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# **Enhancing policy implementation:**

Lessons from the education sector

Caroline Kihato and Claude Kabemba

Senior researchers, CPS



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Centre for Policy Studies  
Construction House  
130 Sivewright Ave  
New Doornfontein 2094  
Johannesburg, South Africa

P O Box 16488  
Doornfontein 2028  
Johannesburg, South Africa

Tel (011) 402-4308  
Fax (011) 402-7755  
e-mail: [admin@cps.org.za](mailto:admin@cps.org.za)

[www.cps.org.za](http://www.cps.org.za)

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## **INTRODUCTION**

This paper reflects the second, empirical, phase of our attempt to examine the gap between education policy and its implementation. To focus the research, we looked at the implementation of two specific policies: the decentralisation of school governance to school governing bodies (SGBs), and Outcomes Based Education (OBE). Three provinces were chosen as sites for the empirical research: Northern province, KwaZulu-Natal, and Gauteng. One rationale for these choices was that these provinces are economically diverse -- Gauteng is the richest, and Northern Province one of the poorest, with KwaZulu-Natal straddling the two. Another rationale is their urban--rural components. Gauteng has a large urban population, but KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province have relatively larger rural populations. These case studies not only provide a comparative angle, but also help us understand how policy implementation occurs under varied socio-economic conditions.

## **Research method**

A total of 17 schools were visited, and focus group sessions were conducted in Gauteng. Primary data was obtained via interviews at schools with governing body members, principals, and educators. It would have been ideal to hold meetings separately with each group, but interviews were conducted with all stakeholders present because of the time constraints of researchers and respondents. To this end, the focus group discussions were useful because they were held with discrete categories of stakeholders: parents, learners, and educators (excluding the principal). The sample of schools was chosen in order to ensure as much diversity as possible. Both interviews and the focus group sessions drew on information from township, ex-model C, rural, peri-urban, and informal settlement schools. This helped to identify the differences between various geographic and socio-economic regions. A standard questionnaire was designed for the meetings, in order to ensure some consistency in gathering information. The questions were open-ended, to allow respondents to articulate their issues. The research also involved interviews with officials from national, provincial, and regional government departments.

## **Limitations**

Obtaining access to schools was sometimes difficult. In many areas we needed provincial permission for such visits, which sometimes took a month to obtain. Since we did not have local knowledge about schools in the various areas, we had to rely on others to identify suitable schools. In some cases, prior knowledge of schools in a given region would have resulted in better samples.

## Working hypothesis

The gap between education policy and implementation is often attributed to a lack of resources. For analytical purposes, resources have been divided into three broad categories (these are only analytical categories, and are therefore not watertight). These are:

- *financial resources* — the levels of funding available to schools. Funds are considered as integral to resources, as their availability enables schools to purchase other resources;
- *infrastructure-related* — These exist at two levels: infrastructure at specific schools (buildings, equipment, facilities, fax machines, telephones, e-mail, etc), and public infrastructure (such as roads in the school's area); and
- *expertise* – trained and capable people, including teachers, school managers, and administrative staff.

This paper argues that explaining the gap between policy and its implementation only as a consequence of resource limits provides a partial picture only. While resources enhance the capacity of a school to implement policy, other variables—such as leadership quality, the ability to mobilise, stakeholder relationships, motivation levels, and the history of a community—play an equally important role in successful implementation. The gap between policy and practice is as much a result of unquantifiable as of quantifiable resources.

It is often assumed that urbanised areas and well-resourced regions are advantaged in implementing policies. Urbanised provinces do not, or should not, experience the same challenges faced by rural areas where it is not only difficult to implement policies, but disseminating new policy initiatives is also made difficult by poor infrastructure, making some schools physically inaccessible. Phone, fax, and e-mail facilities are also less likely to be present in rural areas, where basic services such as electricity are often unavailable. Moreover, the sheer distances between rural schools also makes communication difficult, increasing the challenges of effective policy dissemination and, by extension, implementation. While there are great disparities among urban schools, their areas are usually better serviced. Access to schools is often better, because of better road networks. High densities mean that circuit inspectors travel smaller distances between schools. This also implies less travel costs and greater efficiency, and (at least in theory) greater responsiveness to and interaction with schools. And the availability of communication technology means that urban schools are much better placed to receive policy documents than rural schools. The relatively well developed road networks in urban areas also implies better access to support from circuit inspectors or other schools.

But do schools in urbanised and economically well-off regions implement policies better? At a glance, it appears as if this is the case. Better infrastructure and resources undoubtedly enhance the ability of education departments and schools to implement policies. But while socio-economic resources make effective policy implementation easier, other variables impact on the gap between policy and implementation: among them the political histories of the region, the ability of the community to mobilise

around issues, leadership in an area, and, for want of a better term, its ‘social capital’. These factors explain in part why a school in a very poor community, with inadequate or no resources, may be able to raise funds for infrastructure, obtain voluntary teachers, and teach learners with little or no support from provincial government. It also could explain why some schools with more resources are unable to perform as well.

Our empirical research aims at going beyond the obvious—resource balance sheets—as the key framework for explaining the gap between policy and implementation. And while we do not deny that there is a serious resource deficit in some schools that impedes the effective implementation of government policy, this in itself does not fully explain the existence of the gap. We argue that it is not all about rands and cents: if it were, solutions to the problems facing education would be straightforward, merely involving injecting more financial resources. Our research has therefore focused on teasing out the other variables we believe influence the implementation of education policy. A better understanding of these factors may contribute to bridging the policy—implementation gap.

Flaws in the policy itself could, in some instances, explain the gap. The tenets of the policy itself, and/or the process of its generation, are rarely interrogated as a means of identifying implementation shortcomings. Often, the search for why a gap exists between policy and practice focuses on problems ‘on the ground’, and fails to illuminate those arising from the policy itself. If overzealous policy expects more than the environment is capable of providing, the problem lies with the policy, not the environment. In this case a good policy is one that is realistic and takes into account the capability of the environment to implement it.

## **SCHOOL GOVERNING BODY POLICY: THE RATIONALE FOR A DECENTRALISED SCHOOL SYSTEM**

### **The politics**

The origins of decentralisation, and, by extension, SGB policy are far less contentious than that of OBE. It aims to decentralise functions such as discipline, the management of fees, control of budgets, management of projects, and governance to SGBs.

Although there is an international trend towards decentralising education, the decentralisation of school governance in South Africa emanated from political conditions in the education sector. Described as a ‘deft political move’ by a former MEC for education in Gauteng, it emerged from two contradictory political movements. The first was the movement against apartheid education, which called for the development and strengthening of parent teacher student associations (PTSAs) in black schools in order to create an avenue for voicing the needs of disadvantaged schools, and to provide an institution for transforming Bantu education. The other was a tradition in Model C schools of structures similar to SGBs, with similar powers of governance. Particularly after 1994 there was concern that the new democratic government would

have substantial powers to interfere in the running of previously white schools. There was therefore a perceived need to ensure greater autonomy of these schools. Ironically, decentralisation assuaged both majority and minority constituencies: it satisfied the democratic movement by providing a platform for the participation of stakeholders in school governance, and also protected minority constituencies from the perceived meddling of a majority government, offering them some independence to make school governance decisions.

Official policy documents argue that decentralising school governance improves the quality of education, ensures that policy is more responsive to local contexts, and also ensures the better management of schools. While these are the 'tangible' outcomes, there are intangibles which are a strong basis for justifying attempts at decentralisation. Giving stakeholders in education a 'sense of ownership' is one, and the 'empowerment' of stakeholders is another.<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps one obvious reason for decentralising education in South Africa is the constraints faced by national government as a result of a tightening of fiscal policy. This broadly implies a greater need for schools to raise their own funds. More cynical commentators view this as government renegeing on its duty to provide adequate resources to schools, as part of a neo-liberal conspiracy to reduce the influence of the state and pass responsibility for education on to citizens and other service delivery agencies.<sup>2</sup> This aside, decentralisation does provide schools with an opportunity to augment state funds and reduce their reliance on a single source of funding, which may be unreliable, erratic, and dwindling. But this is only beneficial to schools in communities that can afford to raise extra funds. It is a problem in poorer areas, and this increases resource inequalities. Yet the negative outcomes have to be considered against positive ones. An intangible intention of decentralisation policy in South Africa is to strengthen the voice of stakeholders in the education system. The policy documents argue that the increased democratic participation of parents, learners, and teachers provides them a stronger voice in making critical decisions on the future of schools and the school environment of which they are part. The empirical research performed during this phase of the study has been aimed at evaluating how successful implementation of these intentions has been in the three provinces. It has sought to evaluate the outcomes of decentralisation not only against the immediate intentions of the decentralisation policy but also against the broader policy intentions of ensuring equity within the system and improving education quality across the board, particularly in previously disadvantaged<sup>3</sup> contexts.

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<sup>1</sup> See C Kabemba and C Kihato, The gap between education policy and its implementation -- phase 1 of the EU project, 2000.

<sup>2</sup> Salim Valli, discussant at EU workshop held in Johannesburg on 22 February 2000.

<sup>3</sup> 'Previously disadvantaged' is often used in South Africa to denote those, particularly in black communities, who under apartheid were considered inferior and therefore received little or no services from the state. While in a democratic South Africa the law recognises everyone as equal, for some 'previously disadvantaged' communities continue to be disadvantaged even in the current dispensation. 'Previously' disadvantaged can therefore be misleading, as it could imply that disadvantage has ended.

## Findings

### *Measurable variables*

Understanding policy — or ‘policy knowledge’ — has a crucial bearing on implementation. Conventional wisdom stipulates that if a school does not know about SGB policy, or does not understand its contents, it is unlikely to implement it effectively. In addition, it adds that professional skills, literate parents, and material resources are necessary if SGB policy is to be successfully implemented. This section investigates these variables to assess their influence on the implementation of policy. Importantly, it attempts to capture what those interviewed thought were the problems they faced in implementing SGB policy. Their responses have thrown open several issues that partially explain the gap between policy and practice.

#### A lack of understanding of policy

A lack of understanding of policy is a function of various factors. Low involvement in policy formulation could be one, and illiteracy is often cited as another. But schools with well-educated educators and parents also find it difficult to understand the concepts in policy documents: ‘the scientific jargon is confusing, and leads to a lack of understanding’<sup>4</sup>.

Those interviewed often said they did not understand the policies, and therefore found it difficult to implement them. As a consequence, few SGBs interviewed understand their mandate. The deputy principal of a school in Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal said: ‘The governing body does not know what its functions are; they are not totally clear ...’. A parent in a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal noted: ‘The governing body has never been trained. I have been in it for the fourth year now, and I know nothing about our roles.’ Similarly, at a school in Northern province, a teacher noted that ‘some parents are nominated and asked to do a job for which they do not understand a thing’. Responses like this were particularly common at schools in KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province. This had two consequences. The first is that SGBs are inactive at many schools, and used only as rubber stamps for decisions made by school management teams. They hold regular meetings, but only to ratify decisions taken elsewhere. The other is that SGBs encroach on the powers of the department or school management team, and make it difficult for them to perform their functions. In several schools, SGBs have interfered with the hiring and firing of teachers: ‘... Governing bodies claim that their role is to hire and fire educators. In fact this is not true, because they are only meant to recommend people.’<sup>5</sup>

In Gauteng, the responses varied from one school to another, but overall there seemed to be a greater understanding of the role of SGBs in this province than in the others. There could be various reasons for this, including the fact that the provincial

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<sup>4</sup> Teacher at an ex-Model C school in Durban South, 5/6/2000.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with a district manager in Camperdown, 8/6/2000.

department ran an intensive SGB training programme. Yet this factor alone cannot explain why parents serving on newly elected governing bodies that have not yet received SGB training are relatively more aware of the role and functions of SGBs. Another explanation could be the history and levels of school organisation in the province, which in the 1980s had a high level of PTSAs, supported by the National Education Crisis Committee (NECC). This history of high levels of school organisation partially explains the high levels of knowledge and ability to organise in Gauteng relative to the other provinces in which research was conducted.

The extent to which the government communicates policy to those responsible for implementing it is important if it is to be effectively implemented. In education, where the successful implementation of policy relies upon the participation of citizens, ensuring that policy is communicated is particularly important. Communication mechanisms should go beyond ensuring that policy imperatives reach those responsible for implementing them. More has to be done than simply letting the public know about the policy—the government has to ensure the ‘buy-in’ of those people and institutions who are key to its effective implementation. This requires it to actively campaign for and promote its policy. When problems are experienced with dissemination, convincing stakeholders to co-operate and implement policy becomes even more difficult.

This observation could be generalised beyond education policy. While a reliance on citizens to ensure policy success is more obvious in education policy, this only masks the extent to which the government relies on others – officials at lower levels, citizens, civil society, NGOs – to implement its policies. If the success of policy relies on the actions of others, the government should make a concerted effort not only to educate people on its policy, but also to ensure support for it. A recent study by the Centre for Policy Studies on the influence of civil society over the policy process revealed strong perceptions among civil society organisations (CSOs) that they were excluded from decision-making, and that, while the government had created avenues for civil society to participate in public decision-making, these often did not translate into a direct influence over policy decisions:

... many organisations expressed their frustration with the ‘imperviousness’ of government departments in the policy-making process. Some complained that their submissions are seldom reflected in policy documents. Respondents claimed that government used ‘participation’ as a legitimisation process to endorse policies designed by the state.<sup>6</sup>

If a section of society feels excluded from policy-making, yet is integral to implementation, there is an obvious need for the government to ensure their compliance. This does not necessarily mean that everyone must agree with the tenets of policy, nor does it require that all are consulted on its formulation, but there needs to be campaigns aimed at ‘selling’ policy ideas and principles.

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<sup>6</sup> C Kihato C & T Rapoo, *An independent voice?: a survey of civil society organisations in SA, their funding, and their influence over the policy process*, Research report no 67, Johannesburg: Centre for Policy Studies, 1999, p 49.

Introducing new values, ideas, and ways of behaviour requires effective dissemination, not only to introduce people to the new ways of thinking but also to encourage greater engagement with the new policy imperatives. In a sense, the ‘selling’ of new policy ideas seldom occurs in South Africa. Given that this is crucial because of the dependence of government on citizens for the successful implementation of policy, it is one of the causes of the gap between policy and implementation.

### Poor stakeholder involvement in policy formulation

The research shows low stakeholder involvement in the formulation of policy. Although this is true in urban and rural areas, stakeholders in rural areas in particular perceive policies as urban-biased. Arguably, these perceptions affect the way policy is implemented. Where stakeholders feel policy is imposed from above, there is little motivation to ensure that it is implemented effectively. People do not have a sense that they are part of the process – they lack a sense of ownership of the policies, and therefore invest little in its implementation. Responses like this were not uncommon:

I don't know how they consult people in the generation of policies. In the rural areas, we have not been involved. Maybe in urban areas people were involved. These people don't come to consult rural people. They only consult urban areas and their surroundings. For this reason policies have failed to distinguish between rural areas and urban areas in the implementation phase.<sup>7</sup>

Yet these responses were not exclusive to rural areas. In a relatively well-resourced school located in a former coloured area in urban KwaZulu-Natal, the chair of the governing body had this to say:

Our government speaks of all these lovely terms, consultation, empowerment, transparency, democracy, before you formulate policy you should consult the stakeholders. However, policy lands on our table and we are expected to implement it. We are merely policy administrators not part and parcel of policy making.<sup>8</sup>

When those responsible for implementing policies feel far removed from policy-making, they feel alienated from the broader process of change in schools. New policies are perceived as an imposition and a burden by stakeholders on the ground who are responsible for implementation. Many educators feel the government forces policies on to them. This alienation often results in poor implementation, because people feel they are not part of the change and therefore invest little in it, or because they genuinely cannot implement policies because they do not understand them, or both.

Yet the issue of participation and consultation is complex. Who participates? When? How? Public participation is often extolled uncritically. Government is exhorted to consult or ‘facilitate the participation of citizens’ without critical thought on how this is to happen. Part of the problem is the acceptance of participation as an un-

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<sup>7</sup> Kihato and Rapoo, *An independent voice?*

<sup>8</sup> Interview with the chair of the governing body of a secondary school in a former coloured township in Durban South, 6/6/2000.

questioned good. Clearly it is not possible to elicit responses from all stakeholders; even if it were, obtaining consensus is very difficult. But it is possible to get actors whose support is crucial — such as principals, heads of departments and SGB chairs—involved in policy formulation. Participation can be used to further a broader end: involving key stakeholders in policy decisions can be used to popularise policy, and to shift mindsets on some issues. But this requires effective political management of the formulation process. If, as mentioned earlier, the government needs the cooperation of a particular group because it is key to implementation, it is important that these stakeholders are brought on board in decision-making. Seeking the involvement of key stakeholders is important not so much to ensure their agreement with the policy (although this would be desirable), but to ensure that they feel their concerns have been heard by government. This is lacking in policy-making, and in part contributes to the gap between policy and practice.

### Poor policy dissemination

The extent to which government documents reach stakeholders has a definite impact on the gap between policy and implementation. Schools with access to policy documents are obviously better placed to implement them than schools that have little or no access to policy documents—for how do you implement policy if you don't know what it is? Dissemination of policy is a minimum condition for policy implementation. Without the fulfilment of this basic condition, implementation, good or bad, is impossible. Our research found that strategies used to disseminate education policies are often inefficient: schools have to rely on their own sources—such as unions or personal connections in the department—if they want documents on time, and these methods are not always reliable.

The problems encountered in policy dissemination can be understood by analysing different points in the communication system: the interface between national and provincial departments, provincial departments and regional offices, regional and district offices, and circuit inspectors and local schools. Policy dissemination is a function of the capacity of these institutions to interact with each other and relay the information to policy end users.

Perhaps the most obvious constraints on dissemination are physical. The research revealed that the access of schools to relevant policy documents varies, depending on their levels of infrastructure. Relatively well-off urban schools usually (but not always) have the necessary communication equipment, and thus a greater chance of accessing policy documents than rural and poor urban schools. And schools in an area with good roads are easily reached by circuit inspectors, and therefore stand a better chance of receiving policy documents. Policy dissemination is thus urban-biased, although there are stark contrasts between schools in urban areas.

Dissemination problems are worse in rural areas where a lack of roads and telephones make communication with schools very difficult. For example, Nare High School in Northern Province is almost inaccessible in the rainy season, and so are many schools in rural KwaZulu-Natal, where seasonal floods destroy roads, making

access impossible. In many cases, circuit inspectors who serve close to 30 schools need to travel huge distances to reach them. And when they are able to do so, they spend most of their day travelling rather than on developmental work such as training SGBs and providing support to school management teams.

We are battling as circuit inspectors. We have no facilities to aid us in our work. In addition, most schools do not have phones, and we need to drive there to deliver even small messages, and some schools are inaccessible. Better roads would improve school accessibility.<sup>9</sup>

But there are constraints on dissemination that have less to do with a lack of physical resources than with the culture of interdepartmental communication on the one hand, and bureaucracy on the other.

Policy documents are not given to schools. The schools and the inspectors find it difficult to get access to documents. There are many bureaucratic layers; the province, region, district, and the circuit and it takes a long time to reach the ground. Even us as circuit inspectors find it difficult to get access to policy documents. We get some through the regional office but not all and only after a very long time. At times people start implementing without the original document.<sup>10</sup>

The lack of communication between government departments and people on the ground was perceived as a serious constraint to the implementation of policies. As a teacher aptly put it:

People on the ground are not aware of the channels of communication with government. What is the vehicle of making our submissions to government? Government needs to look at the channels of communication both up and down. If people know the channel of communication they will feel that they own the policy and they will strive to implement it. When government does not consult people who are supposed to implement the policy, things do not usually work.<sup>11</sup>

Yet another problem is the perceived distance between implementers and policy-makers. Many teachers and SGB members felt there was little interaction between them and provincial (and national) policy-makers.

The implementation [of policy] is difficult because there is no follow-up. Policy makers are at a distance from us, they do not know what is happening on the ground. They workshop us and leave us to implement, they do not come to our schools to see how we are doing. We can voice our concerns they listen but do not respond.

This distance is worsened by the fact that departments are unable to interact with schools, even at the most basic level. The chair of the SGB at Ndlokolo Primary School in rural KwaZulu-Natal laments that 'there is no communication at all with the province. I can phone the circuit [offices] and the phone rings for five minutes or

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<sup>9</sup> Interview with a circuit inspector in Durban South, 6/6/2000.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Interview at Marianhill secondary school, 6/6/00.

more ... when they get promoted, they don't want to talk to us.'<sup>12</sup> This was not an isolated incident. An SGB member of a school at Marianhill in Durban South claims that 'the government never corresponds with schools; it does not acknowledge receipt of letters that we send, it never sends people to see what problems we are experiencing.'<sup>13</sup> When basic communication between schools and provincial departments and circuit offices is flawed, it becomes even more difficult to ensure that departmental policy is implemented. Not only do departments experience difficulty in monitoring progress; they also fail to provide the necessary support to schools.

But there are variations between the different levels of government. Some schools felt that some departments were more accessible than others. In Hambrook in Bergville the principal stated that 'the circuit inspector is the only support we get'. SGB members at Escombie Primary School in Durban South claim they do not get enough support from circuit inspectors because the latter are attending to schools that have greater needs.

Communication among schools is largely lacking. In the absence of adequate departmental support the need for schools to communicate and form support networks is great. But the research revealed that few schools communicated on policy issues. A few, like Escombie and Marianhill, have tried to network with other schools, with mixed success. According to respondents at Marianhill, their attempts to train teachers at other schools have been so successful that schools in their area prefer their training sessions to those carried out by the department.

### A lack of skills

The lack of 'necessary' skills in the governing body is often cited in schools, particularly in rural areas, as a problem impeding governing bodies' ability to carry out their functions. The lack of professional skills such as fund-raising, writing proposals, and accounting in these schools is often perceived as a disadvantage by SGBs in schools where many parents are illiterate. A teacher at Acton Homes Primary School at Bergville in KwaZulu-Natal stated: 'While governing bodies want to assist they are not well exposed. If you do not tell them what to do, they will not do anything, because of a lack of skills.'

The lack of formal education was often cited as a reason for parents' lack of participation. Literacy plays a huge role in shaping the dynamics among parents and educators in schools. A parent of a child in a school in an informal settlement in Gauteng said during a focus group discussion that 'the principal sometimes takes advantage of the parents in the SGB, who have not got the same level of education. He intimidates them, and they do not dare question his actions even when they are suspicious.' Illiteracy is often used to justify principals' (and educators') domination of SGBs and their use of parents as rubber stamps. This is because of the association of ignorance and inferiority with illiteracy. These perceptions are common, particularly among teach-

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<sup>12</sup> Interview at Ndlokolo primary school, 6/6/00.

<sup>13</sup> Interview at Marianhill secondary school.

ers, who argue that it is difficult to work with illiterate parents. A circuit inspector in Bergville expressed this argument forcefully:

We are really struggling with governing bodies. The training we conduct fails to take into account the level and background of the people—illiteracy is high. The training considers these people are similar to those of the urban areas. Because of the lack of skill, they become a nuisance to the school.<sup>14</sup>

This perception is often shared by parents. A teacher at Acton Homes Primary School in KwaZulu-Natal lamented that ‘the lack of education isolates you from people because they seem much better than you. When you are not educated, you think, “what do I have to offer?”’ A parent with a child in a Gauteng squatter school argued: ‘Which parent doesn’t want good things for their child? People stay away [from school meetings] because they think they have nothing to contribute - they are poor, and have no education.’

Ex-Model C schools (formerly white schools which were allowed relative autonomy in matters such as determining teachers’ salaries) which have a large pool of professional skills - lawyers, accountants, auditors or human resource managers – among parents seem to illustrate the degree to which parental capacities decide how capable a school is of meeting managerial challenges. Consider this statement from a teacher at Escombe Primary School, an ex-Model C school:

We are very fortunate when it comes to fund-raising because we have a financial secretary in the school and one of the governing body members is an accountant. In terms of conflict management, there are mechanisms which we use, the governing body being the last resort. Also, governing body members are in management positions in their companies, and it makes it easy for them to manage conflict.

Where schools can harness parents’ skills, SGBs make a huge impact on their governance. But this is only an advantage if schools can rely on parents; having highly skilled parents is not necessarily a guarantee of support and involvement. In a focus group discussion with parents of children at ex-Model C schools there was broad agreement that many did not ‘care’ about what happened at schools, and therefore gave little of their time.

But a lack of formal skills does not always mean an SGB cannot function effectively. One rural school in KwaZulu-Natal has parents on the SGB who are illiterate but play a highly active role. They contribute their time to resolving conflict, disciplining learners, and volunteering their artisan skills. Having illiterate parents does not necessarily mean they have nothing to contribute to the school - or even that they necessarily contribute less than parents who have professional skills. There are other ways of contributing that do not necessarily need high level skills or an education. A high school in Bergville, which has experienced clashes between teachers and pupils, has received enormous help from an SGB member who is well-respected in the com-

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<sup>14</sup> Interview with a circuit inspector in Bergville, 6/6/2000.

munity. He has been brought in numerous times by school management and learners to resolve conflicts. He is an elderly man without any formal education, but with considerable conflict resolution and negotiation skills as well as a neutrality and integrity that educators and learners are able to trust.

In another school in rural KwaZulu-Natal a parent body – without any professional skills – has an incredible capacity to mobilise support from parents and organise neighbouring communities to participate in school affairs in various ways. With the help of parents and the community they have built a new classroom, and have plans to build a staff room for teachers. They have approached a local NGO that has helped fund some of the building material for the classroom and have sent letters to other possible funders. It is the capacity to make these decisions as well as implement them that is remarkable about the SGB. Though none of their parent members have any ‘white-collar’ or professional skills, and few have had access to formal education, they are able to envisage a future, develop an idea, generate a decision around it, and obtain and mobilise support from community members and potential funders. True, they have to rely on others to write proposals or letters to potential funders, but this does not lessen their impact on the school. Therefore, other skills such as a capacity to mobilise support, make decisions and implement them, negotiate, and resolve conflict – which do not necessarily require a formal education—are just as important as formal skills.

### Inappropriate perceptions

Although literacy and professional skills play an important role in determining the efficacy of an SGB, what impedes SGBs from carrying out their functions is not necessarily a lack of formal skills or the illiteracy of parents but the perception that people without an education cannot make any contribution. During a focus group discussion, an educator from an informal school in Gauteng remarked: ‘We are trying [to build a relationship with parents], but they do have that inferiority complex.’ To illustrate this, she continued: ‘A lady teacher in the township is known as a mistress.’ What is perhaps most damaging about this perception is that it limits creativity by crushing the confidence and esteem of SGB members. The response from a parent in a squatter settlement illustrates this vividly: ‘We have not thought about fund-raising from companies. Approaching big business is for elite schools.’ The prevalence of these attitudes in schools immobilises governing bodies, and limits their potential. This inevitably narrows the scope of their activities. These attitudes also shape relationships between educators who are literate and parents who are illiterate; as this paper will show, the educator—parent relationship is key to the effective functioning of SGBs. When parents and educators are unable to work together in SGBs as equals, the success of SGBs is compromised.

It is parents’ negative perceptions of themselves that the government needs to deal with through campaigns which could include sending a set of strong public messages, reinforced by education officials stressing the potential contribution of people at the grass roots. Also, awareness campaigns carried out among education officials, princi-

pals and teachers could help to create a greater appreciation of the potential value that illiterate or semi-literate parents could add to SGBs. Admittedly, perceptions are very difficult to change because they involve shifting the mindsets of a society. In South Africa, as in the rest of the world, a high premium is placed on formal education and professional skills, while little recognition is given to social skills that are inherent abilities or acquired informally through experience. Active campaigns that acknowledge the role of all stakeholders – including those without formal skills – are imperative for the success of SGB policy.

This observation makes huge inroads into understanding the policy implementation process. It is often assumed that it is those with skills – particularly professional skills—who have the know-how to generate and implement policy. This occurs at various levels. Consider the way in which government contracts ‘experts’ not only to advise it but to generate policy; the policy process is often ‘expert-driven’. And, when gestures are made to include civil society and ordinary citizens, they are often perceived as legitimisation exercises rather than *bona fide* consultations.

The dominance of experts often obscures the wisdom and knowledge of ‘ordinary folk’. But it also implies that policy generation and implementation do not harness the invaluable skills of policy beneficiaries. In many SGBs for instance, parents are often used as manual labourers – to clean schools, and maintain the yards and buildings. Although this is an important aspect of school management, it fails to recognise other skills as essential to school governance, and therefore fails to realise the full potential of parents serving on SGBs in decision-making. This also happens in the course of the policy process, during when advice from specialists overshadows that of non-specialists.

Perhaps one of the greatest gaps in policy is thus the failure to recognise the potential contributions – in generating and implementing policy – that could be made by those not considered experts but who have knowledge and abilities that experts are unlikely to possess. The policy-making process in many sectors is greatly influenced by technocrats, with private sector management terms such as efficiency, cost-effectiveness, streamlining, cost-cutting, and cost-saving dominating public policy discourse. While there is a need for greater efficacy and efficiency in the public domain, the public sector is governed by additional, and some would argue just as important, rules of democracy, public participation, accountability, responsiveness, and transparency. In a democracy, policy should express the needs of citizens. This naturally assumes their active participation in its generation. Where technical decisions need to be taken, the role of experts should be to provide citizens with a clear picture of the available options, as well as their costs and socio-economic implications, so that they can base their decisions on the best available knowledge.

### A lack of institutional capacity

The effective implementation of policy relies heavily on the efficacy of institutions. In the absence of the right institutional support, no matter how ‘good’ a policy is, or how well geared an implementing agent is to implement it, translating available capacity

into tangible outcomes is difficult, and perhaps even impossible. Institutions can be regarded as the ‘software’ that drives the hardware, without which the hardware cannot operate. According to a former education MEC, the key areas of weakness in the implementation of SGB policy are institutional:

- Many SGBs are not representative of the school and its surrounding area. Women and high school learners tend to be underrepresented, and even when they are present, tend to be excluded from decision-making either because of logistical problems or a lack of acknowledgement of their views.
- The state has not maintained proper oversight of SGBs, to look at ways in which they can improve school management.
- Many have not fully used their legislative powers.
- Teacher appointments have become very contentious, and have been the source of SGB power struggles and divisiveness.
- There is a lack of a regional school governing body structure which could give support to SGBs.

Yet, while these institutional gaps are specific to SGB policy, institutional problems are universal, spanning all policy sectors. In a large number of areas, the policy statement precedes the building of viable institutions to support its implementation, with the assumption that institutions will develop incrementally to support the implementation of the relevant policy. To some extent SGB policy has assumed the incremental evolution of support institutions, and so too has the policy to provide free basic water, as another example. In both these cases, the end was determined before the institutions were ready to support the policy. This is not necessarily a flaw in the policy process; if policy-makers had to wait until all the relevant institutions were built, then few, if any, policies would be implemented. Yet there is a need to ensure that institutional building is not ignored in the process of implementation.

### Limited resources

Although this paper argues that resources are not the only reason for the successful implementation of policy, they are important for the functioning of SGBs. This is best captured by the secretary of the SGB of a relatively well-off secondary school in a KwaZulu-Natal township. ‘We [the SGB] have jaws with no teeth. We have been given functions which we are unable to implement because we lack resources.’ Almost unanimously, spokespersons for all schools—including ex-Model C schools, which are considered to be well-resourced—complained of a lack of resources.

But these complaints pale against the huge disparities among schools. The provision of resources varies significantly between urban and rural and township and ex-Model C schools, and within townships themselves. The difference in resources is vividly illustrated by comparing a former KwaZulu Education Enhancement Programme (KEEP) school in a KwaZulu-Natal township, and one in a rural part of KwaZulu-Natal. When visiting the township school we were escorted by the school *bakkie*. The school is well-resourced, has well-maintained buildings, well-tended playing grounds, a fully functional computer facility with e-mail and internet capabil-

ity, and a well-stocked library. It is presently planning to build a swimming pool, and upgrade the sports facilities. On the other hand, for the school in rural KwaZulu-Natal a laboratory, library, and electricity are pipe-dreams. This school does not have a roof or windows, and the floors are potholed and uneven. There are no ablution blocks, and the learners are forced to use the veld for their ablutions. Most schools in South Africa fall somewhere between these extremes: few, however, have the facilities of the KEEP school. A lack of resources can have a direct impact on the running of SGBs. Those in schools with fewer resources struggle to contact parents, lack a conducive meeting-place, and are restricted by not having electricity. These disadvantages are compounded by the poverty of the communities in which they are located; parents or guardians have to travel long distances to attend meetings, crime is often a problem which restricts meeting times, and many parents are forced to work long hours with little time off to attend meetings.

The biggest disadvantage in poorer communities, however, relates to SGBs' fund-raising function. In a school in Northern Province, the chair of the governing body stated that 'the SGB finds it very difficult to fund-raise because of unemployment. Parents are working elsewhere, and households depend on pensioners for their survival. Many learners are brought up by their grannies.' In a poorly resourced rural school in KwaZulu-Natal, a parent member of the SGB lamented that 'the SGB meets once a month to discuss issues such as fencing, building, water, and toilets, but with a contribution of R25 per learner a year [for school fees] we have too few resources to meet our demands.' Even better-resourced schools claimed that fund-raising was difficult. As a teacher from a relatively well-resourced township school observed, 'we have held many fund-raising activities such as cake sales, school dances, and a fun day, where kids wear their home clothes, but the funds raised are not always enough. Not all parents participate, because they cannot afford to do so.' Parents or guardians in these communities are often unable to contribute financially to schools. Furthermore, in poor rural areas there are few thriving businesses to turn to for sponsorship. This means that the cycle of poverty is entrenched.

The ability of SGBs to set the school fees and raise their own funds has unfairly advantaged schools in relatively wealthy areas. School fees range from thousands of rands in well-resourced schools to R20 per learner per year in poor schools. Levels of payment vary, but it is significant that schools where fees are not very high find it most difficult to attain 100 per cent payment. In the schools we visited, where fees were R20–R65 a year, payment levels were sometimes as low as 50 per cent. Ironically, schools with much higher fees had fewer problems with non-payment. The ability of SGBs to set fees and raise extra funds from other sources is important, because it gives them full discretion over the funds. They can decide whether to spend money on extra teachers, sports facilities, a computer centre, or a new classroom. SGBs unable to raise their own funds are obviously unable to make these decisions.

Moreover, decision-making on funds received by schools from provincial departments is limited to those which have been given the go-ahead by the province's head of department. There are some functions which all SGBs are expected to carry out.

These include developing a constitution, a mission statement, and a code of conduct; promoting the best interests of the school; providing support to the principal, educators and other staff; making recommendations to the provincial department on educator appointments; administering school property; and encouraging stakeholders to participate in the school.<sup>15</sup> But there are others which the provincial department has to allocate to SGBs on the basis of their ability to carry them out: those that require making decisions on how finances are used in the school such as the decision to maintain buildings, buy educational material, pay for services, and determine the extramural curriculum.<sup>16</sup>

In all the rural schools we visited, no SGB had the financial autonomy to decide how funds, allocated to them by the provincial government, were spent. A standard form is provided by the province with a list of provisions—educational material, books, furniture, etc. The SGB requisitions those that are a school priority. All this has to be within the available budget. Many schools in this category complained that the choice on the department's list was limited – what is not on the list cannot be requested by the school—and in some cases the quality of the material was very poor. Yet, because they have not been allocated these functions, they are unable to make their own decisions on what materials the school really needs, or who will supply the goods. Moreover, the schools cannot make decisions about suppliers; if this were possible, many argued that they could obtain school materials such as furniture at far cheaper prices than the department could. This could have positive local spinoffs if SGBs employed local artisans. In schools such as Marianhill, Escombie, and Umlazi, which are all based in urban areas, have professional SGB parent members, and are relatively well-resourced, provincial funds were directly transferred to the school, which decided on its budget. This discretion is expected since the provincial government has to ensure that funds are used effectively. South Africa cannot afford to devolve financial autonomy to SGBs that have no mechanisms to ensure efficient and effective decision-making.

But this distinction between governing bodies implies that those in relatively better-off schools are likely to have more decision-making power. It entrenches disparities between schools where those with the professional and management skills – which also seem to have the ability to raise funds – are those able to take full advantage of the devolution of governance to schools. Conversely, those in impoverished areas are less likely to have professionally skilled parents, have fewer resources, and have a minimum say in how school funds are spent.

Since there are obvious disparities in the devolution of powers to SGBs and the ability to raise funds, and those who benefit are often historically advantaged schools, is the devolution of powers to SGBs really closing the historical gap between wealthy and impoverished schools? Our research suggests that although SGB policy has given a voice to stakeholders who previously had none, the gap between schools will remain

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<sup>15</sup> See Republic of SA, SA Schools Act 1996, *Government Gazette* 377 (17579), Cape Town.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

unless SGBs are adequately trained and supported. Moreover, unless the criteria for determining the extent of SGB functions shifts from ‘hard’ resources such as financial ability and professional skills to ‘soft’ resources such as ability to mobilise, organise, negotiate, and resolve conflict, government policy will continue to disadvantage those whom it is meant to uplift. SGBs in relatively well-resourced schools therefore have greater scope and power than those in poorly resourced schools. Because the criteria used to allocate financial powers to SGBs are already biased against impoverished schools, barring literacy campaigns and vocational training they are unlikely to obtain powers equal to their better-resourced counterparts. The effectiveness of these SGBs is therefore limited by the limited scope of their functions, and, to some extent, policy is biased against those schools that have limited ‘hard’ resources.

Again this finding addresses a broader policy problem in which a hard resource framework ignores or downplays the importance of ‘hidden’ resources in policy generation and implementation. In addition to this, there is a latent yet persistent assumption in policy that hard skills are necessary to make certain decisions. In the case of SGB policy, there is an assumption that formal qualifications are necessary in deciding how the budget is allocated, or even who the school suppliers will be. We argue that formal skills are not necessary to make these decisions – one does not need to have accounting skills to decide whether a supplier can meet the school’s needs within budget, or to prioritise the school budget. This is perhaps one of the greatest policy biases, and it limits the extent to which SGBs can participate in school management and develop their decision-making skills. This need not be restricted to SGB policy. Integrated Development Plans (IDPs) in local councils are, at least in theory, meant to increase citizens’ access to decision-making processes in their residential and work areas. Yet research carried out on IDPs shows that the real decision-makers are ‘experts’, or council officials – the process of participation for citizens is often limited to endorsing decisions that have already been made elsewhere.<sup>17</sup> The result of this process has been the marginalisation of citizens in decision-making. This also has broader implications for democracy. If we assume that levels of participation are directly related to levels of democracy, then the more constraints policy puts on the participation of citizens in decision-making processes, the greater the barriers to deepening local democracy. The link between greater levels of citizen participation and democracy is dealt with below.

### ***Hidden variables***

The section above has focused on how resources that can be valued in monetary terms have impacted on the gap between policy and implementation. This section looks at variables that cannot be measured, or are ‘hidden’ because they are often eclipsed by more visible or quantifiable variables such as money or infrastructure. As a result, their impact on development processes is downplayed or goes unnoticed.

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<sup>17</sup> See C Kihato, A critical look at local government planning in South Africa, paper presented at the Democratic Decentralisation Conference in Kerala, India, June 2000.

## Relationships between parents and teachers, schools and communities

### *Parents and teachers*

The decentralisation of power to SGBs has in some cases led to tensions between teachers and parents—mainly expressed by teachers, who complain that parents misunderstand their new powers. Our limited research suggests that they seemed more prevalent in township and rural than in ex-Model C schools. As a circuit inspector in rural KwaZulu-Natal observed:

There is often misunderstanding and conflict between educators and governing body members. Educators are refusing to accept governing bodies, while governing bodies claim that their role is to hire and fire educators.

There is evidence to support this claim, but this response was not shared in all the provinces. When the same question was posed in Gauteng, there was a strong sense that SGB members understood their roles. Yet even here teachers complained about parents overstepping their roles. It is possible that the differences in the provinces are as a result of the training received by SGBs – the Gauteng province’s training programme could be more effective than the programmes in other provinces. However, other variables, such as the history of mobilisation around school governance issues, could explain these provincial differences. Schools in Gauteng, and particularly—but not exclusively—in Soweto, have a rich history of organising around school issues. Parent teachers associations were well-established in the 1980s, and this historical experience could explain the variations in the levels of organisation in the provinces.

While some complaints by educators are justified, it is equally possible that the negativity expressed by them arises because they feel that their role in the school has been undermined by parents. Although the policy clearly states that SGBs should recommend appointments only, they do have substantial powers for running schools which they have never had before, and which challenge the traditional hierarchical relationships between teachers and parents in townships and rural areas. During a focus group discussion a parent from an informal settlement remarked that ‘most teachers see SGBs as a threat because of the powers given to illiterate parents’. While there are occasions when SGB members, particularly parents, have overstepped their boundaries, and complaints from educators are warranted, there are cases in which complaints about SGBs stem from the fact that educators feel threatened by their powers. As one educator in KwaZulu-Natal observed: ‘[in our school] the budget is drawn up by the principal and the HODs, who then have to show it to the governing body - and they don’t like it’. SGBs are responsible for making budgetary decisions; in some schools this has been resisted by the school management team (the principal and HODs) which has traditionally not had to be directly accountable to parents.

Most teachers in ex-Model C schools reported favourably on their relationship with parents serving on SGBs. They felt SGBs functioned effectively in providing support and raising funds. A teacher remarked: ‘we meet once every two months to dis-

cuss the aims and the goals of the school. We have a good relationship between educators and teachers.’

Not all township teachers are threatened by the new powers given to parents. Some see it as an opportunity to build a stronger relationship. As a township teacher in Gauteng said:

All of a sudden, parents have been giving responsibility for disciplining the schools yet they feel it is the teachers' responsibility. I'm having to educate the parents every time. This has historical roots. We need to empower them to build their self-esteem, and involve them more in the day-to-day running of the school.

Most principals and teachers, though, complain that parents do not participate enough in school activities. Teachers often express their frustration that parents (or in many cases grandparents) fail to attend SGB or PTA meetings, and neglect to help their children with their school work. As a teacher in an informal settlement in Gauteng put it:

Parents are lazy and are waiting for the government to provide, so fundraising is difficult. People expect everything to be given to them, to be spoon-fed. Parents do not provide support at meetings. They agree to everything, but do not do it.

Further, a teacher in an urban school in KwaZulu-Natal claimed that ‘attendance at SGB meetings is low because parents are working. It is rare that a meeting has everyone in attendance, and it affects their performance.’ But other reasons may result in an inactive parent body. A parent in an informal settlement states:

It would be nice if the school called parents not only when they want money. People do not want to go to school meetings because they are always told to fork out money.

Model C schools tend to have more of a tradition of parent involvement and attendance at meetings, but they still complain that only a handful are regularly involved. In a focus group discussion with parents from ex-Model C schools, one observed that ‘when we have school functions, only a handful of parents help out. The rest just sit in the tent and drink beer.’

Interestingly, township parents and teachers have a perception that parents with some children at Model C schools become more involved in those children's schooling:

The reason why parents don't come is due to a lack of respect of their own. When they go to school in town, they make an effort to go. But with us they say, ‘no, I can't make 6 pm.’

Yet there are township and rural schools where parents are actively involved. In the case of one Gauteng township school, parents' response to special school days on which they are asked to help clean the school, tend the garden, and paint buildings was reported to be very positive.

High parental involvement not only in SGBs but also school activities impacts on the ability of SGBs to carry out their functions. An SGB that has the support of the parent body and educators is more likely to be effective on issues such as discipline in the school, fundraising, or identifying school priorities. When asked who the most important people in a school are, almost all discussants – parents, educators and learners – pointed out that one of the ingredients for a successful school was an involved parent body. In a focus group discussion with township parents, one remarked: ‘More than resources, committed staff and parents who are involved are very important for a good school.’ But, for a more involved parent body, there needs to be a good relationship between parents and educators. Therefore, the success of an SGB and, by extension, a school is dependent on how this relationship is nurtured.

These responses bring to the fore an interesting observation on the parent—teacher relationship. While educators would like to see an increase in parent participation in school activities, they are in some cases unable to relinquish power, or accept parents’ new decision-making roles. Also, on the one hand educators use illiteracy to justify why parents should not be given decision-making powers in the schools, yet on the other they still expect illiterate parents to assist learners with their homework. The expectation that parents provide support to learners when they themselves have educationally deprived backgrounds is clearly unrealistic, but in some cases is born of a frustration with the expectations of OBE. There is clearly a narrow conception of parents’ roles in many schools. Research shows that parents are often slotted into traditional roles of paying for school fees, or participating in cake sales, or other fundraising initiatives. It is difficult for some schools to envisage a more active decision-making role for parents. This is most prevalent in rural areas and at less-resourced schools. It reduces the scope for greater participation by parent in school affairs, as there is a failure to see beyond their traditional functions.

SGB policy is also dismantling old school power hierarchies, in which the actions of educators and the principal were rarely questioned because of their status in schools. SGB policy is advocating a power-sharing structure where educators and principals share decision-making powers with parents who are considered to be less able because they may not be as educated as teachers. There are bound to be tensions between educators and parents particularly because the new system has overturned traditional power hierarchies. The inability of policy to envisage this tension has been one of its shortfalls. And the *ad hoc* way in which these tensions are addressed – circuit inspectors or departmental officials often deal with them case by case or when they arise – has meant that it is an issue that has largely been ignored at a policy level. More effort is required to ensure that support is provided to parents who have to deal with teachers and pupils from a very weak position. To level the playing field, more education on the importance of parents in SGBs, and improving SGB training to ensure that issues such as relationship dynamics, conflict resolution and negotiation skills are provided in addition to budgetary and management skills, are essential.

### *School and community*

Poor relations between schools and their surrounding communities can have a negative impact on the functioning of SGBs. Schools, like most other institutions, have been affected by crime. Many are vandalised on a continuing basis, and teachers and students are attacked. Many principals and teachers believe the community is to blame, and that communities should be looking after the school as a community resource. As a spokesperson for a Gauteng school stated:

The community really messes us up. There are burglaries every month. They steal our fences and our photocopier. We have had to employ a night watchman, but he is defenceless as he has no weapon.

Although crime has many roots, it has been interpreted as evidence of an adversarial relationship between the school and community, and certainly has an impact on SGBs. Teachers and parents are afraid to travel and attend meetings after hours. A teacher at a township school in Durban remarked: 'We are not safe; we can't risk it.' And this places a restriction on meeting times, and leads to conflicts with other weekend activities. Thus a teacher at a Gauteng school stated:

I've also noticed with us Africans, we have counterattractions: funeral ceremonies, stokvels, societies. What is the right time to call a meeting?

An unsympathetic community also makes it extremely difficult for SGBs to raise funds to improve the infrastructure and resources of schools, firstly because people in the surrounding community are reluctant to give money and time, and secondly, when they do raise funds from sponsors, vandalism and theft often nullify their efforts. As a teacher at a rural school in KwaZulu-Natal lamented:

The school is frequently vandalised by members of the community. Proper security is needed. We have no plugs, they were stolen. Our roofs were made of corrugated iron sheets, and slowly our roofs have disappeared. The community tears up teaching aids, and breaks windows.

But while vandalism is common at many schools, some have reduced its incidence by giving the community a stake in the school. A rural school in KwaZulu-Natal seems to have the right formula.

There used to be vandalism in the school, but it is better now because we have a fence. We also have a youth association which holds meetings in the school and disciplines the hooligans.

Similarly, a school in an informal settlement in Gauteng has worked out an arrangement with a few community members. It allows them to use part of its land to grow crops for sale, and they repay the school by ensuring that its property is safe. In the case of a high school in a Gauteng township, community relations work because members of the community were involved in building the high school. As one parents said, 'we took ownership of the school; it belongs to us, and we take good care of it.'

Yet community—school relations are complex, and while incidences of vandalism have been used as an indicator, this relationship is less simple. There are schools which claim to have a good relationship with their community, yet vandalism still occurs. Also, the concept ‘community’ is misleading, since it connotes a homogenous group of individuals. Good relations with a ‘community’ do not necessarily mean with all its members. But the experiences of schools suggests that giving a few individuals a reason to value the school makes a significant difference.

Other relationships that were significant were those among schools. A few principals and members of SGBs claimed they got their ideas from attending PTA meetings at white schools. One principal who had children in an ex-Model C school claimed he had learnt a lot from being a member of the SGB in his childrens’ school. ‘What I learn there, I come and implement here in my school, and it has worked miracles.’

A principal from a relatively well-resourced township school in KwaZulu-Natal best summarised the importance of relationships in the running of schools.

Our ex-students support the school. They phone us and tell us, we didn't like the long hours but what you taught us was very good. ... We have a dedicated staff who like the school and work hard. For us it is not a matter of getting a 100 per cent pass rate; it is about improving the quality of grades. We want As and Bs. There is also a sense of appreciation from the community. We must show students we love them, we help the students get bursaries for university, and because of this they don't even stone my car.

### Good leadership

In schools in which we observed a high level of participation by parents, good leadership was a key ingredient. In a focus group discussion, an educator from a township school stated: ‘When the principal runs the school well, everything falls into place.’ If the principal’s relationship with the staff is good, this spills over on to the parents. As an educator in Orange Farm said in a focus group session:

Our head [principal] is very positive. He allows discussion in staff meetings, pulls out those who are quiet, and asks them what they think. He sacrifices himself, and motivates us. He enjoys his job, so his support staff fall into line. He is like this with parents as well, and this has made a big difference in our school.

One strategy used by school leadership to involve parents is constant communication. Schools send out a planner at the beginning of every term to let parents know what activities are taking place, or quarterly newsletters that keep them abreast of happenings during the term. Focus group discussions with parents revealed that they appreciate school efforts, and often respond. Other strategies involve putting pressure on learners to ensure that their parents attend meetings, and teachers sending frequent reports to parents which they must sign. Having fun days where the school puts on plays and other performances is also often a successful way of attracting parents to schools.

Most people consulted by us cited leadership, in particular the principal, as the determining factor of successful school governance. This implies the need to review selection criteria for principals. Whereas traditionally there has been a focus on academic training and experience as key criteria, those such as an ability to listen, be assertive without being controlling, and resolve conflict need to be introduced. Already, the Gauteng department of education has begun to see leadership qualities as important for running schools, but in the main this view is not widespread.

Although leadership is essential, the scope of the research did not permit us to explore in greater detail what other factors may combine with good leadership to ensure a successful school. Some variables that may have an impact could include the history of mobilisation in the community, and its ability to organise around issues. The complex link between civic involvement and school governance is illustrated by a statement by a parent in a Gauteng squatter settlement:

Some parents were afraid to join [the SGB], but I wasn't, because I was in the civic movement for some time. In 1987 we saw the SGB (then PTA) as illegitimate. Since the late 1980s I've been involved in schools. I continue to be involved in the SGB, even though my kids have finished.

Sometimes momentum in a community as a result of mobilisation over basic needs has facilitated parent and civic involvement well beyond the functions assigned to SGBs. In a Gauteng squatter camp we visited, members of the civic and community have started a high school in response to difficulties experienced by their children in getting to school. Using contributions from parents, they have converted run-down and unused structures into temporary classrooms. Teachers are volunteers, and do not expect payment. Some rural and informal communities have banded together and built, funded, and run their own schools. Many have been taken over by the government. It would be interesting to see whether the parents (and community) continue to be actively involved in them.

## Summary

In this section we have tried to reach an understanding of the gap between SGB policy and its implementation. As the research has shown, factors such as policy awareness, a lack of skills, illiteracy, and a lack of funds and infrastructure were often cited by respondents as impediments to implementing SGB policy. These factors are often evident in the stories that parents, teachers, or even learners tell. Their frustration is evident as they relate the difficulties they have in understanding what is required of them by the new policy. But even before they have even understood their new functions, they are expected to run the school and ensure 'effective governance'. SGBs have hit the ground running for many in a context of extreme poverty where communicating meeting dates is difficult, and electricity, proper meeting places, or even transport do not exist. When looked at in this way, the variables that contribute to the gap between policy and implementation are the lack of 'hard' measurable resources.

But do these variables really matter? Our research tried to probe why certain SGBs which are not well-endowed with ‘hard’ resources govern their schools effectively. We often received responses such as: ‘we do not know what our functions are’, or ‘we have not seen the policy documents’. Yet we were told that the SGB had raised money to build a classroom, or was organising parents and community members to come in and clean the school. It is possible that the question was misunderstood, or that a couple of schools exaggerated their lack of awareness of SGB functions. But this was a response in most schools, particularly in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo. And while in many schools a misunderstanding of SGB functions sometimes leads to conflict, a few manage to carry out their functions effectively without clarity on their roles. Similarly, the research showed in various cases how SGBs have managed to govern effectively, with very few resources. For instance, a school in an informal settlement in Gauteng, where poverty and unemployment are rife, was able to pull together and build rudimentary structures for a school. Its SGB has managed to do what many schools in better socio-economic positions, or with better facilities, are unable to do.

Given this, where does the gap between policy and implementation really lie? Although hard resources makes it easier for SGBs to perform their functions, research has shown that they can function without them. While a more detailed look at these variables is necessary, what seems to emerge is that the presence of ‘soft’ resources, which we have identified as good leadership, the nurturing of good relationships with all stakeholders, and levels of organisation of the school (and surrounding community) can mean the difference between an effective and ineffective SGB.

### ***Transcending school boundaries***

SGB policy has implications that transcend issues of school governance. In essence the policy provides a space for the development of an organisational vehicle that deals with issues around school governance. But the organisational structure of SGBs, the nature of its formation, as well as the rules that guide its functions have great significance for democracy in general. SGB policy creates a framework that triggers the formation of organisations bound by the rules of democratic practice. Members are elected by the school body; it is imperative that each school develop its own constitution, and that SGBs encourage transparency and openness in decision-making and consensus-building. In and of themselves, governing bodies are important, and indeed crucial, in the management and governance of schools, but it is their potential for deepening democracy that is their greatest virtue. In other words, the greatest strength of SGBs is the possibilities they open not only for democratising schools, but also democratising society.

The ability of SGBs to deepen democracy is not as tedious as it may seem. Literature on (CSOs) argues that a strong associational life helps to consolidate democracy by overcoming the failings of formal democracy. Associational life inculcates democratic principles in members. Members of CSOs that hold elections, develop constitutions which govern their interactions, and promote values of openness and transparency are more likely to demand these of their government, and abide by and partici-

pate in public democratic processes. CSOs such as SGBs build high levels of ‘civicness’ in members, which in turn translate into greater participation and support for democratic values in broader political life. Some of the case studies used in this report already show a tendency towards civicness. The way in which some of the SGBs build consensus on priorities in schools, resolve conflicts between various stakeholders, and share power implies that they are more inclined to support a regime that promotes these values.

Whatever its shortcomings, SGB policy helps to create a space for the participation of citizens in decision-making in schools – a space that also has implications for strengthening democracy in South Africa. This not only increases the importance of the policy, but also raises the stakes considerably. It implies that the success or failure of school governing bodies may have an impact on the democratic character and culture of South Africa.

## **THE GENERATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF OUTCOME BASED EDUCATION POLICY (OBE)**

In February 1996 the Council of Education Ministers approved the new curriculum framework produced by the National Curriculum Development Committee entitled *Curriculum 2005: Lifelong Learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*;<sup>18</sup> thus endorsing OBE. In contrast to policies such as Early Childhood Development (ECD), General Education and Training (GET), Further Education and Training (FET), and Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET), OBE is currently being implemented; the others are still at a policy generation stage. Yet Curriculum 2005 has been extremely contentious.

This section examines the origins of OBE, and the attempt to implement it. Most of the information has been gained from interviews with informants who were at the coal-face of the generation of a new policy. While wherever possible we have mentioned the source of our information, some of our respondents requested anonymity, and we have been unable to quote them directly.

### **The policy’s origins**

During the political negotiations in the 1990s, education policy-makers were faced with two key questions (in relation to the new school system). First, what kind of school system would best suit post-apartheid South Africa? Interviewees differ on whether the second question was ever seriously deliberated by policy-makers. Nevertheless, it was one which several organisations and individuals involved in education posed: how can we implement a new school curriculum?

Like many other policies, the foundations of South Africa’s current education system are the product of a rich and complex history. To some extent, it has its origins in the mid-1980s ‘peoples’ education’ movement established to protest against apartheid

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<sup>18</sup> Department of education, *Curriculum 2005, learning for the 21st century*, 1997, Pretoria.

education.<sup>19</sup> It had several striking features: firstly, the movement represented a political front against the discredited apartheid regime – student, teacher and parent organisations mobilising against an illegitimate education authority, demanding democratic governance of the education process involving all these stakeholders. Secondly, as an educational protest, its most striking feature was that it not only sought to provide equal rights to education for all, but called for the transformation of the content of apartheid's oppressive curricula. It proposed an alternative education system (both in terms of its governance and content). It would not only provide knowledge and skills for the marketplace, but also provide learners with tools for assisting the liberation struggle; hence the cry 'people's education for people's power'. Education was perceived as a means through which liberation from apartheid could be achieved. Although fervent debates took place in the 1980s over pedagogy and curriculum development, they were eclipsed by the larger issue of national liberation, so that the ideas on substantive education reform remained largely inchoate. Thus, according to the director of the Sacred Heart Policy Unit, 'the people's education movement which was grounded in a political ideology of struggle aimed in the first instance at bringing down the apartheid regime. It proposed an alternative education linked to the struggle. The central questions of the movement were: How do you tie education to the struggle? How do you use English to further the needs of the struggle? This was somewhat narrow, and all disciplines were related to the liberation struggle.'

People's education was also rooted in democratic principles of participation, and was central in the establishment of parent-teacher-student associations (PTSAs) via which stakeholders could take part in decision-making in schools. While it provided an alternative to apartheid's Bantu education, and to some extent symbolised the empowerment of black South Africans, it was a mass-based movement established to challenge apartheid. As a result it lacked the conceptual clarity required to establish a substantive education policy—a real alternative to apartheid education.<sup>20</sup>

With the ANC in exile, COSATU played a major role in the establishment of teachers' unions such as SADTU, and was as a result heavily involved in mobilisation against the apartheid education system through these structures.<sup>21</sup> It was also involved in issues such as worker training, skills development, and frameworks for the assessment and grading of workers. In contrast, although the ANC was broadly supportive of the teachers unions, it was only tangentially involved in education issues, and had few experts able to engage with substantive education transformation. According to McGurk,

it soon became clear when we visited Lusaka in 1989 with the Five Freedoms delegation that the ANC in exile did not have the people, know-how, or research necessary to counterpoise the poli-

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<sup>19</sup> G Mashamba, A conceptual critique of the people's education discourse, *Review of African Political Economy*, Autumn 90, 48.

<sup>20</sup> See J Davies, The university curriculum and the transition in SA, *European Journal of Education*, 1994, 29(3).

<sup>21</sup> Interview with McGurk.

tics of mobilisation and the imperatives coming from COSATU for adult basic education and skills development. Even at that time a number of us were warning against the overload on the future education budgets that in the first instance would have to address the enormous backlogs in schooling provision. In the light of the current situation in which we find ourselves, I think this judgement has been proved correct. I believe that the influence of the trade union educationalists, such as Adrienne Bird, Alec Erwin and Bernie Fanaroff, within the broad educational front sympathetic to the ANC carried most weight. Understandably, therefore, the new system was conceived of as some form of hybridisation of formal schooling, adult basic education, and skills development.

People like myself who had been involved in the struggle for a desegregated, open schooling system since 1976 believed that we were dealing with very different sets of social dynamics within the formal schooling system and the unionised adult imperative for basic education and skills development. Generally, the situation was overly politicised. We are still living with the aftermath, which will take a long time to play itself out. It is interesting to note that nearly all the senior positions in our national department of education are occupied by ex-teacher trade unionists. Besides often not being the best managers around, the normal tensions between themselves, as the new authority, and their ex-comrades in the unions tend to become skewed.

In support of the above, according to a former MEC for education, macro planning on the curriculum started in COSATU with the notion of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and SA Qualifications Authority (SAQA):<sup>22</sup> establishing a single framework for assessing qualifications, they integrated the training and education systems into a single grading framework similar to that in New Zealand. For COSATU, the establishment of the NQF was important because it provided a structure in which the training that workers received would be recognised and rewarded through increased pay. Labour based its assumptions on the premise that greater skills training would eventually lead to higher wages. Thus, the ensuing NQF system recognised skills training as well as educational achievements.

COSATU also needed to ensure that workers were afforded basic education which would provide the foundation for learning vocational skills.<sup>23</sup> Consequently, OBE strongly emphasises Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET) levels 1,2,3 and 4. All curriculum work, evaluations, and developmental materials are heavily influenced by COSATU, which struggled to ensure that the new education system focused on ABET.<sup>24</sup> Labour's strength in the education negotiations ensured that it not only established a vocation-focused education system, but won funding for skills development through the levy charged to all employers. The focus on learned 'outcomes' emerged from a need to ensure that what was learnt in classrooms was relevant outside them. While qualifications were important, they should not overshadow 'tangible' outcomes—what an individual can produce. The close link between OBE and NQF lies in the notion of 'outcomes' as a basis for grading individuals in the education and training system: guidelines that state what a learner or trainee should be able to do after

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<sup>22</sup> Interview with former MEC for education, 24/6/2001.

<sup>23</sup> SAQA, *How did the NQF come into being? A brief history*, <http://www.saga.org.za>.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Paul Musker, director of Paul Musker & Associates.

completion of a certain level. The use of outcomes as a measure for judging the level of qualification inevitably meant that the NQF had to be accompanied by a curriculum that was outcomes-based.

### ***The struggle for turf***

The process for formulating OBE policy seems to have constructed two broad factions within the education sector, each struggling to establish itself in the new democratic polity:

- government officials, with technocratic approaches to policy and a considerable degree of political power to ensure the transformation of the education system; and
- educationists, who had working experience in the sector and had been involved in spearheading alternative models to apartheid's Bantu education.

It is important that these categories are understood as a broad framework for aiding analysis. They are not discrete, and there is some fluidity between them. For instance, there are government officials who emerged from the struggle for education transformation.

Some of our respondents argue that 'educationists' were not involved in the debate on whether this was a suitable curriculum. They argue that the process of formulating OBE was led by a few ANC and COSATU officials. Although eight committees were established, each charged with the responsibility of looking at learning areas, interview evidence suggests that the committees had little space to debate the merits of OBE as South Africa's school policy. The debate on the relevance of OBE (if there was a bona fide period of questioning and debating the new curriculum) was short-lived. One of the respondents stated that OBE was a *fait accompli*: there was no room to debate it.

One consistent criticism from 'educationists' is that OBE was adopted and implemented by people who had no background in education, and who alienated those with a long history and experience in the sector. Curriculum development had been taken away from educationists and placed in the hands of technocrats and departmental officials who, it is argued, had little knowledge of the classroom and were driven by political agendas that may have compromised the emergence of a curriculum suited to South Africa.

Further, key education actors who were interviewed claimed that the OBE process had marginalised its critics. Criticism is perceived as disloyalty to the struggle: 'if you are not loyal to the policy, you are not loyal to the struggle.' Similarly, a senior government official stated that 'Jonathan Jansen's [a prominent educationalist's] critique of OBE was seen as the ultimate betrayal.' This alienation has no doubt caused rifts between the department and educationists who have been critical of OBE. And the department is perceived as having used its resources to reward its supporters and punish critics. A respondent strongly argued that 'OBE appealed to those who wanted power. If you want to be in the "in" crowd, you have to speak the language of OBE. Certain NGOs close to the department pick up on the governance and curriculum id-

iom of OBE, and it has become a language that provides access to government contracts. If you oppose, you alienate yourself from the department and the money.’ If these perceptions are correct, the formulation process has been insulated from external criticism, and has been supported by organisations whose proximity to the department ensures that they receive contracts in return for their support of OBE.

Department leadership perceives the challenges of OBE as emanating from not the policy, but its poor implementation. Some recall a statement by a key official: ‘What is all this talk about delivery? You have to stay with the purity of the idea.’ This implies that what is important is the soundness of the policy, in theoretical or abstract terms, not whether it could be implemented, and that implementation has somehow tainted or distorted the purity of the ideas in policy. ‘Energy in the transformation of the school system was directed by “sound ideas” and not necessarily the practicability of the policies. There is huge disillusionment among people working in the department who say that things have not worked. Some have left; others, however, are consoling themselves that they are the generation that makes policy, and that the next generation will tackle implementation.’

Some argue that, once the policy was developed, its adoption was ‘completely uncritical and was assimilated with a lack of serious knowledge about not only education in general but its context in South Africa’.<sup>25</sup> This undoubtedly had significant consequences for implementation. A senior official argued that ‘everyone struggled with OBE terminology’. While our research shows the difficulties experienced by educators, learners and parents in understanding the concepts, she says OBE possessed such difficult concepts that those responsible for its development were themselves unclear about some of the definitions. Even at a conceptual level it was difficult to understand what exactly OBE was, let alone how it would be implemented. Moreover, ‘those responsible for its formulation were reporting to people who did not have any idea of what was going on’. Thus, from the very beginning of OBE there was doubt from a core group of educationists about whether it could be translated into practice. What compounded the problem was an ‘underestimation of how much it would cost to transform the system and adopt OBE’.<sup>26</sup> Also, implementation of a radically new curriculum would often need to be tested in pilot projects, so that the implementation phase was informed by data on its applicability. Yet OBE was not piloted: a senior official in the department was quoted as having said something to the effect that ‘the whole country is a pilot’.<sup>27</sup>

According to a former education MEC, policy-makers had no idea of existing capacity. More than anything else, the system could not handle the support required to implement OBE. The link between schools and MECs were school managers and district supporters such as circuit inspectors who are overworked at having to support more than 30 schools. These officials have been unable to provide teachers with the

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<sup>25</sup> Interview with Musker.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with McGurk.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Musker.

support they require to implement OBE in their classrooms. This is compounded by the fact that OBE was too profoundly different to the curriculum in place, particularly in black schools, and it placed educators out on a limb, with no tools for coping with the demands of the new curriculum. Yet another factor that has impacted negatively on the efficacy of curriculum development is poor leadership, and weak appointments. Some interviewees argued that officials wanted power and control over resources, and that this has often clouded their judgement when making decisions on educational matters.

Perhaps the urgency in transforming apartheid's narrow, racial, Christian-based education system is understandable. Officials were under great pressure from the political class to quickly develop a new curriculum, which, to some extent, explains the lack of a pilot and the insulation of decision-making from civil society and those in government who challenged OBE's practical ability. Politically there was a need to be seen to deliver an alternative to apartheid education. To some extent, the 'delivery' of OBE was considered a bold political move in the new democratic South Africa—OBE symbolised the transformation of society. An interviewee remembered: 'I was going to a meeting where educators were being trained in OBE, and some white teachers were opposing its implementation while black teachers were backing the strategy. Because OBE was seen as an ANC strategy, it became the rallying cry that symbolised the liberation of the education system from the inferior apartheid Bantu education.' As this subsequent re-examination of the curriculum suggests, enthusiasm for OBE dissipated as educators faced huge challenges while implementing it in classrooms.

Responses to whether OBE had been a success varied between respondents, although most felt that it had crippled education in South Africa. Paul Musker, an education consultant, has argued that politically it has been successful in launching a curriculum that reflects South Africa's transformation. 'In terms of education, I think it did more harm than good, but then I don't think the evidence is conclusive.' One of our respondents argued that it was too idealistic, given the limited resources allocated to education.

## Implementation

In 1998 the phasing in of outcomes-based curriculum began in the three general education and training bands: the foundation (grade 1-3); intermediate (grades 4-6), and senior phase (grades 7-9). Curriculum 2005 was also phased in as follows: grade 1 in 1998, grade 2 in 1999, and grades 3 and 7 in 2000. Grade 8 was to follow in the 2001 academic year. But when the former minister of education, Prof Sibusiso Bengu, announced the introduction of the new curriculum in 1995, implementation was scheduled for all grades by 2000. In 1997 the implementation timetable was revised to 2005 and, in line with this, the new curriculum became known as Curriculum 2005.<sup>28</sup> The report of the Chisholm review committee appointed to examine Curriculum 2005 clearly states that OBE has not been implemented properly, and is failing to deliver the

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<sup>28</sup> Interview with Musker.

expected results.<sup>29</sup> It maintains, nevertheless, that it is the most progressive policy available.

Our research examines the performance of the system at all levels—national, provincial, district, school, and classroom. It maintains that at all levels, structural, institutional, organisational, and human resource weaknesses continue to hinder the smooth implementation of OBE. We did not lose sight of the fact that OBE is three years old; it still has to mature. There are gaps just because the policy is still new to everybody and which are the result of:

- the inadequacy of consultative democracy;
- poor policy dissemination;
- poor training;
- the lack of a support system;
- difficulties in the classroom;
- the speedy introduction of a multitude of policy documents;
- a lack of resources; and
- difficulties in finding a balance between political and education goals.

## **Factors impeding implementation**

### ***The inadequacy of consultative democracy***

The status report by the minister of education of June 1999 stated that the new curriculum framework had been adopted after extensive consultation and research. The question is: what was the extent of this consultation, and what impact has it had on implementation?

Consultation took place mostly via national structures – workers, teachers and student unions. For the government it was enough if they sent a representative to meetings; it did not ask if the information was disseminated to the lower echelon. There was no consistency in representation; representatives changed with every meeting. This created continuity problems, and affected the design of the curriculum. In any event, it was difficult for representatives to transmit the information since they did not fully understand its contents: either because of a lack of appropriate knowledge, or simply because they had joined the process halfway. The quality of people at the meetings was not always appropriate. At transition, most organisations with a stake in education did not have skills in curriculum design. They were powerless to understand and influence content and direction. This explains the many complaints today from people and organisations which took part in the conceptualisation and design of the curriculum: SADTU, which was part of the process of formulation, is today complaining that it was inadequate.

Interviewees, especially teachers, believe they were not consulted – if they were, not properly. Because they are the people who implement OBE in the classrooms, the

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

process was therefore flawed. But this position can be disputed. If unions do not consult their members, it is not the government's or the department of education's fault. The limitation of representative democracy was that the information received by members of the different stakeholders' organisations who attended the meetings was not properly transmitted to their lower echelons.

Education experts say that, although the representation of all stakeholders through the consultation approach has been inadequate, the process had the positive effect of involving many people. They also argue that it was difficult for the government to implement participatory consultation: there is no such a thing as a totally inclusive process. There is always a group of people who feel they are not adequately represented in the process. Another argument is that people were not left out of the process intentionally, since it is dictated by which voice is more important in the production of knowledge. The views of established education specialists, particularly those close to the national department (there is disgruntlement among some specialists who argue that they were sidelined in the process), seemed to carry greater weight than the views of other stakeholders.

But if one takes into account that the ANC succeeded in mobilising people when political activity was banned, one would have expected that, in a democracy, its ability to involve people in policy decisions would have increased. It seems that the ANC government, either deliberately or under pressure to deliver, was not ready to engage in lengthy processes of direct participation. The issue is not whether there is some ideal number of people to be consulted. Most of the time, it is what the government had to do to understand attitudes and behaviours at the grass roots which may affect implementation, and to win widespread co-operation from those from whom it was needed. This might be achieved by more vigorous representative democracy.

### ***Inadequate policy dissemination***

Policy dissemination is an important aspect of implementation. But in the case of OBE, information and training were not effectively transmitted. This has led to different interpretation of the policy among stakeholders, and poor implementation in classes. The poor policy dissemination strategy has resulted in poor access to information, and the absence of a common understanding of the policy and its contents.

### **The cascade model of dissemination**

The problems referred to originate in the cascade model of dissemination adopted by the department, in which people are trained to train others. But the model could not achieve its objective since the trainers were not qualified to train the teachers. For example, after failing to answer a question put to him by an educator, one trainer replied that they too received training in less than seven days.<sup>30</sup>

The Chisholm report also points to the weakness of the model. Cascading information through people who do not have much expertise ensures that the information

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<sup>30</sup> Focus group, teachers from Model C schools, 13/12/2000.

progressively loses quality as it is transmitted to different levels. The model also means that teachers who are badly trained transfer their problems to the child because they are implementing a system they do not understand. One official at the DOE said that, ideally, 'one would have liked to have all educators trained. But this required financial capacity that the government did not have.'<sup>31</sup>

Nevertheless, as time passes, competent trainers are emerging who conduct workshops. This is apparent in Limpopo, but teachers complain that most of the time workshops are organised at the wrong time in the wrong place. Most either take place after school hours, when teachers are tired, or on weekends. While weekends might be better, there is no transport for rural teachers to attend workshops in town. Another element that impacts negatively on attendance is communication. People are told of a workshop a day or two before it takes place.

In KwaZulu-Natal, teachers at rural schools said they had never received further training besides that organised by the province. One exception must be mentioned. In the same region there is a school with its own OBE expert which tries to come to the rescue of friends. It seems every province is fast developing its own adaptability strategy. Besides our experience in KwaZulu-Natal and Limpopo, the report of the review committee on C2005 states that in regional teams are conducting workshops in the Western Cape, while in North West a team of core trainers are moving from district to district conducting workshops. One teacher who received training in Western Cape and is now teaching in Gauteng believed that 'the quality of training received by teachers also differs, depending on the organisation of the provincial education departments'.<sup>32</sup> He said he was surprised to find his friends struggling with OBE in Gauteng.

Many mechanisms are being developed at school to deal with the gap left by training:

- For rural, informal, and township teachers who are the most affected, districts organise visits to other schools in towns where teachers are given a chance to observe others teach.
- Teachers who have children in what are considered better schools use their books to familiarise themselves with teaching methods. They also go as far as copying the contents of their children's books, killing the creativity they were supposed to use to teach OBE. The teachers who copy material in this manner share the information with their colleagues. However, they experience difficulties in applying what they have copied, since model C schools seem to do things differently. What teachers are saying here is that far more is needed than just consulting a book on how others do it.
- Many schools in town organise workshops on OBE, and invite teachers from the disadvantaged schools in their district. This is a useful initiative. But some schools complain that those invited do not attend. One teacher from a Model C

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<sup>31</sup> Interview with Lebs Mphahlele, department of education, Pretoria, 23/11/2000.

<sup>32</sup> Focus group with teachers, 13/12/2000.

school said schools from informal settlements did not co-operate even when the training was on weekends.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, most teachers said these initiatives should be supported since they could assist teachers where government training had failed.

- Some schools which can afford this invite a facilitator for a training session. Increasingly, there are emerging OBE experts who avail themselves to schools for a fee. Some schools which can afford to pay also invite teachers from disadvantaged schools to these training sessions.

### Poor access to information

Information on the transformation of the education system reaches schools. But its quality and the manner in which it is transmitted ensures that most educators get to know about a policy through the mass media. It is only on rare occasions that they are able to read the policy document, and then they struggle to understand it. Documents that make it to schools either arrive late, when the policy is being implemented, or are left to rot in the principal's office. Lack of access to information by teachers is the result of many bureaucratic layers from the national, through the provincial and district, to the circuit level. The problem is clearly communication within the government system.

A distinction must be made between rural and urban schools. Most urban schools with internet have easy access to policy documents, which they can access on the department of education's website. Although this does not mean they are read, according to one educator, it is mostly rural educators who are affected by a lack of information. Access to policy content cannot be gained only through training. It is essential that those who responsible for implementing policy in classrooms be given a chance to read the policy documents, since training exposes teachers to a limited version of their contents. Educators have also become merely administrators and are not party to policy-making.<sup>34</sup> An educator at Woodford Primary School said that 'we are forced to implement policies we do not understand. There is a perception that if teachers do not accept government policies they can be dismissed.'<sup>35</sup> Some educators, because of lack of proper information, cannot distinguish between OBE and the old method of teaching.

But educators are also to blame, since they are reluctant to participate. They ignore channels of communication, failing most of the time to make submissions. But this ignorance is acute in areas where there are no facilities. A teacher at Bethany Community primary school went to the extent of asking if, to obtain a white paper, one needed to apply for it. This vindicates those who argue that formulation was not inclusive enough, as teachers seem not to have been properly consulted. An educator at Acton Homes Primary complained:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Interview with chair of the governing body at Marianhill Secondary School, KwaZulu-Natal, 6/6/2000.

<sup>35</sup> Interview with teachers at Woodford Primary School, 5/6/2000.

We were not part of the process of formulation. It would have been better if the government conducted workshops as a way to consult us.<sup>36</sup>

Workshops were conducted for teacher representatives. But how much of this information was shared with teachers? Many educators in rural areas say consultation is urban-biased: most of it occurred in or close to urban centres. If the government had consulted them, they would have advised it to delay implementation until rural schools acquired basic facilities. It failed to assess the environment in rural areas, and took urban and semi-urban as the barometer of OBE implementation. The mere fact that it assumed that rural and urban areas requires similar policies has created a gap in implementation. Certainly, as noted above, inadequate government knowledge of realities is a major obstacle to implementation, or it is assumed that fancy techniques can solve a basic problems such as a lack of facilities when in reality the latter obstructs the former.

In general, teachers say there are many aspects of OBE with which they disagree.<sup>37</sup> One is the teaching time (seven-hour working days are too long, especially for rural teachers, who must fetch water or travel long distances on poor roads). The principal at Woodford said: ‘The government is making us put on a coat that does not fit us.’<sup>38</sup> There is no relationship between many of policies and the context in which they are implemented. OBE, to be properly implemented, requires schools which are functional, with adequate learning materials. But these are not found in many schools.

### **Poor training**

It is better to train somebody to teach and not to workshop somebody to teach.<sup>39</sup>

Since teachers were not, as the previous section demonstrates, properly consulted on the design of C2005, training remained the only hope that educators would be introduced to the policy. But our research shows that training was rushed, and trainers unqualified. It thus failed to equip educators with the necessary skills to cope in classrooms. Taylor and Vinjevoid thus suggest that the greatest strength of the training has been its ideological domain: this may partly explain why most teachers seem to have embraced OBE despite its flaws. But it has not equipped them to implement it.

### **Inexperienced trainers**

OBE was introduced to teachers at training session by people with a very limited understanding of it. Trainers during the first years of implementation were drawn from the department of education and NGOs, contrary to the common wisdom that colleges of education should conduct the training. As one teacher said: ‘Training workshops

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<sup>36</sup> Interview, chair of the governing body at Marianhill Secondary School.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Interview, Woodford Primary School, 5/6/2000.

<sup>39</sup> Focus group, teachers from informal settlement, 12/11/2000.

were run by ordinary teachers, and we are not sure what criteria government used for choosing them.<sup>40</sup>

Trainers had difficulty understanding the policy's terminology.<sup>41</sup> One teacher in Limpopo noted: 'If the terminology is difficult for educators, what about learners?'<sup>42</sup> The difficulties in understanding and teaching OBE have pushed some teachers to revert to old methods of teaching. Most grade 7 teachers expressed difficulties in linking theory to practice. Those who are teaching according to OBE rules also do not know if what they are implementing is correct. The complexity of terminology and lack of experienced trainers made it difficult to engage with the substance underlying it, and put it into practice in classrooms.

Teachers are experiencing problems with their year plan because trainers failed to demonstrate how this is done. For most training, the trainers were so unprepared that they were unable to communicate most of the issues. Trainers knew as little as the trainees. This left teachers confused. For example, trainers failed to provide mechanisms to assess children, leaving teachers to formulate their own. Could the problems teachers and children encounter in class when implementing OBE be avoided with better training? It is possible that low capacity in the system meant that even better training would not have helped. But it would surely have improved the way in which teachers transmit knowledge.

Trainers were also unaware of the context in which most teachers operate. For example, there was no classroom demonstration during training. Although teachers suggested to trainers that pupils be brought into training sessions, trainers were not prepared to be put to the test. OBE is a new way of teaching, and training should have been accompanied by practice. This shows that planning as well as training and the dissemination of information did not take account of the concrete conditions in which implementation must proceed.

The government introduced OBE without paying enough attention to training or preparing trainers, who were not accustomed to the new policy and its concepts. In the senior phase (grade 7), training was not effective and was conducted late in the year. Grade 8 was to have implemented OBE in 2001, but by November 2000 teachers had not yet received training..

### Very little time devoted to training

All interviewees expressed this concern. Training sessions were very short. The longest was two weeks for the foundation and intermediary phases, and two to three days for the senior phase. Few teachers were trained, and they trained their fellow teachers in some cases. This has left educators unprepared to implement OBE. As a circuit inspector at Ladysmith, Mandla Mchuru, put it:

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<sup>40</sup> This was a unanimous perception among teachers spoken to in interviews and the focus groups conducted in Gauteng.

<sup>41</sup> Focus group, 2001.

<sup>42</sup> Interview, Northern Province, 2000.

I have often thought OBE was rushed. Our educators are not ready to design their own materials as OBE demands.<sup>43</sup>

The misjudgement of capacity available to implement OBE is a constant theme. It could be argued that making policy without considering whether capacity is there to implement it is a constant government policy-making problem.

But the inability of educators to teach OBE in class is not a problem across the board. Most white teachers said they were implementing OBE, and it was not new for them. The only difference was in terminology, which had changed drastically. Black teachers were of the view that the government should have considered this and afforded them adequate training if it was serious about redressing inequality. One teacher said: 'It is a disgrace that Bantu education was able to train teachers for two years, but our democratic government cannot do it.'<sup>44</sup>

The inadequacy of the training does not only refer to the quality of trainers and time devoted to it, but content too. Teachers were introduced to the changes that OBE was bringing in a general way. There has never been a breakdown of subjects during training. Trainers should have demonstrated practically how each subject should be taught. The training did not equip teachers with classroom skills on how to teach subjects differently from the old system.

### ***Lack of a support system***

The third reason is lack of a support system at school. Many other reports have reached this conclusion. A well-co-ordinated support system at national, provincial, district and school levels could have helped teachers to face difficulties in classrooms, but there is no such system to help educators cope with the many difficulties they face in implementation. The main reason is that the government never trained enough subject advisers. Subject advisers are ideally responsible for providing teachers classroom support and help to alleviate difficulties encountered by teachers in a specific subject. Ideally, subject advisers should be available to teachers discuss problems experienced in the classroom and on the subject matter. But given their huge load – in some cases having to serve at least 100 schools, their reach is extremely limited, and many teachers are left to deal with difficulties on their own.

In addition, very few principals were trained, and this has left educators on their own, with nobody knowing exactly what is happening in the classroom. However, it seems that most white teachers are better trained than their black fellow teachers. A learner from a more prosperous school put it in these terms:

I think black teachers, although qualified, are not as well trained as white teachers. When I compare my textbooks with those of kids who attend township schools, there is a big difference. Also,

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<sup>43</sup> Interview, 2000.

<sup>44</sup> Focus group, teachers in informal settlements.

our syllabus at multiracial school are more intense, and we have more homework than kids in the township.<sup>45</sup>

The Education For All (EFA) assessment report notes bluntly that nearly a quarter (24 per cent) of primary school educators are not appropriately qualified (they are unqualified or underqualified). Their employment is often dictated by a shortage of human resources, particularly in rural areas. The provinces with the highest rates are North West (34 per cent), Kwazulu-Natal (32,8 per cent) and Free State (30,5 per cent). Those with the lowest rates are the Western Cape (10,2 per cent) and Gauteng (12,4 per cent).

The government was well aware of this. Was it assumed that OBE would solve the problem of underqualified teachers because qualifications would not be relevant? If so, OBE was not fully understood by those who introduced it.

The Ministry of Education regards teachers' education, including the professional education of trainers and educators, as a central pillar of implementing curriculum change. But an important curriculum was introduced without thorough teacher education: intervention to upgrade qualifications occurred only three years after the policy document on 'Norms and standards for educators' gazetted in January 1999 outlined policy on the qualifications of educators and their evaluation. All teachers interviewed said the government should have delayed implementation until training was successful.

The government hoped to alleviate the lack of qualified teachers in disadvantaged schools through the redeployment strategy. But it has failed to transfer qualified teachers to those schools. Only in rare cases have whites moved to black schools. One reason why experienced teachers are said not to move to black schools is that they are afraid of violence there.<sup>46</sup> But the real reason may be that a teacher transferring from a well- to an underresourced school is likely to lose morale and productivity. Producing more qualified teachers seems the more viable response. This reveals an important theme in policy implementation: an inability to see that people are not inanimate objects, and that they do not conform to what policy-makers want because they are told to do so.

South Africa still has schools that are seriously understaffed, despite the redeployment strategy. In some it is possible to find teachers taking responsibility for more than three subjects. Sometime it has been difficult for a teacher to teach some classes in terms of OBE, and others not. While OBE's intention is to improve the quality of education, there is a need for school-based training and support systems for educators.

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<sup>45</sup> Focus group, learners at Model C schools.

<sup>46</sup> Focus group, learners at townships schools.

### ***Assessing learners: difficulties teachers face in the classroom***

The lack of appropriate training has resulted in a failure among teachers to assess learners. In most cases, the team found that teachers do not know what outcomes to expect from them. Many teachers said they do not know how to assess pupils because they were not trained to do this in the workshops they attended.

Besides the impact of bad training, there is also the work involved. C2005 covers eight learning areas. Since none is considered more important than others, the assessment of learners in each is crucial. The National Assessment Policy indicates that assessment should be based on 66 special outcomes. These are too many and too complex, and obviously beyond the capacity of the most dedicated primary school teacher. Also, according to the policy, there are two broad outcomes: ‘critical’, and ‘specific’.<sup>47</sup> Teachers find it difficult to distinguish between them. Although each has a set of criteria, teachers complained that they were complex, leaving them unable to correctly measure the performance of learners. The poorer the school, the more likely that teachers are underqualified and not properly trained in the assessment methods which OBE requires.

One element that negatively affects assessment is overcrowding in classes. Each learning area has specific outcomes, and three to four assessment criteria. Teachers say this is difficult because of the number of learners they must assess. The learner—educator ratio for South Africa’s public primary schools means that, on average, each educator has to cater for more than 35 learners. Most teachers, parents and learners said an ideal class should have 25 to 35 pupils; this would go a long way towards reducing pressure on teachers and students. The higher educator—learner ratios combined with inadequate conditions of teaching and learning, plus the lack of adequate instructional support materials, are seriously obstructing the better delivery of quality education that OBE is pursuing. The bigger the class, the more difficult the individual assessment of OBE becomes.

One critique of OBE is thus that it continues to entrench inequality. This is so firstly because only affluent schools have the educators to make it work, and secondly because, in the absence of a standardised national examination, assessments issued at poorer schools will not be taken seriously.

Parents also experience the same difficulties at home that educators experience in classes. The successful implementation of OBE was meant to be supported by parents at home via the supervision of homework. But many parents lack the education to be able to help. It is difficult for parents who have gone through the previous system to understand these requirements. As such, supervision has become very difficult. Most parents in rural areas thought OBE was a waste of time, and many did not know what

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<sup>47</sup> Critical outcomes are those which underpin the constitution and are adopted by SAQA. They prepare the learners for life and refer to the skills, knowledge and values that contribute to national development. Specific Outcomes include skills, knowledge and values, which inform the demonstration of the achievement of an outcome or set of outcomes. Department of education, 1997.

it was. However, learners also accused parents of being negligent.<sup>48</sup> ‘Parents do not communicate with teachers; they do not know who is the math or science teacher.’<sup>49</sup> Many parents, especially in rural areas, are embarrassed because they assume that they cannot contribute; therefore, building parents’ self-esteem may be a key challenge for policy implementation. This lack of insight by policy-makers into parents’ incapacities is a clear example of how inadequate information about key actors produces unimplementable policy.

### ***Lack of a common understanding of OBE***

Interpretations of the curriculum also seem to differ. This is a serious problem, since people are implementing OBE in many ways. Some educators, mostly white, think there is nothing new in OBE. Others, mostly black, think it involves group work, and if learners are organised in groups they are implementing OBE. Other teachers do not even try to implement it, they say. Instead, they continue to teach using the old method. Another group thinks OBE is just a method where there is no exam but the child is assessed throughout the year.

Differences in understanding OBE have partly resulted from the misunderstanding of policy documents, whose terminology is very difficult to understand. Most teachers said trainers at workshops had different ways of explaining many concepts. Here again, incorrect assumptions were made about the capacities of people who must implement policy. There are also differences of understanding and interpretation among department of education officials on key concepts – including outcomes, assessment criteria, and performance indicators—which constitute the base on which to judge whether OBE is successful. The report of the review committee confirms that ‘there is no agreement among DOE officials on the way in which many terms are used’.<sup>50</sup> This confusion about terminology is even worse among teachers.

### ***Speedy introduction of a multitude of policy documents***

The fact that the government introduces many documents at the same time is an obstacle to implementation. There are too many policies, most of which have not been successful. These policies are interlinked. There is a need to understand the first before the second can even stand a chance of succeeding.

Rationalisation and redeployment have also affected the implementation of OBE. Much uncertainty has been created about teachers’ employment. They are consistently made to feel inadequate. Teachers’ morale is low. They feel government policies usually do not consider the classroom and teacher. They are depressed because of the way the redeployment policy is being implemented. The most affected are tempo-

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<sup>48</sup> Focus group, learners, 2001.

<sup>49</sup> Focus group, learners at Model C schools.

<sup>50</sup> Focus group, learners at Model C schools.

rary teachers, whose position is always unstable: teachers take sick leave not because they are sick, but because they are not motivated.<sup>51</sup>

### ***A lack of resources***

#### **Physical resources**

Information on the condition of schools has become available from the School Register of Needs, established in 1997. OBE was introduced without the total picture of school conditions and needs. Today we know this picture: one of inequalities in buildings and facilities, basic services, books and libraries, teachers and their qualifications, school leadership, district services, community capacity, transport, and communication.

The disparity between previously disadvantaged and model C schools was meant to be addressed via the redistribution of school funding. For this to happen the government introduced in 1998 the Norms and Standards for School Funding Act, aimed at redistributing recurrent non-personnel resources to the most needy learners in each province. Has this happened? The funding provides for three categories of expenditure: the maintenance of school buildings, municipal services and utilities, and learner support materials (LSMs). The last-named are of paramount importance to implementing for implementation of OBE.

#### **Learner support materials**

The quality and availability of suitable LSMs is one of the factors that improve the quality of teaching and learning. OBE focuses on alternative methods of teaching which require not only the greater participation of learners in the classroom but also, contrast with traditional rote learning, stimulate learners' motor co-ordination and senses of sight and touch, all of which contribute to more holistic learning.

Despite the government's intention to redistribute resources assisting this holistic learning, parents and teachers in informal urban settlement and rural areas believe it is not doing enough to uplift their schools. And the implementation of C2005 failed to differentiate between disadvantaged and better resourced schools. The materials essential to teaching are unavailable at many rural schools: these include photocopy machines, teaching aids, charts, pens, dictionaries, video machines, and TV sets. To this should be added maps, charts, and skeletons. To illustrate the difficulty teachers encounter, one from an informal settlement said during a focus group:

In my school, OBE is being implemented in five classes (from grade one up to grade 5), with 45 to 50 learners per class. We only have one small photocopy machine.<sup>52</sup>

Another said:

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<sup>51</sup> Focus group of teachers, 2001.

<sup>52</sup> Interview at Rev M P Malatji School, Northern Province, 2000.

In the area I teach we have tried to resolve the problem through clusters. Schools which do not have photocopiers will go to make copies to a school that has one. But this approach has come with its own problem. The school where the machine is located is always inundated with people. This disturbs the classes at the school. Also, one big photocopy machine cannot cope with the demand from three or four schools. So every time you want to use it you make a small prayer so that it does not break down.<sup>53</sup>

Although books are provided, their quality is questioned: the Grove Primary School submission cited by the report review committee describes them as ‘woolly or quite superficial’, or essentially a reissue of old textbooks. And when they are provided, they reach schools very late. At the inception (1997--8) of OBE, the funds available to provinces for ordering LSMs drastically declined. Totally inadequate provincial allocations for LSMs in 1998--9 resulted in the cabinet making additional allocations available by way of a conditional grant managed by the department of education. A study by Khulisa Management Services in 1999 found that almost three quarters of sampled sites did not have sufficient educational equipment in relation to the number of learners, and slightly more than half the sites had books available. It concluded that this was reflected in poor results in literacy assessments.

Despite the government’s efforts since 1998 to inject additional funds and improve planning, co-ordination and monitoring, the LSM cycle is still far from being efficient. The problems occur in ordering and supplying, and in a funding shortage. Poor rate of retrieval of books from learners at the end of each year is also a major hidden cost. The distribution of books is sometimes affected because planners underestimate the number of learners. Another aspect is that schools use different kinds of books produced by various publishers. Although at first glance it seems that there is no problem with this, some teachers (mostly from black schools in rural and informal settlements) believe the quality of the books they receive is totally different from those which model C or private schools use.

### Other physical resources

The SA Monitoring Learning Achievement (MLA) Survey of 1999 confirms that classrooms and infrastructure at many schools are inadequate. This results in poor conditions for teaching and learning, including crowded classrooms and disciplinary and other related problems. Indeed, the physical environment of many schools is not conducive to quality teaching and learning, especially at rural and informal settlement schools. This includes:

- a lack of electricity (OBE teaching techniques such as video, TV, and radio cannot be used);
- a lack of water and proper toilets. This is a serious problem especially for female learners and educators during their menstruation; learners’ absenteeism during that period of the month is very high. The government is fast-tracking develop-

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<sup>53</sup> Focus group, teachers from semi-urban schools, 2001.

ment without putting in place the necessary mechanisms to support these changes; and

- a lack of facilities such as staff rooms (in many schools a class serves as a staff room), cupboards (new and old stocks of textbooks can be found lying in the staff room, with no proper attention given to them), or laboratories. In one school, a class is used as a laboratory and classroom.

A major contradiction in South Africa's education system is schools in some areas are overcrowded, while those in others are empty. According to most teachers interviewed, OBE can only be implemented in small classes.

Since 1994 the RDP has tackled the backlog of school facilities via the National School Building Programme. But public expenditure on personnel remains high; the department of education has made it a priority to reduce spending on personnel costs from 89 per cent of provincial expenditure in 1997—8 to 85 per cent by 2005. This modest reduction was expected to make funds available for the provision of LSMS, equipment, and other infrastructure as well as the general improvement of the quality of education.

Schools are trying to overcome the problem of insufficient resources using the 'cluster approach' whereby those in a certain area share resources.

### Cultural resources

This refers to knowledge and values. In a curriculum, this might be more important than physical resources. The curriculum did not take this dimension into account. It was designed as if South African society was homogenous. The material in the curriculum was generated in accordance with the culture, values, and knowledge of the children of those who designed it; it lacked a sufficient understanding of the background of rural learners.<sup>54</sup> The question then becomes: who designed the curriculum, and in whose interests? OBE was designed by a predominantly white middle-class team, and their influence is discernible in the curriculum.<sup>55</sup> The resource and teaching levels required to implement it successfully, and the pitch and content of the curriculum, clearly indicate that it is biased towards an urban, middle-class audience, and makes little effort to fit into rural contexts.

### **Finances**

Overall expenditure on education has increased from R34,1 million during the 1995 financial year to R45,2 million in 1998--9. In implementing OBE, the government has failed to take into account the weak backgrounds of black schools and learners. The transfer of resources to previously disadvantaged schools has not occurred, and they are not equipped to deal with the financial requirements that accompany OBE. Most school fees range between R25 and R35 a year per child in rural areas, informal settlements, and township schools. Their governing bodies are failing to raise funds be-

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<sup>54</sup> Interview, department of education, 2000.

<sup>55</sup> Interview, department of education.

cause they lack the know-how as well as potential sponsors in their areas, which suggests that inequalities are likely to continue unless these schools receive higher state subsidies.

While the government knows well that schools depend on fees, it does not allow them to suspend the children of parents who do not pay. Although schools in town have devised legal ways of forcing parents to pay, in the rural areas principals are left with no option but to continue as if nothing has happened. The problem is that policy-makers rushed everything, and impoverished schools are not coping with changes. However, the fees issue is more complicated than suggested above. The constitution states that every child has a right to education. A child cannot be deprived of that right because her/his parents can't or won't pay. Equally important, rural schools should be empowered to find mechanisms to deal with such issues. If schools in town are able to persuade parents to pay, it might well be done in rural areas, but conditions prevailing in the area would have to be taken into account before introducing any mechanism.

The government's commitment to the equitable distribution of resources is continuing, but redress does not seem to be occurring. A school funding provision in the Norms and Standards for Schools Funding says schools should provide each learner a basic package of R100 for support material. In reality, this is not what happens. The executive responsibility for provincial education rests with provinces, which determine education budgets out of the block grants appropriated by parliament. The provincial education departments (PEDs) are challenged by the size of total redress funding, given the small share of non-personnel expenditure in their budgets (90 per cent of funds goes to salaries). This constraint has restricted the ability of most PEDs to effect the meaningful distribution of redress funds to the majority of poor learners.

### ***The absence of crucial actors of implementation***

The 'cascade model' bypassed crucial players who would otherwise have contributed positively to the implementation of OBE. The information was transmitted from national level up to the provinces. From there it went directly to districts, and then to schools. Subject advisers who are key to curriculum implementation were ignored, although they are meant to provide professional support to schools.

This demonstrates that a well-formulated plan of implementation was lacking. Otherwise the government would have trained subject advisers first. Implementation is also difficult because there is no follow-up. 'Policy-makers are at a distance from us, and do not know what is really happening in the classroom,' said one teacher. Another recalled that 'they workshop us and leave us to implement. They do not come to our schools to see how we are doing. We can voice our concerns, and they listen but do not respond.'<sup>56</sup> The lack of follow-up on policy which is being implemented is a serious weakness. Policy has to assume that implementation never ends.

In addition, most principals have not been trained and are not in a position to support teachers or to follow up in classrooms. An interesting anecdote is that of a group

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<sup>56</sup> Interview at Umlazi Secondary School, 2000.

of teachers who, after receiving training, told their principal that there was not much to report since they had been told that OBE did not require training. Later, one teacher revealed to the principal that they had lied to him because they did not understand the training. Without on-site support for OBE, or a delegated OBE 'agent' at schools, it is difficult to ensure its successful implementation.

### **Political goals, or quality education?**

Why did the government implement OBE without the capacity to carry it out? It seems that the process was driven by the political need to show that change was occurring, since the government felt under pressure to deliver on its promises and to move swiftly away from apartheid education towards radical change. As a policy, OBE seems to have been widely accepted: no one is disputing the curriculum's content and intention. Most people spoken to believed it is a progressive policy since it tends to respect the needs and dignity of all. It is the way in which the government has gone about implementing it that is being questioned. Critics argue that the government should have given itself time before starting implementation: some teachers proposed leaving three to six years for implementation.

The recent review report acknowledges these shortcomings, and there seems to be a widespread consensus both in government and the education sector at large, that some changes in the curriculum are necessary. Therefore, the problem is not whether change should happen, but how it should be managed. It seems that despite the government's recognition of its mistakes, political reasons continue to inform matters affecting education, especially the implementation of OBE. For example, the review report called on the government to review implementation in grade 8 since pilot projects are not giving good results. But a political decision at cabinet level has been taken for implementation to go ahead in grade 8.

### ***Impact on the quality of education***

The transformation of education in South Africa emphasises quality. The objective is first to redress the unbalanced and inequitable distribution of education services inherited from the apartheid regime, and second to develop a world-class education system to meet the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.<sup>57</sup> It has previously been stated that the redistribution of resource has not yet redressed the apartheid imbalances between provinces, districts, communities and schools. Has the quality of education improved with OBE?

Quality can only be judged after an evaluation of the performance of schools. Until recently there was no national system for evaluating this. The national policy on whole school evaluation, which has just been introduced, is a step in that direction.<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, the contribution of OBE to the quality of education can be analysed

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<sup>57</sup> Interview at Umlazi Secondary School.

<sup>58</sup> Department of education, The national policy on whole school evaluation, 2000.

through what is happening in classrooms in the perception of teachers and learners, compared to the old method. There are indications that OBE is working unevenly, with schools with resources and well-trained teachers doing better than those with neither. The government failed to take into account the weak background of disadvantaged learners, among whom, the review commission demonstrated quite clearly, its impact is still negligible. But this does not mean that OBE should be dropped. Teachers, parents and children are enthusiastic about it; they say it has the potential to become better than the previous system. However, many things need to be put in place before quality can improve.

On the positive side, OBE makes learners observant, and increases awareness, self-esteem and discipline. In class learners become more involved. The best thing about OBE is that it is fun, especially in maths and science, said one learner. Another said:

The fact that we are grouped in literacy is a good thing, because in the old method the teacher did it in an advanced English and it was difficult to apprehend by mostly non-English kids. In a group there is a possibility to help each other. In the old method it was difficult for everybody to follow the teacher. In small groups everyone wants to participate in discussion.<sup>59</sup>

A teacher at Handbrook Primary School said: ‘With OBE learners are learning, they are not being taught.’<sup>60</sup> The learners have become open; they talk, enjoy classes, and can express themselves.<sup>61</sup> Teachers affirmed that leaving learners to express themselves has revealed that the learners know more than people think. But it is difficult to say if what has been observed in their behaviour can be translated into quality improvement. How would one know that? What evaluation is appropriate to OBE since there are no single final exams?

Others believe OBE has a negative impact on the classroom: they argue it caters only for fast learners. The others are left behind because there is no mechanism to help them cope. A teacher at Acton Homes primary said: ‘Since OBE does not provide educators with methods to deal with these slow learners, I simply revert to the old method of teaching.’<sup>62</sup> Although slow learners can be stimulated by fast learners, it is difficult to assess this because teachers are failing to cope with the size of classes. The point about slow learners seems particularly important. It is possible that, when confronted with the need to change drastically without the tools to do so, implementers often retreat quickly to the old and familiar ways, frustrating change. But there are teachers who are trying to construct mechanisms to help slow learners. One said: ‘I ask every member of the group to produce a personal report of the group work, rather than asking the group to produce one report. My method helps me to identify slow learners, and it puts me in a position to test them again on the same exercise the next

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<sup>59</sup> Focus group.

<sup>60</sup> Interview with a Mr Dlamini, deputy principal at Handbrook, 2000.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Interview at Acton Homes Primary School.

time.<sup>63</sup> Some teachers said that although there was no method and time during school hours to help slow learners, they were prepared to stay at school after hours to help them. But there is no security at many schools for teachers and learners to stay until late. Security at school will go a long way towards allowing teachers to spend time with slow learners.

Another weakness of OBE is that the approach in which all learners pass is not equipping them with the skills needed to cope with the demands of the higher grade. Educators and parents with children in grades 1, 2 and 3 therefore complained that learners in these grades reach grade four without knowing how to read and write. The previous system of teaching gave more direction on how teachers should initiate learners at this level.<sup>64</sup> Parents believe this is not done properly at this level.

## CONCLUSION

This paper had described two important aspects of education policy in some detail in order to illuminate the gaps – where they exist – between policy intention and implementation. While there are variations in experience between schools and regions, broad conclusions can be drawn on the cause of the gaps between policy and implementation, not only in education but more generally.

The implementation, or lack thereof, of government policy is almost always perceived to centre on the ability of governments or other stakeholders to finance and administratively manage its implementation. This report has illustrated how the absence of adequate hard resources limits successful implementation. For instance, poor planning in OBE implementation has been one of the causes of the gap between policy intention and implementation. Many respondents said OBE was rushed without paying attention to details such as the needs of schools, the infrastructure, the quality of learning materials, the disparity in resources among schools, and the availability of finances. Equally important, planners also did not consider unintended consequences prompted by human behaviour. Seemingly, planners assumed that parents would be able to participate, and teachers would be motivated and enthusiastic. Yet the inability of parents to participate because of deprived educational backgrounds, the low morale of teachers due to policies such as redeployment, the absence of follow-up training in schools, and teachers' preference for the old system impacted negatively on the successful implementation of the policy. Similarly, SGB policy has been hampered by poverty, a poor understanding of policy, poor dissemination policies, poor training programmes, and a lack of readily available professional skills in SGBs. However, it is argued here that the gap between policy and implementation caused by these quantifiable variables can be closed via:

- improved planning and communication strategies;

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<sup>63</sup> Teachers' focus group.

<sup>64</sup> Focus group of teachers from informal settlements.

<sup>64</sup> L P Khumalo, W D Papo, A M Mabilla, and J D Jansen, A baseline survey of OBE in grade 1 classrooms, 1999.

- longer training programmes which have a practical component that prepares educators for classroom situations. It is also essential that new SGBs are trained. Training should not only focus on generating and understanding budgets, but on skills such as negotiation and conflict resolution;
- follow-up after the training process. This is essential because it helps to resolve many problems faced in the actual implementation of policy. The follow-up could take the form of experienced trainers attending classes where they observe and assist the teacher. It could also involve trainers having subsequent meetings with teachers to discuss their problems, and suggesting possible solutions;
- increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of education expenditure. This is one of the greatest priorities in the sector. The education budget is large and continues to grow, but whether this sum is adequate or not is less important at this stage than whether it is used optimally. The government should therefore prioritise the effective use of available funds;
- better management of consultation, and a more strategic outlook on participation, which clearly identifies who is to participate in policy formulation or implementation, when, and how.

While it has been noted that resources, both financial and human, are crucial in the implementation of policy, they only form part of what is required. Moreover, a lack of quantifiable resources is often used to justify poor or ineffective implementation. Common refrains such as ‘a lack of funds’ and ‘the lack of resources, administrative skills, and necessary infrastructure’ become masks behind which those responsible for policy implementation explain the reasons for failure. While there is no denying that South Africa faces fiscal and ‘hard’ resource constraints, where the social budget and administrative ability fall far short of the magnitude of need, the acceptance at face value of the lack of resources refrain prevents policy-makers from investigating other causes of policy failure. This the research into OBE has thrown up a series of questions about the policy itself.

Interviews with individuals who were involved in policy generation provided a window on the events leading up to the generation and finalisation of OBE policy. These insights reveal a highly contested political process, which to some extent failed to match the country’s curriculum requirements. On the one hand, respondents argued that the failure of OBE was a result of a policy process that had marginalised a significant number of experienced organisations and people in the sector and was driven by political ideals which placed huge pressure on officials to deliver on a new curriculum within a limited time, which may not have necessarily resulted in a suitable curriculum. On the other hand, the Chisholm report states that the problems faced by OBE lie largely in the realm of implementation. And ruling politicians and officials often suggest that the policy is sound, but the implementation is faulty.

This is true to some extent. Interviews with teachers showed that the resource requirements expected for the successful implementation of OBE were way beyond the capacity of the economic context. One of our respondents argued that it was like implementing a first-world policy in a third-world context. Yet where does the problem

really lie? Is it not with the overambitious policy rather than the lack of resources? A policy with more attainable goals may be more successfully implemented. In many instances, policy-makers misjudge the available capacity of the system, actors, and resources to implement OBE. Making policy without considering whether capacity exists to implement it seems to be one of the biggest problems.

The dominance of resources – particularly financial ones - in policy discourse also eclipses the importance of unquantifiable or ‘cultural’ resources. SGBs clearly illustrate that successful implementation is not completely dependent on how much money is available, or the availability of professional skills, but on less palpable variables. This is also the case for OBE. The research illustrated that a variety of reasons hamper successful implementation. Those often quoted by respondents include the poor training of teachers, a lack of finances, the large size of classes, the poor dissemination and understanding of policy, the lack of follow-up, and so on. To some extent, these problems can be solved by an injection of resources and better management and communication strategies. But the cultural resources, local knowledge and values that influence behaviour in schools are essential, yet often ignored. Creating a ‘culture of learning’ requires not only physical resources, but, perhaps more importantly, those that are not quantifiable such as leadership, motivation, the ability to mobilise, and social capital.

Because the gap between policy and implementation is often explained by the lack of ‘hard’ resources, policy-makers and those responsible for implementing it define problems and solutions within this narrow framework. Consequently, the identification of problems and solutions are confined to the ‘hard resource’ framework. The danger is that stakeholders are less able to identify or even recognise problems that fall outside the domain of quantifiable resources. But this tendency also encourages ‘throwing money at the problem’, or perceives solutions within the narrow framework of providing quantifiable resources. It also ignores the need to nurture, support, or instigate ‘soft’ resources identified by school stakeholders as imperative for the efficacy of SGBs and OBE.

This report highlights some gaps between policy and implementation that emanate from a lack of soft resources. For instance, it has illustrated the inability of policy to anticipate the dynamics between teachers and parents in governing bodies as a problem that impacts on the efficacy of SGBs. Policy gives parents an equal role in running schools to those of educators and principals. But this upsets established hierarchies of power, which often means that parents, particularly illiterate ones, operate from a point of weakness. Yet because problem identification and solution are often confined to the narrow ‘hard resource’ framework, it is seldom suggested in mainstream policy that parents be supported by means of education campaigns or direct intervention in schools to ensure that parents operate on a level playing field with educators. Moreover, the role of parents in particularly rural and impoverished areas is often restricted to performing manual tasks at the school. Changing perceptions that (illiterate) parents can only participate in certain activities is therefore essential, and initiatives to do this must be incorporated in policy.

In addition, the policy's bias towards 'hard skills' excludes the contributions of those who lack formal or professional skills. This often disadvantages those caught up in cycles of poverty. Expert-driven policy processes fail to capture the context in which policy is implemented, because they largely ignore the knowledge and skills of policy beneficiaries. As a result, it is recommended that the processes for generating and implementing policy be widened to include those who are not traditionally regarded as experts in policy.

It is also recommended that the processes to select and promote key educators, and particularly principals, be widened. Besides formal qualifications, they should include criteria such as an ability to lead, a sensitivity to inequalities such as gender, an ability to defuse conflict, an ability to motivate educators, and an ability to mobilise support from stakeholders.

But these 'soft' resources are much more difficult to create than quantifiable ones. How does one generate 'good leadership', or identify it in an individual? How can one instigate 'social capital'? How can one foster good relations among parents and teachers when there is a history of undermining the ideas of those who are illiterate or have no formal skills? The great task is to make policy-makers and implementers recognise that these variables are important for the success of policy. The battle of closing the policy—implementation gap is then half won. Changing the mind-sets of those involved will take even longer, but this is possible if the government and its agencies adopt the right programmes, and implement them correctly.

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