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SCHOOL LEVEL STRUCTURES AND THE MANAGEMENT OF EDUCATION RESOURCES IN PUBLIC PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN GHANA

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■ Introduction

Ghana's commitment to providing quality basic education for all, as prescribed by the Education Act 2008 (Act 778), and other international development frameworks such as the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and Education for All (EFA)-Fast Track Initiative (FTI) has witnessed relative progress on several fronts. Over the last few years, there has been substantial budgetary and financial commitment by government and donors towards the attainment of universal access to basic education and ensuring the provision of quality education as evidenced by the increase in education expenditure from 5.3% in 2008 to 6.1% in 2011, after the rebasing of the GDP in 2010 (MoE, 2012). These increases in educational expenditure has no doubt contributed to the rise in Gross Enrollment Ratio at the primary level from 83.3 in 2004/05 when the capitation grant/school fee abolition program was introduced to 96.5% in 2011/12 (MoE, 2012), making Ghana one of the few developing countries that are likely to meet the MDGs 2 on achieving Universal Primary Education by 2015.

The surge in education expenditure as highlighted above have also heightened concerns among stakeholders in the sector regarding effective governance and efficient management of education sector resources, in the wake of relatively high level leakages in educational inputs such as

capitation grant¹, textbooks², teachers³, furniture, among others.

To address some of these education sector governance and accountability deficits, policy reforms have been targeted at key actors such as the District Education Directorates, Circuit Supervisors, and headteachers. Beyond these key actors and perhaps more importantly, School Management Committees (SMCs) and Parent Teachers Associations (PTAs) have been identified as critical agents of horizontal accountability at the district and school levels. Yet “to *what extent are SMCs and PTAs able to contribute to transparency and accountability in education sector resource utilization at the school level*”?

The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana) with support from the Results for Development (R4D), a Washington D. C. based international Non-governmental Organization, since 2008, has conducted three (3) Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) to establish the extent to which educational resources reach their intended beneficiaries. These studies also assessed the extent to which SMCs and PTAs contribute to eradicating teacher absenteeism in schools and promote

¹ CDD-Ghana (2010) Tracking Capitation Grant In Public Primary Schools In Ghana. Research Paper No. 19 and Steering Committee for the 2007 Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (2009 final Draft) Ghana Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS) Education and Health

² GNECC (2010), Tracking Survey for Textbooks, Exercise Books, School Uniforms, Capitation Grant, School Infrastructure and Teachers. Ghana National Education Campaign Coalition. www.gnecc.org/

³ CDD-Ghana (2008) Tracking Leakage of Public Resource in Education: A pilot investigation of teacher absence in public primary schools in Ghana. Research Paper 17

effective and efficient management of the capitation grant, and core textbooks.

This Briefing Paper draws on the findings of these three PETS conducted by CDD-Ghana to highlight the important roles SMCs and PTAs play in ensuring efficient use of education resources at the school level.⁴

■ Findings from the Three Pets

Tracking teacher absence study: The first PETS conducted by the Center in 2008 tracked *Teacher Absence in 30 Public Primary Schools*. In general, the study found that teacher absence was a widespread phenomenon in the schools surveyed and perhaps public primary schools in Ghana. The average absence rate (from Monday to Friday) recorded was 27% and this was comparable to rates obtained by Chaudhury *et al* (2005) which ranged from a low of 11% in Peru to 27% in Uganda. Again, the teacher absence for all the days of the week followed a hyperbola path (i.e. U-shape in nature). Starting from 24% on Monday, the rate declined by half to 12% on Tuesday only to rise steadily to 19% on Wednesday, 31% on Thursday and 40% on Friday. The high absence rate recorded in the latter part of the week, particularly on Friday, was attributed largely to funeral attendance and participation in the long distance education lectures which were held on Fridays.

The beneficial role of school level support structures in management of education resources at school level was confirmed by the finding that the presence of active PTAs in public primary schools significantly lower the level of teacher absence.

This finding is quite instructive. PTAs in most schools are very instrumental in the development and provision of educational facilities with the intention of enhancing teaching and learning. This has therefore engendered strong community ownership of schools in many communities. Thus, the PTAs are able to influence school management policies and also insist on the adoption of measures that enhance pupil-teacher contact.

In addition, the descriptive analysis established some level of association between teacher absence and a number of factors that were broadly

classified under the following categories: school or personal characteristics; infrastructure availability; proximity to facilities; and supervision. In order to determine the extent to which these characteristics influenced teacher absence and their significance, the study estimated a regression model which had teacher absence as the dependent variable and various factors under these four broad categories.

Estimates of the Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression model came up with one interesting finding relating to Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) - one of the factors classified under the broad category captioned supervision. The coefficient estimate of this factor showed that in public primary schools with active PTAs, teacher absence was significantly moderated. This state of affairs was expected especially when community ownership and PTA support to school development had taken roots. In such instances, executives of PTAs are able to influence school management policies and also insist on taking measures aimed at improving pupil-teacher contact hours to enhance teaching and learning outcomes. Indeed, as part of the data gathering methodology, the focus group discussion with the leadership of PTAs and SMCs revealed high level of enthusiasm on the part of parents to ensure that schools in their communities developed. These results support the findings of the regression analysis.

The study also revealed that availability of staff common rooms (infrastructure factor) and nearness of school to a health facility (proximity to facilities factor) also reduced teacher absence significantly. However, the professional qualification of a teacher (school or personal characteristics factor) rather encouraged teacher absence in a significant way (for full report, see CDD Research Paper #17 by Asunka, J., Armah-Attoh, D. and Ofosu, G., 2008).

⁴ **Note:** Each of the three PETS conducted by the Center surveyed 30 primary public schools selected using multistage stratified random sampling procedure. The first PETS schools were selected from three districts (Wa West, Asante Akim North and Birim North) in three regions (Upper West, Ashanti and Eastern). The second PETS schools were from Savelugu district and Tamale Metropolitan in the Northern Region, Bosomtwe and Sekyere East in Ashanti Region and Jomoro and Mpohor Wassa East in Western region while those for the third PETS were from six districts - Abura-Asebu-Kwamankese, Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam, Asikuma-Odoben-Brakwa, Awutu-Efutu-Senya, Cape Coast and Twifo-Hemang-Lower Denkyira – all in the Central Region. Trained field assistants interviewed GES officials at the national and district levels, head-teachers and teachers, SMC and PTA chairpersons, parents and guardians as well as pupils (in Focus Group Discussions). Apart from the face-to-face interviews, documented records were also collected for the analysis.

Tracking capitation grant: The second PETS conducted in 2010 by the Center which tracked the *disbursement and use of the Capitation Grant (CG)* from national through the DEDs to beneficiary schools established delays in the distribution. Almost all District Directors of Education, headteachers in the study schools, and other stakeholders in education interviewed conceded that this was a problem. In fact, there appears to be no fixed time period for the release of the Capitation Grant (CG) from the Ghana Education Service (GES) to the District Education Directorates (DEDs) and later to the schools. The releases were quite irregular, irrespective of the releasing agent.

Similar to the case of teacher absence, researchers again found that effective SMCs and PTAs in schools are moderating forces that ensure that Capitation Grant Resources are not misapplied on items which are not supported by the CG guideline or listed in the School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIPs).

Compounding the delay was the problem of leakages in schools' limited receipts that even could not fully

address the needs of pupils. The leakages observed cut across schools in both the endowed and deprived districts per the GES' classification. In addition, some schools were found to be misapplying the limited CG on items not specified in the School Performance Improvement Plans (SPIPs).

One of the six hypotheses that the study tested was that schools with effective PTAs and SMCs used the CG for the intended purposes than those with weak PTAs and SMCs. To conduct the hypothesis test, researchers operationally classified SMCs and PTAs that met weekly or monthly and were also actively or very actively involved in the management and utilization of CG resources in their respective schools as effective. A cumulative scoring system⁵ based on responses of head-teachers, teachers and executives of SMCs and PTAs to two questions - how often SMCs and PTAs meet and how actively they are involved in the management and utilization of CG resources - was developed to distinguish effective SMCs and PTAs from their ineffective counterparts.

Based on the scoring system, the study identified 17 schools where the SMCs and PTAs could be branded as effective.

Of this number, six were found to have misapplied their CG resources on expenditure items not approved by the CG guidelines in the 2008/09 academic year. Of the remaining 13 schools which had ineffective SMCs and PTAs, five also misapplied the CG funds. A Chi-square test conducted using the scores of schools produced a Chi-square statistic of 30.0 (The Chi-square test is used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between the expected and observed frequencies in one or more categories. It simply conveys the existence or non-existence of relationships between variables). This statistic was significant (i.e. $p = 0.000$) at the 95% confidence level to establish that effective SMCs and/or PTAs significantly ensured proper application of CG resources in beneficiary schools (for full report, see CDD Research Paper #19 by Ampratwum, E. and Armah-Attoh, D., 2010)

This finding appeared to have found support in the opinions expressed by some school level stakeholders regarding the participation of SMCs and PTAs in school resource management and administration. For instance, significant minority of teachers (40%) claimed the PTAs were very much involved in the monitoring of the usage of CG funds. Also, in some schools, the head-teachers and executives of SMCs and PTAs acknowledged the active involvement of these support structures. In some cases, executives of school level support structures (one each from the SMCs and PTAs) were signatories to school bank accounts and therefore had to endorse cheques alongside other signatories before withdrawal of CG funds could be effected.⁶

Again, a large majority of executives of SMCs and PTAs (86%) indicated that they knew what schools in general used the CG for. A similar percent (83%) were aware of expenditures that their wards' schools committed the CG to. Indeed, the PTA and SMC executives identified renovation works on school structures; maintenance of furniture; purchase of sports equipment, textbooks; printing of examination papers; first aid; sanitation and hygiene materials and in-service training as some of the uses of CG in their schools, which are generally consistent with the CG guidelines.

⁵ **Note:** Schools were scored on the following basis: Effective SMC & PTA and yet misapplied CG = 0; Either SMC or PTA effective and yet misapplied CG = 1; Ineffective SMC & PTA and also misapplied CG = 2; Either SMC or PTA effective but never misapplied CG = 3; Effective SMC & PTA effective and never misapplied CG = 4; and Ineffective SMC & PTA and never misapplied CG = 5.

⁶ Even though PTAs involved in these financial arrangements were contravening the demands of the CG guidelines, these local arrangements appeared to be probably based on trust and confidence in the PTAs.

Tracking core-textbook distribution: The third PETS conducted in 2011, tracked *possible leakages in the supply and distribution of textbooks* (three core-textbooks: Mathematics, English and Science) from the national through districts to the ultimate beneficiaries - pupils in public primary schools. Analysis of documented evidence (i.e. textbook distribution and receipt records) revealed some amount of leakages in the GES to DEDs, as well as the DEDs to schools distribution channels respectively. Nonetheless, poor record-keeping which was not the focus of the study, turned out to be a widespread problem in textbooks distribution at all levels.

Additionally, core-textbooks were inadequate in most schools and pupils therefore had to share textbooks during lessons in school and for studies at home. Storage of the inadequate book stocks in the various schools was also a serious challenge (forthcoming CDD Research Paper by Ampratwum, E., Armah-Attoh, D., and Ashon, M., 2012).

Given that some schools recorded leakages, the question was whether the active roles played by SMCs and PTAs minimized leakages in the textbook distribution chain. To answer this question, researchers first developed an average of means scores for each study school using the question-items which captured information on the following: (a) the presence of SMCs and PTAs in the various schools; (b) the regularity of SMC and PTA meetings; and (c) the efficiency of SMCs and PTAs in demanding accountability from school heads on how textbooks and other instructional materials are stored and used.⁷

On the basis of the average mean scores, researchers found both SMCs and PTAs in half of the study schools (50%) to be active. In 10% of the schools, only PTAs were found to be active while for 7% of the schools only SMCs were active. A third of the schools (33%) lacked active SMCs and PTAs.

Having identified schools with active and inactive SMCs and PTAs respectively, these were juxtaposed against schools where leakages in core-textbooks were recorded. Based on this comparison, the following six categories of

Again, the core-textbooks tracking study also revealed that SMCs and PTAs were moderating factors where control of leakages are concerned. The study found that generally, in schools where SMCs and PTAs are active, the likelihood is that leakages are largely controlled.

schools with varied characteristics were created: active SMCs without

leakages; active SMCs with leakages; inactive SMCs with leakages; inactive SMCs without leakages; active PTAs without leakages; active PTAs with leakages; and inactive PTAs with leakages; and inactive PTAs without leakages. Each category was assigned specific scores which were used to conduct various hypothesis tests using paired-samples t-test to determine whether there were significant differences between pairs of the six categories of schools above.

At the 95% confidence level, the test results established significant differences between paired schools with the following characteristics: active SMCs without leakages and inactive SMCs with leakages (p-value = 0.012); active PTAs without leakages and active PTAs with leakages (p-value = 0.014); and active PTAs without leakages and inactive PTAs with leakages (p-value = 0.007). The finding clearly showed that active SMCs and PTAs in public primary schools are able to moderate leakages.

■ Conclusion And Policy Recommendations

The findings from the three PETS clearly showed that SMCs and PTAs in public primary schools in Ghana play very important roles in ensuring efficient utilization and effective governance of education resources at the school level. In schools where these structures were active, the results have been a reduction in teacher absence, efficient and appropriate use of capitation grant resources and minimal leakages in textbook receipts. Given these findings, the policy recommendations below are proposed for the consideration of education policy makers:

- √ The Ministry of Education as a matter of policy should ensure that SMCs (which are officially acknowledged) and PTAs (which are more quasi

⁷ **Note:** The Head-teacher/teacher questionnaire had no questions regarding the regularity of SMCs and PTAs meetings. Likewise, the SMC/PTA questionnaire did not ask about the presence or otherwise of SMCs and PTAs in schools. Large majorities of SMC/PTA executives (65% and 73% respectively) claimed SMCs and PTAs meet regularly. While over half of head-teachers/teachers (i.e. 56%) perceived both SMCs and PTAs to be inefficient in demanding accountability from head teachers on how textbooks and other instructional materials are stored and used, on average, about half of SMC/PTA executives (50% and 48% respectively) thought the SMCs and PTAs were efficient in this function.

in nature) are not only present in schools but are active in the local management of schools.

- √ The capacity of school level support structures such as SMCs and PTAs should be built and subsequently supported to provide effective and efficient oversight for efficient use of education resources. Probably, the executives could be trained in procedures for monitoring resource management and usage, how to oversight the functions of heads of institutions and how to demand accountability without being confrontational.
- √ SMC members and to some extent, PTA executives should be trained in book-keeping to enable members help in CG administration where schools lack substantive and qualified heads.
- √ Furthermore, Ghana Education Service should ensure that the membership composition of SMCs is a good mix of persons with varied skills and abilities (e.g. administrative, technical, accounting and management) for the body to be able to exercise its oversight responsibilities effectively and with the right authority.
- √ Where the Ghana Education Service has difficulties getting more lettered and technical persons on SMCs, it will be useful to establish one unique SMCs for a cluster of schools within a given geographical boundary similar to circuit supervisors.
- √ Given that the dynamics of power between school heads and SMC members tend to be collusive, PTAs could be made CG signatories to increase demand for transparency and accountability by actors outside of the formal management structure of schools.

- √ SMC and PTA members or representatives should be encouraged to be present when books are unpacked and counted at the various schools to reduce leakages and corruption.

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❧ *CDD -Ghana Briefing Papers are generated from commissioned research on topical issues, as well as presentations at round-table discussions at the Center.*

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