

CLIMBING THE TOWERS OF LEARNING IN NORTHERN ZAMBIA

Author: Pamella A. Opiyo

Country: Zambia

Sector: Education

CHALLENGE

Education is a priority sector for the Zambian government. In support of the delivery of accessible quality education, SNV Zambia is engaged with Ministry of Education through a Memorandum of Understanding that addresses selected targets as stipulated in the National Implementation Framework 2008-2010 based on the Education and Skills Development Chapter of the Fifth National Development Plan. In this agreement SNV provides technical assistance towards decentralization processes, strengthening education management and governance institutions in Ministry of Education through advisory services to the Education Board Services Unit, Provincial and District Education Offices. SNV also provides capacity building to other education stakeholders such as civil society organisations. This contributes to greater efficiency, effectiveness and impact in education service delivery

CLIENTS

Following the Memorandum of Understanding with the Ministry of Education, SNV Northern Province works with four District Education Boards namely Mpika, Mungwi, Nakonde and Kasama. The District Education Boards, established in 2002 by an Act of Parliament, consist of a District Education Management Committee and a Governing Board comprised of members drawn from different sectors of the community. The secretariat to this board is provided by the District Education Board Secretary who is the head of District Education Management Committee. The goal of each District Education Board is to ensure the provision of quality education especially in line with the national policy of "Educating our Future" (1996) and universal basic "education for all". The policy document, "Educating our future" is built on five main themes, namely access, quality, equity and equality, decentralisation and partnership. The equity theme expands on the social inclusion of the disabled, orphans and vulnerable children. In line with the MDGs, all children are expected to receive free basic education up to grade 9 by 2015. In the Zambian context grade 9 falls within basic education.

METHOD / SNV INTERVENTION

The discovery of the low pupil learning achievement of 30% triggered interest and stimulated the exploration into the capacities of the head teachers in effective leadership and school management. This was derived from the theory that management is a fundamental factor that determines the performance of any institution. While the District Education board is charged with ensuring effective school management and delivery of quality education they can only sponsor head teachers for management training if and when financial resources are available. SNV recognises that the school environment has a strong influence on how well the children are taught and how much they learn; how long they stay in school and how regularly they attend school. This, in turn, influences learning achievement. SNV also recognises that the learning standards at any given school define the outcome levels that pupils can achieve from participating in the classroom instruction process.

Armed with the baseline results on learning achievement, SNV initiated dialogue with the Provincial Education Officer in Northern Province on what interventions could be put in place to remedy the poor learning achievement situation. With limited resources and no institution to sponsor the head teachers in existence, SNV was requested to support District based Standards Officers to tailor-make training modules on Effective School Leadership and Management. SNV encouraged the Provincial Education Officer to also initiate discussions with

Ministry of Education National Office about the revival of National In-Service Training College Chalimbana to its original mandate of training head teachers in school leadership and management.

So far, the training modules have been delivered to a total of 62 Zonal Basic School Head Teachers in the three target districts of Northern Province (Mungwi, Mpika and Nakonde). Nakonde and Mungwi Districts had the training conducted in September 2008 while Mpika had it in April 2009. The objectives were to:

- Reflect on the learning achievement in the district;
- Identify different leadership competencies and competency gaps amongst the head teachers in the District;
- Learn the 'whats' of an effective manager/school head teacher roles and make a strategy for improvement in effective learning outcomes; and
- Set out how to improve Parents teachers Association/parents' and other stakeholders' involvement (voice and accountability) in education service delivery.

Though SNV developed the modules, users could have their own different approaches. However, simple matrices and data included prop up knowledge and skills development and raise awareness on the current situations as real case scenarios were used in illustrations. During the training sessions one could hear comments such as *"I wish this training came earlier, a lot would have changed in my school"*, *"I thought I knew, yet there is so much more to learn"*, *"This kind of training should be given to head teachers soon after appointment"* to mention just a few. The various governance aspects such as gender, equity, social inclusion and accountability were discussed and resolutions made for implementation.

During the training, each head teacher prepared an action plan for improvement of management and performance of his/her school. One of the actions for the head teachers was to ask for support on assessing teachers they have assessed and realize need more support from the district Standards officers. The follow-up of the implementation of the action plans are hinged on the District Education Board Secretary's office. Monitoring is done by Education Standards Officers who are members of District Education Management Committee. The training of other Head Teachers in the Zone(s) became a designated responsibility of the District Education Board Secretary. The Standards Officers have gone out to be part of dissemination and training organized by the trained Zonal head teachers. The head teachers also send progress reports to the Standards officers. The governing body of the District Education Board has also been challenged to mobilize community involvement in the education of their children through effective participation in the Parents-Teachers Associations and initiation of school open days that will allow them to appreciate the performance of their children.



Group session, Nakondi Head Teachers Training



Community mobilisation on quality education in Mungwi

OUTCOME

A leap at the Tower

With 62 head teachers trained, more than 50,000 pupils and about 1,000 teachers now experience inspired visionary leadership. This is illustrated in the joint setting up school targets and indicators with teachers. There has been improved supervision of teacher performance by the head teachers with the result that teachers now appreciate their functions and take more pride in their work. For instance, there is establishment and teacher involvement in pupil reading clubs recently set up. Teachers in Musungu and Malambwa Basic Schools in Mungwi and Mpika Districts respectively expressed their satisfaction with the consultations their head teachers make before arriving at decisions that concern them in delivery of education in the school. Internal assessments reports from the three District Education Boards indicate improvement in performance of pupils at all levels from grade one to grade nine.

Other outcomes of the improved management skills are:

- At least 10 schools have initiated open days and accountability systems in which, together with the parents, they also incentivize performance. The head teachers have also embraced stakeholder participation for quality education delivery, data collection, and analysis and use of data to support decision-making.
- The 9 Education Standards' Officers now appreciate that their role is not only about supervision of lesson delivery in class but that school management affects the performance standards of the school and pupils. They now pay attention to leadership issues.
- The District Head Teachers Associations have been revived with a new vision, renewed vigour and motivation to discuss education and school improvement issues rather than only the conditions of employment.
- The districts in which the training was rendered in 2008 recorded remarkable improvements in performance of National Examination results in grade 9.
- Continuous assessments have now been introduced in most schools and they show improved literacy and numeracy in non-exam classes. The assessments are taken on monthly basis.
- The National In-service Training College Chalimbana has been requested by the Ministry of Education to restart the in-service training to head teachers on effective school leadership and management. The first batch of sponsored teachers is now under training.

Since this was a pilot, only a few partners have been involved including the Northern Province Women Development Association and Kasama Christian Community Care who have both facilitated increased community involvement and participation in delivery of quality education. Consultation is on-going with other partners like Action Aid in Nakonde, World Vision in Mpika and the Zambia Scholarship Fund in Mungwi District. They will support the strengthening of Parents Teachers Associations to enhance accountability in schools.

IMPACT

Currently, other districts in the province and beyond have requested the same approach. Indeed, the Ministry of Education has found it an important support mechanism for the quick transformation of learning achievement in Zambia. This process can be replicated in other provinces and countries as it is clear that effective school leadership and management are the backbone of good performance in the sector. Already, the Ministry of Education is considering

LESSONS LEARNED

adopting the SNV tailor-made training modules developed by the SNV Education Advisor Northern province to train more head teachers on the job through out the country.

Organisations can easily become mired in the traditional ways of doing things, in this case lamenting over the lack of resources to train head teachers in leadership and management for increased pupil learning achievement is a case in point. This could be because they either do not know that there are alternatives or because they are afraid or unwilling to try them out. In three districts in Northern Province SNV interventions at the intermediate level combined with new school leadership and management skills has triggered bold steps that have delivered positive results, erased fears and encouraged groups of stakeholders to quickly embrace local solutions. These include public-NGO partnerships, modification of schools standards monitoring to embrace leadership and management monitoring, establishment of multi-stakeholder platforms that work.

It is not just about infrastructure, adequate teachers and many other factors, but also about effective leadership and management which continue to be an important and integral part of good performance in schools. Good school leadership and effective management cannot and must not be ignored in the drive to address education quality issues. **"I wish this training came earlier, I would have done a lot better"** is a cry that denotes the thirst for higher capacities for improved performance among front line service providers.