

Part IV: Controls on Quality

Chapter 11: Government Controls

The experience of several countries suggests that governments would be unwise to allow communities to establish schools wherever and whenever they wish. The Kenyan experience of Harambee, for instance, indicates that unless self-help schemes are carefully regulated they can be a two-edged sword. Uncontrolled opening of schools can lead to institutions that are unstable and qualitatively poor, and can increase inequalities between social groups and between regions.

1. Controls over the Establishment of Schools

Most governments already insist that all schools, including private ones, must be registered before they can operate. When agencies first apply for registration, the governments are in a good position to insist on various qualitative safeguards. The following checklist of questions might be asked at the time of registration:

(a) Justification

- * Why does the community want a school? Is its aspiration justified, or is it likely to lead to disillusion? Is there evidence of a strong and continuing need for the school?
- * Is the proposed school within the catchment area of an existing school? What effect will the new school have on the enrolment of its neighbours?

- * If the school is a religious one, will its opening make it uneconomic to establish a government school in the village and thus force children to attend it even if they are not members of that religion? Are there adequate safeguards to protect the rights of pupils who are not members of the religion?
- * Is the community united in its desire for a school, or are there signs of serious social splits?

(b) Management

- * Does the sponsoring agency have evidence of adequate finance for both the capital works and the recurrent expenditure? Do the sponsors have realistic and detailed proposals on ways to secure future finance?
- * Is there evidence of long term commitment to the school? Is the community aware of the extent to which a school can be a heavy burden?
- * Does the school have a proper Board of Governors which looks likely to be effective?

(c) Quality of Inputs

- * Does the school have enough land? If it intends to commence in temporary premises, are these satisfactory? When will the school move to a permanent site, and where will it be?
- * Who will be the teachers in the new school? Are they qualified? Are they sufficiently committed to the school to be prepared to stay a reasonable length of time?
- * What curriculum does the school intend to follow?

(d) Implications for Government

- * Is it the long term objective of the community for their school to be taken over by the government? What will happen if they are unsuccessful in this?
- * What impact will the school have on regional imbalances?
- * Will the government have to give grants to the school which are needed more urgently in other projects?
- * Do economic projections indicate a need for more graduates of the type that the school will produce? Or will the school merely contribute to unemployment and social friction?

Many situations are politically sensitive, but most Ministry of Education planning officers would like to have satisfactory answers to each of these questions before giving approval for a school to open. Churches and other sponsoring agencies should ask themselves the same questions.

2. Controls over Existing Schools

Governments can also exercise various controls when schools are already operating. They may be direct or indirect:

(a) Direct Controls

- i) regulations on the size of classrooms, the pupil:teacher ratio, the number of toilets, etc.
- ii) inspection of teachers' and pupils' work

(b) Indirect Influence

- i) grants with 'strings', e.g. for buildings which meet standard specifications
- ii) gifts of particular required facilities (e.g. laboratories)
- iii) control of examinations, which will therefore influence the curriculum
- iv) promise of takeover if the facilities and the examination results are good
- v) in-service and pre-service teacher training
- vi) training sessions for Boards of Governors.

3. The Need for Information

At present, many Ministries of Education know rather little about self-help activities in their countries. Much more careful analysis could be undertaken, so that the authorities can gain a clearer picture of developments and appropriate future strategies. At the same time, many governments provide only a poor service to communities who would like information and guidance for their schools. It is often hard for villagers to know what grants are available, what textbooks could be used, what legal rights they have over teachers who behave in unprofessional ways, and so on.

In many countries, there is a need for a separate unit in the Ministry to take charge of these matters. Specifically, the units could be responsible for:

(a) Collection of Data for the Government

- * the number of self-help schools already existing,
- * the geographical distribution of the schools,
- * the agencies responsible for the schools,
- * the number of schools that communities would like to open,
- * the enrolments in the schools, by grade and sex,
- * the number of teachers, by age, sex and qualification,
- * the nature of the schools' buildings and facilities,
- * the curricula of the schools,
- * the quality of educational achievement in the schools,
- * the level of fees,
- * the nature and strength of the schools' finances,
- * the nature and quality of the schools' managing committees,
- * the destinations of the schools' graduates,
- * the ways in which self-help operations could be improved,
- * and so on.

(b) Dissemination of Information to Communities

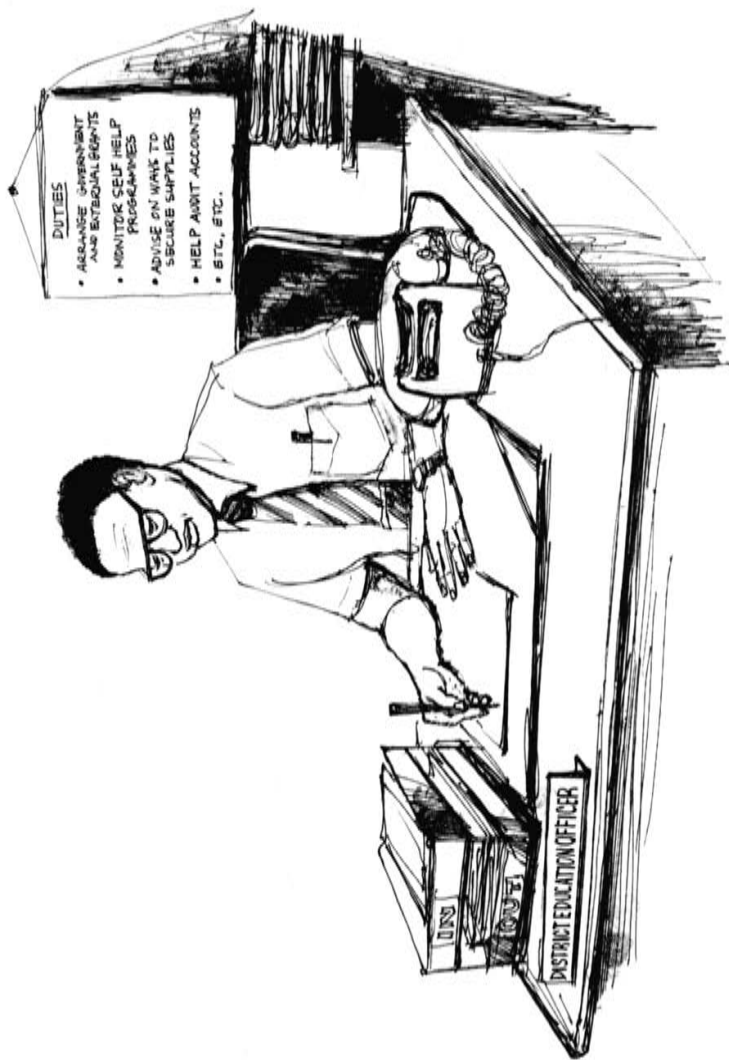
- * the regulations with which schools should comply,
- * the grants that are available,
- * the other agencies from which communities might secure funds,
- * the conditions under which schools can get taken over by government,
- * the types of buildings that are durable and easy to maintain,
- * the places in which schools can buy building-block machines, etc.,
- * the best way to keep accounts and to get them audited,
- * the rights of teachers in self-help schools,
- * the rights of schools who want to dismiss teachers for bad behaviour,
- * the most suitable textbooks to purchase,
- * the criteria on which school inspectors will judge them,
- * the best ways to deal with indiscipline of students,
- * and so on.

Dissemination could be through posters, radio discussion, leaflets to be taken round schools by inspectors and others, and by word of mouth.

In small countries, or ones without large Harambee-type systems, it would still be useful to have an officer part responsible for helping PTAs in both government and non-government schools. Often, this could be made part of the duties of the District Education Officer.

4. A Cautionary Note

Although this chapter focusses on controls, it is also important to stress that government intervention should be constructive. Bureaucracies can easily become complicated and obstructive. Controls should not be so tight that they inhibit community spirit. If they are too tight, both communities and governments will be frustrated.



The District Education Officer should be a key person for assisting communities with self-help projects and checking on quality.