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Acronyms

DFID	Department for International Development, UK
DST	District Support Team
DTST	District Teacher Support Team
FCUBE	Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education
GES	Ghana Education Service
PTA	Parent Teacher Association
SMC	School Management Committee
SPAM	School Performance Appraisal Meeting
TED	Teacher Education Division
WSD	Whole School Development

Whole School Development in Ghana

Background to Educational Reforms in Ghana

Ghana, a West African English speaking Republic covers an area of approximately 238,540 km². It is bordered on the north and north-west by Burkina Faso, on the east by Togo, on the south by the Gulf of Guinea, and on the west by Côte d'Ivoire. Ghana gained independence from Britain in 1957 and thus became the first independent majority-ruled nation in sub-Saharan Africa. Its education system in the first one and half decades after independence had been described as one of the best in Africa (World Bank 2004). But by the mid 70s the education system had begun to slip slowly into decline prompting several commissions of inquiry, notably the Dzobo Education Review to be set up to determine the causes and way forward for recovery.

Finally, in 1987 Ghana embarked upon what could well be described as one of the most ambitious programmes of educational reforms in sub-Saharan Africa based largely on the recommendations of the Dzobo commission. The education reforms were part of a national economic recovery plan which began with a restructuring of the school system, a process validated and accelerated by the global agenda of *Education for All* following the Jomtien Conference in 1990. Prior to the reforms, basic education had been affected by a crippling economic decline with devastating consequences on the quality and efficiency of education provision and delivery. The proportion of GDP devoted to education had declined from 6.4% in 1976 to about 1.0% in 1983 and 1.7% in 1985 (World Bank, 1996). Schools were lacking the very basic and essential inputs such as textbooks and stationary, with school buildings, furniture and equipment in dilapidated state, and statistics needed for planning no longer collected (Yeboah, 1990). Worse still, a large scale exodus of qualified teachers fled the poor conditions at home with the majority heading for Nigeria where new found oil wealth was funding a rapid expansion of basic education. Consequently, untrained teachers filled the places of those who left. Meanwhile, population growth led first to a rise in class sizes and then to a steady fall in gross enrolment ratios – from 80 in 1980 to 70 in 1987, (Colclough with Lewin, 1993). These factors and conditions all contributed to a general demoralisation within the education system affecting school management, teacher morale and quality of primary education (World Bank 2004).

But, the most persistent criticism of the education system at the time was its structure, totalling 17 years of pre-tertiary education and considered inefficient, highly selective and which generally marginalized participation of the poor in education.

Thus, the educational reforms set the following targets:

- Replacing the 6,4,7 school system with 6,3,3 thus shortening pre-tertiary education from 17 to 12 years

- Improving the quality of teaching and learning by increasing school hours and introducing a policy to phase out untrained teachers
- Make education planning and management more efficient and effective

After the new structure of education had been set in place, government introduced an education sector policy in 1996 known as “Free Compulsory Universal Basic Education (FCUBE). FCUBE represented the effort to ensure that all school-age children received free and compulsory quality primary education by 2005. The new policy helped to create (i) motivation for a coordinated sector programme providing a framework for donor support to education, and (b) a drive for educational decentralization with greater recognition of the important role of community participation in school management for school improvement. FCUBE was developed on the basis of three costed components:

- Improving quality of teaching and learning through the review and revision of teaching materials, new measures on teacher incentives, and a focus on in-service teacher training.
- Strengthening management at both central and district level; and
- Improving access and participation especially through schemes that encouraged girls’ participation at primary level

It also created the momentum for introducing School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) with the intention to enhance communities’ sense of ownership and participation in education service delivery. To deliver the objectives of FCUBE government adopted a large scale *Whole School Development* (WSD) programme that was designed and managed by the Ministry of Education with funding from the UK Department for International Development (DFID). WSD was viewed as a strategy to counter the paralysis that had come to characterize local decision-making in basic education by devolving control of education to districts, schools and communities.

The main focus of this report is to examine three main issues with respect to the WSD programme in Ghana:

- (i) the strengths and weaknesses and identify what has worked, and why
- (ii) discuss the key lessons which have been learned regarding WSD as an effort to improve the quality of primary education and,
- (iii) the implications for education policy of this intervention in Ghana.

Before examining these issues it is important to review the school improvement literature for the main educational ideas that have informed and shaped WSD as a school improvement initiative.

School Improvement: The Concept and Practices

The notion of school improvement has evolved more or less from the tradition of research into school effectiveness where attempts have been made to isolate critical inputs and processes that are likely to produce the best outcomes in terms of achievement results. These studies were primarily concerned with the question: what makes a school effective and usually looked at teacher qualities and instructional practices for answers. From an ideological perspective, schools are cast in the same mould as social organisations where success is judged by results and outcomes (Morley & Rassool, 1999). With time and as understanding about how complex the nature of 'effective' schools are, there has been a shift in interest to looking at the *processes* of school improvement and the links between processes and outcomes (Gray *et al.* 1999, Reynolds *et al.* 1993). School improvement studies have been more sceptical about single-cause explanations of improvement, and have come to recognise the full variety of changes going on in schools and which interact with student characteristics to produce differences in student learning outcomes. Essentially, therefore, the meaning of school improvement has come to stand for how schools are able to improve their effectiveness over a period of time and is particularly concerned with activities that bring about this change. As Gray *et al.* (1999: 5) point, 'it gives particular salience to efforts towards change which focus on student achievement and the classroom and organisational conditions which support it'.

Hopkins (1996:32) suggests that there are two ways in which the term school improvement is used: one is in terms of "the efforts to make schools better places for students to learn (and) ... "as a strategy for educational change that enhances student outcomes as well as strengthening the school's capacity for managing change". According to Harris (2002) this definition highlights the importance of school improvement as a process of changing school culture.

Two important assumptions therefore about school improvement are, first, it is those managing the school from within who are the critical agents of change. Secondly, internal conditions in terms of management, ethos, support system etc. are important to motivate and sustain the school's effort to improve. Apart from mobilising change at the school level, the literature also raises the importance of multi-level intervention to promote school improvement (Harris 2002).

On the one hand, school improvement reforms have attempted to change the professional and organizational culture of schools – to promote a more collegial environment with emphasis on collaboration and professional relations among the staff and extended to the local community, but has also given considerable attention to teacher development activities as a way to improve student behaviour, learning and achievement (Hopkins 2002). Change is sought at all levels of the school: classroom, teacher level, engaging teachers in professional dialogue and development and change in the school culture with the support of external professional agencies (Harris 2002). Thus the focus is on the school as the unit of change.

Four ways of gauging school improvement has been suggested by Gray *et al.* (1999: 36).

- Loose descriptions of what has happened, starting with how things were and step by step description of what has happened since then;
- More systematic description where headteachers involved in effective school improvement programmes estimate how much change has occurred usually using different outcome measures such as changes in staff morale and pupil achievement;
- Judgement by people external (e.g. inspectors) to the school about how much change has taken place
- Judgements about extent of improvement based on ‘harder’ measures such as examination and test results

Dimensions of change which are more likely to produce the best results in school improvement usually in terms of student learning and achievement have also been a subject of interest in the literature. From their studies of areas of change and correlates of school improvement in some British schools Gray et al. (1999:140) came up the following general themes:

1. Efforts to raise pupils’ exam performance through such strategies as entering pupils for more exams and mentoring ‘borderline’ pupils;
2. Modification to management structures and planning procedures to achieve greater staff (and to a lesser extent) pupil participation;
3. Efforts to implement more coherent policies for teaching and learning in such areas as codes of classroom conduct and homework;
4. Changes in the ways in which the curriculum was organised, mostly in response to national reforms;
5. Refurbishment of the school environment and facilities;
6. Efforts to involve parents in their children’s education and the community in the life of the school;
7. More active marketing of the school; and
8. Giving attention to the processes of teaching and learning, including such things as fostering more discussion of classroom practices

Examining closely this menu of options against approaches used in school improvement initiatives in developing countries, such as the Aga Khan Project in East Africa and other initiatives in South Africa and Sri Lanka, four of them stand out prominently. These are: emphasis on efficient school management (2), improving the quality of teaching and learning (3), improving the working environment of teachers (5), and finally getting more local community participation in school development (6). These actions are all taken with the ultimate aim of improving, with time, student learning and achievement results – the ultimate aim of all school improvement initiatives, whether in developed or developing countries.

School improvement strategies have been derived predominantly from the western school context, and so how they play out in contexts that are radically different may not be straightforward (Hopkins 2002). In low income countries the existence of sometimes weak institutional structures creates additional challenges for school improvement initiatives. For example, the Aga Khan School improvement initiative that was introduced in many parts of East Africa in the mid 1980s, selected a mixture of school improvement strategies, such as child-centred learning, a focus on teacher learning, professional development and leadership training, and capacity building. But some of these strategies did not work particularly well. For example, when it sought to promote teachers' professional development through centre-based in-service training workshops the transfer of skills into classroom practice was often problematic. The programme found that 'on-the-job' support was more critical, but this also had implications for changes in the work place culture and the way job support is organized to help teachers in their classrooms (Hopkins 2002). For developing world education systems, therefore, perhaps a greater challenge of school improvement initiatives is changing the management and working culture within schools to facilitate effective teaching and learning.

School Improvement Initiatives and Whole School Development

Ideas about school improvement derived in developed countries have generally influenced and shaped the similar initiatives in less developed countries, notably the 'whole school development' (WSD) initiatives which have been used as a vehicle to improve the quality of primary education. Treating the schools as the unit of change, school improvement initiatives gave birth to the idea of 'whole school' change as an education reform drive meant to harness improvements in management strategies, in-service training, monitoring and evaluation and target setting in school development plans, teacher appraisal etc. to orchestrate a complete change in the culture and organisation of schools to improve performance.

WSD can be found in various development projects in South Africa and Sri Lanka for example. In places like South Africa the focus has been on achieving a systemic and targeted intervention programme to work 'holistically' with schools at all levels to improve performance. In Sri Lanka, the emphasis has been on revision of textbooks, teacher development, and decentralisation but also to achievement improvements in school quality (Sayed et al, 1999). In the developing world context, generally the notion of WSD is fed by two inter-related ideas: educational decentralisation and change management strategy at school level.

- *Educational Decentralisation*

Education delivery in many low income countries is often characterized by a top-down approach, where decisions are taken at the centre and expected to be implemented at all schools irrespective of their peculiar circumstances and needs (Akyeampong 2004). Education is delivered as a one size fit all. This tends to create a dependency of schools

on central government direct intervention to address problems of quality when in most instances these are best handled through the combined efforts of headteachers, schools and their local communities. In effect, the whole school development philosophy is that schools can achieve significant improvements in terms of the learning outcomes of pupils, if there was effective educational decentralisation.

Educational decentralisation as understood under WSD is a strategy for enhancing the participation and involvement of all key partners in planning and decision making. The assumption underpinning the policy is that a decentralised education system is more responsive to local need and nurtures a culture of ownership, partnership, and commitment. The WSD Training Programme Handbook (1999: 4) notes that it is a 'process of effecting positive change in the classroom to be owned by head teachers, teachers, and the community'.

- *Change Management and School Conditions*

Improving the 'whole' school to improve student performance is also about change management as the school improvement literature suggests. As a change management strategy, it is concerned with changing the 'whole' school's organisational culture and structure, and also the school community relations. In these changing relationships, head teachers are encouraged to adopt a more open and participatory management style, where parents, school management boards and students are considered crucial partners in the day-to-day functioning of schools. WSD programmes also target poor school conditions for improvement. School conditions, in terms of infrastructure and facilities correlates quite strongly with quality primary education (World Bank 2004). WSD thus emphasises the 'rehabilitation' of school buildings and the provision of resources such as textbook, furniture and stationary.

- *Commitment to Child-Centred Learning*

School improvement initiatives recognise that how child learn and produce knowledge is very important if this is to lead to improvements in school performance. Thus, all school improvement programmes make an effort to improve the quality of the child's experience of learning. Typically, teaching in many developing countries is characterised by authoritarian, teacher-centred approaches that are linked to behaviourist approach to learning (Avalos 1991). Thus, in the context of education in developing countries WSD programmes have attempted to promote student-centred learning as part of the move to change the instructional culture of schools. Emphasis is placed on developing problem solving skills in the context of group and project work. It is important to add that this reflects a movement away from behaviourism and towards constructivism with its emphasis on the child's active learning. How well this shift will stabilise given the deeply rooted behaviourist traditions in most developing world school instructional systems (Tabulawa 1997, Jessop & Penny 1998) remains one of the biggest challenges facing WSD initiatives.

WSD in Ghana: Framework and Focus

As noted earlier, WSD in Ghana is the Ghana Education Service (GES) intervention strategy for achieving the objectives of FCUBE. Thus, the WSD programme has been operated through the existing structures of the GES headquarters, regions and districts. At the regional and district levels, decentralisation support structures made up of District Support Teams (DSTs) and Zonal co-ordinators were engaged to manage the intervention. The DSTs were made up of three groups of consultants¹ in the three key FCUBE areas: quality of teaching and learning, access and participation, and management efficiency. The intervention sought to promote the following:

- (a) Child-centred primary practice in literacy, numeracy and problem-solving with the view to improve the quality of teaching and learning in basic school classrooms;
- (b) Community participation in education delivery;
- (c) Competencies of teaching and learning through school-based in-service training;
- (d) Participatory planning and resource management at school and district levels
- (e) Improve efficiency in resource management (GES WSD Report 2004)

At the heart of the WSD process in Ghana is the provision of support to headteachers and teachers to improve the quality of teaching and learning in schools. This focus is rooted in the belief that quality teaching provided by competent teachers will result in effective teachers (WSD Training Programme Document, 1999). To achieve quality schooling outcome, WSD workshops for headteachers and district support personnel focus their attention on three instructional areas for improvement - literacy, numeracy and problem solving². Usually, the workshops follow the cascade model of in-service training where head teachers and district school circuit supervisors are given training, and are in turn expected to provide similar training at local district and school levels. The training also places considerable emphasis on child-centred pedagogy, the use of appropriate teaching and learning materials, and the use of the local environment as an important learning resource (WSD Training Programme Document, 1999).

As is typical of school improvement strategies in developing world context, WSD in Ghana has also attempted to improve the partnership between headteachers, teachers and the community. Participants at WSD workshops are taught how to develop a 'Whole School Action Plan' that emphasises this tripartite partnership arrangement in addressing teaching and learning needs in schools. Specifically, this action plan includes target setting and appraisal for the school, designing and preparing school budget for inclusion

¹ The three groups of consultants who were engaged for 24 months were put into three teams of three members each constituting a mixture of skills in Education and Finance. Each team work with 36 or 37 districts in its zone and provided technical assistance to districts to solve educational and social problems militating against the provision of quality education at the primary level (GES/WSD Report 2004)

² WSD in Ghana has renamed the subject science as 'problem-solving'. This is rather curious way of naming since problem-solving is a generic term that describes an approach to tackling problems or tasks, and can apply to all subjects.

in District budgets and, a plan of action to promote community involvement in the work of the school (WSD Training Programme Document, 1999). By promoting local ownership and community participation in schools, WSD programmes have sought to sensitize the school community into action to address the problem of poor pupil learning and achievement in many primary schools especially in rural settings.

Another important feature of WSD in Ghana is the attempt to foster better organisation of in-service training. The approach adopted is the organisation of schools into clusters ranging from five to eight. Cluster in-service workshops are meant to form the focus and centre of school improvement activity. Teachers from an individual school form a single school-based in-service unit and the group of five to eight schools, the cluster unit. Here again, partnership roles with head teachers are expected to work in close collaboration with 'District Teacher Support Teams' (DTST) to offer instructional and management support to schools. It is expected that head teachers within a cluster will meet with the DTST's to identify common unsolved problems relating to teaching and learning in the schools forming the cluster. These problems then become the basis for a cluster-based workshop in which DTST's and headteachers act as resource personnel. Where solutions to problems are beyond the expertise of head teachers and the DTST's, other cluster centres are to be approached for assistance. In the final instance, the problem is relayed to the National WSD co-ordinator for support. Thus, for WSD in Ghana the school cluster has more or less come to represent the unit of change for school improvement

In conclusion, the WSD programme in Ghana has been framed within the context of a policy of educational decentralisation underpinned by a change management strategy that is aimed at improving quality of teaching and learning, access and participation in primary schools.

WSD in Ghana – achievements, weaknesses and the key lessons

WSD in Ghana has acquired the stature of a national school improvement intervention trying to shift more power and responsibility for school improvement to the school community and district level. WSD supported the Teacher Education Division (TED) of GES to train 2,200 headteachers and 1,100 DTSTs in the promotion of primary practices in literacy, numeracy, problem solving and preparation of teaching/learning materials. Headteachers has also been trained in the use of performance appraisal instruments. WSD has struck alliances with NGOs and development partners to provide training in the promotion of management efficiency for DTSTs, Zonal co-ordinators and circuit supervisions (GES WSD Report 2004).

To promote access and community participation in education service delivery at the local level, WSD programme trained community participation co-ordinators in all the districts in the country. Also, it was able to collaborate with the Inspectorate Division of the GES to train district personnel in how to conduct School Performance Appraisal Meetings (SPAM). At SPAM meetings school management committees (SMCs), teachers and the rest of the community meet to discuss the results of pupils' performance on performance

monitoring tests (PMT) administered locally, and from the deliberations on the data draw up plans to improve the quality of schooling (GES WSD Report 2004).

One of the clearest achievements of the WSD programme has been the impact on the level of teacher supervision and support. The recent World Bank (2004) evaluation report on primary school improvement in Ghana noted that due to the efforts of WSD more headteachers and circuit supervisors than before, were sitting in teachers' classes discussing with them their lesson plans, looking at samples of students work, and discussing with teachers their career development.

Also the WSD programme has had initial success in *strengthening* the capacity of existing education service institutions e.g. TED, Inspectorate Division to tackle specific issues on the FCUBE agenda. It has addressed human capacity at the district level where education personnel in the districts have been sensitised into adapting their operations to address school quality. Another good thing about the WSD programme is how it has gone about implementing educational reform: as a *process* and not *an event*. This can be seen in the way it has involved districts, schools and teachers, and other stakeholders in long term planning and implementation of school improvement strategies.

But there are signs of old management practices eroding some of the gains of WSD as noted in its latest report:

“Non-adherence to rules, regulations and guidelines has weakened capacity built through WSD. The recent mass transfer of District Directors and Accountants without consultation with WSD have created a new vacuum for capacity building and sustainability of the initiatives set in motion through WSD” (GES WSD Report 2004 p. 25).

This situation shows that WSD policies may not have been fully synchronised with other management policies in the education system.

On the question of effectiveness of educational decentralisation policy, there are indications that this is proceeding satisfactorily and generally achieving some good results. But there are also teething problems. In a study that explored the kind of impact WSD was making in 20 schools in the Cape Coast district of Ghana, Sayed et al, (2000) found headteachers complaining that decision making had not been sufficiently decentralised. But this complaint turned out to be “head teachers struggling to come to terms with the new relationships they have to enter with schools”. Some SMCs, it appears, are now expecting greater transparency and accountability from headteachers and schools. These actions have sometimes been considered intrusive. On the more positive side, decentralisation policy appears to have helped to improve the textbook availability situation in primary schools, although this cannot be attributable to the efforts of WSD alone (Sayed et al, 2000, World Bank, 2004).

The cascade model of training and development has been an important strategy used by WSD to promote educational decentralisation for school improvement. But although it

has had merit in facilitating teacher development through on-site support, in reality, it seems to lack effectiveness as hoped. Sayed et al (2000) found that headteachers, who tried to organise on-site teacher development activities were often faced with the problem of no or limited resources provided to schools and experienced difficulties in motivating teachers in the absence of rewards and incentives. Also, it was clear that “structures for supporting and training teachers such as DTSTs, clusters, have been established but have not developed an active and visible set of training and development activities” (Sayed *et al.* 2000: 10).

What is less evident is the extent to which WSD activities have encouraged teachers to adopt student-centred teaching and learning approaches. But since the mechanism for promoting greater emphasis on child-centred learning in schools is through cluster and school-based in-servicing training of teachers, whether or not child-centred learning was gaining ground in schools, depends to a very large extent on how regular and effective these training workshops have been. In reality child-centred learning may take a lot more time and effort to become a widely common practice in primary classrooms³.

School improvement initiatives as the literature suggests are ultimately about improving student learning and achievement outcomes. WSD is no different. ***But what is the evidence in Ghana that WSD has made an impact in terms of primary school achievement?*** Fortunately, the recent impact evaluation of World Bank (2004) support to primary education in Ghana included analysis of the effect of various inputs into primary school quality measured in terms of test scores.

A national sample was drawn that included all children aged between 9 and 15 who had recently attended or were currently attending primary school in the locality of residence. Only children with at least three years of schooling are included. Among the school characteristics variables the impact study revealed that:

- A high pupil teacher ratio is detrimental to English test scores, and being a beneficiary of the WSD program improves them.
- Participation in WSD positively affects both English and math scores.

Thus, the evidence appears to show that WSD in Ghana is having the kind of impact expected from a school improvement initiative focusing its efforts on decentralised decision-making to enhance local community participation in school development, leadership training for headteachers, school infrastructure, local government support and capacity building to improve the quality of primary education. In particular, the big investment in headteacher training and development of their schools is a good example of

³ The recent impact study of the World Bank (2004) on primary education in Ghana revealed that about “a third of teachers use a student-centered learning approach and use simulations on a regular basis, though about a fifth of the latter could not explain them properly. And about one fifth use cues to help explain difficult words. In summary, modern methods are far from unknown, but their use cannot be described as widespread, being utilized by a minority of teachers” (p.26).

engaging head on the formidable challenges provided by systemic change (Hopkins 2002). The main weakness would perhaps be that it has lacked system depth especially at the level of values and ways of working. According to the 2004 GES report on WSD a persistent problem is that “most district directors are unwilling to co-operate in the provision of budgetary allocation for the operations of district structures”. This is likely to affect the smooth operation of school and cluster-based in-service programmes in the districts.

Implications of WSD intervention for education policy in Ghana

The WSD programme represents a very bold attempt to put into operation an education sector policy plan to improve access, participation and quality of primary education. To understand the importance of this initiative, one has only to imagine an attempt to achieve the FCUBE objectives without a national school improvement initiative such as WSD. At best, this would have left the implementation mainly in the hands of NGOs and development partners, creating the situation where “a government driven education system exists seemingly independently next to a variety of donor driven projects that are only supplementing instead of strengthening the formal system” (Plomp & Thijs 2002). Thus, by adopting WSD as its intervention strategy to improve school quality through partnership between headteachers and schools, district education authority and the community, primary education in Ghana may at have last started the journey to recovery.

From the discussion three main implications of WSD intervention for education policy in Ghana can be derived.

- Education policy to improve quality primary education needs to have a clearly defined framework and strategies to achieve its goals. The example of WSD suggests the importance of including and defining clearly the different roles expected of key players and partners for effective delivery of policy. Hopefully, this should reduce the gap between policy and concrete change in practice.
- Educational reform policies need a tangible conduit to channel policy intentions into practice. Using a bounded school improvement initiative such as WSD to implement educational policies provides good chance for the reforms to make the necessary impact
- It is better to strengthen the capacity of existing structures within the education system to support large scale whole school improvement initiatives than to set up new structures that are meant to bypass ineffective ones (Akyeampong 2004). WSD in Ghana has given indication of the potential benefits of decentralised decision making down to the local school community level for primary school improvement. This suggests that educational policies need to work towards a strengthening of local participation in education service delivery.
- What has not been very clear to isolate as a result of the large scale nature of WSD in Ghana is the specific and more detailed understanding of how school

improvement initiatives play out in particular socioeconomic contexts of schooling. Gaining such understanding would help map out the range of policy options related to aspects of school improvement initiatives that really work (good practice). Although WSD was started in a few districts before scaling up, the knowledge and experience gained does not appear to have been made explicit and used to adjust education policy.

- From the GES/WSD status report (2004) there seems to be at times the problem of some education policies undermining the institutionalisation of WSD practices, such as the transfer of district education personnel without bearing in mind the impact on WSD agenda. The message is that various education policies need to be synchronised to work in harmony to promote quality primary education.

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