Making Education Work
Lessons Learnt from HakiElimu’s Community Governance Program in 2002-2003
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Schools need to incorporate cultural activities to promote all round child development

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Introduction

This booklet was compiled using information collected from HakiElimu’s Community Governance program in four districts: Serengeti, Mwanza, Misungwi and Ukerewe. The program enabled communities - including teachers, parents and pupils to transform schools and influence decision-making, by facilitating their meaningful participation in school governance.

The primary focus was to stimulate the democratization of school committees, and to encourage historically disadvantaged persons to act collectively to bring change. Pupils and teachers were encouraged to join existing local associations, and to form their own. The program encouraged citizens to share information and take joint actions to improve education in their communities.

It is important to understand the deeper motivations and cultural norms of each community. Often, what is most obvious to a villager in Mbalibali, may be completely overlooked by others, rendering their attempts to facilitate change futile. And yet we do not understand why we failed. The solution rests, at least partially, in good listening.

This booklet presents some of the deeper challenges facing education and democracy in the four districts. These lessons were collected from teachers and pupils, in the schools in these districts, in 2002 and 2003. We noted actions that have been successful, as well as those that have failed for one reason or another. Each one of the 12 “case snapshots” presented here provides a lesson learned about what makes education work. Some of the situations described are changing due to citizen action and overall responsiveness. The lessons have been learnt from listening to citizens, including parents.

Names of most of the people quoted have been changed to protect identities. The HakiElimu offices in the districts were phased out by mid 2005. The Community Governance Program will be continued by citizens themselves, with the support of their local government. The lessons herein bear witness to the achievements of local actors and can serve as inspiration to communities throughout Tanzania.
Mr. Julius Mahendeka, head teacher, was transferred to Kahama Primary School. He noticed right away that students were generally disinterested in school. The teachers were just as nonchalant, and no concerted effort was being made to change the situation. The whole community seemed to be indifferent to the well being of the school.

He found that in Standard 7, only 9 pupils were attending classes. The general attendance rate was a low 45% with a high number of dropouts. For the past five years, not a single student had been selected to attend secondary school. The school was always near the bottom of the list of primary school results in the Mwanza region. There was obviously something wrong, and Mr. Mahendeka was determined to do something about it.
He advised the School Committee to invest in sports and music in order to attract students to school. The school bought brass instruments for a school band, and sports gear including footballs and netballs, using a small grant provided by HakiElimu, a Tanzanian civil society organization. The school timetable was rearranged to provide time slots for music and sports.

“The first time the band performed, many people from the village came to the school to find out what was happening. Some of the pupils who were not in school were among the crowd. To my astonishment, they joined the line, when the pupils were marching, and later they did not go back home. They went straight to their respective classrooms, even without uniforms,” says Mr. Mahendeka.

The performance by the band created a new sense of motivation among the community members. Parents are now eager to become more involved in school affairs. More students are attending school. Teachers have developed a positive attitude towards their work. Attendance has increased dramatically from 45% in 2002 to 75% in 2003.

Mr. Mahendeka has made a simple, but powerful change in his community. What children learn in the classroom is important, but it is not enough. Children need creative engagement; they need to have fun and physical exercise is good for them!

Mr. Mahendeka says that the Kahama Primary School plans to really prove its worth this year, for the first time, in the national examinations.
Teachers in the Serengeti District are at a loss. The Primary Education Development Program (PEDP) has introduced new subjects, changed the curriculum and examination material, and encouraged new teaching methods. They have also started constructing new classrooms and toilets. But they seem to have forgotten the most vital part of the program.

“We do not even remember the last time we were called for in-service training classes. We are teaching using experience, not knowledge, and we are not sure if we are on the right track. The government should know that this lack of training will affect the pupils negatively,” says Pastor Majani, a teacher at Mugumu ‘B’ Primary School.

The Government plans include training for all teachers. But greater emphasis seems to be
placed on infrastructure and buildings. What is the use of a nice classroom when the teacher does not feel prepared to teach her/his classes? Without providing the teachers with adequate training, how can we expect them to adapt? It seems that human capacity development, one of the key goals of PEDP, has been pushed aside.

Changing the curriculum, without telling the teachers how to teach the new material, is like building a new house without a doorway. If teachers are confused, it is obvious that pupils will be too. The Government needs to develop and deliver a systematic outreach, information and training program on the new curriculum and teaching methods.

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It seems that there is a big misunderstanding about education in Serengeti district. People thought that the low numbers of Standard One and Two pupils was a result of parental indifference to school. But when we asked some parents in the area, we found that the reality was quite different. The problem is not that parents don’t want their children in school. The problem is the time the school starts and the distance to be covered to go to school.

Most families in the Serengeti area are agro-pastoralists and live on the edge of national parks and game reserves, which are full of wild animals. Getting to school means walking through areas where it is common to come across a herd of buffalo grazing, or disturb an elephant’s morning meal. When school starts at 8:00 am in the morning, children have to leave home around 6:30 am. This is prime hunting time. Would you want your 7-year-old child walking
through the bush with lions on the prowl?

“These children are too small to walk long distances to the nearest school, passing through heavy bushes where there are wild animals. Since we do not want to see our children being attacked, we prefer to let them grow up a bit, before sending them to school, so they are able to protect themselves,” says Mkongwe Babisi, a parent from Mbalibali village.

Is this too much to ask?

In Mbalibali village, students are also faced with the problem of seasonal river floods during the rainy season. Parents are afraid that, at such a young age, their children might drown if they try to cross the river. So the children simply stay at home until the season ends.

These are problems that can be solved with a little bit of effort. Standard One attendance is dropping, and something must be done. One parent suggested that Standard One and Two classes start later in the morning, so that the children can walk safely to school. There is also talk among villagers about building special classrooms for the earlier classes, closer to the village, so the very young children don’t have to walk so far.

If we take the time to listen, maybe we would understand the concerns of parents and communities, instead of making assumptions about their motives and behaviours. Perhaps we just need to look a little deeper to discover the real issues and the solutions.
According to the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP), the number of children enrolled in Primary School is going to shoot up dramatically. The goal is that all 7-13 year olds will be in school by 2005.

To help schools handle this massive influx of students, the Government has promised a capitation grant. This means each school is meant to receive US $10 per student enrolled initially. Four dollars out of this amount goes to the district level to buy books and materials for the schools. The remaining $6 is to be given directly to the schools.

In 2002, some schools received Tsh 2,000 (about $2) per pupil, but no books or other materials were supplied. In 2003, despite higher enrollment numbers, the allocation in Ukerewe also failed to reach agreed levels.

When we asked school heads and committee members the reasons for this, they said they had no idea how much they were supposed to receive. When the money was sent, no letter was sent to explain or confirm the amount. With little understanding of how much was due and what would come when, committee members found it pointless to try and contest the amount.

As one school committee member explained: “We do not know how much money we were supposed to get last year, or what we will get this year. We are grateful for the support, but it is difficult to plan. So we just wait to find money in the bank, and we wait for instructions.”

If School Committees are to really thrive and take their role seriously, they have to be well informed. They need to know what funds to expect, so they can plan actions accordingly. They also need to actually receive the promised funds! It is difficult to create transparency...
and democracy at school when some leaders fail to serve as good examples themselves.
For the first time ever, pupils' examination results are being posted on the public notice board at Nkilizya Primary school. This has caused quite a stir. Parents, who avoided school earlier, are now flocking in to see how their children are doing. Teachers are curious to see the results of the other classes. Students challenge each other and compete for the highest marks.

But the notice board is not only for curious parents and competitive students. The main idea is to create an open dialogue among students, teachers and the community. It seems that this has worked. Since installment, the notice board has been filled with poems, thoughts, comments and ideas.

“We write things like poems and comments of our own and display them on the notice
board, and, to our surprise, teachers are reacting positively to it. If you visit the notice board outside, you will find it filled with different writings from us, pupils. Through the notice board we can now talk freely," says Kezirahabi, a pupil of Nkilizya Primary School.

Students said they enjoy being able to express themselves freely, without being judged or reprimanded. They know their voices will be heard because the notice board is centrally located in the school and most pupils and teachers read it every day.

The notice board has also been used to inform students and parents about the financial situation of the school. In Hamuyebbe and Nakatanguru Primary Schools, information such as the school budget; funds received, expenditures and balance remaining, were posted on the notice board.

“Whenever there are any new things, we just go to the notice board and we always find them. For instance, if you go there now, you will find the notice of our school's income and expenditure statement. This transparency creates trust between us and the school management,” says Jessica Ochieng, a pupil at Nakatunguru Primary School.

The notice board has proven to be an inexpensive way to facilitate dialogue among students, teachers and the community, and to create transparency about the use of school funds. It is a source of information for people who have questions. It gives children a chance to speak out and even challenge their authorities. Above all, students, staff and parents have become more involved in the school.
In our Kurya tradition, cultural ceremonies are still valued and considered a priority in our daily life. In our village, we divide education into two categories: the community school and the government formal school. The community school focuses on traditional and cultural processes - ‘rites of passage’ such as female genital mutilation (FGM), locally known as Saro, circumcision, and the popular traditional dance “Litungu.” The government school involves formal classes, with a syllabus and books,” says Mzee Peter Mosama of Mbalibali village.

Once a girl reaches the age for FGM, parents will spend a lot of money on new clothes and shoes for her, to prepare her for marriage. It is an important time in a girl’s life, one that deserves a lot of attention.

The problem is that those same parents, who spend a fortune preparing their daughters...
for marriage, claim they do not have money for school supplies, books, uniforms and shoes.

When we asked parents in Mbalibali village about the importance of education, they admitted that community school is often given the highest priority. Parents are willing to spend a lot of money on the FGM ritual, because they receive a higher return for their daughter’s dowry if she has been circumcised in the correct tradition. School, on the other hand, does not repay anything, according to many parents.

Parents fail to see that their daughters have the right to, and the need for, formal education. They should ideally be able to choose for themselves. But even if they are given a choice, they may not step forward, for fear of disapproval. What is needed is open dialogue with the community, about the benefits of formal education, for girls as well as boys.

Research shows formal education does pay back in the long run. It contributes towards improved health and well-being, better employment and greater participation in society. The harmful health impacts of FGM, and their link to women’s rights, have also been well established.

The question is how can there be open dialogue about issues such as this? How can respect for tradition be promoted alongside education and human rights?

Educators need to explore the possibilities for bridging the gap between these two types of education in the Kurya community. Perhaps an effective approach would incorporate certain local, cultural aspects, into formal education. Attempts can also be made to promote the inclusion of appropriate aspects of formal education in the ‘community school’. This may help the Kurya to see the relevance of formal education and rights. Schooling may also gain greater validity and acceptance, in the community. It needs empowered girls and women, and progressive leaders to make the difference.
For a long time, Nkilizya Primary School in Ukerewe District had nothing to be proud of. Most Standard 7 students did not pass their exams, and only 2-3 students were chosen for secondary school every year, one of the lowest numbers in the region. Disheartened teachers decided that something needed to be done.

They met to discover why this was happening, and decided that the main problem was quite straightforward: pupils were not getting enough time with their teachers. And in particular students who required extra help were not getting the time and attention they needed to catch up.

Teachers came up with an idea: they agreed to put in some extra hours for Standard 4 and 7 pupils. But this was to be done only under the condition that parents made an effort to
contribute as well: they were to provide lunch for the teachers.

The school committee approved the proposal and took immediate action by informing the village leadership. The Village Government called for a public meeting to discuss the proposal. Families with children in the school agreed to contribute Tsh 50 each towards lunch for the teachers.

In 2002, the majority of Standard 7 pupils passed the examinations with marks that were well above average, and 10 students were chosen to attend secondary school. The impact was amazing – people's spirits were high and a new confidence pervaded the community. Everyone in the village celebrated the positive outcome and were eager to work towards an even better performance for 2003.

Everyone is motivated by the results. Teachers are challenged to keep increasing the marks. Students are motivated to do well. The community has found their collective effort rewarding. Some parents have even voluntarily increased their contribution. For the first time, parents feel that they are truly involved in their children's school, not just spectators with no say in what goes on.

This goes to show that community members do value the success of their children. They just need to be given the opportunity to get involved and make a difference!
Teachers in the Serengeti district have expressed their frustration at the failure to get their pay on time. Some teachers said that, on “pay day,” they are forced to skip classes to travel to the District Office, only to find that their files have “disappeared.” When they finally reach school again, all the pupils have left and the day has been wasted.

“You can go today and you will find your file on their table, and they will promise you that if you come back after three days, everything will be ready. But when you go there, you will be told your file has disappeared. Can you believe this?” says a teacher from Burunga Primary School.

Pay day has no fixed dates, and teachers are not informed the pay has arrived. They travel 30 kilometers or more, hoping it is payday. They return empty handed, only to find that other district employees have been paid their salaries. There is obviously something wrong here.

This lack of professionalism on the part of some District Officials is unacceptable, and is seriously affecting teachers’ and students’ performance. Students miss out on precious school hours, and teachers are forced to supplement their income through petty businesses in order to feed their families. It is no wonder they can hardly concentrate in class.

District officials have a responsibility to inform teachers when payroll is due to arrive, and to pay them accordingly. How can quality education for all be realized when teachers can’t be sure about their financial survival?
Despite the outcry by activists against corporal punishment, not all students are against the practice. Rather, they just want to know their rights so they can challenge their teachers if they think they are being punished unfairly.

“Corporal punishment should not be banned in schools, because we, pupils, are sometimes trouble makers. If there is no corporal punishment, it will be worse. Pupils will never respect teachers, because they know teachers will do nothing against them. The problem is how it is administered. Five teachers can punish one pupil, with every teacher having his or her number of strokes, and on any part of the body she/he wants. Can you imagine what happens to the pupil?” says Maishufa Abdallah, a pupil at Mapinduzi Primary School.

Students are not stupid. They know that discipline can go too far, and they demand to know where teachers are allowed to hit, how many strokes they can give, and what kind of reasoning they must have to be able to hit students. That way, everyone has clear boundaries.

Some students said they do not think corporal punishment should be allowed in the classroom, and with good reason. Students should be encouraged to contribute ideas in class, but many are afraid because teachers have been known to hit students who give wrong answers! Corporal punishment should be reserved for those who break school rules, not administered to those who want to participate in class.

Students have also proposed that corporal punishment be banned for children in Standard One and Two. It is unfair to punish such small children, because it discourages them from going to school.

The debate on corporal punishment in school should include students themselves. Pupils have interesting ideas to offer on such topics. We should listen to them as well as challenge them, and include pupils in decision-making processes, instead of always deciding on their behalf. Is it possible to have discipline without corporal punishment? Are some alternatives worst than beating? Is it OK to beat as long as it is fair? Or is beating always wrong? Let the debate begin.
According to pupils and teachers from schools in Ukerewe district, the addition of libraries in primary schools has made a noticeable difference in pupil performance. In this year’s mock examination, 8 out of 10 top pupils reportedly came from schools with libraries. Many people expressed their belief that a library is an important tool in the ongoing effort to raise the standard of education in Tanzania.

Teachers also find libraries useful for their own research. Until now, students have been completely dependent on teachers’ lectures in class. In turn, teachers lacked the resources needed to create interesting, challenging material for classes.

Schools with libraries have a more dynamic classroom environment because teachers can inspire pupils with new material, and pupils challenge teachers by voicing their own opinions.
“Going to the library sometimes makes you come out ahead of teachers, because in the library, you can sit down quietly and read, take notes and be able to concentrate,” says a pupil.

Despite the obvious positive impact of libraries on students and teachers, the establishment of library facilities does not appear to be a priority for the Primary Education Development Program (PEDP). CARE International has funded libraries for 62 schools in Ukerewe District under the “Tusome Vitabu” project.

The library includes both textbooks and other learning materials. Many of the children’s books can help fire the child’s imagination. As one teacher put it, “It is like an oasis in a desert. My pupils can use it to quench their thirst for knowledge.”

Libraries such as those supported by Tusome Vitabu can be found in some schools in some districts. The question is, will the Government and citizens help make them a reality in every school in the country? Is the inspiration going to be spread?
A number of parents in Serengeti District have been discouraging their children from passing the Standard 7 examination, by forcing them to write the wrong answers on their exam papers. Some parents threaten their children, warning them that if they disobey, they will be cursed. Others tell their children to choose between their parents and education. Naturally, these children are afraid to go against their parents’ wishes. Why is this happening?

A discussion between parents and pupils revealed that some parents do not want their child to be chosen for secondary school, because they cannot afford all the costs. But the pupils challenged this reasoning, saying that their parents have more than enough to pay for school.
Mzee Peter from Mbalibali village shed some light on the issue: “We value cows more than education. By marrying off your daughter, you are assured of increasing the number of your cows and hence you gain popularity in the village. When your daughter continues with secondary education, it means cows will come very late to the family.”

This remark helps explain why the number of girls enrolled in secondary school is so low. The lives of many people in the Serengeti district are still rooted in traditional beliefs that support Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), early arranged marriages and other practices that inhibit a girl’s chances of becoming educated.

Although tradition should be honored and respected government policy declares that, all children have the right to primary education. Children should be able to choose for themselves what answers they write on their examinations. But they need the support and understanding of their parents. Positive action for change must start at home, and in the community.

To bring about such changes, non-government and civil society organizations, including women’s groups, teachers and community leaders, need to reach out to the community and foster debate. Community members – children and adults - need to find the best means to learn and respect tradition, at least certain aspects of it. The Government also has a role - to provide a quality education that can build real knowledge, skills and confidence - so that its graduates are truly empowered.
Mugumu ‘B’ Primary school in the Serengeti District has taken a big step towards the movement for democracy and transparency in schools. Farida Sostenus, 13, became possibly the first pupil in the country to be directly involved in the management of school funds. Democratically elected by school committee members, she was designated an official signatory on the school account. The School Committee Secretary and head teacher, Mr. Venance Mathew, is thrilled. He said it is high time pupils are involved in the management of their schools. After all, the funds are there for them!

“During a school committee meeting, the members discussed the involvement of pupils in the management of funds to create transparency and trust. We came up with the resolution that the signatories should involve all representative categories: pupils, teachers, parents and village leaders,” he says.
Farida said she has been given training in financial management and feels confident in her position. “No one can cheat me on the income and expenditure of the school funds. I am able to analyze the budget, and review the expenses and income,” she said. She added that she appreciates that her teachers and School Committee members treat her with respect. They listen to her views and acknowledge her rights.

“I am now involved in the financial management of the school funds. My fellow pupils depend on me. I have to make sure that I keep them informed on how funds are spent in the improvement of academics in our school,” says Farida.

Getting pupils involved at this level is an essential step in transforming our schools. It shows what difference pupils can make, when given a fair chance and support. Mr. Mathew and Farida, and the rest of the members of Mugumu ‘B,’ should be proud examples for all of us to follow.

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