in a sound condition fit for the purpose for which they are used or intended to be used;
- d) engage or hire, in consultation with the headmaster and with the approval of the Secretary, such additional suitably qualified teachers, who have not attained the age of seventy years, whether part-time or full-time, as may be considered necessary by the association to serve the needs of the school;
- e) engage or hire, in consultation with the headmaster and with the approval of the Secretary, an agreed number of non-academic staff whose qualifications for specified posts shall be approved by the Secretary;
- f) ensure that no class with fewer than fifteen or more than fifty pupils is permitted to start at the beginning of any academic year except with the approval of the Secretary, in writing;
- g) subject to prior consultation with the headmaster and approval of the Secretary, undertake the construction or installation of new buildings and facilities and to carry out alterations, additions, improvements or repairs to existing buildings;

- h) establish a committee or sub-committees on which it may confer such of its functions and powers as it may consider fit in order to assist it in the undertaking and carrying out its functions.

### **School Development Committee: Nature, Functions and Composition**

It has already been pointed out that School Development Committees are a recent innovation introduced in the education system of Zimbabwe by the advent of the Education Amendment Act of 1991. Because of their being new, there is limited literature. For this reason, the following presentation includes pertinent information obtained from interviews and analysis of available literature, especially legal provisions.

In terms of Statutory Instrument Number 87 of 1992, School Development Committees are bodies corporate which means that they can sue or be sued in their own name.

It is this provision which has sparked off conflict between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Local Government and Urban Development representing its rural councils. The argument being advanced by rural councils is that by making School Development Committees bodies corporate, the Education Amendment Act was turning the committees into equal, competing and excessively powerful authorities within the areas of another authority, namely, council. In terms of the Rural District Councils' Act 1988, Section 45, councils are empowered to provide, operate and maintain schools but subject to the provision of other enactments which, in this case, may mean the Education Act.

Further confusion arises from the fact that in terms of the Education Amendment Act, local authorities are the ones to establish the School Development Committees in schools. Once established, the committees are accountable to the Secretary for Education. Councils have been unhappy about this provision, and their opposition to the establishment of the School Development Committees emanates from this issue.

### **Objects of the School Development Committees**

According to Statutory Instrument No. 87/1992 (Section 4), the objects of the School Development Committees are basically three, namely;

- a) to provide and assist in the operation and development of schools;
- b) to advance the moral, cultural, physical and intellectual welfare of pupils at the school; and
- c) to promote the welfare of the school for the benefit of its present and future pupils and their parents and its teachers.

### **Powers of the Committee**

In terms of Part II (Section 5) of the same instrument, the School Development Committee has the following powers:

- a) to take all measures that appear to it to be necessary or expedient to preserve and maintain the property and facilities of the school;
- b) to employ or hire staff to serve the needs of the school on such terms and conditions as committee may fix with the approval of the Ministry (of Education);
- c) to borrow money on such terms and conditions as the committee considers expedient and to receive grants and donations, whether from parents of pupils at the school or from other persons;
- d) to apply its funds towards the promotion of its objects;
- e) to invest its funds as are not immediately required;
- f) by means of insurance policies, to protect its property and the property of the school;

- g) to take professional advice on all matters affecting the committee and to institute, conduct, defend, compound or abandon legal proceedings; and
- h) generally, to do all things that, in the opinion of the committee are necessary or expedient for, or are reasonably incidental to, the operation, extension and development of the school in the best interest of its present and future pupils, their parents and its teachers.

### **Membership of the School Development Committee**

*Part II (Sub-section 6) of the Instrument goes further to provide that a School Development Committee shall consist of the following:*

- a) five persons elected, subject to these regulations, by parents of pupils at the school; and
- b) the head of the school; and
- c) the deputy head of the school; and
- d) a teacher at the school, who shall be appointed by the Secretary; and
- e) where the responsible authority of the school is-
  - i) a local authority, a councilor appointed by the local authority; or
  - ii) any other authority or body, a person appointed by the authority or body.

The same piece of legislation contains a provision which may require reviewing. This has to do with the length of the committee members' terms of office which is one year. Given the fact that training is a costly and slow undertaking; one wonders whether it is wise and cost-effective to pour huge financial resources into training office bearers who may leave office within a few months due to the annual elections which are mandatory. In light of this and also in view of the fact that many of the parents who are elected into office to two years so as to allow such persons to respond better to the training and demonstrate this in their

discharge of duty?. Alternatively, the office bearers would be elected on a rotational basis. Either suggestion would thus ensure continuity, an attribute which is likely to contribute to sustained school development.

### **School Fund**

Because the Committee's biggest responsibility is that of funds, the Committee is required to establish a school fund account with a bank. As a safeguard, all financial transactions are made through the bank and this is the responsibility of the school's Finance Committee. This committee consists of the chairperson, vice chairperson of the main committee and the head and deputy head of the school.

All books of accounts are subject to audit by the Ministry of Education's officials (Circular Minute Number 6 of 1994). The Finance Committee also prepares statements of accounts for the main committee for presentation at parents' general meetings. The committee must ensure that all the necessary procurements are made, but only within the limits of the funds available.

### **Achievements, Problems and Challenges**

Notable achievements in the establishment of School Development Committees were outlined in an interview with Head Office staff in the Ministry of Education.

The first such achievement mentioned was that over the six years since 1991, out of 5 202 schools which were supposed to have School Development Committees, nearly all of them had them. While these quantitative achievements are impressive, what is more important is whether these Schools Development Committees have won the confidence of the public, and can prove their superiority over their predecessors. In the case of government schools, each one has a School Development Association.

The second achievement concerns the issue of training members of School Development Committees and Associations already in place. Records of the Ministry of Education show that nearly all the committee

members have received their initial two-day course. This was made possible by devolving the responsibility for training to the Ministry's regions.

This achievement is however relative. The major constraint facing the training programme has been that of limited financial resources even for the two-day initial training sessions designed to equip members with rudimentary skills and mere familiarity with their roles. In addition, these initial achievements were eroded by the inevitable loss of trained committee members as a result of the mandatory annual elections of such office bearers.

Because the training programme is incomplete, none of the School Development Committees is as yet receiving its per capita grant allocation directly from the Ministry of Education as originally envisaged. In the meantime, all such grants are being channelled through the Ministry's regional offices. The process of giving several thousands of SDC and SDA members spread throughout the country, the sufficient training for handling large sums of money in the form of annual per capita grants is a formidable challenge. At the present rate, it might take many years to accomplish this objective.

### **The Future**

In a bid to address the shortage of money available for training SDC/SDA members, the Ministry of Education turned to donors for support. To this end a project document; 'A Training Programme for Strengthening the Financial Management of School Funds in Zimbabwe' was produced by Simkins and Williams (1991) of Sheffield Hallam University, United Kingdom. In their report the consultants emphasise the need to train school heads and members of the School Development Committees in their areas of responsibility before per capita grants could be disbursed directly to them. Unfortunately, the training programme has stalled over lack of financial resources even from donors.

## Summary

Although by name School Development Committees/Associations sound much the same as their predecessors (School Boards, Parents Teacher Associations, School Committees, etc) in terms of legal status, they are different and unique in at least two ways. They are the first in the historical chain of local school management bodies to be explicitly and elaborately provided for by an Act of Parliament. Previously, such organisations were only mentioned in Statutory Instruments and not in the Act itself. Secondly, School Development Committees/Associations have much more power and authority vested in them than was with their predecessors.

Within their respective communities, SDAs and SDCs have been popular. In spite of enjoying such popularity and possessing much more power and authority than their predecessors, their effectiveness remains threatened by several problems. Basically, the problems are caused by a combination of the following;

- a) lack of resources due to the current adverse economic environment;
- b) limited management capacity on their part;
- c) confusion and disharmony amongst government policies and pieces of legislation
- d) on educational administration; and
- e) the resultant perennial conflicts within government machinery.

## Conclusion

SDAs and SDCs carry enormous responsibility in education in Zimbabwe. That being the case more research is needed into this innovation. Their structures, operation and expected or assumed effectiveness cannot be left to chance and hope. Future decisions on their retention, form, composition, obligations and responsibilities should be guided by concrete or empirical evidence generated through research. This paper has made a first step of a very long journey.

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