The Role of Pupils in School Governance



Why should pupils participate in governance?

Some people think children should only be in school to study, and should not be involved in governance. They say that children are not mature enough to be involved in important decision-making. But there are good reasons for pupils to be involved. Some of these are:

- Pupils have insights. Children in school know what is going on, and can contribute practical ideas for change. For example, they can tell if school resources are well used, which teachers are punctually in the classroom, and what can be done to make the school a better place.
- Pupils learn by doing. By participating in decision-making, children learn valuable life skills about how to balance different interests, argue a case, and make a presentation. Pupils will learn how democracy works, and use these skills at home and in the community.
- Participation creates ownership. Pupils who have been involved in creating something are much more likely to understand it, see its importance and be committed to it. For examples rules and regulations developed with pupil participation are more likely to be fair and respected.
- Participation is a right. Pupils are full human beings and have certain basic rights. The Convention on the Rights of the Child, which has been ratified by Tanzania, recognizes the right of children to be involved in all matters affecting them (Articles 12-15). The Government Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) also recognizes this and outlines how pupils should participate.

What does PEDP say about Pupils and Governance?

PEDP explicitly recognizes the importance of pupils to participate in school governance through Pupils' Councils and School Barazas. The PEDP Appendix on this is reproduced fully here (see box).

According to PEDP, pupils involved in governance have the following roles:

- Represent views and interests of all pupils, including marginalized and those with special needs, in school governance and decision-making and in the school committee.
- Contribute to developing and monitoring school plans and use of funds.
- Communicate information between school/village management and pupils

This policy guideline provides pupils with the right to be heard and an opportunity to improve their school. Pupils will also need to be responsible. They need to act in a way that is thoughtful, fair, respectful and inclusive, especially of those whose voice is not normally heard. The guideline provides for a teacher, preferably chosen by the pupils, to guide the pupils in a facilitative manner. School committees need to ensure all aspects of PEDP, including pupil participation, are properly implemented.



Appendix 6
Outline of Arrangements for Pupil Participation in School Governance



Two pupils from each stream (1 boy, 1 girl) will be democratically elected by their peers to be members of the Pupil Council. (This may begin from Std 3 if Std 1 and 2 pupils are considered too young.) In addition, 2-4 extra 'special seats' may be allocated for children with disabilities or other special needs.

The role of pupil representatives will be to a) represent the interests of their classmates in the Pupil Council and b) to share information from the Pupil Council with their classmates. This requires the pupil representatives to be responsive to their constituency – informally on a continual basis and through formal class meetings held for this purpose once a month.

The meeting of all the pupil representatives will constitute the Pupil Council. The council will have its own democratically elected leadership, which will include a chairperson, vice-chairperson, secretary and two representatives to the school committee. Other leadership positions may also be created as needed/desired by the Pupil Council.
The Pupil Council will normally meet once per month and more often if necessary.

The pupil representatives on the school committee will receive their mandate from and report to the Pupil Council.
All pupil representatives/leaders will serve for a term of one year and be eligible for re-election.

A senior teacher/counsellor will attend Pupil Council meetings as an observer. The role of this person will be to a) facilitate capacity development of Pupil Councils and b) serve as a conduit of information between pupils and teachers/school administration (Pupil Council leaders will also communicate themselves with the school administration). This teacher/counsellor will be carefully chosen, preferably by the pupils themselves, to ensure he or she is able to play a facilitative role and avoid dominating or manipulating Pupil Council meetings.

Additionally, a summary of a) Pupil Council, b) teacher/staff and c) school committee meetings will be presented and key issues discussed at a monthly school baraza (meeting). This baraza should not be dominated by the Head-teacher/teachers, or simply an avenue for them to make announcements, but rather an opportunity to share information from and dialogue on key issues among the entire school community. Parents who are members of the school committee will be invited to participate in the baraza. The baraza should be jointly organized and run by the Head-teacher and Pupil Council Chairperson.

The entire process should be characterized by principles of respect, inclusiveness, transparency, honesty and other values consistent with child friendly and rights-respecting schools.

Clearly, the democratic system described above represents a major departure from current practice at school level. Clear guidelines and procedures will need to be developed, and a strategy devised to promote the idea/concept at all levels. Change will take time, and require significant capacity development, including documenting lessons learned, sharing good practice, etc. A careful plan of how to do this will need to be developed, and will be part of the program to school committee capacity building program.

Source: Strengthening Institutional Arrangements, Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP), Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), August 3, 2001

How can I follow up?

Everyone has a right to information, and everyone has a right to know about pupil participation in PEDP. Now that you know what PEDP says about pupil participation, you can see if it is happening in your community, ask questions if it is not and give constructive ideas on how to make things work better. For example, you can ask if the Pupils' Council has been meeting in your school, and how its members were democratically elected by their fellow pupils. You have a right to ask questions, and get clear answers.

According to Government reforms, it is no longer acceptable for leaders just to give orders and not listen to the people. Of course change takes time, and one cannot expect everything to be perfect right away. But you have a right to see progress being made.

You can get information on PEDP from the head teacher, District Education Office, your Ward Counsellor or Member of Parliament. You can ask for information at the Village/Mtaa Assembly or at Council meetings. You can also ask NGOs that are active in your area, or contact HakiElimu.

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