

Chapter 5:

School Committees and Institutional Management

In many countries, both government and non-government schools have their own committees or boards of governors. These bodies have a strong role in community management and financing.

1. Purpose

In most systems, the headteachers are responsible for the day-to-day running of their schools, but the committees are responsible for:

- (a) generating local support for the schools,
- (b) representing their communities and making members' views known to the headteachers and staffs,
- (c) reporting the concerns and problems of the teachers to the communities,
- (d) encouraging enrolment of pupils,
- (e) planning the overall development of the schools, and
- (f) checking on the performance of teachers and pupils.

Anderson's comments on the Kenyan system provide a useful example:

Ideally, respected and responsible people are chosen, and the committee becomes the focal point for educational interest in the area. It is the official body for negotiations with the educational authorities, the local council, self-help committees, and through the local chief, the government administration, in all matters concerning the school.

In conjunction with the headmaster, the committee also

determines the type of support which parents will give the school, for instance, by arranging work days to do such tasks as constructing or repairing buildings or digging latrines. In cases where parents fail to turn up, the committee usually imposes a fine as a form of discipline.

The committee may arrange money collections amongst parents to provide for building materials, and it has to account for the funds raised and used. Further, it has to keep the parents informed about school affairs, arrange for parents' visiting days and parent/teacher meetings, and also keep the headmaster and teachers informed of the parents' views of how the school is being run. (Anderson 1973, p. 36)

Some committees work very well, but others suffer from personal and parochial rivalries and from the incompetence of their members. Where headteachers and committees make genuine efforts to cooperate, very successful relationships can be developed between the schools and their communities. On the other hand, sometimes a committee becomes split or loses the confidence of a section of the parents. Then a time-consuming process of negotiation and reconciliation has to take place. The District Education Officer may act as a mediator, arranging meetings at which grievances can be aired and arguments settled, and perhaps organising new elections.

2. Organisation

In many countries, requirements on the organisation of school committees are laid down in the education law. Anybody who is concerned with school management, or who is thinking about opening a new school, should read the current Education Act very carefully. Most acts are boring and complicated, and people not already familiar with the laws may find it useful to discuss questions with education officers.

Although laws in different countries may require addition or modification to the following list, several points are worth bearing in mind:

- (a) **Constitution:** Each committee should have a written constitution setting out the number of members, their powers

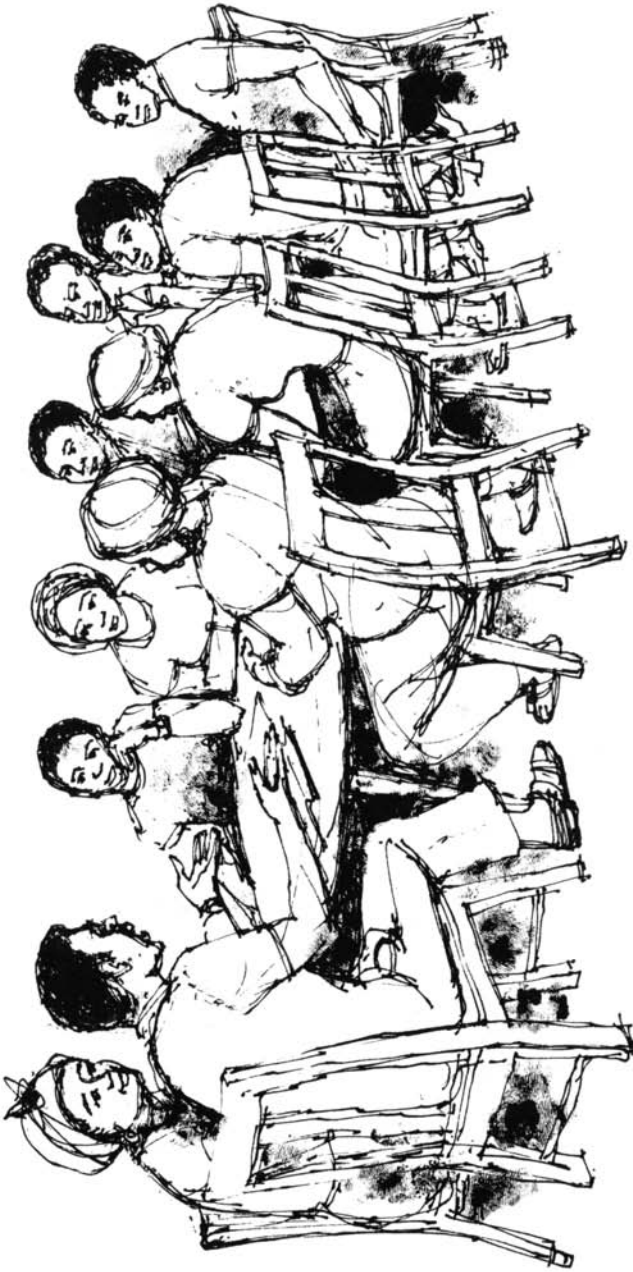
and functions. The constitution should indicate the minimum number of people required for a quorum in a meeting. It should be comprehensive, but it should also be clear. It might be best for the constitution to be written in the local language.

(b) **Composition:**

- * Committees should have representatives from the main sections in the community served by the school, i.e. the different residential areas, clans/tribes, religions and sexes.
- * It is often useful to make several 'political' appointments of important local leaders who can wield influence on behalf of the school.
- * The headteacher of the school should be a committee member, and it may also be useful to appoint another teachers' representative.
- * Some governments insist that their District Education Officers should be members of secondary school committees.
- * There should always be some parents on the committee.
- * In many systems the government reserves the right of final approval of school committees, at least in aided schools. Often this is just a routine measure, but the provision is a sensible one. It allows the government to intervene if it thinks that committees are improperly constituted or are not satisfactorily representative of the communities that they are supposed to serve.

(c) **Tenure and Elections:** The constitution should indicate the length of office and procedures for appointment of members. It is common for members to be elected for two or three year periods, with the possibility of renewal. Many communities elect members by show of hands at public meetings, but some prefer secret ballots.

(d) **Size:** Each committee should have at least five members. Large committees may be cumbersome and hard to operate, but they have the benefit of involving more people. If a committee has more than 10 members, it should consider forming sub-committees to take charge of particular aspects, such as buildings, recruitment of pupils, and fund-raising.



At community meetings the women should be fully represented too.

- (e) **Officers:** Each committee should appoint from its members a Chairperson, Secretary and Treasurer, plus any other office bearers it considers necessary. To avoid concentration of power and conflict of interests, the headteacher is often excluded from the position of Chairperson.
- (f) **Frequency of Meetings:** The committee should meet at least once a term, and more frequently if necessary.
- (g) **Minutes:** After each meeting, the minutes should be written and circulated. Governments may require the minutes to be in the national language so that officials can read them. Alternatively, governments may allow committees to decide on their own languages. It is often best for the minutes to be in local languages.
- (h) **Accounts:** The committee should keep accounts and arrange for them to be inspected by an independent body or person. It is best if this happens each year. Some governments require committees to send a copy of the accounts to their District Education Officers.
- (i) **Powers:** Committee members should realise that they are *not* responsible for internal day-to-day running of their schools. This is the job of the headteacher. She/he should accept guidance with overall policies, but specific matters of timetabling, minor pupil indiscipline, cleaning, ordering of supplies, etc. are the responsibility of the headteacher.