School Management and Decision-making in Ethiopian Government Schools

Evidence from the Young Lives Qualitative School Survey

Workneh Abebe

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty

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Abstract

Both academic and policy documents indicate that poor school management and decision-making at local level are major challenges in creating equitable access to good-quality education in Ethiopia. In principle, educational provision can be improved through better management practices, transparency in the use of resources and accountability to all stakeholders (community, parents, students, teachers, etc.).

This study focuses on school management and decision-making in government schools and is based on the qualitative data collected in 2010 as part of the Young Lives school survey.

The paper examines the extent to which the involvement of different stakeholders in schools (teachers, headteachers, parents, students, local government administration, etc.) impacts upon critical decision-making at school level. The paper uses qualitative data collected as part of the recent Young Lives school-based research from five of the 20 sentinel sites. Specifically it uses data collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and headteachers.

It is only in recent years that the Ethiopian Government has paid attention to the importance of school management and school-level decision-making. Research in the area of school management is almost non-existent in Ethiopia. However, various reports and policy documents prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education clearly indicate the extent to which the Government has been focusing on improving school management in recent years (MOE 2005; MOE 2010a). The paper examines how headteachers and teachers contribute to the strengthening of the day-to-day management and supervision of schools attended by Young Lives case study children.

Acknowledgements

The Author

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1. Introduction, rationale for the study, and methodology

1.1   Introduction and rationale for the study

In 2000, the international education community met in Dakar, Senegal, and committed itself to achieving universal primary education or 'Education for All' (EFA) by 2015. However, the 2008 EFA Global Monitoring Report suggested that large numbers of countries were still not in a position to achieve both the EFA goals and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Out of 149 countries with available data, some 42 were unlikely to achieve both sets of goals, and some were even at serious risk of failing to achieve the basic EFA targets of universal primary education and reducing illiteracy (UNESCO 2007: 180 and 182).

Mpokosa and Ndaruhutse (2008: 15–16), who reviewed literature on teacher management in 13 developing countries, indicate that though education financing both in terms of aid and public spending has been improved in many countries, this is not accompanied by good and effective education management systems. They pointed out that in many developing countries poor education management results in overcrowded classrooms, high pupil–teacher ratios, and high student drop-out. The overall effect of this is a low quality of education. Writing about south Asia, Gottelmann-Duret (2000) discussed how poor school management leads to high levels of teaching staff turnover, teacher absenteeism and teacher dissatisfaction.

Until recently, school management and organisation were not given due attention in education policy formulation, education practice and academic research in Ethiopia. Instead policy documents tend to focus mainly on education access and equity. Between the introduction of the first Education and Training Policy in 1994 and the launching of the third Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP III), education policy has emphasised the need to increase equitable access to quality education (MOE 1998; MOE 2002). ESDP III focused on improving education management at the *woreda* (district) and school levels so as to expand access to education (MOE 2005). ESDP IV (MOE 2010a) considered improvement in school management and administration as one of the tools for improving education decision-making at all levels. The Government also launched the General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP), in which school management and administration are taken as one of the key education quality intervention areas (Shibeshi 2009).

This paper explores the extent to which school-based management and administration contribute to the improvement of critical decision-making at school level and therefore to a higher quality of education. Financial management and fundraising at school level are also important parts of school management; thus the paper tries to look at how community contributions are managed and used. It also examines how school clubs, Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), and local government administration can work towards enhancing decision-making at school level. The paper addresses the ways headteachers accept or resist the decisions from above. Furthermore, the role of community representation in the school management forms part of the analysis.

1.2   Methodology

This paper uses data collected in 2010 through in-depth-interviews with classroom teachers and headteachers as part of the Young Lives school-based research in Ethiopia. Young Lives, a 15-year childhood poverty study in Ethiopia, Peru, India (in the state of Andhra Pradesh) and Vietnam, is carrying out an in-depth qualitative study on children's educational access and the quality of the education they receive, in addition to its longitudinal quantitative research and its qualitative research on other aspects of children's lives.

The qualitative education data was collected from schools in five communities (located in five different regions – see Table 1) of the 20 sentinel sites of Young Lives in Ethiopia. The school management data was collected through individual interviews with headteachers and teachers in 15 schools. Significant information was gathered about school structures and organisation (reward mechanisms, school clubs, PTAs, teacher training, the role of headteachers, and community participation) to help us understand how various school actors worked together to make critical decisions.

Table 1.   *Number of teachers and headteachers participating in the qualitative interviews (by region and site)*

Region and site	Headteachers	Teachers	No. of schools
Addis Ababa (Bertukan)	3	9	3
Amhara (Tach-Meret)	4	9	4
Oromia (Leki)	2	7	2
SNNPR (Leku)	3	9	3
Tigray (Zeytuni)	3	9	3
Total	15	43	15

Note: Pseudonyms are used for all sites and respondents in order to preserve anonymity.
SNNPR = Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region.

Thus, the analysis in this paper is based on the views of the 15 headteachers (six urban and nine rural) and 43 teachers (18 urban and 25 rural).

1.3   Objective and research questions

The purpose of this paper is to examine the extent to which management at school level contributes to improved decision-making in government schools in Ethiopia. Specifically, the paper deals with how headteachers and other staff manage the issues they face in their day-to-day school activities. The paper addresses the following questions:

- What are the roles of stakeholders (headteachers, teachers, communities, parents, students and local administration) in improving school management and decision-making?

- How do headteachers and teachers encourage communities, parents and local authorities to influence education management and decision-making at school level?

- How do students, through school clubs and student parliaments, participate in school management and decision-making?

2. School management as a means of improving decision-making: review of the literature

This section reviews general literature on the significance of management for improving decision-making at school level. It highlights the extent to which devolution of decision-making authority to schools helps in the further decentralisation of school management. It also discusses the roles of headteachers and communities in improving decision-making at school level.

2.1   Decentralisation of decision-making authority to schools

This sub-section attempts to discuss what international literature tells us about education management at school level and how it contributes to improving critical decision-making.

Today, greater decentralisation of educational decision-making is becoming the common aspiration of many developing countries (De Grauwe et al. 2011). Some researchers argue that the participation of communities and students in the day-to-day activities of the schools (for example, in supervision, monitoring and evaluation) is part of the decentralisation of school management (J. Naidoo 2005). In some Asian countries, like Malaysia, school management has improved because it involves students and communities in school decision-making (Luck 2011: 1–2). The same is true in South Africa where the participation of communities and students in decision-making has played a role in the improved and expanded school-based management (J. Naidoo 2005).

Researchers have identified some benefits of decentralisation for critical decision-making at school level. First, as Dunne et al. (2007: 10) have pointed out, education decentralisation reduces inequities mainly when financial responsibility is delegated to local government. Sub-Saharan African countries, from Ethiopia to South Africa, have recently been engaged in administrative decentralisation, and efforts have been made to increase school-level independence through the provision of direct financial support to schools in the form of school grants and by promoting community participation in school governance (J. Naidoo 2005: 122). Therefore, decentralisation facilitates responsiveness to local needs through community participation, transparency and accountability in school management (Dunne et al. 2007: 9).

Second, decentralisation leads to a change in school management. Many African countries, for example, regard decentralisation as a means for management restructuring (Dunne et al. 2007: 6). In many developing countries the school administration is a combination of headteacher, teachers, school administrators, community representatives and local government authorities. The decentralisation process has achieved important outcomes as school administration and communities play greater roles in building classrooms, recruiting contract teachers, and raising community contributions (Dunne et al. 2007: 9). Moreover, the school administration are involved in the setting of staff qualifications, textbook development,

monitoring and evaluation, teacher training, partial financial administration, designing school rules, and maintenance of school facilities (J. Naidoo 2005: 42).

Third, the decentralisation of school management can make decision-making more democratic and lead to improved efficiency and effectiveness. The expansion of good governance and democracy to schools requires the involvement of stakeholders such as policymakers, teachers, students, parents and community members (J. Naidoo 2005). Vegas (2007) describe the effects of devolution of decision-making authority to schools as follows:

> School-based management reforms that devolve decision-making authority to the schools, for example, have had important effects on teacher performance and student learning by making schools more accountable to their communities. Devolution of decision-making authority to schools in Central America has, in many cases, led to lower teacher absenteeism, more teacher work hours, more homework assignments, and better parent-teacher relationships.

However, while decentralisation may be a goal of many education reforms, research from many developing countries indicates that decentralisation policy does not necessarily produce the expected outcomes (Dunne et al. 2007: 9). Some of these challenges are discussed below.

On the one hand, decentralisation has not devolved power and control over education management, financial administration and teacher management to the school level. Studies in some African countries, for example, indicate that decentralisation is loaded with bureaucratic bottlenecks (De Grauwe et al. 2011).

Furthermore, in many developing countries, the shift to decentralisation as a way of improving service delivery has been initiated because of pressure from international organisations. It is not an internally driven force that will bring realistic outcomes in the system (De Grauwe et al. 2011). Another challenge is that problems such as poverty, difficult socio-political situations and limited economic opportunities have prevented decentralisation from bringing about the desired outcomes in local contexts (Dunne et al. 2007: 6).

2.2 The role of headteachers in promoting key decision-making

In this sub-section, the paper discusses literature on the contribution of headteachers to the strengthening of school-based management. It provides an account of how headteachers play a part in the further decentralisation of decision-making at school level.

The role of headteachers is one of the factors in the success or failure of the education system at school level. Headteachers play an important role in financial administration and staff management. In Malaysia, the headteacher and assistant headteachers play vital roles in the management and administration of financial and material resources (Kandasamy and Blaton 2004: 46–7). Headteachers are very important for improving teacher management and teacher motivation and for improving students' achievement (Mpoksa and Ndaruhutse 2008: 11).

It is argued that the important elements in the headteachers' managerial skills include a good educational background, ability to create a good work environment, public relations skills and the ability to communicate well with stakeholders. These elements can be considered as the essence of educational management (Luck 2011; J. Naidoo 2005). Effective management of schools may lead to improved performance and productivity. Therefore, headteachers can make a key contribution to the creation of a conducive environment for the staff to achieve

these things (Luck 2011: 3). The growing interest in strengthening education management at school level can support this process (Gottelmann-Duret 2000: 42).

2.3   The role of communities and parents in school decision-making

In this sub-section, the paper reviews literature on the role of communities and parents in school-based decision-making. It also provides some discussion of how community participation contributes to the further decentralisation of critical decision-making at school level.

One of the advantages of involving communities in school decision-making is that it creates a greater sense of ownership, morale and commitment among the stakeholders. Decisions that are made at local level are arguably more responsive to specific issues related to school contexts (Dunne et al. 2007: 20). An important achievement has been observed in South Africa in this regard, since school-based governance is often integrated with participatory decision-making (J. Naidoo 2005: 41).

Another advantage is that decentralisation empowers communities to mobilise resources (Dunne et al. 2007). In Ghana, for example, decentralisation helps to enhance the efficiency of school management and accountability (Dunne et al. 2007: 9).

Third, decentralisation motivates parents to show greater interest in their children's education. In some cases, the functioning of local education offices was financed by communities (Dunne et al. 2007: 11). According to De Grauwe et al. (2011), the involvement of parents, teachers, local councillors and education officials in school management can help to promote decision-making at school level, which improves the quality of schooling and students' achievement.

However, the implementation of decision-making through the full participation of parents and communities entails challenges. When compared with teachers and headteachers, community groups do not focus on education matters and this often creates conflict (J. Naidoo 2005: 41).

2.4   Conclusion

The literature reveals that in practice decentralisation policy has not ensured the full participation of all stakeholders in school decision-making and school administration. The most positive outcome of decentralisation policy in developing countries appears to be creation of the awareness and increases in local efforts to address problems in education. Decentralisation can generate a critical mass of action to tackle context-specific problems in education management (Dunne et al. 2007: 12–13). But in order to strengthen school-based decision-making, the relationships among education offices, local government authorities, communities and parents need to be coordinated so that stakeholders work as a team.

3. Legal framework: the Ethiopian context

Decentralisation of key decision-making at school level has been a recent development in the Ethiopian education system. This section analyses how Ethiopian education policy enables school-based management to work with stakeholders to make decisions that will improve the quality of children's education.

Ethiopian educational history indicates that the issue of school management and decision-making at school level is a recent development. The modern school system was introduced into the country by missionaries during the nineteenth century. The first modern government school was built by Emperor Menilik in 1908; further schools were built by Emperor Haile Selassie and the subsequent regimes (Nekatibeb 2012).

The rise of different governments to power in Ethiopia was accompanied by educational reforms and policy changes. From 1941–74, the imperial education system functioned on the basis of the emperor's conviction that education held a key position in the country's development. However, each of the two post-imperial-era governments had well-defined reform policies of their own. For instance, the socialist regime issued a five-volume publication entitled *General Directions of Ethiopian Education* in 1980.Its aim was to cultivate a Marxist ideology, develop knowledge in science and technology and integrate education with production (Nekatibeb 2012).

Similarly, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia issued two policy documents entitled 'Education and Training Policy' and 'Education Sector Strategy' in 1994. Initially, policy focused on improving education access and equity. The Government then started to emphasise the importance of school governance. For example, the Education Sector Development Programme (ESDP) I (MOE 1998) defined the roles and responsibilities of school governance at the federal, regional and *woreda* level.

When ESDP II was designed in 2002, the Government realised the significance of management and decision-making at the *woreda* and school levels. This was further strengthened with ESDP III (2005) when the Government decided to decentralise critical decision-making from regions and zones to the *woreda*s and municipalities, and further to the school level, with the objective of having education become more responsive to school situations (MOE 2005: 23).

The devolution of decision-making authority to the *woreda* level was expected to strengthen *woreda*-level educational institutions, to offer better local governance, to promote accountability and to improve community participation (MOE 2005: 23). The focus of the decentralisation programme at this time was to strengthen the capacity of *Woreda* Education Offices (WEOs) through training in educational and financial management (MOE 2005: 23).

ESDP III also outlines the importance of community participation in school decision-making and financing. Communities were expected to raise funds for purchasing basic school equipment, hiring contract teachers, constructing schools and classrooms, building teachers' houses, and encouraging girls to enrol in schools. Community members and parents are members of the Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs), which were expected to participate in preparing annual action plans (MOE 2005: 24).

The Government has recognized that weak management and implementation capacity at school level was one of the main barriers to achieving access, equity and quality in primary education (MOE 2005: 29). After 2005, therefore, the Government acknowledged the importance of school management for improving school-based decision-making. It designed policies and programmes that strengthened the role of communities and parents in school management and financial administration, with the primary objective of improving the quality of education. However, the *woreda* administration still had more powers of critical decision-making and improving governance in schools. For instance, the WEO was responsible for recruiting teachers and managing the financial and material resources of the schools (MOE 2005: 37).

At the end of ESDP III, it was recognised that despite the increased attention given to devolving decision-making to the local level, in practice, school management and administration remained inefficient and ineffective. The WEOs were unable to implement government programmes because they did not have the capacity to ensure that schools were managed and administered effectively. In addition, the system suffered from a weak relationship between regions and *woreda*s (MOE 2010).

ESDP IV therefore emphasised the further devolution of key decision-making to the local level, including improving the functioning of offices at all levels, promoting cluster resource centres, and improving school-level management through capacity-building programmes (MOE 2010: 69).The General Education Quality Improvement Programme (GEQIP) aims to improve quality intervention in key areas, including school management and administration (Shibeshi 2008). Priority areas identified included increasing effectiveness and efficiency through decentralised educational planning and management; establishing open, transparent and productive management systems; and promoting effective horizontal and vertical communications across the education system (MOE 2008).

Alongside ESDPs and GEQIP, the Government has designed and implemented the School Improvement Programme (SIP). One of the main focuses of this was strengthening school management and parent and community partnership in order to improve decision-making at school level (MOE 2005: 56). The document outlined the main components of school management and administration as: headteacher and assistant headteacher; school management committees at various levels (comprising teachers, students, parents and representatives of the local community); and educational experts and supervisors working at various levels outside the school. These parties are expected to take responsibility for problems and weaknesses that arise in schools, and they play leading roles in implementing effective practices and decisions (MOE 2007).

As compared with the other policy documents discussed above, the SIP gives more decision-making power to the headteacher. Headteachers are responsible for making parents and the school community aware of school improvement plans by using school newspapers, magazines, pamphlets and meetings (MOE 2007b).

The SIP says that any individual who participates in the activities of the school can participate in the evaluation process. Headteachers are empowered to make key decisions and lead all stakeholders at school level, including ensuring that the rights of all stakeholders are maintained and their opinions are heard and considered. Stakeholders' participation can be facilitated effectively through communication. The headteacher needs to explain how the school community members, i.e. teachers, school committee, student representatives and clubs, can participate in school improvement activities.

As the headteachers lead the development of strategy at school level, they should also encourage teachers to play a leading role in the development of strategy by participating in the self-evaluation process (MOE 2007b). The headteacher should provide management and professional competency training for teachers and staff members and support them to take responsibility for the school improvement plan. Furthermore, the headteachers should arrange training opportunities for student representatives, parents and other community members on school improvement and self-evaluation processes (MOE 2007b).

The SIP also emphasises the importance of the *kebele* administration in the implementation of decentralised educational management. The *kebele* Education and Training Boards were expected to play an important role in supervising and assisting schools to implement the SIP; in helping schools in getting the necessary assistance from governmental and non-governmental organisations; and in coordinating the support and assistance provided by students, parents and local community (MOE 1998).

One of the stakeholders described in the SIP is student clubs. The document outlines the importance of student participation in school decision-making for improving teaching and learning. Thus, to ensure the participation of students in school activities (MOE 1998):

- Students should get suitable opportunities to work in partnership with adults in schools.

- Students should get training and responsibility that help them to offer solutions to problems.

- Schools should work cooperatively with schools to promote student participation.

- Students should take initiatives to establish clubs, and take responsibility for improving students' discipline in classroom.

- Students should conduct surveys on the consistency of teaching methods.

- Students should participate in activities that connect their school with parents and the community.

Meaningful participation of students in school management is explained in terms of the level of their participation in school decision-making. For example, students may initiate action and participate with adults in the decision-making process. Students' participation increases student motivation and helps them have higher aims for their education. . Participating in the school decision-making process also enables them to become aware of the needs and problems of poor students, and their participation in the PTA provides feedback on matters from the students' perspective. In addition, student participation enables them to take on the responsibility of becoming class captains (monitors) and to manage the class effectively in the teacher's absence (MOE 1998).

To conclude, the Government of Ethiopia has recently focused on improving school-based management through the devolution of education decision-making to school level. To achieve this objective, it has promoted the roles of various education stakeholders in decision-making. Specifically,

- It has tried to strengthen the relationship between the WEOs and the schools through monitoring and capacity-building schemes.

- The recent education programmes such as ESDP IV, GEQIP and SIP give more power to headteachers and administrators to coordinate the roles of communities, parents and local administration in school decision-making.

- The policy emphasizes the importance of the participation of communities, parents and teachers (through PTAs) for the improvement of critical decision-making at school level.

- As a key local administration unit working closely with the community, *kebele* administration is considered as one of the key stakeholders for enhancing school-based management.

- The participation of students in education management is also a way of promoting participatory decision-making at school level.

4. Findings

In this section of the paper, the main findings of the research are presented. Based on the data collected from headteachers and teachers, it looks at the role of stakeholders in improving school management and decision-making. It discusses the roles of headteachers and teachers in encouraging the communities, parents and local government authorities to become involved in school management and decision-making. The analysis also includes a discussion of the contribution of school clubs and other school-level student structures to school management.

4.1. The relationship between the Woreda Education Offices and schools

In this sub-section, an attempt is made to discuss the relationships between the WEOs and the schools, and how these relationships affect decision-making at school level, as perceived by headteachers and teachers.

Our interviews indicate that the WEO plays an important role in passing directives and regulations to schools. It is also involved in the provision of education equipment to schools when there are crucial shortages. As one headteacher from a rural school in Tigray pointed out, schools have little budget to procure this equipment. However, because of budget shortages and complex purchasing processes at the *woreda* level, equipment (e.g. chairs and tables) does not reach schools in a timely way.

The administrative procedures, the capacity of education officials at *woreda* level, the nature of their responsibility and accountability, their experience of education management and governance, communication channels, and their individual characteristics all affect the relationship between the WEO and the schools. For instance, the WEO is responsible for assigning teachers and other education staff to schools. The headteacher has to report the school's human resource needs to the WEO. The WEO is also responsible for facilitating teacher capacity building. However, as ten of the headteachers and 28 of the teachers interviewed reported, the WEO could not respond adequately to the requests to assign teachers, or to teachers' capacity-building issues. As one headteacher from a secondary school in Amhara indicated, though 16 teachers with a diploma and 64 teachers with a degree were available in his school, there were still shortages as the number of classes and student population are large. He added that the diploma teachers attended the summer programme, and so came back only after the first term of the school year had started. Therefore the school faced shortages of teachers at the beginning of the first term every year.

The shortage of qualified teachers in schools placed a heavy burden on the existing ones, and had an impact on the provision of quality education. One headteacher in a rural second-cycle primary school (in Amhara) explained the problem of teacher shortage as follows:

> In case of our school, we have shortage of teachers. Especially the school had no physics teachers. Even when teachers are assigned, they are transferred to other place without a replacement. So it is hard for students in Grade 7 and 8 to attend their class attentively. Teachers are replaced after some months. I think it is distracting for the children when teachers are changing frequently.

A teacher from a rural school in Oromia also reported a critical shortage of teachers, mainly for subjects like mathematics and English. The challenge was due to the fact that teachers leave for various reasons, including promotion and getting jobs outside teaching. Since the recruitment and deployment of teachers was the responsibility of the education bureau at the regional and zonal level, according to this teacher, the school's responsibility was only to report the problem to the WEO. He knew that the headteacher in his school had indeed reported the problem to the WEO but no practical measures had been taken for at least two months.

Headteachers in three rural schools in Tigray and two urban schools in the Southern Nations, Nationalities and People's Region (SNNPR) commented that the bureaucracy at the *woreda* level has become a challenge for day-to-day activities of the schools. The WEO wanted the schools to implement the policies and regulations imposed from above as they were, but the teachers and headteachers wanted to consider the local community contexts whenever new policies, such as SIP and GEQIP, were launched. According to one teacher from a school in Addis Ababa, 'formulating policy is quite different from implementing it'. This is understood to mean that it is important to take into account the local situation when policies are implemented at the local level. As a headteacher from a school in Hawassa City Administration pointed out, when new policies are to be implemented, parents and the communities should be well aware of the benefits of these policies for their children; students need to be introduced to the policy; and teachers should comment on the policy document before it is actually launched for implementation.

Therefore, it can be argued that the full participation of the community and the parents is needed in order to achieve quality education, and to help hold headteachers and school-based management to account. One teacher from a rural school in Amhara said that 'unless the community's awareness about the importance of quality education for their children is improved, the full implementation of the various education policies is far from achieved'.

A headteacher from a school in Addis Ababa suggested that schools and communities should be considered not only as the main place to implement policies and regulations, but also as the main source of evidence of whether the policies are understood, accepted and implemented in such a way as to achieve the expected result. In principle, the Government wants schools to become a place of learning and research in order to bring real change in the lives of those who are involved in teaching and learning (parents, teachers and students) (MOE 2007). In practice, this has not been achieved. One of the teachers from a rural primary school in Amhara region reported the importance of community participation in implementing education policies at school level as follows:

> Although, the rules and regulations do come from the district and the regional level, we face difficulties to implement it at the grassroots level. Even though the rules and regulations are good and correct, we have to take into consideration the community

contexts when we implement it. It is only by becoming more flexible that we are able to improve students' achievement.

To conclude, it is clear from the above discussion that critical decision-making at the school level faces challenges because of lack of proper support and coordination at the *woreda* level. The gap between the WEO and the school communities (teachers, headteachers and PTAs) is largely responsible for the loose coordination and communication between the higher government structure and the local institutions.

4.2. The role of the kebele administration in improving school governance and management

In principle the *kebele* administration plays a significant role in promoting parent and community participation in school management and decision-making. Particularly in rural areas, the schools and PTAs report the lists of children who dropped out to the *kebele* administration. Since the administration is in close contact with the communities, it has the power to influence parents to send their children to school and to reduce school drop-out rates.

One headteacher of a primary school in rural Tigray said that when students dropped out, the *kebele* administration helped the teachers by showing them the child's house so that the teachers could go and follow the situation up.

> First, teachers attempt to resolve the problem of drop-out by themselves; otherwise they refer the issue to the headteacher. The school solves the problem if it can do so. If the problem is beyond its capacity, it asks the support of the local government.

In some areas there was a drop-out committee in the school consisting of a community representative, a teacher, the local government authority and parents. The *kebele* administrator was the chairperson of this committee. In this regard, the community could easily be kept informed of new regulations and rules.

Teachers indicated that the *kebele* administration also played an important role in reducing the educational challenges facing children living in difficult situations. In both rural and urban areas, schools used the local administration to contact NGOs in order to get support for those children who were not able to cope well with their schooling because of social and economic problems. The *kebele* administration writes the support letters to NGOs and other relevant organisations based on the lists of children it obtains from the schools.

Interviews with three teachers in one rural school in Oromia indicate that these students are able to benefit properly from their education because of the efficient and effective coordination among the school, local government administration, NGOs, private organisations and their communities. In one rural primary school in Amhara, the headteacher reported that 331 students were able to continue their learning because of the material and financial support of two NGOs. According to this headteacher, schools were responsible for ensuring that students attended lessons properly and their performance improved; the local government administration was responsible for ensuring that the communities (students, parents) benefited from the delivery of educational services, and the NGOs involved in education had a duty to support the provision of quality schooling under the current NGO legislation in Ethiopia.

> The village capacity-building office collaborates with the school, and the PTA helps in organising the community to construct the school blocks. In addition, it helps in mobilising the community to build residence for teachers around the school. The

capacity-building office makes discussions with the community so that children can be registered on time.

(Headteacher from rural school in Amhara)

As the *kebele* administration had the power to influence the parents and other community members, headteachers and teachers wanted to go through this administration in order to resolve the majority of the challenges they faced with students and parents. For example, one teacher in a rural school in Oromia reported that, when students dropped out, it was very effective to use the *kebele* authorities. According to this teacher, the *kebele* authorities used both persuasive and coercive methods to persuade the parents to send their children to school. The coercive methods might include imposing fines on the parents whose children had dropped out. Therefore the *kebele* administration contributes to the management and governance of schools in ways that sometimes result in improvements in the quality of children's education.

4.3. The roles of headteachers and teachers in decision-making

Headteachers and teachers play pivotal roles in school management. One teacher from a rural school in Tigray pointed out that while the headteachers occupy a key position in making decisions at the school level, teachers are more responsible for making decisions at the classroom level (e.g. on attendance, absenteeism and drop-out). One secondary headteacher from a school in Amhara talked about the importance of headteachers and teachers for improving school management at school level as follows:

> The first indicator of good-quality schooling is the proficiency of the management and the headmaster of the school. The second indicator is the presence of well-motivated, committed and well-trained teachers. The third one is the full participation of the communities, parents and students. Additionally, the role of local government and NGOs is important to ensure better quality of education.

Headteachers and teachers are, therefore, involved in various kinds of school management and administration. In this sub-section, detailed analysis is given to the roles of the headteacher and teachers in improving school-based management and decision-making.

4.3.1. Coordinating the participation of communities

The policy gives a key responsibility to headteachers to ensure meaningful community participation in education management and governance. It is the role of the headteachers and teachers to empower community members to participate in school decision-making. One teacher from a rural school in Amhara said that, in addition to disseminating the new regulations, the headteacher in his school was responsible for coordinating and supervising the activities of all stakeholders. It is also part of the headteacher's role to persuade the wider community that education is important for their children. As explained by one primary school teacher from Addis Ababa:

> It is very difficult to improve school quality without changing the mentality and attitude of the society towards the importance of education for the lives of children. The main impediment in improving school quality lies on changing the mentality of the society.

The participation of communities in school management, as one headteacher said, helps to improve the relationship between the schools and communities; it also opens the door for cooperation, and creates the feeling of shared ownership.

4.3.2. Procuring and administering equipment and materials

Headteachers were also responsible for the administration of material resources in the school. As already discussed, the purchase of the education materials are carried out at the *woreda* level. But the actual utilisation and administration of the school's property is the responsibility of the headteachers, teachers and administrative staff in that school. Teachers reported shortages of education materials including textbooks and reference books. One teacher from a rural school in Tigray where there were serious shortages of equipment and teaching materials was very critical of this, saying that for teaching and learning to become more effective, education materials, including books, were needed. He added that having sufficient materials in schools motivated the teachers to teach better.

When asked how schools could address the shortage of material resources, one headteacher in a rural school in Amhara said:

> The community should have active participation to help the school in fulfilling material resources. The headteacher should work closely with the community in order to mobilise the community resources. The headteacher, the teachers and the PTAs should also mobilise resources from non- governmental organisations (NGOs) and private organisations. The headteachers should lead and coordinate this activity effectively and efficiently by creating strong linkages with all stakeholders.

But a teacher from one rural school in Tigray argued that the provision of education materials including books and reference books was the responsibility of the WEO, adding that the WEO should provide all necessary materials to schools in a timely way.

4.3.3. School budget management

Another major area of school management and administration in which headteachers and teachers play key roles is managing the school budget. The main budget is for the salaries of teachers and administrative staff. The *woreda* allocates very limited budgets for core activities such as maintenance, the purchase of equipment and furniture, the building of new classrooms, etc. The recently approved school grants had still not been allocated to the schools studied by Young Lives in 2010 when these data were collected. However, some headteachers were aware that grants would be allocated in the near future. But four of the headteachers and six of the teachers from the rural schools were not sure whether the grants would be given directly to schools or managed by the WEOs as usual.

Because of the shortage of budget from the Government, headteachers and administrators struggled to meet the material and equipment needs of their schools. Budget shortage also prevented the schools from paying incentives to teachers when they worked overtime. As one headteacher from a rural school in Oromia said, his school did not have sufficient funds to purchase school materials and to pay for extra-hours work. He argued that schools should receive subsidies from the WEO and contributions from communities.

The budget shortage is particularly challenging in rural primary schools where community contributions are small and students are exempted from paying school fees. Of course, secondary schools are in a better position, both in raising funds and management of financial resources, because they impose school fees on students and do various income-generating activities. A headteacher from one school in Amhara gave the following account about how his school overcomes budget shortages:

The number of teachers in this woreda, for instance, was 1,300 and the salary allocated for these teachers was around 17 million birr. So, it was impossible to allocate budget for non-salary activities. If we want to buy a plasma amplifier [in secondary schools, students learn through electronic media, which uses loudspeaker], we had to request the cabinet [the local government council]. If we faced more serious problems, we had to conduct discussions with the parents. So, they decided to contribute money to fill the gap of financial constraint. We needed a photocopy machine for the secondary school. So, we bought this photocopy machine with 45,000 birr [from the money contributed by communities]. With the support of parents [and communities] we were able to purchase around 245 combined desks, some books and stationery materials.

(headteacher from a rural secondary school)

4.3.4. Teacher management

Teacher management is one of the key aspects of school management. Effective systems of teacher development, supervision, and monitoring and evaluation need critical decision-making at school level. The school is also responsible for arranging training for teachers and other education staff. Interviews with teachers indicate that the capacity-building activities are effective in most cases but sometimes the selection criteria for teacher development programmes are not clear. It is the headteacher's responsibility to identify the teachers who are eligible for the various development and training programmes, but the responsibility for selecting the candidates and making the final decision lies with the WEO. As a result, both teachers and headteachers are not clear about the procedure and the selection criteria. Thirty-five of the teachers reported that while some teachers have participated in several different training and teacher development programmes, others have only had a few chances. One teacher from Hawassa City Administration said that it was social connections, personal affiliation and political attachment that enabled people to get training.

As already discussed, the teacher shortages, poor motivation, lack of clarity about selection criteria for training and development programmes, poor teacher management and control, and lack of appropriate facilities for teachers, especially in rural areas, are the major challenges around teacher management. The overall effects of all of these are low teacher morale, high levels of teacher absenteeism and loss of desire to continue in the profession.

4.3.5. Coordinating support for children in disadvantaged circumstances

One of the areas where headteachers and teachers make critical decisions is in supporting children living in difficult situations. When we talk of improving education decision-making at all levels, we mean that the system should bring positive changes in the lives of the students. The role of teachers and headteachers is crucial in this regard. As one teacher from a rural school in Amhara reported:

Those students who have problems of writing and reading are those who have stationery problems. Thus, the school has to mobilise resources from the village administration and the community for the benefit of these children. Or else, there should be a school club that collects money from the students every month and helps these students. The school should also see a way to get support from NGOs.

In nine of the rural schools studied, teachers and headteachers have taken initiatives to help disadvantaged children to attend their lessons properly. Teachers have played significant roles in referring these students to NGOs. In one rural school in Oromia, clubs used the

income of school tea rooms for the purchase of education materials for students struggling to obtain school materials and uniforms. Clubs and PTAs created community awareness to support these children within the community. But, as one headteacher from a rural school in Tigray reported, 'strong collaboration and support from the *woreda* and kebele administration is crucial to resolve the education problems of vulnerable and orphan children'.

4.3.6 The importance of appointing well-trained headteachers

While headteachers do play important roles in the day-to-day management of the schools, some do not have the skills to take on this challenge. Some headteachers are not efficient in the management of the school resources (human, material, financial, etc.). Some of them do not want to report problems to the WEO, probably because they want to please the higher officials by not complaining too much, as one teacher from a rural school in Oromia explained:

> The headteacher should inform the education office about the major problems that have happened in the school, and the office should give timely solutions to the problems. However, the headteacher in this school does not want to complain to WEO probably because he wants to be liked by the officers in the woreda. This is a challenge we are facing in this school.

Moreover, teachers complained that although the appointment of teachers needs to be based on competency and efficiency, in practice the appointment of headteachers is often not based on purely professional criteria. Political affiliation, special social attachment and networking were suggested to be the main criteria used. As one teacher from a rural school in Amhara reported:

> Everyone cannot be a manager. For instance, I can't be a manager. I am not trained [in educational management]. If they assign me to manage the school, I may perform [the work] intuitively, which could be disastrous. I should be trained before being assigned as a headteacher.

4.3.7. Some achievements of headteachers

Though in many schools headteachers failed to improve critical decision-making at school level, there were headteachers who performed well in certain respects. The activities of a school in one small town in Oromia can be taken as a good example. The headteacher in this school said that in the last three years the school had made good progress in achieving quality teaching and learning. The progress was mainly achieved by encouraging teamwork and making the staff more responsible and accountable for their work.

> In our school we created a condition for education staff to work as a team. There are different members of staff that have different positions in the school. These include the headteacher, vice-headteacher, unit leader, various department heads, etc. We have divided activities for each department but to accomplish it with team spirit so as to make our school a model school in the town. Accordingly, we have been able to make the school a model among the three government primary schools found in the town. As you see our school environment is attractive; it is very green. We have been working to achieve these things since 2007. This has increased students' interest to learn or attend. In a short period of time, we have achieved remarkable changes through unity and teamwork.

(Headteacher from a school in Oromia)

A teacher from one rural primary school in Tigray also confirms the importance of teamwork in the school in which he was teaching.

> The headteacher works very closely with the teachers, and the teachers work very smoothly with students. Teachers report any problem to the headteacher, and we discuss and solve the problems. We work as a team and in unity. The headteacher's office also closely follows up our activities.

We can therefore conclude that, generally, headteachers and teachers play key roles in improving school management and in involving communities, parents, and the local administration in matters related to school decision-making. Yet despite the efforts made by the headteachers and teachers to involve these stakeholders in decision-making, shortages of budget, school materials and teachers have become serious challenges. The appointment of inefficient and inexperienced headteachers to schools is considered to be an obstacle mainly in the rural areas. Moreover, lack of coordination and supervision from the *woreda* has created some gaps in implementing regulations and directives passed from above.

4.4. Student clubs and parliaments

In recent years students have begun to play a significant part in decision-making in schools by participating in activities such as school clubs and student parliaments. Young Lives school-based research has produced some important evidence on how students 'participation contributes to the improvement of decision-making at the school level. Table 2 indicates the types of clubs usually found in Ethiopian schools and the way they increase students' participation in decision-making.

Table 2.   *Types and functions of student clubs*

Type of club	Role and function
Girls' club	Works on reducing the problems of female students, for example by creating awareness to reduce harmful traditional practices such as early marriage and abduction, and on promoting female students' participation in school.
Human rights club	Works on the protection of child rights and the democratisation of decision-making at school level.
Pedagogy club	Prepares teaching aids - the drawings made by this club are used for teaching in classrooms.
Anti-HIV/AIDS club	Focuses on awareness creation of HIV/AIDS and girls' reproductive health; works with the community on these issues during school vacations.
Sport club	Responsible for promoting sport activities in schools.
Charity club	Searches for ways to support children living in difficult situations (orphans, poor children); attempts to promote community contributions; runs tea rooms in the schools to raise money for charitable purposes; makes contact with NGOs and private companies to support needy children.
Media and communication club	Presents entertainments to students and teachers every morning; disseminates messages on local, national and international issues through school mini-media.
Work and sanitation club	Works towards changing the school environment into a green, clean and attractive setting.
Drop-out club	Works to make the community aware of the importance of enrolling their children in school and reducing student drop-out.
Competition club	Organises and promotes question and answer competitions among students in the school.

Source: Extracts from teacher and headteacher interviews, Young Lives Ethiopia Qualitative School Survey, 2010.

School clubs have tried to help the headteachers and teachers to raise funds for different education programmes. Charity clubs, for example, have worked very closely with the headteachers and teachers to find ways to support children living in difficult circumstances (orphans, poor children, street children, etc.). They contact NGOs and private companies to ask them to support the needy children. In addition, they establish tea rooms in the school, and the income obtained from the sale of tea and coffee is used for charitable purposes. The members of this club also attempt to obtain community contributions for schools in their locality. As members live within the community, the school administration and teachers have involved the students in raising community awareness about the importance of quality education for their children.

As one teacher from a rural school in Oromia region reported, clubs used different strategies to disseminate their messages to students, teachers and communities. The most common mechanisms were pictures, poems, dramas, music and personal communication. Personal communication was used when they discussed issues with communities and parents.

Students' involvement in school clubs has helped them not only to participate more fully in school affairs; it has also increased their participation in school decision-making. As one headteacher from a rural secondary school in Amhara indicates, clubs have played crucial roles in moving school governance towards a more participatory approach. The objective of establishing clubs in school, as one teacher from a rural school in Amhara reported, is to 'make students more responsible in their learning and to improve their participation in school decision-making'.

The clubs have also helped the students to improve their behaviour and contributed to the improvement of teaching and learning in their schools. One female teacher from a rural school in Oromia said that clubs helped their members to become more responsible, to adopt community norms and values, and to work collaboratively with parents, communities and the school administration to ensure that the rights of children and other citizens were protected and respected. She added that the clubs also worked towards promoting the knowledge and personal development of the participating students. One teacher from a rural school in Tigray added:

> Clubs have responsibilities to help student members to enhance decision-making power, to improve their knowledge and personalities, and develop confidence of explaining their ideas, opinions and feelings.

Teachers were positive towards school clubs because the clubs have played crucial roles in reducing much of the burden on the teachers. For example, as one teacher from a secondary school in Amhara reported, clubs have greatly contributed to reducing student drop-out and absenteeism. The environmental and sanitation clubs in schools studied in Oromia and Amhara achieved great success in making the school environment and classrooms conducive to teaching and learning. Some clubs, like the child rights, literature and drama, sport and aesthetic and anti-HIV/AIDS clubs, have become important instruments in making students more responsible citizens. They have taught students about their rights and responsibilities through drama, poems, music, literature, pamphlets and other means. Some clubs were also said to have contributed to the decline of disciplinary problems in schools because they made students aware of the importance of refraining from becoming involved in illegal and criminal activities. One teacher from Hawassa City Administration even said that 'clubs contribute to the improvement of the security conditions in schools and in the neighbourhoods'.

According to headteachers and teachers in all the schools studied, the clubs were coordinated by the teachers. The leader of each club was, however, a student. Each club leader reported to a teacher who in turn reported to a headteacher. The club leader was elected by the members of the club. Students had the right to become members of any club. Club members had the responsibility to be involved in the activities of the club in which they became members. Non-club members had the right to participate in the events run by the clubs.

In addition to clubs, other student bodies, particularly student parliaments, worked closely with the school administration to improve decisions in school. While student clubs were very active in both rural and urban schools, student parliaments seem to be more prominent in rural schools because the issue of child rights is more important in the rural areas where the majority of the population is still not educated. Like the student clubs, student parliaments were involved in various kinds of school activities including school decision-making. According to five of the teachers interviewed in schools in Amhara, the student parliaments had worked very closely with teachers and headteachers on promoting child rights in schools and in the communities. In three of the schools visited by the fieldworkers in Oromia, student parliaments were invited to major meetings organised by the WEO, and *Woreda* Women's and Children Affairs Office to listen to quarterly, biannual and annual reports of the district governments. At those events, they had the right to make comments on issues affecting children in their communities.

In schools, parliament members worked closely with the clubs, teachers and headteachers. They had some responsibility for creating awareness in their communities about child labour, child abuse, gender inequalities and HIV/AIDS. They can listen to the problems encountered by students in the schools, and discuss these problems with the school administration. But sometimes, the parliament members could also incite students to become involved in gang actions, particularly when they felt their rights were violated. One teacher from a secondary school in rural Amhara said that members of the parliament could play important roles in mobilising students for good actions but they also had the power to form gangs which might adversely affect the smooth operation of schools.

In conclusion, clubs and the student parliaments were seen to play a crucial role in developing the capacity of students to make important decisions on issues concerning their lives, their schools and their communities. As one teacher from a primary school in Oromia explained, the participation of students in school affairs is an important step towards the improvement of decision-making and the strengthening of democratic participation at school level. The role of the student parliament was also an indication of the growing importance of students' representation in community and school affairs. As one teacher from a rural school in Amhara explained, 'The student parliament helps students to make important decisions about their future; the clubs and committees help students to develop self-confidence.' Therefore, we can argue that the student clubs can increase the community's awareness of the importance of education and children's rights, and, as teachers and headteachers reported, school clubs and student parliaments have influenced the decision-making process at school level.

4.5. The participation of parents and communities

Efforts to involve parents and communities in school decision-making are a recent development in Ethiopia. Therefore it requires considerable effort from all the bodies concerned (the Government, schools, NGOs) to make parents and communities aware of the

importance of strengthening school management and administration for improving the quality of education for their children. A headteacher in one rural school in Tigray said that his local community played a key role in education management and decision-making, and contributed to the achievement of quality education through their involvement in school affairs. He said that community leaders participated in mobilising parents to reduce student absenteeism and drop-out. A teacher from another rural school in Tigray also reported that parents and communities supported children living in difficult situations to get access to quality schooling.

Teachers and headteachers maintain that relations between schools and communities have greatly improved in the last few years. The introduction of new education policies and programmes that aim to decentralise education decision-making has played an important role in the increasing participation of communities.

As already highlighted, communities and parents play pivotal roles in financial contributions and the provision of school materials. They also recruit contract teachers from the community. In rural areas, they have recruited guards and part-time teachers. In the schools we studied, parents were involved in the building of new classrooms and other buildings. A headteacher from one rural school in Amhara reported how community contributions and school fees helped the school to address budget constraints:

> To improve the teaching and learning condition in our school, we have mobilised financial resources from the communities and parents. Even though they are not standardised ones [not in good quality], we bought books with 25,000 birr from the money contributed by the community. In addition, parents have contributed 20,000 birr, which was also used for the purchase of books. However, these couldn't resolve the lack of resources for the construction of a laboratory, a library and to buy additional books for the secondary level. To reduce the problem, we decided that each student should pay 20 birr every year. With a student population of 3,500, this amount would be a big contribution and helps the school to improve many things.

According to one teacher from an urban primary school in Oromia, in order to improve school management and administration, the meaningful participation of the community is vital. He thought the community should feel a sense of ownership for school management and administration, and added that the active participation of the community in school decision-making helps to reduce the major challenges that most schools have been facing. Community participation would ultimately help to ensure sustainable improvements in the quality of education and decision-making, and the full participation of the community would lead to the development of democratic decision-making at school level. Another teacher from a rural primary school in Tigray reported that the participation of the communities in school affairs encouraged teachers and headteachers to become more efficient and effectives. One headteacher from a rural primary school in Oromia reported what he expected from the community, and what the school community expected from him:

> As a government employee, I am responsible to execute my duties with integrity and passion. As a headteacher, I am responsible to shape the life of students. I have the duty to serve my community. In return the community motivates me. I have earned immense respect from the communities and parents. Their encouragement and moral support help me to love and enjoy my job.

Though the awareness of communities and parents has increased over time, more efforts are still needed to ensure their full participation in school affairs. This is clearly reflected in a comment of one teacher from a school in Addis Ababa. He said that not all parents had similar

awareness levels about the importance of education for their children. There are some parents who can be considered as role models in terms of ensuring that their children do not drop out; they understand that education improves the life of their children. Other parents still have very low awareness and do not give priority to the education of their children.

Another teacher from a rural school in Amhara pointed out that in the scattered remote rural areas teachers were fed-up of travelling from house to house and village to village to discuss education programmes with parents and communities. In some cases, the parents and the communities were not happy to spend much time with the teacher visitors. Moreover, teachers were forced to go to villages to talk to the community members without any incentives. In urban schools, it is even more time-consuming to find drop-out children because the children might live far away from the school.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The review of national education policy indicates that in recent years Ethiopia has shown a commitment to strengthening school-based management. In both ESDP IV and GEQIP, school management is one of the pillars of programme interventions to improve participatory decision-making in both primary and secondary schools. The policy empowers the headteacher to lead the activities of various stakeholders involved in school decision-making. As clearly explained in ESDP IV and the SIP, the headteacher is responsible for managing and controlling the human, financial and material resources of the school. Headteachers are also responsible for ensuring that communities, students and local administration participate in decision-making. The WEO is given the role of supervising, monitoring and evaluating the activities of the schools, and of ensuring that the schools are provided with the necessary human, material and financial resources.

Our findings also confirm that the attempt to strengthen school-based management and administration has made good progress. However, the presence of weak communications between the WEO and the schools has constrained the process of devolving critical decision-making to school level. As teachers and headteachers reported, there have been communication gaps between the WEO and the schools. The teachers, in particular, were not happy with the support provided by the WEO for improving teacher capacity. Teachers expected that the WEO would select individuals for professional development programmes on the basis of their merits, but they asserted that in practice, selection was based on political affiliation and personal connections. This contributed to their dissatisfaction with their profession.

Headteachers also said that the participation of the *kebele* authorities in decision-making helped to improve the relationship between schools and communities. The *kebele* administration plays a vital role in making parents and communities aware of new education policies. In many of the schools studied, mainly in rural areas, schools were able to increase enrolment and reduce drop-out because of the increasing participation of the *kebele* Education and Capacity Building Board in school decision-making. The administration has also contacted NGOs and private companies and persuaded them to give financial and material support to schools.

Though the policy gives full power to headteachers to manage and control the overall activities of the school, in practice various factors have constrained the headteachers' ability to implement policies and regulations properly. These include headteachers' limited management capacity, lack of transparency in their appointment, shortages of human, material and financial resources, lack of adequate support from the WEO, and a low level of awareness among communities.

It is true that the policy encourages the full participation of communities and parents in school management and decision-making. However, in practice, parents' and communities' participation is achieved only through the PTAs. Even the PTAs are led by the teachers, and the community members in the PTAs have little power to influence decisions at school level. Moreover, communities and parents, mainly in rural areas, are not aware of the importance of their involvement in school management for improving the way schools are run and therefore the education of their children.

Despite these challenges, headteachers and teachers have played vital roles in promoting the roles of parents, community members and students in school-based decision-making. Headteachers have taken responsibility for managing the teachers, administering the financial and material resources of the schools, and leading the PTAs and other stakeholders to improve school decision-making. Interviews with teachers and headteachers indicate that as the head of the school, the headteacher has led the various committees, associations and clubs in the school. The school bodies also communicate with WEOs and other government structures through the headteacher. It is mainly the responsibility of the headteacher to oversee the actual teaching and learning activities in the school. He or she should closely monitor whether good working communication is maintained between the teachers, students and other members of the school community. New directives of education policy and regulation are communicated to the teachers, students and communities through headteachers.

As already discussed, different actors play different roles in school decision making. Students are one of the key stakeholders in an education system. All kinds of decision-making and governance practices at school level directly affect the students. The clubs and student parliaments were seen as playing crucial roles in developing the decision-making capacity of the students. The participation of students in school affairs through student clubs was viewed as an important step towards strengthening democratic participation in schools. The role of the student parliament was also an indication of the growing importance of students' representation in the community and school affairs. Student parliaments were thought to help students develop self-confidence and plan their future. Therefore, it appears that student clubs can increase the community's awareness of the importance of education and children's rights. Plus, as teachers and headteachers reported, school clubs and student parliaments have influenced the decision-making process at school level.

This study indicates that even though Ethiopia has only recently initiated a programme of involving parents and communities in school management, in most of the schools studied, communities have played significant roles in school affairs. Teachers and headteachers saw these changes as a vital move towards the decentralisation of decision-making. Of course, the increasing participation of communities in school management is achieved both through persuasive methods (by using student clubs and teachers) and coercive ones (by using the *kebele* administration). However, whatever the mechanism, the movement in this area has increased enrolment and attendance, and financial and material contributions.

Yet despite these important changes in school management and decision-making, completing the devolution of critical decision-making to school level still requires major efforts both from the Government and school communities. Below are some suggestions for improving school management and critical decision-making at school level.

- **Improving the relationship between the school and the WEO can reduce the problems related to human, material and financial resources**

  As the first line of contact between the schools and regional education bureau, the WEO should be strengthened in human and financial resources. The supervision and reporting mechanisms at the *woreda* level should be revisited and reframed in a way to improve relations between the WEOs and school management. The selection criteria for teachers' capacity building and training should be transparent, and be based on individual merit. The WEO should work on the further decentralisation of decision-making to the school level, where the headteachers, students and PTAs can play a greater role.

- **The *kebele* administration must continue to play a leading role in ensuring community participation in school decision-making**

  Strengthening the role of the *kebele* administration in school management can enhance participatory decision-making. It should use mainly persuasive methods (instead of coercive method) to make parents and communities aware of the importance of education for their children. Its role in raising funds to cover budget shortages should also be strengthened.

- **Headteachers should be given full authority over teacher management and the control of material and financial resources**

  For school-based management to work, the headteacher has to be given real authority. Headteachers should therefore possess the management skills to provide leadership and manage the school's human, financial and material resources properly, and should be appointed on the basis of their experience and qualifications. Headteachers should not be seen just as the implementers of decisions imposed from above; rather, they should be given greater power to make critical decisions and to encourage stakeholders to participate in school management and administration. But the headteachers should ensure that a proper relationship is maintained with *woreda* offices and other government structures. It is also mainly the responsibility of the headteacher to oversee the actual teaching and learning activities in the classroom.

- **Teachers should be seen as a driving force in improving school management**

  As teachers play an important role in school management, we cannot overlook their contribution to decision-making. Teachers have an important role to play in helping to increase community participation in school management. They lead the activities of PTAs and help to mobilise community to improve student enrolment and reduce drop-out. Plus their role in coordinating student clubs is crucial. Therefore, teachers have to get the necessary training and support in the areas of management, information communication systems and public relations. Parents and communities should give full recognition to the role of teachers in teaching and learning. Teachers should receive incentives for non-teaching activities.

- **The role of students in school decision-making should be strengthened**

  School clubs and student parliaments can contribute to the participation of students in decision-making. They have to continue to play roles in ensuring that all school-age children in their communities are enrolled, attending and participating in school. Their role in promoting student participation in learning and teaching should be appreciated and strengthened. Their role in creating democratic citizens should be given a special place. Above all, headteachers, teachers and communities should continue to support the activities of school clubs, and guide them properly for the benefit of teaching and learning.

- **Community participation in school management will improve decision-making**

  Headteachers and teachers should continue to work very closely with parents and communities to improve participatory decision-making at school level.

  - Parents and communities need to be aware of how important education is for their children's future, both in terms of personal development and expanded opportunities.

  - If parents take more interest in schools, schools will be more accountable and the quality of education will improve.

  - Schools may be able to raise money from parents if they see the benefits for their children.

  - Education might be more relevant and suitable for children in a particular location if parents have a say in what is taught and how that is done.

  - However, there should be limits on the rights of parents and communities to determine what happens in school, as decisions need to be made in the interests of all students. Headteachers should have the ultimate authority.

In general, it can be said that balancing the rights and responsibilities of all stakeholders is complex and further thought is needed, both by policymakers and by stakeholders themselves; however, devolving management to school level and increasing the participation of students and local communities is a step in the right direction.

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School Management and Decision-making in Ethiopian Government Schools: Evidence from the Young Lives Qualitative School Survey

Both academic and policy documents indicate that poor school management and decision-making at local level are major challenges in creating equitable access to good-quality education in Ethiopia. In principle, educational provision can be improved through better management practices, transparency in the use of resources and accountability to all stakeholders (community, parents, students, teachers, etc.).

This study focuses on school management and decision-making in government schools and is based on the qualitative data collected in 2010 as part of the Young Lives school survey.

The paper examines the extent to which the involvement of different stakeholders in schools (teachers, headteachers, parents, students, local government administration, etc.) impacts upon critical decision-making at school level. The paper uses qualitative data collected as part of the recent Young Lives school-based research from five of the 20 sentinel sites. Specifically it uses data collected through in-depth interviews with teachers and headteachers.

It is only in recent years that the Ethiopian Government has paid attention to the importance of school management and school-level decision-making. Research in the area of school management is almost non-existent in Ethiopia. However, various reports and policy documents prepared by the Federal Ministry of Education clearly indicate the extent to which the Government has been focusing on improving school management in recent years (MOE 2005; MOE 2010a). The paper examines how headteachers and teachers contribute to the strengthening of the day-to-day management and supervision of schools attended by Young Lives case study children.

Young Lives
An International Study of Childhood Poverty