

Key Principles For Every School Committee



Key Principles for Every School Committee:

human rights
participation
accountability
transparency
democracy



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Foreword

The Government sees participation of citizens as central to development and realizing human rights. This is particularly important at the community level where people live. Participation is a key pillar of the local government reforms underway in the country.

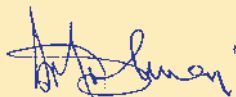
Education is vital to development in Tanzania. This booklet is about school committees. It explains the key principles for good governance underlying school committees and their members.

While launching the Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) at Mtopwa Village in September 2002, President Mkapa emphasized the role of school committees in planning, implementing, and overseeing school development and the use of school funds. This booklet aims to support Government efforts to strengthen school committees and expand opportunities for people to contribute to improving education.

The key principles for good governance are human rights, participation, accountability, transparency and democracy. It is important that every school committee discuss and understand these principles and their true meaning in relation to education. I believe that by implementing these principles school committees will gain the confidence of the people who they represent.

The main audiences for this booklet are school committee members and community leaders. I request leaders at district and regional levels to help distribute it to communities countrywide so that it reaches these audiences.

The responsibility of the Government is to establish good policies and guidelines for school committees. It is the responsibility of each school committee member, every local government leader and all citizens to make sure these are implemented for the benefit of the children of our country.



D.M.S. Mmari

Permanent Secretary

President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government

15 July 2004

Introduction

Good governance is also about expanding the freedom of citizens – freedom of expression, freedom to contribute ideas on the future of society, freedom to demand that leaders be accountable to the people, freedom that is enhanced by education...”

(President Mkapa, 31 May 2001, translated by HakiElimu)

Under the law, each primary school in Tanzania is to be managed by a school committee. This booklet aims to support the efforts of the Government to strengthen school committees, and promote ways in which people can contribute to improving education.

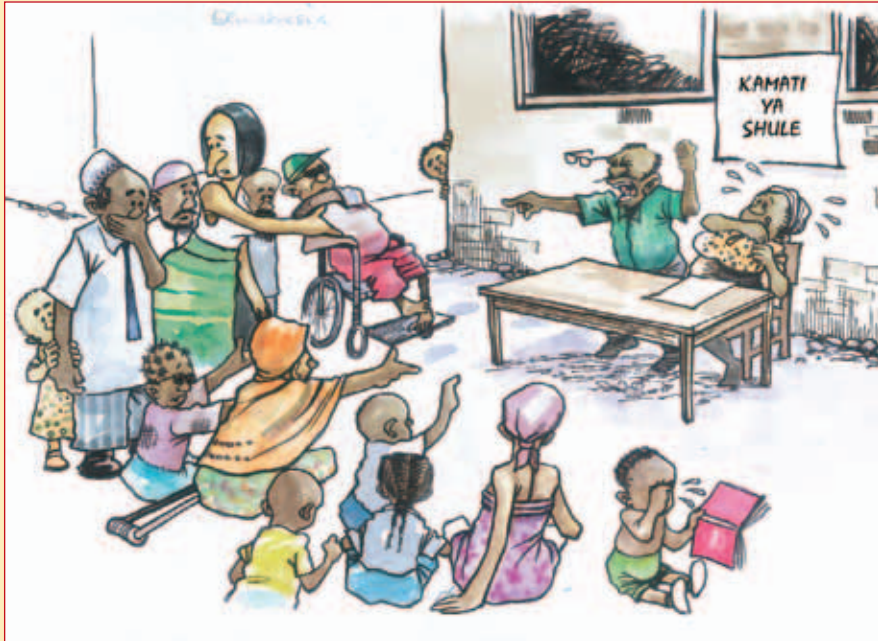
The booklet is not a practical guide on how to run school committees. It does not provide all the roles, responsibilities, rules and regulations. Instead, it focuses on the key principles that should guide school committees and their members. These are human rights, participation, accountability, transparency and democracy. It is important to understand and discuss these principles, because any school committee that loses sight of them will fail to be effective, and risk losing the confidence of the people.

The booklet is divided into two sections. The first provides a brief background to education reforms and the role of school committees in democratization efforts in Tanzania.

The second section looks at the key principles. Each principle is presented briefly, explaining what it is and what it is not. Why the principle is important in relation to education is discussed, as are ideas on what people can do to improve the situation. The presentation on each principle ends with questions to stimulate reflection and discussion about the issues raised.

We hope that you will find this booklet useful. Use it to provoke discussion and debate that leads to greater understanding and action. Ask yourself: Is my school committee practicing these principles? What can I do to make it better? Discuss your thoughts and ideas with others. Contact your local government leaders and NGOs active in your area. We would also like to hear your thoughts and ideas. Write to us at the address provided on the back cover. Your voice matters!

School Committees and Democracy

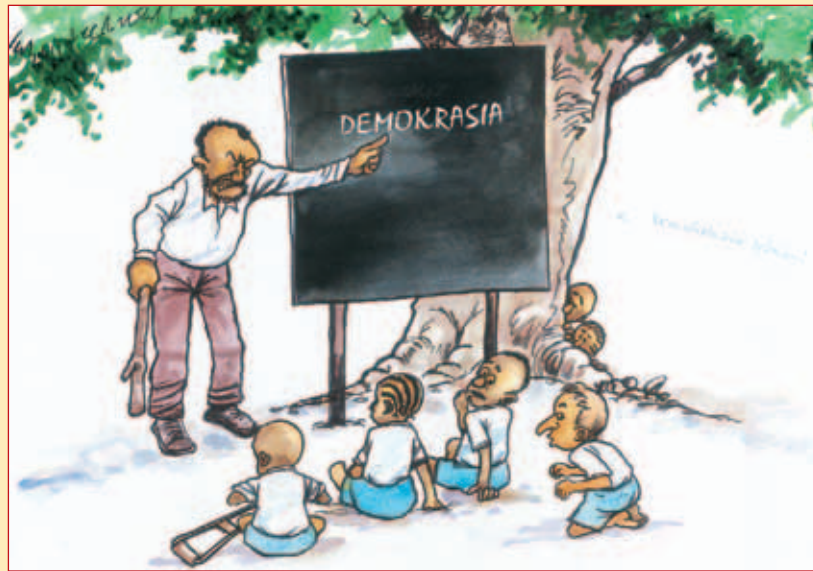


Things are moving in education in Tanzania! The Primary Education Development Plan (PEDP) is bringing new energy, ideas and resources to schools. More pupils are in school. More classrooms have been built. And promises have been made to improve the quality of education.

The changes in education are not separate from other changes in the country. Education reform is part of larger changes in national development and local government, in how decisions are made and how resources are used.

There is greater emphasis on participation of the people and accountability to the people. The Government is 'devolving' a great deal of power and resources closer to the people and their local governments. The basic idea is that people are served better when they are the drivers of their own development.

The Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), which provides the overall policy direction for the country, has among its key objectives to expand participation of citizens in policy processes. The Local Government Reform (LGR) Policy Paper states that one of the key goals of the reforms is "the democratic development of society from the grass root level" (page 15).



The Government's goal of broadening democratic participation and accountability at all levels requires increased involvement of men, women and young people in the way that schools function. The form of leadership is also to change. Local leaders are to see their role as listening to and serving people, and be primarily accountable to the people, rather than simply carrying out instructions from the Central Government.

The revitalization of village assemblies is a key strategy for local democratization. Efforts to increase the voice and power of school committees are expected to increase accountability of village and mtaa governments to the people.

The changes in education have been developed in this context. The PEDP is a five year plan (2002 to 2006) that seeks to ensure that every child in Tanzania is able to access quality primary education. Its four main components are to:

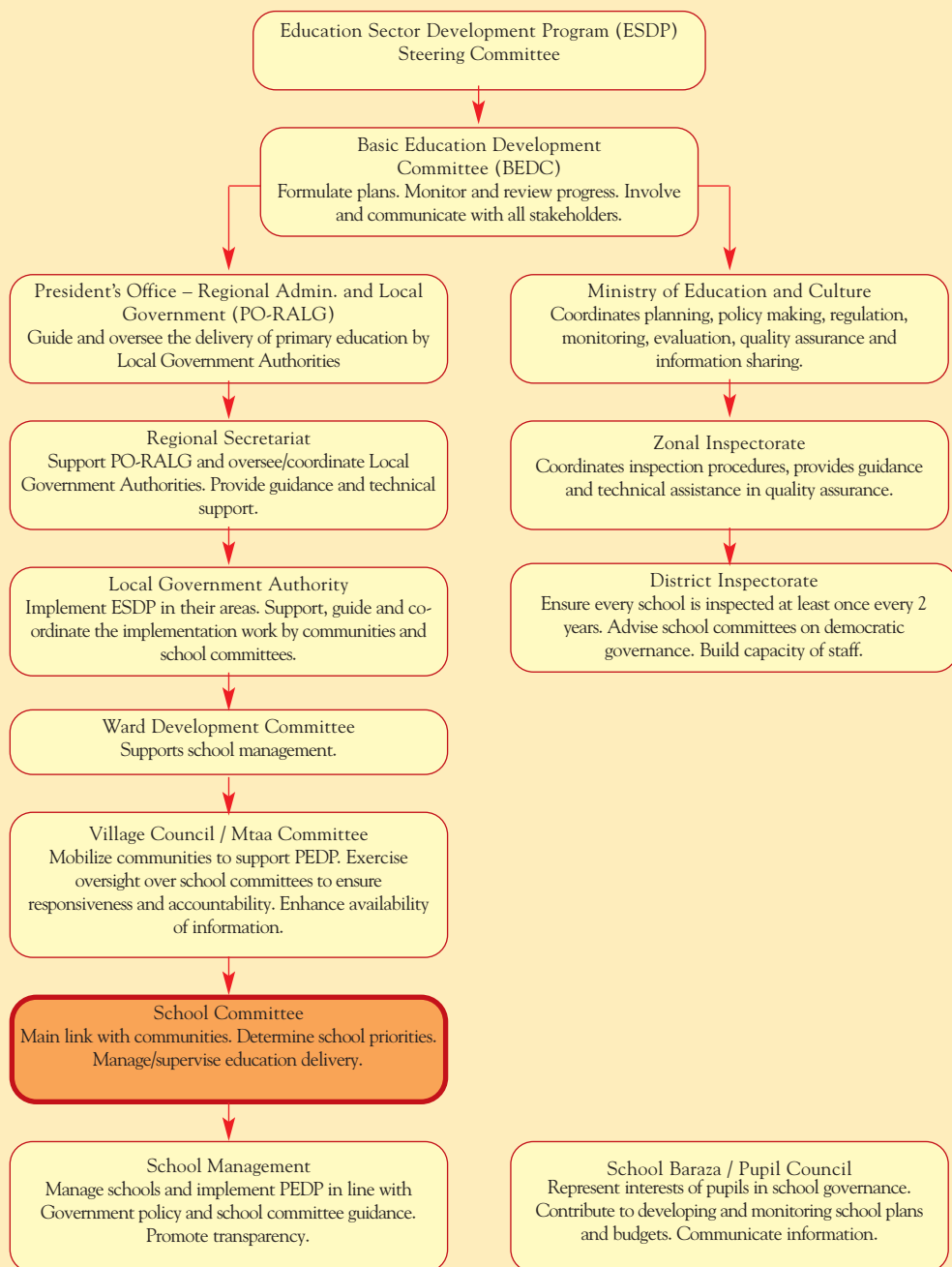
- expand enrolment
- improve the quality of teaching and learning processes
- build capacity within the education system
- strengthen the institutional arrangements that support the planning and delivery of education services

A key PEDP strategy is to improve education by improving governance. This involves developing closer links and cooperation between teachers, pupils, parents, village/mtaa governments and wider communities in order to strengthen school management. The overall intention is to promote participation, democracy, transparency and accountability in school governance.

These issues are explained in the PEDP Annex on Strengthening Institutional Arrangements. The roles of different levels are explained (see next page), and there is special emphasis on school committees that are to play a “pivotal” role in PEDP. They are the means by which people can become involved in the way in which their schools are run. The Government intends to provide financial and human resources to empower school committees to manage and develop schools.

Under PEDP, school committees are to prepare ‘whole school development plans’ and manage school budgets. The plans are intended to enable schools to make their own decisions about the development of their school. This enables each school to make use of local expertise from amongst their communities, pupils and teachers about what is best for them. It also provides for information to be shared with everyone, and in this way promotes greater space for monitoring and accountability of resources and service provision for quality assurance.

Institutional Framework for ESDP/PEDP Implementation



Human Rights



What are human rights?

- entitlements you have in society
- are part of being human, a 'gift of nature'
- are not given by (and cannot be taken away by) someone else
- apply to all human beings – rich or poor, male or female – without discrimination
- are indivisible, all rights matter
- are affirmed in the Constitution, and recognized by the law and the government

What are human rights not?

- are not personal wishes or desires
- are not privileges you earn
- are not responsibilities that you must fulfill

Why are human rights important?

- they affirm your dignity
- they assert you are as important as every other human being
- they mean you are to be respected by others
- they protect you from abuse
- they mean your views matter and you have a right to be heard
- they empower you to know your role in the society
- they enable you to ask questions and give views
- they build unity and equality

What can you do about human rights?

- learn about your rights, and help others learn
- read important documents, including the Constitution, Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), PEDP and its Annexes, and local government reforms
- listen to radio or TV programs about human rights
- discuss human rights realities and policies with others
- write and share your experiences and views on human rights

- speak out on and try to stop abuses of human rights
- ensure your actions reflect human rights
- support people who are fighting for their rights
- report human rights violations to the authorities (When rights are violated the Government has an obligation to take action)

Questions for discussion

- Are human rights respected in your community? In your school?
- Are some people discriminated against more than others? Who are these? What can you do to support them?
- How does the violation of human rights affect education in your school? What can be done about it?
- How can people – including pupils, parents and teachers – learn about their rights?
- Does the local authority promote human rights? What can it do to improve the situation?
- Where can an ordinary person go to report human rights issues with confidence that he or she will be respected?

Participation



What is participation?

- being meaningfully involved in something that matters to you
- contributing ideas, concerns and suggestions
- being valued, listened to and taken seriously
- being informed and consulted
- influencing decision making
- making choices about what to do

What is not participation?

- orders and directives without discussion
- being represented by people who do not listen to you
- ‘one person show’ or person in charge deciding everything
- discrimination against or exclusion of someone’s views
- being in darkness about what is happening
- token or manipulative involvement
- being asked to give views after everything has already been decided

Why is participation important?

- allows people to contribute ideas
- builds on people’s skills and talents
- enhances collective responsibility and ownership
- gives people a forum for sharing views and experiences
- builds effectiveness and sustainability
- reduces corruption and unfair decisions
- makes people feel good about being involved

What can you do to promote participation?

- find out what the law and government policy says about participation and share this information with others
- use existing opportunities to participate in school and community life such as the Village/Mtaa Assembly meetings (where everyone over 18 years is invited)

- give constructive ideas on how to improve the situation, and raise concerns when you see things are not going well
- advocate for more space and opportunities for people to participate, especially for those whose voice is often not heard such as the poor, children, women and people with disabilities
- listen to the views of those most affected by school life – pupils, parents and teachers – and support them to have their views be heard
- assess if your school committee is democratic in the composition of its members and how it functions, and suggest ways in which the situation can be improved

Questions for discussion

- Are there enough opportunities for participation in your community? In your school?
- Are some people discriminated against more than others? Who are these? Children? Girls? People with disabilities? People with HIV/AIDS? What can you do to support them?
- Do you know of good examples of participation? What made the participation good and how did it help your community?
- Do you know of examples where the lack of participation harmed development? What can be done to improve the situation?
- What factors reduce meaningful participation? What kinds of conditions are needed for everyone to be able to participate fully?
- How can people in the school community – pupils, parents and teachers – participate effectively?

- Does the Government promote participation? What can it do to improve the situation?
- Do the members of your school committee represent the interests of everyone in school and the community?
- How does your school committee function? Do the voices of everyone get heard equally?



Accountability



What is accountability?

- being answerable to the public and to supervisors or to those who chose you to do a task
- taking responsibility for your actions
- being honest about achievements, challenges and failures
- refusing to do something that is unethical or wrong even when pressured to do so
- caring about results and wanting to do the best possible with public resources
- being transparent and open

What is not accountability?

- not taking responsibility
- avoiding giving explanations or answering questions
- lack of feedback to your constituency
- misuse of power or resources
- fear about asking questions

Why is accountability important?

- leads to improved decision-making
- increases integrity, trust and understanding
- promotes ownership and sustainability
- contributes to efficient use of resources
- promotes fair use of power and authority
- helps stop damage before it is too late
- reduces corruption and other unlawful or poor behaviors by leaders

How can you promote accountability?

- know your rights and responsibilities
- know responsibilities of leaders such as school committee chairpersons, head teachers, village councilors and ward education supervisors
- seek information about what should be happening and ask why if it is not
- ask school leaders to clearly explain how resources including funds have been used and demand written reports
- promote a culture of school committees involving the people before making decisions, and communicating these after the decision

- check to see if the information provided to you by leaders is fair, accurate and consistent with policies and the truth
- report cases to the authorities where you suspect serious lack of accountability and follow up
- identify, praise and support representatives and leaders who are accountable

Questions for discussion

- Is there a culture and practice of public accountability in your community? In your school?
- Are all leaders accountable, or are some less accountable than others? Who are these? Why is the situation like this?
- How are the members of your school committee accountable to the public? pupils? teachers?
- Do you know of good examples of accountability in your school? What made it good and how did it help your community?
- Do you know of examples where the lack of accountability has harmed development? What can be done about it?
- How can people in the school community – pupils, parents and teachers – contribute to effective accountability?

Transparency



What is transparency?

- sharing information widely about education policies and what is going on at the school, including the use of funds
- being fully open about what is going on, not hiding or holding back important information
- people being aware of what decisions have been made and the reasons for these decisions
- clear reports being regularly prepared and shared with all
- disseminating information that is accessible and easy to understand
- being honest

- giving and receiving feedback to all who ask
- answering questions clearly and fully
- having reliable places/channels that people can trust to regularly provide them with useful information

What is not transparency?

- lack of information or use of outdated information
- use of information that is not clear or difficult to understand
- use of false or misleading information
- restricting information to only a few without good reason
- inadequate opportunities and space to ask questions and get clear answers
- leaders not responding to requests for information in a timely or open manner
- bureaucratic and cumbersome procedures

What can you do to promote transparency?

- find out where you can access reports and policy documents, get them and share them
- read minutes of school committee meetings, encourage others to do the same and discuss the issues raised
- share information with others
- identify what you have a right to know and ask for it
- volunteer to help the school make information more widely available,

including through public displays on walls and notice-boards

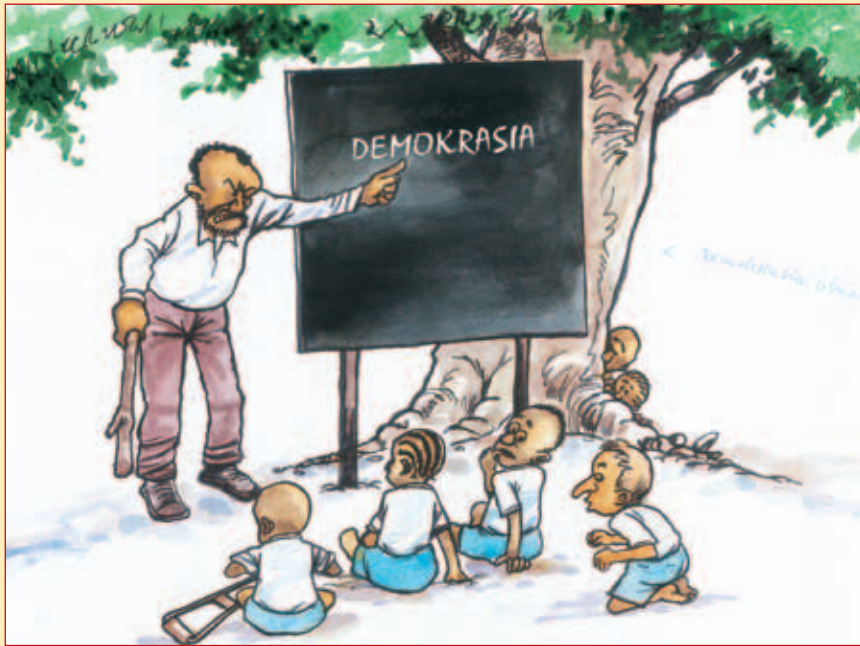
- help the school make their reports clear and easy to understand and encourage the authorities to share these regularly
- identify, encourage and promote good examples of transparency in education and its benefits
- share information with radio, TV, newspapers and other media
- help leaders to pro-actively share information
- report cases of serious resistance to transparency to higher authorities and follow-up

Questions for discussion

- Is your school transparent? Do all people have easy access to important information, or are some people denied information? Who are these?
- Do you and others know about the school finances? Are incomes, expenditures and balances accounted for in a way that everyone can know what is going on?
- Is the information shared clear and easy to understand? How is the information shared?
- Are minutes of school committee meetings, school plans and financial statements available for all in the school community, including pupils and parents?
- What other systems or tools are in place to ensure transparency in school committees and in the community?
- Do you know of good examples of transparency in practice? How did it help your community?

- Do you know of examples where the lack of transparency harmed development? Who is resisting transparency and why? What can be done about it?
- What factors reduce effective transparency?
- Does the Government promote transparency? What can it do to improve the situation?
- Is it easy for different people (men, women, children, poor and rich, people with disabilities, etc) to ask questions, including about sensitive issues? How do leaders respond to these questions?
- Is someone tracking what leaders are saying in relation to Government policies and promises made by leaders?

Democracy



What is democracy?

- form of governing where people share power and rule; and where citizens feel they can make a difference
- free participation without being forced to do something against your will
- a practice of decision-making that listens to the concerns of different people, especially those who may have been traditionally excluded (e.g. the poor, young people, people with disabilities, people with HIV/AIDS)
- decisions based on the opinions of the majority and respect and protection of the minority, decisions that respect the rights of all

- transparency and fairness in the election of leaders and representatives
- more than elections, a continuing culture of representatives receiving their mandate from and reporting back to the people who elected them
- accountability of leaders to the people

What is not democracy?

- lack of meaningful space for people to contribute ideas, thoughts and concerns, and have these been taken seriously
- decisions made by one or few persons for others without having a mandate to do so
- poor system of electing (and removing) leaders and representatives
- lack of mechanisms and opportunities to hold leaders accountable on a continual basis
- some people dominating and reducing space for others to have a fair chance to be heard
- ‘mob rule’ whereby the majority make decisions that discriminate against the minority
- lack of information and transparency

What can you do to promote democracy?

- discuss with friends, colleagues and leaders what democracy means for you and how it can be promoted in your school and community
- find out what government policies (e.g. PEDP and its Annex on Strengthening Institutional Arrangements) say about how school committees can be elected and function democratically, and share this information widely
- assess level of democratic practice in your school committee and share

information with others

- interact with school committee members, head teachers and other leaders and offer suggestions on how democracy can be strengthened
- take time to listen to those who tend to be left out, and support them to participate effectively and have their views heard by decision-makers
- participate in the democratic election of the school committee members
- write to the authorities if you observe serious lack of democratic process or practice

Questions for discussion

- Is your school democratic? Is your school committee democratic? Classroom? Management? Disciplinary measures? How and to what extent?
- Are some people discriminated against more than others? Who are these? Pupils? Girls? People with disabilities? People with HIV/AIDS? What can you do to support them?
- How does your school committee function? Do the voices of everyone get heard equally? Do its leaders dominate or give everyone a fair chance to speak?
- How were your school committee members elected? Who are they accountable to in practice?
- Do you know of good examples of democratic practice? What made it good and how did it help your community?
- Do you know of examples where the lack of democratic culture harmed development? What can be done to improve the situation?
- What factors reduce democratization? What kinds of conditions are needed for there to be a mature democratic practice?
- Does the Government promote democracy in practice? What can it do to improve the situation?

Conclusion



This booklet has outlined the key role of school committees in the current education reforms, and discussed five key principles that need to guide their make-up and functioning. It has been written in a style that seeks to clarify basic concepts and stimulate debate about their meaning, relevance and what can be done to bring real change in our schools.

The booklet does not provide concrete information on the rules, procedures and functions of school committees. These have been prepared by the Government and others. For more information we encourage you to consult the list of resources in the next section.

School committees can be extremely powerful and inspiring – or painfully weak and dull – depending on how they work. Historically, many have failed to revitalize schools or manage them effectively. But current government reforms, including PEDP, provide a real opportunity for school committees to be informed and empowered, to be proactive, and to make things happen. It is a real opportunity for people to mobilize, take charge and improve education and democracy in Tanzania.

You – the reader – are an important part of the answer. Change and progress won't be handed to us from outside by the Government, donors or others. It will come when people are awake, confident, organized and care enough to make a difference.

What are you going to do to make your school committee a wonderful place for all? What will you do to make sure your school committee works to make your school a good place?

Sources and Resources

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HakiElimu is an independent civil society organization which seeks to realize equity, quality, human rights and democracy in education and society. We facilitate communities to access information, transform schools and influence policy-making; stimulate imaginative public dialogue and organizing for change; promote critical research, analysis and advocacy; and collaborate with partners to advance social justice.



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