A Toolkit for Best Practices in School Governance

Idasa's Right to Know,

Right to Education Project

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Right to Know, Right to Education Project

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Right to Know, Right to Education Project, Idasa

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Idasa – an African Democracy Institute

Idasa's mission and vision is to build democratic societies in Africa. Idasa is an independent public interest organization committed to promoting sustainable democracy based on active citizenship, democratic institutions and socio-economic justice.

Right to Know, Right to Education Project

Idasa's Right to Know, Right to Education Project is focused on increasing the democratic space around the development of the national budget. This entails sensitising policy-makers to better alignment between education policy and its corresponding budget lines as well as sensitising communities to their right of access to information and improving parental involvement in local school governance.

This five-year project is working with implementing partners in six African countries: Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Swaziland, Uganda and Zambia with an implementing agency in Tanzania as an advisory partner.

This toolkit provides a set of easy-to-follow steps, concepts and guidelines to help local communities to focus and understand Best Practices in Schools and Governing Bodies. It is a generic guide that is adaptable to different situations, different countries and different systems.

In this toolkit, we describe the basic standards that a well-governed school must meet. There are at least five different steps that need to be followed for a school to be well governed.

A well-governed school is:

1. Efficient and effective
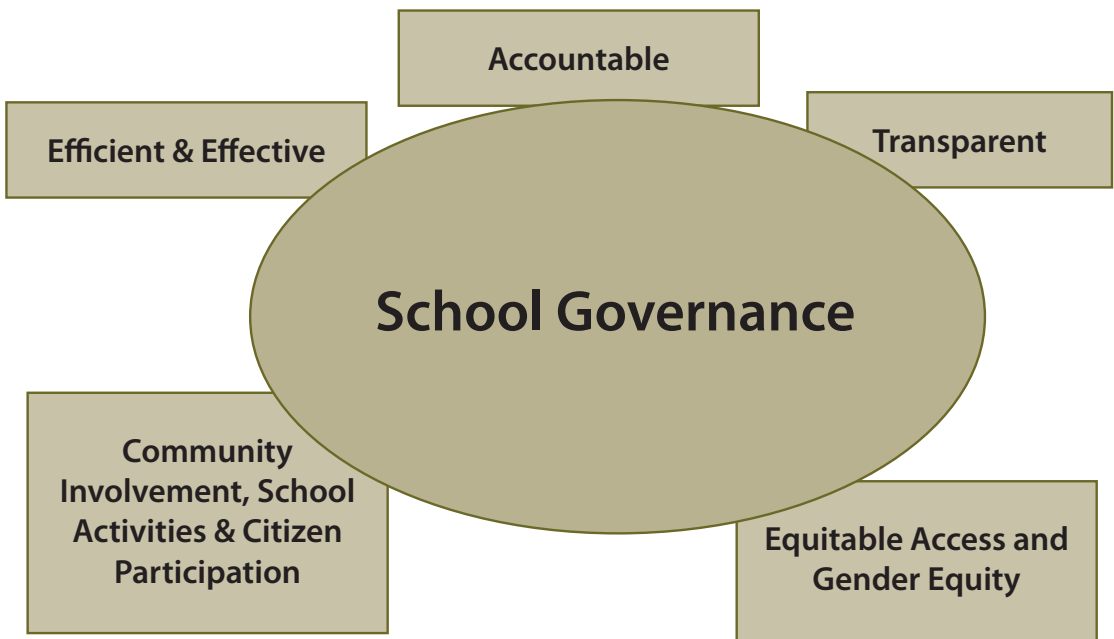(it does things well and is able to make things happen)

2. Accountable
(is able to tell people what has been done and to listen to people)

Who can use this Toolkit?

The toolkit is aimed at:

- trainers and facilitators working in and with the Right to Know, Right to Education Project

- CSO networks

- the education sector

- policy makers

- school governing bodies

- local communities in Africa

Accountable

Efficient & Effective

Transparent

School Governance

Community Involvement, School Activities & Citizen Participation

Equitable Access and Gender Equity

> ### Best Practice
>
> This toolkit comes with a downloadable toolbox to explain how those working in schools and governing schools can best implement good governance of the school.

3. Transparency and the Rule of Law

(shows people what is done and keeps to the law)

4. Citizen participation

(helps people to take part in the school)

5. Equity

(makes sure that all types of people are given a fair chance and play a fair part in the school)

Each of these areas will be introduced in a separate section of this booklet.

The five areas shown above have been found to work together to support best practices in school governance. These principles of good governance cannot be separated from each other as they work best when they are applied together. It is useless to focus on efficiency at school without being accountable to the community. In the same way it is no good to be transparent but have no regard for equity and treat women and the disabled poorly.

It follows that focusing on just one or two principles of good governance will lead to problems at the school. The five areas must be engaged together for a school to transform its school governance.

1. Efficient and effective

The good governance of a school needs to do things well, i.e. be efficient; and needs to be able to make things happen, i.e. be effective.

– Efficiency is getting the best results from the money, resources and people in the school and in the community. The school board and the staff of the school, led

by the head teacher, need to make sure that they run a good school which teaches pupils to learn diligently. The community, such as the clinic, the youth centre or the businesses can all help the school to run successfully. Efficient schools are also safe and promote health and safety.

– Effectiveness is how well the school reaches its goals. The school board needs to be able to define what it wants the school to do. It needs a vision for the school and a clear mission. This means that everyone in the school and community must work together to plan what and how they want to do it. A school motto is often used to describe the underlying goal of the school.

The key to success is balance. If the school is efficient but has no clear idea of what it wants to do or where it's going, it will not be of much use. By the same token, if a school has a good vision of where it is going and plans for success, but wastes money, furniture and does not hire good teachers, then it will fail to reach its goals.

What is the use of a school where all the paperwork is done correctly but children do not learn and develop? What is the use of a school where children are learning and growing but there is no way to show progress?

In any school community there are at least two types of role or things to be done:

Task and maintenance roles

For a school to arrive at a good decision or achieve a project successfully, it needs people who play two key roles:

– *Task roles:* actions that show that people are doing their duties to achieve the task at hand;

– *Maintenance roles:* actions to help continue good working relationships in the school and community;

The table on the next page will help show the differences between task & maintenance roles.

Performing both task and maintenance roles well require good governance of the school, i.e. equal weighting must be given to paperwork and routine and maintaining

good relationships. For the school's mission to be measured or understood, relationship builders and task managers need to work together and recognise the roles each other plays.

Try to avoid negative behaviour which brings down the school, such as stubborn disagreements, complaining about others' duties, laziness and refusal to perform duties, refusal or failure to attend meetings, or to support the school or children or the community.

Task Roles	Maintenance Roles
Asking for information or opinions: Identifying the information that is needed to finish a task; making sure that all the good ideas and skills in the group are used.	*Encouraging:* Building confidence of group; supporting the group and showing that you have faith in everyone's contributions.
Sharing ideas: Providing information; sharing each other's experiences and abilities, giving different opinions.	*Agreeing/Reinforcing:* Responding positively and building on suggestions made by others.
Explaining/Clarifying: Requesting or providing clarification; repeating a point in a different way in order to clarify; providing an example.	*Mediating conflict:* Helping those who disagree to understand each other's views; suggesting ways to stop people from failing to do good work because of disagreement.
Harmonising: Making sure that all the good ideas and suggestions will help the task to progress.	*Looking at the reason for difficulties:* Identifying reasons why the group might not be progressing with their work and suggesting ways of improving working relationships.
Summarising: Stating the main points that have been raised; and the important decisions that have been made.	*Showing satisfaction/solidarity:* Expressing acceptance and appreciation for ideas or work of others; building a sense of belonging in the group.
Checking for consensus: Seeing if everyone agrees.	*Involving others:* Finding ways to involve quiet group members; raising status of quieter members and supporting their ideas.
Suggesting direction: Proposing a way forward; checking people if they lose focus; reminding the group of tasks; suggesting a process for decision-making.	*Releasing tension:* Using humour to create a happier group atmosphere.
Concluding/Wrapping up: Checking that the task has been completed; tying up loose ends; stating that the job is done.	*Expressing feelings:* Bringing emotions into the open, especially if blocking group's progress; voicing fears and frustrations.

To do list:

Preparation and delegation:

Make a list of all the tasks that must be performed at school. Focus on what needs to be done to improve the standards of the school (Sport? Cultural activities? Food? School subjects?).

This list can be broken down into departments for bigger schools.

Give each task to the person whom you believe is best able to do the job.

Make sure that everyone has a task and that one person is not doing too much.

Make sure that each person who is given a task understands what needs to be done or will soon be trained to do the job.

The task needs to be planned and broken down into different parts.

Make sure that everyone has enough money, materials and equipment to do the tasks they have been given.

Each person given a task needs to think about how they will be affected by this task.

Things to do:

Monitoring and evaluation:

A list of those affected by the task must be drawn up.

The people affected are called stakeholders and they or their leaders need to be asked to help do the task.

Make sure that women and children and people who are often ignored or left out are invited to help.

Make sure that those you have asked to help are given assistance; they may struggle to participate because they are disabled, poor, challenged or in difficult circumstances.

Make sure you record all the work that has been done and account for all the money and materials and equipment used.

When planning a task or project you can use this checklist to make sure you are effective and efficient:

| Project Element	Format	Method
Summary statement	Short description of how the task or project would run	In discussions, mentors help identify key phrases and break down the project idea to as few words as possible.
Aims and objectives	Bullet points	Participants list all their aims and work out how to reduce them to the least number of points that will still show what the project plans to achieve.
Benefits assessment	Flow chart	Participants visualise the end point of the project and plot out the many benefits they hope to achieve.
Needs assessment	Plan of action	List the resources and people needed to do the work.
Individual roles and responsibilities	Bullet point list of team members' areas of activity	Break down the plan into its many activities and assess who is able to do them.
Action plan	A chart to clarify timeline and critical dependencies	Create a chart that plots out what activities need to be done and in what order, then add deadlines for completion. Make sure that any activities that depend on others are in the right order!
Monitoring and evaluation	Plan of action	Identify critical parts of the project's plan that can be measured.
Budgeting	Budget chart	Take activities in the action plan and work out what they will cost, develop this into a proposed budget and (possibly) projected cash flow if necessary.
Project principles	Bullet point statements	Review the values and principles behind the project's activities. Include governance structures if needed.

2. Accountable

A very important part of governance is to be willing and able to publicly tell the community and children and other people involved in the school all the details of the school's decisions and actions. This means that school governors should be willing and able to explain the choices they made and the actions they performed to any interested stakeholder, like a parent or a learner. They should give this information freely in detail and must be ready to explain everything they do.

The test for accountability is how reasonable you have been. Reasonable choices are those that any other person in the same situation would have made, in this situation.

Account-ability in a school may be explained as taking place in layers, like an onion.

International

National

School & Community

Professional & Interpersonal
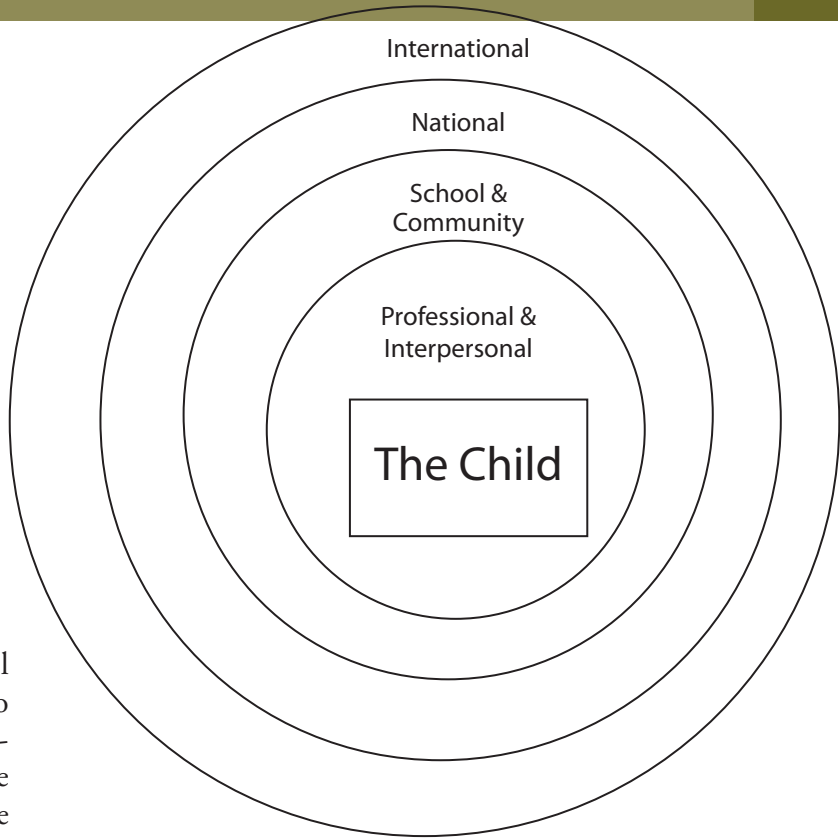
The Child

At the international level, the school needs to be governed by following rules that are made and accepted world-wide and in most countries. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP) and The Millennium Goals are just some of the most important international rules and agreements that a good school must follow and accept.

At the national level, the school must be accountable to the laws, policies and regulations which the state has put in place for education in the country. Accountability at schools should be guided by policy.

At the school and community level, the school must be accountable to parents, alumni, community members, staff and its learners. The school needs to be accountable to the local and school community for things like minutes of school board meetings, annual general meetings, open days, the publication of school accounts, yearbooks and reports on pupils' progress.

Teachers are professionals and must therefore be accountable to the professional body that regulates them. They must be willing to explain their choices and actions such as how they work with other teachers and the school head. Also, a teacher must show that s/he has a good professional relationship with the children they teach. The child is the centre of good governance of a school and the best interests of the child is the primary concern.

Checklist for Accountability:

Things to think about before giving an account of your work and receiving feedback:

– Discuss what are the best conditions for giving an account of your work and hearing feedback?

– What assumptions do you make when people say 'Here is an account of what we did'?

– What is the best feedback you have received? What made it the best?

– What feedback would you like to receive more often?

– What part do you play in being accountable positively or otherwise?

– How do you create the space between how you 'act/ behave' and what you 'feel'?

– In what contexts or situations do you best take challenging feedback?

– How might budget information be shared better so that everyone can understand?

PRACTISE GIVING ACCOUNT and RECEIVING FEEDBACK

Use the model – Retain, Increase, Decrease

1. Describe and show what was been achieved.

2. Explain what was done, when and how.

3. Show what difficulties you had and how you tried to fix these troubles.

4. Discuss some things that happened that were not planned.

Giving and receiving feedback:

1. Ask permission – May I give you feedback?

2. Retain – What you are doing is working, please continue. What could be retained is...

3. Increase – I think your performance would be enhanced if you would increase some action or behaviour.

4. Decrease – When you ask someone to minimise a behaviour or action, you are not saying things are not working, you are saying you will be more powerful if you reduce it.

3. Transparent

Transparency – needs to be open, honest and easy to see.

A transparent school head of committee is one that makes sure that everyone can see and understand what is being done at the school no matter how rich or poor they are.

Every school must make big and small choices. The big choices should not be made behind closed doors where individuals are able to make sure their private interests are met, but should be open to the public. The public should be able to see that all the important decisions made at a school are for the common good and not for the good of a few people in power. The school needs to be prepared to account for its choices by ensuring transparency.

A system needs to be in place to allow citizens to see all the important choices made at the school. It is not always the right thing for the community to see every single choice made at a school. This is because sometimes teachers and the governing board have information that is confidential and, if this information was made public, it would hurt others.

For example, it might embarrass a family if everyone knew that they were experiencing money troubles. If the school makes a decision to help with school fees, caution should be taken whether the information should be made public because it may be embarrassing to the family.

Similarly, if a family is affected by AIDS, the school board may make a decision to invite the local clinic nurse to pay a home visit to this family or arrange for home-based care for the family. Allowing members of the public to know which families are affected by AIDS might make life difficult for those families, so tact needs to be employed while ensuring transparency. The community must be able to trust those who are governing the school to make decisions for the common good even if they are not showing every detail and piece of information.

The school is a place of power in any community and it is here that children are taught the things they will need to build a better life for themselves and the community. Schools are places where those who want to learn how to lead should be able to practice leadership skills.

A school is like a social and cultural power generator for the local community, the state and the world. For this reason, a school needs to actually do good for the community it serves, and also be seen to be doing good.

The community should learn to love their school and this can only be done when it shows that it is making decisions and choices for the common good. Transparency allows the community to see and trust that a pattern of choices is being made that benefits the whole community. Transparency also allows community members to see where things went wrong and allows the whole school community to learn from their mistakes.

Transparency can be used to stop corruption.

| Common Forms of Corruption	
Bribery	Probably the most common form of corruption, bribery is the giving of some form of benefit to unduly influence some action or decision on the part of the recipient or beneficiary. Bribery can be initiated by the person looking for the bribe or the person giving the bribe. The "benefit" may vary from money or other valuables to other benefits such as inside information or employment. Bribes may be paid on a case-by-case basis or as part of an ongoing relationship.
Embezzlement, theft and fraud	The taking or using of money, property or other valuables for personal benefit. Embezzlement and theft means taking of property by someone to whom it has been entrusted, but fraud entails misleading information to get someone to turn over the property voluntarily, for example, by lying about the amount of people in need of a particular service.
Extortion	Extortion is when a person uses the threat of violence or the threat of exposure or damaging information to make someone do what they want them to do.
Abuse of discretion	This is when someone abuses their public position for their private gain, but without any threats from anyone. This mostly happens when someone is given a lot of power to make decisions, without anyone else also checking that the decisions are good for the school or community. People who do this usually never have to report their actions or decisions to anyone.
Favouritism, nepotism and clientelism	In general, these involve abuse of power to make decisions. In cases like this, the person in power does it sometimes to help a family member or a friend or for their own church or political party and not for the good of the school.
Improper political contributions	This is when a school head or committee member(s) give money to political parties, so that the parties can do special favours for that person or school. It is difficult to show that such a payment is against the law, because sometimes it is hard to show that the reason for giving money was illegal.
Adapted from UNODC Anti-Corruption Toolkit, Volume 1, General Introduction, p. 10.	

A school can ensure transparency by doing five things:

1. *Assessment and Monitoring:* Make sure that the community, the students and all the board members have a real chance to assess and check on choices the school makes.

2. *Access to information:* All stakeholders need to be allowed to see information that will help them to participate in the school.

3. *Ethics and integrity:* These are rules that leaders and committees must follow, so that they do their work without corruption and so that they also do exactly what they promised to do. These rules will also give people a chance punish them if they break public trust.

4. *Institutional reforms:* These will make sure that administration rules and procedures are easy to understand and are included in the other school governance processes. This also will allow parents and children and communities to participate in the development of the school.

5. *Targeting specific issues:* Using specific issues as entry points for improving transparency. These issues must be important in terms of local development and have the potential to serve as rallying points for positive changes in local governance.

4. Equity

Equity is not the same as equality.

Equity is about fair treatment. People are different and sometimes they have different needs.
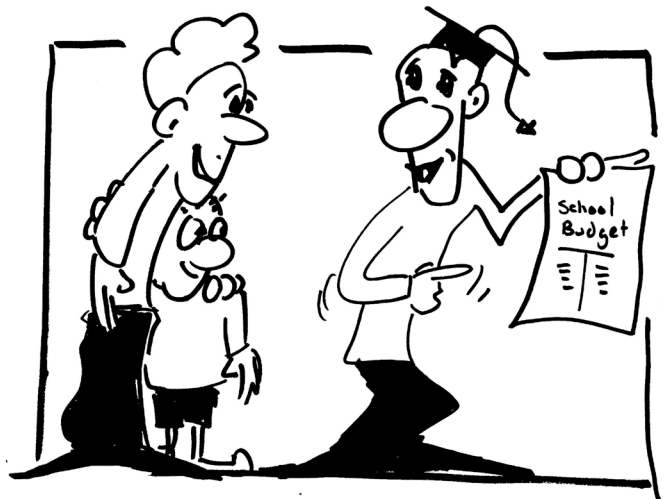
For example, a learner who needs to use a wheelchair might need a ramp and other things to get into and around the school. Providing these extra things means that the

school must recognise that some people, just to get to use the school, will have special needs and cannot be treated equally with all the rest. In fact, treating everyone equally will disadvantage many. Another example is both girls and boys have an equal right to toilets, but take into account that girls need better sanitation facilities for their health needs when they reach puberty.

Equity at school means the school needs to be a place that can help everyone to be treated fairly. The school's rules and practices must allow everyone who is rich, poor, disabled, male or female to be included in discussions and decisions for the school and for children's safety and education. Schools must become the engine for successful changes and for development.

These are factors that are often used to oppress people:

Gender   Race   Culture

    Language   Sexual preference

    Class   Poverty   Caste

Physical disability   Learning difficulties

Nationality   Religion   Age

Can you think of any other?

Points to think about:

– Does your school discriminate against anyone based on an item in the box above?

– How can your school make sure that everyone has equal access to the school even if they fall into any of these categories?

– How are girls and women unique and what can be done to value this? Equity must also extend to doing business with other organisations in the community.

Organisations and fair operating practices:

Fair operating practices are about how a school deals with other organisations. These include relationships between the school and government agencies, as well as between schools and their partners, suppliers, contractors, competitors and the associations of which they are members. Fair operating practice issues come up in the areas of anti-corruption, responsible involvement in the public, fair competition, promoting social responsibility with other organisations and respect for property rights.

Fair operating practices and social responsibility:

In the area of social responsibility, fair operating practices are about the way a school works with other organisations to promote good results. Good results can be achieved by providing leadership and promoting social responsibility in all activities and with more people in the community and public that the school works with.

Principles or rules and things we must think about:

Behaving ethically is very important for a school, to enable it to create and maintain, over a long period, successful relationships with other organisations. Therefore, observance, promotion and encouragement of standards of ethical behaviour underlie all fair operating practices. Preventing corruption and responsible political involvement depend on respect for the rule of law, obeying ethical standards, accountability and transparency. Fair competition and respect for property rights cannot be achieved if schools and other organisations do not deal with each other honestly, equitably and with integrity.

Some principles might include:

– Anti-corruption

– Responsible (honest) political involvement

– Fair competition

– Promoting social responsibility in each and every person involved in the school and public, no matter what their job is (from the cleaner to the company director)

– Respect for property rights (when the right to own or use property such as a community centre, clinic or school, are protected)
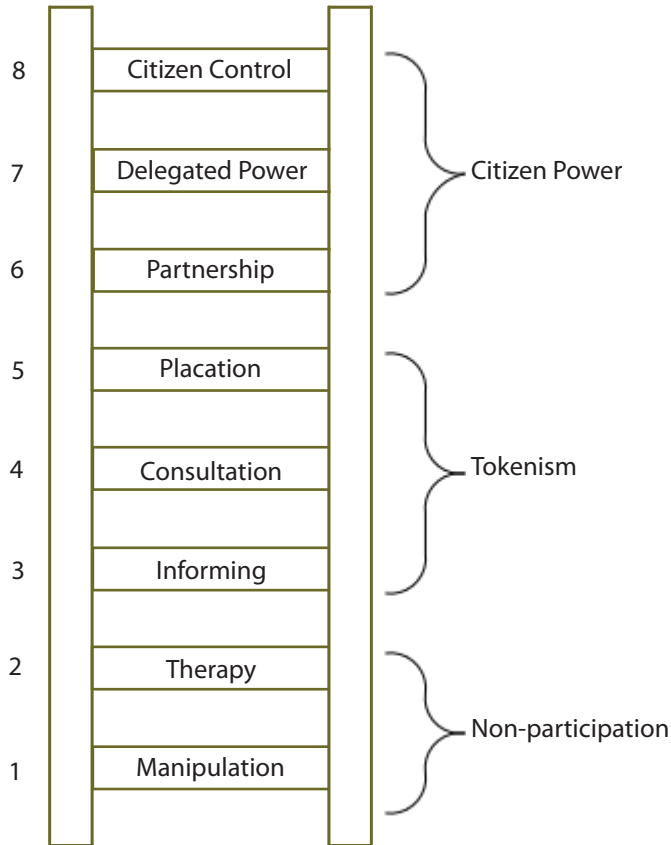
Things to do to promote Equity

- Make a list of groups of people who are not participating in the school. In particular, think about women, girls, parents and the disabled but also other groups of people left out in the running of the school.

- Plan how these groups can be contacted and their interests listened to.

- Plan how to get these groups to become more involved in the running of the school.

- Think carefully about how these groups can get to and access the school. Some will just need transport while others will need changes to the school buildings to allow them to move about the school in wheelchairs, for example.

- Ask these groups to think about what money, materials and equipment will be needed to help them take a bigger part in the school.

5. Community involvement and citizen participation

A well-run school adds to the life of a community. Young people learn and grow and share their lives with each other. Parents meet other parents and share common concerns and interests about their children. Teachers inspire and teach children, giving them powerful tools for later life. Businesses benefit from supplying the school with goods and services. A direct consequence of the school working well is that the life of the community improves.

A school that works well needs the support and active participation of the citizens in the community so that it can go on working well and serving the community.

Community involvement and citizen participation can be said to get better by stages. Sherry Arnstein, a community activist, describes the ladder of participation:

Step	Level	Category
8	Citizen Control	
7	Delegated Power	Citizen Power
6	Partnership	
5	Placation	
4	Consultation	Tokenism
3	Informing	
2	Therapy	
1	Manipulation	Non-participation

Things to think about

- How far up the ladder of participation is your school?

- What can be done to move the way in which decisions are made up the ladder of participation?

- What or who is stopping the school from moving up the ladder of participation?

- How many safety projects at school are led by parents?

The bottom rungs of the ladder are: (1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy.

Manipulation is when those in power use their power to make it look like they are working with others, but are really just covering themselves so that they can do whatever they want.

Therapy is when those in power ostensibly "help" disadvantaged people, but actually disempower them by treating them as weak and useless and in need of help instead of enabling them to participate.

These two rungs describe levels of "non-participation" that have been falsely created by those in power, so that others (for example, poorer parents or females or children) do not get a chance to be involved in important discussions in the school. This is done because those who have power want to maintain control of parents and the community.

Informing is when those in power simply tell others what they have decided to do. No chance to change or give suggestions is permitted.

Consultation is when those in power ask others what they think about plans or decisions. Those in power listen, but go ahead with their plans without including ideas or suggestions of the others.

Placation is when those in power give others a little bit of what might be good in order to keep them quiet and happy and not make an uncomfortable noise.

Rungs 3 and 4 progress to levels of "tokenism" (pretending) that allow the poorer or weaker people in the community to hear and have a voice. It is important that the leaders do not just pretend to listen to those they consult and are honest with the information they give them.

Good participation is when people are listened to and when their ideas are included in the decision-making process.
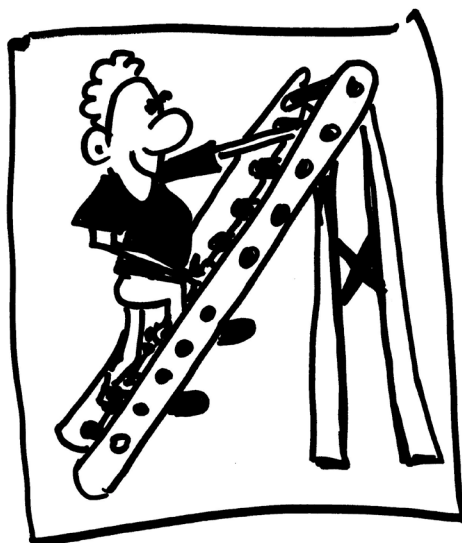
When participation is left at the pretending and non-participation levels, then communities and parents will never have power to help the school and their children, and change will only serve those already in power.

Rung (5) Placation (to pretend to make peace, so that people do not complain) is simply a higher level of tokenism because the rules allow the poorer and weaker people to say what they want, but those in power still do not listen and continue to make decisions based on what they want rather than what parents or communities want.

Further up the ladder are levels of citizen power that allow them to make more decisions which are listened to and included in the projects and activities conducted by the school.

Citizens can enter into a (6) Partnership that gets them to negotiate and gives them a chance to agree with those in power to have both their and the leader's wishes included.

At the top rungs, (7) Delegated Power (power that is handed over or given) and (8) Citizen Control, there are larger numbers of poorer and weaker citizens who make decisions or have full power to manage and lead the decisions.

Participation without sharing is an empty and frustrating process for the powerless. It allows the power holders to claim that all sides were considered, but makes it possible for only some of those sides to benefit. It does not lead to positive change for those who need it.

The eight-rung ladder is more simplified in these examples but it helps to show that there are so many different levels at which communities and parents can participate, from very low and poor levels to high, powerful levels where they are listened to and have the power to decide. When we are aware of these different levels of participation, it is easier for us to understand that there is more and more noise and demand from those who don't have power, to participate and be listened to. It also helps us to see how leaders in power often ignore these demands and either pretend to listen or create confusion to avoid doing what others want.

Conclusion

The nucleus of the Right of Know/Right of Education project impact and results is centred at community level. This toolkit is therefore a medium to achieve maximum learning and positive impact at community and school level, where parents are more involved in the welfare of their children, the school's governance culture is monitored and relevant information is available to all and learners are prioritised.

In *Best Practices*, David Skyrme (adapted from SDC knowledge management toolkit) recommends a six-step approach. His approach is aimed at documenting the essential features of a good practice, learning from that practice, developing guidelines, diffusing basic knowledge, and using that knowledge to apply and adapt the practice in a new context. The key steps are as follows:

1. Identify school requirements:

Start by considering where you can really add value. Look at the areas of the school needing attention because of poor performance or difficult challenges. Who can most benefit from better knowledge and understanding of good practices? How will they access and use them?

2. Discover good practices at school and community level

There are various approaches to look at what is producing excellent results, but don't necessarily limit yourself to only including practices within the school. Much can be learned from practices of other schools and community-based organisations in your area and beyond.

3. Document good practices at school level

The aim is not to describe the good practice in detail, but to give enough information to allow other schools and the community at large the power to decide whether they would like to use the same examples and where they can find more information.

4. Validate good practices

A practice is only "good" or "best" if there is a link between what was practiced and the end result. When identifying and validating good practices, it is important to ensure that these are based on a combination of both performance of school-governing bodies and sound evidence from its practice. It is also important to seek input and feedback from the rest of the school and the school community.

5. Disseminate and apply

Common ways of sharing good practice knowledge include: the school governing body to discuss ways of improving processes, the involvement of the school community in issues such as safety of learners and school resources, community dialogues, visits to other schools (twinning) through learning from best practices, organising further capacity building and training if required.

6. Develop a supporting infrastructure at school level

To successfully implement good practices at school, you need to have the following in place:

– People to facilitate and drive the process, and

– Infrastructure to document, store and share best practices.

This toolkit provides a set of easy-to-follow steps, concepts and guidelines to help local communities to focus and understand Best Practices in Schools and Governing Bodies. It is a generic guide that is adaptable to different situations, different countries and different systems.

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