

# MOBILE TEACHING IN TANZANIA: A SOLUTION OR A SADDLE?

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**Country: Tanzania**

**Sector: Education**

## INTRODUCTION

It is Thursday mid morning in Komtonga Primary school at Turiani Division and the sky is clear with a shining sun. Madame Simphrosa Kifunda, riding on a bicycle from Turiani school, had just arrived at Komtonga school, and she wipes her sweating face with a hand-kerchief. Her watch reads 11.00 o'clock in the morning, and she is just in time before she enters the class at 11.30am. Today is her turn to conduct a classroom lesson on "Maarifa ya jamii" (Social Study) to Standard Seven pupils of Komtonga School who are just about to seat for their Final National Examination in September this year. This is part of her weekly routine work as a mobile teacher. The Host and the head teacher of Komtonga Primary school, Mrs Margreth Sebe, offers Simphrosa a "Coke" to cool her throat which had been so dry due to long riding under the hot sun. Madame Simphrosa is a grade IIIA Teacher and one of the 12 Competent Champion (Mabingwa) teachers in Turiani division who were identified to be involved in an innovative programme of "Mobile Teaching", to respond to shortage of teachers and poor quality of teaching in Primary schools.

### Background

Mvomero District is situated at the Southern -Eastern part of Tanzania. The district performance in 2007 Primary School Leaving Examination went down from 52% in 2006 to 45.5%. Thus, out of 5330 candidates who did the exam only 2,417 passed. That was below the National Performance standard of 62% in the same year. Performance in individual subjects was 12.8% in Maths; English- 26.3%, Social study - 46.3%, and Science 57% respectively. At the regional level Mvomero District was the last in performance among the 5 Districts.

#### Primary Education Statistics in Mvomero District

- Primary schools- 138
- Number of Teachers-
- NER- ....
- GER-....
- PTR-
- PCR-
- THR-

Overall Performance in 2007 National Primary School Leaving Examination- 45.4% ( maths-... English... Science..., Social Study....)

- Shortage of Teachers....

## CHALLENGE

To respond to that embarrassing situation the leadership of Mvomero District took several initiatives:

- a. Consultations between District Executive Director and the Education Department to reflect more on the issues.
- b. A visit to Maskati Ward which had the most poorly performed schools. All Education staff, the DED and Councillors from Social service and Education committee formed a team to visit Maskat ward. The purpose of the visit was to discuss and learn from stakeholders including parents, pupils, teachers, local leaders about the factors that contribute to poor performance of Primary Education in their schools.
- c. Reflection meeting of the District Social service and Education committees to analyse and reflect on the findings from Maskat visit and workout the way forward. SNV advisors from Central Portfolio were requested to facilitate the meeting, which was conducted on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2008. With SNV facilitation members were able to identify factors hindering performance in Primary schools and prioritised them for the way forward. Most of the factors were grouped under planning, leadership and management (governance), communication and coordination of stakeholders, gender and inclusiveness, rule of law, effectiveness in teaching and learning process, incentives to teachers, accountability, monitoring and evaluation. The meeting recommended calling a District stakeholders workshop for further reflection and synthesis of the factors and way forward.

- d. The recommendations from Social service and Education Committee were presented to Council management Team (CMT), which endorsed them for further action.
- e. On 28<sup>th</sup> Jan 2008 SNV advisors facilitated Mvomero District Multi-stakeholder workshop which involved Regional and Council education officials, retired education officials, CSOs and Private sector representatives. At the end of the workshop, 6 main areas were identified for improvement in order to improve performance in Primary education sub sector. These were:

- Governance systems (planning, budgeting, management, leadership, monitoring and evaluation, and incentives for teachers) at all levels.
- Collaboration, Coordination, and communication among implementers and actors at all levels (Council, Ward, Schools).
- School comprehensive plans (vision, objectives, action plans, pupils assessments, teaching tools and learning facilities/equipments, infrastructure, motivation to teachers and pupils, etc)
- Capacity building of school committees
- Teachers establishment and professional capacity
- Functionality of Teachers Resource Centers (Supervision, foster Team teaching etc).

In the same workshop an Education Task Force was formed and given mandate to develop a reinforcement /action plan, coordinate and supervise actors around the implementation process. Recognising its valid and productive advisory input to the District, SNV was identified to be a member of the District Education Task Force and participated in all activities. It was the Education Task force, in one of its planning session, which came up with the idea of establishing a "Mobile Teaching" to respond to limited Council funds, which was a constraint in transferring teachers to respond to problems related to teacher establishment and professional capacity.

#### **The Mobile Teaching**

An innovative cluster based strategy – "Mobile Teaching" was introduced in May 2008 to respond to problems related to teacher shortages and poor quality of teaching which affected performance of Primary Education sub-sector.

The Mobile Teaching concept was visualised to be feasible in addressing the problems of teacher shortages and teaching quality, as it would require very minimal financial input from the council, TRCs and the respective schools. The Mobile Teaching (MT) is managed by Teachers Resource Centres (TRCs), across the District, and the main emphasis is on content knowledge and pedagogy.

The MT embraces two contextual concepts:

As it reads, it involves teachers moving from one school to another to support teaching and learning processes in primary schools. Selected competent teachers called "Walimu Bingwa" (The Champions) move around to visit other schools and support other teachers to teach their respective subjects focusing on improving the quality of teaching in Primary schools.

On the other hand, Mobile Teaching is applied in a Camping context where a group of students from several schools are camped in another school compound and the champion teachers from various schools come together and teach them on respective subjects/topics. This happened this year in June when the Primary seven pupils from all 8 schools in Sungaji ward camped at Turiani school during the holiday period.

## CLIENTS

### Identification of Champion Teachers

An in-depth process was carried out to identify the teachers. It included the following:

1. First of all the Head teachers were asked by the DEO to identify competent subject teachers in their schools and submitted names to TRC Coordinators. Identification criteria were developed by TRCs and given to Head teachers.
2. TRC coordinators prepared assessment meeting which the Head teachers and academic teachers from respective schools attended. The identified teachers were given specific topic to prepare a lesson and teach in front of the assessment panel. The panellist, using the given assessment criteria, selected 28 teachers (gender disaggregation will be done later) who were really competent in content knowledge and pedagogy while delivering their teaching lesson. However, at the moment only 12 selected "Champion" teachers are running the Mobile teaching in Sungaji ward.

## METHOD

### Operational Modalities

This case study focuses on a Mobile Teaching programme in Sungaji Ward at Turiani Division, Mvomero District. The Mobile Teaching operates at the Ward/cluster level under supervision of TRC Coordinators. It has been arranged for a mobile teacher to visit one school per week to provide required support. Mobile teachers do meet twice per month to share experiences and exchange ideas to improve their strategies.

Initially TRC members planned that each mobile teacher should be given Tshs. 10,000 weekly, but that has not materialised due to limited funds. Schools have been asked to provide some token amount to facilitate transport of mobile teachers. The assisted schools also provide meals for the mobile teachers as motivation. When students are in a learning camp in one of the selected schools, their schools do arrange for meals for them and the mobile teachers who come together to teach the students in the learning camps. Learning camps are normally arranged during the holiday period. Sungaji Ward TRC has incorporated Mobile Teaching in its annual plan and budget, and has budgeted Tshs. 15 million for Mobile Teaching, for consideration in the next year Council Budget.

## IMPACT

### Achievements

It is too early to assess realistic achievements only in three months period after the introduction of Mobile Teaching in the District. However, few initial progress and achievements can be described:

- The approach has triggered the mindset of Education officials and teachers to be creative in searching for feasible local solutions to local problems in the Education Sub-sector. A sense of voluntarism is demonstrated by Champion teachers who assist teaching in other schools without formal additional teaching allowance. They are only given a token according to school financial position.
- Despite other initiatives including close supervision and monitoring, and regular school based assessments, most teachers and District Education officials were convinced that the mobile teaching has contributed, to a certain extent, in the current tremendous improvement of Mvomero District overall pass rate in the Regional based mid assessment (MOCK) up to 81%. That performance pushed the District from the last position in 2007 to second position in 2008, among the 5 Districts of Morogoro Region.
- Recognition of champion teachers has increased their morale and commitment to support other teachers towards improving the quality of teaching in Primary schools. This was evident from the discussions with the "Champion" teachers who made the following remarks:

## LESSONS LEARNED

"It has been wonderful to be involved in a Mobile Teaching. First of all I feel honoured to be identified as a champion teacher. It is a prestige. Secondly, the children in the schools that I visit really enjoy my teaching, they become very attentive and curious to ask questions in order to learn. They really enjoys the experience" (A mobile teacher from Turiani school)

On the other hand, the students get new teaching experience which enhance their learning and build their confidence to tackle their lessons. One student in Komtonga school said it all:

"Yesterday we had a Fantastic revision of difficult Mathematic topics with a new teacher (mobile teacher. We feel that we are well prepared for the soon coming final examination, which is just one month ahead". (Std 7 pupil, Komtonga School).

- Recognition of champion teachers and social support enhanced their motivation and commitment to support other schools in classroom teaching.
- The mobile teaching opens gateways for improved team teaching
- If well implemented and documented the mobile teaching can be a national Model for replication country wide.

### Limitations and Challenges

- Currently the Mobile Teaching has been very limited to classroom teaching in order to improve academic performance of the pupils and there is little focus on improving other areas of student learning and teachers' professional development.
- Geographical locations of some schools e.g. in the mountainous site is a hindrance factor to the implementation of the Mobile Teaching. Such areas are not accessible by car, a bike or bicycle. To reach those schools one has to walk on foot for 1 and ½ to 2hrs or more depending on the health fitness of the individual.
- Limited funding of TRCs makes it difficult for TRCs Coordinators to conduct regular monitoring in schools and support mobile teachers financially with some lunch allowance and transport fare (e.g. for hiring a bicycle).
- Increased Teaching load on part of the Champion teachers.
- Limited support system to mobile teachers. Motivation is primarily based on recognition that one knows the subject matter and teaching methodology, and meagre allowance that is provided by schools.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

Mobile Teaching is a good takeoff in applying local solutions to local problems in the education sector. However, it still requires further development to sharpen the approach and related strategies to focus on long term teachers' professional development. Also there are no clear Sustainability and exit strategies hence need to be well established right from the beginning to avoid unexpected discontinuation of the initiative.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Mobile Teaching should be applied only to schools which have a need in relation to shortage of teachers and competency of teaching staff. Otherwise it will be a wastage of energy and resources, let alone demoralising the available competent teachers in respective schools
- Mhonda TTC, which is situated in Turiani Division, can support tailor made in-service training for Champion Teachers who are coaches/ mentors and academic teachers from respective schools. Such support may include preparation of Teaching aids. In turn the TRCs can arrange in-service orientation training of subject teachers, to be facilitated in collaboration by Champion teachers, Academic teachers and TRC coordinators
- TRCs should support Champion teachers to establish a District Network for sharing experiences and new innovations that will make the mobile teaching effective and successful
- Existing ward meetings among champion teachers should be well structured and formalised.
- Develop further the mobile teaching and make "Team Teaching" concept embedded in the Mobile Teaching approach. The approach should also be expanded to provide on the job training to teachers with limited content knowledge and teaching skills in their particular subjects.
- SNV to support the Council and TRCs to document Mobile teaching approach, process and experiences for record keeping and sharing with others.
- Supported teachers should attend lessons conducted by Champion teachers for them to learn and improve knowledge on subject matter, methodology and teaching skills.
- SNV has a big room to facilitate Council to bring together TRC coordinators, Champion teachers and Education key actors (include CSOs) to share experiences, and further develop the approach.