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Photo by Mudi Astuti

Interviewer: "What kind of relationship do you have with the local school?"

Respondent (a young mother in rural Malang District): "At the age of six, I surrendered my child to the school; six years later, I got him back. I was only asked to go to the school when he did something wrong or when the school needed money."

I. Decentralization and School-Based Management

Experience from many years of educational reform has shown that many system-wide efforts, largely planned and implemented from the top of the system, often leave the core processes of teaching and learning virtually unchanged. For genuine reform to occur at the school and classroom level, schools need frequent and consistent support. But central ministries and even sub-national education offices often cannot adequately meet this need, especially given the fact that each school is different, operating in a unique context and with unique development potential.

The process of decentralization is meant to support this reform process. In the best of circumstances, it can:

- bring change processes closer to where decisions make a real difference – the classroom and the school
- encourage local innovation by developing a greater sense of efficacy and professional commitment in teachers and principals

- increase local accountability for the provision and quality of education delivered by the school
- increase the relevance and flexibility of education to local conditions and needs
- stimulate participation in, and a sense of ownership of, the school by its various community stakeholders
- generate a stronger local demand and more financial and human resources for education.

An essential part of this process is school-based management (SBM). Through SBM, individual schools, with community participation, are encouraged to:

- define their own particular "vision" and mission within the context of national legislation and system-wide goals
- diagnose their problems, define their needs, and identify their limitations and resources
- establish a school development plan – with priorities, goals, targets, and programmes – within a framework and using standards set at the central level (e.g., determining local curriculum content, adjusting calendars to local economic schedules, managing their resources in areas such as teaching-learning materials, hiring teachers, etc.).

The community participation which is meant to make SBM succeed is usually in the form of a school committee, composed of, at least, parents, teachers, and community members and often charged with opening the school to the gaze, support, and oversight of the community; making it a more transparent, welcoming place engaged with and in the community; and making it feel accountable to the community for the quality of education it provides. In many countries around the world, SBM has shown positive results in both enhancing parental and community interest in education and reducing grade repetition and failure rates and improving teacher attendance (World Bank 2009).

II. School Committees in Indonesia

In one form or another, such school committees have long been present in Indonesia, originally as largely fund-raising parent-teacher committees (BP3). But after the 2002 Ministerial Decree on School Committees, the mandate of these bodies was expanded to include:

- accommodating aspirations of the community in regard to the school's operational policies and education programs (e.g., supporting active teaching-learning and preparing teaching aids)
- encouraging a larger role for the community in education (e.g., participation in grade-specific parent groups or *paguyuban kelas*; the construction of facilities such as fences, toilets, libraries, and computer laboratories; the provision of school meals and clean water; and serving as resource persons on local content)
- facilitating the management of education and the school's resources in a more transparent, efficient, and accountable manner .

The Decree requires the school committee (of at least nine people) to include representatives from parents, community leaders, education professionals, the private sector, teachers, community-based organizations, and village officials.

With the introduction of sizeable block grants (BOS) from the central government to schools in order to reduce fees and promote stronger quality assurance processes through school self-evaluations and development plans, it was envisioned that the new school committees would gain an expanded role in school budgeting, planning, and monitoring – in other words, in more professional aspects of the school's development and therefore in its accountability to the community it serves.



Photo by Mahargianto Wardoyo

These expectations, however, have not been easy to meet in the Indonesian context. Traditionally, schools, although in communities, have often not been of communities, their teachers and principal from outside, their curricula and texts standardized by the central government, their language of instruction not that of the home. Principals are linked to the central bureaucracy and report officially – and are therefore accountable – to the district office (rather than to the school committee or the larger community) and have

both administrative and professional control of the school; this position has been strengthened by the provision of BOS funds which has made less important the school committee's earlier (and valued) role in raising money for school expenses (while, in theory, strengthening its role in the budgeting and oversight of BOS funds).

In addition, new committee members are often either less well-educated and less experienced than the school staff or are hand-picked by the principal; in both cases, committees end up being dominated by the school. Cultural reluctance to confront authority figures, challenge hierarchies, and enter into debates and disputes only adds to the difficulty of creating more empowered school committees and therefore more effective school-based management.

III. Challenges and Achievements of SBM in Indonesia

Recent studies of community participation and SBM in Indonesia (Bjork 2009, Pradhan et al 2011, and Chen et al, in draft) reveal mixed experiences with SBM, especially with school committees, in Indonesia. The challenges are many. In some cases, school committees are seen as being mere replacements for the BP3 with their principal function being fund-raising – a job difficult to do given the constraints on fund-raising imposed by the BOS process. Also, many parents receive little information from the school and have low awareness concerning their potential role in ensuring its accountability to the community. Officially, committee functions are largely concerned with community relations, school facilities, and other administrative areas, and it is therefore difficult for committees to influence more substantive areas such as local curriculum content and teacher management. And principals still largely see their accountability upward to the district rather than outward to the community.

Most importantly, perhaps, the roles of the principal, the school committee, the District Education Officer (*Dinas Pendidikan*), the Education Board (*Dewan Pendidikan*), and parents in the SBM process have not been clearly articulated by MONE, in either national guidelines or documents such as the BOS implementation manual. All of these reasons make it difficult for school committees to feel empowered to take a stronger role in SBM. In one study, only about 1/3 of the principals and *dinas* staff interviewed said that parents and committees exerted pressure on them in regard to school improvement.

But Bjork's qualitative study of community participation (2009) and other recent evidence suggest that SBM and the school committees which support it are having an increasingly important impact on educational provision and quality. Bjork found that where conditions were favourable for school

committees (e.g., elected in a democratic process, with members representing different community groups, and led by a chair with at least senior secondary education), there were many positive results:

- Most parents knew about the committee and the names of its chairperson and some of its members
- The committee met more often than the former BP3 and also met parents and teachers more regularly, serving as a multi-dimensional channel between the community and the school where parents could share ideas and ask questions.
- In the best of cases, the committee had access to school personnel and inputs into school planning, budgeting, and decision-making and could help raise funds to further enhance school quality (e.g., support after-school programmes, improve school facilities, hire extra temporary staff)
- School committees which had higher than average status (e.g., because they were democratically elected and were seen as being representative of the community and/or because their chairperson was experienced and well-educated) also encouraged higher teacher attendance and greater teacher time spent on activities such as lesson preparation and student evaluation
- One or more of these variables – greater spending on student activities, more temporary staff, and higher teacher attendance – was shown to have a significant effect on raising student scores in Indonesian and mathematics.

The pilot project that tested four methods of empowering committees and promoting school-level accountability (Bjork 2009 and Pradhan et al 2011) demonstrated that selected interventions can strengthen committees to more successfully fulfill their objectives. These interventions, implemented by neutral, third-party facilitators, included block grants transferred directly to school committees, training for its members, the democratic election of members, and the establishment of linkages between the committee and the local Village Council. Impacts were mixed, but some treatments showed positive results in regard to both SBM and student outcomes.

Grants were especially important, providing resources which the committee could actually plan for and use. **Training** helped to some extent (but would have been more useful if it had been more directly relevant to the committee's context). Adding **visits to schools** with well-functioning school committees made the training more useful. Democratic **elections** were especially important, showing correlations with increased parental supervision of student work at home and teacher time on task.

IV. Recommendations for the Further Development of SBM

Recent studies have indicated various ways in which the government can assist in strengthening school committees and therefore SBM in Indonesia. These should be endorsed and articulated in a MONE policy regarding school committees and SBM – and also, where relevant, in future editions of the BOS manual – and could include the following:

To determine school committee membership:

- School committee members should be selected through democratic elections monitored by neutral facilitators. Based on characteristics of an effective committee member generated by the community itself, a list of candidates, including under-represented groups such as women and illiterate citizens, should be developed. Committee members should be elected from this list. (Principals and standing committee heads should not be involved in these elections.)
- Guidelines should ensure that elections lead to regular changes in school committee membership (e.g., an election must produce at least one new member or the election will be invalid).



Photo by Gedsiri Suhartono

To strengthen school committee members:

- The current framework for school committee training (both in general and in manuals such as that for BOS implementation) should be revised so that material will be more accessible and relevant to participants and in a language reflecting the background of school committee members; i.e., educational jargon replaced with language that non-educators can understand
- Such training should be implemented using a “whole school” approach with the committee, the principal, and the teachers receiving the same basic information

and capacity building; additional training for specific committee functions (e.g. bookkeeping, proposal writing) should also be provided

- Given that the principal is the school's key change agent and that his/her leadership is instrumental in the implementation of SBM, his/her capacity to activate and motivate the school committee is essential
- Local experts – people who have served on successful committees and respected retired teachers – should be recruited to revise training documents and lead the training workshops
- The amount of workshop time devoted to information dissemination should be limited to one day with the rest of the time used for study trips to other committees in the area.



Photo by M. Wildan

To strengthen school committee functioning and enhance SBM:

- Complementary approaches to strengthening school committees (e.g., combinations of elections, training, and grants) should be developed
- Ongoing support, training, and mentoring should be provided to committees to ensure that guidance is available to them when needed (such as during conflicts with principals)
- Strengthening linkages between the committee and local government is an important way of generating community leadership support for education; this proved especially useful when combined with democratic elections

- The sharing of ideas among committees should be institutionalized; e.g., the involvement of existing (and effective) school committees in the training and mentoring of new committees through helping to plan workshops, organize site visits, and facilitate cross-school committee brainstorming. This could be structured around a school cluster (*gugus*) to encourage greater collaboration among committees in the same cluster
- School committee meetings should be organized to respect the parents' outside obligations—especially in economically challenged communities – and scheduled at times that have the greatest potential to attract large audiences
- Although principals need to be encouraged to support and help build the capacity of their school's committee, current regulations prohibiting them from serving as heads of the committee should be universally implemented. An individual not involved in school administration needs to oversee the committee; this also reduces the potential for corruption if the principal's authority is balanced by the presence of a leader not employed by the school
- The roles of all parties related to the school committee (principals, members, facilitators) in regards to decision-making and the monitoring of block grants should be clearly articulated.

To finance school committees:

- Block grant funds need to be transferred at the beginning of each funding cycle so that school committees can develop long-range plans based on available funds
- Outstanding school committees should be offered block grants to further develop their school. The District Education Offices could then disseminate good practices in regard to this process for use in their districts.

Recommendations such as these should form the basis for more detailed and standardized guidelines in regard to the establishment and development of school committees. Those concerning the development and implementation of school budgets, especially decisions concerning the planning for and use of BOS funds, should also become an integral part of the BOS implementation manual and training materials.

About BEC-TF

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The findings, interpretations and conclusions expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Government of Indonesia, the Government of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, or the European Commission.

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