

Chapter 8:

Generating Other Resources at the Community Level

This chapter is concerned with contributions in kind: land, labour and materials.

1. Land

Obviously all schools need land, and ideally they should have land near the centres of population which they serve. When allowance is made for buildings, sports fields and car parks, the area required may be quite large. Sports fields also require land which is flat, which may mean that it has a high value for other purposes and is hard to obtain.

Because land is so obviously needed by the school, and because parents themselves want to minimise the distance that their children have to walk to school, many schools are able to secure gifts of land quite easily. In some societies they can get common land allocated by the chief. Alternatively, church schools may be founded on land that already belongs to the church. Finally, of course, communities can buy land.

Two points about land matters deserve particular attention:

1. When securing land, the school authorities must plan ahead. They must remember that their school will grow, and they must estimate the area that the school will need when it has reached its maximum size. If they do not do this, there is a danger that their initial piece of land will be too small.
2. It is essential for land transactions to be legally recorded. This requires proper surveying, marking, and registration with the government. Many schools have suffered severely from land disputes arising from lack of records and from families changing their minds about donation of land. Even common

land donated by the chief can disputed if ownership is not properly recorded.

2. Labour

The most obvious inputs of labour are usually in construction of buildings and in maintenance of school compounds. The availability of people who are skilled in construction with local materials is one reason why it is often sensible for schools to be built with local rather than imported designs. Many community schools require parents and other community members to come to the school compounds on a specific day of the week. If they do not come and do not have good reasons, they may be fined. Those community members who have other commitments can agree to contribute money instead of labour.

Again, several guidelines may be laid down on the management of community labour:

1. The times when the school most needs labour, and when community members are most readily available, may vary. To make use of enthusiasm and develop momentum for projects, it is often a good idea to organise concentrated activity when constructing new buildings. Demands should not be made during the planting or harvesting seasons, when people are very busy elsewhere.
2. The practice of setting aside one afternoon a week for maintenance such as grass-cutting or repair of buildings is a good one. Such work must be properly organised:
 - (a) there must be work to be done, so that people's time is not wasted,
 - (b) the organisers must make sure that the necessary tools and materials are available,
 - (c) each person should know exactly what he or she is supposed to be doing,
 - (d) the organisers should make sure that they use the specific talents of capable individuals, and
 - (e) good records must be kept of who comes, and who works properly. When community members find that nobody notices whether they come or not, and that nobody appreciates their work, they soon lose interest. Records are also valuable if disputes break out because some groups feel

that they are supporting the school more heavily than others.

3. The work days and projects can be made the responsibility of either a specific member or a sub-committee of the Board of Governors. It is better for the Board to undertake responsibility than for the teachers to do so, because Board members are more likely to be members of the community and they are likely to have authority.

Many community members are also willing to undertake unpaid services on behalf of the school as part of their normal work. For example, a contractor whose lorry is travelling on other business may be willing to transport people or materials without charging for it. Likewise, villagers who are going to town for other reasons may be willing to purchase school supplies, and the local health officer may be willing to come to the school compound to carry out work that would otherwise be done in his clinic. The school committee could compile an 'inventory' of resources of this type that may be available.

Many schools also organise lunch programmes and employ mothers on a rota basis. The food may be contributed by the mothers themselves. Or it may be grown in the school garden or purchased, in which case the community contribution is just in cooking and serving. Such food programmes are likely to have several benefits. For example, good nutrition contributes to better learning, and if the food programmes are well supervised, they may also improve mothers' nutrition practices.

Where schools have wide catchment areas but are unable to provide boarding facilities, many communities organise accommodation. For instance, the host villagers may agree to look after children from distant areas in return for help with domestic work and farming. Alternatively, the host village may lend land and the distant villages may build a hostel for their children to stay in. When this arrangement is followed, it is important for the community to ensure that an adult supervises the hostel and that the children are not left entirely to fend for themselves.

Finally, it is often possible to engage community members as ancillary or part-time teachers. Some communities, for example, have many retired teachers who are still active and keen to remain

involved. Others have skilled craftsmen who enjoy working with young people and transmitting their skills. Often the local health officer can teach about hygiene and first aid, and in most communities the local priests are willing to teach religious knowledge. In some cases the school can provide a small honorarium in recognition of these services, but in others the individuals work without payment. Three potential problems should however be noted:

- (a) that the individuals may be very good at their craft and have excellent knowledge of their profession, but they may not be very good at teaching it;
- (b) that discipline problems can arise because pupils think that such personnel are not 'real' teachers and do not have authority to punish them; and
- (c) that because the ancillary teachers do not receive a proper salary they may feel less concerned about punctuality, homework assignments, etc..

Because of these factors, schools should not rely too heavily on voluntary labour of this sort unless it is properly supervised.

3. *Materials*

As well as building materials, schools require books, furniture, cooking utensils, laboratory equipment, and so on. Locally produced materials can often be secured during fund-raising ceremonies and work days. It may be possible to secure donations of books and other equipment by writing to commercial companies and to organisations such as the Rotary Club and Lions Club.

 * *Should Urban Communities Contribute too?* *
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 * *Some people feel that it is unfair that rural communities should* *
 * *be expected to contribute labour and materials to their schools* *
 * *if urban communities are not. To make the system more fair, in* *
 * *1983 the Lilongwe Urban District Council in Malawi imposed a* *
 * *levy of K5 per family in lieu of self-help contributions. Many* *
 * *governments also charge high rates on property in urban areas.* *
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Contribution of labour is often just as important as contribution of cash or materials.