

Community Initiatives in Education: goals, dimensions and linkages with governments

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ABSTRACT *Recent years have brought increasing advocacy of community participation in education. This has been a particularly common theme in policy documents, not only of governments but also of international agencies. Among the main goals has been a desire to spread the burden of resourcing, though advocates also commonly have in mind the volume, relevance and impact of schooling. However, policies often fail to differentiate between different types of communities. Further, the communities' knowledge bases and motives for engaging in educational work may be very different from the governments'. Thus, while in some situations communities and governments collaborate in harmony, other situations lead to dissonance. This paper notes experiences in a range of countries, and stresses the need for policies to take account of the diversity of circumstances.*

Review of the policy documents of governments and international agencies reveals increasing advocacy of community participation in education. This advocacy has partly been based on a desire to spread the burden of resourcing education systems, but has also aimed to increase the volume, relevance and impact of schooling. Much of the policy framework surrounding these moves has been associated with shifts towards decentralisation of responsibility for education.

The arena is more complex than is commonly supposed by many macro-level policy documents. One problem is that the concepts of community used by different actors may be imprecise and inconsistent with each other. A second problem is that the perspectives of the communities may be very different from those of the governments and international agencies. Thirdly, the dynamics of operation may have wide variations even within particular localities; and fourthly, the outcomes of community initiatives do not always match those anticipated by the policy-advocates. This paper takes examples from a wide range of countries to illustrate these observations. The paper notes on the one hand situations in which government and community initiatives may operate harmoniously with each other, and on the other hand situations in which the knowledge and values of each side are inconsistent with each other and perhaps even in conflict.

The paper is mainly concerned with education at the primary and secondary levels. Discussion commences by noting some international and national statements on the roles of communities in education. It then turns to concepts of community, noting diversity in definitions. Next, the paper presents some motives for community activity in education,

and some models through which community inputs are channelled. In some settings communities chiefly supplement the resources of state-run schools, but in other settings communities operate their own schools. The range of patterns naturally leads to diversity in outcomes. From this diversity, it is possible to identify major categories of situations and to link these to the capacity and attitudes of governments. Having considered these points, the paper concludes by returning to the international and national statements on the roles of communities in education. It notes points of harmony and of dissonance, and links this to the question of whose knowledge and whose values are permitted dominance in education sectors.

Macro-level Advocacy

Community activity in education has a long history. Indeed, a perspective of centuries rather than decades would generally show a rather minor role for governments until the twentieth century, with schooling before that time being mainly provided by churches and other voluntary agencies (Archer, 1984; Cummings & Riddell, 1994). Many colonial education systems were at least partly based on community inputs (Murray, 1929; King, 1976; Sinclair with Lillis, 1980).

During the period following World War II, the work of governments expanded until governments were widely expected to play the dominant—and in some countries almost exclusive—role in providing education. Support for this expanded role was contained in various international resolutions, including the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, the 1959 Declaration of the Rights of the Child, and the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

However, the last quarter of the twentieth century brought a swing of the pendulum. As the financial and other limitations of government capacity gained wider recognition, advocacy of community participation again became stronger. The Declaration of the 1990 World Conference on Education for All (WCEFA) stated that:

Partnerships at the community level ... should be encouraged; they can help harmonize activities, utilize resources more effectively, and mobilize additional financial and human resources where necessary. (WCEFA Secretariat, 1990, p. 58)

A related sentiment was expressed in the Delhi Declaration (UNESCO 1994), which emanated from an Education for All summit of leaders in nine high-population countries. The preamble to the Declaration stated (clause 2.8) that:

Education is, and must be, a societal responsibility, encompassing governments, families, communities and non-governmental organizations alike; it requires the commitment and participation of all, in a grand alliance that transcends diverse opinions and political positions.

Similar statements have been made by bilateral agencies. For example, the UK government's Department for International Development (DFID, 2001, p. 19) stressed the desirability of:

greater participation of parents and communities in the education of their children [which] plays a central role in stimulating education at a local level, in building pressure for improving quality, and in developing accountability.

Comparable statements have also been made by many other governments. For example, a 1997 South African publication stated (pp. 8–9) that:

An important aspect of the Schools Act is the principle that there must be a partnership between all stakeholders who have an interest in education. These are the State, parents, learners, educators, other members of the community in the vicinity of your school, special education bodies and the private sector ... Parents, learners, educators and others cannot expect the State to give everything and do everything in the school. After all, parents and members of the community are often in the best position to see what the school really needs and what the problems in the school are.

Diversity in Definitions

One major problem with the above set of statements is that the word ‘community’ can have different meanings to different people and in different circumstances. Hillery’s classic 1955 paper (p. 113) identified 94 alternative definitions of community, and noted that the list was still not exhaustive. More recently, Wolf *et al.* (1997, pp. 9–10) have observed that communities may expand or contract according to needs and situations.

For the purposes of this paper, the most important types of communities are:

- *geographic communities*, which embrace the individuals living in relatively small areas such as villages, districts or suburbs;
- *ethnic and racial groups*, especially ones which are minorities and which have self-help support structures;
- *religious groups* of various kinds;
- *communities based on shared family concerns*, including parents’ shared concerns for the welfare of their children; and
- *communities based on shared philanthropy*, including specifically-designated charitable and/or political bodies.

Some communities gain formal status by forming Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) or Community-Based Organisations (CBOs). In the school sector, such bodies have become increasingly prominent (Bowden, 1997; Bartlett, 2000). In some settings the NGOs and CBOs operate in partnership with governments, but in other settings they are critical of governments and see themselves as alternative instruments for the delivery of education (Miller-Grandvaux & Yoder, 2002).

Other communities do not have formal bodies through which voices are heard and collective decisions reached. Indeed, in many settings it is difficult to state where the communities begin and end. Moreover, communities are rarely homogenous. Most communities have sub-groups which do not always operate in harmony; and even in tightly defined geographic areas, some individuals and groups may not consider that residence in a particular location necessarily makes them part of a community. Such ambiguities can raise major issues during attempts to operationalise broader policy statements.

Motives and Models

The motives of communities for engaging in educational activities may differ significantly from the motives of governments and international agencies which advocate

community participation. This may best be explained by considering different types of situations.

In many cases, community inputs to school systems are a response to lack of government action. Communities in these situations feel that the main responsibility for education lies with their governments, but the communities observe that the governments are either unable or unwilling to make adequate provision. These communities realise that if they wish to secure schooling with adequate quality, or in some cases any schooling at all, then they must themselves bridge the gaps.

Community inputs under such headings may be divided into two groups. On the one hand are situations in which communities provide supplementary resources to state education systems; and on the other hand are schools which are operated by communities outside the state systems.

Striking examples of the former category include the following:

- *Cambodia's* school system is officially operated by the state, but relies heavily on the inputs of households and communities. In 1997, households and communities were estimated to provide nearly 60.0% of the resources used for primary schooling (Bray, 1999, p. 127).
- *Bhutan's* school system is also basically operated by the state. However, the authorities differentiate between primary schools, in which almost all costs are met by the state, and community schools in which communities provide a significant proportion of inputs. In 1998, 115 community primary schools operated in parallel with 128 fully-government primary schools (Bhutan, 1999, p. 25).
- In *China*, 32.4% of primary teachers and 7.4% of lower secondary teachers in 1994 were 'minban' personnel, most of whom were employed by collectives and village communities (China, 2000, p. 55).

In the second category, communities operate schools outside the state system. For example:

- In *Togo*, 19.1% of schools in 1998/99 were classified as community self-help institutions, and a further 14.7% were operated by religious bodies mainly on their own resources (Gbogbotchi *et al.*, 2000, p. 24).
- In mainland *Tanzania*, 42.9% of the secondary schools in 1999 were classified as community institutions. Another 38.0% were private institutions, and only 11.3% were government schools. The remaining 7.8% were seminaries run by religious bodies (Chediel *et al.*, 2000, p. 65).
- In *Zambia*, the first-known community school as defined by the Zambia Community Schools Secretariat was founded in Lusaka in 1982 but further developments did not occur until the 1990s. During that decade, many community schools were established, particularly in rural areas. In 1998 the Secretariat listed 200 schools serving over 25 000 children (Kelly, 1998, p. 23).
- In *Malawi*, community-run primary schools unassisted by the government comprised 20.5% of all primary schools in 1992/93, and enrolled 9.5% of all primary pupils (Malawi, 1993, pp. 8, 30).

These four examples refer to 'Western-type' schools; but in addition are religious schools, particularly Islamic ones, operated along very different lines (Belambri, 1988; Cook, 1999; Easton, 1999). In some societies children attend both Western-type and Islamic schools, but in other societies Islamic institutions provide the only schooling received by children. In this respect, Islamic schools have arguably been of particular

significance in countries with low enrolment rates in Western-type systems, such as Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Niger and Somalia. In some settings, communities consider Western-type schooling a waste of time and labour, or even an active threat, particularly because of the values that it imparts. The perspectives of interviewees in a Gambian survey would have echoes elsewhere:

If you send your sons to the Tubab [Western-type] school you lose farmhands. The madrassa [Islamic school] is better for farmers. There is no teaching in the rainy season. (The Gambia, 1995, p. 28)

Girls in the Tubab-schools hang out with boyfriends. They are out of control and might end up getting pregnant. In the madrassa the girls are taught good morals and behaviour. (p. 24)

Madrassa education is good, especially for girls. They are taught how to pray and they learn the Islamic obligations of women. If girls are not taught these things, they will never become good wives and mothers. (p. 54)

In the madrassa the children are taught how to be respectful and how to greet elders. They will know how to be good members of the community. (p. 54)

At the bottom of the system is a Koranic school, which in The Gambia is called a *dara*. Madrassas are higher-level institutions which in some cases include secular subjects and offer teaching up to the secondary level. Many madrassas are entirely village-based organisations, though half of the madrassas in the survey cited here (The Gambia, 1995, p. 55) had received external support from Islamic foundations at some point in their histories.

In different countries, the perspectives of governments on these institutions has varied. In general, governments have given little recognition to Koranic schools and madrassas, neither counting them in official statistics nor considering them part of 'real' education systems. However, some governments have endeavoured to work with religious authorities to add subjects such as arithmetic and writing in the Roman script to the curriculum of the Islamic institutions. This has been the case in Nigeria and Senegal, for example.

Variations may also be found in government reactions to community inputs to Western-type school systems. The governments of Cambodia and Bhutan have generally valued the community participation, since the authorities have recognised that they could not operate their state education systems without it. In Togo, by contrast, the government was initially negative towards the community schools. In the 1980s, when the number of such schools was small, they were officially described as 'spontaneous', and then 'clandestine' (Gbogbotchi *et al.*, 2000, p. 4). A similar vocabulary was used in Chad (Esquieu & Péano, 1994, p. 32), and reflected a perception that the community schools were somehow subversive of government standards and official goals for education. This was partly because the schools paid their teachers at much lower levels, and were qualitatively weak. Only in 1997 did the Togolese government give the schools stronger recognition and status, renaming them in official publications *écoles d'initiative locale*.

In China, the central authorities have declared an intent to phase out *minban* teachers on the grounds that many are of poor quality, which not only undermines state goals for the education system but also maintains regional and social inequalities. However, some communities, especially ones faced by resource constraints, have simply relabelled their *minban* teachers, instead calling them substitute teachers. For example, in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, the number of *minban* teachers decreased by 28 000

between 1994 and 1998, but the number of substitute teachers increased by 22 000. The national government has recognised the need for flexibility in policies, observing that:

in view of the realities prevailing in various areas, it is advisable to adopt differential approaches to address the problem by setting different time limits for phasing out, allowing economically difficult areas to continue to recruit community-paid teachers within a certain period to make policy measures fitting in with local realities. (China, 2000, p. 56)

In Pakistan, a different situation has arisen. In 1972, the government nationalised all private schools to create an entirely state-operated education system. The move, in the words of a later government publication (Pakistan, 1989, p. 8) was 'nationalist in content ... [and] infused with egalitarian rhetoric'. The scheme encountered administrative, political and financial obstacles, and in 1979 the regulation was rescinded. Since then, private and community schools have flourished. In many cases this has reflected discontent with government institutions, which are widely seen as inefficient and poorly supervised. Some community schools are also operated by religious groups in order to spread their faiths (Baqir, 1998; Karez & Mitchell, 1999; Kazi, 2000).

A further variation has been evident in Indonesia, where many schools are run by Islamic communities and come under the aegis of the Ministry of Religious Affairs rather than the Ministry of Education and Culture (World Bank, 1998, p. 70). In the mid-1990s, enrolments in these schools, both public and private, formed about 14% of the total at the primary level and 10% at the secondary level. The government has made substantial financial grants to these schools (Bray & Thomas, 1998, p. 37), arguing that the institutions, like the state schools, were serving the Indonesian people. The grants also served as a mechanism to bring disparate elements within Indonesian society into a common framework.

During the 1990s, religious schools also became increasingly prominent in Eastern Europe, following the collapse of the Soviet Union and its satellite totalitarian regimes. In Hungary and Poland, well-established religious authorities have created whole new education systems (Heyneman, 1997, p. 335). In Russia's St. Petersburg, religious institutions in 1997/98 included eight Christian schools, three Jewish schools, and one school operated by the International Society of the Consciousness of Krishna (Lisovskaya & Karpov, 2001, p. 57). In addition were a number of 'ethnic' schools serving Georgians, Armenians and Tartars. However, national authorities have not always been comfortable with such diversity of initiatives. The government of Azerbaijan, for example, has been very cautious about religious schools, having noted the divisive effect which they have had in some neighbouring countries.

A rather different situation has been evident in Singapore, where the government has been well-resourced but has noted limits in its effectiveness. The government has encouraged community participation in order to tackle some of these limits. In 1981, a Council on Education for Muslim Children was founded. Almost all its members were Malays, and the organisation is better known by its abbreviated Malay name, Mendaki. The association was mainly founded to help the Malay community catch up with the Chinese and Indians in educational performance. In 1982, Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew (quoted by Tan, 1995, p. 344) observed that a government-run scheme 'cannot achieve a quarter of the results of this voluntary, spontaneous effort by Malays/Muslims to help themselves'. He added:

You can better succeed because you will be more effective with Malay/Muslim parents than government officers ... You can reach them through their hearts, not just their minds. You have the motivation and the dedication and commitment. This emotional/psychological support can make a vast difference between a student who tries, fails, and tries again, and another who fails and gives up.

The government not only provided assistance to Mendaki but also amended the Administration of Muslim Law Act to enable Malays to make voluntary monthly contributions (Gopinathan, 2001, p.29). Subsequent initiatives gave support to the Singapore Indian Development Association, the Chinese Development Assistance Council, and the Eurasian Association.

Experiences and Outcomes

The range of situations noted above chiefly highlights differences between countries. In addition, major differences may be found within countries. Thus, even within a small state such as Fiji, wide variations may be found between regions, socio-economic groups, racial groups, and institutions.

Fiji's school system is based on the notion of partnership between the state and communities. Almost all institutions are owned and managed by village communities, religious bodies or cultural organisations. The government (quoted in Tavola, 2000, p. 13) sees this as a mechanism to provide a 'strong and vital education system throughout the country ... [which] provides opportunities for schools to develop their own special character while also ensuring that common standards and operating requirements are met'. In 1998, the Ministry of Education operated only three of the 710 primary schools and 12 of the 154 secondary schools, and was taking steps to divest itself of the three primary schools. At the primary level, 75.2% of schools were controlled by community-based committees, while 17.7% were operated by religious bodies and 3.9% were run by cultural organisations. Corresponding figures at the secondary level were 40.9, 40.9 and 7.1%. The few remaining institutions were operated by private enterprises and various other organisations.

At the primary level within Fiji's school system, the government pays all teachers except for a few part-time language teachers. At the secondary level, the government pays all teachers who have civil-servant status and 80% of the salaries of teachers who are employed on grant-in-aid terms. The government also sets curricula for all levels, and provides teaching materials. Schools are not permitted to charge fees for tuition, but can impose levies for books, stationery, buildings, etc. The government forbids schools from sending children home for non-payment of levies, but this injunction is widely ignored (Tavola, 2000, p. 15).

The government inputs provide a uniform baseline for the schools, but variations among communities lead to considerable diversity. One problem is that school committee members are volunteers who in many cases lack expertise and understanding of their responsibilities. Where the various stakeholders have good relationships, positive outcomes include strong learning environments. However, discord can arise over key issues of authority, especially because the committees own their schools and appoint unpaid managers, whereas the headteachers are employed and paid by the Ministry of Education. Tavola (2000, p. 17) added that:

Schools are political entities, and reflect the communities they are in. If

divisions exist in communities, there tend to be divisions in school committees and the level of management deteriorates. In such situations, the whole teaching and learning process suffers.

One major dimension in Fiji concerns race. About half the total population are ethnic Fijians, while most of the other half are ethnic Indians whose ancestors had been brought to Fiji to work on sugar plantations or to support the colonial enterprise in other ways. School management is usually in the hands of one or the other ethnic group, which means, for example, that while many Fijian children attend Indian schools, those institutions are owned and managed by Indian committees. The two ethnic groups tend to have different management styles, and Indian schools are generally better equipped and operated. It is widely acknowledged that attitudes towards education differ. For Indians, the provision of schools is the highest priority, whereas Fijians have competing demands from church and traditional obligations (Tavola, 2000, pp. 43–44). The system also leads to major urban/rural, regional and socio-economic disparities, since prosperous communities are in a much better position to support their schools than are impoverished communities.

Racial disparities have also been noted in Zimbabwe. During the 1980s, great emphasis was placed on community financing as a way to generate resources and expand educational provision with the goal of strengthening the nation and reducing inequalities. However, the policy had unanticipated side-effects. The management committees of schools in former white areas levied their parents to buy additional equipment, recruit extra staff, and introduce additional subjects such as music and computing (Maravanyika, 1995, p. 12). The amounts charged by the committees were generally out of the reach of ordinary black parents, which had the effect of perpetuating racial segregation. Similar patterns have been evident in South Africa (Sayed, 1999, pp. 142–146).

Malaysia also has a tradition of schools sponsored by minority races, in this case particularly the Chinese communities. According to Tan's historical analysis (1992, p. 184), the school managers in these schools were commonly recruited not on the basis of their learning or scholarship but rather because of their wealth:

The management committee of a school usually came from its biggest financial contributors. The men who headed the state level Chinese School Committee Associations (CSCA), always located in the capital of each state, would be amongst the richest and most influential businessmen holding leadership positions in several Chinese *shetuan* (social organizations).

Again, this had problematic side-effects on the management processes within the schools.

Comparable problems may also arise in situations which are racially homogenous. In Uganda, Opolot (1994, pp. 112–113) has noted that executives of Parent–Teacher Associations (PTAs) are commonly from among the socially and economically advantaged groups, and are not always sympathetic to the disadvantaged; and Seel (1999, p. 7) has observed that local elites can ‘capture’ resources for their own uses. In Pakistan, Merchant (1999, p. 8) refers to the ‘great fear of the involvement of political persons in the affairs of the school through PTAs’; and Dandekar (1996) gives an example from India in which one political group initiated a secondary school in a particular village. This caused another political group to launch a competing school in the same village, with the result that both schools collapsed. The two groups were

unwilling to compromise on a single, joint institution, and students therefore had to walk six kilometres each day to attend a school in a neighbouring village.

The matter of fees and levies for community initiatives requires further comment because it is almost a *sine qua non*, but also runs contrary to many statements by international agencies and national governments. For example, the oft-quoted Article 26 of the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights stated that everyone has the right to education and that education 'shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages'. In similar vein the 1959 Declaration on the Rights of the Child declared that the child 'is entitled to receive education, which shall be free and compulsory, at least in the early stages'; and Article 28 of the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child indicated that signatory states would make primary education 'compulsory and available free to all'. Similar statements are contained in many national policy documents and even some constitutions.

Yet while on the one hand international agencies and governments declare that education should be free of charge, on the other hand they advocate community participation. In practice, almost all communities have to impose fees and levies in order to gain the cash resources necessary for their work. Some communities permit contributions of labour and goods instead of cash; and most communities encourage donations on top of the fees and levies that they demand (Bray, 1996a,b). However, many communities consider per-pupil fees to be essential to meet their recurrent needs.

A further dimension concerns gender. Again, many international and national pronouncements stress the need for gender equity. Since in most situations the schooling of boys tends to look after itself, the advocacy commonly focuses on the schooling of girls.

On this issue, experiences again show diversity and complexity. The 1995 Gambian survey cited above showed considerable community bias against the schooling of girls in Western-type schools. The fact that many girls went to Islamic schools at least meant that they received some formal education; but policy makers remained concerned about imbalances in the types of education received by each gender. In Togo, the lower quality Western-type community schools enrolled considerably more girls than boys (Gbogbotchi *et al.*, 2000, p. 29), which again caused government discomfort. In Pakistan, however, some communities have been at the forefront of girls' education (Marchand, 2000, p. 47). While some of this work has been launched and supported by external agencies (see, for example, O'Grady, 1995), other projects have been entirely local endeavours (see, for example, Elahi, 1999, pp. 13–14). These advances, however, have mostly been despite rather than because of government initiatives.

Of course, not all community initiatives present problems and tensions of the sorts presented in this section. Examples may readily be found from countries as far apart as Bangladesh (Rugh & Bossert, 1998), El Salvador (Sawada, 1999) and Kenya (Herriot *et al.*, 1999) of school committees that work well and of community activities that are productive and in harmony with government objectives. However, the problems require recognition in order to temper the commonly superficial advocacy of community work by international agencies and governments.

Explaining the Diversity

Differences between countries result from many factors, including economics, culture, ethnic/racial composition, and politics. From a macro-level perspective, one major variable is the weakness or strength of the state. This may be explained by comment on some of the examples raised above, and by adding some further examples.

At one end of the spectrum are situations in which the state barely exists at all. Examples include Somalia and Sierra Leone during the 1990s (Schwarz, 1998; UNICEF, 2001). In these circumstances, communities have found themselves forced to provide their own schooling in order to secure any provision at all. The state has been too weak either to encourage or to regulate the community initiatives.

At a slightly higher level are states which are weak but which do at least exist and function. Togo and Chad during the 1980s and 1990s were in this category. The combination of economic crisis and general disorder deprived their governments of human and financial resources, and limited the scope and quality of the state education systems. The authorities in both countries felt threatened by community initiatives because the activities were outside the governments' control. This was reflected in the vocabulary of 'spontaneous' and 'clandestine' schools. Similarly, in Cameroon *Associations des Parents d'Élèves* in public and state-supported schools were outlawed until the early 1980s because they were deemed 'subversive' (Boyle, 1996, p. 618). Over time, however, the authorities in all three countries have become more accepting of these institutions. Both in these countries and elsewhere, such acceptance has been accelerated by the policy advocacy and resources of external donors. This has been the case, for example, in Egypt, Pakistan, Malawi, Mali and Senegal (Hartwell, 1995; World Bank, 1996; Hyde *et al.*, 1997; Tietjen, 1999; Diarra *et al.*, 2000).

Macau up to the late 1980s was a different type of example in the category. In this case, the state was weak, not so much because the society was impoverished, but because the Portuguese colonial authorities gave little attention to a territory which seemed to them small, distant and unimportant. For many decades, almost the only government provision in the school sector was Portuguese-medium education for the minority (less than 10%) who wanted it. The gap was bridged by churches and other voluntary agencies, who provided education in Chinese and in English, and whose work permitted total enrolment rates in the 1970s and 1980s to exceed 90% (Alves Pinto, 1987; Adamson & Li, 1999).

Indonesia provides an example of a stronger state which is much better resourced than those mentioned above but which faces various challenges of national unity. The Indonesian government has chosen to collaborate with the religious and other communities, providing financial and other support in an effort to keep them within the national system of education and amenable to some government direction.

Hungary, Poland and Russia, by contrast, are states which used to be strong but which were undermined during the 1990s by far-reaching political and economic changes. Prior to the 1990s, the governments of these countries resourced almost the entire education sector, over which the authorities exerted strict controls. Now the governments are more tolerant of diversity, but in any case no longer have the resources to maintain controls at their previous levels.

Finally, Singapore is at the top end of states which are very strong but which nevertheless choose to encourage at least some community initiatives. Because the Singaporean state is strong, it is not threatened by the types of racial and religious activities which would be considered problematic elsewhere. The Singaporean authorities began by encouraging the Malay-dominated Council on Education for Muslim Children, and then proceeded by giving parallel encouragement to Indian, Chinese and Eurasian groups. The Singaporean action was in sharp contrast to patterns in neighbouring Malaysia, where the government for some decades felt very threatened by the work of Chinese self-help associations (Tan, 1988, 1992). More recently, however, the Malaysian state has felt stronger, and in turn has become more accommodating. Other

important factors which shape diversity in national patterns, which must at least be recognised here even though they cannot here be explored at length, include demographic and socio-cultural features. Concerning geographic communities, for example, whereas in some locations households are clustered together in ways that promote local identification, in other locations households are more scattered. Concerning ethnic, racial and religious communities, again the diversity may be considerable. Ethnic, racial and religious groups that identify themselves as minorities may be particularly willing to embark on self-help initiatives, but not all are willing to do so. Diversity may also be evident in the cultures of school management and in the willingness of parents and other members of communities to serve on committees and respond to calls for involvement.

Conclusions

At least on the surface, community initiatives in education usually seem very desirable. They can help spread the burden of resourcing, and they can increase the volume, relevance and impact of education. However, closer scrutiny reveals many complexities not only in operation but also in macro-level policy. Concerning resourcing, for example, some critics have argued that advocacy of community participation has a questionable basis. Lynch, for instance, has stated that:

Moves towards greater involvement of local communities in the provision of primary education have often been little more than thinly disguised means to move the burden of financing onto the backs of the poor, where such approaches have not included the allocation to those communities of adequate and appropriate resources to fulfil the devolved functions. (1997, pp. 77–78)

Moreover, this paper has noted that community initiatives can exacerbate dissonance within societies, and that many broad policy statements are fundamentally unhelpful because they fail to examine in sufficient detail the types of communities being considered and the circumstances of operation. Sometimes, indeed, community initiatives directly undermine other government goals. They may maintain or increase racial, social and geographic disparities, and they greatly increase diversity within education systems.

Some advocates might argue that diversity is in itself not undesirable. Indeed, many would assert that the notion of monolithic national education systems which serve all groups uniformly and equally is outdated. This view is consistent with advocacy of decentralisation and plurality in education systems. However, decentralisation and plurality bring costs—and in some cases they threaten the very basis of the nation state. Heyneman's (1997, p. 338) remarks about Eastern Europe may also have wider applicability:

It is possible for ethnic, religious and racial groups to teach disrespect for the rights of their neighbors. In so doing, it is possible that schools ... may be used to exacerbate social tensions. Instead of helping to create a consensus on public welfare and the public good, they may contribute to civil unrest and social instability. In these circumstances, schools can lay an intellectual foundation which leads to social breakdown and, in extreme instances, to civil war.

Scenarios of this type may be considered within a broader picture of the strength of the state. This paper has suggested that in certain circumstances strong states as well as weak states may welcome community initiatives, but that they may do so for rather different

reasons. In strong states, community initiatives may be welcomed simply because the state can afford a more pluralistic approach to education and may desire to increase impact and relevance. In many weak states, community initiatives are seen as a way to supplement meagre government resources. However, even in weak states community initiatives may be considered problematic because of the inequalities and other problems that accompany them.

From the perspectives of communities, considerable ambivalence may be felt about the nature and roles of governments. Some NGOs and CBOs aim to provide alternative forms of education, and are antagonistic to state control. Other community bodies would like to secure resources from the state but remain ambivalent about the relationships with governments. For example, as explained by Kelly in Zambia:

The support of the Ministry of Education [MOE] for these [community] schools is sincere and warmly welcomed by the various management bodies and NGOs. But this very support and recognition bring with them the danger that community school practitioners, and communities themselves might see MOE schools as the model they should emulate, while MOE personnel might feel uncomfortable with their lack of control of a government-supported initiative and might want to impose 'standards' that would shape community schools more along conventional lines. Moves in either direction could spell the death of community schools as they are known in Zambia today. (1998, p. 29)

These considerations lead back to the question with which this paper commenced, namely whose knowledge and values are dominant in the relationships discussed here. Governments commonly welcome community inputs which supplement the resources of state school systems. They may also welcome community initiatives which lead to parallel schools which resemble the state institutions; and in some circumstances they may permit community initiatives which lead to models of schooling which promote values and skills rather different from those in the state system. However, in other circumstances governments block community initiatives because the authorities fear threat to broader social structures; and even when they permit such initiatives, they may do so only with ambivalence.

Communities, however defined, do usually have elements of knowledge which governments can never secure. This may include detailed information on the circumstances of particular households and individuals. Village leaders know the families in their villages, church leaders know the families in their churches, and members of school committees know the actors in their schools. However, the fact that such people have local focuses may also be limiting. Governments usually have broader pictures, and can see how local patterns fit regional, national and international patterns. They may also have resources for training of teachers and managers; and they may be able to take a more detached view of inter-personal divisions within communities.

These considerations lend support to the notion of partnership, in which both governments and communities work together. However, some types of partnerships can work better in some types of circumstances than in others. Many policy recommendations about partnership are also based on shallow understanding, and both concepts and practices require careful scrutiny (Sack, 1999; Bray, 2001).

It seems that the new century is bringing more diversity in educational provision than was the norm in previous decades. In part, this results from persistent advocacy of decentralisation and greater tolerance of diversity. It also results in some cases from a weakening in the state, not only in the former communist countries but also in many

longstanding capitalist countries. Some observers welcome the plurality which results; but others are not so sure.

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