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Contextual issues in decentralization of primary education in Tanzania

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Abstract

Steps to decentralize the control of primary education are presently under way in Tanzania. Based on experiences over the last 15 years, a considerable inertia in the implementation of such changes can be expected. Thus, despite the reform efforts of the mid-1980s, local government councils remain marginalized in decision making regarding primary education, and parents have limited influence on collective decision making in these matters. The challenges to present local government and primary education reforms are therefore considerable. To address them requires significant changes in the relations between central and local governments and, equally important, in the rules of political representation as they are presently stated in the Constitution. © 2000 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

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1. Introduction

Questions of power and representation are among the most contentious issues of the decentralization of control of education. In Tanzania, a downward shift of control is a key feature of the forthcoming reform of the primary education system. The intention is to make participation more inclusive, to attain broader locally based decision making and 'sounder decisions', and to raise commitment for change among parents and other stakeholders at the local level. This, it is assumed, will help to increase enrolment and improve the quality of education.

Such goals are difficult to attain. Debates on the

merits and de-merits of decentralization of education are extensive and continue with little prospect of consensus or of commonly agreed propositions (McGinn, 1992; Lauglo, 1995). There are disagreements about the interpretation of key concepts such as devolution, delegation and deconcentration, and about their application in specific countries and sectors. A renewed debate about democratic decentralization has also emerged. Furthermore, there are conflicting views regarding the impact of decentralization on poverty alleviation and on equity in service delivery, and there have been continuous attempts to identify and understand the political forces that shape the support for and resistance to decentralization (Fiske, 1996; Lauglo and McLean, 1988; Manor and Crook, 1998; Rondinelli, 1990; Samoff, 1990b; Slater, 1989; Smith, 1985; Wunsch and Olowu, 1990).

This article focuses on the importance of

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implementation processes in shaping the actual outcomes of decentralization policies. Implementation tends to be neglected in many of the decentralization debates mentioned above. In these, it is often implicitly assumed that policy is made by the assigned political bodies and implemented in a subordinate manner by public officials; and that rationality in public policy involves the setting of objectives followed by activities to implement these objectives. Such assumptions miss key features of the actual implementation of decentralization and other policies. The influence of policy statements and the top-down implementation of policy is overemphasized, while the importance of ambiguity and bottom-up processes in shaping policy outcomes on the ground tend to be neglected. This perspective also helps to explain the inertia in bringing about changes from above, because implementation depends on the actions (and non-actions) of a large number of people and organizations operating through implementation networks rather than through an assigned hierarchical political-administrative machinery, as is often assumed by policy makers (Hill, 1997, chapter 6; Lane, 1987; Sabatier, 1986; World Development, 1996).

To provide evidence for these arguments, three contextual questions of relevance to the present reform efforts in Tanzania are addressed. How committed are the political-administrative elites to implementing significant downwards shifts in power in the school system? What actors are likely to influence primary education at the local level if decision-making powers are decentralized? And how may parents in rural areas react to the more demand driven educational system that present reform efforts aim to establish?

The article is divided into six parts. In the second section, a brief account of trends in primary education and decentralization since Independence is presented. It serves to put the current reform efforts in perspective. Then follows three sections—each addressing one of the questions raised above. Finally, implications of the analyses for current reform efforts are highlighted.

2. Trends in primary education and decentralization policies

Political and ideological rationales have significant influence on public sector reforms, including those of education and decentralization (Lauglo and McLean, 1988; Carnoy and Samoff, 1990).

In Tanzania, the political support for education has been strong since well before independence.¹ When nationalist movements emerged, their mass mobilization depended crucially upon the promise of a better life, involving struggles against colonial regimes that provided services along racial lines. People were promised free services, such as primary education, in return for political support. After Independence, policies emphasized education's role in skills development and modernization, self-reliance and Tanzanian socialism. A key characteristic of policy implementation has been the recurrent tensions between these policies, although the modernization aspects have tended to prevail. Certainly, the earlier emphasis on the formation of a socialist state and public responsibility in education has now given way to a focus on the development of a market economy which blends private and public initiatives. A second key characteristic of educational policy has been centralized decision making, and vacillation between reliance on mass mobilization and distrust of mass participation. Yet, most of the primary education infrastructure existing today was built through co-production between community-based village organizations and government. A third feature has been the shift in political priorities, over the last 20 years, from primary and adult education towards secondary, vocational, technical and tertiary education. There has, for example, been a rapid expansion of private secondary schools since the mid-1980s with clear effects on primary education as illustrated later. This shift is linked to the fourth feature of the primary education sector—resource scarcity. The shift has led to dwindling public funds for basic education, and to a growing degree

¹ Trends in education policies based on Buchert (1997, pp. 34–43), Ishumi (1995), Government of Tanzania (1998, pp. 78–81), Samoff (1990a), and Semboja and Therkildsen (1995, pp. 12–16).

of de facto parental payment. Economic crisis has amplified these trends. Dependency on donor funding has increased, and donor influence has grown.² Nevertheless, Tanzania successfully resisted the drastic cuts in education expenditures demanded by the international financial institutions in the late 1980s. Although real per capita expenditures on education are still far below the levels of the late 1970s, they actually grew slowly from 1985 to 1994—contrary to the claims of many observers. Lately, government allocations to primary education have fallen again, while donor funding for all levels of education is growing.

Significant changes in decentralization policies have also occurred over the years.³ The local government system inherited at Independence—with the racial discrimination removed—was basically continued until 1972. It was then replaced by a deconcentrated system of sub-national administration in which Regional Development Directorates headed by presidentially appointed Regional Commissioners became the focal point. Numerous ministerial civil servants were transferred to the regions and districts to staff this new system. Local taxation and local democratic representation were abolished, while district councils, mainly consisting of appointed members, were retained. Accountability was upwards—to the party, the President and the ministries—in a deliberate attempt to assert central control and direction and to undercut local councils as rallying points for opposition to national policies. Nation building concerns also played a role in the decision to abolish local government, because poorer regions and districts were lagging behind, and redistribution in the absence of a strong central authority was thought to be unlikely. Moreover, the abolition of local government reflected the leadership's strong belief that technical expertise rather than political participation was necessary for development. This 1972 system, labelled 'Decentralization', gradually

became moribund due to a lack of resources, inefficient administration and declining political legitimacy.

In 1984, a local government system with elected councils was re-introduced together with local taxation. Councils remained highly dependent on meagre public grants, however, and Regional Administrations were left intact. This resulted in conflicting and confusing relations of power between central, regional and council levels of government. Primary education, for example, was ostensibly a local government responsibility, although all teachers continued to be paid by central government and appointed by a central Teachers Service Commission. Moreover, educational grants were earmarked, so that councils for that reason alone had little influence on primary education development. Despite the introduction of multi-partyism in 1995, the subsequent election returned the previous ruling party, Chama cha Mapinduzi (CCM), to power in all councils in the country.

The local government reform, now scheduled for step-wise implementation at council level beginning in the year 2000, has various aims. Regional Administrations will be reduced considerably in size, functions and powers, and will be left with only monitoring and technical support functions vis-à-vis councils (considerable reductions have already been effectuated). Councils will be given a clear non-subordinate role in relation to ministries, so that councils will appoint and employ their own staff (including teachers) and make their own plans, budgets and bye-laws within a national policy and legal framework, while ministries will be left with responsibility for policy, the setting of standards, and monitoring of sector development. Finally, a new block grant system will allow councils to use public subsidies for local priorities, and this will be supplemented with equalization grants for poorer districts with below average tax bases and infrastructure.

3. Political commitment for decentralization of primary education

This very brief historical account of changes in education and decentralization puts the present

² Buchert (1997, pp. 18–26) lists and discusses present donor support for education.

³ Trends in decentralization policy are based on Civil Service Reform Secretariat (1996), Max (1991), Mawhood (1983), McHenry (1994), Samoff (1979) and Semboja and Therkildsen (1994).

reform efforts in primary education, local government, and civil service in perspective. All three reforms focus, among many other issues, on the perennial problems of the balance of power between central and local government, and on the role of citizens in service provision. These two issues—as they relate to certain aspects of primary education—are the focus of the subsequent analyses.

Current reforms are driven both by domestic forces and external influences. An important domestic rationale for reform of primary education is the widespread dissatisfaction with its quality. It is regarded as low by many educationalists and parents (Omari and Mosha, 1987; Syrimis, 1988; Malekela, 1995). Moreover, enrolment levels have stagnated at around 60–70% for almost 10 years, although intakes have now again begun to exceed the population growth (Tadreg, 1992; MOEC, 1995). Disparities in both quality and enrolment across districts are substantial (Sumra, 1995, table 8; Malekela, 1995, p. 70). Most other sub-Saharan countries face similar problems (World Bank, 1988).

Such dissatisfactions are as politically sensitive now as they were during colonial times (Semboja and Therkildsen, 1995). Perhaps it is therefore no coincidence that several changes to education policies were prepared during the mid-1990s when multi-partyism was introduced (Government of Tanzania, 1993a,b, 1995a,b). These documents form the basis of the present reform initiatives in the education sector. While those policy papers that address wider issues of education have a clear government imprint (such as the *Tanzania Integrated Education and Training Policy* of 1993), the more operational policy papers (such as the *Social Sector Strategy* and the *Primary Education Master Plan: 'A Framework'* of 1995) have been strongly influenced by donors (Buchert, 1997, p. 2). In particular the World Bank, the European Community, Britain, Denmark and the Netherlands are actively involved in educational policy formulation—and in the funding of various primary education activities.

An important general agreement in the various policy documents of the mid-1990s is that the primary education system is too centralized (Buchert,

1997, pp. 34–43). Hence it is proposed that certain responsibilities should be devolved to the local authorities and the communities/schools. This response partly reflects the inspiration from liberalism and populist localism which is common in many present decentralization efforts in education (Lauglo, 1995). It is also consistent with the pragmatic view of limited central government capacity, which informs the ongoing Civil Service and Local Government Reforms (Civil Service Reform Secretariat, 1995, 1996). And it constitutes yet another attempt to grapple with the recurrent issues of balancing central control and local influence.

In 1997, this focus on decentralization was given added impetus by conditionalities in the new World Bank Structural Adjustment Credit to the social sectors. One stipulates that previously earmarked recurrent government grants to local authorities for primary education should be given as block grants, thereby giving councils greater room for manoeuvre in decisions about primary schooling. A second condition is that the employment of teachers—hitherto mainly managed by the Teachers Service Commission—should be shifted to the councils. Both changes will be implemented in 2000, starting with 35 districts, and subsequently introduced country-wide over a 3-year period. These steps aim to increase the power of local governments over primary education. They are based on the implicit assumption that these authorities are—or can be made to become—the main locus of decentralized local decision making.

Changes in the roles of parents in primary education are also envisaged. It is clear that larger user payment will be emphasized. Such contributions are already significant. They make up some 30% of total resource inflow to primary education (see Therkildsen, 1998; Government of Tanzania, 1995b, p. xxi). The general view in the mid-1990s policy documents is, moreover, that parents must be empowered to play a more active part in the running of schools. The precise content of this empowerment is still unclear, for example with respect to the formal influence on the financial and administrative running of schools; the maintenance of school discipline; and the hiring, firing, promoting and disciplining of teachers. Whether formal powers should be shifted to the parents and tea-

chers (through school committees) or to communities (through village councils) or both is also an unresolved issue. Underlying these debates—which so far have mostly been internal to the ministries, donors and consultants involved—is, however, an unspoken assumption of collective action: it is parents as groups, or communities as units, that are perceived as the main actors in the school system at the grass-root level.

Descriptions and analyses of these changes in Tanzanian education and decentralization policies are mostly based on government reports, policy documents, and statements by prominent politicians (see for example Munishi, 1995; Samoff, 1990a). Such sources have, however, become less reliable than previously in detecting domestically based political and ideological rationales for educational changes, as policy making is increasingly being influenced (both directly and indirectly) by donors (Therkildsen, 1999). Legislation and administrative regulations are more reliable sources for assessing political commitment, because their drafting and approval by Parliament are generally less influenced by donors. Moreover, such documents do influence the actual implementation more directly than policy papers do. Analyses of this material with respect to the roles of central and local government and parents depict a more ambiguous situation than the officially approved policy documents of the mid-1990s.

3.1. Relations between central and local government

It is telling that the legally prescribed role of central government in primary education has remained intact over a 20 year period and that it was actually strengthened considerably during the 1995 revision of the 1978 Education Act. This must reflect a long-held normative vision by parts of the Tanzanian polity about the proper role of government, local institutions and parents in education. Moreover, it runs counter to the emphasis on decentralization of the various policy documents prepared concurrently with the legal revisions of the Education Act (e.g. Civil Service Reform Secretariat, 1996). The relevant sections of

both the 1978 act and the 1995 revision are equivalent and state:

The Minister [for Education] shall ... be responsible for the promotion of the education of the people of Tanzania ... and for securing the effective execution by local authorities, under his guidance, control and direction, ... of nationally beneficial education services (Part II, section 4).

Furthermore, various 1995 revisions to the 1978 act actually strengthen the power of the Minister of Education over primary education and weaken that of local governments. Thus prior to the amendments the ministers responsible for education and local governments, respectively, should agree if they wanted to modify local authority education plans. The revised law of 1995 gives this power exclusively to the minister responsible for education.⁴

The Education Act expresses the desired state of affairs: that central government is in full control of education; local authorities are agents of central government; and education is for the benefit of the nation. It is noteworthy that the roles of children, parents, communities and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) in primary education are not prescribed.

However, the above quoted section of the Education Act conflicts with the powers given to local governments in the Local Government (District Authorities) Act no. 7 of 1982. It states that—subject to national policy and plans—every local government:

shall ... formulate, co-ordinate and supervise the implementation of all plans for ... social development in its area of jurisdiction (Part V, section 118).

If the two acts are read together—as they should be—relations between the Ministers responsible for Education and Local Government, respectively, are rather ambiguous. One stresses the national

⁴ See amendments to part II, section 5(c) of the Education Act.

political goal of providing the same education for all; the other emphasizes the need to adjust primary education to variations in local conditions. In practice, however, the local governments (and their minister) have little real influence on substantive educational issues: curriculum; examinations; the relative weight given to academic and practical activities in the schools; the duration of classroom instruction; the management of teachers, the financing of schools, and so on. Even the earlier permission for local authorities to adjust school terms to the agricultural practices in the district was removed back in 1968. Until recently, control of primary education by the Ministry of Education was, in fact, so strong that District Councils did not have formal access to the Ministry's school inspection reports. Such information was passed on to the Ministry and left to it to act upon (which it rarely did).

3.2. *The role of parents*

A second important set of relations—between communities, parents and primary schools—is formally regulated through circulars. School committees are central in these relations. In a 1968-circular—following on the heels of the Arusha Declaration of 1967—it was decided that they “... will not have powers over academic matters of the school”.⁵ Since then the committees have had an advisory role only. Their primary function is to promote the integration of the school in the life of the community and to cooperate with teachers in solving “local educational problems”. In practice this mainly means involvement in solving disciplinary problems with pupils. Similar problems with teachers are, for example, outside their authority.

Changes have also been made in the membership of school committees. In 1968 they were dominated by parents and consisted of eight parents and four teachers. Ten years later parents' representation was reduced to three (out of a typical committee of 15), while the party-controlled village council occupied eight seats. The dominant

position of the village council vis-à-vis the school committee is retained in the Local Government Act of 1982 and subsequent circulars.

Formally, the direct influence of parents on school affairs has therefore been reduced and that of the village council increased. All village council members were members of the sole legal party, CCM, until the introduction of multi-partyism in 1995. Most still are, because councillors must be members of a party, and the new ones are weak—especially in the rural areas. The same rules apply to council elections and CCM continues to control the majority of seats in all of them. The next local government elections are scheduled for 2000.

In recent years various revisions of the circulars on school committees have been prepared. The ongoing reforms aim to strengthen these committees substantially (see Government of Tanzania, 1995a). Donors, in particular the World Bank, Denmark and the Netherlands, have pushed for a more prominent role of parents in school committees and for more power of these over schools affairs. These intentions have yet to be translated into formal new mandates for the committees although changes can be made administratively. The past trend of steadily declining formal influence over school affairs by parents appears difficult to turn around, despite the declared intention to the contrary in the mid-1990s policy documents.

3.3. *Commitment to changes*

The evidence presented here indicates that the political commitment for shifting control of primary education downwards to local governments and parents is ambiguous, as it has been throughout the post-Independence period. Policy documents outlining the reforms of primary education and local government are, however, not mere rhetoric written for the benefit of donors whose funds are needed for implementation (although that certainly plays a role). Rather, the ambiguity reflects real conflicts about control of the provision of primary education and about the appropriate means for its improvement. This points to the likely “overwhelming importance of negotiation and bargaining”, which generally characterizes the

⁵ Ministry circular MOE EDP/PI/124/14 of 6 May 1968.

implementation of reforms everywhere (Hill, 1997, p. 152).

4. Local level decision making

To assume that local governments and parents will have limited influence on primary education may therefore appear to be justified despite the reform efforts under way: present government support for decentralization remains ambiguous and a long tradition of centralized control of primary education pervades the school system. This is also the standard position in much research on decentralization in Africa in general (see, for example, Wunsch and Olowu, 1990) and on local government and Non-Governmental Organizations in Tanzania in particular (Mwaikusa, 1985; Liviga, 1992; Gibbon, 1994; Kiondo, 1994). Yet, as implementation theory indicates, more subtle ways of influencing primary education issues typically coexist with highly centralized decision-making structures. In the following the importance of elites and bureaucrats as well as teachers in local level decision making and in shaping certain educational outcomes will be analysed. The subsequent section will focus on the role of parents.

The analyses presented in the remaining part of the article are based on information collected between 1987 and 1993 in 15 districts on mainland Tanzania. Important macro-level changes in primary education between 1993 and the end of 1998 are also presented.⁶ This information dates back

some years, and does not pertain directly to the specific reform measures that are underway. It serves, nevertheless, to highlight some contextual features that influence the bottom-up processes of implementation, which, according to the implementation theory quoted earlier, are likely to change much more slowly than policy statements about reforms and top-down efforts to implement them.

4.1. Elites and bureaucrats

Secondary school matters receive much more attention from local elites and NGOs than primary education does (Lugalla, 1989; Kiondo, 1994; Ishumi, 1995). Both issue areas are, however, influenced by various constellations of individuals from the council staff and politicians, the parties, central government, Parliament and, in some cases, the business community. The District Council is just one—and generally not a very prominent—arena for decision making among several, despite formal rules to the contrary.

Local level primary education decisions are typically concerned with the improvement of physical school infrastructure rather than with education itself, and with making plans—for 30 years a potent symbol of modern politics in Tanzania—rather than with finding ways of financing them. Some examples from the 1987–1993 period illustrate this.

Improvements of school infrastructure are included in the investment (i.e. development) plans and budgets of the District Council. During budget sessions the key issue tends to be the *location* of development projects. Both political values and political tactics influence the outcome. Thus, to the extent that equity issues do enter the local political debate, it appears that equity between areas (i.e. wards, the constituencies of elected councillors) rather than equity between social strata (i.e. rich/poor) or institutions (i.e. schools) are of major concern. Consequently, district development plans and budgets that include many small (school) pro-

⁶ Most information is derived from various studies of local level initiatives in primary education during the 1987–1993 period, although only a limited part of it is used here. The case study councils were not randomly selected, but do cover both poor districts (e.g. Kiteto and Hanang) and richer ones (Arumeru and Njombe) as well as Babati, Iringa Rural, Kibaha, Kisarawe, Mbulu, Moduli, Mufindi, Ngorongoro and Pangani, plus two relatively well endowed municipalities (Arusha and Iringa) in four regions (out of 20). Here interviews with key politicians, civil servants and teachers were made. During the 1996–1997 period additional information from such individuals were collected as explained in note 8. In addition, both in-depth interviews and structured questionnaires were used to obtain information from 40 headteachers in Arumeru and Babati districts in 1991. Finally, 637 household interviews were conducted in Kisaha and Kisarawe districts in 1992. Headteachers and households were selected randomly using a two-stage procedure

within each case council. More specific details are provided in the tables, and in Therkildsen (1998).

jects spread across wards are more likely to get council approval than those including fewer but larger projects. Moreover, the larger the development budget *appears* to be, the easier it is to satisfy various constituency-based political demands during budget preparations *without* being forced to prioritize between them with the danger of conflicts within the council that this would entail.

There are two typical outcomes of this. One is a planned wide geographical spread of many small projects. The other is that desired expenditures are budgeted for *before* revenue estimates are made, so that the latter can be made to fit the former. Typically, the approved development budgets are therefore much higher than the actually available funds. As a consequence, most council development plans are fictitious and largely carry symbolic value. It means that many decisions with actual implications—in primary education as well as in other sectors—are made outside the council proper. Where?

Generally, the acceptance by local politicians of a substantial gap between planned expenditures and actual revenues means that the influence of a few bureaucrats on actual resource use is enhanced. It is normally the District Executive Director (DED) and the Treasurer who control the day-to-day use of very scarce funds. Few District Educational Officers (DEO) are influential in these decisions, even when they concern education, but there are interesting variations to this trend.

In one district, for example, the DED and the Member of Parliament, who was also a prominent minister, cooperated closely in mobilizing council staff and village councils to improve school buildings. They also set up competitions among schools to improve educational quality—an uncommon strategy in the 1980s, but a practice which is now widespread following the introduction of multi-partyism in 1995.

In another district the DEO thought that the political leaders focused too much on secondary education and ignored primary education (“they grabbed the wrong end of the stick”). He lobbied for his views, primarily with the District Commissioner (a central government representative) and the District CCM Party Chairman. He also

tried to influence his formal superiors in the local government (the DED and the Council chairman) although he did not regard them as very influential in educational matters. Eventually the District Party Committee decided that within 3 years every primary school should have an adequate number of classrooms and all teachers should have a ‘modern’ house. The District Council later approved this decision.

As is often the case, the cost and funding implications of this decision were unclear at the time. Eventually a typical solution was agreed upon: necessary funds should be raised through special contributions from parents and schools. This failed. Later the district leaders attended a budget session of the Regional Development Committee (RDC) where all local government budgets must be screened.⁷ Here they were questioned about their failure to apply for money from the President’s Self-Help Fund. They immediately phoned the DEO to get him to prepare an application for support to primary schools (based on the ideas approved by the party committee 3 years earlier). This application was promptly endorsed by the RDC. The President’s Self-Help Fund later approved the proposal. Subsequently it sent the money to the District Commissioner’s office. This central government organ then sent corrugated iron sheets for roofing directly to the schools in question. Actual construction at village level was organized through CCM that mobilized parents and schools for self-help. During this whole chain of events the district council, which is in formal charge of primary schools, was only marginally involved in both decision making and implementation.

In a third district the DEO proposed to the council that an Education Centre for in-service training of primary school teachers be built. The council approved the idea in 1987 without making plans for financing and implementation. The DEO estimated the cost to be some 19 mill. shs.—30 times bigger than the approved primary school investment budget of the whole district. As in the case

⁷ This involvement of the RDC in council budgeting was abolished in July 1996.

described above, schools and parents were ordered to contribute funds and bricks for the Centre. Apart from the initial spurt of activity—immediately praised by the Regional Commissioner and the RDC—no construction has taken place for some years. The DEO said that only a foreign donor can now save the project.

There are also many examples of prominent individuals—mostly private businessmen or parastatal executives—who donate funds to improve conditions in one or a few schools. Such initiatives are rarely aimed at supporting the school as such. Private donations of school desks are, for example, often made upon the condition that the desks will only be used by the (class of the) children of the donor(s). The border line between the public and the private is constantly blurred. In this sense public schools are becoming ‘privatized’ (Semboja and Therkildsen, 1995).

Finally, it should be noted that no NGO was actively involved in primary education activities in the nine rural districts included in this analysis. Instead they focus on secondary education (Ishumi, 1995).

These cases illustrate the subtle and not so subtle influences exercised on matters of primary education by central level elites, local bureaucrats, and local political and economic elites. With the introduction of multi-partyism in 1995, CCM lost its formal privileged position in the political-administrative system, but gained control of all councils in the subsequent elections. It is therefore unlikely that local level decision-making processes have changed considerably in the 1990s.⁸ The cases also show how the formal decision makers on primary education matters—the elected councils—tend to be by-passed. But this is not the whole picture.

4.2. Teachers

Teachers do not figure explicitly in the above cases.⁹ Indirectly, however, teachers do have con-

siderable influence on staffing in districts and schools, which has significant influence on the quality of education (Omari and Mosha, 1987). This is surprising given the formal rules for the allocation of teachers to schools. Newly graduated teachers are allocated to regions by the Directorate of Primary Education in the Ministry of Education based on the number of streams in each region. The Regional Education Officer, in turn, allocates these new teachers to the districts using the same stream-based formula. The DEO, finally, allocates the teachers to individual schools. (S)he is also in charge of the transfer of teachers already working in the district. Transfers between districts require involvement of the regional (sometimes national) organs of the Teachers Service Commission.

If the allocation and transfer of teachers were based on the pupil–teacher ratio, then a fairly equal distribution of teachers among districts, and among schools within districts, could be expected. This is not the case.¹⁰ During the early 1990s there were large variations between the best staffed districts (Liwale, Bukoba urban and Tabora urban) and the poorest staffed (Mbulu, Meatu and Bariadi) with the pupil–teacher ratio ranging from 14 to 59 around an average of 35 per district. This general pattern is similar in both rural and urban districts. The variation is even bigger for female teachers and for the best qualified teachers (based on data given in Tadreg (1992), appendix table 5). Variation in pupil–teacher ratios across schools within districts is also substantial. In Iringa Municipal Council, for example, the average was 29, but ranged from 19 to 37 among its 26 schools. In the 183 primary schools of Iringa rural district there was an average pupil–teacher ratio of 42, ranging from 16 to 85. In the adjacent district of Mufindi the average ratio was 39 among the 135 primary schools there, ranging from 17 to 72 (World Bank, 1991, p. 63). In Kibaha district 13% of the teachers would have to be reallocated to equalize the pupil–teacher ratio across schools. More recent data from

⁸ Based on discussions during the author’s work on public sector reform for the President’s and the Prime Minister’s Office during the 1996–1998 period.

⁹ As Temu (1992) has shown headteachers are, however, important decision makers with respect to school management and teaching.

¹⁰ The quality of educational statistics in Tanzania is questionable (Samoff, 1991). The figures presented here should therefore be regarded as illustrative rather than exact.

the Ministry of Education show that the unequal distribution of teachers persists.¹¹

Some (unknown) part of these observed variations in the allocation of teachers is no doubt a result of deliberate decisions by central and local educational authorities, and to some extent based on patronage, class and ethnic interests pervading the allocation of resources in the public sector as Oyugi (1995) argues. Moreover, part of the present inter-district disparities in pupil–teacher ratios is caused by differences in enrolment growth and withdrawal across districts over time that were not counteracted by central allocation mechanisms (see Therkildsen (1998) for details).

Individual decisions by teachers are, however, very important in explaining the present unequal patterns of teachers' postings. Interviews indicate that district authorities administrate the allocation of teachers to schools with a high degree of passivity. Although a DEO may order a newly recruited teacher to a remote school badly in need of staff, and many districts use peripheral schools (called 'our Siberia' by deported teachers) to punish teachers who are out of favour, most DEOs regard the reallocation of teachers within the district as sensitive. It involves considerations about availability of suitable housing (which favours urban and former mission schools); the work situation of spouses (which favours urban schools preferred by female teachers staying with their husbands who often tend to be members of the local elites); the health situation of the individual teacher (which favours schools located near health facilities); etc. Moreover, interviews with headteachers in Arumeru and Babati districts show a clear pattern: the closer a teacher is to retirement age, the more preferable it is to work closer to home. Analyses of transfers of teachers indicate that

many of them eventually succeed in being placed in schools of their own choice (often near home). In practice, therefore, the geographical location of teachers tends to reflect the priorities of the individual teacher rather than educational requirements of the schools, communities or districts. The outcome is a highly unequal distribution of teachers in relation to need. To a large extent the formally centralized teacher management system is actually driven by decisions made by individual teachers.

These analyses show that local level decisions about primary education are mostly made outside the District Councils, even where these have formally designated powers. Reform measures aimed at strengthening accountable local level decision making must take this important contextual factor into consideration.

5. Parental responses to differences in primary education quality

The formal role of parents¹² in primary education has been substantially diminished over the last 30 years, as argued earlier. Now, inspired by liberalism, popular localism, and pragmatism, the reform documents of the mid-1990s envisage a much more prominent role for collective action of parents and communities through better empowered school committees. To succeed such committees must attract members that are now already actively pursuing better primary education for their children. The question is whether individual rather than collective responses by parents to primary education improvements are likely. Analyses of the way perceived differences in educational quality among primary schools influence parental action provide some relevant evidence.

Interviews of households with school-attending children indicate that a 'good' primary school is

¹¹ The Ministry has begun to address this problem assisted by the European Community, but a planned pilot project for the transfer of teachers across districts was abolished. New initiatives are planned as part of the Tanzania Education Sector Development Programme. The problem is also being addressed by the Local Government Reform Programme, and by the Public Sector Reform Programme. The efforts are not well coordinated and illustrate the fluidity of responsibility for the education sector discussed earlier in this article.

¹² In many cases it would be more correct to use the term 'family' rather than 'parents' because decisions about and funding of primary education often involve relatives or other adults in addition to the biological father and/or mother. In certain contexts it would also be appropriate to include children in the analyses. Unfortunately, little is known about the extent to which children influence educational decisions.

one which—compared to other schools in the area—consistently send the highest proportion of their primary school leavers to a government secondary school. The analyses presented below are based on a statistical indicator of this.¹³

Access to government secondary schools is based on the results of the standardized national examination for primary school leavers in standard VII. The proportion of a standard VII cohort actually admitted has fallen over the years and was only 6% in 1990 (9% were admitted to private secondary schools). This illustrates that access is increasingly difficult. The growth of enrolment in private schools continues to exceed that of government schools. Nevertheless, the attraction of a place in a government secondary education seems as strong as ever. There are two main reasons for this. Government secondary schools are widely believed to offer better quality education than most private secondary schools. Moreover, fees in private schools are, on average, more than twice those in government schools.

The analyses of the transfer of pupils between districts and schools presented below show that certain parents are able and willing to transfer their children from one primary school to another to increase the probability of access to government secondary schools. Such transfers between primary schools can be made fairly easily because school choice based on spatial segregation into school districts (which typically exists in many other countries) has not been introduced in Tanzania. A transfer only requires the approval of the headteacher from both the receiving and the sending school. If pupils are transferred across district boundaries, the DEO of the receiving district must also approve. In both cases only one important formal reason to refuse a transfer request exists: classroom overcrowding. How overcrowding is defined in practice is unclear, but it seems that few headteachers or DEOs refuse requests for transfers

(although bribing is said to be widespread in these situations).

Children can therefore be transferred if their families are willing and able to do so. Transfers within walking distance of the residence may not require additional resources compared to enrolment in the nearest school. Transfers beyond walking distance require special arrangements for boarding, lodging and adult supervision of the child. Most families are likely to depend on extended family networks for this. Grandparents, uncles, aunts, cousins, and so on, living near appropriate schools are important in this respect. Additional payments are required if families cannot rely on these extended networks. The feasibility of transferring children thus depends on specific circumstances. Generally this is an option that the better-off and 'network-rich' parents are most likely to use. It contributes to a growing differentiation of the school system and this is likely to accelerate with the documented increases in social differentiation (Ferreira, 1994; Sarris and Tinios, 1994).

To improve access to secondary education parents may move a child to: (i) a primary school within the administratively defined catchment area of a day secondary school; (ii) a district with a low examination score entrance requirement; or (iii) a 'good' primary school which 'produces' many candidates for government boarding schools.

5.1. Access to day school

Access to government secondary day schools depends on examination results at the end of standard VII, but a Ministry of Education rule dictates that candidates should stay within a 6 km radius of the day school. Consequently children within this catchment area have a better chance of post-primary education than children living outside it.

Government day schools tend to be concentrated in urban districts. This influences primary school student transfers across urban district boundaries. Arusha municipality, for example, had 2/3 of all day school places in Arusha region in 1990, but only 1/10 of the standard VII leavers. Pupils living in Arusha municipality therefore stand a much better chance of getting access to a government day secondary school than pupils from the rural dis-

¹³ Proportion of pupils in school selected to government secondary school for the past (3–5) years. See Therkildsen (1998) for details. Parents may also use additional criteria for accessing primary school quality—such as modest use of physical punishment of student—but access to a government secondary school is by far the most important criteria.

tricts of Arusha region. Many parents respond to this by transferring pupils from a rural to an urban district school, as illustrated in Table 1.

The table shows the proportion of students enrolled in one grade that proceed to the next. The unique feature of the table is that retention rates for students in municipal standards V-VII are very high and *rising* to 100 and above but stable or *falling* in the rural districts. It is a pattern that cannot be explained by general in-migration to the urban area, in which case retention rates in all grades should be affected. Disaggregated data show that the transfers are especially pronounced from Arumeru district (which completely surrounds the municipality). Some 10% of the pupils in the municipal standards VI and VII classes came from the rural districts. The trend is similar for boys and girls.

5.2. Access to boarding secondary school

Also access to government secondary boarding schools depends on the results of the final examin-

Table 1
Pupil retention rates^b in Arusha municipality and rural districts^c (%)^a

	Municipality		Rural districts	
	Girls	Boys	Girls	Boys
St. I-St. II	98	94	94	95
St. II-St. III	96	97	94	94
St. III-St. IV	89	96	101 ^d	100 ^d
St. IV-St. V	93	93	84	86
St. V-St. VI	99	99	93	95
St. VI-St. VII	102	103	92	95
Total St. I-St. VII	79	83	64	69

^a Source: Regional Education Officer, Arusha.

^b Retention rate=[Enrolment in Standard (Y) (×100)]/[Enrolment in Standard (Y-1)].

^c Calculations based on information from the following years: Arusha Municipality: 1980-90; Arumeru: 1980-85 and 1989-90; Mbulu: 1980-84 and 1986-90; Babati: 1987-91; Hanang: 1986-90; Monduli: 1980-87 and 1989-90; Kiteto: 1990-91; Ngorongoro: 1980-83 and 1985-90. Access criteria have been in place throughout the 1980s.

^d The high retention rate for standard III-IV for rural districts is caused by the examination in standard IV which, if failed, forces pupils to repeat. This is a bigger problem in rural than in urban districts.

ation at the end of standard VII. A centrally controlled quota-system aims to secure that the same proportion of standard VII leavers in each district gets admitted. In reality it is an attempt to provide equal access for various ethnic groups to government secondary schools. Educational performance varies, however, across districts. Consequently, the examination score needed to qualify differs. Some parents living in districts with high entrance level requirements try to circumvent this system by transferring their children to districts with less competition. Cooksey and Ishumi (1986, appendix 1) have provided some details of this phenomenon, but were unable to quantify it.

5.3. Transfers to 'good' primary schools

Transfers of pupils from a 'bad' to a 'good' primary school (as defined above) is a third parental strategy to seek to gain (eventual) access to government secondary school for their child(ren). This may involve a transfer across a district border, but most moves take place within districts.

Analyses of standard VII examination results from selected regions show pronounced differences in quality (measured in this way) between schools within districts. Hence, attending a 'good' school may increase the chance of getting access to a government secondary school. Data on transfers between 'good' and 'bad' primary schools in Arumeru and Babati districts in 1990 and 1991 provide some evidence for transfers driven by examination results. This data is summarized in Table 2. In the 'good' schools chances of selection to government secondary schools is very modest, but in the 'bad' schools it is nil. This is reflected in the figures for net transfers of pupils. They are large and positive for 'good' schools and small and mostly negative for 'bad' schools. In other words, some parents seek out 'good' schools and are able to get their children enrolled in them. The relatively few 'good' schools in a district and the many 'bad' ones help to explain why the number of transfers into 'good' schools is much higher than the small number of transfers out of 'bad' schools.

Obviously some transfers of pupils between schools are unrelated to the quality of schools. When families change residence, children tend to

Table 2
Net transfers to 'good' and 'bad' schools within districts, 1990 and 1991^a

	All grades (a)	Standard V–VII (b)
<i>'Good' schools</i>		
Arumeru	214	273
Babati	69	157
<i>'Bad' schools</i>		
Arumeru	–26	–25
Babati	–17	10

^a Source: Transfer files from 10 'good' and 10 'bad' schools in each district (excluding Gidas school, Babati; and Burka Estate school, Arumeru). Gidas (a 'good' school) was excluded because a large out-migration was caused by drought. Burka Estate, Arumeru district (a 'bad' school) was excluded because a large in-migration was caused by changes in coffee estate employment.

follow. Such moves may be made in search of better livelihood elsewhere or to avoid localized calamities (local draughts; significant changes in plantation employment, etc.).¹⁴

The evidence presented here shows that not all families are passive recipients of state-supplied primary education. Some families carefully assess the quality of different primary schools before making a choice—and they have the means to finance such choices. But the numbers involved are still limited. Some 96% or more of all children—except in urbanized areas—attend the nearest school. Generally school choice is an option available only for children of the better-offs.

Interviews in selected schools show, furthermore, that examples of collective action by parents and teachers through school committees aimed at improvements in school quality are rare and not very successful (see also Temu, 1992). Under present conditions individual rather than collective action is evidently the preferred option for many better-off parents when they seek to improve the quality of primary education for their children.

¹⁴ The data presented in Table 2 are corrected to account for this as indicated in the notes.

6. Implications for reform

Changes in power relations are central if control of primary education is to be shifted downwards. The analyses above give some indications of how present relations affect decisions concerning primary education at the local level. They highlight three important features of the present context for reform of primary education in Tanzania.

The first is that a considerable ambiguity of commitment among the political-administrative elite for decentralizing control of primary education still exists despite recent policy statements to the contrary. Currently there is also little indication of a significant pressure from below to change the status quo. Moreover, the institutional setting for local level decision making and implementation concerning primary education is dominated by individuals (politicians, bureaucrats, teachers and prominent businessmen) rather than local governments, NGOs or school committees. Finally, the analyses show that despite the limited influence of parents in collective decision making, a small but significant group of them are very active in making individual arrangements to improve the education of their own (or the family's) children. These findings are based on empirical material from the last 15 years and illustrate a considerable inertia in the implementation of change.

Several implications for the present reform of primary education and local government follow from this. In the current situation, measures to shift power downwards are unlikely to have immediate and significant impact on who makes decisions at the local level concerning the school system. Significant real changes in power relations can therefore not be expected in the short term. On the other hand the analyses indicate that it is not a general lack of interest among local users of the education system that accounts for their present passive role in local decision making, but the institutional arrangements that limit and influence their involvement. Hesitant initial downwards shifts in control of education may therefore set more decisive future decentralization moves in motion, although local elites are likely to be most active in this.

This points to the importance of the rules of re-

presentation in changing structural relations of power. The exclusion of non-party members from political office in the present political system is probably crucial. While this exclusion helps CCM to maintain its grip on power at all political-administrative levels, it also constrains the renewal of local political leaderships whose legitimacy has been severely damaged through the past decades of one-party rule. As long as participation in the appropriate local institutional arrangements for influencing primary education affairs depends on formal party membership, with new parties still being very weakly established in the rural areas, individualistic responses to the crisis in primary education are likely to continue. Institutional arrangements must therefore be changed to encourage stakeholders with a direct interest in primary education to pursue more collective responses to improvements in primary education for their children.

A final implication follows from this: reforms of primary education should not be designed in isolation from changes in the political-administrative system as a whole. In the Tanzanian context this means that the outcomes of the ongoing civil service and local government reforms are crucial for the future impact of educational reforms. It also means that the forthcoming revisions of the Constitution are important, for the changes in the rules of representation are constitutional matters.

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