Implementation of the Primary Education Development Plan: Are We Achieving its Goals?

Japhet Makongo

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Introduction

The Government of Tanzania has shown serious commitment to improve primary education in Tanzania by launching the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP). The public clearly appreciates the actions taken by the Government to revitalize education, and has contributed immensely to the process.

The ministries responsible for PEDP implementation (MOEC and PORALG with support of the Ministry of Finance) have made significant strides including through the provision of guidelines, funds, field visits and training of actors at different levels. Significant achievements during the first year include increased enrolment, classroom construction and teacher recruitment and deployment. Numerous guideline documents and circulars have been issued. Funds have been released and transferred to local councils and school accounts for construction and quality improvements. A strategy for school committee capacity development and practical materials to support that process are in progress. These changes represent important advances after almost two decades of decline in education.

At the same time, implementation of PEDP faces a number of serious challenges. This is inevitable given the ambitious scope of the program. Nevertheless, these challenges need to be clearly and honestly identified so as to be able to find solutions, devise strategies and move forward. Many of these challenges need immediate attention if PEDP is to be sustainable and continue to enjoy public support.

There are many important issues, but in this paper I will focus on three critical challenges:
1) access to information, 2) transparency and democratic decision-making and 3) funding at the community level. My purpose is to share information and insights from civil society on PEDP implementation, in concrete terms. The information is drawn from our experiences of working in partnership with school communities in Serengeti and Ukerewe districts, monitoring reports from the Government and NGOs (presented at the PEDP Stocktaking workshop in 2002), and media coverage.

1. Access to Information

> Local government Authorities will, in any case, manage the implementation of ESDP in their respective LGA within the framework that enables and empowers communities around schools to meaningfully and effectively

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at a public forum organized by TRACE, Karimjee Hall, Dar es Salaam on 24 March, 2003.
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> participate in the implementation of decisions (PEDP-Strengthening Institutional Arrangement Annex, August 2001)

The government's initiatives to facilitate decentralisation aim to improve the participation of individual citizens, leaders and institutions at local levels in decision-making processes. One of the key prerequisites for enhancing public participation is provision of **information.** Well-informed citizens will be in a better position to make sound decisions and to participate effectively in the implementation of policies. Implementation of the Information, Education and Communication (IEC) strategy is therefore critical to PEDP's success.

Achievements

During the course of implementing PEDP, we have observed increased space and opportunity for NGO engagement in PEDP at various levels (BEDC, Task Force, Technical Working Groups and direct implementation). This enables NGOs to input information from community level and assist in informing communities across the country. Civil Society – NGOs, CBOs and other actors – have played a key role in informing the public about PEDP.

A comprehensive IEC strategy has been developed, which emphasizes the use of two-way communication methods and creative, popular materials. Workshops have been held at different levels to enable different stakeholders to understand the purposes and modalities of PEDP.

Challenges

Distribution of circulars and guidelines to districts and schools on the use of funds, school committee reform, construction guidelines and procedures has been delayed in many cases. IEC materials often reached communities long after funds were already sent, which led to major problems of accountability and transparency in implementation. The 2002 baseline study carried out by HakiElimu in Serengeti and Ukerewe districts illustrates a number of key problems:

- Unwillingness of some village government leaders to provide information to communities
- Low capacity of village councils, ward development committees and school committees to document and disseminate information creatively
- Difficulties in accessing information on key policy issues (PEDP, circulars etc)
- Failure among many leaders (from village, Ward, District, National) to report back on how concerns raised by communities had been addressed.

There is low capacity within District Councils to disseminate information fast, creatively and in a participatory manner. Some District officials dominate public meetings by **telling or giving instructions to** communities on how PEDP should be implemented rather than engaging in dialogue and creating space to listen to people's views and ideas. Consequently, while the PEDP document emphasizes public participation and accountability, in practice it is often not clear how people's views are listened to and accommodated in PEDP implementation.

In some instances contradictory information on key policy issues is presented to the public, and specifically to school committees. A concrete example is the case of guidelines on the use of funds for construction. Conflicting information is found in the policy statements listed below as they refer oo the power, role and responsibilities

of different authorities (e.g., district officials, district councillors, ward level officials, village government officials, head teachers, school committees):

- PEDP guidelines as stipulated in one of its annexes on construction
- Circulars issued by MOEC and PORALG
- The Presidents' address to the public to launch classroom construction strategies of PEDP at the national level on 20 September, 2002, stressing the need for community participation in construction of schools
- District Council directives on how to use contractors, required number of classrooms, purchase of building materials (at times a number of different circulars)
- District Commissioner interventions.

In many cases this has resulted in confusion, hampered implementation and fostered conflict between different leaders and among the community. [3] In some cases head teachers have been detained and school committee members fined personally due to failure to conform to one or another version of the directives. This kind of situation undermines the very notion of a community-based approach as fostered by PEDP. Accountability is paramount, but so is due process and fairness. Clear, consistent and open dialogue and two-way communication, where both leaders and citizens have an opportunity to understand their roles and air their views, is critical to enhancing community participation and accountability of all actors.

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2. Transparency and Decision Making Processes

Official Government documents clearly state that PEDP implementation will be done in conformity to principles of public participation, democracy, transparency and accountability at all levels - from the national to the community. Emphasis is placed on **devolving power and resources to the community level**, and in particular on the role of the School Committees.

> "… Local Government Management Teams (LGMT) will shift from direct execution of activities to providing technical and organisational assistance to school committees and village councils who will implement their school plans." (PEDP, Institutional Arrangement Annex, August 2002)
>
> "School committees will determine the precise use of the grants in a democratic and transparent manner but within the main guidelines from BEDC." (PEDP).

Achievements

Mechanisms have been developed and guidelines issued to enhance democratic and transparent decision-making.

Information and transparency on quarterly disbursements of ("Other Charges") funds from Treasury to regions and districts is published in newspapers. Some District Councils display fund allocations on public notice boards. (However, internal re-

[3] See "What the Papers are Saying about the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP)" News Clippings April-September 2002 and "Letters to the Editors about Primary Education" News Clippings July 2002-March 2003, HakiElimu, Dar es Salaam.

allocation of funds, particularly the Other Charges budget codes, made at departmental level is rarely shared publicly.)

Transfer of funds to the school level has increased the motivation and confidence of school committees and parents to participate in school affairs more effectively. Training of school committee members and head teachers (though to date still limited and sporadic) in management and accountability of school funds has been helpful.

Challenges

Communities and school committees have not been given adequate space and opportunity to determine their own priorities at the school level, which is contrary to the spirit of devolution in PEDP and local government reform. For example, the use of capitation grant funds has been pre-determined from central headquarters, through the percent formula breakdown of capitation grants.

The extent to which all school committee members have the opportunity to engage fully in transparent decision-making is limited. In many cases, head teachers are still the main source of information in some schools and therefore control what is known by other stakeholders. Information on budgets and school plans is kept in files and not publicly accessible, including on head teachers' notice boards.

> In a recent school committee meeting at … Primary School in Ukerewe District, the head teacher presented the school annual plan and budget based on government-funded activities only and did not include ongoing activities being funded by other agencies. When one member requested to know, the head teacher was not in a position to present the information (HakiElimu baseline study).

In many districts, school committees do not include democratically elected pupil representation as required by Attachment 6 of the Institutional Arrangements Annex. The involvement of ordinary citizens and especially those who have been excluded in the past, such as pupils and poor families, has not been pursued vigorously.

3. Funding at School and Community Level

One of the most important components of PEDP is the commitment to ensure significantly greater funds reach the school level for quality improvements. The **capitation grant** is the main device by which to achieve this.

> "In order to introduce a reliable income stream for essential non-salary expenses at school level, a Capitation Grant equivalent to US $10 per enrolled child will be instituted nationwide as of January 2002. Of this, $4 will initially be sent to districts to enable schools to acquire textbooks and other teaching and learning materials. The remaining $6 will be disbursed to schools through the district council, and the school committees will decide how best to use the funds." (PEDP)

The Government has further emphasized transparency in relation to the use of these funds:

> "In order to strengthen democracy, each school has to give a report on income and expenditure every three months to the Village Government and Assembly. The report should also be put on notice boards. From now on, every citizen should be able to know the amount of money received by his or her District Council, or school, and how it was used. I should like to commend those schools who are already doing so … This is the kind of transparency, accountability and good governance that we want from each school, and from every District Council." (President Benjamin Mkapa, Speech, 20 September, 2002). [4]

Achievements

The capitation grant mechanism to transfer funds to school levels has been established. Virtually all school committees have opened bank accounts.

Disbursement of part of the capitation grant has been made and has reached the school level in many cases.

Broad financial guidelines have been issued and the need for transparency and democratic accountability has been emphasized.

Challenges

Various reports indicate that the full capitation grant ($6 per pupil in cash and $4 per pupil worth of learning materials) is yet to reach the school level. In many cases it appears that schools have only received about Tshs 2,000 (or about $2) as the "UPE replacement" portion of the capitation grant, and an uneven number of books. This has serious negative implications because many schools do not have the "reliable" and adequate income stream needed to undertake essential educational functions.

The actual flow of funds to schools is erratic and not reliable. The schedule and amounts of school funds are not known at the school level.

Developing the capacity of school committees, teachers and village council in planning and budgeting processes is desperately needed, though it should be noted that there is work underway to deal with this situation. However, training programmes appear to only emphasise accounting and reporting functions, such as book-keeping skills. These are certainly crucial, but focus on only one set of responsibilities of school committees. More attention is needed to basic planning skills and debate concerning the quality of education, appropriate teaching methodology and the like. Exposure to different kind of learning materials, text books and other sources of information is needed as well, so that committee members will know differing educational approaches when making decisions about education plans.

Despite strong public statements by higher government authorities, there seems to be resistance at the local level to publicise financial information about school budgets, incomes and expenditures so that it is accessible to most citizens. This lack of transparency weakens accountability and increases the potential for abuse of funds.

[4] Reproduced in "President Benjamin William Mkapa: Recent Key Speeches on Education, Development and Democracy" News Clippings September 2002-March 2003, HakiElimu, Dar es Salaam.

Financial decisions that should be the mandate of the school committee are still made in many places by higher authorities who send "instructions" to schools on what to purchase, where and when. This not only disempowers the school committee and community, it weakens accountability.

Conclusion

We should all rightly celebrate the achievements made to date in increasing enrolment, building classrooms and recruiting teachers. But PEDP is much more than that. Access to practical and relevant information, democratic decision-making, and transparent accounting of funds are also central to the success and sustainability of PEDP. Government reports, NGO experiences, media coverage and the discussion above all indicate that while important strides have made on these aspects of PEDP, there is still a long way to go. The time is now ripe to debate these challenges openly and honestly.

One way of doing this is to discuss the essentials that must be in place for PEDP to move forward. To start off the debate, I suggest that the following three components should be vital priorities for the Government and its partners:

1. Ensure that every citizen – every leader, teacher, parent and pupil at least – has practical information at their fingertips about PEDP, and about their rights, roles and responsibilities. In part this means that every school and every community centre has a publicly accessible notice board that shows, among other information, school budgets, incomes and expenditures.

2. In every village and neighbourhood, create practical mechanisms to sustain a culture where every citizen is able to speak out openly and honestly, and their views are taken seriously. Ensure that citizens have practical mechanisms to use if their leaders are not being responsive or not incorporating their ideas and plans into decision-making processes.

3. Ensure that the full capitation grant reaches the school in a timely and reliable manner. Real change and quality education need real resources.

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